

August 2018

## My Story

My name is Shane, and I am a grateful, recovering sex and love addict. By the grace of my higher power and the power of the twelve steps I have been sober from acting on my bottom lines since February 20, 2013. My journey to addiction began when my adopted father, an alcoholic and sex addict, introduced me to pornography at the age of six. I now realize that exposing a six-year-old boy to pornography is a form of sexual abuse. As a child, I lacked the maturity to deal with the feelings I began to associate with these images. My secret activities continued into adolescence, where they collided with my struggle with same-sex attraction. About the time I hit puberty, I became a born-again Christian. Over my teenage years, I repeated a cycle of being attracted to boys my own age, looking at pornography, sex with self, experimenting with same-sex peers, and then drowning in a sea of religious guilt and shame. By age sixteen pornography and sex with self became my drug of choice to medicate my shame, guilt, confusion, and fear of being gay.

After High School I entered the clergy and was married, mistakenly believing doing so would cure me of my struggles. How wrong I was! These issues persisted despite prayer, fasting, and faith. It left me convinced that I was unworthy of God's intervention. Regretfully, my need to control everything (so the real me would never be revealed) drove a wedge between my wife and I and we divorced. I eventually married again with an honest commitment to do the right thing. However, I quickly returned to my addiction, this time discovering the internet. Addiction is progressive and debilitating, and every barrier I said I would never cross I did. In the 15 months I was acting out I had scores of sexual encounters, one of which was with a young man I met on line who was under age. Sex addiction is a sure pathway to insanity. How else can I explain the perfect sense it made (to me) to imagine that an emotional and sexual relationship with a teenager would be acceptable? I had so detached from the reality of my life that I was trying to maintain the public persona of a faithful husband, respected religious leader and member of the community while hooking up with men at the risk of my freedom, my family, my career, and my sanity.

Eventually I was found out and arrested. I seriously considered suicide when the police came to my door, but the thought of my children or wife finding my body stopped me from doing the deed. After a 93 day stay in sex rehab I was able to admit that I was an addict and came out to my family as a gay man. While there I was introduced to SLAA and made a half-hearted attempt at recovery. After rehab I did a one-year stint in state prison. I left state prison in 2012 thinking I had everything under control. Within six months I had relapsed. I did not believe the stories I heard about relapse being worse than the first go around with our disease, but I became a believer. I rationalized that I could handle a little pornography. That thinking error began a journey that led me back to prison for four years. During that time, I missed my grandfather and uncle's deaths/funerals, the birth of my two grandchildren, and so much time that can never be regained. It took that second arrest and imprisonment to wake me up and get serious about recovery.

I wrote SLAA's office asking for a correspondent sponsor who would work with me while I was in prison. My higher power sent me just what I needed in my sponsor! He had been in prison as well and had an almost identical background. While inside, I began to work the steps, set my bottom, caution, and top lines, developed a daily spiritual routine that includes prayer, meditation, and affirmations. For a brief time, I actually met with other inmates for SLAA Meetings in our dorm. It has been said that

suffering is a pathway to peace. Those four years were the most difficult days I have ever experienced – so much violence, darkness, isolation, and despair. Working the steps, the support of my sponsor, my family, a small group of fellow inmates whom I trusted, and my Higher Power were how I got through it. On December 20, 2016 I began my recovery journey in the “free” world.

Since my release I have continued that work by seeing a licensed sex offender therapist, regularly attending our local SLAA meetings where I serve by setting up chairs, leading meetings, and serving as the chairperson for our Intergroup. I am beginning work on my ninth steps and have one sponsee. I have been able to find work and have a recovery job as a restaurant manager. I recently led a discussion group at my church that discussed the connection between the Twelve Step and the Gospel as Jesus lived out. An opportunity I never imagined I would ever again have.

I have built recovery friendships and meet regularly with a group of men in recovery. I am actually developing healthy, intimate same sex friendships! I have a close friend who serves as my spiritual advisor and mentor who is well versed in recovery. I have surrendered my right to have sex anytime I want, with anyone I want, and have made peace with abstinence unless I am in a committed relationship.

Almost five years of sobriety has restored much of my sanity and empowered me to begin to love myself. I am now fully present for my family and friends. My spiritual life is exactly where it needs to be, utterly human yet touched by the grace of my Higher Power. Now when I feel those familiar triggers creeping in, I call a trusted recovery partner or my sponsor. My biggest struggle is with loneliness and much to my surprise, feeling lonely does not kill me. Each day I do not act out is a step back to restoring my reputation as an honorable man.

I now pray for an opportunity to live out this hope by carrying this message to others trapped in their own struggle with sex and love addiction, especially those who are in vocational religious ministry. In that regard, I am now a certified Recovery Coach who focuses on helping recovering clergy stop living out a pattern of sex, love and pornography addiction. My recovery has not been perfect, but it has been the recovery I needed, including my prison sentence. I am thankful for the pain it brought and the hope I discovered behind those bars through the twelve steps of SLAA.

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