

SCA DC NEWSLETTER

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By SCA Metro DC Intergroup

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My Story

By Ron L.

In 1st grade, I persuaded kids to play doctor. Through elementary school, I continued – mostly with guys from school. When a 6th grade buddy showed me his older brother's pornography, it was like a flash went off. I began fantasizing about the men I'd seen in the pictures. On the eve of puberty, a lot of my buddies were also experimenting and I quickly figured out how to persuade them to experiment with me and keep it secret, having lots of sexual experiences during junior high and high school while excelling in my studies and other activities.

Initially, college was overwhelming to me. It was very difficult to handle the pressure of coursework and all my feelings. I happened to go to a public bathroom where I was studying and stumbled into a sexual free-for-all. I was transfixed, instantly hooked by the explosive risk, danger, and thrill of the experience. In a short time, I was obsessed with what I might be missing in that bathroom. I wasn't able to go more than a day or so without returning.

Within a few months, I knew I was in trouble. I tried everything I could think of to stop, but I couldn't keep myself from going back. I'd leave with a profound sense of guilt and shame and vowed not to come back – but always did. I had the sense that I was drowning and reached out to two important people in my life – a chaplain I saw regularly and my father. I told them what I was doing and that I couldn't stop. They were both aghast, shocked, and had no idea what to do. I was 18 and an out of control sex addict.

15 years later my therapist told me I was a sex addict and I needed to go to a 12-step program called SCA. During those 15 years, I had learned how to manage the double life of an addict, developing my professional public life while living an extraordinarily isolated secret life frequenting parks, bathrooms, bookstores, cinemas, bathhouses, tricks, and an endless number of short-lived 'relationships.' I also developed

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Dating as a Tool

By William H.

I learned how to date when I was 41, after joining SCA. Even though I had never been single, I never dated, I just ended up in two long (wrong) relationships. Before I could start dating, I had to get healthy and sober on my own. It wasn't until I was happy being alone that I was ready to be with someone else. Everything I thought I needed from another person (to feel loved, complete, happy), I had to get from my Higher Power instead. I also learned how to make and keep boundaries and take care of myself.

Before dating, I made three lists: "Must Have," "Must Not Have" and "Nice to Have" characteristics. For example, I will only date men who are single, available and self supporting. I will not date smokers or active drug users. There are no physical traits on my list. It's surprising how many people "accept" unacceptable characteristics, thinking that they can either live with it or somehow change it. Neither works. I learned the hard way that I cannot, and must not, try to accept things that I find unacceptable or it builds into resentment.

I also had a Dating Plan. It seems analytical and unromantic, but it's important to make decisions about what to do and when to do it in advance. My first plan was simple. The first date could only be for one hour: a "coffee date," i.e., a short meeting in a coffee shop. I had a 3-date rule – at least 3 dates before sex; sometimes I extended it to a one-month rule. We couldn't go to each other's apartment or other places where it would be hard to impose boundaries. I could date up to 3 men at a time, as long as I wasn't having sex with any of them. Once I had sex with someone, I couldn't date anyone else. This kept things less complicated for me.

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SCA NEWS & EVENTS

Put Saturday Feb 24 on your calendar! Intergroup is hosting ISO's (International Service Organization of SCA) annual meeting and we will be having a SCA 12-step meeting at 5:45 pm at 1st Pres. Church in Arlington (where our Wed. night meeting is). After dinner, we will be meeting back at the church for games and desserts. Email Randy M or call him for more information.

Be part of DC SCA's online recovery support group. Email dcscablog@verizon.net to join.

Please contact your editor, Rod F. at roddiver@verizon.net, if you would like to share your story or contribute in other ways to the DC SCA newsletter.

My Story continued

a core within myself that was hardened, bitter, cynical, and felt life offered little hope.

The first SCA meetings I attended, in LA, were terrifying to me. They were often large with a lot of attractive men attending. I began to understand that my sex addiction was part of every aspect of how I related to people – how I flirted with others, brushed up against people, and even presented myself. There was no aspect of me that wasn't complicit in my search for sex. That same year I learned I was HIV +, underscoring one of the costs of my addiction. I abstained from all sexual behavior during this phase and found withdrawal frightening – but I believed I was better off confused in withdrawal than lost while compulsively acting out.

I moved, ending up in Chicago with a partner. I had learned to avoid anonymous sex and to be sexual in the context of dating. I felt ready to commit to monogamy with my partner. I decided the only way was to commit to my 12-step work. I found a SCA fellowship, attended meetings, got a sponsor, took on service positions, and worked the steps. One day at a time, I was sexual only with my partner for over 5 years, until a short time before his death.

While I didn't lose everything I'd gained in recovery, I couldn't figure out how to deal with my pain and grief honestly. I resumed acting out sexually, finding ways to keep it from sabotaging my achievement in grad school. I ignored the quiet voice within that reminded me of my prior recovery by avoiding time for reflection. I worked and played hard – and never stopped to think. I found another partner, and managed to keep most of my acting out behavior virtual. I convinced myself that this wasn't "really" acting out, and – no surprise –my disease progressed over the years until I was meeting people for sex. Then in DC, I got caught by my partner in a very humiliating way. It took this shameful experience for me to realize the only way to find sanity was by committing again to a sexual recovery program. I returned to SCA in DC in mid-October 2005.

I wouldn't say it is easier now, but some of what I'm experiencing is familiar. I still found the initial abstinence and symptoms of withdrawal confusing and irritating, but I knew that the feelings wouldn't last forever. I find the same tools work for me in recovery: attending meetings and recovery-related activities, taking on service positions, and allowing time in my life to reflect and to listen to the voice of my higher power within. I'm building a relationship with a new sponsor and am grateful for 15 months of abstaining from my bottom-line behaviors. At this stage, I am more open to learning what I need to do today to stay sober than in having it all figured out.

Dating as a Tool continued

My Plan has evolved over time, but it's still there.

But how to meet someone? My first step in relationships in sobriety was to learn how to make friends; I never really had close friends before sobriety. My sponsor told me to ask program people to fellowship and be social, and to make myself vulnerable. Once I could make friends, it was easier to ask men out on dates. I joined groups (church, music, volunteer) that I was interested in; I naturally met new men and potential dates who shared my interests. I have also used non-hookup dating websites, though these are not for everyone.

My goal in dating has evolved. At first it was to try to find a partner. But now it is about enjoying the process of dating and having fun. Dating is all about discernment – learning about yourself and another person. The only goal of the first date is to decide if you want a second date. It's not that complicated. I usually don't ask for a second date during the first date; it puts someone on the spot. One of us will say in a call or e-mail that we had a good time and would be up for doing it again. If not, it doesn't happen.

If we do have more dates, if I see something I don't like, such as how he treats a waiter, or if he reveals that he does party drugs once in a while, that's information I have to acknowledge and not have another date, no matter how cute he might be. As an old therapist put it, "It's all information." I pay attention to that information, and I trust my instincts. Since I know that when I reject someone as a date, it's not a rejection of him as a person (I don't really know him, he just isn't what I am looking for), I am much better about being rejected by someone else, since he doesn't really know me, either. Sometimes it's frustrating if I think I like someone and it's not returned, but the feeling passes.

As a sex addict, I had divorced pleasure and especially FUN from my sex life. When I am practicing healthy dating, I can relax and be myself. I also keep my expectations low: I'm no longer looking for a husband - I'm just open to whatever happens. Dating hasn't always been easy, and I can get addictive about dating just like I can about sex. I just keep talking about it and keep putting myself out there. Overall, I'm enjoying myself, I am having healthy sex, and I am letting go of the outcome. Dating is a great tool of the program!