

Together AZ

OCTOBER 2020

Inspiring Success on the Road to Recovery

My Passport to Pain

From Asian Immigrant to American Addict

By Sam Louie, MA, LMHC

As a first-generation immigrant in this country, my identity and those like me is nuanced. Yes we are “Americans” but with cultural and ancestral ties elsewhere. Not just elsewhere in a vague way, like, “Well, I think I’m a mix of Irish and Scottish,” but in a very tangible and direct link to my ethnic heritage, immigration story, along with the language, customs, and worldviews passed down through the generations. Our identities are intertwined to the country we live in, our country of origin, those of our colonizers, or a combination of those. The external pressure of assimilation has been one where I’ve been asked to strip myself of my past understanding of self, and prove my allegiance to this country by simplifying my identity as one of just, “American.” The implicit mainstream message was the pathway to citizenship, acculturation, and acceptance in this country was the adoption of patriotism to the degree that the only color accepted was red, white, and blue oozing out of my pores. But in doing so, I betrayed what it truly means to be American in my eyes, while also betraying my ancestral roots.

Chinese Immigrants from Hong Kong

Hong Kong was once home for my ancestors, parents, me and two younger brothers. We are ethnically Chinese — more specifically Cantonese-speaking. Mandarin is the official language of Mainland China and Cantonese is the second largest dialect spoken primarily in cities like Hong Kong, Macau, and parts of Southeastern China. Another major cultural influence is that Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 until the handover back to China in 1997. This meant more than 150 years of British influence in spheres such as politics, fashion, architecture, and language (*English is also an official language in Hong Kong*).

My early identity and roots were of both British and Chinese influences. I recall the juxtaposition of British double-decker buses with traditional Chinese fishing boats known as “junks”. I still have hazy memories of our British passports to mark our distinction as Chinese with British citizenship. Even before setting foot in America I was ethnically Chinese, but legally British. My young mind couldn’t make sense of it all and thought it was “cool” I could be both Chinese and British.

Oldest Son Syndrome

My grandparents on my dad’s side were in an arranged marriage. They had no choice in their partnership — and it showed. Issues of domestic violence, gambling and strife plagued their relationship and impacted my father and my uncles and aunt.

My father is the oldest son of seven children. When my grandfather abandoned the family and moved from Hong Kong to Australia, my dad was tasked to work to help support the family. He dropped out of school in junior high and began his apprenticeship in the kitchen of various Chinese restaurants.

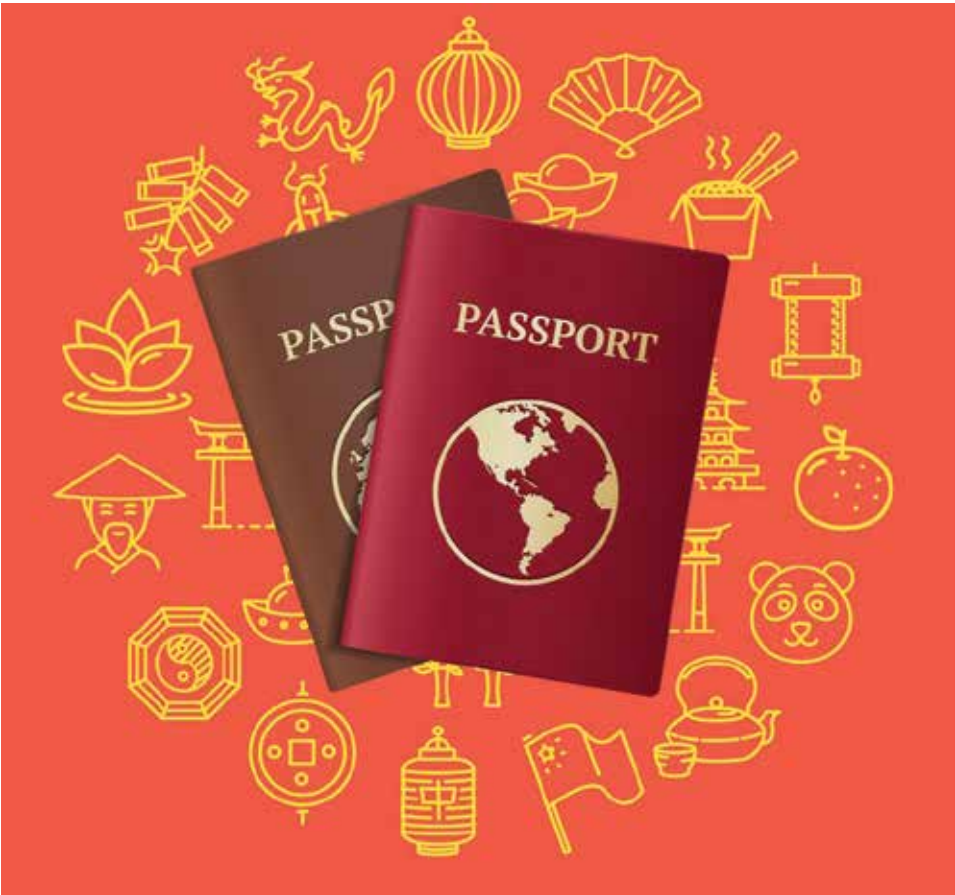
Along the way, he met a waitress who would become his wife (*our mother*) while working together at one of these restaurants. By age 30, my father had risen to the rank of chef and was making a name in the culinary world. Yet, with three toddlers in tow, his individual aspirations were set aside for the collective desires of the family. My parents wanted a better opportunity for us. Neither of them had much of a public school education and came from blue-collar families. So one fateful day in the summer of 1976, everyone on my dad’s side, packed a suitcase full of belongings and we flew to Seattle, Washington to start life anew.

Coming to America

My parents were part of the dominant culture in Hong Kong. Cantonese-speaking Chinese made up more than 90% of the population. They only knew how to be a majority and to view life through a prism of ethnic and cultural privilege. When they arrived in Seattle, they were not only immigrants to a new land, but an ethnic minority popularized in Hollywood as strange, exotic, and foreign.

Beyond the cultural shock of adjusting to a new language and customs, they were stripped of the status of being part of the majority. Not only were they known as Chinese immigrants, they were also a minority living within a Black minority culture.

While some Asian immigrants struggle to fit into white, suburban communities, we had to navigate our ways through three worldviews: White America, Black America, and our own Chinese culture at home. Not only are we trying to understand what it means to be a member of White America in general,



“When it comes to Asian people, our lives, families, and cultures revolve around some aspect of shame. Our identities are forged by trying to avoid any shame-producing feelings.”

we had to adapt to the nuances of living within Black culture while trying to honor our own ethnic heritage and history.

America is often romanticized as a destination for immigrants, yet the harsh reality of cultural shock is often overlooked. My parents were in their late 20’s with no understanding of English, American customs, or a support network. The values of Asian collectivism in which they tried to impress upon us as their children clashed with American ideals of independence. We went from being ethnic majorities in Hong Kong to ethnic minorities in America. How would that impact our sense of identity and shape how others viewed us and how we saw ourselves?

Asian Shame and Honor

To understand Asians, you need to understand the principle of cultural shame and its underlying impact on those from Asian backgrounds. This concept of shame is what undergirds Asian societies, families, and individuals. When it comes to Asian people, our

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Publisher's Note

By Barbara Nicholson-Brown barb@togetheraz.com

Recovery...Stick with It!

After years of drinking and drugging, when I surrendered I had no idea what would happen. I heard everything from, it's a day at a time, commit to showing up to 12 step meetings, keep my mouth shut, ears open and be accountable. It was all foreign to me.

I am grateful now, I was so panicked with fear — because not only did I listen, I followed the suggestions put before me, I was too scared not to. I realized I was not the only one on the planet with this disease.

It was suggested I read one particular book, a few paragraphs at a time. Then it came to writing and journaling. The real work began when it was time to look deep inside and reveal on paper who I was and what I'd become. It was a hard look in the mirror.

It was difficult to start the process because I still wanted to blame the outside world and people in it for what I'd become. But this inventory was not about them, or the world, it was about me. Once I started the "homework", the pen flowed on the paper. After sharing it with my sponsor — that's when recovery began. Through years of being sober I've learned there will always be work to do. I still have character deficiencies that need fixin', but for the most part, I've shed the old skin and stepped into my authentic self.

Wherever you are on your journey, I cannot emphasize enough to stick with it, stick with the people who are strong in their recovery. From them, we learn how to do the next right thing. There is tremendous power of love and support from our fellow travelers on this road. Ask for help when you need it and give it to others when you can. In gratitude,

If you missed the premier of Celebrate the Art of Recovery Virtual Expo.... <https://www.celebratetheartofrecovery.org/watch>

Bringing Awareness to Domestic Violence Month

The Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family (GOYFF) is committed to supporting services for victims and families that have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. Through a trauma-informed lens, we develop and implement numerous grant funding opportunities, training, outreach, and prevention efforts that strengthen our communities and connect Arizonans to critical resources.

Domestic violence does not discriminate

It is an issue affecting Arizonans in all communities, regardless of age, race, gender, economic status, religion, nationality, or educational background. In fact, twenty-four people in the United States are victims of intimate partner violence every minute. Together, we can enhance education, prevention and intervention efforts around domestic violence and support organizations and individuals who provide advocacy efforts, services, and assistance to victims. Everyone deserves to be safe at home.



Lighting AZ Purple

This October, during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we will continue to prioritize the safety and security of all Arizonans and bring awareness to this important issue. This year marks the sixth annual Lighting Arizona Purple campaign. The campaign provides an opportunity to support victims, connect families and communities with essential resources, and encourage Arizonans to end domestic violence in Arizona.

Join us in raising awareness about domestic violence by lighting your homes, businesses and places of worship purple this October. You can find #LightingAZPurple resources at goyff.az.gov/content/lightingazpurple.

Hotlines:

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | TTY 1-800-787-3224

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Arizona Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence: 1-800-782-6400

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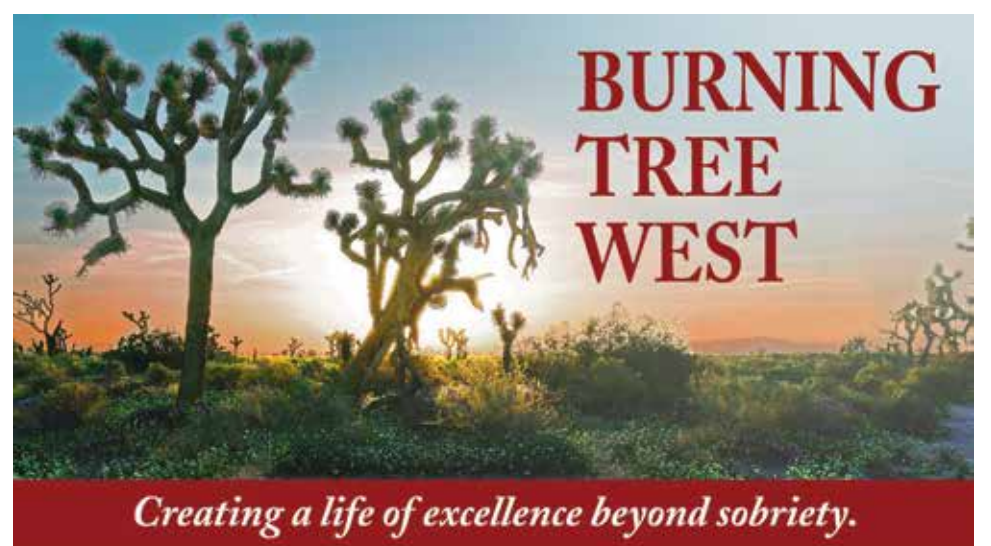
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Staying Active in Recovery

Many factors contribute to the success of recovery, including having support from friends and family, and by having a disciplined schedule. There is another thing to improve the recovery process and keep an addict from a possible relapse — new hobbies and physical activities.



How Hobbies and Interests Help

There are so many benefits of having a hobby or interest to focus on in recovery. Physical activities keep you distracted and away from the thoughts of using substances. Now that the weather is cooling off, it's time to gather your friends in recovery for a morning hike, game of golf, or any other outdoor activity you can think of.

Learn new skills builds confidence

If you have ever dreamt of learning something new, recovery time is the best period to do so. Learning new skills keeps your mind and interests engaged, as you progress your way through long-term sobriety. The joy being good at something is incomparable. Doesn't matter if you are learning something new or are improving an existing skill. Once you start noticing the progress you have made, there will be a spike in self-confidence.

Use Time Effectively

After a day full of work, chores, responsibilities, or anything that occupies your time, you need something to distract your mind and relax. Passing these idle hours effectively is very crucial, as this is the time when you are most likely to feel the urge to consume. Having a hobby or something you can work upon can be extremely helpful here. You can not only utilize your time but also ease your mind the right way.

Sense of Accomplishment

Every activity helps you progress as an individual. For instance, if you choose to learn guitar you could be overwhelmed by that song you just played perfectly. Or if you take up cooking, you'd be happy to see the meal you have just cooked. The end result is a sense of accomplishment, it's not about perfection.

Observe and Adapt

Certain activities make us as human beings feel happy and content. Nature, for instance, has the power to connect with our soul and induce a refreshing effect. Nature can also provide a sense of spiritual healing while also making you realize your true worth and the things that matter more than drugs, alcohol, other substances in your life.

Trusting Yourself

Certain outdoor activities require you to have trust in yourself. Risky endeavors such as hiking, mountain climbing, or anything that keeps the adrenaline rushing through your veins can only be completed by you if you believe in yourself. Also, this skill is imperative during recovery since self-confidence and self-trust elevates your chances of achieving long-term sobriety.

Addiction recovery is often known as the most difficult phase of the addiction treatment process. With relapsing being a common element of the recovery phase, it is possible to avoid this if you have a well-planned approach to how you would be tackling your downtime during recovery. Incorporating hobbies and outdoor activities in your life can elevate your chances of achieving a long-term recovery without even experiencing a possible relapse. So, if you are currently in addiction recovery, or your loved one is battling their way out of addiction, it is advisable to include some sort of healthy mind-distracting activities to ease your brain during recovery.

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Calling all Heros and Heroines

By Dina Evan, Ph.D

Most of us are holding on by the seat of our pants today, waiting for the next feud, flood or failure of our government to return to compassion and humanity. This is a difficult time, but what do we do besides wait for someone else to fix it? What if something bigger than that is going on here? What if you knew this time is a reminder the only way things change is through us? What if the whole time we were saying let's leave it up to God, God was saying, Okay, but how about a little help from you! I think this is a great time! Because it's fun or easy? NO! But because it is calling each of us to step into our personal hero or heroine and change something. Don't gasp. You don't have to start a march or craft an amendment.

However, what we each of us has to do is become the hero or heroine we are within. Jim Weiss reminds us in his 2015 article on the nature of a hero... "Rosa Parks is such a hero. She did not change the laws in the USA, but she began the process one day on a bus ride home.

Confronted by the demand to give up her seat-something she knew was wrong — she firmly said, "No." That one syllable, spoken quietly, was more powerful than the angry shouts of today's talk show hosts, more long-lasting than damage done by bombs and bullets, more inspiring than demagogues' easy answers. Rosa Parks was one of us." She was a heroine!

What are the internal values or principles necessary for the making of a hero? Let's look.

- A hero doesn't finesse the truth for personal protection or political gain. He or she tells the truth exactly as it is.
- A hero is never silent in the face of abuse or prejudice to anyone. They do not stay silent in the face of oppression of any kind.
- A hero looks beyond what is, to what can be different.
- Heroes ask for help and find the strength to overcome challenges and difficult conditions without becoming a victim. They face the smallest and largest of fears with unbridled determination, even while they are afraid.
- Heroes and heroines make decisions, both small and large that cause us to stand in mute applause and awe, just like Rosa Parks. Those decisions are based solely on what is right and principled, rather than personally advantageous.
- Heroes use compassion and integrity as the motivation and base for having a positive effect on every personal, professional and political issues.
- Heroes and heroines don't necessarily have great degrees, certificates of accomplishments, hefty stock portfolios or grand achievements. They are everyday people just like you and me.

In fact, if you stop a minute, you will be able to identify a regular everyday person in your life who was a hero to you, one who changed your life or ideas dramatically.

For instance, one of my heroines is my spinster (lovingly interpreted to be independent warrior) fourth grade, teacher Ms. Franklin, who wore long skirts and old fashion laced up heels, but who braved the dirt playground to come and ask me — after I had sort of given up — whether even though things were pretty bad at home, "Do you think it could be time to stop acting like you are not smart, because I know better?"

To my amazement she talked a growling, frothing at the mouth dog down one time by reaching in her pocket and offering him the nuts she used to keep her energy up after telling me, "We are all God's creatures Dina, settle down." I am proof, that just one hero or heroine can change a life. This time is not about what other people are doing or not doing or what is God doing for us. It's about who we are being or not being. Get your cape and the next time you have a chance, be the hero or heroine you already are. Who knows what great things might happen!

I am proof, that just one hero or heroine can change a life. This time is not about what other people are doing or not doing or what is God doing for us. It's about who we are being or not being. Get your cape and the next time you have a chance, be the hero or heroine you already are and VOTE!. Who knows what great things might happen!



Dr. Evan is a Marriage, family, child therapist and consciousness counselor. She has presented nationwide seminars and workshops, written several books and created meditation CDs for couples, individual and mental health professionals. She has also won national acclaim as a human rights advocate. Visit www.dr dinaevan.com or call 602 571-8228.



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lives, families, and cultures revolve around some aspect of shame. Our identities are forged by trying to avoid any shame-producing feelings.

Unlike the U.S., which prides itself on the individual or “I” factor, Asian nations are collectivist with “we” being exalted. As a result, Asian societies are often referred to as “shame-based” cultures where social order is maintained through the use of shame.

Shame and honor are tied together in Asian culture. It’s the yin and the yang of life. They co-exist together to bring harmony, cohesion, and order in Asian countries. Honor and upholding honor is paramount. You learn honor early on from your parents. Everything we do is predicated on bringing honor to our families: our grades, achievements, careers, and our relationships.

Growing up in a traditional Chinese household, I learned how important the family name is to Asian cultures. Chinese names are written in three characters, with your last name written first. My Chinese name is translated as Louie, Fu Yuen. As a child, when people asked what my Chinese name is that’s how I answered in Cantonese (Louie, Fu Yuen). In Asia, when you first meet someone they’ll ask you what your family name is. I would say I’m a Louie and they would respond with their own family name, so we can get a sense of who we are based on our family lineage and reputation. Consequently as a “Louie”, my loyalty and allegiance belonged to the family. It was not about my individual desires or wishes, rather my focus was to be on the family. What I do in this life isn’t so much about me but about bringing and preserving honor to my family and Chinese heritage.

As the oldest son, this sense of obligation and responsibility to bring honor to the family was even stronger. I was responsible to pass this sense of honor down to the future generations. When I stepped out into the American world of education, career, or marriage, I felt the weight of my culture following me along.

Because of the Asian fixation on honor, we learn early on to achieve as a means to “save face”. “Face” is the equivalent of how one is seen or judged by another in the Asian culture. When people talk about how Asian cultures are shame-based, they’re referring to the concern one has for what others think about them and their “face”.

It should be noted the Chinese character or *kanji*, for “face” is the same character for “mask”. Following this line of thinking, where your face is known as your mask, it’s no wonder why traditional Asian people will do whatever it takes to hide their emotions or true “face” by putting on their “mask”. Since “saving face” is seen as bringing honor to oneself and culture, then hiding one’s true feelings also carries a degree of honor. The outward display of emotions is shunned since that would be seen as losing face by showing your true self. For many Asians,

they will do everything in their willpower to never show any negative emotions or feelings for fear of losing face. Anger, disappointment, sadness, and fear were never expressed or condoned in my family. As a result, we unconsciously learn to associate these emotions as shameful. In a strange and twisted way, becoming authentic to our human experience and emotions is internalized as being “bad”.

When we go through experiences that are not honorable or proud for our families, **what then?** When you feel you’ve let down not only yourself, but also your family, ancestors, and entire culture, and can’t talk about them, it inevitably leads to toxic shame. This is a shame that seeps into our veins and courses through our very being. This deep sense of rejection, humiliation, failure and embarrassment penetrates our core and robs us of life. We come to view our entire self as flawed, defective, unworthy, and ultimately unlovable.

Secrecy, Silence and Shame

As an Asian-American stepping out into the world of education, career, or marriage, the weight of my culture followed me along with the expectation and obligation to bring honor to my family and my ancestral roots. Anything less would be seen as dishonorable or a loss of “face”. If someone has “lost face”, there’s deep feeling of humiliation, embarrassment for letting down yourself, family, and culture.

When it comes to addictions, there is scant attention given to Asians. Part of the limited attention lies in the age-old, Asian custom of *secrecy, silence, and shame*. We try not to disgrace our families or ethnic heritage so we strive to do everything within our being to bring honor to our family and ancestors. It’s so strong that when Asians struggle with life issues (i.e. grief, depression, physical or sexual abuse, anxiety, etc.) many never seek help out of a fear of appearing weak. At a young age, we’re indoctrinated to be strong and not show any signs of weakness. Feeling weak or even a need for help will trigger intense feelings of shame. From an Asian addict’s perspective, it’s the ultimate blow of humiliation to be weak. It’s the most difficult admission to our selves, families, and loved ones that we are weak and cannot solve our problems alone. Imagine being Asian and trying to break free of an addiction. Whether it’s gambling, drugs or alcohol, or sex, many would rather “suffer in silence” than break the cultural code of honor by acknowledging a problem and seeking help.

When it comes to Sex Addiction

The grip of shame is even tighter for those embroiled in sex addiction. When it comes to sex, no other area is more misunderstood or shame-bound than this realm. Our sexuality strikes at the core of our humanity and cannot be cut off. Yet the tension and shame arise when you are trapped in sexual obsessions or compulsions. Whether it’s a one-night stand, multiple affairs, visits to strip clubs, pornography, or the use of prostitutes, the combined feelings of dirtiness, defectiveness, and weakness all race to the forefront ensnaring the Asian addict to see himself as unlovable, worthless, and ultimately a failure to not only himself but his family and ethnicity. I not only studied Asian shame and addiction, I lived it. As a young child growing up in a home with language and cultural barriers to connect with our parents, I sought solace in activities and objects.

Bereft of emotional intimacy, I spent endless hours of trying to fill the void in my heart by playing basketball, video games, watching television or browsing department store catalogs. During my young adult years, I confused sex with love. By college, this distortion took the form of one-night stands, self-masturbation, and if I was in a relationship, they were short-term and primarily sexual in nature.

This misunderstanding continued after college and escalated as the cultural pressure to honor my family as an “American success story” took firm hold. As I launched into the profession of television journalism, the fear of failure and inadequacy took center stage. It was further heightened as I moved away from Seattle for the first time and lived in Montana. I was living alone more than 500 miles away from home. I was lonely and wracked with insecurity and questioned my abilities.

It was also the first time I experienced so many bewildering emotions: fear, inadequacy, and culture shock. I was the only Asian guy I knew in the city, or the state for that matter. I wondered to myself, “What if I don’t succeed in this career? Will my parents or friends accept me or reject me and want nothing to do with me?” I reasoned to myself that failing was not an option. The fear and potential shame of bringing dishonor on myself, family, grandparents, and ancestors weighed heavily on my conscience. I had to succeed. As an Asian-American male, I was also fighting stereotypes that we were nerdy and sexually undesirable to say the least.

The anxiety that fueled these questions, doubts, and concerns swirled through my being. Even if I had wanted to talk about it, communication with home wasn’t an option. This was before the age of e-mail and cell phones. My isolation sealed my distorted belief that, much like during my childhood, I could not truly trust anyone in my deepest time of need. I would have to tackle these adult challenges alone.

All these social, cultural, and personal factors created a perfect storm where sex became the salve for my soul. Sex was anything sexually stimulating. While





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A Message from Sierra Tucson

Dear Colleague,

The challenges we have faced in the past 6 months have provided us an opportunity to innovate, evolve and to reflect on the many blessings we have in our lives. I am grateful to return to Sierra Tucson as the Sierra Tucson Group CEO and to continue our valued partnerships. Prior to returning to Sierra Tucson, I spent 10 rewarding months in southern California, expanding Sierra Tucson's mission with the launch of Sierra by the Sea in Newport Beach and Sunrise Ranch in Riverside, forming the Sierra Tucson Group. Both Sierra by the Sea and Sunrise Ranch offer all levels of care and provide an integrated and trauma-informed approach to addressing substance use and co-occurring disorders.



Sierra Tucson has consistently been a leader in healthcare, utilizing a trauma-centered approach to addressing substance use, mood, trauma and pain. With this solid foundation, we continue to offer treatment aimed at addressing the health challenges we face as a society.

Our **Healthcare Heroes Trauma program** is designed to help our essential healthcare professionals who have experienced emotional trauma, exhaustion, anxiety and depression as they devote themselves to caring for others during this pandemic. We are proud to dedicate a trauma program solely focused on the unique circumstances healthcare professionals and their loved ones experience.

In addition, we are excited about the growth of our **Sierra Tucson PHP and IOP** which provides a seamless transition from residential level of care and ongoing robust clinical and medical program. Our PHP and IOP allows our residents to continue their recovery journey with the continued support of the Sierra Tucson team.

With the limitations on face-to-face interactions, we mobilized to offer weekly **Nourishment educational webinars, podcasts** and complimentary **CE webinars** to provide support to our professional colleagues and community. This compassion project brought us closer together during these times of social distancing and uncertainty.

Reflecting on this past year, we have much to be grateful for and are hopeful that next year will continue to present opportunities for continued advancement in healthcare, innovation and strengthened partnerships. Wishing you all health and happiness.

Sincerely,

Valerie M. Kading, DNP, MBA, MSN, PMHNP-BC
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it included one-night stands, it primarily consisted of pornography purchased at adult bookstores. Every day after work, I remember using it to quell my fears and sense of isolation. With the internet, my usage escalated as it was now much more accessible and anonymous. The ritualized nature of going to porn before I went to bed set in motion the tentacles of addiction. By the time I had met my first wife in Ohio, she had no idea I was shrouded in sexual secrecy and shame. Even after three years of marriage, I hid the shame of my addiction from her until the night of discovery.

“Thank God I’m Caught!”

One night while I was caught in my usual trance of browsing through nude images online, she woke up to use the restroom. She peered into the living room and saw me looking at porn on the computer. A loud shriek of disgust pierced the silence of the night. I was shaking as I felt exposed, helpless, alone, and afraid; a whirlwind of mixed feelings coursed through me. I intuitively knew my marriage was in jeopardy, yet there was also a huge sigh of relief. “Thank God!” I thought. I was relieved she had caught me, as I was tired of living my double life. Finally someone knew my secret.

Despite my terror, I also felt a sense of peace as the years of guilt, shame, and silence came to light. A tremendous burden had been lifted; I could not hide behind denial or rationalizations. I had to acknowledge to her and to myself that the tentacles of lust, infatuation, and pornography had strangled all the intimacy in our marriage.

The feelings of loss, abandonment, and shame associated with my divorce under these circum-

stances were excruciating. How could this happen to me? Nothing was more important to me than my marriage; not my career, family, or relationship with God. Nothing was more important than my desire to uphold the Asian honor of a good marriage.

The cultural shame was compounded by religious shame. I belonged to an Asian-American church. Everything that I believed in about a Christian marriage had disintegrated in front of my eyes. How could this happen when we were Christians? Disillusionment with my faith quickly set in. I felt like a failure not just to myself, but to others. I felt like a failure in the eyes of my immediate family, grandparents, deceased ancestors, church, and the Asian community at large. The stigma within my culture of both the divorce and the addiction pierced my soul. How had this happened? How could I be so weak? God must hate me.

A Shattered Dream

It was long after the discovery that my wife at the time filed for divorce. After years of suffering in silence, I finally acknowledged to myself and others, I was addicted to sex (i.e. pornography, prostitutes, sexual fantasies, etc.).

Everything I had worked so hard to achieve was gone. I experienced a shattered dream, not just an individual dream but also the collective dream of my parents and grandparents. Insecurities and fears ex-

ploded and swirled inside me when my personal and professional life collapsed. The emotions paralyzed me. The gut-wrenching fear of being rejected had been realized. I was tormented beyond belief. I had lost more than a marriage. I thought I had lost the meaning to life because I had lost the honor of my family. The shame of letting down my family, my community, and my ancestors was palpable. It was a shame that wracked my soul.

Life Through a New Lens

But the blessing from my divorce is that it forced me to acknowledge the pain within while working on issues related to my sex addiction: childhood abandonment, emotional neglect, Asian shame, and other cultural forces at play that impacted my dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors. Eventually through my own time in therapy, I emerged with a new lens from which to see life. The dark shadow of sexual shame and secrecy had been lifted which spurred me into my career as a therapist specializing in Asian shame, sexual addictions and recovery.

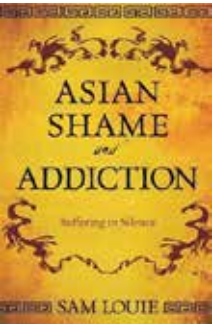
It’s ironic how as a first-generation Chinese immigrant, I was indoctrinated to bring honor to my family and ancestry while chasing the American dream. But it wasn’t until that dream of success, perfection, and independence was obliterated that I had the courage to delve deep into my own cultural wounds of Asian shame and addiction. Only then was I able to find what I was looking for in life: meaning, passion, love, and the joy of experiencing intimacy with God and my fellow man.

I no longer see my faults as bringing shame to my culture, family, or me. Instead, my faults are a chance to showcase unconditional love and grace to others so they can glimpse the glory of their trials, failures, and disappointments. Despite my struggles and challenges as an immigrant to this country, they have also been the greatest opportunities of spiritual growth, healing, and self-discovery. My takeaway through this journey is that my past imperfection is now my greatest gift to the world.



About the Author
Sam Louie is a licensed mental health counselor with a private practice in near Seattle specializing in cultural issues, sex addiction and trauma. Prior to counseling, Sam worked more than twelve years as an Emmy Award-Winning television journalist where he researched, produced, and reported on a number of stories related to psychotherapy, relationships, and addictions.

He has also written, *Asian Shame & Addiction: Suffering in Silence* that touches on the themes of Asian culture and addictions. His book and counseling practice information can be found on Amazon or his website at www.samlouiemft.com. Sam Louie, MA, LMHC. www.samlouie-speaks.com. (206) 778-2686



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Worried About COVID-19, School and Substance Use?

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We chatted with one of our helpline specialists, Deb Drache, to learn more about the concerns she’s hearing as families transition back into a most unusual school year. We asked, too, if she has advice for parents facing the added worry of substance use or addiction.

Tell us about the helpline. What can parents expect when they connect with you?

When a parent or caregiver reaches me, I greet them with a lot of warmth and empathy. I validate their concerns and help to remove the stigma so many feel. As specialists, we provide empathy around feelings of shame, guilt, anger, sadness or fear having a loved one struggling with substances. I really want to understand what the parent needs to determine the “next best step” for them. Sometimes this is weighing the pros and cons of a certain limit they want to set. For others, it’s about ways to have better, more productive conversations. Often, it’s about helping them see that changing their own behaviors and engaging in more self-care may be the next best thing to do.

Many parents are concerned about learning, safety and loss of connection due to COVID-19. What can they still do to encourage healthy choices and behavior this school year?

When it comes to mental health and substance use, we encourage parents to proactively and frequently engage in conversations with their kids. Unfortunately, it isn’t enough to just ask your teenager/young adult, “How are you doing?” You will likely hear, “Fine.” By talking regularly, you can better keep your finger on the pulse of their mental health and relationship with substances. Make it a point to do weekly check-ins and find creative ways to ask them, “How are you?”

If you notice specific behaviors, such as sleeping a lot, or withdrawal from family or irritability, you can say something like, “Hey, I noticed you have been staying in your room a lot lately, and I wonder what’s up with that?” Don’t be afraid to ask your child about feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger or resentment.

It also helps to find creative ways to pose your question. For instance, talk with them about how many people feel stressed about doing school differently, missing friends and having to juggle social pressure and academics. Then, ask them specifically how they feel about these things. You can also use scaling questions, such as, “On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being not at all sad and 10 being depressed, what number would you give yourself?” Once they answer, you can ask follow-up questions. As an example, “What’s one thing you could do to move your number up a point? How can I help?”

Even for older teens and young adults, connection and engagement are important. As parents, we look to balance out the needs of giving our kids both roots (to ground them) and wings (so they can be independent). Teens tend to try to push away, yet they need the safety of family. Have dinner or any meal together, play a board game or watch a movie. These are all ways to stay connected and serve as a foundation to have ongoing dialogue. It can also mitigate some mental health issues and substance use.

Many of our kids haven’t had the ability to see their friends or socialize in months. What are the new ground rules this school year?

It’s been a difficult time for everyone, but especially for kids who haven’t been able to socialize and are now back in school. Empathy for their situation is important. That said, it’s my recommendation that whatever rules had been in place should remain in place. It helps to notice when your child follows the rules, even if it’s what they “should be doing.” Acknowledgement of this, either in a kind word or small token of appreciation, can go a long way.

Specific to COVID-19, talk about their health and safety. Discuss why sharing a vape pen or a joint is a health risk due to the virus. Explain how attending a gathering inside — when there is prolonged exposure to others — can also increase transmission. It’s important to explain the “why” behind the rules. Let your child know that it’s a communal responsibility to stop the spread of COVID. Moreover, this guidance is not about them specifically, but the recommendation of public health professionals. You can also try to make it more personal to them and their lives. For instance, if there are low transmission rates, it’s more likely they can be at school with their friends.

For parents of college students, how can they help manage COVID-19 “safety pledges” from a distance?

It’s not too late to have a conversation with your college-aged child about how the pandemic is reshaping campus life today, in addition to the normal challenges of being away at college. Acknowledge that many kids “party” and choose to use substances. Have a conversation with them about how they are handling this on campus. Acknowledging that you value honesty and direct communication is a start. Give validation that they have made it to the point in their lives where they can make independent decisions. Remind them that you are still available to help with guidance and support as they navigate this next stage of their life.

(Source: Drugfree.org) **Partnership to End Addiction.**

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