

SCA

**THE EARLY DAYS OF SCA IN LOS
ANGELES & ORANGE COUNTIES,
CALIFORNIA**

A DOCUMENT FROM SEXUAL COMPULSIVES
ANONYMOUS IN LOS ANGELES (SCA-LA), FOR
CIRCULATION WITHIN LA-AREA GROUPS ONLY.

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Before we discuss the early days of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA) in Los Angeles (LA) and Orange counties, we want to convey a sense of what life was like before programs such as SCA existed.¹ They called our age group “Baby Boomers” and we came to maturity in the 1960’s, 70’s and early 1980’s. We were 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

Our sexuality stopped working for those of us who are sexual compulsives. Instead, 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 the first SCA meeting in Los Angeles 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 the “sexual revolution” as it was called, had gotten out of control. These three groups were ready to lend support to anyone or anything that could help.

Frank L., who wound up starting the first SCA meeting in LA, had been 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."³

In the autumn of 1972, Frank L. contacted the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), in 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 L. 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 in LA look, as our start.⁴

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 here 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, attorneys, probation officers and judges heard it too, and eventually referred appropriate cases to us.

By August of 1976, new meetings were started in Orange County and LA's Silver Lake District. And the SCA meeting at the MCC 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 in LA had legal problems centered on their sexual compulsion⁵. Just like today, attendees who met 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 fantasies⁶. 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 compulsion⁷.

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 slowly⁸. We had *both* the desire to stop having compulsive sex, as well as the desire to anesthetize the painful feelings we were experiencing⁹.

Early SCA meetings in LA 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 resources we would use, commitments we would make to our recovery, and we encouraged each other to keep these commitments¹⁰. In time, we hoped to modify or eradicate the sexual compulsion. 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 in Los Angeles 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 us¹¹.

As of this writing, Frank L., the person who started SCA in LA, was sometimes seen at meetings, but at some point in the late 1970s, his attendance at meetings became sporadic. Although some long-time members knew of Frank L.'s importance to SCA, our collective memory of SCA in LA being started by Frank L. 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^{12, 13}.

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 indulgence¹⁴. Fear of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (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 the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)¹⁵.

When a test for HIV finally became available, it took two weeks to get the results. Dwelling on the potential test result, and the AIDS epidemic in general pushed us to drop our hesitation and talk or cry about the problems we faced¹⁶. One of our meetings 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 we provide no health services, or medications. At first this was looked upon as disruptive to the meeting, but in time we accepted it as another opportunity to reach sexual compulsives who were still suffering¹⁷.

As recovery spread, attendance at meetings increased. We needed more than just a few SCA meetings a week. We believed in the concept of attending a meeting every day, to help establish a period of abstinence. We started meetings where they had the best chance of success, regardless of personal convenience. Also for many of us old-timers, no meeting was complete without fellowship afterwards. We often directed sponsees to join us at SCA meetings and at the fellowship afterwards. The sponsees who argued against it, said they were too busy to make such a drastic commitment of time. But eventually every night of the week had a meeting in LA, and most attendees went out to fellowship.

Nothing attracts a crowd like a crowd. Picture twenty or more sexual compulsives descending 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.

Some of these new groups met at Alano clubs¹⁸, which seemed to be 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.

One new SCA group formed because its members wanted to hand out “chips” or medallions to recognize various lengths of abstention from the behaviors we considered most harmful. Recognizing lengths of sexual

sobriety was controversial, causing conflict and debate amongst our 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 abstention is the accepted definition of sobriety and abstention is helpful to work the A.A. program of recovery. Sex is an intrinsic part of our makeup as human beings, and to define sexual sobriety seemed to ask for continual evaluation of this concept.

The discussion opened up a can of worms with regard to letting the sexual compulsive decide what behaviors were prohibited or permitted on a sexual recovery plan. Some groups objected to a person claiming sexual 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 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 a meeting themselves. Like SCA in New York, the "chip meeting" chose to base its definition of sobriety on the Overeaters Anonymous (OA), model of abstinence: Each member defines sexual sobriety for themselves, based upon selected sexual behaviors that make their lives unmanageable. An early SCA member in LA, 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 his book "*Out of the Shadows*." Within a year, every meeting in LA and Orange

counties recognized this approach to defining sexual abstinence and accepted it as helpful in measuring sexual 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 anesthetized 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 for the entire meeting, often over issues as basic as how to arrange the chairs. Many people acted out over these conflicts, and some never returned.

Just like how A.A. had to formulate the Twelve Traditions and the principals of how the group must survive, we SCAs in LA and Orange County had to have our own controversies and conflicts to arrive at our own conclusions. When our first female newcomer showed up at a meeting, she wasn't allowed in until the group conscience prevailed. Like the early AA members, we were afraid of loosing our safe haven. However, as more people accumulated longer lengths of sobriety, things calmed down and we learned to look to the Twelve Traditions instead of trying to reinvent the wheel.

As recovery began to flower among our membership, the spirit of SCA meetings in LA and Orange counties changed¹⁹. We demonstrated to everyone, that a period of sexual sobriety could be achieved, and if lost, that it could be regained²⁰. 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”²¹ 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 an SCA member, Michael M., who traveled around the US, we discovered that New York had SCA meetings 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”. Michael M. brought New York’s literature back to Los Angeles, and because of its sophistication, their consistent presence of long-term members and in the absence of a voice to the contrary, we assumed that SCA was started in New York²².

As the number of SCA meetings in LA and Orange County 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 California²³. We decided to separate the two fellowships here, and each continues separately to this day. Ultimately, our boundaries were more clearly defined²⁴.

On Memorial Day in 1987, SCA in LA and Orange counties started having regular retreats, in addition to the Intergroup meetings²⁵. 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 in our early days 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 straight²⁶, ²⁷. 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 upon their return, of what happened to those who left the fellowship prematurely.

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 it²⁸ was all we needed to hold a meeting. In those days, 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 had²⁹, ³⁰. 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. LA and Orange County SCA had three delegates too³¹. 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 relationship³², ³³.

Years later, at the Los Angeles SCA convention³⁴, Frank L. was our keynote speaker. Frank L. distributed an assortment of photocopied documents from the 1970s, and told us his story³⁵. Here was a man who told us an SCA history, which had been lost with time³⁶. 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-Fellowships thereafter, were preceded by the sometimes-tenuous thread of SCA meetings in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

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 affirmative of each individual's

humanity, 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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Please help us with feedback or any additional information you can provide. Write to us at:

Workshops@SCALosAngeles.org, Thank You

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) had been founded in 1935, some thirty-eight years before the first SCA meeting in Los Angeles, in the spring of 1973. By then, most people knew of AA and it was just becoming socially acceptable to admit one's alcoholism. During the years between the founding of AA and the start of SCA, we 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 He needed some organization to work with him.

⁴ That early group, and all its subsequent manifestations, laid the foundation for what was to follow.

⁵ And had a relationship with the legal system. The legal system needed an alternative to jail, and sometimes sent us prospective new members.

⁶ We called public toilets "tearooms," implying that they were within the private realm.

⁷ Some of us were unhappy and had trouble accepting our sexuality. Our isolation increased with every bout of acting out.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Some SCA groups still have the commitment portion of the meeting today.

¹¹ In the years since the first SCA meeting in Los Angeles, 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.

¹² 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. A long-term SCA member from Orange County speaks 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ When the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic occurred, during that same period, (late 1970s and early 1980s,) attendance at SCA meetings ballooned.

¹⁵ SCA meetings, which had once been in Orange County restarted, and the total number of meetings in LA and Orange County hovered between three and four.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Later, despite treatments developed for HIV, SCA in LA and Orange County suffered catastrophic loss of leadership as a result of the AIDS epidemic.

¹⁸ Organizations formed to address the concerns of alcoholics.

¹⁹ We broke the "two-week ceiling" (No SCA members here could continuously abide by their sexual recovery plan for more than two and a half weeks.), and we 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.

²⁰ These members were the first to call attention to these milestones in LA and Orange counties, and word spread throughout the fellowship here.

²¹ Twelve Step fellowships that deal with harmful sexual behaviors and their effects.

²² Though as of this writing, no one has been able to settle the question of how each of these groups settled upon “Sexual Compulsives Anonymous” as its name.

²³ We *all* gathered together in recovery. In time, someone read us the Traditions, and we realized we had to make a decision.

²⁴ The process of separation induced unnecessary feelings of blame and hostility—entanglement and abandonment—in some.

²⁵ Some members had been to AA retreats and picked up information as to how we could host a retreat.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Once in 1988, the whole group in San Diego took a road trip to the Saturday morning SCA meeting in Long Beach, 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.

²⁸ And another SCA member.

²⁹ Each Intergroup, however, produced booklets different enough to cause friction. For example, the SCA groups in LA and Orange County used the term “sexual responsibility”, while New York said “sexual sobriety” in the “*Opening Statement*.”

³⁰ 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.

³¹ Both groups agreed to have someone moderate the discussion, as well as someone to take notes.

³² 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.

³³ 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*.

³⁴ 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 LA, introduce Frank L.

³⁵ When it was over, many of us were stunned into silence.

³⁶ But the long-time members in attendance verified his story.

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