FINDING REALITY: HOPE FOR THE NEWCOMER

Finding reality seems like such a simple thing to do, yet when faced with it for the first time in recovery, the thought often becomes overwhelming. The first time I surrendered to the fact of my addiction and walked into an S.L.A.A. room for the first time, I had absolutely no control of the desperate thoughts running through my head, which were fear and trepidation over what the people would think of me. I felt eyes piercing through me, exposing my darkest secrets. I was just sure everyone knew the things I had done.



As my mind cleared enough to move my feet and take a seat in the room, a few people greeted me, telling me that I belonged there as they offered me the basic newcomer packet. I was sure they were judging me. I knew there was a reason I was there, but even though everyone I cared about had told me I needed help, I couldn't for the life of me understand WHY! Was I really so different from everyone else? Why did I need help when so many others had done the same things I had done? I knew from talking with my wife that pornography played a part in the script of my life, as well as how I was acting around girls at our church. Since I had never had any physical relations with anyone outside of a



hug, I was certain that nothing had been inappropriate. Back in the S.L.A.A. meeting, the beginning-of-meeting rituals were over, and I began to listen intently to the speaker share. The subject matter was good, but I never connected with the speaker, since the share didn't relate to my issues. As time passed, stories, Step studies, shares, and workshops helped me to understand the nature of my addiction to sex and love, but nothing quite connected with me. Finding and working with a sponsor helped me determine that my core issue was unhealthy, addictive fantasy, though even that knowledge didn't resonate with me for a long time. I spent many hours and days going through the Steps. I didn't really know why I did certain things in my life. I hadn't learned yet about my issues as a child suffering sexual abuse, so I really was lost with a hard roadblock to my recovery. I learned that I didn't have a clue how to do amends properly, and in that process learned the importance of Steps Six and Seven. Staying involved through service within S.L.A.A. kept me invested in my recovery, but my growth was sporadic, to say the least. Slips happened, and my sobriety dates changed on a routine basis. Fellowship developed with others in my home group, and strong accountability partners helped me "white knuckle" my recovery for the next few years.

Nearing 10 years in the program, I hadn't given much more thought to fantasy as a drug. Then, within four months, two events happened that finally started me on a solid recovery path. First, my brother told me the story of how he ran into a woman who was a childhood playmate of mine. She told him that as an older child, she had been teaching the younger neighborhood boys what to do with girls. This conversation immediately flashed me back to when I was nine years old, and I recalled instantly what went on in my garage all those years ago. Sexuality and sensuality for which my nine-year-old mind was not ready.

Second, a few months later, I was invited to a fantasy-focused S.L.A.A. meeting. In the course of that meeting, the pieces of the puzzle started to finally coalesce. Fantasy was a vehicle, but it was also the drug that I sought as I acted out over the next 65 or more years. So, now I know the cause and effect of my addiction. But what can I do about it? Except for a few mentions about fantasy in the basic text, there were no materials within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous that addressed an addiction to fantasy. In the course of fantasy-focused S.L.A.A. meetings, I started to learn about the recovery tools and wisdom of other fantasy addicts like me. For example, one tool is the “fantasy inventory.” In this exercise, I imagine and list three things that the object of my fantasy hates, fears, and wants. In doing so, I am reminded that I often have little idea what the other person really feels. It helps me become aware of the ways I project my own feelings onto those I fantasize about.

I also practice guided meditation to overcome fantasy. Meditations like the beginner and advanced meditations on overcoming fantasy addiction help me isolate specific parts of my body that are affected when I am in fantasy and understand how inauthentic and disquieting my "play-acting" in fantasy can really be. Meditative breathing techniques help clear and quiet my mind and restore balance to my spirit. Practicing mindfulness is another way to counter the hold fantasy can have on me. When I’m objectifying or fantasizing about someone, usually a

stranger, I can pause and take a second look. I look for details that humanize the person and allow me to break the fantasy and reclaim my brain. For example, perhaps the person has dark circles under their eyes and appears tired, or maybe a scarf they are wearing matches their coat. Still, learning all those tools has not completely solved my impulse toward fantasy. I am still a fantasy addict, and my addictive behaviors are always available to me at a moment's notice when I feel grief, pain, or loss, no matter how much recovery I have. What S.L.A.A.'s fantasy meetings do more than anything is to teach me how to be a fantasy addict in recovery. I have learned that my addiction is not a problem to be solved. It is a compulsion to be observed and outlasted.

I have learned that it is by inches, not miles, that I stay sober. I find community and acceptance spending an hour or two in an S.L.A.A. meeting and sharing, reading recovery literature, being a sponsor, praying and meditating, being of service on S.L.A.A. committees, and most of all, just making progress each day and forgiving myself when my recovery is not perfect.

In the end, it is the meetings themselves—spending time with other fantasy addicts like me, rather than any epiphany that I learn in those meetings—that gives me the strength to make progress against my addiction and stay present in reality every day. One of my program outreach partners taught me the phrase: "Your strength is my strength." The fact that we come together and listen to each other and share helps me know I am not alone. And that I never was.

— Anonymous Fantasy Addict