

The Outer Circle

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

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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.

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ISO Board Actions

**The following are actions taken
by the Board of Trustees
since the last issue of *The Outer Circle***

- Voted that all designated donation funds must be approved by the board and that at that time the board will determine how those funds are to be administered.
- Approved a motion that designated donation funds must be used exclusively for the designated purpose and cannot be changed without approval of the donors.
- Authorized placement of following announcement:

“Help for dealing with compulsive sexual behaviors? Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) is a fellowship of men & women who share their experience, strength & hope to abstain from their addictive sexual behaviors. For info and meetings: www.SAA-recovery.org or call 1-800-477-8191 or 1-713-869-4902.”

in *The Advocate* magazine, with the cost to place the announcement not to exceed the amount of funds raised for this venture.

- Elected Mark S. (SE) as Vice Chair for the board.
- Elected Michele F. (SP) as Vice Secretary.
- Adopted the 2009 ISO Convention budget as written.
- Voted that cessation of funding of the Literature and Translations Reserve until a four-month operating reserve is achieved be considered retroactive to January 1, 2008.
- Agreed that ISO staff would be paid as usual during the outage caused by Hurricane Ike.
- Set the delegate fee for the 2009 Delegate Meeting at \$50.
- Approved a motion to host the Interfellowship website for a quarter of the year when it is SAA's turn to host it.
- Voted that, when the ISO hosts the Interfellowship Forum in 2009, that it be during the 2009 Convention, utilizing the room reserved for board

meetings on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

- Authorized placement of a COSA Convention statement on the 2009 ISO Convention website.
- Elected Staci S. for the position of Disclosure Advisory Committee (DAC) Liaison.
- Accepted a proposal for the standing DAC workshop at the ISO Convention.
- Allowed the Indiana Intergroup to use the 12 questions without citation as proposed.

Board Committees Report

**The following is a report from the Board secretary
on activities going on in various Board Committees**

Online Presence Committee

The Online Presence Committee (OPCom) continues to work on both the Outreach and Service Websites. In addition, the following items have been completed per the Board's direction:

A Seventh Tradition web page has been installed on the Outreach Website at the following web address: http://saa-recovery.org/7th_Tradition. This page is referenced by links on the home page and throughout the website.

The COSA announcement has been placed on the home page of the 2009 Convention website.

Intergroup Communications Committee

The ICC Chair has been working with the office to get a good listing of intergroups. A proposal was made to ask if a box on the group registration form could be created to ask each group to list the name of its local intergroup, so that information could be used for cross checking.

Plans to create an educational video conference on outreach which would be put on in about a year. The format is to be four panel members

who are familiar with different aspects of SAA outreach. Kalen C. is the point person for this event.

The ICC Chair will draft an article for the Outer Circle regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Intergroup getting copies of the Green Book into public libraries in their area. (see article on page 6)

Prisoner Outreach Committee

The Prisoner Outreach Committee continues to work on preparing a standard letter to prisoners interested in starting a meeting in prison. The intention is to provide support, information and general advice on how to proceed.

An introductory letter to prison officials is in draft and under review.

The Committee is considering the value and appropriateness of preparing regional lists of halfway houses which accept sex offenders.

ISO Literature Committee Literature Committee Mid-Year Update.

The Literature Committee (LitCom) continues to be active on multiple fronts despite the financial crisis being experienced by the ISO. Although not an exhaustive list, the following will give a flavor of ongoing activity:

1. The re-organization plan adopted in July 2008 does seem to be a more effective way of assigning tasks and tracking progress than the procedures used in the past.
2. Over the past two months, the LitCom has switched to list-serve technology for our internal email communications, a plan developed and implemented by the Online Presence Committee (OPCom) of the Board to address the SPAM problem incurred in the previous service year.
3. Under development is a new Handbook that will contain the policies and operating procedures used by the LitCom, as well as guidelines and a style sheet for authors who are interested in submitting materials for possible publication by the ISO. The Handbook should be available by the time of the 2009 convention.

4. The Book work group continues a thorough review of *Sex Addicts Anonymous* in anticipation of the next edition. In October, an open forum was held by teleconference as part of that effort.
5. Through the Periodical Subcommittee and Website work group, the LitCom is actively engaged in writing, reviewing, and approving content for the SAA website, using procedures adopted last year for interaction between the LitCom and OPCom. Most recently, the LitCom approved a 7th Tradition appeal for immediate posting on the website under the concurrent review / distribution procedure developed two years ago.
6. The Group Guide work group continues to receive and process feedback on the draft version currently in circulation.
7. Guidelines for Interaction with Other S-fellowships developed by the Interfellowship Relations Committee will most likely receive final approval from the LitCom for posting on the website before the end of the calendar year.
8. The Intergroup Guide developed by the Intergroup Communications Committee is presently being edited by an outside writer. We anticipate approval by the LitCom this service year.
9. Consideration is being given to proposing a 52-week version of the meditation book as an intermediate step in the process of developing the full book of 366 meditations.
10. An audio version of the women's outreach pamphlet is being produced as an initial test of the process that will be required for additional audio productions in the future.
11. The basic outreach pamphlet, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, which was originally approved in 1990, is under revision in anticipation of presentation for conference approval in 2009.
12. The LitCom is bringing to the Board a proposal to mail five copies of the *Writing to Prisoners* pamphlet to each registered SAA group.

The LitCom wishes to express our appreciation to the Delegates and the Fellowship at large for the opportunity to serve as co-laborers with the Board in support of the ISO and the Fellowship of SAA.

Respectfully submitted,
Literature Committee of the ISO of SAA

Bay Area Public Library Project Submitted By Don S.

The San Francisco Bay Area Intergroup of SAA embarked on a project to donate a copy of the Green Book to every public library in the area. Because the San Francisco Bay Area has well over 150 public libraries, the project requires considerable administration. Below are some of the practices that evolved through trial and error:

We decided to donate hardcover copies because the title is printed clearly on the spine, and it is more durable.

We found it best if one person oversees the project. If the project is handled this way, no library gets overlooked and no library gets double donated. We built a list of public libraries in the area. In a large metropolitan area especially, many libraries are under a county system, but there are also independent city libraries and city library systems within each county. Two aspects required considerable support from the fellowship: fund raising and contacting libraries.

Donations were solicited from the membership. Fliers were distributed through Intergroup. The flier publicized the cost per book. Donations were sent to the administrator who catalogued them. Donors were allowed to earmark their contribution for specific libraries if they wished. Checks were made out to Intergroup and the administrator passed them on to the Intergroup Treasurer. After 9 months, we have received about 25% of projected donations.

The other major administrative component is contacting libraries / library systems to introduce the project and to determine interest. For independent libraries, we simply sent a book with a letter explaining the project and SAA. We included a return address and asked them to return the book if not interested. For larger systems, we found it best to establish personal contact with the acquisitions officer. Volunteers from the fellowship chose a library system and started the conversation. The administrator wrote up a fact sheet for the volunteers. This process can take months for each library. A common response was a request for a copy of the book to review. After a month or so, it was often necessary to re-contact the library to determine their willingness.

Response has varied considerably but always favorably. One system wanted one book, another wanted 30. One system wanted a book for each branch after two phone conversations.

It continues to be a rewarding opportunity for service both within and outside the fellowship. If you would like more information including materials, contact Don S at donsfbaoutreach@yahoo.com.

Northeast Region Holds Caucus, Elects Trusted Servants

The Northeast Region of the ISO of SAA, Inc., held its 2009 Caucus on Saturday, November 12, in Skaneateles, New York, marking only the second time a region has caucused apart from the annual convention.

A record-high 17 members participated in the conclave. They elected Wayne K. of Skaneateles, NY, as their representative on the Board of Trustees and David B., also from New York, as his alternate. Edward G. of Broadalbin, NY, was chosen to serve as Prisoner Outreach Coordinator. All trusted servants will begin their service after the 2009 convention.

Following the success of this first independent caucus, members of the Northeast Region hope to continue to meet officially away from the convention in the coming years. The only other such gathering was held by the former Latin American Region in Mexico City in 1998.

Fund Raising Committee November 2008

The following are the fund raising activities that have taken place or are scheduled for the next three months:

Two articles have been published in The Outer Circle. The first expressed a member's reasons for being a LifeLine Partner. The second article described our current financial condition.

The annual appeal was quite forthcoming in asking for financial help now and why.

An extensive coverage of the 7th tradition was prepared for our web site. It includes where our income comes from (donations, sales etc.), how the funds are utilized, and the many ways one might donate. Take a look; it's up on the site.

We are aware of three Giving Thanks Events scheduled for the November, December and January.

Our goal is to increase the number of Groups that donate directly to the ISO. Only 40% of the 1,000 now give.

In Your Service
Don K

ISO Income/Expense Summary As of July 31 , 2007

	October	Monthly Average	Year To Date
NET OPERATING INCOME			
Net Sales	13,576	8,131	81,307
Donations	14,366	16,331	163,316
General Donations	8,807	9,848	98,493
LifeLine Partners	5,072	5,335	53,352
Designated Donations	487	1,147	11,471
Delegate Registrations	0	536	5,355
2008 Convention	0	6,477	64,768
Miscellaneous Income	3	1,022	10,224
TOTAL NET OPERATING INCOME	27,945	32,497	324,970
OPERATING EXPENSES			
Wages/Benefits/Taxes	11,988	14,686	146,870
Program Related	8,592	9,735	97,354
Administration	1,172	1,674	16,738
Benefits	1,446	2,311	23,117
Payroll Taxes	778	966	9,661
Insurance	725	400	4,002
Depreciation	175	175	1,750
Postage	199	87	869
Phone	312	293	2,934
Website Related	100	72	721
Occupancy	1,228	1,463	14,633
Office Expenses	803	799	7,986
Professional Fees/Contract Services	1,431	1,772	17,715
Financial	934	1,040	10,398
<i>The Outer Circle</i>	1,981	1,148	11,484
Board & Committees	2,143	2,487	24,872
Translations/Major Literature Projects	0	101	1,008
Convention Related Travel	0	2,364	23,642
Delegate Meeting	0	874	8,738
2008 Convention	0	5,298	52,984
Miscellaneous	0	1,000	10,000
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	22,019	34,060	340,607
TOTAL NET OPERATING SURPLUS	5,926	-1,564	-15,636

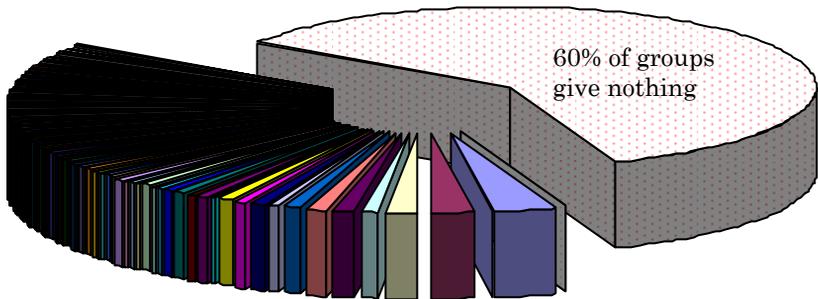
Just by the numbers, October was a very good month. In reality the bottom line was helped a great deal by the fact that hurricane Ike back logged literature orders so much that \$3,900 of September's sales were processed in October. Still, during the three months since publication of the July figures, the ISO has been able to reduce its year-to-date deficit by \$5,960.

Several factors brought about the improvement. Retail literature sales increased moderately as did donations. Operating expenses decreased, although some of the decrease was due to both directorships being vacant. The final ingredient was \$5,875 in wholesale sales through the ISO's agreement with Health Communications, Inc. This added a net \$2,600 to the bottom line.

The best news, of course, is that the tough months are now past. In November the first responses to the annual appeal will start coming in, and the San Francisco Bay Area will host its sixth annual Giving Thanks event.

Combined, these two fund raisers should erase the deficit. Unfortunately, simply ending the year in the black falls far short of the \$20,000 surplus that was projected and will not be enough to fully restore the Prudent Operational Reserve, which at the end of October was still under funded by \$41,700. Not even a tremendously successful 2009 Convention will be sufficient to rebuild the reserve. That will not happen until significantly more than 40% of SAA groups hold group consciences that make a commitment to support the ISO.

Through October just over 400 groups had contributed \$57,363 in general and LifeLine Partner donations. That averages out to a little more than \$14 per month per group. There are now more than 1,000 SAA groups worldwide. If the remaining 600 groups were to give only \$10 a month each, contributions would more than double. It all comes down to the Seventh Tradition. Is it a principle that governs the group or is it just an option for group consideration?



28 groups give half of what is given by all groups

From the Editor

By Mike L., Literature Editor, *The Outer Circle*

A House Guest Named Ike

The last couple of weeks have been interesting, to say the least. Hurricane Ike visited this part of the state a little over two weeks ago. We've been fortunate in this neck of the woods not to have had a hurricane come through in the past twenty-five years, since Alicia made its appearance in 1983. So I imagine our good luck could not hold up forever.

While Houston came through Ike relatively unscathed, at least in comparison to what could have been, there have been unimaginable horror stories coming out of Galveston and other coastal towns. While it would be easy for me to play Monday morning quarterback and give advice on what the coastal residents should have done under the circumstances, I'm not the least bit certain that I would have taken my own advice had I been living on the coast.

All in all, I was actually pretty fortunate. My electricity was out for roughly seven and a half days, a longer period of time than it was for some, and a much, much shorter period than it was and continued to be for many others, including our much-missed ISO office. I had tree branches all over my front and back yards, and a huge limb was separated from its tree and fell onto my patio cover. I lost two turbines (a/k/a "whirlybirds") from the roof, and those will have to be replaced before the next rain.

On the plus side: After the weekend had passed, I was able to start camping out at my office; it did not lose power since it is in downtown Houston, where most of the lines are underground, safe from wind and falling trees. So I began staying there in the evenings, just going home in time to beat the midnight curfew. Another blessing is that my roof is still intact and I didn't have any structural damage to the house.

For the first couple of days I was pretty much cut off from the world. My cell phone died over twenty-four hours before Ike made landfall, and my home phone did likewise roughly twelve hours after Ike made it to Houston. As anyone who has tried to use a pay phone in the last decade or so probably knows, most of them don't work any more. Hardly anyone uses them since everyone has a cell phone and so, since they don't bring in money, they are not maintained. So, to pass the time, I grilled what little perishable food I had. I listened to the news on my battery-powered radio until I had heard them say "for more information on xyz topic, go to our website" as many times as I could stand it—I kept wondering if there was something everybody else knew that I didn't—and spent the rest of the time reading by flashlight and listening to music.

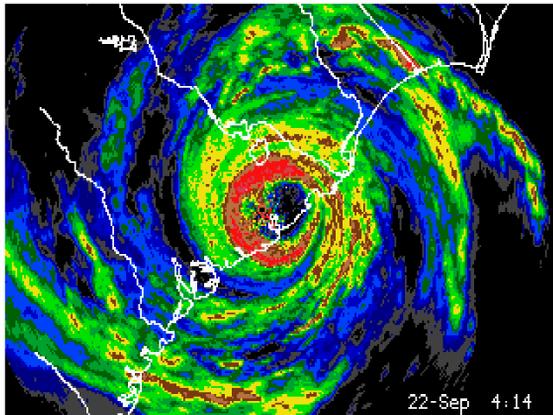
It is rare for me not to be eminently reachable by home phone, cell phone, work phone, e-mail and even pager, so I got to learn that the world would not come to an end if I couldn't be reached for a couple of days. On top of that, it was actually an almost pleasant change to have nothing to do for that time other than take care of myself. In a strange way, I got used to not having electricity at home, and I suspect that I will be doing much less hurrying to the a/c controls when arriving home, simply because I got so used to not having it.

I also got to spend some time thinking about the things I would have been doing if I hadn't been dealing with the inconveniences and the other aspects of the aftermath of Ike. Sort of a modified version of "what would I do with my life if I knew I only had six months to live?" I did come up with some things I want to start accomplishing and, now that things are back to semi-normal, it's up to me to see if I actually take those actions.

Still, it is nice once again to have access to all those things that were gone for that week or so. And it is good to be back working on *The Outer Circle* again. There has been a trend in recent issues to have more articles directly focusing on the Steps, as well as more powerful personal testimonies, and I'm happy to say that those trends are continuing.

The Outer Circle continues to be blessed with lots of submissions. Please continue to send them in. From where I'm sitting it looks like I have a decent backlog of articles, and that can always change from issue to issue. You can submit your articles by e-mail (Word, WordPerfect, or inline text) to toc@saa-recovery.org, or else by regular mail to ISO, P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270-0949.

Enjoy this issue of *The Outer Circle*. I'll be talking to you again next issue, when I hope to have less exciting occurrences in my life to share about.



The Story of a Sexually Addicted Lawyer by Larry E.

This article was hard to write, because it is the story of my disease, a disease that most people do not even acknowledge as such. It is a disease of shame. From literature directed toward helping professionals, I have learned that my disease can be diagnosed as a “sexual disorder – not otherwise specified.” From recovery literature, I have learned that my disease has a name. I am a sex addict.

I have learned a lot about my disease since breaking through my denial about it. I have learned that fifteen to twenty million Americans suffer from it, and that I can recover from it if I am willing to be honest again.

I have learned that my disease has physiological and psychological bases. While young, I suffered traumas and abuse. I found relief from the resulting fear, anger and depression by dosing myself with the various hormones that my limbic system produces, such as cortisol, serotonin and endorphins.

By recreating trauma through exposure to certain stimuli, my brain kept producing drugs that numbed me. I isolated from others and denied that I had an addictive problem. The stimulation in my case was sex. But the problem was not sex; that was just the context. The problem was delusional thought.

My disease progressed apace with my professional career. I was as compulsive about my work as I was about my disease. I used them both to cover depression and feelings of inadequacy. Despite considerable success as a lawyer, stress and anxiety overwhelmed me. I deluded myself into thinking that sex, particularly pornography, gave me the relief that I craved.

I was not alone. By 2005 the Internet hosted more than four million pornographic websites. I was one of forty-five million men and women who monthly looked at some of the three hundred million pages of pornography on the Internet, an industry worth thirteen billion dollars in 2005.

My guilt, shame, and fear grew over the years. Although I desperately wanted to stop my compulsive sexual acting out, I could not do so on my own. Conventional psychotherapy did not help. I often considered suicide as an option, but could not bring myself to do it.

Like I did with substance addiction, I had to escalate the intensity of stimulation to achieve an equal effect over time. When merely looking at images of adults was not enough, I engaged in other forms of sexual

acting out despite the risk of discovery and sexually transmitted diseases. Eventually I graduated to more dangerous and illicit forms of behavior.

Like many addicts, I suffered a crisis that I could not disregard in my delusional fantasy world. I was arrested for viewing illegal images on the Internet. I lost my job and my career and had to check into a psychiatric ward to remain safe from myself. It was time to get help or to lose everything.

I had to break through my denial by acknowledging that I had a problem. I started seeing a certified sex addiction therapist. I attended a residential sex addiction treatment center. When I returned home, there was outpatient therapy. I attended seven or eight SAA meetings a week for more than a year, which provided a stable and spiritual supportive community. Also I was blessed with time, a remarkable wife and family, caring friends and supporters and a growing library of recovery literature.

Meanwhile my case wound its way through the courts. I ended up being convicted, serving time in jail, and having to register as a sex offender.

Now I take things one day at a time. I wake each morning and express my gratitude through my words and deeds, making a living amends. I pray, meditate, read recovery literature and attend SAA meetings and therapy. I look for new work. I appreciate the blessings in my life. I remain in the present and suffer less shame. I realize that I am not in control of anything but me, and that is okay.

Having worked the Twelve Steps, I am making amends to those I have harmed, including those whose images I viewed, and I am working to raise money to care for others like them. This is helping to restore my integrity and feeling of self-worth.

I now have more than eighteen consecutive months of sobriety from compulsive sex. I have come to know and to accept a more spiritual path. It is a path for which I am eternally grateful. I share my story with the readers of this publication in hopes that at least one fellow sufferer will find that path, too.

Seek Spiritual Perfection Through Proper Planning

By Santi L.

As an addict, I have an aim in life, but no ammunition. Then I am forced to get sober, and I am given plenty of ammunition but often no specific target to aim for.

I'm at a picnic and I spot a young man with an archery set, shooting arrows into tree trunks. Every time he hits a tree, he goes over and paints a perfect bull's eye around the arrow. Isn't this basically the way I run my life? I end up somewhere and then decide that's where I wanted to be all along.

As a mature individual, I've forgotten the most basic concept of a life of accomplishment, which is to Properly Plan Ahead. I plan and rehearse for a week of vacation over and over. I pore over every detail of the various activities I wish to be involved in as if I were presenting a dissertation on some unique new medical cure. Yet my only once-in-a-lifetime journey of LIFE is played through without too much rhyme or reason, usually with no plan beyond today and what it may bring. The Koran says, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

I must learn to differentiate between sayings that are meant to simplify my life, like "One day at a time," "Stay in the now," "Let go and let God," and the truth of life which demonstrates over the history of the world that those who have been able to accomplish the most are folks who understood the value of goals and ideals. Whether my goal is to become a zillionaire or to become a godly man, it is highly advisable, if not essential, that I have a plan of action to accomplish the written personal goals that motivate me daily to keep trying.



This is where the guidance of a well-trained sponsor pays off handsomely. It is impossible for a newcomer to develop real recovery goals and ideals on his own. He, for the most part, will be concentrating all his efforts on physical sobriety (that's ok), and so it is of paramount importance that as he moves from step to step his sponsor not only will help him see where he was and is now heading but also begin to paint the picture of what it is like to live in the spiritual realm where peace, joy and a feeling of being OK with oneself are the norm rather than the exception.

It's a well-known fact that a proper planning person and a goal-setting individual is much more likely to succeed than those who just wander aimlessly in life. Goals are not important to positive living. They are crucial.

It is not a coincidence that the word goal begins with "go." I am an Action man and believe decisions are meaningless, especially coming from my addict, unless accompanied by corresponding actions. I equate Go with Action. Daily goals give me the best reason to get up and do. Weekly goals make the months fly, and monthly goals renew my enthusiasm for life, twelve times per year. Annual goals can almost guarantee a lifetime of successful happenings, as I maintain full focus on my personal destiny.

Just as the captain of a ship does not need to see his destination thousands of miles away to know he will reach it at a certain date and time, so can I plan my life according to your own timetable. My goals must be realistic and reachable, so that I can reap the rewards of positive reinforcement at timed intervals, and thus have the confidence to know that I'm on target for the big plan. That is why in SAA, as in other twelve-step fellowships, the chip system is used as a reward for various timed sobriety accomplishments. It works very well by providing the newcomer addict intermediary goals that help to maintain reasonable enthusiasm based on the success he or she is having collecting those early program tokens of progress.

There are literally hundreds of self-help books, meditation books and recovery books, but very little on the subject of proper goal setting. It is for this reason that I engage in intimate sharing of my goals with my spouse (being careful of what I share), sponsor, friends and spiritual director. It is in this process of self-examination while sharing my fantasies and hopes that I find myself really discovering all that I am today and all that I may be called to be. When I'm in search of internal peace, I pick up a copy of the AA Big Book and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. With the help of those aids, I can make sure that though my recovery ideals, clearly outlined in the Twelve and Twelve, may be different from those of others, we're sure to meet each other on the road to happy destiny as we all strive to reach our personal goals, which hopefully will be of a spiritual nature.

On Step Twelve

by Robert S.

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.

I am writing this article as one of the four hundred seventy-eight incarcerated members of SAA I read about in the March/April 2008 issue of *The Outer Circle*. I was amazed to learn there are four hundred seventy-seven others who may be as isolated as I feel. I came to realize my addiction after I was arrested, so I have never been able to attend a meeting, call my sponsor, or just shake hands with a fellow member. My only contact with SAA is with a pen-pal sponsor and the literature I receive. When I feel weak, or in need of support, I write to my sponsor, and I feel privileged to be able to do so, but still it is not an ideal situation. I believe one of the strengths of the program is in the members. For me, the group consists of two: my sponsor and I.

From the basic text of *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 60, "However we do service, we receive much more than we give. . . . We break out of the isolation and the self-centeredness of our addiction. We grow as we practice generosity, empathy, and humility. We forge new bonds with others that nourish and sustain us. And we experience the joy and satisfaction of giving something of ourselves to a larger cause."

As one member of SAA, I am making a request of anyone reading this to please contact the prison outreach committee and volunteer to write to an inmate. I waited months before a sponsor was found for me; I know there is a shortage. As a sponsor to an inmate, you will not get three-am phone calls, desperate cries for help moments before or after an inner circle violation or even an IM. You will get a chance for service to someone in need and possibly make a friend. Inmates cannot have contact with other inmates so I, in addition to four hundred seventy-seven others who are known, and others who are not, need your help.

In this prison, a stamp can buy six cigarettes, a cup of coffee, or a ticket in a betting pool. For me, a stamp offers hope for recovery, a chance for sanity, and an opportunity for friendship.

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:

Thank you for your quick response to my first email. I can't realistically go to meetings every day. I have a husband and three children at home as well as a full-time job, and I don't think anyone else understands how difficult it is to get there!

Signed,
Overwhelmed in Oregon

Dear Overwhelmed:

Nothing is more important than your recovery! Ninety meetings in ninety days is a tried and true method of getting going in recovery. Getting to a meeting everyday whether you feel like it or not is an awesome piece of doing. Doing something tangibly different is a big step in recovering and changing our pattern of living. It takes some willingness to go when you would rather do something else or when it might mean missing out on something. Perhaps for a while you will need to be as aggressive about your recovery as you were about your acting out. If there are few or no SAA meetings in your area attend tele-meetings. The point is to act on the belief that nothing is more important than your recovery.

Grace

Intimacy

by Chris B, Knoxville, TN

Intimacy presents itself as a topic time and again at the SAA meetings in our city, perhaps because it is a topic that we, as sex addicts, often knew little of before setting foot in the rooms. Perhaps, in our addiction, we felt we knew what intimacy was. Some of us believed, however errantly, that intimacy was that warm feeling in our abdomen as we completed our latest conquest or tryst, even those of fantasies lived out on a computer screen and in our minds. Some of us delighted in the self-deception that such behavior was not in fact technically “cheating” on those with whom we share commitments. The lie, of course, was betrayed by our own self-loathing and emotional devastation.

Real intimacy, of course, is something far more frightening. True intimacy is the antithesis of the unreal, the chemistry, the idol, the lust, or the connection that had the magic. Real intimacy mirrors who we really are right back at us, challenges us to be even more than we are. True intimacy is, in short, a confrontation with reality as it REALLY is, rather than how we might wish it to be. Intimacy is the rejection of fantasy.

Intimacy, of course, precedes, rather than is a product of, the physical union. That is not to say that healthy sexuality between one's partner and one's self doesn't create even greater, even more fulfilling intimacy. Rather, the starting point of intimacy isn't the sexual act itself, but the honesty, fidelity, and shared commitment that precedes the act.

We live in a society that lies to us, telling us that “love” just happens. The reality, of course, is that love is a choice. Love is a commitment. Similarly, intimacy is the product of that shared commitment, an experience that lovers have when they willingly CHOOSE to work towards that end.

In my own religious tradition it is firmly believed that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. What we each hold within us is the indelible mark of the Divine. One medieval Jewish mystic refers to us as the shattered shards of the mirror of the Divine Essence. Each of us, no matter how wounded and/or self-absorbed, holds within us something beautiful, something holy, something marvelous. We are even called to become partakers of the Divine Essence itself.

The relevance of this great mystery to human sexuality is obvious. If sexuality were evil, dirty, shameful, etc. as some folks seem to suggest, it would mean that God was in fact tainted by human nature. Just as lovemaking has the potential to bring unbelievable joy into our lives, we must readily admit that it also has the potential to create unfathomable suffering in our lives and the lives of others. When we “become one” we exchange great energy, great power, an essential part of our being. When we make love we give part of ourselves to another. We make ourselves, our whole being, vulnerable to another person.

Indeed, healthy sexuality contains within it the power to change the world. For if everyone submitted themselves to the vulnerability and self-revelation that true intimacy entails, how many wars could be avoided, how many less children die of starvation, how much less suffering would we allow the world to endure?

The Futile Pursuit of Self-Esteem

by Gene D, Dallas Texas

In meetings, I often hear sex addicts complaining about their lack of self-esteem. The implicit premise usually seems to be that restoring or enhancing self-esteem is the path to recovery. To that end, I hear screeds of bootstrap nostrums for inflating self-esteem like the daily incantation of affirmations. I recollect that, in my youth, there were some who still advocated the regular recitation of the well-known mantra of Emile Coué, a French psychotherapist, "Every day in every way I am getting better and better." This is the therapeutic centerpiece of his chef d'oeuvre, *Self Mastery Through Conscious Autosuggestion*, originally published in 1922. But more common were those, more fully aware of the fatuity of both book and bromide, who simply used it as a punch line for jokes.

I am of the school that thinks the latter had a better grasp of the problem of self-esteem than did Coué and his minions. I do not believe for a moment that we can wish ourselves into loving ourselves, nor that, by our own efforts we can remedy that over which, in our First Step, we have admitted we are powerless. Recovery is not, and never has been, a process of self-mastery. If I could have mastered my behavior on my own, I would not have had to spend the last twenty years going to meetings. Nor is it a process of self-love. I can't speak for the addictions of others, but mine was much the product of an excess of self-love, an excrescence of my delusion that I was most clearly one of the Masters of the Universe, for whom all was permitted. Self-love is no more than self-will, which is, in turn, none other than pride, first among the Seven Deadly Sins because it is the progenitor of all the others. Not something, I'd surmise, one would want to cultivate.

On the most mundane level, I esteem myself because of what I do, what I've accomplished. On this basis, I, as a sex addict, have little on which to base self-esteem. Quite the contrary, I have lots of which I can be profoundly ashamed: I have lied, cheated, fornicated – promiscuously and without compunction – betrayed my spouse and my children, and generally behaved in utterly shameful ways. Right now, I suspect that the self-esteem commissars, as they read this, are tut-tutting and clucking that I, as an addict, am beating myself up, that I simply shouldn't be saying such shaming things. I am, however, saying these things because they are true. Among the various addictions that are out there, save perhaps only Serial Murderers Anonymous, I, as a sex addict, am more likely than any other that I know to have committed truly vile, occasionally heinous acts. To say that my life has not been pretty is a profound understatement. For me to fail to face up to that fact is simply another manifestation of the self-delusion that fed and nurtured my addiction.

The next response is: But I am a child of God and precious in His sight. Absolutely one hundred percent correct. (Remember: this one will be on the Final!) But in my experience that observation rarely dissipates the burden of shame that I carry about because of my addiction. Spiritual nostrums by themselves just don't cut it. But they do foreshadow the way.

And the Way for me, the Truth that leads to the Life, is the Twelve Steps. If I work the steps honestly and diligently, my life changes in ways that I never would have imagined possible. The Twelfth Step promises me a spiritual awakening, and the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, in a section generally referred to as the Promises, describes the fruits of that awakening. Notable among those promises, in respect to our discussion here, are the following:

“We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it . . . No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away.”

Is not my fretting about my self-esteem simply another manifestation of self-seeking? Is it not simply self-absorption, one of the “selfish things” in which I will lose interest?

How do the steps do this, how do they accomplish this goal? As we Catholics are wont to say when faced with unanswerable questions: it’s a mystery. And it is true that no one can even begin to understand how the grace and love of God actually work. Let me, however, never discouraged by the mere impossibility of a task, venture my own personal guess. I see the Twelve Steps as a way of getting myself back into alignment with God and His purposes for me. In the Eleventh Step, we pray only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry it out. Doesn’t that set out the very essence of the difference in my life? If my life were, as the Big Book has it, “self-will run riot,” doesn’t this prayer show a radical realignment of my perspective? When in the midst of my addiction would I ever have even thought to utter such a prayer? My prayers were almost invariably about getting what I wanted. And I was astounded that God’s answer was so frequently “No.”

In my experience, as I worked the steps, I became increasingly able to hear the still, small voice of God whispering in my ear, a voice so soft that it was utterly lost in the daily bedlam of my addiction. Once I could hear it, that voice spoke to me with a simple message: do the next right thing, which next right thing it always revealed to me. And every time I listened to that voice and did what it requested, in short, every time that I did His will – no matter whether it was listening with compassion to a newcomer or to my children, helping a friend through difficulties, or chatting with a panhandler when I gave him a two-dollar bill – I always felt an internal warmth, a quiet satisfaction, that let me experience God’s joy in my doing His will. What I discovered was that when God esteems me, I cannot but esteem myself.

When I pursue a will o’ the wisp like self-esteem, I abandon the fundamentals of my program: I forget to work the steps. When I do that, I wander off the path that invariably leads me to a spiritual awakening, an awakening that leads me not to self-esteem, but to discovering the irrelevancy of self-esteem. So I remind myself not to waste my time contemplating my navel; but rather work the steps.

An Offering for *The Outer Circle* by Barry M.

The deep relationship of addiction to the spiritual understanding of sin, to that of the medical or health model understanding of addiction, as an illness, is basic. For me, it is crucial. I have often fallen off balance on this creative tension.

To be sure, I have felt much clutter and confusion around this sin/illness distinction and overlap. How often, for long periods, addiction seemed to be thought to be chiefly a moral issue; when one “indulged” or gave in to “temptations” such that we were held to be sinning or trespassing a strongly held moral standard, norm, or value. We -- and thus, I -- were held responsible, hence, and it was a matter of being exhorted to shape up! To cease sinning! To exercise my will-or power to cease and desist and, henceforth to stay “reformed”!

“Grace”, for Bill W. and Dr. Bob, and for those who worked with them, with their very heart-and-soul lives, “came to believe” in ways that re-framed addiction as an obsessive-compulsive understanding, such that a real powerlessness was truly experienced

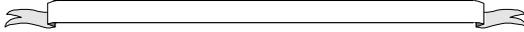
With huge relief I am sure, the origins of AA, the mother Twelve-Step fellowship to which we remain gratefully obliged, wrestled into fresh being a grace-filled understanding of addiction. “Grace”, for Bill W. and Dr. Bob, and for those who worked with them, with their very heart-and-soul lives, “came to believe” in ways that re-framed addiction as an obsessive-compulsive understanding, such that a real powerlessness was truly experienced (of, and over our mere will power). Thus, a grace-as-acceptance, an unconditional depth and width of acceptance, became the thankful response to one’s own and other’s sufferings in and out of addiction.

Have you too felt welcomed graciously, and with courage, from the very beginning of Twelve-Step meetings? And welcomed back, when returning? Again, God willing, graciously!

Meditation readers help with this, for example that book that so many of us use, over the course of its welcome three hundred sixty-five entries’ guided meditations. Certainly, the entry on distinguishing shame from guilt, speaks to guilt’s link to “sin” or that profound, gnawing sense of harming or abusing

or betraying -- and out of this, being moved to make eventual, if not quick amends. How often I have confused this, and wondered how it was that shame could lure me back into the addictive cycles!

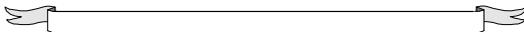
Does any of this mean, though, that "sin" is obsolete, outmoded, bankrupt, irrelevant? I say, an understanding of both sin and illness is needed. Both are part and parcel of coming to terms with the real forces of addiction -- addictive thinking (obsessiveness) and addictive acting out (compulsive) behaviors. I experience sin as selfishness; being curved in on merely myself; a willing falling into helplessness where isolation becomes the non-risky cocoon for avoiding the very Twelve-Step fellowship I really long for. I



Does any of this mean, though, that "sin" is obsolete, outmoded, bankrupt, irrelevant? I say, an understanding of both sin and illness is needed. Both are part and parcel of coming to terms with the real forces of addiction

relate sin further, to really what we share as part of a SAA meeting's opening preamble, when we speak of the "cunning," "baffling," and "powerful" nature of addiction. Here, I feel that sin is larger than merely my own awareness or conscience at the moment, for it can blind-side me!

Sin is surely related to what I wisely discern in confessing that while I feel powerless in the face of my addictive forces and patterns, I am not helpless -- not even in the beginning of my recovery, for that is what



moved me to seek help. Sin may be experienced as a rebelliousness, when one may slip and stay stuck, to the point of self-abusive relapsing, as if, to prove a point, to someone or other, that damn it all, I am not worthy, and I am bloody well going to prove it, if only to myself and any who may be noticing, once and for all!

The accompanying strong, healing notion of grace complements sin. I recall that this has usually been the case when, in spiritual literature, grace is thought of and accompanies virtually all talk of sin, as Gerald May's *Addiction and Grace* volume and the spiritual hymn "Amazing Grace," attest. And, grace is at the heart of our opening and closing Serenity Prayer; especially the original version. To wit, "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." We are not left abandoned by our "Higher Power" -- nor, grace prevailing -- our fellowships.

Letter to God

by Jack C.

I'm Jack. I'm a recovering sex addict. The following is a letter I wrote to God as part of my work in Step Two and Three, following the exercises in a workbook I use. Please, take what you like and leave the rest.

Dear Jesus,

I came to know you exist as the God of my understanding when I was very young, but I didn't have a clue what your will was for my life. I tried to figure it out myself and got lost in the process. When I accepted you as my Lord and Savior, I thought I found my redemption from my homosexuality. I wasted so many years of trying to be straight, and it didn't work out. I thought I was doomed to go to hell. In my addiction, I lost my spirituality, believing that I am not capable of being spiritual because of my internal homophobic belief that "Being gay is bad and something to be ashamed of, and gay sex is a sin."

In recovery, I came to believe that you love me and accept me for who I am, and that you can restore me to sanity. Being restored to sanity for me means that I have to counteract my own internal homophobia and start believing that there is nothing wrong, bad, sinful, or shameful about being gay or gay sex. By the grace of God, the power of the program, and the love of the SAA fellowship, I am sobering up one day at a time, becoming the person that you intended me to be. I believe that it is your will for me to be a happy, joyous, and free gay man. Sobering up for me started by admitting that I was powerless over my addictive sexual behaviors, that my life had become unmanageable. In working Steps Two and Three, I am humbled to admit that it is not I but you alone who have the power to keep me sober, and all that I need is to put my faith in you and accept you as the Manager of my will and my life.

My recovery from sex addiction has become my highest priority, and is also God's work in progress. I thank you for revealing to me what holds the balance for my sobriety, which is expressed in the SAA Basic Text on page 13 under the heading "Meetings": "We clarify what our abstinence is, what we need to avoid, and what we need to add to our lives in order to experience healthier sexuality." As I understand it, in order to improve the quality of my sobriety, I not only need to avoid my "inner circle" behaviors, but I also need to move into my "outer circle" behaviors such as dating, and getting involved in healthy gay social functions, as well as practicing healthy, clean, safe, intimate, and fun gay sex. By allowing myself to make mistakes in practicing healthier sexuality, I am making progress and I feel much happier and more grateful for every experience of freedom from addiction. In this manner of working a tailored program of recovery, I believe that God integrates my sexuality with my spirituality as a gay Christian, which is my highest spiritual ideal.

I am making a decision to turn my will and my life over to my Higher Power.

This involves admitting that I have made a mess of my life by managing my addiction with my will, my intellect, and my determination, and in so doing I failed miserably. In making my decision to turn my will and my life over to God, I am relinquishing any attempts to control my addiction. I am simply letting God take control not only of my addiction but also of my past, present, and future relationships, my time, my decisions, my finances, my mental illness, and all other areas of my life. From what I've gathered from reading about Steps Two and Three in the SAA Basic Text, I understand that I am not letting a powerful taskmaster control me as if I were a robot, forced to do what he wants. Instead, I am allowing my Higher Power to work in my life, totally trusting in his power with my best interests at heart. I still have the freedom to make healthier choices as I ask God to guide me and direct me everyday gradually learning to care for myself as he teaches me the way he takes care of me. In making my decision everyday to turn my will and my life over to the care of God, it's comforting to know that my Higher Power is a loving, caring, and powerful God, certainly more powerful than my addiction and powerful enough to restore me to sanity.

My previous sponsor in SAA suggested that I note, "What do I expect from God in return for making my decision to turn my will and my life over to him?" A dictionary I use defines "expect" as "think or believe that a thing will come or will happen." So, with this definition, I expect God with my co-operation, of course, to fulfill the Promises for me. First of all, I expect that God is doing for me what I cannot do for myself: staying sober. I expect God to continue making me the person that he wants me to be, happy, joyous, free, sane, sober, assertive, and self-confident. I expect God to restore my personal values and beliefs, and a stronger sense of personal integrity. I expect to develop healthy intimacy with God, others, and myself. I expect to know peace and to ask for serenity, courage, and wisdom. I expect to be of use to my fellow men, therefore restoring my sense of belonging in this society, community, and humanity. I expect to maintain a healthy balanced mental and emotional health. I expect to find my place in the world as a mentor to young gay people coming out, as well as to other people with mental health issues. I expect to develop my ability in writing to share my experience, strength, and hope with my fellow sex addicts, not taking for granted that it is a privilege to be understood. I expect to develop healthier sexuality by celebrating my homosexuality with pride, participating in and contributing to the welfare of the gay community, and, on a more personal level, by practicing healthy, clean, safe, intimate, and fun gay sex. I expect to be full of gratitude for the Twelve Step Program, for the grace of God, and for the love of the Fellowship. I expect to live at peace with myself, the world around me, with other people, and with my God. I expect to have financial security. I expect to succeed in my recovery every day I choose recovery over my addiction. I also expect that no matter what happens to me, I know that I will be taken care of, so that I don't need to fear but I can trust that my Higher Power will provide all the help, the strength, and the hope that I need, even when I struggle with my addiction, and as part of that struggle. I think this speaks to the co-operative work that, indeed, we are invited and summoned to do, along with God and thus, God may then have something to work with, in our own

honest struggles, since, as I stated earlier, we are not robots, and neither is God. All these things I expect from God are gifts of my Higher Power, remembering that it is just that my work of and in and through the Steps, that invites and requires my co-operation as does, then, the hope in expecting.

Last but not the least, I simply thank you Jesus, once again, for restoring my faith in your eternal promise in John 3:16-17 where you stated that (paraphrased) because you love me so much that you sent your Son, and if I put my faith in him, you will not let me perish in my addiction, but you will redeem every fabric of my humanity and grant me an abundant sober spiritual life today.

For all of my experience, strength, and hope, I am truly grateful, as I say the Third Step Prayer, "God, I offer myself to Thee--to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of Life. May I do Thy Will always!"

Love,
Jack

"The Truth Shall Set You Free" (Step Five)

by Aaron G.

What does that statement mean to me? In the past, I had always assumed that it was to be taken literally. If I tell the truth, it will get me out of a nasty situation. I think a lot of people see it in a similar way.

What that now means to me, is this: If I have lived life in fear of my feelings, emotions and the truth; accepting and telling the TRUTH gives an enormous emotional release. My mind and heart can begin to know and understand peace. Knowing I am doing the right thing, regardless of consequences, is powerful. It opens the door to growth, growth for me that is desperately needed.

Being honest to yourself and God is not always easy. And disclosing my deepest darkest secrets to another person never is. But for me this has been one of the most important steps. This step has allowed me to understand recovery, and healthy thinking.

What does Step Five mean to you?

Who Guides the Wind? by a grateful Scotty W.

I am profoundly grateful for every moment of my life, because without them I'd be a different person today. HP has patiently and lovingly watched while I stumbled through failed relationships and shameful habits, calmly listened as I asserted time and again how much I didn't need Him to run my life, because I thought I was doing a pretty good job of running my life my way.

Only He could know how these seemingly random and undoubtedly painful processes happened to define my character, and refine my very being. He already knew where my life would lead, and He allowed events to occur which would more appropriately prepare me for the life I live today.

I've spent many years aboard the ship of my life with sails furled and hatches battened, fighting and enduring the fury of the storms in my life, not knowing that a Higher Power was there with me, gently waiting until I trusted Him enough to release my tight control, unfurl and hoist the sails a bit, and allow the wind to take me in unfamiliar directions, to unfamiliar destinations.

I thought I was steering the ship of my life through my own courageous, independent actions, but I never gave thought to Who guides the wind.



Moving Toward the Spiritual Solution – Again

by Chris S. from New Mexico

I am Chris S., a sex addict who has been blessed with nearly twenty months of sobriety from inner circle behaviors. While this is true, it has been a day-by-day journey of beginning the Twelve Steps in earnest, and then formulating my own program of semi-twelve-step adherence. By this I mean attending one face-to-face SAA meeting, one to two telephone meetings a week (unless work gets busy), and sporadic contact with my sponsor.

In the beginning of my step work, I came to know the extent of my powerless over my addiction. I grew in my understanding that my Higher Power, my God, had the power to guide me toward healing the inner pain of shame and emptiness that was fueling my addictive behaviors. It was astounding to know that I could make other choices besides fantasizing over men inappropriately, using gay pornography, being a voyeur and using masturbation to fuel my fantasy life, along with crossing professional boundaries with men to try and address the emptiness in my life.

I thought that just remaining abstinent from my inner circle behaviors and not acting out was all I could expect of the twelve-step process. For a while I was living a pretty good life. While I was not completely healthy in my thinking and acting, I was living far better than when I was mired in the behaviors of my destructive addiction.

I was stuck in working Step Four: Writing the resentments. Going back into those painful situations and people of my life. Feeling those feelings, but not wanting to face them at any depth -- so I stopped working the steps. At this time, my work as a Christian minister was in a period of seasonal busyness. I attended fewer meetings. I stopped contacting my sponsor long ago. My excuses for slacking off on my program were numerous, but I was still not going back out there, so I thought my life was OK . . . enough.

I had come to realize that my OK living was not so OK. I became over-critical of a colleague who would soon be promoted and this anger spilled over into other areas of my life. And I came perilously close to crossing professional boundaries that jeopardize not only my sobriety, but also more importantly the spiritual well being of others with whom I might want to act out.

On the positive side, I was asked to be a sponsor for someone in the fellowship. And I devised a list of tasks I wanted him to do as my sponsee – most of which I had stopped doing weeks earlier.

I needed a change. That change was to begin working my program again. I have just reconnected with my sponsor and continued my work on Step

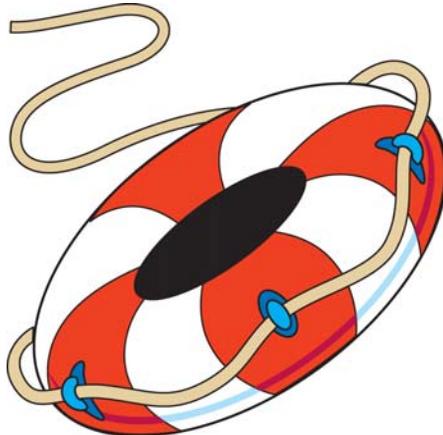
Four. Among the many words of wisdom he offered me, he shared this analogy: I do care that you achieve recovery. In that process, I cannot be attached or stuck on whether you do the Twelve Steps now or not. The ship is sinking, and if you don't want to grab a life preserver when one is offered to you, that's your own decision. As a sponsor, I can't be co-dependent. I'm not going down on the sinking ship with you if you decide it's not yet time for you to recover.

My sponsor's words are powerful reminders to me that the work of my recovery from sexual addiction is mine and mine alone. While I have been strengthened by the stories of many in our fellowship who have shared their experience, strength and hope, I have the daily decision to be dedicated to my recovery or not. No one's experience, strength and hope can substitute for the personal work I need to do for my recovery. No one else's recovery journey can be the personal spiritual awakening that God desires for me.

Today I'm taking my sponsor's advice of writing this article for *The Outer Circle* about this part of my recovery journey. I hope to write more in the future. He noted that people whom I'll never meet might be able to identify with some aspect of my story. If this is so, then I thank God that my laziness can possibly help you with examining the motivations for working your program.

I thank my sponsor for being there for me during this time -- by staying away as I wanted. If he chased after me, I might need to include him on my resentments list. I also thank God for giving me the space to show me how well my life was working on my terms. It was better than in my addictive past, but not as well as it could have been if I trusted God to take me deeper into the recovery journey.

Today I am more committed to working the Twelve Steps toward the goal of the spiritual awakening that God wants for me. May you and your Higher Power be committed to working your program today.



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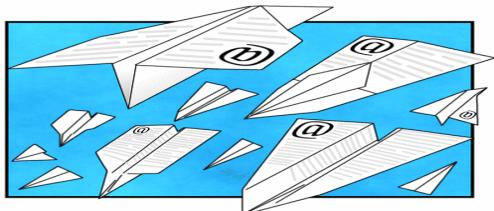
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How to Submit an Article to *The Outer Circle*

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 Twelve

Submission deadlines:

Jan/Feb:	Nov 12 th	Jul/Aug:	May 12 th
Mar/Apr:	Jan 7 th	Sept/Oct:	Jul 7 th
May/Jun:	Mar 10 th	Nov/Dec:	Sept 8 th

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

SIGNED: _____ **DATE:** _____

WITNESS: _____ **DATE:** _____

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

