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# Plain Brown Rapper

## THE SAA NEWSLETTER



*The purpose of the Plain Brown Rapper is to be a voice of the SAA Membership, published by and for those recovering from addictive sexual behaviors. We strive to be informative, sensitive, and responsive in expressing the experiences, strengths and hope of recovering sex addicts. Unless otherwise noted, the content of the PBR reflects the opinions of the writers and editors and not necessarily of the National Service Organization, the Literature Committee, or Sex Addicts Anonymous as a whole. Contents ©*

### Needed!

#### Person(s) who are Willing, Sober and Literate!

The position of PBR editor and the accompanying PBR editing committee positions will be open as of January 1, 1994. Interested persons will have familiarity with and access to a computer and the necessary software (including an electronic mail service), will be required to dedicate at least 25 hours a month, and will do all this for a consultant's fee of \$50.00 a month. As such it is essentially service work. A job description for this position is available. Interested persons should contact a member of the Literature Committee or the national office for details, or communicate with us directly. A letter of inquiry by interested persons should contain such things as time of sobriety, past SAA service work, skills with computers, language, organization skills, the reasons for wanting to serve as editor and a brief description of the applicant's view about the role of the PBR newsletter in SAA. Write or call:

Attn: PBR Committee  
P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270 (713) 869-4902

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***From Grace to Shame And Back Again:***  
**Contamination of a Recovery Program**  
**by the Core Beliefs**

*Sometimes I forget completely  
what companionship is.  
Unconscious and insane, I spill sad  
energy everywhere. My story  
gets told in various ways: A romance,  
a dirty joke, a war, a vacancy.*

*Divide up my forgetfulness to any number,  
it will go around.  
These dark suggestions that I follow,  
are they part of some plan?  
Friends, be careful. Don't come near me  
out of curiosity, or sympathy.*  
—Jeladuddin Rumi—

**F**ive years ago, I experienced a rebirth; I entered recovery. As I was hitting bottom, there were times I thought I might not make it. Like birth, the process was painful and frightening. But the result was such a blessed state of grace! After decades of "spilling sad energy everywhere" I decided to take certain steps and was sure I would never again open the door to that old behavior.

I was wrong. After two years, I fell back into my shame and spent several years in isolation and acting out before hitting bottom again. I have been back in my twelve step group for about

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a year now. This essay is an attempt to gain clarity about how the core beliefs of sexual addiction had contaminated my first recovery program.

### The Core Beliefs

In the poem above, Rumi identifies isolation ("forgetting completely what companionship is") as the antecedent of acting out ("I spill sad energy everywhere"). Pat Carnes in *The Sexual Addiction*, pushes the chain one step further back: isolation is due to shame. Carnes' four core beliefs of sexual addiction are a concise summary of the addictive causal chain:

1. I am basically a bad, unworthy person.
2. If people knew who I really was they would leave. No one could love me as I am.
3. I can't rely on others to meet my needs.
4. Of all my needs, sex is the most important.

This analysis helps me to see that sexual acting out is not a painful irrationality existing in isolation. It is instead the final link in a dysfunctional chain of cause and effect stretching back into earliest childhood. To recover from sexual addiction, I must do more than change my behavior. I must also heal what is motivating the behavior. Self-acceptance and healthy relationships are the essence of recovery. Earnie Larsen writes in *Stage II Recovery*, "I believe that learning to make relationships work is the core of full recovery."

### Positive Feedback Loops

This is not to imply that controlling dysfunctional behavior is unimportant. It is essential. Until we limit our acting out, we don't get a chance to work on the core beliefs. Acting out reinforces the core beliefs. After I engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior I felt flawed to the core (belief one). The burdensome secrets of my

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behavior left me feeling unfit for human contact, even a menace to others (belief two). it was foolish to even consider that others might help such a loathsome person as me (belief three). My only relief was more compulsive behavior (belief four).

Sexual acting out generates feelings of abnormality (1), isolation (2), and neediness (3). Acting out creates the prerequisites for more acting out. No wonder it escapes control! Acting out creates a positive feedback loop, a vicious circle. The more often and more shamefully I acted out, the greater the pressure to act out again.

Positive feedback, feedback that increases rather than corrects deviations from stability, is damaging. When a microphone squeals with "feedback", you're hearing positive feedback. Epidemics and chain reactions and explosions are positive feedback loops. So is compulsive sexual behavior.

Sexual acting out began as a tool to blunt awareness of the painful core beliefs, but my life exploded out of control as I inadvertently created positive feedback loops. I lost control over my behavior and it threatened to engulf my life in chaos. But halting the behavior did not eliminate the core beliefs. They had touched everything I had ever done in my life and my recovery was no exception. There are two ways in particular that the core beliefs contaminated my recovery program:

1. I set goals I could not keep: my recovery program provided further evidence of my "badness."
2. I granted myself only a conditional right to be in a recovery program: I felt I had to earn a place with my sobriety.

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## A Program of Rigid Recovery

*"Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself."*

Desiderata

When I entered recovery five years ago I constructed a recovery of prohibitions, a list of "Thou shalt not .....s". Some of these prohibitions still seem essential: "No pornography." "No sex outside marriage." Such actions would powerfully reinforce the core beliefs. Other prohibitions, such as "no lingering over the Dayton's lingerie ads," seem less essential because the actions have minimal consequences on the way I regard myself or relate to others. Still other boundaries such as "No gawking at women." do have a deleterious influence on the core beliefs, but were impossible for me to maintain.

When I entered recovery I was ( and remain) convinced that ogling women is something to eliminate. It's intrusive to women and degrading to me. "No more, I said, "Today it

stops! This is my sobriety date!"

But I was incapable of such a change. I was simply not aware enough to carry through. Before I was even aware I **might** look, I already **had** looked. I never had an opportunity not to gawk. I would just find my gaze on some woman's body. It was outside my conscious control.

These slips seemed like vicarious rapes. They were incontestable evidence that I am basically a bad person (belief 1). If people knew how uncontrollably I transgress against women they would surely shun me (belief 2). I couldn't risk asking for what I need because people might discover my secret (belief 3). My efforts to eliminate subtle forms of sexual acting out increased the strength of my addictive belief system.

It was so painful to slip again and again in this way, that I gradually let these boundaries slide from my program. But I fudged at check-in and I felt as

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if I was working a watered down program because I was a bad person incapable of better. I thought my brothers would find my program wanting if they knew its real state. I had started on the path from grace to shame.

### Conditional Self-Esteem

*"The sages call a person wise when all undertakings are free from anxiety about results. The wise have abandoned all external supports. Their security is unaffected by the results of their action."*

—The Bagavad Gita—

The core beliefs of addiction were firmly established in my psyche long before I first acted out. I learned them in childhood. I rarely perceive these beliefs directly, though. They are generally unconscious elements of my personality. They are core not surface beliefs. It would be too painful to live with the constant aware-

ness of the isolation and despair that Rumi describes.

In my daily life I function from a state of "conditional normalcy." My fundamental human rights and dignities are **contingent** on some achievement or quality. **Because** I have a good job, or own a fast red car, or get good grades in school, or have blond hair, or run five miles a day, or have a good stereo, or pump iron... I'm **OK** and other people want to be around me and will meet my needs.

I'm not sure I have ever engaged in activities that did not either bolster my contingent self-esteem or provide evidence for the core beliefs. If I performed well, I was, for that day at least, I was OK. If I performed poorly it was evidence that I was flawed, that the core beliefs were correct.

In particular, my first recovery program was swept into this dysfunctional system. Although I was changing my behavior, the core beliefs still

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defined who I thought I was and how I thought relationships worked. Sobriety became one of the supports of my contingent self-esteem, "I am (still) basically a bad person, but I am OK now because I have x time of sobriety." Medallions became tokens of my contingent self-esteem: This 30 day medallion proves I can come to this group. Except for my 9 month medallion, people see that I am dangerous. The only reason others listen to me is my 18 months of sobriety.

It was only through achievement that my fundamental needs for membership and companionship could be met. My recovery wasn't about dismantling the core beliefs. It was a way of feeling good despite them. This rigid recovery program that bolstered a wounded ego was a menace to others. I kept sharp watch for laxity and delusion in my brothers' recovery programs. When I found them I felt justified in feeling OK about my myself.

Conditional self-esteem requires finding others who don't seem to be measuring up. I once confronted a brother on "Not being in touch with your feelings." This occurred during his first step presentation and contributed to a painful experience for him. He stopped coming to group. Within a few weeks I was no longer coming to group either.

#### Fall from Grace

Recovery and sobriety began to feel like walking a precipice. I had so much to lose and there were so many ways to fail! If I slipped and acted out again, the bulwarks I had built against the core beliefs would be swept away. I could lose my license to be in recovery to feel good about myself and to associate with people who were important to me.

Well I did "slip". I was out of town at a convention. I left the convention and spent all one afternoon and evening cruising pornographic book-

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stores and then all that night compulsively masturbating, dozing, and waking again to masturbate. After almost twenty months of sobriety I had conclusive evidence (conclusive to me at least) that I was a bad, flawed person. I fell from grace.

The pain of the core beliefs that I had kept in check for two years with the conditional self-esteem of a recovery program burst forth. I experienced weeks of flattening depression. I worked listlessly and grouched at or avoided my wife and kids. I didn't call any brothers—How could they possibly respect me anymore? At the meeting I couldn't hold my head up; I couldn't look people in the eye and after a few meetings I stopped going entirely.

### And Back Again

*"But many of them did recover if they had the capacity to be rigorously honest."*

AA Big Book

The addiction is truly cunning, baffling and powerful. It was able to use my recovery program for nourishment! As powerful as the addiction is though, there is one thing it cannot do. It cannot confer happiness and it cannot protect from pain. I spent two years in initially mild, but steadily increasing pain. That pain was eventually more than I could tolerate and I hit bottom for the second time.

Since returning to the program I have run a much different program. I have to be wary of creating a recovery program that feeds the core beliefs. Honesty, self-acceptance and healthy relationships are more important than "Thou shalt nots." The heart of my current recovery program is reversing the core beliefs and living the core affirmations:

- 1) I am basically a good human being and I deserve to have things work out well for me.
- 2) Many people like having me around and like me more the

more they know of me.

3) I can ask for what I need. Some people will try to understand and meet those needs.

4) I have many things I enjoy doing with my time and energy. At many times, other needs are more important than sex.

**Controlling** addictive behavior is essential, but **focusing** on behavior change is dangerous to me. My boundaries aim at behaviors which: a) most powerfully feed the core affirmations and b), are within my conscious control. I am wary about setting boundaries that will prove once more that I am a bad person. I have the capacity to use a recovery program as a club against myself. Keeping recovery free from conditional self-esteem is a tough problem. I don't have a solution and don't even understand the problem very well. Humility seems like the best strategy, "none of us have gone far." Intolerance and arrogance are signs that I am not feeling good about myself. If I am tempted to give advice, I look hard for contingent self-esteem. I use arrogance as a cue to do self-forgiveness and self-acceptance affirmations.

Although things are still difficult, my serenity and ability to be in relationship are better than they have ever been. This closing poem is an inspiring promise of the fruits of a life built on the core affirmations of recovery instead of the core beliefs of addiction:

*The Guest is inside you, and also inside me;  
You know the sprout is hidden inside the seed.  
We are all struggling; none of us has gone far.  
Let your arrogance go, and look around inside.*

*The blue sky opens out farther and farther,  
The daily sense of failure goes away;  
The damage I have done to myself fades,  
And a million suns come forward with light,  
When I sit firmly in that world.*

*Kabir*

**Anonymous Member of S.A.A.** [Editor L.G. regrets misplacing author's name]

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**I** am responsible.  
When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help, I want  
the hand of  
{the fellowship} always to be there.  
And for that: I am responsible."

*(Alcoholics Anonymous, Adapted in the SAA Outreach Committee Newsletter 5-30-93)*

### Our Mission

To serve and support the membership in further extending the hand of SAA to addicts reaching out for help and to addicts still suffering.

#### What do we hope to accomplish?

The creation of a national committee to coordinate outreach efforts will give SAA a clearinghouse for sharing the experience, strength and hope of its members. It will give us the ability to focus on tasks, create a service network and avoid the reinvention of the wheel.

#### How will we do it?

We want to create a group with responsibility, accountability and cohesion. We want to be able to come together as a committee at next year's convention and look back at our progress. We want to work with the literature committee, the prison outreach committee and local intergroups. It is

important to set realistic goals, to find balance. In this first year, we see as our primary goal the creation of the international network. We want members with questions to have access to answers. With that in mind, we have created a committee structure that includes regional chairs or contact persons. Our second goal is to collect as much information as possible about what outreach is already happening around the country and around the world. Then the committee can develop a way to share information on what has and what has not worked.

#### What can you do to help?

##### How can we help you?

Let the members of your group or intergroup know we are here. If you know of any outreach happening in your area, document it. What have you learned? What guidelines or procedures have you followed? How has it worked?

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Share this information with us so that we may pass it on. If you do not know of any outreach but you would like to get involved, contact us. We can help you get started. If you have questions or concerns, ask us. We will share with you the experience, strength and hope of those who have had the same questions.

Attn. Outreach Committee  
NSO of SAA  
P.O. Box 70949  
Houston, TX 77270

**7th Annual SAA International Convention**  
**May 27-May 30, 1994**  
**in Phoenix, Arizona**

*Out  
of the Ashes,*

*Into the  
Light!*

This four day event will include speakers, recovery workshops, Arizona recreation activities and more. COSA is holding their first annual COSA NSO Convention at the same place and time. All SAA and COSA members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Registration packets will be available in late January. For more information contact SAA—Mike O. @ 602-863-3006 or Stuart G. @ 602-285-9910; COSA—Sherry T. @ 602-947-7370.

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### Sisters in Sexual Sobriety

A newsletter by and for women in Sex Addicts Anonymous has begun publication, with a second issue printed this month. The views and opinions of the writers do not necessarily reflect the views of Sex Addicts Anonymous as a whole. To submit or receive the newsletter write or telephone: Editor SISS, 420 Allen St., Lansing, MI 48912-2602; Phone: 517-484-1807. The deadline for written submissions to this newsletter is the fifteenth of each month with issue date the first of each month. Expenses of printing and mailing are covered in the spirit of the Seventh Tradition.

The following article has been excerpted with the kind permission of the organizers of the SISS newsletter.

### Privacy and Respect

While whispering on the telephone to my sponsor, someone had entered the adjoining room and I thought they might be able to overhear my conversation. I abruptly said, "Why do I always have to feel shame and guilt?" My sponsor offered me an option as sponsors do! She said to upgrade feelings and vocabulary to: *I need privacy. I deserve respect. I am accepting this growth lesson. I am deserving and vulnerability is not bad.* All from an ordinary conversation. Thanks H.P! I had the following insight:

Earn the gifts of the program,  
Not the privacy of secrecy,  
Nor the demand of respect,  
But the dignity of abstinence.

Marilyn F., Detroit, MI