

Step 1

Two months ago an event occurred that finally made me seek help for my sexual addiction, although I did not know it was an addiction at that time. I had allowed my wife to use a fake Facebook account that I had created so that I was able to look at the public posts of others on Facebook. During the course of looking at the account of a non-profit pet rescue organization we had recently visited, she found evidence of a flirtatious chat I had with someone and evidence of searches that I had made of other women's accounts. Her questions opened up a number of old wounds in our marriage. My adulterous behavior was exposed for a third time in our 34-year marriage and her reaction was severe. We made an appointment with a counselor who we had been seeing for almost four years and during that two-hour session, he told me that he believed that I was a sex addict and that needed to begin a 12 step program. That is how I made it to my first SA meeting on Sunday, June 4, 2017.

The guilt and the shame of my behavior was overwhelming. I had to put a spotlight on my actions in order to bring it to a halt. I had come to realize that I could not control my behavior on my own and I needed to do something to try to make it stop. My life was spinning out of control. It was the culmination of over 45 years of lust, masturbation, and sexually acting out with others.

I honestly had no idea that I was a sex addict. I just thought that I was a person who acted immorally. I knew that many of my behaviors were wrong, especially after I got married, but I never realized that I had a sexual addiction problem. I thought that I was just highly sexual and needed more outlets than most people did. Of course, I had no idea what most people did, or didn't do, because I never talked to anyone about it. I kept my sexual behavior very private and tried very hard to make sure that no one had any idea what I was doing. However, it was finally obvious to me that lust had become a preoccupation.

Looking back, my childhood seemed normal to me. My three sisters were 10-13 years older than I was and by the time I entered first grade, they had all moved away from home to go to college and/or get married. Both of my parents worked, and with the exception of the time my paternal grandmother stayed with us from the time I was 4-6 years old, I felt like an afterthought. I stayed with neighbors or my maternal grandmother after school until 10 years old and I was a latch-key kid after that. We lived in a rural area and even though I had some friends nearby, I was often lonely and I spent a lot of time by myself.

My earliest recollection of exposure to sex was finding the Playboy magazines that my brothers-in-law kept in their homes. Two of my sisters lived within an hour of our family home, so my parents and I would visit them somewhat frequently. I can remember the first time I found one of the magazines. I was probably around nine or ten. My sister took it from me, but I remember her smiling at me as if I really had not done anything wrong. However, looking back, I became obsessed with finding and looking at the magazines whenever I was in one of their homes. I relished being asked to stay at my youngest sister's apartment overnight because I could secret several magazines to the room I slept in and look at them in relative privacy.

Not long after I discovered the magazines, I discovered masturbation. Unfortunately, or so I thought at the time, I was often unable to put the two together. When I was where the magazines were located, I did not usually have the opportunity to masturbate. When I was home, I did not have access to the magazines, so I relied on my memories of the magazines. The cycle had begun.

Soon, the magazines were just not enough. We had a large house with a number of empty rooms, so my parents frequently invited people to stay overnight with us. In our furnished basement, we had a large walk-in shower in the bathroom. It was also the bathroom I always used because my room was on that floor, so I was familiar with its vulnerabilities. One such vulnerability was a crack between the wall and the doorframe leading to my father's shop. I would occasionally sneak into the shop from my room and peep through the crack at women using the shower. It was my first actual viewing of nude women and it was incredibly exciting.

However, the riskiness of my behavior was growing. I was scared of being caught with the increasingly large stash of magazines. I was afraid of getting caught peeping in the bathroom. I was scared of being caught stealing magazines from other people's homes, or occasionally a store with bad security. My 20-year-old first cousin busted me once while she was in the bathroom, but she did not expose my behavior to others in the family. The magazines stayed secure. The riskiness actually made the behavior more exciting to me and the masturbation became more frequent, often several times per day. Even then, I now realize, my addiction had started diverting my attention from my friends and healthy activities and I started spending more time alone with my obsession. Fortunately, my schoolwork did not suffer, so I never considered my behavior a problem and no one else knew what I was doing.

I went to graduate school in a new city and a new state at 22 and I went through a period where my behavior was pretty much under control. I discontinued my previous relationships within my first four months of grad school. I also met my wife soon after I arrived at school, introduced by some fellow students in my graduate program. Even though I tried too hard at first trying to overcompensate for my insecurities, she gave me a second chance and we hit it off. We started spending more time together, and I eventually moved in with her at her apartment. We were sleeping together, but not having sex, but I felt closer to her than anyone I had ever been around. She became my best friend. We got married quickly, about two weeks after I graduated. It had been over a year since I had indulged in porn, and I thought that part of my life was over. The masturbation had not stopped, but it had become much less frequent and, to me, relatively insignificant.

Often, when I wanted to have sex, she demurred. I became angry and resentful. My old buddy masturbation came back to comfort me.

I started down a path that would become very destructive. I started seeking out magazines again and I occasionally hid one in our home. I remember going to see a porn movie and a live show in a local theatre featuring a woman I had seen in one of the magazines. It was risky, because I had to disappear from my new job for an hour after lunch to make it work. I remember feeling dirty and ashamed when I walked out of that sleazy theatre and I vowed that I would never go back. This was the first occasion that I can remember lying to myself about stopping.

We moved to South Carolina in 1983. I found a good job in about eight weeks. In the meantime, a couple of magazines kept me company each idle day. I eventually made some good friends at work. However, my behavior gradually got further out-of-control as the years of our marriage went by. Even though my wife sought help and eventually dealt with her feelings about my prior sexual behavior and our sexual relationship improved, my acting out continued. I justified my behavior to myself as being normal because I had a higher need for sex than she had and, after all, she had rejected me. I hated that feeling of rejection! My resentment provided an on-going excuse for my poor behavior.

The magazines became my refuge. I had to buy more and more to meet my needs. They got more extreme and I sought out the ones that matched whatever fantasies I was having at the time. Then came the internet. I began downloading images, hoping that they would meet my desires. As access speeds got faster, I would sneak off to a computer at work that was not on the larger network and look at porn after hours. Later, I would find ways to look at it during work hours. If I could, I would print some photos, sneak them out of the office, and take them home. I would masturbate everywhere I could including in the car, in my office with the door locked, even in restrooms. However, the main place for me was in my bathroom where I could hide my porn.

Not long after I started printing these photos, and while my wife was early in law school, she discovered my stash hidden in my bathroom. After a brief argument that culminated in throwing out all of the offensive material, the subject was dropped. I later learned that she had blamed herself to some degree for those photos because of her extreme focus on her law school studies. I had dodged a bullet, but the addiction only took a short holiday. By the end of her time in law school, I had begun communicating with another woman that I casually knew through others at work. I gave her a sob story about how neglected I was and, to my surprise; she offered "comfort." Another line was crossed. I felt guilty and ashamed, but to some degree, I also felt entitled to this comfort.

The next dozen years are truly kind of a blur to me now. My behavior spun out of control. I would sometimes find ways to look at porn videos. I went to strip clubs on several occasions. I discovered websites like Craigslist where you could place and answer ads for sexual liaisons. I found local telephone chat lines where you could actually talk to women by exchanging lurid messages. I trolled social media sites to look at photos. I would be active nearly every day for extended periods looking for some type of sexual excitement to meet my needs. I bought a "burner" phone to hide connections. I also made connections for phone sex and in person. I had affairs with four different women over the course of those years. I attempted to make connections with many more with various degrees of "success." In addition, my wife and I pretty much stopped having sex during this period.

My life had become very unmanageable. My behavior gradually escalated. I took bigger and bigger risks. I started seeing prostitutes, sometimes more than one per week. I generally made sure that I was seeing only "high-end escorts" because I thought that they were safer. I found some that I seemed to click with and I became a trusted regular. I convinced myself that they cared about me. I joined online boards of "hobbyists" and shared reviews of the women with fellow addicts. I became a trusted source of intelligence for others acting out. However, at times I broke my safety rules to get a quick fix. One of the women I met online and had sex with threatened and blackmailed me. While my wife was away with a friend for a weekend, I spent the time pacing my house. I was distraught and terrified that I would be exposed and I worried about losing my marriage and my job. I fantasized about killing myself, or my tormentor, until my wife returned home. I doubt that I slept more than a few hours that weekend. Yet it was not enough to make me stop. Less than a year later, I was back at it.

Yes, I would also go through periods of time when I kept my behavior in check. I would promise myself that I was going to stop and I would resist the temptations to go online or call the chat lines. My behavior was in check for the moment, but my life was not. I was moody. I could fly off the handle over little things. My wife would reach out for intimacy and ask why we never had sex, but I made excuses and dodged her questions, never coming clean. Eventually, something would trigger my lust reaction and I would start the cycle all over again.

Surprisingly, I was keeping it together at work, getting promotions, commendations and occasional awards. Therefore, I thought I had things under control. I was a master at compartmentalization. I do not think anyone had any idea that I had a lurid, secret life. I also became an expert at lying to my wife. Sneaking around, covering up, making excuses, trying to act normally when my head was spinning out of control. I abused the trust I had at work to duck out and feed my addiction. Slowly, my double-life was catching up to me. I grew increasingly anxious and I was certain that I would be found out eventually. Nevertheless, I could not stop acting out.

Simultaneously, my health and other relationships started to unravel. My addiction was undermining the rest of my life.

In 2013, I began pursuing a new woman online. She was a young (about 21), extremely attractive and physically the type about whom that I had the most intense sexual fantasies. Our first meeting was unfulfilling, but I was determined to get what I wanted from her. Her main interest was money and I spent a great deal of it on her in hopes of fulfilling my fantasies. She kept stringing me along, giving me just enough to keep me coming back in hopes of more. However, those fantasies were never realized in full. The chemistry I sought was an illusion. One Sunday afternoon, I pretended to be heading to the golf course, but I went to see her instead. After yet another brief, unfulfilling encounter, followed by an additional request for money, it finally accepted that I was being played for a fool, an old fool. I went to my office, began to cry and begged God to make my behavior stop. I realized that I could not live with my double life anymore. I had a breakdown. The crisis was full-blown now and I could no longer keep my secret.

Later that day, I drove home, taking a circuitous route. I did not know what I was going to do. I finally decided to tell my wife about my behavior, but I did not take into consideration how much it would hurt her. I just had to dump my guilt. Yet again, I was being selfish and inconsiderate in the extreme. When we were young, she had told me clearly that if she ever caught me cheating on her, our marriage would end. It was my expectation that my confession would have that result. I was afraid. I was afraid of ending the one relationship in my life with someone about whom I was certain loved me. I was afraid of the economic impact of divorce. I was afraid of what would happen to me. Where would I live etc.? My thoughts were all about me.

I told her about my years of adulterous behavior, but for some reason I did not come completely clean. I was still lying, even in my confession. I regretted confessing, but I was constantly making it worse with my continued lying. I found it hard to keep my stories straight. It had become my worst nightmare.

I now believe that what I was trying to do was to make it more difficult for me to act out by ensuring that I was being watched like a hawk. I knew I was powerless, but I did not surrender my behavior to a higher power, I surrendered it to my wife.

From the day of my confession until the day two months ago when I was caught using social media to act out vicariously, I had pretty much discontinued acting out with others. I had two slip-ups about one year apart during that period, but I felt terrible about them and deeply regretted my weakness. Again, I vowed that I would stop this awful behavior for the last time. However, I was still wasting hours of my time each week trying to get my fix through the online voyeurism. The lust was still there, but I had convinced myself that I had it managed. I knew that it was wrong, but I told myself that it was better than what I had been doing, which somehow made it okay. I made the analogy that if my past behavior

was like murder, this was more like trespassing. Not a big deal. It was my version of Dr. Bob's beer experiment.

I was advised that I needed to join a 12 Step program, it came as a relief to me. I thought that maybe this would finally be a way to get my behavior under control. I called the local phone number and I was shocked when someone named Brian answered. I babbled about who I was, why I was calling and what my counselor had told me. He listened and reassured me and I instantly found myself relaxing. He suggested the meetings that would be the best locations for my first visit. I told him the one that I planned to attend. He told me that I would probably hear the word masturbation more times in that hour than I had ever heard before. I laughed nervously and found myself both hopeful and anxious about the meeting. I had no idea what to expect.

I remember sitting in that first meeting and feeling incredibly awkward and ashamed. I remember the first time I uttered the words "I am a sex addict" and how it almost caught in my throat. I also remember how remarkable it was to hear the stories of others and how they seemed so similar to mine. Still I found myself trying to downplay my addiction, telling someone at that first meeting that I just acted out periodically, not all the time. As I attended more meetings, I found myself growing more relaxed and I started to share my feelings for the first time with others. The acceptance and encouragement I have felt have been remarkable. I am truly grateful for the fellowship of the SA groups. For the first time, I have hope that I can overcome my lustful thoughts and curtail my unhealthy behaviors. I am home.