

SCA DC NEWSLETTER

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By SCA Metro DC Intergroup

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My Story

By Ginger T.

I will never forget the first night after receiving an online subscription. As a shy, 15-year-old kid drowning in low self-esteem, “instant messaging” fascinated me. I could suddenly talk to anyone without fear of judgment. As I became curious and confused about my sexuality, I quickly discovered the world of gay chat rooms. What started out as a healthy exploration quickly turned into a fueling habit. By the time I got my driver’s license, I was sneaking out the door to meet up with guys I met online. Sometimes, I lied about my age, but not always. Almost all of the guys were much older than me, and I could have easily gotten into a lot more danger than I did. Very quickly I was leading a double life: honor student by day, sex addict by nights and weekends.

When I wasn’t chatting online, I would masturbate whenever I could. I now realize that my sexual compulsion didn’t start with the online world, as I discovered masturbation as a kid long before that. Growing up in a family struggling with alcoholism, I would use it to calm my fears and anxiety or when bored or procrastinating.

In college I spent too much time in chat rooms while my social life and development suffered greatly. My addiction supported my social anxiety, and I lost out on enjoying the company of others my age. I also began to develop unhealthy crushes on authority figures and people much older than me, and would easily confuse sex with love.

After college I moved to a large city in the Northeast and met people through the only method I knew how: the Internet. Hookups were not leading to friendships or intimate relationships. Disillusioned with my menial, paper-pushing job, I became depressed and came home from work everyday searching for connection and self-esteem in the chat rooms.

One particular hookup led to an intense, “crash and burn” relationship. When he suddenly disappeared on Christmas Eve, I desperately logged online to search for any hookup that might mask my pain and help me redeem myself. I hooked up with someone whom I would not normally associate with, experimented with drugs, and had unsafe sex. I woke up on Christmas Day freaked out and delusional. I was convinced I

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Sharing Our Addiction With Others

By Bill W.

Like many who came to SCA, I came when my life was out of control two and a half years ago. While I had the classic upper middle class life that I often dreamed of as a kid, I was also leading a double life. It left a destructive path that cost me money, relationships, and even a job. I was one of the lucky ones that survived the crazy years with my health intact but I was living a secret existence with an overwhelming desire to have sex with women outside my marriage and occasionally men.

After my wife found out, she repeatedly asked me to get help for my problem. Over the years, I tried several therapists and many unsuccessful attempts at “white knuckling” my way through a few months or a year or two. However, I always ended up back in bed with someone new, sexualizing almost every female encounter. If I wasn’t in an affair, I was working on the next encounter or the occasional one night stand. After yet another intense sexual affair with an unstable woman, my addiction sent me into a depression that I couldn’t shake. I nearly threw away my marriage which finally drove me to SCA and therapy for my addiction.

A close friend who attended AA sessions took me to my first SCA meeting. I was nervous, felt out of place, and was in complete denial that I had a problem. At the same time, I started to attend sessions with a therapist who specialized in sexual addiction. Over the next six months, I finally accepted my addiction to sex and began to get sober. For the first time in nearly 20 years I wasn’t trying to get every woman in bed. My wife and I received couples counseling and worked very hard to stay together. It wasn’t easy and still has its pitfalls but at least we work through them rather than living in denial.

In my work and social life, I continued to live a guarded life; separate from my personal life. People had no idea that I was receiving treatment. My life with my wife revolved around couples that we met through our children and social activities. I talked to them about teachers, soccer games, summer camps, taxes; all the things of a normal suburban life. They didn’t know that I was tormented inside, trying hard to stay sober; that I spent years constantly cruising ads, websites, and worming my way into sexual encounters.

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My Story continued

was now HIV+ and that my life was over. Doused in shame, I called my doctor and immediately went on post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) therapy. The drugs made me sick for an entire month, and I slipped further into the despondency of depression. My spiritual bottom occurred when I continued to turn to the chat rooms for even more hookups and escape, even when I was physically ill. Something had to give. That's when I entered the S-rooms. I learned that my story wasn't so special. The rooms slowly taught me how to emerge from my shell and connect genuinely with others in real-time. I first learned how to be a friend to someone and how to receive and accept love. This foundation was key for me as I would later begin to address my social anxiety with the help of group therapy. By coming to meetings, doing service work, and socializing, I continued to gain more confidence with intimate relationships, whether with a friend, dating partner, or boyfriend.

My sexual sobriety has come and gone throughout my time in SCA, and sometimes I feel depressed/angry/shameful that I haven't achieved linear sobriety. But I keep coming back because I'm amazed at what I've learned about myself and others during these three years. I can't help but think of the continued progress I'll make in the future if I keep coming back.

Recovery also taught me the concept of a loving Higher Power (who is not me) who wants the best for me and is the "manager of my fan club." Learning about and incorporating spirituality into my life has brought peace and serenity at times, even in crisis situations.

A couple Program themes that I have been thinking about lately are: 1) acceptance is the answer to all my problems today, and 2) recovery is a journey, not a destination. Sometimes when struggling with sobriety or a character defect, such as codependency, my first reaction might be hopelessness or resentment. But when I allow myself to believe that my Higher Power has me exactly where I'm supposed to be, and that this conflict/situation was brought to help me be the person I want to become, peace and serenity no longer seem far away. So with the tool of acceptance, my conflicts or problems are no longer catastrophes that fuel the desire for online binges.

I also remind myself frequently that recovery is a journey of spiritual growth one day at a time, and that I'll never magically "arrive" at a blissful destination, void of any problems. I like to read the Promises, as they provide me with goals to work towards, but for me there is no recovery "finish line." Progress for me has been slow, and that is OK. I'm currently facing a major life transition with many fears and unknowns in my future. Thanks to the Program, I know change is slow but progress is never far away. Because of that, I'll keep coming back.

Meditation continued

Unfortunately, my closest SCA friend and sponsor moved out of the area. At the time, I felt that I needed to share my SCA experiences with another person inside my social world. I didn't share regularly at my home meeting because I felt a disconnection. I didn't understand in the beginning that sex addiction is not about sexual preference. In order to overcome my strong attraction to females, my therapist encouraged me to develop stronger relationships with males and share in meetings. I picked someone that I had become good friends with over the past year, Mark, another married guy who was part of our suburban social circle.

Mark was a successful CPA with whom I had a lot in common. I opened up one night and told him about my sexual history. It didn't seem to faze him at all. He opened up himself about getting therapy for depression. Over the next few months I would occasionally tell him a little more. As couples, Mark and his wife grew close to me and my wife and we were spending more time together. However, we began to notice that Mark had his own drinking and family issues to resolve. We discussed with his wife if it might be time for an intervention.

One day my wife told me that she had received a call from Mark, insisting that I sexually assaulted him on several occasions. I was shattered. Fortunately, I had an alibi and could truthfully say it never happened. I felt betrayed and hurt. As a quiet individual, opening up to a person about private events was a difficult thing for me to do. I immediately cut off all contact with Mark and his wife. It was especially hard because one of my children became best friends with one of theirs. I felt intense guilt and shame. My addiction was yet again creating pain and suffering in my family's lives.

I shared this experience with my therapist and at SCA meetings. I learned that Mark probably has his own issues and my disclosure may have spurred him to confront his own demons. It has definitely made me more cautious about whom I open to about my personal life. Since I have SCA I really don't need to share my sexual issues in another forum. The two worlds can exist separately without overlapping.

At the same time, I can't live in a vacuum. I need to come to meetings and talk about everything on my mind and hear others. It also requires me to loosen up in SCA and be less defensive and accept the trust of the fellowship; to seek out those members who are good role models for sobriety. From now on, I will not be sharing in my suburban world what I am going through in recovery. This doesn't mean that I can't have close personal male friends, but I am working on establishing good healthy relationships with boundaries.

I believe it's important to find a safe place to share my triumphs, struggles, and pain. I found a safe outlet within my regular SCA group. As I try to apply the SCA principles to my relationships in both my personal and professional life, I am learning to trust and be open but accept that there are boundaries for sharing my addiction.