

# **INVISIBLE HANDS**

*Lessons About Transformation  
and Change from a  
Recovering Love Addict*

*Susan Peabody*

*Preliminary Draft*

*Susan Peabody.  
2019 7<sup>th</sup> St. "A"  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
510-642-6511  
peabodys@law.berkeley.edu*

## Contents

Lesson #1: *The truth will set you free.*

Lesson #2: *Find a safe place to grow.*

Lesson #3: *Find a mentor.*

Lesson #4: *Identify what you want to change.*

Lesson #5: *Work on your self-esteem.*

Lesson #6: *Divine help is a prayer away.*

Lesson #7: *Make amends.*

Lesson #8: *Consider investigating the past.*

Lesson #9 *Learn to forgive—yourself and others*

Lesson #10: *Pass on what you have learned.*

## Introduction

Change is to human life what metamorphosis is to the caterpillar. It is the inevitable cycle of life. If there is no metamorphosis, there is no life.

Sometimes the transformation process gets interrupted—usually because we are flung into survival mode by difficult circumstances. To ease the pain of these difficult times, we sometimes turn to mood altering experiences that can throw us off track. Sometimes these mood-altering experiences turn on us and become full-blown addictions.

This was certainly true for me. By the time I was thirty two years old I had not grown emotionally or socially since my adolescence. My maturation had become fixated. I was a creature of habit, not a human being. I was lonely and out of control. I hurt others and I hurt myself. Yet, despite all the pain I was in, I was afraid to change. I was terrified of the unknown. But then a miracle occurred and I overcame my fear. I began to make decisions about how to think and act that altered my course for the better—and I began to remove certain obstacles that stood in the way of my maturation.

The things I did to change can be summed up as follows. (1) I admitted the truth to myself—that my problems were of my own making. Then I submitted to the natural transformation process. I became willing to change. (2) I found a safe place to grow. This place was both metaphorical and physical. Metaphorically, it was that place in my heart where my soul resided before the trauma of my childhood and where today I am a free and unblemished spirit unencumbered by my fears and illusions. Literally, it was a place where I found the kind of fellowship I needed to support my transformation. (3) I found a mentor. (4) I made an inventory of the thoughts

and behaviors I wanted to change and painstakingly began to change them. (5) I worked very hard to build up my self-esteem. (6) I developed a personal relationship with God and by so doing had a spiritual shift in consciousness. (7) I made amends to the people I had hurt. (8) I investigated the past and made peace with it. (9) I learned to forgive myself and others. (10) I passed on what I had learned.

The lessons I have learned about the art of changing, and a description of how these changes were manifested in my life, is the essence of this book. It is both a textbook and a journey story. I have written it because I love to teach. I only wish the woman I am today could reach back in time and teach the young woman I was. I would try to help her see what is so clear to me now. That change is important. That there is nothing to be afraid of. That dreams come true if we change. That we are not alone. That there are what Joseph Campbell calls “invisible hands,” which come to our aid when we are ready to change.

*Susan*

## Teachers

You are all channels.  
You are all open to hear your own hearts  
Or you would not be here.  
From the deep well  
Of your own human experience  
You bring up the cool clear waters  
Of love, of knowledge, of wisdom  
To give to the rest  
Of your human community. . . .  
But remember,  
When the teacher ceases to learn  
He ceases to teach.  
Such a one becomes rigid and fixed—  
A signpost perhaps,  
but not a teacher.

*Emmanuel's Book,*  
Compiled by Pat Rodegast and Judith Stanton

## Lesson # 1

*The truth will set you free.*

Change begins with a *new attitude*—an intuitive understanding that things are not right the way they are. This is followed—sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly—by a *desire* to change.

If all goes smoothly (or not so smoothly), the next step will be the *willingness* to change. No one knows where this willingness comes from. For me it came out of the blue after years of procrastination and denial. Such a miracle as this prompted me to consider the possibility that it was a gift rather than something I did. Of course, I cannot say for sure whether my newfound willingness was something I had worked for, just plain luck, a natural process, or a gift from God, but the end result was the same. I was thrilled to finally be willing to change. The way I carried on at the time, you would think I had won the lottery.

Once willingness appears, the next step is to get honest with yourself about your problems and the things that get in the way of your maturation. You may start by identifying the most glaring challenge in your life. For me this was my love addiction or as I called it at the time—loving too much. Here is my story.



Love addiction kind of crept up on me. In the beginning, I was just an innocent—looking for love. Then things got out of hand. It all began when I

was about 12 years old and started falling in love. My first crush was on a boy named Alan. Oh, how I loved him. I just knew he was going to make all my dreams come true.

Alan was embarrassed and angry that I liked him so much. He told me not to write his name on my school books. He threw rocks at me when I walked by his house. I can still feel the sting of those missiles. I cried, and was humiliated, but nothing discouraged me.

Every day I watched Alan play baseball at the park. At school, during recess, I would sneak into the cloakroom and put on Alan's jacket. I wanted to touch something that was his—I wanted to smell his presence. I also wrote in my diary about my love for Alan. Day after day, I described the bittersweet pain of unrequited love, hoping that someday Alan would love me too.

There were other infatuations over the years. The pattern was always the same. I fell in love and believed that only this particular boy could make me happy. And I always felt so powerless—as if I couldn't help myself. Eventually, I would get emotionally and physically sick from yearning to be with someone I could not have. Then, when the pain became unbearable, the obsession faded and I found someone more promising to adore from a distance.

High school was not a happy time for me. I prayed that someone would ask me out for a date. One time I did get a call from a boy. He asked me out and I agreed to go. I was so excited and nervous that I stayed up all night making a new dress. The next day at school some boys snickered at me as I walked by, and that night someone called to tell me that the phone call I had gotten the night before was just a joke. I was so embarrassed, I wanted to die.

When I was nineteen years old, I became desperate to have a relation-

ship. I wanted to have a boyfriend and I was willing to do anything to get one, even if I had to take someone hostage. Of course, I did not feel loveable enough to attract someone I really liked, and I was too impatient to wait for someone compatible to come along, so I got involved with the first person who showed any interest in me.

I met Ray walking down the street in San Francisco. I was visiting the Haight Asbury district made famous by the hippies. Ray was twenty five years old, unemployed, and living with his mother. I started spending a lot of time with Ray and within a few months I was pregnant. I decided to sign up for government assistance (welfare) and find a place where Ray and I could live together. From that point on, I became Ray's caretaker. I paid the bills, bought Ray's clothes and gave him money for drugs.

I accepted a lot of neglect from Ray. I seemed to have a high tolerance for suffering because in my mind this was the price I had to pay for having a man in my life. Ray took advantage of this. He only came home when he felt like it. He didn't give me any affection. Ray and I didn't even talk very much, unless Ray was telling me what to do. He also took all of my money, except what went to pay the bills. Sometimes I would try to hide money for a rainy day. Then Ray would get into some kind of trouble with gambling or drugs and beg me to give him some money. He said the men he owed money to would kill him if he did not pay up. I can still see him standing there, tears running down his face, asking me to save his life. Of course, I always gave in. I felt responsible for Ray.

I also accepted a lot of dishonesty from Ray. I had no idea what it felt like to trust him. Usually he lied to me about other women. He said he was not having affairs and he usually was. Deep down I knew what was going on, but



I buried my head in the sand because I was afraid if I said something to Ray he might leave me.

Of course, I wanted more than I was getting out of the relationship. I was just too afraid to demand it. So I just cried when my birthday went unnoticed. When Ray didn't come home at night I spent hours lying in the bed, curled up like a child, waiting for his car to pull up.

Despite my dependency on this relationship, I tried several times to end it. I remember after six months of being with Ray I wanted to leave him. When I told him I was going to leave he got very sad. He said, "I guess you've gotten what you want and now you're ready to move on and leave me behind." I felt guilty when Ray said this and I stayed with him to keep from hurting his feelings. I projected my fear of being abandoned onto him, and assumed that he could not survive if I left him.

Later in the relationship, I thought about leaving Ray again, but I felt guilty about withdrawing my financial support. I knew Ray had become dependent on me. I was also afraid to leave the relationship because I knew it meant facing my fear of loneliness and giving up my identity as a caretaker. Most of all, I didn't want to face the emotional pain of breaking up so I just kept putting it off, hoping my misery would end someday.

Another time I asked Ray to leave, but when he started packing his bags I panicked. The next thing I knew, I was begging Ray to stay—like a child begging her mother not to leave her alone in the dark. During this scene my fear of abandonment overwhelmed me, and I was ready to do anything to avoid feeling the panic that gripped my heart.

While it seemed as if I would never leave Ray, eventually I did fall in love with someone else and was ready to move on. Unfortunately, Ray was not

ready to lose me. When I told him I was going to leave he held a knife to my throat and threatened to kill me. Then he beat me up and held me prisoner in the house. He kept saying to me, "I know you still love me, just admit it." After three days of this, I agreed to stay with Ray and he immediately calmed down. Then I said, "Ray it's time to cook dinner and I need to go to the store and get some things." Ray agreed to let me go and I quickly hurried out of the door. Once I was safe, I went to a phone booth and called the police. Ray was told by the police to leave the house and he did.

The first man I got involved with after Ray was not much better, and that relationship failed too. From this point on, I became involved in a series of short-term relationships similar to the one I had with Ray. All of these relationships failed because I was too emotionally unstable to select an appropriate partner; and even if I did, I couldn't sustain a relationship because of my neediness, low self-esteem, and fear of abandonment. So, as the years passed, my hungry heart went unsatisfied and this made me even more desperate to find love.

It was during these years of endless searching for love that I neglected my children. Kathy and Karl were always important to me in between relationships. I cooked their meals, washed their clothes, walked them to school, volunteered as a PTA mother, went to their sports events, and tucked them in at nights. But when I had a boyfriend, things changed. I am ashamed to admit this, but I actually brought men I barely know into the house to stay for long periods, and while these men were there they became more important than my children.

Eventually, all these toxic relationships, and my guilt about neglecting my children, took their toll and my health began to deteriorate. I developed a

spastic colon and high blood pressure. I was chronically depressed and almost died in two car accidents. Once I couldn't see the road because I was crying and the other time I was fantasizing instead of looking where I was going. Finally, after another failed relationship, I was in so much pain I swallowed a bottle of aspirin.

In 1982 my father died. The day before, I had asked my boyfriend if I could use the car to visit my father. My boyfriend said "no," so I didn't go and of course my father died. I cried about this in front of my boyfriend and he promptly punched me in the eye. I guess he thought I was trying to make him feel guilty. So I sat at my father's funeral with a black eye wondering what had become of my life.

On the day of my father's funeral I went to work. I wanted to be a "brave little soldier." Across from me was the desk of a co-worker by the name of Barry. Barry had only recently been assigned to the desk near me after the office manager, for no logical reason, decided to move everybody around to a new location.

Around 4:00 in the afternoon I was typing away when I looked up to see Barry staring at me. I was curious about this and decided that it meant he cared about my situation—perhaps he felt sorry for me. This was good news for someone who felt invisible and unloved. I would take any kind of attention I could get.

I started stopping by Barry's office more often after this. It did not take me long to fall in love. Eventually I asked Barry if he wanted to go out on a date. He very nicely said he was dating someone else. I was devastated, but undeterred. I decided at that moment that I would seduce him come hell or high water. Thus, in the blink of an eye, my final toxic relationship began—the

last one before finding my way into a new life.

My master plan to seduce Barry was to lose weight and become so attractive that he could not resist me. Men were basically weak, I assumed, when it came to sex. Over the next few months, I took off a lot of weight and spent all of my money on sexy clothes. Unfortunately, my plan didn't work. Barry was my friend and that was all.

This, of course, depressed me. As the depression wore on and on I became suicidal. Someone said to me one day, "Susan, if you lose anymore weight you will be invisible." "Yes! I exclaimed to myself. More than anything else, I just want to disappear from this life."

Fortunately for me, as I got closer to death I became afraid. It was sort of like moving closer to the edge of a cliff, thinking that beyond this point lay freedom, and then having second thoughts when you look down.

During this time I had thought often about how to get out of the rut I was in. But I really couldn't come up with any answers. I knew my life was a mess, but I really didn't understand that *I* was a mess. If I had known, it might have been easier to see that I needed to change before my life could change. (This idea that our life will change without changing ourselves is what I call magical thinking.)

One day, I read a passage from some literature that Barry had given me. It was from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The passage read: "[W]e invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making."

At first I vehemently objected to this concept. I have not made a mess of my life. I am the victim here. I had a horrible childhood. Ray was a monster.

As I discussed this with Barry, however, he just laughed. “Just think about this idea,” he said, “maybe something good will come of it.”

Well, I did think about it and the idea grew on me. Maybe I had contributed just a little to the mess my life was in. I may have started out as a victim, but who was keeping the ball rolling? In a flash of insight I knew it was me.

This was the beginning of my realization that my life would change if I changed. But how would this happen? Where would the willingness come from? What are the changes that need to be made? After a few weeks of asking myself these questions I knew I needed help.

## **Lesson # 2**

*Find a safe place to grow.*

Honesty is very fragile. It begins to fall apart in isolation. To guard against the withering away of the progress you have made, it is important to find a community of other people who are also struggling to change and overcome addiction.

Many wonderful things happen in such a place. (1) You will tell your story out loud and find out, to your amazement, that you are not banished from the group. (2) You will find love and support from others who really understand what you are going through. (3) You will find strength you did not know you had and the hope you thought you had lost. (4) You will find more wisdom about how to change than you know what to do with.



One day, I was sitting in Barry's office, very depressed, and suddenly I started crying. I turned to Barry and said, "Barry, can you die of loneliness?" I really thought he was going to tell me to stop feeling sorry for myself, but instead he looked at me with such compassion and then reached into his pocket. He pulled out a coin that was marked with the number 5. I was later to learn it was a chip from a 12-Step program rewarding Barry for five years of membership. With the coin in his hand, Barry turned and said to me, "Yes, you can die of loneliness. I know this first hand." I looked at him astonished, because after months of pouring out my heart to him he had never once told me anything personal about himself. Finally, after a long pause, he said, "Susan, I think you need to go somewhere where people understand you." That was it. No warnings about my obsessive dieting—just a simple "get help."

I didn't visit Barry for a few days after this. When I did see him he asked me if I had gone to a support group. I looked at him and blurted out, "No, I am afraid they might cure me." I was surprised at what I had said. Barry just laughed. It was only years later that I realized I had become addicted to the pain—the depression, the self pity, the misery. It was the only thread I had left and I was afraid to let it go. The idea of happiness made me nervous.

Eventually, I did go to my first support group for my anorexia. I really didn't think my behavior was out of control, but I sat there as someone explained how the program worked. Then, something the moderator said caught my attention. "You will have to learn how to ask for help," she announced. "Not me," I said to myself with the assurance of a lonely, stubborn survivor. "I can take care of myself."

Despite all my reservations, at some point during the course of the meeting, I began to have a feeling of homecoming. I could not explain it, but

I felt as if I was in the right place—that I had come home after a long journey. I started crying and, in embarrassment, I turned my face to the wall. The woman next to me raised her hand and said “How do you know you belong here?” “You just know,” I whispered to myself. “You just know.”

I loved my support group and it was there that I was given the willingness to change. It just descended on me, or welled up from some soulful place within me—I don’t know which. I just know that one day I had the willingness to do the work. Not only that, the willingness was so strong that you could actually call it enthusiasm.

I in recovery for about two years, when I began to look at my love addiction. It all started when I read Robin Norwood’s book, *Women Who Love Too Much*. At first I was afraid to read it, but after forcing myself to do just that, I was thrilled to find out that I had a diagnosable disease. (Up to this point, I just thought I was crazy when it came to relationships.)

Soon after, I went looking for a support group for women who love too much. Unfortunately, the only group in town was full and they only had a waiting list. I was impatient, so I decided to start my own group. I called it The El Cerrito Group of Women Who Love Too Much.

I still remember posting flyers all over town and then anxiously waiting to see if anyone would show up. They did. Ten women sat in a circle that first day in 1984 and discussed how to organize the meeting.

It was decided to run the meeting like a 12-Step program and to adopt Robin Norwood’s ten steps as well. We would discuss our struggles with loving too much and we would read literature together. Most of all we would support each other through the most important days of our lives—our recovery.

Many things happened in this group over the next eight years. I made

friends and found a deeper understanding of what was wrong with me. I was guided by the experiences of others and more than once shown the way. Most of all, this community of women sharing their experience, strength and hope each week became the crucible in which my transformation from love addict to mature woman took place. I could not have changed without the help of the women in this group.

### **Lesson #3**

#### **Find a mentor**

. . .a discussion of the value of mentorship will be forthcoming



To supplement my Women Who Love Too Much meetings I often went to Alcoholics Anonymous. This is where I met Joan. She was the speaker that night. I can still see her standing at a podium telling everyone about her experience with alcohol and drugs. I sat riveted in my chair. “What an amazing woman,” I thought. “I wonder who she is.”

After the meeting we all stood in a circle and said a prayer. (Back in 1982 it was the Lord’s Prayer. These days it is more often The Serenity Prayer.) As the circle was forming I kind of inched my way toward her. I took her hand and we stood in the circle together. After the prayer she turned to give me a hug. “That was a wonderful talk,” I said. She thanked me and then offered me her phone number. I was shocked. This is a fairly common thing to do in AA, but I was not expecting the speaker to be available for a phone



call. I went home with a feeling of amazement. Of course, years later I realized that this is what makes support groups so special. No one feels superior to the others. We all have problems and that humbles us.

I began calling Joan to talk. I was amazed that she took my phone calls—day and night. Eventually I asked her to be my teacher and she agreed. And for the next few years she was there for me one hundred percent of the time. (That is quite a track record.) We talked over my problems. She comforted me when a crisis arose. She helped me understand the areas in which I needed to grow. She suggested books to read. We even went to classes together. We did it all.

Joan was a mentor, role-model and surrogate mother for me. I can't speak to her relationships with others, but for me she provided everything I needed at that time in my life. I knew she was a gift from God.

Sadly, a few years after we met, Joan got cancer and went into a nursing home. I visited her every Sunday. I just sat there while she fell in and out of sleep. She liked to have me there when she woke up. I just wanted to be in her presence. I adored her. But most of all, I wanted to give back to her what she had given to me.

When Joan died it left a huge hole in my heart. I did not know if I could make it in recovery without her. But eventually I realized that angels come into your life and then they go. Accepting that was part of my growth.

#### **Lesson #4**

Identify what you want to change.

. . . forthcoming

## Lesson #5

### Work on Your Self-Esteem

Underlying most resistance to change is fear. Fear stems from a lack of confidence. Therefore, to prepare for the challenges of changing you must do something about your low self-esteem. (This includes those people who outwardly manifest self-centeredness. Ego mania is just a cover—an attempt to compensate for low self-esteem.)

Why do we need self-esteem? Well first of all it feels good and that fosters change. When we feel bad we stay home and pull the covers over our head. When we feel good we get out there and meet the challenges of life.

Self-esteem also gives us the confidence to try to do new things or to do things differently than we have before. We are not sure how this works. All we know is that all successful people have moderate-to-high self-esteem and those whose lives are going nowhere lack it.

You might ask why people lack self-esteem in the first place. Well, I have studied this problem for many years, and I have come to believe that young children cannot love themselves. Instead, they must be validated by the people around them if they are to build a sense of self-worth. Love and attention are the most important forms of validation. Unfortunately, some children do not receive the nurturing they need to thrive. Whether it be at home or at school they just don't get enough love.

Once children have low self-esteem, it begins to feed on itself. Due to their poor self-image, children are incapable of accepting the small doses of love their parents do provide, or the love of other people they may meet as they are growing up. This results in more shame and low self-esteem.

Other than acting as a barrier to change, how does low self-esteem impact our lives? The most common symptoms of are as follows:

- P chronic insecurity
- P chronic anxiety
- P depression
- P feelings of alienation
- P feelings of inadequacy
- P loneliness
- P people pleasing
- P an exaggerated fear of abandonment and rejection
- P clinging to others
- P a compulsive to apologize
- P feelings of deprivation
- P feelings of emptiness
- P self-loathing
- P confusion or fear when love is available
- P anxiety when things are going well
- P under or over achieving

While it can be helpful to understand the origin of low self-esteem, or its symptoms, it is more important to learn what you can do about it. My own journey to find and sustain self-esteem may act as a guide.



My mother loved me, but we did not bond. She made it clear through her body language and some of the things she said that something was wrong with me. As it turned out, my fatal flaw was that I was too much like her abusive mother. Can you imagine trying to get away from an abusive parent and then giving birth to someone who reminded you of her.

Unfortunately for me, my mother was never able to separate what she projected onto me from who I really was.

Kindergarten was a traumatic experience for me. When I left home that first day I thought my name was Susie. By the time my mother picked me up at the end of the day I had learned that my real name was “Fatso.” What a rude awakening.

Of course kindergarten was not the end of all the teasing. It went on all the way through high school and beyond. And it had a devastating affect on my self-esteem. You might say it kind of destroyed it.

Once in my recovery group, I started hearing about this mysterious thing everyone called low self-esteem. It was a new concept to me, but I caught on quickly. After one particular meeting in which my friends talked about it, I remember going to the library and checking out several books on the subject. I still remember my favorite book, *Celebrating Yourself*, by Dorothy Corkille-Briggs.

Once I had several handbooks on how to build self-esteem I began to make a concerted effort to change my self-image. The following is a list of things I did over the next few years.

P I started out by adopting an attitude of self-acceptance or unconditional self-love. This meant really understanding that I was a worthy person despite my shortcomings. This wasn't easy, but eventually, I got the hang of it.

P Once I had a general acceptance of my worth as a human being, I spent some time focusing on my specific attributes. This was hard too. It felt

like was indulging self-centeredness. But I just kept telling me it was just a lesson and that my inner critic was not going anywhere. She would be back to compensate for any loss of humility.

P As part of my new my positive-thinking campaign, I learned how to superimpose new information over my old negative tapes. (Negative tapes are all the hurtful and inappropriate things people said about me while I was growing up.) This meant a lot of conversations with my inner self.

P I also began to accept the fact that self-respect, which I had to *earn*, does not necessarily contradict the notion that I should love myself unconditionally. Both concepts are important to maintain self-esteem. I just have to find the balance between loving myself unconditionally and pushing myself to do things that will engender self-respect—self-discipline, change, taking responsibility for my actions, standing up for myself, etc.

P Whenever possible, I began surrounding myself with people who affirmed me (people who like me just the way I am). Like it or not, my relationships with others can erode my self-esteem. So I made a point of choosing my friends carefully. (A choice I did not have as a child.)

P I got to know myself better—who I am, my values, needs, wants, taste, etc. How can I value what I don't know? Remember the old song, "To know, know, know you is to love, love, love you."

- P I stopped trying to be perfect. No one is perfect. We all live in the shadow of perfection and are perfectly imperfect.
- P I began doing nice things for myself. This one was hard, but you value what you take care.
- P I learned early on to stop comparing myself to others. Like the old saying goes, “They broke the mold when they made me.” I had to resist thinking they broke the mold because it was defective, but I did.
- P I forced myself to learn how to receive. I had always had a monopoly on giving to promote a false image of myself as a good person. This was meant to bolster my low-self esteem but it become very addictive and before I knew it I was only good because I did things for others. So when I stopped giving I was *bad*. So now I stopped dismissing compliments and returning gifts. I let people do things for me. I let the love come in.
- P I began being creative. I started writing. I first got in touch with how much I loved to write in high school. I won first prize in an essay content. I was thrilled, but I also felt deep down that it was a mistake, or at least an isolated incident. But I believe now that everyone has a talent, and they should use it. This stimulates self-satisfaction and reinforces the positive things you have been trying to think about yourself. Still it was hard to share my creativity. I was so sensitive and I cringed at any negative feedback, even if it was constructive. I have

gotten better at this—kind of. But, for the most part, I have learned to appreciate my own talents and see them as an expression of my innermost being and therefore beautiful.

P I learned how to make amends for “wreckage from the past.” I had hurt my children and I needed to own up to this. (More on this later.) I believe we have a conscience for a reason and I can’t ignore healthy guilt if I want to feel good about myself. But I also had to learn how to separate *appropriate* guilt from what I call *codependent* guilt—guilt that comes from our shame-based self and has no relevance to the situation. Most love addicts feel guilty for taking up space on the planet and blame themselves for everything, especially the errors of other people. This was certainly true of me.

P To protect my newfound self-esteem, I prepared myself mentally for those times when people tried to drag me down (people I can’t avoid like family and co-workers). I learned how to keep from taking them so seriously, as well as how to filter out inappropriate criticism. I am still learning this. Sometimes I do well and other times I fall apart.

By 1985 all of these things really began to help my low-esteem problems and today I do feel a lot better about myself. However, I would not be honest if I did not say that despite all the work I do I still have relapses when it comes to self-confidence. I have learned over the years that I have to work harder than some people to keep the progress I have made. It would be nice if once I feel good about myself I could maintain that feeling, but

usually it doesn't work that way. Self-esteem can be elusive. One minute it's there, and the next minute it seems to have vanished.

I would also like to point out that while many of the things that helped me build up my esteem amounted to validating *myself*, other things utilized the validation of others to enhance my self-worth. This may seem contradictory. Many people feel that we can love ourselves unconditionally from within and have no need for the love of others. However, I feel that we do need some outer validation. We are only human, and no matter how strongly we believe in ourselves we need a little support. What is important to remember, is that our validation of ourselves should come *first* and it is *more important* that what others think of us.

### **Lesson #6**

*Divine help is a prayer away.*

### **Rebirth**

You writhe till you die  
You pray till you lay  
In God's loving arms  
Awaiting new dawns  
When you feel, till you heal  
And grow till you know  
The gain from your pain  
The new—that comes from the old.

Change and transformation are often accompanied by a spiritual experience of some sort. Such an experience can be subtle or dramatic. Sometimes one only knows in hindsight that it has happened. Other times you are totally aware that it is happening while it is happening. Sometimes it is



only a shift in consciousness. Other times it includes connecting with a diety—some kind of Higher Power.

I believe that a spiritual experience is very important to long-term recovery because it gives us staying power. Alone we cannot battle the demons of addiction. In our support group we have some aid, but even that can fail us in a crisis. It is only with the aid of spirituality that we can continue, for a lifetime, to be sustained in recovery. This is because spirituality is just another word for change. But to differentiate this change from what we do on our own, I call it a transformation. By this I mean that we are aided by something outside of ourselves although the changes are manifested inwardly. Sounds complicated doesn't it? Well it is more than complicated, it is the greatest mystery of all time. No one really understands it, we just experience it and then swear by it.

While we do not really understand spirituality, we can observe the changes that take place once it has occurred. Over the last twenty years I have seen people overcome their addictions after a spiritual experience. They start out at the mercy of their dependencies. They are powerless over their inner compulsions and have no strength to fight back. They habitually re-enact behavior that is self-destructive and life-threatening. Then, in a moment of agony, call out "God help me," and somewhere deep in their heart they surrender. They admit they are powerless and they ask for help. Then, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, they feel willing, when before they felt hesitant. They feel loved, when before they felt abandoned. They feel as if they are at the start of a glorious new journey, when before they felt near death. Most of all, wisdom replaces confusion, hope transplants despair, and fear becomes courage.



My spiritual experience occurred in 1983. At the time, I was an agnostic, and spirituality was a mystery to me. If asked whether or not I believed in God, I said, “I think God must have died in childbirth because I feel like an orphan.”

Still, after the miracle of finding my way to a recovery program, I wondered if some creative force in the universe did exist. My curiosity was piqued you might say. To find out what other people had experienced, I went to the library to do some research. Why not?

Reading about spirituality and religious experiences was very enlightening, and it helped me understand that I was not the only person seeking answers to questions about this mysterious process. I also found out that most people who have had this kind of awakening personify spirituality as some form of Higher Power. This suited me just fine and from this point on I adopted the word God.

Learning about other people’s experiences with God suddenly relieved me of my hesitancy and embarrassment. This allowed tender feelings for God to grow and bear fruit. Then, shortly thereafter, I had a wonderful experience. I was sitting in my kitchen. Everything was clean and bright. The sunlight poured through the window. I was thinking about God and then suddenly a feeling of well-being took over me. I felt peaceful and content. I was all lit up inside. All of my fears disappeared and I felt as if everything in the universe was in order. I just suddenly knew that even the chaos of this world was part of God’s plan, and that everything was being taken care of. This serenity and trust was so exhilarating that I felt overwhelmed and grateful. I bowed my

head and just let the feelings overtake me. Later I thought, “I like this God stuff.”

## **Lesson #7**

*Making amends is a turning point.*

There is another obstacle to change and transformation that most people don't think about and that is the guilt and shame we feel for hurting others. We get so caught up in these feelings that we lack the motivation to move on. Many people can't even get started because of this burden. Fortunately, there is a solution to this age-old problem—making amends!

When making amends, it is important to note that this often means more than an apology. If you are rude to someone in the grocery store maybe saying you are sorry is enough, but if you are rude to a friend all the time, making amends is offering your friend a new relationship—one in which he or she is no longer being hurt.

Furthermore, if you have some serious amends to make, what 12-Step programs call “wreckage of the past,” making it will be harder than you think and will not always take the course you want or expect.



My major amends went to my children. They suffered tremendously because of my love addiction. Kathy, my daughter, was born on Sunday, January 12, 1969. As I was in labor I noticed a placard hanging on the wall.

Monday's child is fair of face;  
Tuesday's child is full of grace;  
Wednesday's child is full of woe;  
Thursday's child has far to go;  
Friday's child is loving and giving;  
Saturday's child has to work for its living;  
But a child that's born on the Sabbath day,  
Is fair and wise and good and gay.

As it turned out, Kathy was exactly like the poem—beautiful, wise beyond her years, and good as gold. And this was extended outward to others. By the time Kathy was in nursery school every mother in the neighborhood was calling me to see if she could come over and play with her child.

Unfortunately, when Kathy was a child I was drinking heavily and looking desperately for my “knight in shining armor.” I don't know why I thought I would find him in a seedy bar downtown, but I did. Because of my drinking and codependency, I neglected Kathy. I couldn't wait for the weekend to come so I could send her to my mother's house and then go out drinking. Over the years she spent more and more time there. Years later she told me how abandoned she felt.

Despite all this neglect, when I finally sat Kathy down and apologized I expected her to immediately embrace me. In my mind, this meant moving away from her attachment to my mother and becoming closer to me. This didn't happen and I was devastated. Finally, Joan said to me. “Susan, recovery is all about attraction rather than promotion. Maybe this applies here.” She was right, so I let go and waited.

When Kathy was twenty two she married a man named Monty. They both attended the same church. (My mother had taken Kathy to church while I stayed at home to drink). Kathy and Monty were friends for a long time and

then it turned romantic. This really impressed me since I usually fell in love over night.

Kathy and Monty waited four years to have a baby. Then in 1993, Kathy got pregnant. I was ecstatic. I wanted to much to be a grandmother and have a second chance at parenting. I knew Kathy and Monty would make good parents and that the cycle of dysfunction would be broken by them. I wrote the following letters with a light heart.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Snyder:

My name is Angel #99. God recently confided in me that you were thinking about having a baby. He suggested that I apply for the position, and I am happy to do so.

I have been watching you and I am convinced that you will make wonderful parents. God promised me that I could go to good parents. My best friend ended up in a dysfunctional home and he is miserable. I hope to avoid that fate.

If you agree to have me I will be as good as I can. I am very spiritual and will be happy to go to church with you. I don't care if I am a boy or girl and you can name me anything you want.

I am especially excited about having Susan Peabody as my grandmother. She is chaffing at the bit to be a grandmother. She doesn't have much money, but we can work with that.

Well, I want to get this in the angel's pouch before she leaves. I hope you will consider me as your child. Please feel free to write and ask me questions. I am also available for interviews, but once you accept me there can be no exchanges. This is not Sears Roebuck you know.

*Anxiously yours,*

*Angel #99, 2019 Saint Gabriel Drive, Heaven, Universe 11269*

P.S. If Angel #87 writes to you please be advised that he exaggerates a lot.

Dear Mom and Dad,

This is Angel #99. Remember me? I hope you are well. I am fine. I just wanted to write and tell you the good news. God has selected me to be your child. I will be a girl and my name will be Jasmyne. (Mom, God sent you a dream about this—remember?) Anyway, I just wanted you to know that I love you and will be there as soon as I can. By the way Dad, you don't have to announce to everyone that I was conceived on New Year's eve. I think that really embarrasses Mom.

*Your child, Jasmyne*

Early in June, three months before she was due, Kathy went into labor and did not even know it. She thought she was having a backache. By the time Monty rushed her to the hospital the baby's little foot had started to come out. Kathy was given medication and her feet were elevated. The doctor said that if the delivery could be delayed just two weeks the baby would have a chance. We prayed. We begged God. Monty even dreamed the baby would wait. On June 16, 1994, at 11:04 p.m., Jasmyne Marie Snyder was born. She weighed one and one-half pounds. Monty was too nervous to be in the operating room (Kathy had a caesarian) so I was there when little Jasmyne came out. She was perfect.

We watched over Jasmyne for fourteen days while she struggled to hang on. All during this time, my heart ached for Kathy. The pain was as sharp as a knife. I had to ask God, "Why are you doing this? Kathy does not deserve this. I am the one who has sinned. Punish me."

The waiting made me nauseous. Jasmyne sucked in the air of her ventilator. Her little swollen hand reached out to me. When she grabbed my hand it was as if she was pulling out a plug and tears came rushing out of me.

Jasmyne passed away on June 29, 1994, at 12:20 p.m. They took her off the ventilator and we all rushed down to the hospital chapel. Kathy couldn't bear to be there and asked me if I would stand in for her. I was afraid, but I had to do this for my daughter. The doctor, pastor, nurse, Monty and I all sat side by side. We each held her in turn. A moment after she was placed in my arms she stopped breathing. I was the last one to be with her on this earth. Later, Kathy told me how grateful she was. It was at that moment that I felt I had finally made my amends to her.



My son Karl was born in 1970. Like Kathy, he was also neglected because of my love addiction. For years I brought men home to live with us who ignored or abused him. I was also drinking more than ever when Karl was born and still spending a lot of time in the bars. At first my mother helped out with Karl, but he was a handful, so eventually he took to hanging out in the neighborhood and the homes of his friends. I still can't believe I let him wander around the neighborhood at the age of eight without supervision.

Making amends to Karl was more complicated than it was with Kathy, because he was so angry. It involved standing by him through a very difficult time in his life. It involved being patient and never giving up on him. It also involved, to my surprise, the help of God, and—of all things—prayer.

Soon after I got into recovery, Karl entered high school. I prayed that he would do well and go on to college. Unfortunately, it became apparent right away that Karl was having a difficult time adjusting. When his first report card came, it indicated that he was failing all of his classes because of poor

attendance.

I talked to Karl about this. I went to endless parent-teacher meetings at the high school. I sent him to counseling. I went to counseling with him. I tried punishing him—even begging. Nothing worked. Everyday, I dropped him off at the high school entrance, on my way to work, and after I drove away he crossed the street and hung out in the park with the other dropouts.

The low point for me came the day I received both Karl’s report card and a letter from the school’s “Talented and Gifted Program.” The report card indicated that Karl had been absent fifty times and gotten five failing grades. As a result, he was now a full year behind his classmates. The other letter said, “Your son was given an IQ test and it indicates that he has above-average intelligence. Please call our office to discuss his future. We are convinced that he will do well in our college-bound program. He is exceptionally bright.”

This was the last straw for me. I couldn’t get Karl to go to school, much less to a program that asked for extra effort. I was powerless, so I just started crying. Then, after what seemed like hours, I dried my tears and began to pray. I asked God to take my son into his arms and dry his tears. I asked God to make up for what he did not get because of my love addiction. I asked God to inspire Karl to live up to his full potential.

When I finished praying for Karl, I was rewarded with a sense of peace that I had not known in years. I slept like a baby that night, fully convinced that everything was going to be all right. And, from this point on, I stopped all efforts to make my son go to school. I turned the whole situation over to God—and I waited.

A few weeks later, I was sitting at my desk at work. Suddenly, the phone rang and a man with a deep voice asked for Karl’s mother. “That’s me,”



I replied. "What can I do for you?" "I am Karl's school counselor," the man said. "I want to talk to you about your son's absences." "Oh," I said. "I am glad to hear from you, but I want you to know that I have already tried everything to get Karl to go to school. Now, it is up to the Lord." With these words I began crying and pouring out my heart to this stranger on the phone. "I love my son," I said. "I only want what is best for him. But I can't make him do something he refuses to do. God knows I have tried. So, I am going to pray for him and love him no matter what he decides to do with his life. That is all I can do for now."

When I was finished, there was silence on the other end of the line. Then, solemnly, the man said "Thank you for your time, Mrs. Peabody. I will stay in touch."

Karl's next report card showed a marked improvement in his attendance and grades. I was ecstatic. The following semester Karl was on the honor roll. I couldn't believe the change, and yet I had prayed for it.

For the next two years, Karl continued to work hard. He went to summer school and evening classes at the local adult school to make up the classes he had failed. He was determined to graduate with his class even though I told him that it was all right with me if he graduated a year late.

Halfway through Karl's last semester in high school he asked me to go to Parents Night. I agreed and he squired me around from classroom to classroom introducing me to his teachers. They were all very happy about Karl's improvement.

Before we went home that night, Karl escorted me to a patio adjacent to the school gym. It was a beautiful night. The moon was full and the stars glistened. Karl and I sat down on a wooden bench just enjoying the moment.

We were both silent for awhile, and then Karl turned to me with a smile on his face. For a second he hesitated; then softly he said, “Mom you have never asked me why I went back to school. Don’t you want to know?” “Yes,” I replied. “I guess I was so happy that I didn’t want to question it.” “Well,” he said, “I would like to tell you. Awhile back, I decided to play a joke on you. So I called you at work and pretended to be a school counselor. For some reason, you didn’t recognize my voice and so you shared with me your inner most feelings about the problems I was having. What you said saddened me and made me ashamed. Then, suddenly, I knew deep in my heart that I had to do something to make things right. From that moment on, I resolved to do better—for myself and for you.” Then Karl turned to me and said, “Thanks for standing by me mom, and for your prayers.” I really feel like you love me now and that makes up for a lot. I couldn’t speak. I was amazed. Then, I gave Karl a hug and silently thanked God.

### **Lesson #8**

*Consider investigating the past.*

Some people move easily beyond a difficult childhood and just naturally make peace with it. Others will have to really explore what happened to them because they are haunted by the past. Even the therapeutic community is divided on the importance—or unimportance—of exploring our childhoods.

Some of those who do take that long journey into to the past to find answers will do it on their own. They will talk to family members, read old diaries, or pour over family albums. Sometimes memories will come flooding back and they will process the pain in solitude and be inspired by the insights

they provide. In my first book, *Addiction to Love*, I discuss the process of healing the past as if it can be done alone. However, since writing my first book I have explored another option. I have gotten into therapy.

Therapy is a mixed bag. Sometimes you get a good therapist and you get a lot out of it. Sometimes you get an inadequate therapy and it is a waste of time. But I think nothing ventured—nothing gained—and if you are not getting all the answers from your community of supporters then giving therapy a try may do the trick. The individual attention and intuition of your therapist might untangle a lot of mysteries. And change always begins with the truth.

The most important thing about therapy, other than showing up, is that you be honest about what you say and what you feel. This is not always easy. Sometimes you will have to look at things you do not want to look at. Sometimes you will have to get angry even when it makes you feel uncomfortable.



At some point in my recovery I started having a series of startling dreams. All of the dreams had one common theme—babies. In one dream I was with my mother, and suddenly I realized that I had lost my baby. I desperately looked for the baby and found that she had lost weight and was malnourished—almost dead. I desperately tried feeding her, hoping to reverse the effects of the starvation. I was always shocked that this had happened, and I tried desperately to reverse the neglect. I desperately prayed, as I fed her, that I had not arrived too late.

When these dreams began, I suspected that they were my unconscious

self telling me that I was not grieving the emotional wounds left over from my childhood. Perhaps this was because I had forgotten most of my early years. So I asked myself, “Is God trying to draw my attention to some kind of trauma in my childhood that needs addressing?”

To find the answers to these questions, I considered going into therapy. But doing so was a big decision. I had tried therapy when I was in my mid-twenties, and it had not helped much.

Because of my ambivalence, I always managed to put off making an appointment with a therapist. Then, one Saturday afternoon, I could not get the name of a book out of my head. It was a book I had bought years before and never read. All afternoon I could not get this book off of my mind, so finally I looked all over the house until I found it buried under a pile of other un-read books. With a great deal of curiosity I opened the book to the first chapter and read the following:

Experience has taught us that we have only one enduring weapon in our struggle against mental illness: the emotional discovery of the truth about the unique history our childhood.... In order to become whole we must try, in a long process, to discover our own personal truth, a truth that may cause pain before giving us a new sphere of freedom. The damage done to us during our childhood cannot be undone, since we cannot change anything in our past. We can, however, change ourselves, [and] we become free by transforming ourselves from unaware victims of the past into responsible individuals in the present, who are aware of the past and are thus able to live with it.

I caught my breath as I realized that either God or my intuition had directed me to this passage. Suddenly I knew it was time to get into therapy

and discover the truth.

As it turned out, going back into therapy was the right decision. My therapist, Dr. Swann, was intelligent and intuitive, and he had been practicing for over thirty years. His experience and vast knowledge of psychotherapy would prove to be very valuable. Most of all, he was very supportive of my faith in God.

At first, Dr. Swann and I concentrated on getting to know each other and building trust. This took awhile. But eventually, when I felt ready, I began to ask him about my dreams. His response was to ask me about my childhood. So I started talking about my early years (this took weeks) and during one session I mentioned that when I was three years old I had a serious case of insomnia. Suddenly, Dr. Swann sat up in his chair and asked, “I wonder what kind of stress caused that?” “I don’t know,” I said, “Don’t all children have a difficult time sleeping”? “No,” he said, “That is quite unusual.

Dr. Swann asked me to reflect on this time in my life and I agreed. It did not take long for memories to come flooding back—memories of long months in the hospital with pneumonia and endless lonely hours tucked away in my bedroom reading books while my sisters and brother were out playing. I also remembered the pain of being teased all through my school years. I had no friends and no one to talk to. Finally, I relived the nightmare of my brother’s electrocution and his subsequent death when I was fourteen years old.

It was during therapy that my step mother died and this brought back memories of my father’s death in 1982. As I was telling Dr. Swann about funeral, I mentioned that the night before the service I had pinned my Phi Beta Kappa pin on my father’s lapel. Dr. Swann casually asked me why I had done

that. “I don’t know,” I said, “it just seemed important.” “Why is that?” he persisted. “I don’t know,” I said, getting exasperated, “It just did.” “But why,” he insisted. “I don’t know,” I practically screamed at him. “I guess it was as close as I could get to crawling into the coffin with him.” Dr. Swann just looked at me in disbelief and I looked right back at him. We were both kind of surprised by what I had said, but this, of course, led the way to extensive conversations about my father.

You might say that a daughter’s love for her father is not extraordinary, but it is more complicated than that in my case. As it turned out, my love for my father explained my love addiction. All of those years (until I was thirty two), the romantic obsessions were just an attempt to hold on to Daddy. He was my first love and I was Daddy’s little girl. Put another way, my relationship with my father turned out to be *emotionally* incestuous. Let me explain what I have pieced together from conversations with my aunt.

My father grew up in an alcoholic family and went off to fight in World War II. When he came back he met my mother and they were married two weeks later. My father was lonely and withdrawn even within the marriage. I realize now that he suffered from PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) from the war and had not dealt with his “family of origin” issues. And even more important, he was not living the life he wanted to live. While he had graduated from college and was working as a civil engineer, he really wanted to be a naval architect which would have required more schooling. Unfortunately, he had four children to support.

My mother had twins in 1947 and was very preoccupied with being the perfect mother in order to please her mother. She really wanted to be a doctor, but her parents would not allow this. So, as my aunt explained to me, my father

turned to me for solace and companionship. According to her, he fell madly in love with me. And she admitted that, to the shock of everyone in the family, his feelings were sexual as well as romantic even though to my knowledge he never crossed that line from covert to overt incest.

I realize now that this relationship, although I am sure I loved the attention at the time, was very stressful—especially the intimate overtones. Furthermore, because of this intimacy with my father he became bigger than life to me. This would have grave consequences for me later in my life.

When my brother Eddie was electrocuted, both my father and mother permanently withdrew from the family as they grieved his death, but it was my father's absence that caused me the most pain. I was angry and sad. I started looking elsewhere for love and discovered boys. Thus began my quest for my Prince Charming, who, to my innermost self, bore an astonishing resemblance to my father. By this, I do not mean a physical resemblance. It was more subtle that.

Since my father was unavailable (he was married to my mother) most of the men I fell in love with were unavailable as well. Imagine that. And when an *available* man came along? Well, he was either boring or he frightened me to death. And because the incest with my father was mostly emotional, sex did not frighten me—only feelings of tenderness. This, I believe, is because unconsciously I associated emotional intimacy with shame—the legacy of covert incest. Therefore, I sought out intimacy and then I ran from it. Or I experienced intimacy only in my fantasies and loved men from afar—unrequited love.

Discovering all of this in therapy father shocked me and relieved me at the same time. One minute I was nauseous from the shame and the next

moment I was excited about figuring out why I had always been so immature when it came to love and relationships. At the same time, I felt another emotion somewhere in between the shame and excitement. I felt curiosity about what I was going to discover next.



About nine months after I started therapy, I decided to read some old letters my grandmother had written to me when I was young. Years before I had rescued them from a box at my mother's house that she was going to throw out.

Before I sat down to read the letters, however, memories of my grandmother washed over me. I used to refer to her as iron fist. She was an educated woman, and quite accomplished, but she was very abusive. I won't bore you with too many details, but suffice it to say that while on her deathbed she told my uncle to tell my mother not to come to her funeral unless she had lost all "that hideous weight."

When I was growing up, my mother both hated and loved my grandmother. The part of her that hated grandmother took it out on me—not physically but emotionally. She would tell me long stories of how horrible grandmother was and then a few days later comment on how much I was like my grandmother. At the same time, she used me to placate her mother. I was the only child put on the bus once a year to go visit my grandmother in Los Angeles. Those visits were horrible. I was afraid and lonely. I felt abandoned. I also had to endure periodic enemas and all kinds of foul-tasting medicine every night at bedtime.



Eventually, I refused to visit my grandmother, and to her credit, my mother never forced me to go, but my grandmother still hurt me through a stream of shaming letters. It was one of these letters that I was about to read. This letter was written when I was fourteen years old.

Dear Susie,

I will have to admit that I am heartsick to learn you have gained weight. I never enjoyed a visit so much as my last one in May when you were eating scientifically and healthfully. You know how I watched what you ate like a hawk when you were visiting me. Perhaps I should not have written you darling until I had taken more time to get over feeling as I do. Now darling, see how much weight you can lose in the three weeks before Grandmother comes for Christmas. When I was a little girl, and learning to write, one teacher had us write “eat to live but not live to eat.” With your wonderful mind, taste and judgment you will know and be glad to have Grandmother help you get on the right track. You know there is nothing in this world I would not do for my Susan—because I love you and know you have such wonderful potential. But Susan darling—what future do you have with boys who all go for the slim girls? I want you to be popular as you get older so you will have a good time while you are studying and going to college and above all be healthy and popular with boys. Everyone keeps talking about you darling—your lovely manners, your fine mind and very attractive personality. You had such a lovely figure once. You can and will get it back and keep it. Ask mother to buy the dietetic food for you alone. Now don’t feel sad and hurt over this letter darling. We all get in the wrong tack from time to time. This is just a tiny thing, but very important. We will have some talks when we are together. Have you ever seen a picture of your mother with her lovely figure when she was married? But I had to watch her weight. Now this letter is just for you—and of course mother—who will comfort you because you will be sad. But don’t be sad. Be determined.

I realize that this letter was meant to be a pep talk, but it devastated me. As I read it, I could feel the shame all over again. I wanted so much for my grandmother to love me just the way I was, but she made it clear I was not good enough. At the same time, it explained (beyond the teasing I experienced at school) the source of my low self-esteem and why I was so ashamed of how I looked. It also explained why I felt I could never have a man unless I *bought* his affection with money, unconditional loyalty, a high tolerance for abuse, and any other form of degradation and sacrifice required of me. Still, I did become “determined” as she requested. I became determined to have a man at any cost. Thus my love addiction was born.



Today, I am still in therapy, but nothing as dramatic as these insights about my father and grandmother has emerged. But that does not mean that the moments of clarity I continue to have are not important. Even the small pearls of wisdom are worth something. So, for now, I go every week to process my feelings and learn how to grow up.

### **Lesson # 9**

Learn how to forgive.

Forgive: To give up resentment of or claim to requital for; to cease to feel resentment against (an offender); to stop blaming or being angry with (someone) for something they have done.  
*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

In the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the author Bill Wilson (the co-founder of AA) discusses forgiveness by making it necessary for sobriety. He does not call it forgiveness, but letting go of resentment, and it is not to please God, but in the interest of self.

Resentment is the “number one” offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spirituality malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically.... It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness.... [T]his business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal.... If we were to live, we had to be free of anger.... They [resentments] may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison. (p. 64-65)

On the other hand, there are the scientific psychologists (as opposed to the transpersonal therapists), like Susan Forward, in *Toxic Parents*, and Laura Davis in *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, who proclaim that forgiveness is not necessarily a part of the recovery process—it might even be dangerous. In talking about recovering from an abusive childhood, Susan Forward says this:

At this point, you may be asking yourself, “Isn’t the first step to forgive my parents?” My answer is *no*. . . . [It is not necessary to forgive your parents in order to feel better about yourself and to change your life.... Why in the world should you “Pardon” a father who terrorized and battered you, who made your childhood a living hell? ... Early in my professional career I too believed that to forgive people who had injured you, especially your parents, was an important part of the healing process.... The more I thought about it, the more I realized that this absolution

was really another form of denial.... One of the most dangerous things about forgiveness is that it undercuts your ability to let go of your pent-up emotions. How can you acknowledge your anger against a parent whom you've already forgiven? (pp 187-189)

The question is this: Is it possible that Bill Wilson and Susan Forward are both right? Yes. Susan Forward is correct when she says that we must own our anger. Anger is honest. Anger in the right setting is therapeutic. Anger can lead to justice. Anger can free us from tyranny. And by coming out against forgiveness Forward allows us to *take our time without shame*. Bill Wilson, in my opinion, is also right. If we stop hating people we feel better about ourselves and others.

So how do we reconcile these two opposing views? The easiest way is to differentiate between anger and resentment. Anger is an emotion of the moment, Resentment is anger re-visited over and over again when we least want or expect it. It is not a positive emotion and it can get us in a lot of trouble.

The process of letting go of resentments is called forgiveness and sometimes it is the hardest thing we ever do. But I believe it is important, not just because I get tired to hating people, but because I want to be forgiven for my shortcomings.

It might be helpful to realize that letting go of anger (the definition of forgiveness) does not mean you have to like the person who hurt you, or continue to let that person persecute you, or even be around the person. Sometimes, you have to love people from a distance.

Furthermore, forgiveness is not a constant state. It ebbs and flows like the tide. You sometimes feel good about those who hurt you and other times you feel the anger all over again. But this does mean you have not progressed.

I have found that as long as I ask God for the strength to release my anger, or I announce it in my support group that I am going to “turn it over,” or I tell my therapist I am really tired of these rage dreams and want them to go away, that the anger comes less and less often.

Despite my own personal feelings about forgiveness as a therapeutic and healing device (and the right moral choice for me), I feel strongly that it is a very personal choice and that *no one should be told to forgive when they are not ready*. They should not be shamed by others, and they should not shame themselves. They should just push themselves gently in the right direction.



My greatest victory over the specter of resentment was forgiving my mother. As long as I could remember, I had been angry with her, both as a child and as an adult. Even in recovery I had what I call rage dreams. In these dreams I was so angry at my mother that I was paralyzed. I could not move. I opened my mouth to scream at her and the words got stuck in my throat. When I finally did get something out of my mouth it was horrible. In one particular dream I was talking to my father and he told me that my mother was pregnant. I went into a rage. Then my mother appeared and I screamed at her, “You are going to do to another child what you did to me?” I was so angry I woke myself up.

One day, because I was learning so much in therapy about my hidden past, I thought I would go to mom and ask questions about those early years with my father. Mom just stared at me. She didn’t want to talk about it. “I

don't remember," she said. I was livid and vowed never to forgive her. Not only had she neglected me as a child, and exposed me to the parent who had abused her, now she was interfering in my attempts to get better.

When I talked to Dr. Swann about it, he said something interesting. He shrugged his shoulders and said sympathetically, "Oh, she couldn't do it." I stopped dead in my tracks when I realized that he did not say "She wouldn't do it." He said she "couldn't do it." What a difference a letter can make.

Eventually, my mother called and apologized. Then she called me over to her house and told me the story of my childhood. She revealed all the secrets that had been hidden for so long. She explained why she had neglected me and she apologized. I was overwhelmed and I can trace the lifting of my resentment toward my mother from this time.

To celebrate this milestone in renewing my relationship with my mother, I wrote her the following poem:

*Universal Woman*

Wife of my father,  
Mother of my body:  
Life is full of the seed  
That grows in the light of your love.  
Daughter of woman,  
Mother of woman:  
You are the link  
Between past and future.  
Woman alone,  
Woman among many:  
Seek out the truth  
Of your own identity.  
Child of God,  
Sister of mankind:  
Let not your mourning body

Deter you from your quest.  
Nameless soul,  
Wandering in a timeless maze:  
Be not afraid  
Of your new beginnings.  
Universal woman,  
Smiled upon by all:  
Your wounds will be healed  
And you will stride proudly forth.

It was almost six months later that my mother went into the hospital for emergency surgery. As I sat by her bed just before the operation she reached out and took my hand. Tears started streaming down her face and she said, “Susie, you will never know how much your poem meant to me. I love you so much.” I started crying too and we just sat there in silence—the wounds healing and the peace settling into our hearts.

### **Lesson #10**

*We are all teachers, so pass on what you have learned.*

In studying why 12-Step programs are so successful, experts have discovered that the middle part of the 12th step—the instruction to carry the message of the 12-steps to others who are still suffering—is at the heart of the program’s success. Apparently, studies have shown that teaching builds more confidence and self-esteem in the teacher than it does in the student. This, in turn, bolsters recovery.

Some people hesitate to teach, thinking it outside their realm of expertise. But teaching is easy. It may mean taking someone under your wing or being a good parent. It may mean giving advice. It may mean telling someone your story like I am doing now. It may mean role-modeling. I was

rude to a woman in the store one day because I was in a bad mood and she just said to me very patiently, “I hope your day gets better.” At that moment she was my teacher.

Teachers often appear when you least expect them. I had an inmate in San Quentin become my teacher. I had been visiting Michael for over a year as part of a prison ministry group. When it was time for him to be released he came to me to say goodbye. He thanked me profusely and I could feel my pride welling up. I gave into the temptation to stroke my ego and said to Michael, “Of all the advice I have given you, what helped you the most?” Of course, the moment the words were out of my mouth I was embarrassed, but without missing a beat, Michael turned to me with a look of surprise on his face and said wholeheartedly, “I really don’t remember much of what you said, I just remember that you kept coming back.” I bowed my head in shame. It is not the message that saves people—it’s the *love*. This is what Michael taught me.



For the first year I was in the Women Who Love Too Much support group, I was just a student like everyone else. However, by 1984 many of the other women had dropped out of the meeting and I was the only regular attendee. To keep the meeting going, I took on a leadership role. I loved this. All week I worked on writing handouts which talked about recovery. They were well received and all the women encouraged me to do more of this kind of work.

Around 1985, one of the women at the meeting suggested that I take my show on the road. “You really love doing this,” she said, “Why don’t you



consider teaching a class.” So, armed with a teaching credential which I had gotten in 1978 and never used, I approached the principal of a local adult school. He was very enthusiastic about the general subject matter of the course I wanted to teach, but he encouraged me not to limit myself to just the issues presented in Robin Norwood’s book. He also wanted me to allow men in my class. When I agreed, he suggested I call my course “Addiction to Love.”

Excited about the challenge of teaching, I set aside Robin Norwood’s book for awhile and began reading other literature about obsessive behavior in relationships. This was a great learning experience for me. I was amazed to find out how much had been written about love, obsession, and dependency.

Once I acquired a lot of professional information about love and addiction (which I could use to supplement what I had learned from my own personal experiences and the experiences of the women in my support group), I began to prepare an outline for my course. My goal was to condense and clarify many of the ideas introduced by others, and then to interject some of my own concepts.

When I finally had what I thought was a model of a course about addiction to love, I taught my first class. It was an exhilarating experience, and the response of my students really made it clear that I had put together some valuable information about a very serious problem.

My class went well. I was nervous at first, and my notes were sketchy, but I kept doing a lot of research and I learned a lot from the experiences of my students. As the years passed, I grew more confident.

Eventually, my students prompted me to put my course outline in manuscript form and make it available to people who, for various reasons, could not take the class. I agreed to do this and eventually created a class

reader. It was an extension of my teaching.

I never really thought my reader was publishable, but my friends encouraged me to try and so off it went to various publishers who I thought might give a newcomer a chance. Of course I received a lot of rejection letters, but most of them had a sentence or two which encouraged me to keep on trying.

Eventually, I got discouraged so I decided to give up after sending one more copy of my book to a local publisher by the name of Ten Speed Press. Then, half-heartedly, I waited for a response. Nothing happened.

One day, while sitting at my desk at work, I heard a distinct voice in my head say, "Call Ten Speed Press." The voice interrupted my thoughts and was so strong it immediately got my attention. Still, I was not sure if I should do as the voice commanded. I had never called any of the other publishers who had received my manuscript. Why should I do so now?

To help me decide what to do, I called my friend Matt who had been selling home-made copies of my reader on consignment at his bookstore. He encouraged me to go ahead and call. "Ask for Phil," he said, just as he was hanging up the phone.

With my friend's encouragement I called Ten Speed Press and asked for Phil. The secretary put me through and I introduced myself over the phone. Then I asked Phil if he had seen my manuscript. "I don't think so," he responded. "Why don't you tell me a little about it." So I described the contents and he seemed interested. Then he suggested I come down to his office so we could talk about it further. Excited about the invitation, I left work and took a copy of my book down to Phil's office, still not knowing who he was. (I secretly hoped that he was one of the editors and that he had the power

to recommend my book for publication, but of course I tried not to get my hopes up).

I arrived at Ten Speed Press and was shown into Phil's office. Phil was a very friendly person who gave me his full attention. He wanted to know more about how I had come to write the book and what I thought it had to offer my readers. I chatted on about my own struggles with codependency and how I wanted to help others with my book. I also explained that unlike other books on the subject I had a whole chapter devoted to God and his power to heal people from this painful disorder.

After listening attentively, Phil got on the phone and asked two people to step into his office. While we waited for them to arrive I suddenly noticed that the office we were sitting in was very plush. A moment later I was introduced to George and Jo Ann who addressed Phil as "Mr. Woods." I caught my breath, suddenly realizing that I had been talking to someone very important. "Who is this?" I asked myself. "Dare I ask?" Then Mr. Woods turned to me and said "You know your manuscript sounds very interesting to me. I am going to ask my editors to take a look at it and get back to you." Then he handed the book to Jo Ann, shook my hand and smiled broadly. "We'll call you," he added.

I got home an hour later floating on air. Then I called my friend Matt and asked, "Just who is Phil?" "Oh," said Matt, matter-of-factly, "he is the owner of Ten Speed Press. Didn't I mention that?" I sat down while mumbling my thanks to Matt for his help.

A week later I got a call from Jo Ann at Ten Speed Press. "Congratulations," she said, "we have decided to accept your book for publication. Can you come down tomorrow and sign a contract?" "I'll be there," I said

excitedly. “Thank you so much for this opportunity.”

Naturally I couldn’t sleep that night, so the next day I drove bleary-eyed down to Ten Speed Press and signed a contract to have my book published. Then I asked Jo Ann, “Where is Mr. Woods?” “He’s not here today,” she explained. “Actually, he rarely comes in these days, and it is almost impossible to get an appointment with him.” “Oh,” I muttered, smiling to myself and saying a prayer of thanks.

An hour later I arrived home feeling quite elated. Then, grabbing my mail, I went into the kitchen to make myself a cup of coffee. Suddenly, I stopped in my tracks. There, among various bills, was a letter from Ten Speed Press. “What is this?” I asked myself. I opened the letter and gasped. It was a standard rejection letter, complete with an apology and words of encouragement. I stood motionless trying to sort this out. Then I looked at the date of the letter. It was dated two weeks earlier but postmarked the day I had called Ten Speed. Suddenly, everything seemed crystal clear. This was God’s doing. He gave me the nudge to call at just the right time—just when Mr. Woods was in his office and available, and just before the rejection letter came. (I would never have called if I had already received the letter.) He had sent invisible hands to push that letter aside until it was the right time to mail it. I never felt so loved in my whole life as I did in that moment. I just bowed my head and bathed in the grace of God.

## **Epilogue**

. . . forthcoming.

