

SCA DC NEWSLETTER

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By SCA Metro DC Intergroup

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My Story

By C. J.

Whenever I am feeling down, my dog Teddy, a mutt I rescued from the pound seven years ago, will immediately sense something is wrong, and crawl up into my lap, and nuzzle my hand with his nose. I doubt any sort of thought process goes through his brain when he does this; it is an instinctive reaction.

My therapist once explained to me that my disease works in the same way. Addiction governs the “animal” part of our brains, not the rational part. All it “knows” is that when I am feeling bad, its job is to comfort me and it kicks into action. For me, that comfort has most frequently manifested itself in the form of sex addiction.

I was pretty young when I first learned that sex could make me feel better. My mother and father were 45 and 46 years old, respectively when I was born, and I was the youngest of six children. As a very young child I was spoiled. It was like having five additional parents who lavished a lot of attention on me. By the time I was eight or nine, my siblings had all moved out and the older ones had started families of their own. I was essentially an only child at this point, and my parents fought often, and my father was verbally and physically abusive. He was also, I believe, a sex addict, and when I was about five or six, I had already discovered his stash of pornographic magazines hidden in our garage.

Now that I think back on it, no one ever said to me, “Don’t look at those magazines!” but I knew, probably from growing up in a very religious household, that it was wrong. As a result, I would sneak out to the garage to look at the magazines, and I memorized exactly what order they were in. I also memorized exactly where the rake, lawn mower, and the location of whatever else was arranged next to the boxes was, so that I could put things back when I was finished without getting caught. By the time I was about nine or ten, my parents would occasionally leave me alone, and I began to anxiously look forward to this because I knew this meant an opportunity to escape into the secret world of my sex addiction. I was a shy kid, not very athletic and not very popular so I had few friends, and my best friend was my addict.

In high school, I was determined to be popular, so I signed up for every “non-athletic” club or activity. I was the editor of the school newspaper, the yearbook photographer, and on the speech and debate team. Something else started happening, too. I started developing secret crushes on some of the other boys in my class. These feelings terrified me because I had an older brother who was gay and who was kicked out of the house by my father. How would my parents react if they knew

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Healthy Sexuality

By J. M.

As I begin these reflections, I am particularly irked at the toxic sexual energy I have been experiencing these past weeks. I am irked, but not surprised, that even in my ninth year of recovery in SCA, I still need to deal with (though perhaps not on an intense daily basis) the fact of sexualizing deep insecurities and fears about myself that have nothing to do with sex—fears about intimately connecting with others either romantically or in friendship, fears about my competence professionally or personally, fears about my value and love-ability, fear of success. Sex and romance became my coping mechanisms for these at some point in my life. The list seems endless, but it is no longer hidden by a veil of denial and the fears have much less power over me now. Though the first order of business for me when I first came into the rooms was to address the sexually addictive behaviors that made my life unmanageable (anonymous acting out, revolving door relationships, unsafe sex, romantic obsessions), I have spent the bulk of my time and energy trying to emotionally become an adult. What I now know is that **my sexuality is about as healthy as I am!**

I recently read a quote, though not from conference approved literature, that describes well what “healthy” looks like for me on my frequent “good” days in recovery: “With a healthy sense of self we feel at ease. Everything we need is already here. We’re centered within a state of contentment. We’re not too hard on ourselves; at the same time, we’re wise to our own little tricks. We know how we get slippery. We know when we’re trying to get away with something. We’re comfortable looking at ourselves honestly. Our mind is open and supple. We’re becoming inquisitive because a whole range of reality we hadn’t noticed before is coming into focus. With this openness, flexibility, and curiosity, we begin to see certain truths about the way things are.” (Sakyong Mipham, *Turning the Mind Into an Ally*)

The net result for me of working my program these years (working the steps, maintaining a spiritual discipline, working with a sponsor) has provided me with the infrastructure of a healthier sexuality. My mind is no longer overwhelmed by fantasy and the search for sex. Consequently, I now have a career in which I can be focused and which provides me with work I love. I have been able to nurture friendships better and am more available for friendships. I am no longer overwhelmed by financial fears. I am

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SCA NEWS & EVENTS

DC SCA 2008 Fall Retreat – Oct 10-12: Our Columbus Day weekend retreat is now full. We are maintaining a waiting list however, so please do not hesitate to let us know if you are interested. At your next SCA meeting, let your meeting chair, intergroup rep, or one of the retreat committee members know of your interest.

This bi-monthly newsletter is one of the many ways DC SCA Intergroup serves the local SCA community. D.P., R.F. and S.L. are the editors for the newsletter. Please let one of us know if you would like to share your story or contribute to the newsletter in some way or another.

My Story continued

they had two? So I retreated into a fantasy world around sex. In my early 20's, I finally came out after moving to Washington, D.C. to go to graduate school.

I discovered how easy it was to find guys to have sex with...the bars, the strip clubs, and the acting out places. I also discovered the phone chat lines, and started meeting people that way. When the Internet came along, I could not wait to get a home computer so that I could get online and find more sex partners. I also discovered that alcohol helped numb my shyness and lingering feelings of awkwardness, and helped me to lose some of my shame and inhibition around sex. One night a guy I was having sex with pulled out a bottle of poppers, and I tried them and immediately liked the feeling. I had tried pot in college and liked it, and would gladly do it too if a sex partner offered it to me. One night, I used the Internet to hook up after going home drunk from a bar, and the guy offered me cocaine and I did it without even thinking.

From 1994 to 1998, I was in an on and off relationship with a guy and I could not stay monogamous because of my sex addiction. When I saw a therapist during this time, he told me that sex addiction was nonsense, that I just had a higher-than-average sex drive and that I should continue to "sow my wild oats" until I met a guy who was like me. When my relationship finally ended in 1998, my sex addict, and by that time, my drug addict and alcoholic, took off. I started engaging in riskier and riskier behavior and I contracted HIV sometime during the summer of 1999. At this point, I really did not care anymore, and when a sex buddy offered me crystal meth, I did not even hesitate. Soon I was an every-other-weekend meth user, then every weekend, then my use spilled over into the week and I called in sick to work every opportunity I could, or made up imaginary meetings out of the office so that I could go use and act out. If my sex addiction was like a fire--as a friend of mine in recovery likes to say--crystal meth was like pouring gasoline on it.

I met someone else who was also a sex and crystal meth addict in May of 2000, and when he warned me away, I immediately felt I could rescue him. That was when my codependency really kicked in, and it is still part of my disease today. We have broken up and gotten together more times than I can count over the last eight year, and both have gone through different treatment programs. We are still together today only because we have learned that we have to put our individual programs first.

I first started coming to "S" meetings in late 2001, and it has been a struggle. I have actually managed to get more sobriety from drugs and alcohol in the last seven years than with sex. A huge reason for this is that unlike the drugs and alcohol, sex is so readily available to me. After all sex is a part of who we all are as human beings and part of the struggle for me has been defining what healthy sexuality looks like. I have had to "retrain" my brain, and I have found the best way to do that is through working a program, going to meetings, praying every day, and working steps with a sponsor. I also see a therapist weekly who is a recovering addict and specializes in sex addiction. By doing these things, I have over a month now, which is a long time for me, and I am extremely grateful to the program and my Higher Power for the sobriety I have today.

I still feel down sometimes, but by surrendering today, I find that Teddy's head in my lap is more than enough to comfort me. And that is a gift I would not trade for anything in the world.

Healthy Sexuality continued

confident of my ability to take care of myself and no longer am desperate to find someone else who will. Sex is no longer an activity primarily to feel good about myself or to assuage my self-doubt. I can take care of my sexual needs without spiraling out of control. Having grown up in a rageful, angry, and emotionally traumatizing alcoholic family my emotional development got "stuck" somewhere along the way and the embarrassing reality for me as an adult was to cope by getting involved in relationships of unsustainable intensity and erotic urgency, then to use my sex addiction to cope when the intensity wore off. Now that I have a life which is more balanced and which I truly love, I have learned a few basic truths about healthy sexuality:

--My sexuality is an integral part of who I am as a person. It is not necessarily or always about being "genital" or a "technician". It is also affective. To the extent that I can be a warm or affectionate person with friends, family, or co-workers is the extent that I have integrated my sexuality in a healthy way. Genital expressions of sexuality are not the only healthy expressions of sexuality. When my addiction was at its worst, I was least able to be warm and affectionate.

--Healthy sexuality is not about urgency or intensity. In fact, my healthiest sexual experiences have been experiences of attraction to the person, not just to his body. This has not meant that healthier experiences of sex have not been "hot" for me; they have been different. Sobriety used to seem boring because fantasy sexual objects have intensity. The only problem is that fantasy makes it impossible for me to appreciate sexual partners who are real people. Healthy sex is a real connection with a real person.

--Healthy sexuality is spontaneous rather than controlled. It is the result of developing boundaries which are sinuous, respectful of myself and others, and based in moderation. Early on in my recovery I felt that controlling my addictive behaviors was the way to go. My experience now is that Healthy sexuality is about surrendering to my best instincts—and in recovery, I discovered that I do have them, and they are trustworthy. I have discovered that taking care of my sexual needs is a legitimate task of recovery in moderation and balance that is appropriate for me.

--Healthy sexuality is open to intimacy. For me the "threshold of connection", as I like to call it, for appropriate sexual connections has changed in recovery. For now, I maintain a bottom line that makes sexual experiences very available to me, but part of my own experience of healthy sexuality has meant that I don't avail myself of them in a way which "makes unreasonable demands on my time and energy, places me in legal jeopardy, or endangers my mental, physical, or spiritual health." Sex is no longer the be-all and end-all of my life. My higher power is no longer sex. In fact, when I am feeling particularly focused and centered, I have been able to invite my higher power into the most intimate moments of my sexual life. Healthy sexuality is the experience of my sexuality as a gift and not as a burden or a problem.