

THE EARLY DAYS OF SCA IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Before we discuss the early days of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA), we want to convey a sense of what life was like before programs such as SCA existed.¹ We were called “Baby Boomers” and came to maturity in the 1960’s, 70’s and early 1980’s. Our founders were among them.

The age group, from which we originate, was such a large percentage of the population at the time that we felt a kind of hubris: We could do what we wanted. The word we used to describe it was “liberation.” Our anthem was “Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll.” Understandably, older generations did not like it.²

In time, our sexuality stopped working for those of us who are sexual compulsives. But our sexuality seemed to have transformed us into servants. We no longer enjoyed some components of our sexuality, but try as we might, we could not stop being sexual. This was the opposite of liberation.

Our point here is that Sexual Compulsives Anonymous arose out of a need—a need that was felt most strongly in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) community. Our social and religious leaders felt it, and the police certainly felt that something had to be done too. The “sexual revolution” as it was called, seemed to be getting out of control, and these three groups were ready to lend support to anyone or anything that could help.

Frank L.³ was arrested for having sex in public toilets. He repeatedly tried to stop placing himself in legal jeopardy, but after his tenth arrest, he was given an ultimatum by the

judge: "Either get some help with your problem or I am going to take you off the streets and put you in jail."⁴

In the autumn of 1972, Frank contacted the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), in Los Angeles (LA). They were sympathetic, but knew of no organization to which they could refer him. Neither did they have anyone in the church to take on the task of reforming people arrested for sex acts in public places. They suggested that he form some kind of self-help group himself, and offered him meeting space at their church.

Frank had been to psychologists and other helping professionals, but did not see significant improvement in his sexually compulsive behavior. In desperation, he decided to form a group patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous. It took until April 26th, of 1973 for the first Sexual Compulsives Anonymous meeting at the MCC. This is the date to which we look, as our start.⁵

From the beginning, we used the *Twelve Steps* and *Twelve Traditions* as adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and we had a shorter version of the *Statement of Purpose*. Though they are quite different today, we had *Twenty Questions*, entitled "*Is SCA For You?*"

Frank L., and SCA's early members wrote letters, contacted newspapers, magazines and went on radio stations to spread the message that there was a Program for anyone who wanted to stop having compulsive sex. Some of us took a long time to become ready for recovery in SCA, but we heard the message and it stuck with us. Some prosecutors, probation officers and judges heard it too, and they referred appropriate cases to us.

By August of 1976, new meetings were started in Orange County and LA's Silver Lake District. And the MCC meeting had moved to the Gay Community Services Center of LA. Though early attendees were mostly homosexual men with some lesbian women, bisexual and heterosexual men, the meeting format and materials were structured to be inclusive of anyone who might be sexually compulsive, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, class, race or ethnicity.

Most early SCA members had legal problems centered on their sexual compulsion⁶, but attendees who had completed their obligation to attend, often decided not to return. Members who had attended other Twelve Step programs recognized that we had to carry the message to still more sexually compulsive people, if we were to stay sexually sober ourselves. We believe this outreach to the community, stimulated public interest in the concept of sexual compulsion.

We were addicted to instant gratification and hunting for sexual encounters. We took risks in the search for sex and love, and the danger we encountered certainly excited us. The anonymous aspect of sex in public places made us feel exempt from the consequences of "acting out" our sexual or romantic fantasies⁷. Ironically, we were obsessed with secrecy, despite the fact that we often had sex with strangers in public spaces.

Foolishly, we thought our other relationships would be unaffected by our sexual compulsion. But they *were* affected. Relations with family became strained. We lost friends, lovers and employment. We were exposed as sexually compulsive, despite our best efforts to hide it. This exposure produced shame, and fueled a further descent into sexual compulsion⁸.

Finally, we were ready to admit that we could not manage this problem alone; however, few understood how to apply the Twelve Steps. We went to meetings, and did our best to pay attention to the solutions offered, but early meetings were often sexually charged, and the sharing was sometimes very graphic in its detail. The strength of our recovery grew slowly⁹. We had *both* the desire to stop having compulsive sex, as well as the desire to anesthetize the painful feelings we were experiencing¹⁰.

Early SCA had somewhat controversial approaches to recovery: We emphasized distraction from sexually compulsive acts, and the importance of long-term relationships; we set aside meeting time to state commitments to our recovery, and we encouraged each other to keep these commitments. In time, we hoped to modify or eradicate the sexual compulsion. The commitment portion of the meeting, which some groups still have today, may have been a primordial form of the sexual recovery plan. SCA in New York developed "*The Tools That Help Us Get Better*," and some of these commitments and solutions roughly correspond to what we verbalized back then¹¹. We recognized the importance of instilling an ethic of giving back to the Program—of helping others to achieve the recovery we received.

Just as it had happened with the maturation of AA, the general membership of SCA changed. We went from being members whose lives had been so completely turned over to sexual compulsion, into being sexual compulsives who still had some integrity upon entering the Fellowship. It is still true that meeting attendees are here to improve their lives, but the amount of improvement now needed to bring us up to parity with the rest of society is frequently not as much as

it was for our old-timers. We have indeed raised the level at which members can identify that they belong with us¹².

As of this writing, Frank L., a founding member of SCA in Southern California, still attends meetings, but at some point in the late 1970s, his attendance at meetings became sporadic. Although some long time members knew of Frank's importance to SCA, our collective memory of SCA being started in Los Angeles was lost. By the early 1980s, the number of meetings dwindled to one. It was at noon on Saturdays, in the Gay & Lesbian Community Services Center, in Hollywood^{13, 14}.

Public interest in the concept of sexual compulsion escalated when Dr. Patrick Carnes, went on popular talk shows to discuss it as an addiction, rather than an indulgence¹⁵. Fear of AIDS, drove many of us into SCA meetings, especially when we could not stop the behaviors that put us at risk for being infected with HIV^{16, 17}.

When a test for HIV finally became available, it took two weeks to get the results. The AIDS epidemic pushed us to drop our hesitation and talk or cry about the problems we faced¹⁸.

One meeting was upstairs from an LA area clinic that tested for HIV. Well-meaning clinicians, who had delivered the bad news of a positive test result, often referred the patient to our upstairs meeting. This frequently caused bewilderment, because SCA provides no health services, or medications. At first this was looked upon as disruptive to the meeting, but in time we accepted it as another means to reach sexual compulsives who were still suffering¹⁹.

As recovery spread in Southern California, the meetings overflowed. People were crowded together on chairs and sat on the floor during meetings. We needed more than just a few SCA meetings a week. One member, H.B., was instrumental in remedying this situation.

H.B. had eleven years of sobriety in A.A. and sponsored over thirty of our early SCA members; many of whom have become the old-timers of today. H.B. understood the concept of attending a meeting every day, to help establish a period of abstinence. H.B.'s dedication was so strong that he helped start meetings where they had the best chance of success, regardless of the fact that the new meeting locations were far from his own home in a trailer.

H.B. believed that no meeting was complete without fellowship afterwards, and directed sponsees to join him at both the ninety-minute SCA meeting and at fellowship afterwards. Those of us who argued against it, said that we were too busy to make such a drastic commitment of time. We soon came to realize how many evenings we were acting out, while our fellows were at the meeting. Nothing is lonelier than waiting in an acting-out state, realizing that right about now everyone *else* is having fun at fellowship. Eventually every night of the week had a meeting and most attendees went out to fellowship.

Twenty to forty sexual compulsives would descend upon coffee shops near our meeting sites, to linger for hours in laughter and comradery. We were struggling to stay sexually sober and fellowship was a welcome oasis in the shame of addiction. For many of us, fellowship was the first time we stepped out of isolation to experience merriment, community and unconditional friendship. Friendships formed that have lasted twenty to thirty years in sobriety.

One of these new groups met at the Alcoholics Together headquarters (The AT Center), in LA's Silverlake District. Alcoholics Together is an organization formed to address the concerns of GLBTQ alcoholics, and seemed a natural fit for us. Key factors were: that they rented out affordable space for our meetings; and we were in close proximity to people attending other Twelve Step meetings in the building, who may also benefit from attendance at SCA meetings.

This new SCA group formed because its members wanted to hand out "chips" or medallions to recognize various lengths of abstinence from the behaviors we considered most harmful. And no other SCA meetings at the time would agree to hand out chips. Recognizing lengths of sexual sobriety was controversial, causing conflict and debate amongst the membership. Some of us objected to presenting chips because, we saw our sexuality as a right; which no one was going to determine for us. We feared exchanging one kind of police force for another.

Others had difficulty differentiating between sobriety for alcohol and sobriety for compulsive sex. In A.A., complete abstinence is the official definition of sobriety and is accepted as a requirement to work the 12-step program of recovery. They said no one ever died from abstaining from alcohol, whereas sex is an intrinsic part of our makeup as human beings.

The discussion among the Southern California meetings opened up a can of worms with regard to letting the addict decide what behaviors were prohibited or permitted on their sexual recovery plan. They argued that this was like letting the alcoholic decide which brands of beer, wine or hard liquor qualified as a slip. They also objected to someone

claiming sobriety because they were abstinent on one or two behaviors while acting-out on others. People felt resentful that someone else got to take chips where they had to reset their time for the same behaviors.

After months of discussion, the members who wanted chips couldn't get any meeting to agree, so they started the Thursday night meeting themselves. Fortunately the "chip meeting" chose to base its definition of sobriety on the Overeaters Anonymous (OA), model of abstinence: Each member defines sobriety for themselves, based upon selected sexual behaviors that were harming their lives. H.B. wrote a template for writing a sexual recovery plan, with two columns—a right and left side—based upon Patrick Carnes' S.A.F.E. formula from "*Out of the Shadows*." Within a year, every meeting in Southern California recognized this approach to defining sexual abstinence and accepted chips as a way to measure our sobriety.

These controversies turned out to be nothing more than growing pains. Everyone was in early sobriety and emotions were raw. Feelings that had been medicated by sex for years, began to surface and often gravitated like a lightning rod toward decisions that affected the group. Sometimes business discussions would last entire meetings for several weeks, often over issues as basic as how to arrange the chairs. Many people acted out over these conflicts, and some never returned.

Just like A.A. had to formulate the Twelve Traditions and the principals of how the group must survive, we in SCA had to have our own controversies and conflicts to arrive at our own conclusions. When our first female newcomer showed up at a Friday night meeting, she wasn't allowed in

until the group conscience prevailed. Like the early AA members we were afraid of losing our safe haven in SCA. However as more people accumulated longer lengths of sobriety, things calmed down and we learned to look to the Traditions instead of trying to reinvent the wheel.

As recovery began to flower among our membership, the spirit of SCA meetings in Southern California changed²⁰. We demonstrated to everyone, that a period of sexual sobriety could be achieved, and if lost, that it could be regained²¹. Recovery among these members had a synergistic effect, similar but the opposite of the way in which shame about our sexual compulsion accelerated the unmanageability of our lives in its active phase.

Another of these groups was a Step Study group, reading and talking about how to work the Twelve Steps and Traditions. We used literature from other Twelve-Step Fellowships, and consumed any new piece of literature as it became available. We were especially pleased when what we now call "S-Fellowships" developed literature mentioning sexually compulsive behavior by name. Up until then, we had nothing like it. This was yet another step toward recovery.

Because of SCA members who traveled around the US, we discovered SCA meetings in New York with a different, more refined set of literature. SCA in New York had developed the "Tools" and "*Ten Characteristics Most Of Us Seem To Have In Common*" as well as a different collection of the "*Twenty Questions*." These bicoastal members brought New York's literature back to Los Angeles, and because of the sophistication of its literature, their consistent presence of long-term members and in the absence of a

voice to the contrary, we assumed that SCA had begun in New York.

As the number of SCA meetings in Southern California grew, we formed an Intergroup. Each group was asked to elect a delegate to attend monthly Intergroup meetings, though any member is and has always been welcome. Intergroup delegates brought food, and when the meeting concluded, we all shared a meal. At first, our Intergroup hosted meeting delegates from SCA and another “S-Fellowship” in Southern California²². We decided to separate the two fellowships, and each continues separately in Southern California to this day. Ultimately, our boundaries were more clearly defined²³.

In 1986, SCA started having regular retreats, in addition to the Intergroup meetings²⁴. One member said that at their first retreat, they heard others make light of the terrible things that had happened to them. At their second one, this member began to master the spiritual principles discussed at the retreat. By their third retreat, they facilitated a workshop. The retreats were followed by social outings, such as river rafting, and advanced our healing process. We began to comprehend the importance of socializing, as a *Tool* of recovery.

Most meetings had well attended fellowship gatherings afterwards. This is where some of us learned about intimacy for the first time: We took a chance and trusted a few SCA members with our stories. We were relieved at no longer having to keep our story straight^{25, 26}. We learned of the problems with dating newcomers and other members of SCA. (Ultimately, we adopted the “*Closing Statement*,” as developed by SCA in New York.) And we learned of the progressive nature of sexual compulsion, by hearing what

happened to those who left the Program prematurely, upon their return.

The most sophisticated piece of literature at our meetings consisted of a pamphlet, which we now call the “Yellow Four-Fold.” It contained all the literature we had, and was especially useful, because it²⁷ was all we needed to hold a meeting. Individual readings, such as the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, were typed out and photocopied, for the leader to use during meetings. These pieces of SCA literature, poetry and literature from other appropriate sources, crowded our literature tables.

This crowding must have happened at the same time in New York SCA meetings, because both Intergroups almost simultaneously created booklets containing all the SCA literature we had^{28, 29}. SCA in New York sent three delegates to Los Angeles, to represent their meetings, including Frank H., whom we *all* assumed to be our founder. Southern California SCA had three delegates³⁰. Our first order of business was to declare ourselves to be the International Service Organization (ISO), of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous.

Over the three day weekend of our first SCA Conference in 1990—with Frank H. as our keynote speaker—we unified the literature, which we now call “*Sexual Compulsives Anonymous: A Program of Recovery*”, also known as the “*SCA Blue Book*,” and we established a working relationship^{31, 32}.

Years later, at the Southern California SCA convention³³, Frank L. was our keynote speaker. Frank L. distributed an assortment of photocopied documents from the 1970s, and told us his story³⁴. Here was a man who told us an SCA

history, which had been lost with time³⁵. It has taken us some time to authenticate the story and documents, and to get used to the idea that SCA, and indeed all S-Fellowships³⁶ stemmed from the sometimes-tenuous thread that SCA had been in Southern California.

As the message of recovery spreads to all corners of society³⁷, the message is simply this: If you want to stop acting out your sexual compulsion, starting now you can; look, we are doing it, one day at a time. Because of the willingness and work of Frank L. and Frank H., we have a worldwide organization that is both gay-affirming and open to all who are sexually compulsive, seeking recovery.

And here is what we would like you to remember: **Keep coming back!** Your presence is enough to help stabilize this lifeboat in which we find ourselves. When SCA members quit coming back to meetings, the memory of their experience, strength and hope is lost, and it falls to those who remain, to rediscover what we once had. One person can make a world of difference.

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Thank You

ENDNOTES:

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) had been founded some thirty-eight years before SCA's first meeting in the spring of 1973. By then, most people knew of AA and it was just becoming socially acceptable to admit one's alcoholism. The years between the founding of AA and of SCA saw the world plunged into World War Two. When it was over, many of the men and women who served in that war returned home and started families.

² The life served most of us at least once though, or we would not have become addicted to it.

³ A founding member of SCA in Southern California.

⁴ He needed some organization that would work with him, and get the legal authorities off his case.

⁵ That early group, and all its subsequent manifestations, laid the foundation for what was to follow.

⁶ And had a relationship with the court system. The courts needed an alternative to jail, and sometimes sent us prospective new members.

⁷ We called public toilets "tearooms," implying that they were within the private realm.

⁸ Some of us were unhappy and had trouble accepting our sexuality. Our isolation increased with every bout of acting out.

⁹ Sometimes the best we could do was to divert our bodies to an SCA meeting, while wearing our acting out set of clothes. Sponsors received telephone calls from sponsees who were acting out at the other end of the line.

¹⁰ This was the precipitous nature of our sexual compulsion and of the desperate measures we employed to stop. Each of us was welcomed to the group, and congratulated for having made the decision to be in recovery that day.

¹¹ We came to see that our sexual compulsion is only a symptom of the disease; the disease being self will run riot.

¹² In the years since SCA started in Southern California, we have seen members begin attending meetings at younger ages, and before they have lost everything. We have learned to suggest that newcomers find someone to help, as a means of helping themselves. And we tell them the hardest things they will ever have to do are to avoid complacency in recovery, and continue attending meetings on a regular basis.

¹³ Long-term SCA members speak of attending chaotic meetings, devoid of direction and leadership. And yet, upon returning to SCA on other occasions, they report that the group had literature, leadership, structure and readings during the meeting. The unpredictable nature of what one could find at a meeting hampered attendance, and made the group vulnerable to being taken over by domineering members.

¹⁴ We heard stories from long-term SCA members of taking a vote to wrest control of the meeting from an earnest member who was a therapist. He would sometimes interrupt another member's sharing with directions to say "toilet," for example, instead of "tearoom." The group took a vote to adhere more strictly to the Twelve Traditions, as well as the Twelve Steps, as adapted from AA. They

did this to discourage cross talk, to rotate the leadership of each meeting, and to limit the term length of the meeting secretary. This was the result of more new members from AA and other Twelve Step programs entering SCA.

¹⁵ When the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic occurred, during that same period, (late 1970s and early 1980s,) attendance at SCA meetings ballooned.

¹⁶ The Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

¹⁷ SCA meetings restarted in Orange County, and the total number of meetings in Southern California hovered between three and four.

¹⁸ AIDS at the time being a fatal disease, many of us reasoned that if we had only five years to live, and it took two years to achieve sexual sobriety, we would have three years of freedom from acting out; improving our lives and the lives of others. This was worthwhile.

¹⁹ Later, despite treatments developed for HIV, SCA suffered catastrophic loss of leadership as a result of the AIDS epidemic.

²⁰ We broke the “two-week ceiling” (No SCA members here could continuously abide by their sexual recovery plan for more than two weeks.), and closed in on thirty days of continuous sexual sobriety, as defined on our written sexual recovery plan, and shared with another member, preferably our sponsor.

²¹ These members were the first to call attention to these milestones in Southern California, and word spread throughout the rest of the fellowship here.

²² We *all* gathered together in recovery. In time, someone read us the Traditions, and we realized we had to make a decision.

²³ The process of separation induced unnecessary feelings of blame and hostility—entanglement and abandonment—in some.

²⁴ Some members had been to AA retreats and picked up information as to how SCA could host a retreat.

²⁵ We understood from AA, the importance of getting a sponsor. In the Fifth Step, we learn that we cannot surrender our will and lives to an entity to which we are giving direction. We found someone to whom we could talk, and to whom we could at least listen. When we could not find a sponsor, we sponsored someone else. By doing so, we turned our compulsion into recovery.

²⁶ Sometimes whole groups took road trips to other SCA meetings, just to observe a different state of recovery. Something astonishing happens when two groups of SCA members, who are total strangers, get together. We see that recovery is a two way street.

²⁷ And another SCA member.

²⁸ Each Intergroup, however, produced booklets different enough to cause friction. For example, Southern California SCA used the term “sexual responsibility”, while New York said “sexual sobriety” in the “*Opening Statement.*”

²⁹ We decided to resolve this conflict by getting together to coordinate our message, in a manner similar to how the cells of the heart synchronize, once they come into contact with one another. Before that point, each individual cell of the heart muscle beats to its own rhythm.

³⁰ Both groups agreed to have someone moderate the discussion, as well as someone to take notes.

³¹ That proliferates recovery across the globe today. The next year, ISO met in New York, and then began meeting in different locations every year, to help Intergroups in places like San Diego, Chicago, St. Louis and Washington D.C. to maximize the benefit of the experience, strength and hope, which the delegates would have on the local SCA members.

³² At one of these early ISO Conferences, a member suggested that *someone* develop a newsletter. We asked this member, Richard K., what *he* needed to do it, and SCA soon produced our newsletter, the *SCAnner*.

³³ Which traditionally takes place on the same three-day weekend as the original ISO conference—we were all shocked to have Marshall L., a long time SCA member in Southern California, introduce Frank L.

³⁴ When it was over, many of us were stunned into silence.

³⁵ But the long time members in attendance verified his story.

³⁶ Twelve Step fellowships that deal with harmful sexual behaviors and its effects.

³⁷ Our hopes and dreams are with you SCA members of the future.