

SCA DC NEWSLETTER

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By SCA Metro DC Intergroup

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My Story

By P. M.

I grew up an only child of a single parent in NYC. My mother often worked two or three jobs at a time. While I had friends and was well liked, I often felt lonely and "different". I later realized I was gay, but I could not bear the shame. Instead, I overcompensated by being the best student and ingratiating myself with others. I also became fascinated with all matters sexual and pornographic. I was the resident "sexpert" at school. It was the beginning of a dual existence: high-achieving student by day and sex-obsessed adolescent by evening.

I discovered adult book stores while in high school. This was in the pre-Disneyfication days of Times Square. I relished the city's seedy underbelly and it fed into my double-life. In college, I discovered phone sex lines, adult theaters and public sex venues. I never dated; I just had sex with strangers -- mostly older men, often married.

I began graduate school in 1992. I started dating some, but always maintained my secret life. My relationships never lasted long. I'd always find some fault in my partners that allowed me to leave before getting too involved. I frequented back rooms, sex clubs, bookstores, and other public venues...parks, restrooms, playgrounds, piers. I even took to occasional street walking, not because I needed money but because I liked being picked up and having anonymous sex. How I got through graduate school and earned a degree is still a mystery to me. I justified my behavior as that of a normal 20-something year-old gay man. A lot of gay men were doing similar things -- or so I thought.

I came to Washington, D.C. in 1996 for post-graduate training. I knew no one here and felt miserable and lonely. I decided I was depressed and started seeing psychiatrists. I saw at least 4 or 5 psychiatrists and took a variety of antidepressants over a three-year period, but still I felt unhappy. I continued to seek out anonymous sex partners. With the advent of the internet and the purchase of a car, my options expanded enormously.

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The Tool of Abstinence

By L. S.

My experience with the tool of abstinence in the SCA program has been one of some success, some failure, some frustration, and a striving for acceptance of a tool that many of us find quite difficult to embrace. Below is a bit of my story as it relates to my experience with abstinence, and a few of the other tools in this program.

When I first came to SCA I was able to get a sponsor within the first couple of months. I began observing and using the SCA tools, and my sponsor made two suggestions to me that have proven to be invaluable to the effectiveness of my recovery. He said to me, "Keep coming back," and "strive to stay away from the people, places and things that trigger compulsive behavior." These two statements are tied together in my mind because they have allowed me to discover a much healthier environment than the one in which I was struggling when I first arrived in the rooms. I discovered that if I abstained from being with my sexual partners and replaced that with the genuine fellowship that I found by attending meetings, I was able to achieve relief from the anxiety that my sexually compulsive behavior brought me. I was so relieved to realize that abstinence did not mean isolating myself like a hermit. In fact it brought me closer to people in the rooms as I celebrated my first month and every month after that as I grew in my recovery.

After about nine months in the program I lost my office job and started working at a retail establishment. My new schedule did not allow me to have as much free time in the evenings, so over the next few months my attendance meetings dropped off precipitously. I somehow fooled myself into thinking that since I had been able to achieve more than six months of sexual sobriety in the SCA program, I was fine and that the meetings were somehow superficial to my recovery. Boy, was I wrong! My sexual compulsion crept back into my life and the hunger for intimate human contact led me to my addictive behavior once again. While I had broken ties with the lover whom I believed to be my primary

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SCA NEWS & EVENTS

DCA Social Event: Ice Skating & Coffee on Saturday, Feb 23 at 3 pm at the ice rink in the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden For non-skaters, the Pavilion Café will be open and serving coffee, tea, etc. Email S.F. for more information. **Please** contact your editors, R.F. or D.P., if you would like to share your story or contribute in other ways to the DC SCA newsletter. Also, please let us know if you are interested in helping us produce our SCA newsletter.

My Story continued

Sometimes I would have sex with a dozen men a day. I was also escalating my risk by having unsafe sex, sex with drugs, and sex outdoors. I met a married man in a university restroom and we began "dating". He eventually left his wife and family to be with me, but what I had hoped was to be a stable relationship soon became one marked by drama, jealousy, neglect, lies and ultimately violence. I quickly began cheating and found myself again maintaining multiple secret lives.

A lot of it came crashing down in 2000 when I was put on probation at work for constant tardiness. My boss knew something was wrong with me, but he assumed it was alcohol or drug-related. I sought more professional help. I was referred to an academic psychiatrist because my "depression" was refractory. This psychiatrist was the first to diagnose my sexual compulsion disorder. He recommended a therapist who specialized in sex addiction and 12-step meetings.

I came to SCA for the first time in 2000. I wish I could say I took to the program like a fish to water, but I did not. I resisted everything about the program, even using my acting out pseudonym at meetings. I never got honest nor worked the steps. Within a year I had convinced my therapist I was "cured" and stopped attending meetings. I also dumped my boyfriend and came off antidepressants. Unfortunately, my addiction picked up right where I left it, but escalated at an alarming rate. My daily routine included going to work and then getting online or going to the parks or restrooms for anonymous sex. I would have sex until there was literally no one left. In 2003, I contracted HIV. Despite the associated anguish and exhaustion, I did not stop acting out. Sex was the only way I knew how to cope. In 2004, I acquired syphilis. I still kept acting out. It was not until 2005, that I finally hit a wall. Something inside me told me I simply could not continue.

My return to SCA in 2005 was different. I finally surrendered to the process and immediately felt better. I got honest and connected with others. I got a sponsor, wrote a sexual recovery plan and began working the steps. Most importantly, I acknowledged my spirituality and sought a conscious connection with my higher power. My recovery has not been smooth, but the acting out has diminished significantly. I am currently working my Fourth Step and feel like I am finding myself for the first time. I am also working through what I now recognize as my codependency issues. I esteem myself by taking care of myself -physically, emotionally and spiritually. I am also dating in a healthier manner. I accept that my sex addiction will be with me as long as I live, but it doesn't have to control my life. I am learning to coexist.

Abstinence continued

qualifier, I had remained in communication with another lover, whom I now realize was a sex addict. All it took was one ride home from a social event in his car for me to fall into the same pattern of compulsive behavior. Nearly nine months of sobriety were flushed down the drain. Luckily I found a new job that allowed me the time to get back to attending meetings on a regular basis.

Over the next month I was able to separate myself from the sex addict because I was attending meetings and gathering strength from the experience, strength and hope of others. It became easier for me to abstain from compulsive behavior and realize that one of the "personal voids" I was attempting to fill was the perception that I was somehow unlovable. I discovered then that I was not merely sexually compulsive, but that I was also a love addict. I sought to use sex as a way of getting the love that I did not have for myself. I needed to go through the process of figuring out that just because I was not having sex did not mean that I was not capable of being loved. This realization helped me to deepen my recovery in SCA.

At this point I also discovered the concept of sexual anorexia. At first I did not understand this term and I did not think that I was sexually anorexic. As I maintained my sexual abstinence, however, I realized that my sexuality was an important part of me and that I yearned to express it in a healthy way and not deny myself this experience the way that an anorexic would. For me to be able to do this in a healthy way, however, I knew that my self-esteem would need to grow. Being sexually abstinent helped me to work on loving myself rather than trying to get someone else to love me. I knew that I would need to be with someone who respected my desire to participate in sex as an act of self-love, rather than as a way of seeking the love that I did not believe that I had for myself. I found that a period of abstinence was essential in achieving a better self-esteem than the low self-esteem with which I entered the program.

While I do not claim that I know what defines the line between abstinence from compulsive sex and sexual anorexia, I do know that if I am pursuing a relationship with someone else, I need to do that because I love myself and respect the autonomy of the other person. If I am seeking sex just to make myself feel better, or get someone else to love me, then it is unhealthy. For me the period of abstinence that I have been through has been the time that I have been able to work on my self-esteem. It is a time free from the complications and distractions of a relationship with someone else. It has allowed me to focus and create a stronger level of recovery. While it isn't perfect--I still struggle with discerning between loving action and compulsive behavior--it is progress and I feel fortunate to have this experience with the tool of abstinence.