

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

VOLUME XLIV

May-June 2015

NUMBER 3

PEACE

When I think of peace I tend to think of “peacefulness.” I am not sure if there’s a difference. The July 3rd reading from the TABW titled Strength, says peace comes from within. I believe that, but when life is chaotic and unmanageable I need to grab on to a lifeline that will let me find peace outside myself. Some things that help me arrive at peace is letting my mind wander in an open and searching way. I begin an “out loud self-talk.” I listen to myself and hear bits of wisdom. Little “aha” moments arise, and when they do, I stop and dwell on the thought. I can relax into it and feel myself exhaling with relief.

To be at peace is one of the most greatly desired things in this world. This desire motivates people to risk many things including their lives. When I saw on the news the boatloads of people from Syria, Libya, Egypt and other war torn countries, trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, it hit me how precious and important peace is to all people. Without it in my life, I would be in a constant state of stress.

Deep breathing, exercise, prayer, and quiet time, all contribute to finding peace within. The realization that I am not the only problem solver in the room has allowed me to step back, let go, and let someone else handle the emotions of a situation. Even though peace comes from within, I need the outside help from trusted friends and my FA group to acquire the inside peace.

Peace is an embracing of life the way it is. It is accepting who I am and not being angry with myself because I think I come up short in terms of successes in my life. Not to be angry because I made poor decisions in my life and poor decisions as a mother of an addict. The self-loathing doesn’t allow the heart to open and embrace calm. Instead, it keeps me stirred up, agitated, and not able to gracefully accept who I am and just as importantly, where I’ve been.

The past carries too much weight and takes up too much space in my mind. I am slowly letting bits and pieces go, including resentments and shame. Once I clean them out of my life, just like a messy closet, there will be more room for new fresh stuff. Stuff I need now, in the present. Peace is one of those things.

My daughter, Claire, came by one night and we sat and talked. I didn’t lecture; I just asked her questions about her life and her lifestyle. It was sad for me to hear about her desperate, do-nothing life. I could only tell her I love her and hope she finds a better life for herself, soon. She has no desire at this time to seek recovery. She is deep into a self-destructive life and no one, including myself, can talk her out of it. These are the times peace is most difficult for me. I feel smug that I am able to have a happy life: to be able to go about my daily activities with no responsibility for her or her situation. I

certainly don’t feel responsible for my other children’s lives and choices, so I need to come to terms with the guilt I feel in relation to Claire. The guilt is a barrier to peace. It has to go.

Striving for peace in my life has become almost a full time job over the years. I don’t equate lack of troubles with peace. I think true peace can find a home in my heart even when I do have troubles. Peace is like a light. It keeps me attached to hope, grounded in the real world, and quiet enough to appreciate what my life includes; grandchildren, a loving husband, children, terrific friends, and FA. The inclusion of this horrible, insidious disease of addiction has not distanced me from life but has brought me closer to an understanding of the unthinkable desperation in an addict’s life. I am able to separate the disease from the person and continue to love and cherish my daughter despite the madness and craziness that surrounds her.

Helen C, Group 777

*Inner peace begins
the moment you choose
not to allow
another person or event
to control your emotions.
-Pema Chodron*

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Note from Louisville, Group 1989

We are writing to show our appreciation to the FA World Service Office for their help in starting our new group #1989 in Louisville, KY. We meet at 6:00 PM on Monday evenings at Christ Church United Methodist, 4614 Brownsboro Road, Louisville, KY, 40207. Contact us by phone at 502-386-1648, or by email at faccum@twc.com.

Founding members Gary K., Ann K., Jennie W. & Steve K. would like to also extend our thanks to Christ Church United Methodist for so graciously providing a wonderful venue for our meetings. We have all been attending the St. Michaels group on Thursday nights and have watched it grow in number over the past year. Unfortunately, the need for help here in the Louisville area is huge. Given the number of people and the space available, it became evident that a second Louisville group would be beneficial. Sharon H. from the St. Michael's group was wonderful in providing advice and help with procuring literature for our first meeting.

Those of us who initiated the group happen to all be parents of addicts. We represent various situations and are at different places in our journey, which appears to be typical for an FA group.

We are happy to announce that we had our inaugural meeting on Monday, November 10th. Several people from the St. Michael's group joined us, in addition to a newcomer. All totaled, there were 15 people in attendance, and our discussion centered on the "3 C's". The meeting was a good beginning for our newly formed group, and it is our hope that we will be able to continue to extend the extraordinary support, comfort and fellowship to others that we ourselves are experiencing through Families Anonymous.

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Published six times a year by
Families Anonymous, Inc.
701 Lee St, Suite 670
Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508

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*Your story
matters -
tell it.*

Topic Ideas

*Is there a topic
you would like to see
covered in the Rag?
Send your ideas to
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Let's talk...

Have you ever thought about the ways our pets also experience losses with a loved one in addiction? Send your reflections to:
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&

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Life's Journey: CFH

As I try to analyze my inner feelings, these three emotions stand out: confusion, frustration and helplessness. I call it the CFH

Since kindergarten age, my stepson Mark, now 51, has exhibited defiance, excitability, confusion, lack of responsibility, and short-tempered behaviors. My wife was distraught, and didn't know which way to turn for help and guidance.

She finally contacted UCLA's NPI (Neuro-Psychiatric Institute). They diagnosed him as manic depressive and treated him with Lithium as an in-patient from age 13 to 14. My wife thought he was finally cured of his mental/emotional condition, thanks to the Lithium. She was confused.

Then, at age 16, he began experimenting with drugs of all kinds. Aside from the chaos he has caused his mother and me, it became apparent he was wasting away his life. He was making poor life choices. The combination of using experimental drugs, dealing drugs, stealing cars, and his mental instability, has resulted in him being incarcerated intermittently for about 22 years.

For the past five years, thank God, he has been out of prison, but continues to display oppositional behavior. He needs psychiatric counseling, but he refuses or delays medical assistance. Both of us are having a problem getting him to seek help, and from time to time, I feel frustrated and helpless.

Admittedly, he has lived a "roller coaster" existence most of his life. First he lived in California, then relocated for a few years to Oregon, then he moved to Alaska, followed by four years in Arizona, and now he has been "adopted" by an elderly gentleman and the man's step-daughter, and is currently staying with them in Sacramento, California, sleeping in their garage.

My "CFH" these past 25 years has been very difficult to live with, but FA-- after attending meetings for these past seven years-- has taught me a very important lesson. I cannot change my stepson. I can love him, but cannot change him. I can only change myself. And I have. My confusion, frustration, and helplessness are no longer an issue. My Higher Power is there for me.

Thank you, FA; I will keep "coming back."

James G, Group 124, Northridge, CA

My FA Program

I have been a member of FA for about eight years. Although I haven't been a regular attendee of my meetings, I read TABW as part of my daily practice. I attended my first meeting in November of 2006. My daughter had been exhibiting erratic behaviors, using drugs, and had become the child I no longer knew. I picked up a flyer at an outpatient clinic and decided that I had nothing to lose. These compassionate, understanding and nonjudgmental people were my saving grace. I attended weekly meetings, called my sponsor regularly, and used my toolbox of readings and literature to get through each day. There were numerous ups and downs and I realized that only these friends understood what my life was like.

I continue to work the program in my professional and personal life. I have encouraged others to give the meetings a try, and pass on my positive experiences to others. The most important lesson I learned was to allow your loved one to experience pain and disappointment even though it may tear at your heart. I am so happy to report that my daughter has been in recovery for two years. She is a registered nurse working full time and is pursuing her bachelor's degree in nursing. She has made her amends to her father and me, and continues to blossom into a mature and responsible adult. I could not be more grateful.

My FA program has come into play over the last several months as I began looking into assisted living facilities for my parents. With my mother in the early stages of Alzheimer's and my father trying to take care of her, I had convinced them to live near my family. I would be able to check on them and know that they were well cared for and safe. But, after a short time, my father decided they were not going to stay and were moving back to Florida. My first reaction was anger and resentment. I worked so hard researching and visiting facilities, shopping for furniture, meeting with the directors to sign paperwork, and now they are giving it all up for a life that I do not feel is in their best interest. This became very stressful and began to affect my family relationships as well.

After a couple of days, I resigned myself to the fact that as in Step One I am powerless over other people's lives and I cannot control others or their choices. I agreed to support my father's decision and took myself out of the equation. Wow, what a relief! I can still talk to them daily; encourage them to get help at home through a healthcare agency, and have peace that this may be the way it needed to be.

Whether you have family, personal, or working situations that require you to practice one of the twelve steps, don't be afraid to call another member, pick up a piece of literature, and read your TABW. You will have peace and comfort knowing you did what you could and the rest is up to them.

With Peace and Serenity
Bonnie C.

Sometimes we expect more from others
because we would be willing
to do that much for them.

REFLECTION – STEP 3

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

I am a Pittsburgh Pirates fan. On many a Sunday during my childhood, our extended family would make the long trek to Pittsburgh to watch the likes of Bill Mazaroski and Roberto Clemente as they sent the ball sailing over the wall of Forbes Field. During the week, as she watched her new 26" black and white TV, my Aunt Flo would pray to God that the next Bucco up to bat would hit the home run that would win the game for our side. "Look," she would exclaim as the batter approached the plate, "he's blessing himself. God will take care of him. God is on our side." For over 50 years I have cheered my team on through their ups and mostly downs.

I have no control over the Pittsburgh Pirates. I can't make sure they practice hard and get to the game on time. I live too far away to attend more than one game a year. When I'm at home, the best I can do is turn on their game on the rare occasion that it is on the TV schedule. It really doesn't make any practical sense to root, to have a happy ending expectation, for something over which I have no control. And yet, I remain loyal, even though the Pirates have been in the basement for many of the years that I call myself a fan.

I am also a Gregory fan. Gregory is the son who brought me to Families Anonymous. For over five years, I have rooted for the home team as he has had his ups and downs in his struggle with addiction. I have no control over Gregory's choices. The best thing I can do (and really all I should be doing, though I don't always succeed at this objective) is to let him know I love him and I'm on his side. I have to keep in mind, though, that while my aunt was praying for the Pirates to win, another aunt on the opposing team's side was praying for her team to win. God does not choose sides. Turning my life over to the care of God does not necessarily mean a happy ending for my son, but it does mean a happy ending for me. It really just means that I can relax—worrying and obsessing about an outcome will make no difference. The ending to the game is out of my hands and in God's hands.

The Pirates have been having somewhat of a comeback. They even made the playoffs this past season. Let's go Bucs!

Monica
Bloomfield, CT Group 1187

IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT

I find myself feeling discouraged again, because our Families Anonymous group has dwindled.

My phone calls to members mostly result in my leaving messages on voice mail. When my call is answered, I'm told that either they are coming back (they usually don't), or that life is going well. Why is it that people think if their loved one is doing well, there is no need to come back? The most important thing I have learned (in over 25 years in fellowship) is that I have to be alright no matter what else is going on in others' lives. My recovery is my own; their recovery is up to them.

Over the years, people have shared with me that they cannot continue to come to meetings because there are so few people attending with whom to share. Often, there are people who are coming from a great distance, as there are very few meetings in our state. I can certainly understand where they are coming from, and I still try to encourage them because, for me, even if I sit here in a meeting room all alone, doing the readings, I am helped in working my own program. It's not ideal but I have to remember, "It works if you work it."

I have found that all of the readings in TODAY A BETTER WAY are very inspirational. December 3rd is particularly helpful and supportive for me. It says, "Be good to yourself. Keep coming back, and little-by-little, one day at a time, you will become stronger, wiser, and more serene."

The 12th Step reminds me that it's important to "hang in there," don't get discouraged, and continue to be grateful for all I have learned in this incredible program. Thank you Families Anonymous for showing me a better way and showing me that I can "live comfortably, in spite of unsolved problems." I can continue to invite others to come to meetings, but I cannot force them to come, anymore than I can solve the problems of my loved ones for them.

Judy D. Group 788

New Column for 2015

Calling all members !

Please share what you do for yourselves to cope with and enjoy life.

Is it photography? Yoga?
Jewelry design? How about
animal refuge? Pottery?
Needlepoint? Writing?



Share what you do. How it has helped you. And be sure to send in photos of your work.

Submissions or questions
can be sent to:

RagEditor12@gmail.com

Boundaries

I had a private email from a friend asking about boundaries. I decided to share what I wrote in my response in case it might be helpful to someone else. Not that I'm an expert, or even good at it, but maybe my experience will be helpful to someone else.

I have strong feelings about boundaries. :-)

Boundaries are not rules. Rules are there to control or limit behavior.

Speed limits are rules to get us to drive at an appropriate speed. Traffic laws are rules to get us to stop on red, go on green, etc. In the home, bedtimes are rules -- everyone has a bedtime, but not everyone has the same bedtime. Everyone has chores to do. If you do them there are rewards; if you don't there are consequences. All those are examples of rules -- they are there to control behavior and they operate based on mutual agreement, rewards and punishments.

Boundaries, on the other hand, are guidelines for me. They define how I will act and react. One of my serious issues is wanting to control every outcome, making MY opinion the ONLY opinion, etc. (I'm sure no other co-de has this problem...) So boundaries can help me modulate my behavior. They can help me get to a place of safety and peace, regardless of what else is going on around me.

So here are boundaries I've set:

1. My adult children may not live at home. Period. If they do, it only leads to trouble because I know I will be in their business too much. I would rather pay for them to live somewhere else than live in my home. (And I do this for my s/a.) My kids can visit whenever they like; they are always welcome, but they cannot live at home.

2. No illegal activity in my home. If I observe it, I will first ask the offender to stop, then call the police. I cannot force the offender to stop, but I can call the police and let them do their job. Fortunately I've never had to test this boundary. Actually, that's not true. Before my son got psychiatric treatment, he was physically abusive to me. His delusion was that I was harming or going to harm his little sister and he had to protect her from me). When he would not leave my home, I called the police. As soon as I began talking to the 911 operator, he left. It wasn't exactly illegal activity, I guess, but it clearly was something I could not tolerate.

3. I will not butt in where I'm not invited. I will not offer solutions to problems for which I have not been asked advice. This boundary is to protect my family members. If I do observe an issue, I will try to engage my family member in a conversation to see if I can be of help. But if no help is requested, I don't offer it. I don't force myself in when the issue isn't mine. (This is perhaps my hardest boundary to keep.) If I'm in a disagreement and I feel I'm losing my cool, I will walk away -- again, to protect others, and to preserve my own peace.

I don't have many more than three boundaries. Too many, and I can't keep track, and so I don't mind them.

Paul B

FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

To The Newcomer

Not sure where to turn for help about substance abuse in the family?

Who can assist you?
Where to obtain some comfort and understanding?

Any or all of these questions are quite familiar and there is a place where you can obtain answers to these questions. In Families Anonymous (FA), you can meet other individuals who know what you are going through, which in itself, can lead to comfort and a start on your journey to a better life.

We have all "been there" and have sought a level of comfort. For many of us, the answer was to attend a local Family Anonymous meeting (or better yet, attend at least six!) to find out if these meetings can help to provide you with a more serene and enjoyable life.

How to start your journey? - Start with reading the Families Anonymous' To The Newcomer letter and find out if this is the path for you.

Order #6001
To The Newcomer -
\$.20, from the WSO website;
famanon@familiesanonymous.org

"I think knowing what you cannot do is more important than knowing what you can."
- Lucille Ball



THE BULLETIN BOARD

Almost thirty years ago, I saw a flyer on the bulletin board of the public library where we lived at the time. I had been concerned about one of our three sons and what he was “up to” as a teenager. I had attended a few meetings of another 12 step fellowship, but when I saw the FA flyer, it sounded like something for me. The top line of the flyer caught my attention immediately!!

“IF SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT HAS A DRUG, ALCOHOL AND/OR BEHAVIORAL PROBLEM, (MAYBE ALL OF THEM—MY WORDS) CAN YOU SEE WHAT IT’S DOING TO YOU?”

Well, that sounded like just what I needed, and for selfish reasons, I decided it was perfect for me because we lived very close to the school where the meetings were held at that time. My husband Jack and I were in disagreement that there even WAS a problem. What he believed was normal experimentation, I thought was more than that, and concern for this particular son had really taken over my thoughts almost, looking back, to the point of OBSESSION!

I was desperate! I knew I needed to talk where I felt safe and supported, and after a few meetings, I realized that I needed help as much as my son. The third step states----

CAME TO BELIEVE THAT A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES COULD RESTORE US TO SANITY.

Somehow I knew that I had become INSANE and that I had basically no control over the situation; I needed to find my way back from all the worrying as I had lost myself and my OWN life in the process. Plus—we had three other children who had their own trials and tribulations; I felt guilty because I was neglecting them and their needs—at least the ones in which I could be of help. I wasn’t really present to them—even to just listen. I remember Jack saying one day, “Why is it always about him? There are others, you know.” Another time he said, half jokingly, “Why are you yelling at me? I may be your only friend!” Insanity was tough to realize and admit, and yet, it was true and, deep down, I knew it.

Finding FA and attending meetings was definitely one of the most important decisions I’ve ever made, and I just wish more people would give it a try and “keep coming back,” as we say. Also that it “works if you work it.” We are entitled to our own recovery and to feel safe to share our concerns while working to bring the focus back onto ourselves. That was a tough one, and it was comforting to know that I wasn’t alone. Maybe situations are different, but we were (and ARE) struggling and basically in this together.

Judy D., Group 788

SPECIAL THANKS

FA would like to give a special thanks to the New Jersey groups and the 2015 Convention Committee for all their hard work.

We are truly grateful.

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a founding member
of Group 124
Northridge, CA



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grandson of Adrienne C
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Group 468
East Rockaway, NY



In Honor of
Kitty P
We will miss your
contribution to the board
and your shared recovery
to our group.
by
Group 124
Northridge, CA

Convention Tidbits

Hard to believe it was just a week ago that I was in my home state of New Jersey finishing lunch and on my way to my third of four workshops at the FA convention. This was my fourth convention...each one with a little different flavor, but all leaving me recharged and coming home with many things to think about.

It was evident the NJ planning committees put a lot of work and thought into this conference. Some of the highlights for me were: The Friday night mixer where we got to greet old friends and meet new ones. One activity involved dividing into groups by state followed by charades, where we acted out what our state is famous for. I was the only one from South Carolina and was joined by e-meeting member, "Willing to Learn" from the UK, so we stood on the sign marked "other" and were joined by a NJ participant who took pity on our small number. "Willing" was a delight to get to know and she jumped into the activities with enthusiasm!

Saturday, after a "robust" breakfast buffet, I attended the estate planning workshop. This is a subject I was especially interested in. My brother will serve as executor, and recently reminded me that our will is over 20 years old. The delay is partly because our attorney retired, but mostly about how to handle the situation with my homeless son. Since he has made no progress over the years and is getting on in years himself, I have come to believe that his most likely chance for a "normal" life might be through an inheritance. This might take the form of payments on a place to live and things like that rather than a lump sum. But should our responsible daughter be handled differently? These are things I need to study further.

The second workshop was really excellent. It was primarily about addiction, the brain, and the science behind it. One thing I came away with was it takes four months for a new thought or habit to become a permanent pathway in our brain. This is true for both positive and negative thoughts and behaviors. That is why, even after rehab, the work of change and recovery is just beginning for the addict, she explained. On a personal level, I will use this knowledge to be patient as I try to change the negative to positive.

After lunch, two brothers both spoke about their recovery (bless their parents!) and now run a recovery house for addicts. One thing they said stuck with me, "You can bask in the problem, or bask in the solution."

In the afternoon, I attended a workshop by Sandy Swenson, "The Joey Song! I Did Not Cause My Child to Become an Addict." She has written a book about her experiences and also has an active blog. I was interested in what she had to say because, like me, she has decided to distance herself from her son's situation for her own sake. Her writings are something I will check out further, I think.

After the dinner we had a speaker, Gary Mendell, who spoke movingly about his son's addiction and suicide. He has put his sorrow into action, forming an organization to bring the problem of addiction out in the open and encourage further research.

Later there was a DJ and dancing. It about killed me, but let's just say I was very active. Every time I'd stop to catch my breath, I was urged back on the floor. It was great fun and an endurance test for me!

At the closing ceremony we were to list three things we would like to change about ourselves and place the notes in a box. We then formed a circle and each person made a short statement of gratitude. I noticed the ceremony seemed especially meaningful to some of the Dads. I can't know, but perhaps with all the support in the room, they were feeling it was O.K. to love their sons and daughters and express that. Just my thought.

After the convention concluded, a few of us went to a real New Jersey deli for lunch. Great sandwiches and a real kosher dill pickle!

Judith H., e-meeting

Convention Reflection

Just arriving home after a great weekend. A bit of stormy weather had delays yesterday and today at the airport. Arriving in NJ was exciting and fun for me. I had spent time there about 45 years ago as a teenager meeting up with friends.

Tom J and I were late arrivals but got in just in time to join in a very large FA meeting. The message was "Don't worry, Be happy." I was reflecting on those early days when I doubted whether I would ever know happiness again. Today, no matter what is going on, there are so many reasons to be happy. It was such fun finding the TABW e-meeting friends and also to meet others. I agree with others that the convention was well planned and everything seemed just right. We had the choice of attending four workshops on Saturday and they were well done. My favorite was Yoga and the 12 Steps and also the Journaling class.

We had wonderful Keynote speakers and my favorites were two brothers both in long term recovery from addiction. They were funny and deeply sincere. They give of themselves so that others can understand the pain of what an addict feels. They also spoke of how important it was to have the continued love from their family. They both know they are "miracles" and they are grateful for their own recovery.

I cannot express how worthwhile the FA conventions are and would encourage all of you to attend if/when you can. We did a little dancing after a lovely meal on Saturday, and also had our own Marc M. share in his gift as a hypnotist. I was one of the lucky ones to be under his spell! It was a fun night, and as he promised, I had an amazing, restful sleep.

Thanks to all the NJ groups who worked to make the convention a success and also to those from NJ and NY who attended and shared themselves with all of us. It was so much fun to be with all of my Family from this group.

Maggie

Strength

July 3rd Reading

Today A Better Way

On days when I feel I have little strength, I pray for help. I want someone or something to assist me in dealing with my pain, fear, and emptiness.

As I pray, the strength does come. I don't know where it comes from. I only know that I sense a Higher Power, and whatever that power is, it gives me the courage to go on. I entrust myself to that power as I begin to take action or make decisions.

The person whose disease brought me to the Families Anonymous program will have to find strength on his own. Each of finds this power alone, but finding it is truly a miracle.

The power is within me, outside me, and everywhere I look. The strength it brings is also within me, outside me, and all around.

***TODAY I WILL** face life with strength found through prayer.*

Having A Destination

December 31st

Today A Better Way

Have you ever had the disturbing experience of being lost on a back road? Each chuckhole seems like an abyss. Every bend in the road seems to harbor unimaginable dangers. One mile seems like five, and ten minutes seem like hours.

Yet when you retrace your tracks on this very same road, everything looks different. The big rocks are only pebbles, the shadows contain no dangers, you get back in half the time it took to get there, and it feels like downhill all the way.

My experience in recovery has been like this. When I was following my son down the unknown road of addictive living, I did not know the outcome and was unable to find my way to a safe destination. Under those circumstances, life was scary and fraught with danger.

When I made my way to Families Anonymous, I found a tried and true map, the Twelve Steps, and many reliable guides in the group who have been through the territory before me. No longer trying to make my way alone down frightening back roads, I could relax and trust my Higher Power to prepare a way that would take me just where I needed to go.

Once we have committed ourselves to the process of recovery, regardless of our addict's choices, our road will lead to serenity and sanity.

***TODAY I WILL** keep to the high road of recovery, relying on my Higher Power, the Twelve Steps, and my FA group to guide me safely home.*



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