

*I JUST WANTED LOVE:
RECOVERY OF A
CODEPENDENT, SEX AND
LOVE ADDICT*

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When I began my recovery, I surrounded myself with a team of stellar men and women, and we all support each other and work together in transcending our addictions. Through my work with The 12 Steps, I have come to rely on these people, who are my support system, and I hold them close to my heart.

Two of my greatest relational assets, Phil and Randal, are the older brothers I always wanted and my best friends in recovery. Phil has always shown me compassion and kindness; I trusted him to bear witness to my fifth-step work. He allowed me the space to be vulnerable while simultaneously offering me the support and protection I needed. It took a lifetime for me to be able to feel safe and comfortable in my own skin, and to let others hear all the ways I abused people, as well as myself, without fear of judgment or persecution. And in order to take this kind of journey, I have had to develop trust in something much greater than myself.

Randal appreciates me for who I am, and supports me through it all, just like Phil. He gives me support without ever breaking me down. Randal has been an incredible support with ABLE, helping me understand the ins and outs of running a business. He's a lifeline that I am forever grateful for.

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To my Higher Power, thank you for loving me. I am grateful that I found something greater than myself to believe in. I know I am never alone.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the men and women in Twelve-Step fellowships throughout the world. Thank you for sharing and keep coming back. It works if you work it because you are worth it.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Darrett J. Burr. My friends call me DJ. I am a codependent, sex and love addict in long-term recovery.

I shared an earlier version of this manuscript with a friend of mine in the recovery program. He told me that it was “intense.” He is right. The truth is, for most of my life, I was afflicted by pain, shame, and addiction.

There had been countless moments in my life when I didn’t love myself. Hell, I didn’t even *like* myself until recently. I know now that what I had experienced in all of my sexual relationships wasn’t lust or even love—it was sickness. Now, I’d like to tell you how I got here and where I am presently going.

I began my journey of courage, strength, and hope in the 12-Step programs focused on sexual and emotional sobriety. I believe that it has been by the grace of my Higher Power that I have learned more about who I am in the rooms of recovery than

I have over my entire life.

I am codependent. Codependence does not have an established definition. It is generally described as a set of patterns

and characteristics impacting a person's interactions with themselves and others. Codependence has impacted my life since I was a child. It was born out of my dysfunctional family system. I had to survive in a household that consisted of alcoholism, abandonment, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual abuse, and inordinate amounts of shame. To survive all that—I became codependent. I learned to control others, manipulate outcomes, and change my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs— all to protect myself.

Those afflicted with sex and love addiction often find help in 12-Step Programs such as Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA) or Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA). Those afflicted with codependence often find help in Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA). I found help when I started working the 12-Steps for codependence and sexual addiction recovery, and when I started seeking therapy. One day, I decided to attend my first sexual addiction recovery meeting, and there I found a 40 question self-assessment form. I took the assessment during the meeting, and it was as if I had been given a truth serum right then and there. Shockingly, every question on the assessment applied to me and

my circumstances. I must admit that I was stunned and embarrassed but no longer in denial. I left that meeting and spiritually collapsed. I called my sponsor and told him what I had discovered. He was so supportive, but for some reason, his caring words didn't penetrate my mind. Instead, the shame I had so often felt in my life penetrated me and wrapped itself around me—I felt like the life was being choked out of me. No longer was I just “codependent”...I was also a “sex and love addict.” The journey to recovery began by looking at everything that had impacted the choices in my life.

All of my imbalanced behaviors have been helpful to me at one time or another; they helped me to survive my dysfunctional upbringing. I am not proud of these actions or of the fact that I sought out relationships and sex in an attempt to heal myself, but I do accept them as part of my life. I have worked hard to move from sickness to recovery. Now, I am focused on living life.

It's important to note that I am a licensed mental-health therapist. I work with individuals, couples, and families on a variety of issues, but my specialty is codependence and sex and

love addiction. In 2009, I received a Masters of Art from Argosy University in Atlanta, Georgia. I have worked in community mental health since 2008. I am the author of, *Unfinished: A GLBT Domestic Violence Workbook*, which was published in March of 2009.

I see twenty to thirty individuals or couples each week who are primarily working on issues related to codependence and/or sex and love addiction. It can be very difficult to help someone go through his or her history to uncover conscious and unconscious patterns and characteristics that were shaped by growing up in dysfunctional family systems. I create a safe space for my clients to grow from emotional immaturity to mature, functioning adults. They learn how to be who they are because it's whom they want to be—not whom they think they should be.

I want to share my journey with those who are afflicted with codependence and/or sex and love addiction. I value the lessons I have learned from others, so I imagine that my journey could be a teaching tool for families, friends, and sufferers of the disease of codependence and sex and love addiction.

Readers will be taken on a journey of self-discovery from the early stages of my life all the way to the inner workings of my recovery process. It has been a long, arduous journey but well worth it. I am learning who I am each day. I hope you learn who you are, too.

CHAPTER ONE

I AM ONLY AS SICK AS MY SECRETS

Someone actually said they were addicted to me, and that was the straw that broke this camel's back. I could no longer hold in all the pain and shame. I cried out in grief as I had this man inside of me and said, "Take the condom off. I need you. I am addicted to you too." Every ounce of who I was washed out of me as I climaxed multiple times with this man who was not wearing a condom. When it got right down to it, I just didn't believe I was worth anything. I wish I could say that I learned from my mistake that day, but I didn't. I took that risk again and again with him and others.

At this point, I was utterly spent thinking about all the emotional baggage I had in my life. I just wanted to be wanted for me and who I was, but I didn't know how to get there. Somehow, I thought I would find the answers to my questions at the bathhouse. The bathhouse I frequented was a place where men could freely have sex out in the open or in private rooms. There

was porn, a steam room, and showers. The facility even provided vending machines that were stocked with lubricant, condoms, and candy.

I found a sense of false confidence when I visited the bathhouse. For example, when someone approached me and wanted to have sex, I felt empowered. After all, I could say, “yes” or “no.” I hardly ever said no. But, the joy of being needed by others was only temporary, and the power I felt was an inauthentic. It never lasted more than 10 minutes after I left. Always, I worried someone would see me walking out. Often, feared I might see a client there, and then what would I do?

With everything going on in my life at the time, I thought my business was the only thing worth salvaging, but I was wrong. I didn’t realize that through my obsessive sexual behavior, I was abandoning my own business too. I spent so much time worrying about my next sexual fix that often my focus and attention was not on my therapy practice and its growing clientele. Also, I was doing things that were actually illegal, such as videotaping men in restrooms or locker rooms. But what can I say? I got high from that kind of thing which temporarily relieved the pain and chaos

swirling around inside me. The fact that I wasn't getting caught was exhilarating. I actually thought this was normal behavior. In fact, I thought it was so normal that I never hesitated to send copies of my illegal videos and pictures to friends. They sent me their photos too.

I needed serious help. I started seeing a forensic psychologist who has been in the business for over 30 years. Every week I told him about my struggles, and every week he said the same thing, "Go to a meeting."

But, I didn't want to hear about going to meetings. However, my therapist was insistent; he wanted me to see how 12-Step meetings could work for me. During our sessions, he often pulled out the *AA Big Book*, having me read through "The 12 Steps."

He encouraged me to go to Codependents Anonymous, but at the time, I didn't get it. Along with "not getting it," I didn't want anyone to tell me about how I was "codependent." Frankly, I didn't have a real sense of what the word even meant. Most weeks, after therapy, I continued to walk down to the bathhouses to have sex for a few hours. Was I codependent on the sex?

Looking back at the summer after my sophomore year of high school, I now recognize this is when my codependence and sex and love addiction fully emerged. I wish someone would have told me that I was being targeted by a sick, child molester. While hanging out at my great-grandmother, Mama Sara's house, I saw someone out of the corner of my eye. It was Kenny. I had always known him as one of my dad's closest friends. While growing up, I had gone over to his home many times to play with his nephew. Kenny had always been friendly to me. He lived right across the street from Mama Sara.

After catching Kenny's glance out of the corner of my eye, he walked over and asked if he could sit down next to me. I said, "Sure." I had noticed that his wife and kids were hanging out on his front porch...I didn't really know them all that well. Kenny and I started talking, and he asked what was going on with me. Like always, he asked when was the last time I had spoken to my dad. Honestly, I couldn't remember. Kenny always insisted that I call my dad and try to work things out. He was pretty much a broken record when it came to that subject.

After getting all the formalities out of the way, the conversation slowly turned to an awkward topic. In short, Kenny said he knew what was going on with my family and me. At first, I was puzzled. What he was talking about. But as he continued, it was like he had been a fly on the wall inside my house; he knew I was gay. I was baffled.

At first, I was angry and upset with Kenny. Then he told me he was interested in talking with me about it. He had genuine empathy for my situation, and he made an effort to understand what I must have been going through. Finally, I said to myself, *Here is someone who is finally willing to listen to me and possibly be objective about the whole thing.* At that moment, I felt a ton of weight lifted from my shoulders. But the weightlessness didn't last long.

After a while, the conversation between Kenny and I turned a little dark. It was like he was *too* supportive. It was like he was trying to coax me into saying something he wanted to hear, but I had no clue what that was. Throughout our conversation, I kept glancing at him, and he was just staring at me really intensely. His was a look I had never seen before in my

life, and I started to get nervous. I felt shaky, and my hands got very clammy. Then, he popped the question I will never forget for as long as I live. He straightforwardly asked me to kiss him. I couldn't believe my ears. This man was no less than two feet from my face, and he was asking me to kiss him. My heart started to race. At first I thought his gesture was some kind of joke, especially since his family was sitting on his front porch, directly across the street from us, probably wondering why he was even talking to me in the first place. *And now, he was asking for a kiss?*

I was now beyond nervous. I mustered up the courage to ask him what the hell he was talking about and why he was asking for such a thing, especially since his wife was right across the way. I asked if he was gay. He said he didn't like "labels." I thought this was kind of funny because I assumed his label as husband and father, should stand for a lot. But, I guess not. That's when he told me he was interested in me. That was all I needed to hear to get totally freaked out. I had no earthly idea what to do next I wondered, *what interest could a 40-something have in a 16-year old?* I told him I had to go inside, and he looked at me as if I were

Juliet and him, Romeo. There was so much intensity in that look, and I was actually scared.

Now, I am aware now the interaction I had with Kenny that weekend was his initial step in him “grooming” me for a secret, sexual relationship. It was a gradual, calculated process. **Step 1: Targeting the victim** Kenny sized my vulnerabilities up that day. He was empathic to my situation at home and assured me he was not going to be just one more adult interested in judging me for being gay. Kenny wanted to “protect” me.

I hurried into the house and went straight to my room. Once there, I began to cry. I was so confused. There were a billion questions rolling around in my head. I didn’t understand what had just happened. This grown man—my dad’s friend, a married man, a father—had just told me of his interest in me. He had asked for a kiss while his wife sat only 50 feet away. I was in total shock. Since I had no one to talk to, I had to deal with it all on my own. I definitely didn’t want to risk my family finding out. I cried myself to sleep that night.

Several days passed, and I hadn’t seen or heard from Kenny. I just kept thinking that the whole thing had to be some

kind of joke. I tried my best to banish the incident from my mind. Well, no sooner did I try to do that, and I saw him again. Getting off the bus for my job at the mall, there he was.

We engaged in small talk. He told me he now worked a taxi route that included the mall. When I heard this, I let out a scream in the back of my mind—this was all too much for me. If he was now working at the mall where I worked, this increased my chances of seeing him on a regular basis. Which really scared me. It occurred to me that maybe he was some sick man who lusted after young boys. If only I had decided to trust my own instincts. But eventually, I decided to throw that idea out the window because, if that were the case, why didn't he do anything or say something before now?

One afternoon after working the morning shift, I walked across the street from the mall to catch the bus home. Kenny's was parked near the bus stop. He had also been working that day, so we engaged in casual conversation at the bus stop for a few minutes. Our small talk wasn't anything really dramatic, but I noticed more and more that I had these crazy feelings whenever I was around him. I found myself growing awkwardly attracted to

this man who was old enough to be my father. After all, Kenny was in his late 40s at the time, which was way older than my own dad.

Our conversation ended when the bus arrived. A few days later, I worked the evening shift and once again, rode the bus home. By the time I made it back to my neighborhood, it was dark. I got off the bus and headed down the hill to Mama Sara's house. Everything was fine until I heard a car pull up behind me. I knew it was Kenny because his car made this awful sound. He stopped the car, and I turned around to see what he wanted. He asked if I wanted a lift to my place. **Stage two: Gaining a victim's trust** I thought about it for a minute, and then I got into the car with him. That's when he said he needed to make a quick detour to the local drugstore to pick up some ice cream for his wife.

We ended up talking all the way to the drugstore, and it was really interesting having such a lengthy discussion with him. I didn't feel like a child when I talked to him. I felt as though he valued my opinions. I felt a connection with him. We walked into the store together to get what he needed and then headed back toward home.

On the ride back, the conversation took a turn to the topic of him and me. I still thought he was crazy. Why would he want *me*? I still hadn't figured this man out. All I knew was that I was growing really attracted to him, and this became evident because I was so aroused around him. I couldn't tell him whether or not anything could actually develop between us. I couldn't think that far in advance at that moment.

The car finally reached his house and we got out and stood around on the sidewalk for a few minutes. Since Mama Sara's house was right there, I was scared that someone would see me with him. As I started to leave to walk home, he pulled me back and held me. I froze. I liked it. I liked the feeling of his hands on me. But then, I quickly snapped out of it, pulled away from him, and hurried home. I knew right then I was in trouble. I actually liked this man, and he liked me. What was I to do? Kenny gained my trust, and I was on my way to "needing" him.

Stage three: filling a need A few days later I got a page on my pager. It was Kenny. I had totally forgotten I had given him my pager number. I called him back, and he wanted to know what I was doing and when I had to work. I told him I had to work that

morning, and apparently, so did he. He gave me a ride to work, and it was so strange being in his car this time. I felt like a fugitive on the run. I rendezvoused with him further down my street so my family wouldn't see me getting into his car. As he drove me to work, I kept an eye out for other family members' cars. I just knew I would be dead if they knew I was with Kenny.

I finally made it to work undetected, and, afterwards, we planned to go to lunch. So after our shifts ended, we hooked back up in the mall parking lot and went to lunch at this little diner down the street. I felt so strange being with him. I was worried about what people might say. Maybe, they thought I was his son or brother? Maybe, they thought we were lovers? Hell, I didn't even know what we were.

All I really knew was that someone was paying attention to me and thought I was valuable. He was interested in what I had to say and how I felt. I didn't feel lonely when he was around. I didn't feel scared anymore.

After lunch, we got in the car and headed back home. On the way there, he reached over and touched my leg. It felt good. I got this warm sensation. It was unreal. I liked his affection. I

believe, on some unconscious level, I forgot this man had a wife and kids. Was I wrong for doing this? I didn't know then. I was enjoying myself. After all the hell I had been through, I thought I needed to enjoy my surroundings, and he just happened to be a part of those surroundings. That's what I told myself. I was a scared kid looking for safety.

We finally made it back to our street, and he pulled into his driveway. I looked back, and I could only make out part of Mama Sara's house, so I doubted anyone could see me. He hopped out of the car and told me to come in. My heart sank. I couldn't move. I told him there was no way in hell I was going into his house, but he kept begging me. He even came over to my door and playfully tried to drag me out. But still, I didn't budge. Truth be told; I was terrified because of a serious look on his face, and I knew what was going on in his mind—he wanted to mess around. But, I knew there was no way I could do that. I knew I had to get my ass out of that car. He finally backed off, and I went home. I was relieved to be home, my heart pounding. I was all worked up.

The following days and weeks were filled with him trying to pursue me, and me not knowing what to do. He called me

constantly. It didn't matter where I was; he just kept calling. Having my pager going off so much was sort of nerve-racking, but I secretly enjoyed sneaking off to use the phone to see what Kenny wanted. Kenny called me from his home, work, anywhere—and this made me feel good. I felt like I was the only person in his life whenever I was around him. He paid so much attention to me, and I couldn't have asked for anything more. Eventually, the fact that he had a wife didn't seem to bother me at all, because soon he and I finally had sex.

It all went down one afternoon after he gave me a ride home from work. This time when he pulled into his driveway and asked me to come in, I didn't hesitate. He took me to the back bedroom in his house. There was a bathroom, mini-kitchenette, futon bed, and phone—it was like his own studio apartment. He showed me around the other parts of the house, and I saw his family portraits—he had a great-looking family. **Step four: Isolation** He closed and locked the bedroom door, and my heart jumped out of my chest.

At first, I tried to play it calm, walking around the room, hoping he wouldn't try to do anything—but in the back of my mind,

I wanted him just as badly as he wanted me. I had never been in a situation like this before. I had never even been interested in older men.

Step five: Sexualizing the relationship Then, it finally happened. He came up to me turned me around, and we kissed. I couldn't feel my feet...I was floating on air. His lips tasted so good (smoker's breath, but still good). The next thing I knew our clothes were coming off and we were having wild, passionate, uncontrolled sex. I had never had it like that before, so I just let myself go.

Kenny was so gentle with me. I felt so wanted, so loved at that moment. It was like nothing I had ever imagined or experienced. After we both had climaxed, he ran some bath water, and we both got in. I was in heaven. He washed my throbbing body, and it felt so, so good. We kissed some more and fondled each other in the bath.

I didn't know what to think about the whole scenario that day. I was partially relieved because I didn't have to keep telling him "no." I was feeling very anxious because I worried that my family would find out. I became trapped in a web of lies and

became even more isolated from my family and dependent on Kenny.

Step six: Maintaining control In the following weeks, we met secretly at his home, at work, around the block, in the shrubs near the mall—anywhere we could kiss and makeout. We would even sit out in broad daylight kissing in his car in the mall parking lot. It felt like a real relationship. I bought him sweet little cards from Hallmark, wrote him poetry, and did anything else I could do to show him how much he meant to me. He took me out to lunch occasionally. One time he even went to help me shop for school clothes. We bought a matching outfit together! Sometimes I looked out my window, and I could see him wearing his outfit, and I just knew it was some kind of sign that he was thinking about me.

Late at night, he came down to my house and talked to me while I sat on my screened-in front porch. He usually stood out in the street while we talked. One night, all hell broke loose. Mama Sara had apparently started noticing how Kenny was always coming over to talk to me (it was usually around 11 or midnight, but she noticed). Kenny and I were standing there talking about

random things when my cousin, Samantha, came storming out of the house, demanding that Kenny leave me alone. She started ranting and raving about how he had no business talking to me. It was such a mess. I was pissed beyond belief. Kenny left, and I went inside demanding to know why in the hell she had decided I couldn't talk to him.

I walked into the living room all fired up. I couldn't believe Samantha had embarrassed me like that. I demanded an answer as to why I couldn't talk to Kenny. That's when Mama Sara said that she knew all about Kenny, and she knew he was trying to mess with me.

I told her that she had no right to tell me whom I could talk to or see. Then, she played the AIDS card. She went on and on about our neighbor whose son died of AIDS because he was gay. I had no clue why she couldn't understand that anybody can contract AIDS, not just gay people. She got all emotional and started saying that she didn't want me to be like all the other gays and die.

She then took it further by claiming that I was the cause of some fight Kenny and his wife supposedly had out on the street

a few days back. I hadn't heard about any fight. I asked how she knew about it. Just like I figured, she heard about it from all the neighborhood gossip. I was appalled. I wanted to get out of that fucking house so bad at that moment. I called Kenny and told him what went down. He claimed he had no idea what Mama Sara was talking about concerning a fight. From that day forward, everything at my great-grandmother's house got worse.

Finally, it got to the point where I started lying about going to the library, so I could see Kenny. I thought my family was trying to take me away from the one that I loved so much. I had fallen hard for this man in just a month's time. I wrote countless poems that expressed my undying love for Kenny. Here is a sample of one of the poems I wrote to him:

Piece of My Heart

Like a ray of light, you shined into my life.

You took my hand and held it tight.

I looked at you, very sweet, indeed.

You touched my soul and, like a thief in the night, you stole my heart.

I wasn't willing to, give at first, but with your honesty and trust, I must.

Forever in a day, every second of every hour, every day of every month, I will always

Know you have a piece of my heart.

You cherish me, as I do you.

*I may not be yours in the fullest extent, but in our hearts we'll
always be.
I love you with every inch of my heart, but remember only one
piece is given when
We part.*

I became even more isolated from my family that summer. Kenny had come into my life and became everything I thought I was missing. Every chance I could take to see him, I did. He told me he needed me. He told me he loved me. I was convinced that I was in love too. It wasn't clear at the time, but I now know that my child molester had the ultimate grip on my reality.

It was as if I were under a spell. Never had I disobeyed my family like this and lied to so many people. I was different now; I was not myself. I became obsessed with Kenny. But, he knew I was only staying with Mama Sara for the summer, so he slowly tried to push me away. He finally succeeded when he asked me if I thought he would ever leave his family for me. I said I hoped that he would. He said there was no way he would.

And so, there it was. In a single instant, Kenny went from this caring, loving friend and lover to this evil user. But, I still couldn't hate him. Before I left, he said he would always love me and cherish everything I had ever given to him. All of these

moments ignited my addictions, but the stage was set much earlier in my childhood.