

Familiarity

Susan Peabody

Love addicts, and addicts and alcoholics in general, gravitate toward familiarity. This is our comfort zone. Other people like variety, but not us. As they say in AA, “Give us a rut and we will furnish it.”

This is a problem when it comes time for us to change. I remember the man who introduced me to recovery. He asked me to go to a “place where they understood me.” In other words a twelve-step program—Alcoholics Anonymous. A few days later, he asked me if I had gone to a meeting and I promptly said, “No, I was afraid they might cure me.”

This was my first inkling into the fact that I was addicted to the familiar even if it was painful. I think I might even have been addicted to suffering. It was familiar and therefore comfortable. What I was familiar with was sorrow, fear, self-pity, and people who were not good for me. I even picked friends who reminded me of the bullies I was so hurt by in my childhood.

This was such a problem for me that when I began to be happy in AA, I got nervous and my hands would tremble.

Eventually, I made changes despite my fear. I did what my sponsor in AA told me to do. I followed God’s will for me. I tried new things. And, eventually, I began to enjoy the happiness that ensued.

If you are addicted to the familiar, what can you do about it?

1. Make a list all of the things you do that are not good for you.
2. Make a list of alternative behaviors.
3. Break down the list into manageable pieces.
4. Start with the easy things and make a commitment to substitute a good habit for a bad one. For me, this started by going to AA meetings instead of the local bar.
5. Spend the rest of your life making changes like this.
6. Be patient with yourself—progress not perfection.
7. Acknowledge and celebrate each success. Change for addicts is a miracle.
8. Reach out to help someone new, but not in a codependent way.
9. Recognize that not all of your old habits will be changed right away. Some core wounds might have to be healed first.
10. Ask your Higher Power to help. Will power, alone, is not enough. You need HP and the power of the group. Therapy might also be useful in some instances. It was for me once I met the right therapist.
11. “Act as if,” sometimes. “Fake it till you make it.” Imagine the right thing to do and do it anyway no matter what. This is a decision followed by action. This will change your life forever and you will be “happy joyous and free.” (AA)

Friends in Recovery

Through the mist; into the sun.

Step by step; I cannot run.
I reached out to touch someone.
A hand came back; here comes the sun.
Sparkling eyes; hearts of gold.
Words of wisdom; hands to hold.
The gift of love comes to me.
My heart is full and I am free.

1982

Someone asked me once what I meant by the last line, "I am free." I smiled and gently said, "You kind of have to be a slave to habit to understand this line in the poem."