

THE TWELVE STEP RAG



The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS CONCERNED ABOUT ANOTHER'S USE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR RELATED BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

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NUMBER 1

FA and Me

Thirty-seven years ago, my wife and I drove into the parking lot of a church in Levittown Long Island, NY, to meet a clergyman I had asked to bring us to a Naranon meeting. It was my first exposure to a twelve-step program. It came about because my son's behavior was completely out of control and despite all our efforts was getting worse, not better. At that time, he was sixteen and in jail accused of assaulting a police officer. I had heard the clergyman talk about his own addictions and twelve step programs at a religious retreat and was impressed enough to ask him for help. My wife and I were totally obsessed with our son and his behavior. Our lives revolved around him when we went to that first meeting.

The idea I took away from those early meetings was that I was entitled to be happy and I could not let my happiness depend on the behavior of another person no matter how close to me they might be. It was the beginning of a healing process in my life that continues to this day.

I was initially very zealous to promote Naranon, starting several new groups with my wife at first and by myself later. After a few years of being active in Naranon, we heard of Families Anonymous and to the best of my knowledge all the Naranon groups on L.I. at that time elected to affiliate with FA. While the programs seemed almost identical, we liked the FA name and the fact that it included behavioral problems since so many people are in denial that their children are abusing alcohol or other drugs but can more easily admit the behavioral problems.

So after some thirty-five years in FA what have I learned? I cannot possibly put all the things I have learned in this note but I will try to list the most important to me. That the God of my understanding loves me just the way I am and loves my children far more than I ever can or could. That this is truly a family disease that deeply affects everyone in the family and it did not start with the behavior of the son who brought me to the program (it took many years to accept this). That in the addictive family each member plays a part every time there is a crisis and continues to play that part with the same result. When one member of the family decides to get well and stops playing their part then there is hope that all members may choose to get well because the family system is suddenly out of balance and they have to adjust. That when I do for any of my children what they should do for themselves, I am not loving them but telling them in a left-handed way they cannot do it themselves but need me. That enabling is a perversion of love and seriously damages the enabled person. That this is an insidious awesome disease and denial is one of its strongest characteristics. That I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and I can't cure it. That I myself grew up in an alcoholic home and that alcoholics and other addicts can often function well in the material world but the spiritual carnage, which occurs in the family, can be devastating. That I am entitled to live a sane life and do not have to accept unacceptable behavior in my home. That addiction is not a moral issue. From the hundreds of people I have met in the program, to whom I have reached out and who have reached out to me, I have learned how to love.

To many FA members, and to me when I first started, success in the program means the person whose behavior brought them to FA decides to get well and goes on to have a normal life. By that standard, I have not had success. Two of my addicted sons have died of drug overdoses although both were in their own programs at the time, and another of my sons was killed in a car crash where the other driver was DUI. I had a lot of rage at the God of my understanding for allowing my sons to die but my arms are too short to fight with God and have come to believe that healing is still possible. The God of my understanding is not confined by time or space in providing healing. I believe the measure of success in the program is what we are doing with our own lives. That the objective of the program is to heal us enough so that we can release the one who brought us here with love. If we can do that not only are they freed but we are freed too.

I attend my weekly FA meeting without fail and am involved in many activities, which try to reach out to others. I talk to the God of my understanding a lot about my family tree and healing all the relationships in it; me and my wife, our children and grandchildren, our parents and grandparents and great grandparents. The root of that healing is forgiveness, so for me FA is truly Families anonymous and I continue to be filled with great hope.

Harry K

(Originally appeared in the May-June 2010 Rag, Hello My Name Is - Harry, Page 7.)



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This is being written in mid-December 2013, and if all went as planned between now and when you receive this issue of the Twelve Step Rag, our newly reconstructed website should be up and running! (If, as sometimes happens, we ran into schedule delays and it is not yet in production, it soon will be).

When our old site was maliciously destroyed in late August 2013, we established a Recovery Task Force (RTF), led by our vice-chair, Chris D. I challenged Chris and his team to create and implement the new site as quickly as possible. The RTF rolled their sleeves up and tackled this high priority project with intensity and dedication. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

We think you will be pleased with the “new look” and enhancements that have been made. Most of the enhancements were as a result of suggestions and comments we received from members of the fellowship. A significant part of the RTF’s task was to gather and prioritize these suggestions, and to implement as many of them as possible in this first release of the new site. A major area of improvement is our e-Store, which is the part of the site where you order FA literature. We think you will find it better organized and easier to use. We have also simplified online registration for both existing and new FA groups.

We are always interested in your feedback, so as you use the site, please forward any other comments (positive or negative), suggestions, or difficulties with the site, via email to Hank H, chair of our Internet Committee at hankh@familiesanonymous.org, or call the World Service Office.

Of course the hacking of our site placed an unexpected financial burden on the fellowship. Besides the cost of rebuilding the site, we also suffered a drop in literature sales and donations in the latter part of 2013. We assume this is a result of the unavailability of the site. We hope that with the new site up and running, both sales and donations will accelerate. If you or your group were holding off on ordering literature or making a Seventh Tradition donation while the website was unavailable, please consider proceeding as soon as possible.

More exciting news comes from our Literature Committee. A brand new booklet, “Grandparenting In Families With Addiction: A Mindful Act of Hope And Love” should be available for purchase in late January or early February 2014. Drawing on the real life experiences of fellowship members who have faced the challenge of an addicted grandchild or have grandchildren who are suffering direct or indirect consequences of another family member’s substance abuse, it provides practical guidance in dealing with dilemmas many of us have or are currently facing. I feel confident in describing it as one of the best pieces of recovery literature FA has ever produced. I think you will agree.

In closing, I’d like to remind all of our groups, intergroups, and National Service Boards that US Federal and State law, as well as our FA bylaws require that each FA group re-register annually with the World Service Office. The only exception to this rule is those groups in countries served by a National Service Board. The deadline for re-registration is April 1 of each year. If your group has not re-registered with the WSO since April 1, 2013, please do so as soon as possible. Failure to re-register by April 1 will cause your group to be removed from our meeting directories, and you will not be eligible to vote at this year’s Annual Business Meeting in May. You may re-register via our website, or via a hardcopy form. If you have any questions or need assistance in re-registering, please contact our Data Management Coordinator, Lisa H via email at dmc@familiesanonymous.org or via phone at the WSO.

In service,
George R

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Serenity

Today A Better Way
January 4th

My Truth about Fear

My personal experiences with my son have given me a new perspective and insight into his life with addiction. This new awareness of his reality occurred once I fully grieved the loss of the child of my dreams. This led to my honest acceptance which then led me back to the life I had left behind when my son's addiction began. A life of peace and serenity. A life of joy, love and purpose. It is good to be back.

I have learned that the fear I had for him was not the fear he had. He had no fear. I experienced great emotional pain when I learned he was living on the streets, under a bridge. He felt no pain, emotional or physical. I cried when I learned he was in jail. He did not shed one tear. I felt overwhelming sadness when I saw how the addiction was destroying his opportunities for a career, a loving wife, children and discovering his purpose. He experienced no such sadness over these things.

This is my son's life, not mine. I no longer pass judgement, as I have no right to judge him. I will allow him the dignity to experience his life in his way.

Perhaps this is too radical of a concept for other parents to accept but it is an understanding that keeps my codependency in check. It is what keeps me sane and focused on my own recovery.

The User's Parent
Group 1806

When I find myself in mental and emotional turmoil because of my anxieties and fears, I have the ability to put those thoughts "on hold" and shift from negative to positive thinking.

Instead of feeding my anxieties, I can foster a sense of wonder and gratitude. I can notice a beautiful sunset, watch children as they laugh and play, marvel at a bird's flight, or smell the fresh countryside after a summer rain. What beauty and serenity can be found by just observing!

When I am quiet and still, I can be in touch with my Higher Power. Knowing my God is there, I allow my fear to be replaced by faith.

TODAY I WILL work to replace anxiety and fear with gratitude and serenity.

**Be good to yourself.
Keep coming back,
and little by little,
one day at a time,
you will become
stronger,
wiser,
and more
serene.**

(TABW, December 3)

Too many of us are not living our dreams because we are living our fears. ~ Les Brown

FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

What Do I Say?

How many times are we faced with the dilemma of wanting to be caring to our loved one but we struggle with difficult phone conversations? The booklet, *What Do I Say?* (Item 1026), is a great help in figuring out what to say and when!

This guide gives hints on giving compliments, encouraging, saying no, responding instead of reacting and how to hang up calmly! It even helps to know that it OK to answer the phone, yet so much easier if you can stay calm and be prepared!

Have this handy reference by each phone so you are ready!

When you are prepared to have conversations that are constructive and seek to avoid confrontation you gain strength by working the Twelve Steps.

Order this item and share it with family members.

When you don't know what to say,
What Do I Say?
Just might save the day!

Order #1026
What Do I Say? -
\$2.25 from the WSO or the website;
famanon@familiesanonymous.org

Rag Submissions

Do you have a story to tell? We want to hear from you. Send us your poems, art, musings, questions, stories, bios or group history.
rageditor12@gmail.com

It Happened Last Friday

I've had a recent slip in my program. My hopes were up when my treatment resistant homeless son agreed to enter treatment. I became over involved with his care team; obsessed with planning his healthy new future. He relapsed. I spiraled. That piercing anxiety in my chest returned along with insomnia and fear. My husband, not my son's father, his patience worn to a shard, for the first time was afraid for our future. My co-dependency was pulsing through my veins and my heart was dripping for my son. Serenity evaporated. My response to my son's addiction was drowning me, again.

Then last Friday happened. I awoke determined to be present for the day. My husband and I were away for a planned long weekend. We went for a walk on a winter Pacific Ocean beach. With a painted azure blue sky and the waves sleepily breaking in the quiet still morning, I breathed in the ocean air. Long, deep, calming breaths. After walking hand in hand we turned into a cypress grove where 30,000 monarch butterflies were gathered for their short six week life after flying hundreds of miles from points north. Clustered on tree limbs, they protected themselves by looking like leaves. Suddenly a quick gust of wind dislodged the monarchs and the entire sunlit sky was glittering with deep orange butterfly wings. Later, a docent who had volunteered at this site for many years, her face beaming, said it was a rare display and the best she had ever seen.

Walking back through a parking lot I saw a young man. He was dirty, unshaven and shabbily dressed. Clearly, he was homeless and down and out. I surprised myself when I involuntarily called out his name. "Ethan?" He looked up, greeted me and we embraced. It was Ethan, my son's buddy mentor from his long term rehab of over three years ago in a location a thousand miles away. Ethan was the rehab superstar that all the parents bet the farm on. Ethan, dearly loved by his proud parents. Ethan, now homeless and addicted, struggling to stand proud as he extended his hand in introduction to my husband. Suddenly, randomly, there is Ethan, lost in his addiction.

And I thought, there is a higher power trying with unfathomable wisdom to get my full attention:

Look, look, look at all the wonder in this world. Look and open yourself to the beauty, the magnitude, the stillness, the unexplainable wonder that is a cypress grove ablaze with orange butterfly wings, the beauty of a still, clear morning on the Pacific Ocean. Here is Ethan, who is back living in addiction. Whose parents love him but cannot save him, just as you cannot save your son. You can save yourself. And only you can do this. Your free will gives you a choice; live in anguished fear and obsession for a life out of your control or live fully present for the only life you can control; your own. This is it; your one precious life.

I am writing this all out to remember what happened last Friday. Each day, each minute, a choice. Live in wonder or live in anguish. Either choice will not save my son, but there is a choice that will save mine.

Susan/WA

Let's talk...

Send your reflections of the
TABW, September 16th reading
to RagEditor12@gmail.com

Humor

Today A Better Way
September 16th

I often hear others say at meetings how good it is to be able to laugh again. I agree! There are many kinds of laughter. One particular kind arises from a sense of relief. Perhaps this is what first brings laughter back to our lives.

Humor keeps me on a steady and pleasant emotional course day-by-day. It helps me avoid the extremes of misdirected anger or silent self-torment.

With humor I can break through the facade of fear and fury, leaving my old grouchy, ill-humored self behind. With humor I can seek the good in any situation, keeping my wits about me and my spirits high. Humor helps me see myself in an honest and natural way.

In the Families Anonymous program I've learned to use humor rather than anger to tell someone how I feel and to remain pleasant even when I feel rejected, put down, or hurt.

Humor is rooted in humanity and humility. Good humor means smiling, exchanging jokes, and refusing to laugh at the expense of another. It is a good tool for living a useful and purposeful life, even in the presence of unsolved problems. Humor is one of life's special gifts, healing and restorative.

TODAY I WILL find something to laugh at, knowing there is more to be gained from a smile than a frown.

Topic Ideas

*Is there a topic
you would like to see
covered in the Rag?*

*Send your ideas to
RagEditor12@gmail.com*

Please note that effective immediately,
the Meeting Without Walls Forum site
is now being hosted at the following address:
<http://tabw2.fr.yuku.com/>

Emeeting: www.tabw.org



FA World Convention, A NEW WAY...A NEW LIFE, May 30-June 1, 2014 in Chicago

The FA World Convention 2014, *A New Way...A New Life*, will be held in Chicago, IL May 30-June 1, 2014. The Chicagoland FA group has planned an exceptional experience just for you.

You will hear notable and knowledgeable, keynote speakers and presenters. Featuring: Dr. Rami Shapiro, author of *The Sacred Art of Loving Kindness*, Jeffrey Mangram from the Hazelden Foundation and workshops from your fellow FA members.

There will also be fellowship and fun with a Friday night Meet and Greet and Saturday night entertainment.

Visit the FA website and click on "*Latest News*" for convention updates, information and forms.

Chicago – O’Hare/Rosemont Embassy Suites

5500 N. River Rd., Rosemont, IL 60018
847-292-3531 or 800-362-2779
www.embassyohare.com

- > Free Shuttle To/From Chicago O’Hare Airport
- > Easy Access To Downtown Chicago Attractions
- > Discounted Convention Room Rates Available (if reserved by May 5) for the nights of 5/27 through 6/3:
King Suite \$105 + tax, Suite w/2 Double beds \$120 + tax.

For Hotel Reservations please call Embassy Suites 800-362-2779 by May 5. Please be sure to mention Families Anonymous World Convention when making reservations (so FA receives credit toward convention rooms) Hotel room rate includes daily, cooked-to-order breakfast in Atrium Breakfast available Sat. & Sun. for those not staying in hotel @ \$12 per day.

Registration fee is \$140 until April 30 \$150 after April 30

Registration includes Friday night “Meet and Greet,” Saturday lunch and dinner, and all workshops and speakers on Saturday and Sunday.

For convention details as well as a downloadable flyer and registration form, visit the Families Anonymous website and click on “Latest News.”

SUPPORT THE 2014 CONVENTION

RAFFLE TICKETS

Tickets help pay for the convention itself. You can attend and/or be a part of the convention by purchasing raffle tickets. Be a prize winner at home, if you can’t come. Win a prize of \$150, \$100, or \$50. Your group secretary has raffle tickets—also available online.

SILENT AUCTION

These items also help pay for your convention. This is a fun contest. Members bid against each other by silently signing a list attached to an item and raising the price before the auction closes. Want to donate an item for this auction? Ask your group secretary for a donation sheet with directions. Or download one from the FA website.

Any questions can be sent to: 2014.fa.convention@gmail.com

DONATIONS

Please make donations by check to:
Families Anonymous Chicagoland
Attn: 2014 World Convention
701 Lee St. Suite 670
Des Plaines, IL 60016

2014 FA CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORMS

Ask your group secretary for a copy or download one from the FA website by clicking on “*Latest News*”

Spend time with people who care and learn more about recovery from the speakers and presenters

**LET’S ALL DISCOVER
A NEW WAY... A NEW LIFE!**



The Sponsorship

Mail Bag



A Debt of Gratitude to My Sponsors

Sometimes I tell the group that FA saved my life. And I think it did. I was drowning in pain, desperation and helplessness. Throughout the first year I was trying to learn FA's principals. I attended meetings, read the literature, started on the Steps and shared in group. Eventually, I got better and could even laugh again.

Then I realized there was one thing missing, a sponsor. I asked myself, if something bad would happen, who would I call? There were two people who came to mind. One had over 25 years in FA; spunky, and funny. The other had over 10 years; calm, and serene. Both were intelligent and freely shared their experiences. One day I asked them, "Can you have two sponsors?" They said, "Sure," and both accepted me.

Around 5 months later, I desperately needed help and I couldn't wait for a meeting. I called one sponsor, no answer. So I called the other. She answered and agreed to meet me at a coffee house. Right after we got our drinks and sat down, I saw my other sponsor walking in. It just had to be a "Higher Power thing" and although I felt she might have had other plans, she sat down with us. After we all talked, the weight was lifted off my shoulders, the clouds were gone and I could breathe again. That's what a sponsor can do for you.

I thank them for their patience, love and understanding, but much more for sharing their time and experiences. I feel like I'm in the Ya-Ya Sisterhood. Make that the Fa-Fa Sisterhood. Thank you Ellen and Mary Jo, you are the best!

Karen in Indiana

We want to hear from you. Please send your questions or experiences regarding sponsorship or step work to the Sponsorship Committee at sp@familiesanonymous.org.

Note to Self:

In this program we are not suppose to give each other advice, tell each other what to do or be preachy. BUT that doesn't mean we can't preach to ourselves.

So, let's do just that.

What new revelation have you learned that you haven't acted on yet? What new tool have you added to your FA toolbox that you haven't used yet? What do you need to do for yourself that will make today a better day?

Send your notes to: rageditor12@gmail.com

do
one
thing
every
day
that
makes
you

happy

Memorial Donations



In Memory of
Marc C
son of longtime members
Bev and Vinnie C
by
Group 1187
Bloomfield, CT



In Memory of
Marc C
son of Beverlee C
by
Group 1345
Marlton, NJ



In Memory of
James R
son of Anne H
by
Group 1768
Alpharetta, GA

Hello from New Jersey

Our group has been in existence for seven years now. The group has grown so much. It is a blessing that people can find a place to be heard and understood. In keeping with the Seventh Tradition and the Twelfth Step, we asked our members to make a dedicated donation to the Families Anonymous World Service Office. This donation is in honor of past, present and future members of Group 1753 of Mahwah/Ramsey, New Jersey.

We collected 20 checks totaling \$2075.00. We are sure that this will help to spread the word about the wonderful things FA can do. Sincerely,

Richard and Barbara S
Group 1735
Mahwah/Ramsey, NJ

What FA Means to Me

I first went to an FA meeting as an “evening out.” Never did I expect to experience what I did. My purpose in writing this is to share this experience. This is not a sales pitch but rather a heartfelt story of why I find FA to be such a special, unique group. I’ve never encountered a group like it before. The people are so caring and understanding and nonjudgmental. What started out as an “evening out” has continued and I’m still “going out” five years later. I almost never miss a Wednesday night meeting for I attend religiously.

In the beginning, there were about ten people. The group has grown and on any given night there can be upwards of forty people. There is a core group of about twenty people who come regularly. Something wonderful must be going on at these meetings because people keep coming back. There is a lot of recovery in the group. Not only have the members of the group found peace, tranquility and a better life, but many of our loved ones are in recovery. We also get the opportunity to have our loved ones who are in recovery come to speak and share their story. It is so inspiring and gives us all hope. We see firsthand the results of a commitment to a program and it’s not all gloom and doom.

What I learned at these meetings is priceless for we share our stories and offer our wisdom and knowledge. I embraced the program and was a good student. I listened and didn’t try to reinvent the wheel. If it worked for others, I thought, then it will work for me. I wanted what others had successfully attained through the program. Our outside friends don’t understand and offer advice, but they have no real understanding about drug abuse, addicts and people with emotional problems. At our meetings, we learn from each other and share our experiences along with the readings from the book. Many times when I listen to the stories “I feel like my lips are moving” for the stories are so similar but the characters are different. There is so much empathy and sympathy in the group. Over the years what started out as an “evening out” has become my second family. We have bonded and look forward each week to our meetings. The camaraderie is so strong that many of us socialize on the outside. When new members come they are at first taken aback because we find humor and often laugh, which we couldn’t do before we came to these meetings. When we first enter the room we are broken, depressed and hopeless; but over time we are rejuvenated and find hope.

So for me, and for many in the group, I found that “out of bad” came so much good. My daughters are in recovery and my husband and I have found peace and tranquility and a better way to live. I also found a second family---a place where I can say anything and no one will be judging me. I keep coming for many reasons and one is to give back and help the newcomers by sharing my inspirational story. None of what has transformed my life could have happened without this special FA group.

Susan A

Why Me?

One day a wise king learned of a horrible tragedy that had befallen some of his people who lived in a village on the outskirts of his kingdom. He gathered his loyal subjects and said, “I need some volunteers to carry a message of hope to some people whose lives have been touched by a horrible tragedy.” Several people stepped forward. Then the king added, “There is one thing. In order for you to relate to the people you are trying to help, in order for them to believe your message, you will have to suffer the same tragedy that they have suffered.” One by one, the people who had stepped forward, took a step back and soon there were no volunteers left.

The next day, the king summoned his most trusted and beloved subjects. He chose those with the biggest hearts and broadest shoulders and he sent them on a journey. They had no idea that their mission was to spread that very same message of hope. The king knew that this journey would change the lives of these people forever. But he also knew that if anyone could succeed, these people would.

Along the way, each of the people in the group suffered a horrible tragedy. Yet somehow they persevered, somehow they survived, and somehow they found a way to their destination. When they arrived, they celebrated their accomplishments and celebrated their lives. Despite their tragedy they found a way to live, a way to hope and a way to love. And when the other people in the village saw how they were able to cope with their tragedy, they began to look at life differently. They began to see the beauty around them and what was possible.

Sometimes when our lives take a turn for the worse we ask ourselves what we did wrong. We wonder if this is a punishment. We ask, “Why me?”

Well, maybe, we don’t always get to choose our path. Maybe, just maybe, there are times when our path is chosen for us; not because we are the worst people but because we are the best; not because we are the most hated but because we are the most loved; not because we are the most likely to fail but because we are the most likely to succeed.

I know that you have all sacrificed a great deal to be here for me. To all of my FA friends and especially to the Families Anonymous group in Palos Heights, Illinois, thank you for making the journey. You truly have changed my life.

Bob M

Today A Better Way: Volume Two

Send submissions to: newtabw@gmail.com