

Transcript: A Conversation with Rich

John D. (PA): When Ari F. (NJ/CA) and I began planning this event with our fellows from Ireland, we never dreamed we'd have an opportunity to sit down with the first member of our fellowship, Rich M. - you probably know him as Rich, author of our Basic Text. We'd originally asked whether Rich would be available to serve as one of the decade speakers at last night's banquet. But once we started talking with him, we quickly understood he had a lot more to share with us at this point in the fellowship's evolution than could fit into a fifteen-minute pre-recorded share. So, we asked: what if we had a conversation instead? And he was gracious enough to say an emphatic yes. So here we are. I'm going to turn it over to Rich to make some opening remarks and say hello to everyone. One note for folks in the (Baltimore) room: at one point, we're going to show the room to our virtual participants. If you don't want to be included in that, please sit at the three chairs over by Salon A. With that, I'll turn it over to Rich. Welcome to the 2026 IRC.

"Rich": Good afternoon, if it is afternoon. My name is "Rich" - I have to remember that. [laughs] And I'm still alive, which honestly amazes me, given everything. What can I tell you to give you a sense of who I am? Not that there's some great bargain in it, but I can share some of it. One thing I'd say up front: whatever I say today, take it as just something going on in my life. It doesn't have to be what's going on in yours.

My life has been remarkable - not because I have to prove anything, but because of what's happened over many, many years. One of the huge parts of this was being in so much trouble, such serious trouble, that the only way forward seemed to be to stop acting out, which felt virtually impossible to me. And on the other hand, daring to try to pull myself out of that tide in some way also seemed absolutely impossible. I was more than half convinced I was going to die. That was it. And there was no way to stop it, at least as I understood things then. There was no S.L.A.A. yet - that's not S.L.A.A.'s fault, of course. It just didn't exist. This was 1976. I should know that, right? It's been a while. So I'll tell you a little about that, and hopefully it'll be worth something to you, which is the only thing that matters to me. I hope it's good for you. And yes, I am a sex and love addict; that's correct.

I had to do something. I had to stop. What I was heading into was dangerous, and I didn't see how I could possibly stop. I didn't care about the big picture - I just wanted to stop. I knew I was on the verge of being killed. There's no other way to describe it. **It came down to this one place: I had to stop, or I was going to die.** Period. I didn't know how it could go any other way. So, mostly out of not knowing what else to do, I stopped acting out over time. But that alone wouldn't have been enough, because I would have just thrown myself back into something else just as destructive. What started to change things wasn't simply "I can't help myself," but "I can't afford to keep doing this, over and over." So I started doing something else.

By that point I'd been in AA for about ten years, which had given me a great deal - I love that place very much. But I hadn't expected much more to come of it, if I'm honest. When I first went into AA, I made a kind of deal with the God who was becoming visible to me. I said: look, I'm coming into AA, and I'm promising that if you let me in, I'll be good - I won't go on binges with alcohol any longer. But then, because I was screwed up, I added: the thing is, I need to keep the ability to do gross things with other people. I have to have it. And this amazing whoever-that-was said, essentially, okay - we're not going to make you give up alcoholism, but you're going to have to find another way to handle the rest. I thought I was being smart. In fact, it was crazy.

So it took ten years in AA before I got to a point where I was already in a terrible, terrible place. The odds felt right that I was going to fall and not come back. That was it. I had to do something more than I'd already done. There was no luck left, nothing. If it wasn't going to happen, I was going to die. Period. And not many people would have missed me either.

So I did it. I had a tremendous amount of energy going in the wrong direction, and when I finally had to ask the God of my hopeful understanding for help, whatever that presence was basically said: look, you can have this, but you have to start doing it, and you're going to have to find a way. And when you find it - I'm getting goosebumps just saying this - it's going to be something that lifts you and helps other people too. That sounded good. I'd never done anything like that before, for anybody, anywhere, except with someone I wanted to mess around with. But I did it anyway. Only because I was desperate, it wasn't some wonderful, everything's-fine kind of thing. It was: this is what's happening, you've nearly destroyed yourself more times than you can count, there's not much left, and if you can't find something helpful, you're gone. **Right up until that point, there was nothing called S.L.A.A. It didn't exist. But it needed to. That was the key.**

It took a while, but eventually I found people who might be willing. I was going to AA meetings and telling people, quietly: look, I'm in a lot of trouble, and maybe you are too. There's no downside compared to what we've already been through. Out of that, three other people came forward - not with me exactly, but because of me. They were in some very messy situations of their own, but they heard me talking, because I was desperate, and there was no way around it: I was going to be honest, or I was going to be dead.

They came, and the four of us got together at where I was living, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They didn't know each other, and they didn't know much about me either - how trustworthy I even was would have been a fair question. But they were in trouble too, so they came. We sat down and talked about who we were, and what we'd done. I still get goosebumps thinking about it. In knowing and feeling that together, something started to happen between us. There were two women, lovely women, and another guy, very helpful, and every one of us had been in a lot of trouble. I was probably three or four months ahead of them, just from having gotten there first.

By the time it came to close that first meeting, everybody came out of it changed. They were amazed that we were talking about these things at all, because nobody ever talked about them. And there was a feeling - a loving thing that came with all four of us. We respected each other, and we respected what had happened, and we realized: this is it. This is the one that goes in the right direction. It's hard to believe, because it seems like so little, except it's everything. That's everything. I'll stop there.

I've chosen to talk today about those early years - how old I was then, in my early twenties, a mess, and those three others were in their own kind of mess too. **But out of that: did I create you? No. Do I love you? Yes. Do I love myself for having the capacity to love? Yes.** Is that a remarkable thing? The answer is yes.

That first meeting - the four of us, me and the other three - is what made S.L.A.A. a reality. We knew it. The last thing I'll say is that when we got together that first time, we talked for three hours. Nobody had ever done that before. Three hours, and we got through it, and we decided we'd come together again. And we were on our way. I'll just say amen to that, and I'll say the same to all of you, for the beauty you've brought in your own ways, which are fine as they are - they don't have to be mine.

I appreciate you being here; I appreciate being here myself, and I appreciate these dear people. I'm glad I've had this opportunity, and I hope it's worth something. I love you. Bye.

[Cheers, Tears, and Standing Ovation for more than a minute]

John D. (PA): Thank you for that.

"Rich": If anybody has a question, go ahead. I'll just say - you're all beautiful to me, and I appreciate it. Nothing special, just someone who had to do it. That's it.

John D. (PA): Thank you. We have some questions submitted by folks at our in-person sites in both Ireland and the United States.

You've reflected on the early days of the fellowship - in those early days, were there times your faith in this brand-new idea wavered? And if so, what brought it back?

"Rich": Desperation brought it back. Desperation is a rather tough thing to ignore. That's where it came from. We couldn't do the beautiful, polished version of things - we needed the bare possibilities, because that's all we had. Other people may have had different experiences over the years, but that's mine. And I got a smile out of it, which is pretty good for me. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): When you were just getting started, what were you most afraid you'd have to face? And once you were into it, what actually showed up that you had to face?

"Rich": The worst I could see, right away, was that I was going to be killed - that I would die, or that I'd kill myself, going off a bridge or something like that. That was a very real possibility. I had already, at that point, held a pistol to my head. Not a very good scene. I don't know if that fully answers what you asked, but I hope I haven't wandered too far from it. I'll listen for more, thank you.

John D. (PA): S.L.A.A. started in 1976, Sex Addicts Anonymous in 1977, Sexaholics Anonymous in 1979 - all very close together. Of course, this was long before the internet, so you couldn't know what was happening in different parts of the country or the world. At some point each fellowship discovered the others existed. Was there ever a real push to bring the fellowships together, and if so, what got in the way?

"Rich": The obvious answer is that it needed to be something that worked with what people wanted to talk about, in line with the hard times they were having. And I'd say S.L.A.A. has always been very careful about who we are and what matters to us. The way S.L.A.A. has continued to build - I don't know that it's ever been done perfectly, but it's been done very well, and a lot of that is genuinely positive. This is a personal view: I'm not someone who says you have to do this or that. It's about what comes to you, what's helpful to you. And the strength of S.L.A.A. is that it has a long history, and it holds together in a way that's very effective for a lot of people, including me, and including people who are extremely different from me - because S.L.A.A. is very, very safe. I'll pass on that, thanks.

John D. (PA): Thank you. As we continue to talk about the early days of the fellowship, you've got some things behind you. Would you like to show us what they are and what they mean to you?

"Rich": You mean right now? I'm still alive, right? [Rich holds up a paper.] Thank you - those are the four people, including yours truly, who created S.L.A.A. There it is. It was amazing to have any of that at all, and honestly, we were uncertain how successful it would be. But because the possibility of dying was so powerful, we had the ability to do the right thing - and it was the right thing. Notwithstanding difficulties here and there, it's always been the right thing.

John D. (PA): Thank you. You're the primary author of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, our S.L.A.A. Basic Text, and author of the adapted Twelve Steps, so these questions are about that. First: how do

you tell the difference between what your Higher Power wants for you and what's really just your own thoughts and desires talking?

"Rich": I'm not going to go there, honestly, because in my reality it's not about getting God on the right side or anything like that. It has to be something very, very basic. When it's basic, and things start happening well for people on the inside, that's a whole different thing. As the picture grows longer - which it has, with S.L.A.A. - a lot more comes out of it. But none of that was available to me, because we hadn't created it yet. So let's stay with what actually happened. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): There's a new publication that's the most recent to go to print, A Framework for Living: the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts for World Service of S.L.A.A. It has its own narrative and version of the Steps, different from the ones you wrote. How does that sit with you? And how would you feel if the Basic Text itself were significantly rewritten someday?

"Rich": I'm in a good position, because I saw it happen from nothing - it created me, and you can't do better than that. Whatever's there now, if other people want to try new things, I hope they do it carefully and helpfully. But I'm not in a position to say we should make this different or that different. The point is, there was no version of any of this until it started. And without that starting point, none of it would have happened. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): Follow-up to that: as literature continues to develop in this modern age - fifty years later, it's funny, a colleague and I were explaining to a young person here what a mimeograph machine was, since they don't exist anymore, and now we carry around phones with more computing power than would have taken up this entire hotel. So as times evolve, does the Basic Text, the Twelve Steps, and our other literature need to evolve with them, or are they static for all time?

"Rich": That's way outside my position, as I've said. You're talking about a whole different landscape than the one we started in - it's taken a long time to get here, and on balance, it's been quite successful. I'm sure there have been problems along the way, but that's not where I live. The God of my understanding - I pray that's who it is - gave me the ability to do what I could, and we did what we could with it. We've done our part. I hope the fellowship keeps finding things that work, that are honest, that hold up. I think that would be great. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): Thank you. In the Basic Text, your story and Kate's story ended at the time the Basic Text was published. Can you give us an update on the last - I don't know, forty-ish years since then? How is your life now, and how has your story evolved?

"Rich": My former spouse and I - that's private, so I won't get into a lot of it. I'll just say her days were extremely good, and we loved each other for quite a long time. That's what can happen. Sometimes those turnarounds are good, sometimes not. I'm proud of her, and I'm proud of me. I'll pass, thank you. Actually, yes - I do have one more thing. Small, but not so small. I've been married to my second wife, my second person, for about twenty-nine years now. It's been very, very good. That's what I have. I know there can be a lot of interest in learning more, and that's fine, but I find the reality of what I live with, and who I love, is what's good for me. I don't have to talk a lot about it - not because anything's wrong, but because it's nobody else's business. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): Thank you. Looking back at everything you and those three other folks set into motion nearly fifty years ago - what's the strongest emotion or feeling that comes up for you today?

"Rich": Today. They were heroes, including me - we were all heroes in that. They were people I might have messed around with, and they might have messed around with me. But we wound up loving each

other, from a distance, and doing serious work for each other that helped us all, and S.L.A.A. came out of that. You've already heard that part. If you want to ask something else, go ahead, and I'll try to be honest with it.

John D. (PA): Sure. Focusing more on today - what does your spiritual, emotional, and physical sobriety look like today, and what does your program of recovery look like today?

"Rich": Both of those are, frankly, very quiet and very private for me. I respect myself for not trying to make myself look like I'm really something. Instead, I've gone through many things, and those things have created who I am. That's as good as I can put it. **A day at a time is a long journey that's blessed, and it's not finished yet. There you go.**

John D. (PA): Thank you. There was a movie made about Bill W., the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. This person writes: With everything the Me Too movement brought into the light, I've wondered whether a film about your story could do that same kind of good. I know we have to carefully protect anonymity and work within our traditions about not attracting public media attention - but what do you think?

"Rich": What makes you think I think about anything? [laughs] Fair enough. Look, when we created S.L.A.A., it was amazing in ways I still don't fully understand - a lot happened, and it happened in a remarkable time. But I'm not trying to make myself into a movie or anything like that. Here we are, talking, and in my own experience, what I'm saying is as honest as I can make it. How can you beat that? I don't think it's up to me to want something like a film made about it. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): How do you handle fears these days? We had about half a dozen people ask for your advice on handling fear.

"Rich": I didn't realize anyone had wondered about me handling fear - I've certainly had enough of it. How do I handle fear? I don't, really. That's how I do it. I can't cheap out of it - I have to sail it through to other outcomes, I suppose is one way to put it. And it's a good one: **God is the only game in town. That's the simple truth right there.**

John D. (PA): You've given us, over the last fifty years, a source of so much experience, strength, and hope, and we wonder what keeps you hopeful these days.

"Rich": What keeps me hopeful is that I could die - not from screwing everything up, but simply because that's my condition now. I'm having to live with that, and I think I'm doing a pretty good job of it. I'm almost 80. I've been riding on that range for a while now, and so far, so good. When it's time for me to die, maybe that'll be okay too - who knows. I've been learning how important it is to be fair to myself. That's a whole thing, honestly - once you get into the territory of having been around a long time, it's a different world. I say this with respect, about myself: as we get older - I'm getting goosebumps just saying this - it's another kind of mystery. It's not simply, 'I don't feel well, so I think I'm going to die.' It's more like: what do I still have? Does it mean something to me? Am I going to continue to be okay? Maybe yes, maybe no. A lot of that isn't really knowable, at least not the way we tend to look at it. In terms of my own life, I'm well into it, and I hope it remains well. I'll pass. Thank you.

John D. (PA): Thank you. At some point over the last fifty years, after beginning the fellowship, you stepped away from a public, visible role in S.L.A.A.'s leadership and conference service. Can you tell us about when you decided to step away, why, and what that looked like for you?

"Rich": I'll see what I can do here - I'm smiling, and there's a story behind that. I had to step back because it had taken a lot of work to keep S.L.A.A. going. It was working, but there were people who tried to destroy it along the way.

It was tough. I'd been on the board for about thirteen or fourteen years, and, frankly, it was exhausting. I had to leave - not because anyone told me to, but because I decided I needed to take care of my family and other things in my life. I figured that would be the end of my involvement. I wasn't planning to come back. I'd done what I was capable of doing, and whatever happened to it after that, I hoped it would work out in a helpful way. And it did.

So around that time - call it fifteen or sixteen years in - everyone else was busy taking care of things, and I stepped back because it wasn't mine to hold onto anymore. The next time something like that came up was maybe fifteen or twenty years later, when I was contacted by people in Germany who wanted me to come over. That was amazing, because I didn't even know anyone still knew how to reach me. I'd been doing other things by then, mostly just taking care of my own life. But that was about me needing to take it easy - I was already burned out, and my family needed more of me. After that, it didn't continue on, and that was fine with me. That German group was wonderful, and it was wonderful to be part of it for those five years or so. I think it was another ten years or so after that when I got asked again.

So that's been the process for me - it's come to me, I've never tried to force it, and it doesn't happen very often. That's okay with me. I hope that's helpful to everyone here, because there's a lot of beauty in being able to help, and in doing it in a way that honors what people have done along the way. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): Thank you. So you went to Germany - and it sounds like Canada is also a wonderful experience. Our next question is: Dear Rich, will you please come visit us at the S.L.A.A. Toronto Intergroup?

"Rich": What are you having for dinner? [laughs]

Forgive me - at least I'm not getting killed; that's good. I'd give that a maybe. I still adore my wife, I adore my children, and I always wonder what's around the next corner for me, given how old I am. So, it's a maybe. That doesn't guarantee anything, but it's something I can at least look at. Remember, it's not just about doing things my way - it's about asking how old I am, and whether I like being with my wife. Yes, I do. So it's a nice thing to consider. We'll see what you put together, and if there isn't someone in me who can do whatever I'm supposed to do, someone else will come along, I promise. I'll pass.

John D. (PA): And I understand from Ari, our co-chair, that the two of you will be sharing a stage on November 7th at the New England Intergroup. So if we don't want to go to Canada, we could always go to Newton, Massachusetts.

"Rich": Yeah, Canada's a little colder, but that's alright; I'm kidding you.

John D. (PA): Since you're local to that event - what are **you** serving for dinner?

"Rich": [laughs] That's the first church, in Newton, Massachusetts. I was living there at the time. All the necessary early groundwork happened in that church. It's called the Augustine Fellowship - that's a beautiful story for another time, but S.L.A.A. came right out of that. In that church, after a long, tough stretch, people came from all over - the western United States, all around - and said, "We want this."

It worked, and that became a five-year thing. That particular church is sacred to me, and it didn't need me to make it that way - it's held a regular meeting there for a number of years now. If you find your

way to Newton, you'll find plenty. And the big event coming up on November 7th will be another celebration of the fifty years - which makes sense, since it's very close to when things actually happened, at the end of December. So it's fitting. There's a lot more to explore there.

John D. (PA): Wow - powerful. Thank you. For those of us here in Baltimore, there are flyers for that event on the back table. I was also asked to announce that the S.L.A.A. Canada conference information can be found at slaaintario.org, and for those online, the event Rich mentioned can be found at slaanei.org.

Next question: young people are drinking less these days, but love, sex, and relationship addiction seem to be showing up more than ever. For a young person, or someone from the newest generation, walking into their first S.L.A.A. meeting - what advice would you give them, from your decades of experience, strength, and hope?

"Rich": So - say a young person from the newest generation walked in. What advice would I give them? Get out of here! No, I'm kidding, I'm kidding. It's a reality - even when we started, I was in my early twenties. That's the 1950s, all of that. It can happen even earlier now, and I do see that. My reality is that I'm older, and I'm reading from a note here: to a newcomer - pay attention to what is happening. Recognize how horrible active acting-out has been. There's a lot of that around; we see it in our own children and others. It's hard to say what, exactly, creates something a person can trust. I'd say that's pretty much up in the air.

John D. (PA): As we come to the end of our time together - we have over 275 people from around the world registered for this year's IRC. It's the largest gathering in the fellowship's history at an IRC. We hope you know how much we appreciate everything you've done for us. You and I have talked before, so I know you had no idea, fifty years later, that we'd be such a growing, global fellowship. So on behalf of all of us at the IRC - in Baltimore, Maryland; Castletown, County Laois, Ireland; and virtually around the world - thank you.

Rich, we're going to ask you to stay around for our closing remarks for a bit.

"Rich": Okay. Yeah, I'll stick around.

Ari F. (NJ/CA): Thank you again so much. Hi, everyone, I'm back. Thank you, Rich. Thank you, Emily. Thank you, everyone who's here.

I was at the 2016 IRC, ten years ago, and this was something that moved me then and still moves me now - I'm getting emotional just thinking about it. Thank you to those who put this on ten years ago, because I'm just copying what they did. We're going to do a sobriety reverse countdown, starting with those who have less than 24 hours and working our way up through weeks, months, and years, all the way to fifty years.

As your amount of time is called, if you're able to, please stand; if you're attending online, please raise your virtual hand. Once you stand, please remain standing, so that by the end we have everyone standing together - from those taking their first steps today to those with fifty years of sobriety. Those with less than 24 hours, please stand or raise your hand. Up to one week. Up to 30 days. Up to 60 days. Up to 90 days. Up to 6 months. Up to 9 months. Up to one year. Up to 2 years. Up to 5 years. Up to 7 years. Up to 10 years. Up to 15 years. Up to 20 years. Up to 25 years. Up to 35 years. Up to 40 years. And, for the birth of this fellowship - up to 50 years.

[Audible applause and tears fill the room.]

John D. (PA): Thank you. You can sit down now. Once again, we're so grateful to all of you for being part of our recovery, and for letting us be part of yours.

For those of us here in Baltimore, we've arranged with the hotel for this room and floor to be available until 3 o'clock, so feel free to hang out here for fellowship and support. We'll be in touch with a feedback survey, and we'll try to do this again soon.

Would our fellows in Ireland who served on the planning team, who are in the room there, please come to the webcam and wave, if they can hear us? [The Ireland planning team waves.]

Mike, will you spotlight yourself, please? We wanted to make this accessible to anyone, regardless of their ability to pay, so we awarded a couple dozen financial aid scholarships. And we're lucky to have Mike, who handled all of the virtual room management - after something like 8,000 emails about registration and logistics. [Cheers from attendees]

Before we close, I'm going to ask everyone to stand and hold hands with your table. If you're close to another table, extend the circle to reach them too. Rich, would you lead us in the Serenity Prayer, please?

"Rich": God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Thank you.

TRANSCRIPTION NOTES:

*Portions of this transcript were edited for clarity and privacy,
at the request of and with the permission of the participants.*