

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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HOLIDAY REFLECTIONS

The holidays are upon us. It's funny and not in an "haha" way, that this tension comes around every year, whether it is Thanksgiving, Christmas and Mother's Day...yet the rawness of it all seems to rear its head every single time.

I remember last year's holidays we were blessed to spend it with our son. It had been 10 years since we had been able to celebrate it together. We had a great time sitting on the beach with a picnic box - the beach was pretty deserted since most folks were sitting around a traditional table for their turkey. It was a beautiful day and we were so grateful for that moment in time.

I had hoped that this was going to be an ongoing thing - but I guess a different scenario is to be taking place.

As I'm writing this I recall a conversation I had with an FA friend about happiness and joy. By working our program, we are able to experience joy in spite of the disappointments, sorrow and sadness. Because, after all, there is much to be grateful for.

I'm saddened for my son's difficult life but I need to pay attention to the good things taking place in my own.
France/FL

Each year I admit to momentary feelings of sadness and joy... pleasure in the recalling...pain in the wishing to go back in time... to take a better "picture" for my memory bank.

I can understand that all memories for some are often better not remembered.

Maybe it was being a little person or my children being little people; full of joy, scanning the Sears Wish Book. The time flew by while we lived our lives...some with struggles, others not.

All of us here have been stung by addiction. Time has helped. We found new joys, new tomorrows. The recovery road is strung with obstacles for us and for our addicted loved ones. It is O.K. to shed a tear. We are, after all, human. We do not erase the lives we have led, but rather use all we have learned and seen to have a more fulfilling life. One single day at a time. Be grateful and hopeful. I must believe in God's decisions for me.

Cookie

The Families Anonymous program really helped me enjoy the holidays these past two years while my daughter has been many states away. It was tough for my wife to see the missing place at the large and boisterous table. My daughter was in extended care two Thanksgivings ago and relapse treatment this last Thanksgiving, and I was, each time, mightily glad that she was where she needed to be.

And then the holiday music starts, with a number of devastating songs about absent loved ones. But the holidays have a strong spiritual component for me, and I see the hand of my Higher Power at work. I let the mooning about go and am grateful for the presence and health of those around me, and grateful that my addicted loved one is willing to keep fighting.

So I'm able to enjoy the holidays and share with those around me, mostly with my immediate, incomplete family. But what gets me and what threatens my serenity is the way, over the years, alcohol has seeped into so many celebrations. No matter the spirit at the outset, no matter how festive the trimmings, by the close it comes to seem to me to be a pretext for heavy drinking.

The wounds in me haven't yet closed, there's more work for me to do. So for now, I don't focus on the larger gatherings and don't envision my daughter in Dickensian misery over the holidays. More than before, I see and appreciate the spiritual aspects of the holidays and the opportunity to practice gratitude.

Mark McP

Like many of us, I have sweet memories of my childhood holidays. Today, my son, age 26, does not like to be in groups and will not come to family get-togethers. I have accepted that as his issue and I must accept his boundary and make my own holiday.

For turkey day I have volunteered and then had a dinner with some family and friends. My family is very small so it is not much work. I try to make new traditions. Do something and enjoy it.

Life is short and we need to stop and smell the turkey.
Swan

(Continues on page 5)

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Susie Serenity

Holidays

Each year as the holidays approach I feel just a bit apprehensive. It brings back memories of past holidays when the holidays were not happy ones. By definition, holidays are a time for celebration. During the dark days of drug and alcohol abuse, celebrate she did by drinking and drugging more than usual. Instead of the closeness normally associated with holidays, there was sadness and fear and the recognition that my daughter's life was in constant danger from her using and that our family was becoming more and more dysfunctional.

It was in December 1979, that I found hope when I went to my first FA meeting. That holiday season was the beginning of my recovery and search for serenity. Not only has my daughter become a delightful, successful person, but I have found serenity as a result of continuing to actively work my Twelve Step program. I don't have unrealistic expectations that the 2003 holidays will be perfect, but I know I can and will be as happy as I choose to be and will enjoy them and feel blessed. What a difference FA has made in my attitude toward holiday celebrations!

It is wonderful to receive useful and beautiful gifts and to appreciate the love the giver felt when buying them. However, the best gifts are not "store bought." Feeling the connection with family and friends (especially FA friends) is what it's all about. Holidays are time to give thanks, enjoy the spirituality of the holiday season and to look forward to the opportunities of new beginnings---to celebrate the miracles the FA Twelve Step program has given me.

Happy holidays!

Susie

This is a reprint of the Susie Serenity column from the November/December 2003 issue of The Twelve Step Rag. The author, Lucille C., was a founder of the Willowick, Ohio group, a former Twelve Step Rag editor, and was active in FA for over 30 years.

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



Holiday Stress

Many of us long for the holiday gatherings of the past, especially if our addicted loved one has entered recovery.

The following are some shares by members of the E-meeting on wanting normal back.

The holidays are days marked on a calendar. I have memories of people filling the house, sadly most are gone now. Too many miles separate the rest and no one seems inclined to make long trips (understood). Then there are the toxic, dysfunctional, members of the family. If you don't have any of those, you are so lucky!

For years, I hosted a family open house for many great and fun people who loved coming. Then I said who's next to host? End of story. No one.

Today, we concentrate on our small group. This works for me. My son is O.K. and I wouldn't care if he wasn't. He can get "irritable," not my problem. My daughter misses larger family gatherings. She might invite a friend, a distant cousin who has no other place to go. Whatever it is...I no longer concern myself, it is too exhausting and serves no purpose. Grandkids bring the smiles and hugs. This is their time for memory making. Their holiday.

I allow myself some tears, missing family and in my mind, I see them all at the table and bustling in the kitchen. As long as we remember, they are here. My simple thoughts... Simply enjoy what is.

Cookie

I used to wish for the "normal" holidays but learned quickly that Norman Rockwell holidays just are not possible when addiction is in the picture.

Don't set expectations for the day especially if it's about something you can't control. The holidays are just stressful !

Frances/SC

I have three sons, the son who struggles with addiction, the son who blames his brother for "not getting off his butt and making something of his life," and the son who tries, awkwardly, to connect with both brothers. I have dreaded the holidays since the plummet fall into addiction. My addicted son has been in my home for all of them (except the year he was in rehab) but he is isolated, withdrawn, and often (in retrospect) high. But despite this behavior he always says wants to come and I have given him many an out.

Last year, he was newly homeless for the holidays and we had guests in addition to our family, who did not know his status. That was sort of surreal.

This year's plan for my serenity:

- 1, Lots of self-talks with myself about letting go of the Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving Day I torture myself into believing that every household is having except me.

2. Focus on my gratitude list, which is quite long.

3. Let love be my strongest emotion.

4. Accept that my sons are doing the best that they can. And so am I.

Susan H

On the subject of insisting family members gather together for a holiday.

The addict in recovery, especially early recovery, must be comfortable within themselves. This is what is meant by the words, indicating change is a necessity, if nothing changes, nothing changes.

It is very important that the addict change people, places, things that are possible triggers. Forcing people together that are not ready to be together could cause resentments against certain family members. Resentment is the number one offender according to a classic recovery book. It is easy for the addict to feel less-than. They have self esteem issues, poor coping skills and are very conscious of their failings.

Just sayin' - how important is one day in the grand scheme of things? This is not Kansas anymore Toto. Addiction changes everything and so does recovery -- it is supposed to.

Joan

FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

Dear Spanish Translation Team,

The Literature Committee has realized that it is way past time to let you know that your team is providing a tremendous service to FA through your translations of our literature to Spanish. Even though we committee members know that gratitude is an important part of recovery, too often gratitude can be overlooked in the daily press to fulfill responsibilities. We are remiss in thanking you for the meticulous care and the hours of time you are expending for FA. This is the first time since 1990 (when Today a Better Way was written by people from all over the U.S.) that we had a subcommittee team consisting of members both inside and outside the committee. That, in itself, is remarkable!

Your service is a wonderful gift to FA that is overwhelmingly filling a need. For too long (since the beginning of FA in 1971) the World Service Board (WSB) and the Literature Committee have felt great angst about the lack of FA information for our Latino population. We have searched for years, have asked friends for help, have requested help from Spanish-speaking volunteers through the Rag, and have notified the e-meeting that we needed help. At times we have found a few who could help a little but were truly not bilingual or up to large tasks. Finally, you gals came into the picture to fill the gaping hole in our Spanish literature, and you do it with such efficiency! We are amazed and thrilled with your contributions. Currently, with your translations, we are building a quality New Group Pack in Spanish – similar to what is available in English. The list of separate Spanish pieces of literature in the catalog is growing as well. What a satisfaction to see this happening!

We thank you for your service and look forward with great anticipation to every piece you send.

Literature Committee:

Being Grateful

Over the years off and on I have kept a gratitude journal. I was never very consistent with it until recently. I would do it for a bit and then stop. A couple of months ago I was at Staples and they had leather covered journals on sale. I picked one up and it felt so good in my hands and was a beautiful teal color. I immediately thought this could be me gratitude journal. I held it for a bit and then put it down because I thought I did not need to waste \$3 on it (it was marked down from \$9) because I have some other journals (not so nice) that I can write in. I walked around the store picking up the things that I was actually there to get and I went back and picked up that journal again. There was something about it that was speaking to me. Well, who would have known that this teal leather journal would make a difference in my life? I have been the most consistent that I have ever been with writing about 5 good things that happen to me each day. I keep it next to my bed and every day when I make the bed, I lay the journal on my pillow so it's there as a reminder to write in it just before I go to bed. It helps me on those days that I am feeling not so great... sometimes the things that I list are very important things and sometimes smaller blessings like, "I am thankful for the beautiful moon that we had this evening!"

It really does help to think about what we have in our lives to be thankful for!

Connie/NH

So, this week was busy. Really busy. Month and quarter end close, deadlines, spreadsheets, etc. Today I was tired and cranky, feeling a bit sorry for myself for feeling so tired and cranky. At noon I changed my clothes and started my daily two-mile walk around the area where I work. I was stressing about the very few things that were going wrong with the close (minimal, but just where my mind went because it could, because I allowed it). And then I stopped dead in my tracks. It hit me like a 2 x 4. What am I grateful for? Look at these beautiful fall trees, the "Carolina" blue sky (in Ohio), the cool, refreshing breeze, my health, my children, my loving husband, the fact that I even have a job, my nice home, my good friends, my amazing FA program... I did an about face with my thinking right then and there - I just tossed all the negativity right out of my head - all of it.

This is what everyone has been trying to teach me.

BE GRATEFUL. There are ups and downs in life - okay - that's life. If I turn all of my attention to what is good in life, well, I just feel better. It works if you work it, and I'm worth it. This was the best walk I've ever had - ever. Thank you FA for reminding me to be thankful. I think over these past few years I forgot to do that.

Kathv L



Savoring a big, bright, glorious bowl of gratitude today.

Gratitude for the peace and presence that steadily grows to fill my mind and disposition after so many, many lost days of fear, anxiety and despair.

Gratitude for my loving husband who has stayed beside me, especially because my son is not his son, and addiction came into my husband's life like a tsunami.

Gratitude for my son, who has navigated his way out of homelessness and unemployment with a new job today, and a safe place to live, all of which he accomplished on his own, because he had to, and because he wants to live.

Gratitude for my health, now 18 years cancer free. I am grateful for each day that I awake feeling well, strong and free to live without fear of dying.

Gratitude for the simple eloquence of the Serenity Prayer, whose words have comforted me in the darkest of nights and pulled me back up, when I have fallen off my path to recovery.

Gratitude for the unquantifiable power to affirm, support, and care that is alive in this fellowship.

To the new members tormented, crushed and weary, to the practiced members reaching down from the 12th step to extend a hand of compassion, "follow me, there is a better way." I extend my heartfelt gratitude for making this a place of experience, hope, and strength.

Serenity Seeker

Let's talk...

Let's talk about Tradition 7, which states that every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Let's talk about -

- the importance of being self-supporting.
- is there such a thing as giving too little.
- the importance to your individual recovery of being a part of keeping the doors open and the lights on.
- and lastly, what would your life be like if there were no FA.

Send an e-mail to:
rageditor12@gmail.com

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

HOLIDAY REFLECTIONS

(Continued from Page One)

It was one year ago today I was learning about FA, and how to help me. I set a very important boundary for Thanksgiving last year. My daughter was not allowed to come home from college for the holiday period. She was using, and I knew it. I was a mess. Devastated and lost. It was a warm day last year on Thanksgiving day (high 60's I believe) and after dinner I went for a walk by the lake with my other two daughters. I put on sunglasses and cried most of the walk, pretending to "not be able to keep up with them" so they wouldn't know. I thought for sure I was never going to get this whole detachment thing that was going to restore me to sanity, that I was a hopeless codependent and, well, that's just the way it was going to be for me.

Fast forward to today. I did detach. (Hard? Yes. Absolutely necessary? You betcha!), I set up boundaries, and with the help of my sponsor and FA, I stuck to them. Daughter is six months sober and living thousands of miles away in a sober living facility after completing five months in an in-patient rehab (her choice). She speaks at meetings now and will do so again at her "alumni" meeting next week. We both continue to thrive. She won't be home for Thanksgiving this year and that's okay. It's just the way it's supposed to be. And I am okay with that. Really, truly, deep, deep, down okay with that. My what a difference a year makes. It works if you work it, and we are all worth it.

Holidays for everyone are different. And they are different each year - they should be - we all different from the year before. I wouldn't recognize the "me" from last year - and that's a good thing. I will make the most of this holiday knowing it is what it's supposed to be - no more, no less. And thank my HP for allowing me to celebrate yet another one.

Kathy L

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.

FA Website Update



The Families Anonymous website was hacked in August with a virus that made it and all the copies of the site unusable. Our Chair, George R., created a Recovery Task Force (RTF) to lead the creation of a new site. The team interviewed and requested quotations from four website developers. At the September meeting, the World Service Board chose to sign a contract with Key Web Concepts in Chesterfield, VA. Their estimate for the cost of building a new website is \$3500. This is based on the Recovery Task Force handling parts of the rebuild themselves. The estimated launch date for the new website is mid-December.

In leading the effort to rebuild the website, the RTF communicated with many in the fellowship to gather suggestions for upgrades to the new website. We are very excited about our new website and we believe the fellowship will share in our enthusiasm once they get to experience it.

The website loss has resulted in not only the extra cost of the rebuild, but in lost revenue from literature sales.

To place a literature order call Angel at the WSO,
Mon-Thurs. 8-3 (cst)
800-736-9805.
Or email at
famanon@familiesanonymous.org

To make a donations send to FA World Service -
701 Lee Street, Suite 670 Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508

Let's talk...

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

What are you doing for YOU today?

The Sponsorship

Mail Bag



Musings about Sponsorship

When I became a member of Families Anonymous in 1987, I wasn't ready for most of the suggestions that I heard in those weekly meetings. And it took many months before I let myself grasp the concept of asking someone for help. At that time, I was still dealing with the denial that I even needed a sponsor. I liked the people in our weekly meeting, but my false sense of pride kept me from admitting to anyone that I needed someone to "tell" me how to work the 12 Steps.

However, there was a lady close to my age that I really admired and appreciated how she dealt with a husband (now in recovery) and was now faced with a teenage son who was in the same treatment program as my teenaged daughter. She was soft-spoken and had a ready smile and was not what I considered a "know-it-all." She had been in Al-Anon for several years while her husband's addiction was active, so she was a great role model for someone like me who came into the FA program with my heels virtually dug in whenever words like "powerless" or "unmanageable" were uttered. I really felt the urge to get a sponsor, not because I thought I needed one, but because that seemed like one of the "rules" for belonging.

Even when I decided to choose her as my sponsor, I couldn't make myself use that word...sponsor. So I asked her "what information did you use to help you do the 4th step?" I know now that I wasn't ready for that 4th step; I hadn't really worked the first three steps anywhere except in my head. Instead of pointing that out, she smiled and offered to bring me some written material (from Al-Anon); our FA meeting didn't have an abundance of written information at that time.

She and I have both experienced many ups and downs in our respective families through the past years, but I always try to emulate her positive sponsor qualities with my sponsees. I always accept when I am asked, but I give them a letter outlining my personal ways of sponsoring so they don't have unwarranted expectations:

> I listen, but I won't give advice about what decisions they should make about particular situations involving their family members. However, I will share my own experiences in similar situations and let them know what FA tools were helpful to me.

> I will answer the telephone at any time of the day or night, but if I am not available at that time, they should call someone else on their FA phone list and I'll call back as soon as possible.

> I encourage them to share their victories as well as their crises.

> I tell them that recovery is ongoing, so take time to enjoy the process. Even though I have been in the FA program for 25+ years, I gain insight and strength each time we talk. That's how my Higher Power works.

By Mary Jo, 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.

Memorial Donations

In Memory of
Daniel F



by
Group 128
Whittier, CA

In Loving Memory of
Jan L

who founded the
Bay City, MI
Group 888
26 years ago

by
Group 888
Bay City, MI



God grant me the
Serenity
to accept the things
I cannot
change;

Courage
to change the things
I can;
I can;

and wisdom
to know the
difference.

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

SAVE THE DATE

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS

2014 WORLD CONVENTION

A New Way... A New LIFE
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FEATURING :

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...from your Fellow FA Members...

FELLOWSHIP (and yes, even some FUN)
Saturday Night DJ Entertainment

SEEKING: TENTATIVE RSVP's
Please let us know if you're thinking of joining us.
Kindly send an email to: 2014.fa.convention@gmail.com

Who's the Addict?

Here I sat and wept in pain,
I'd found my son had snuck out again.
Heroin addict, drug dealer they said,
these words and more rang round
in my head.

Fear only held me,
Today would my child be found dead?

Racing and rushing to fix and control,
having such struggles I was too strong
to let go.

Seeing the sickness of high and withdrawal,
misery multiplied over and over.

Repeating the cycles and
just feeling rotten,
realizing finally it was I who'd hit bottom.
Seeing the demons that lived in my head,
I found I was the problem - the addict -
I dread.

I must detach and fix only me!
That's where serenity is,
that's where I'll be!

Giving back power to whom it belongs,
Stopping to inventory where I went wrong.
Daily FA reading and not stinking thinking,
Compassion and learning of the disease
my son is feeling,
Many prayers lifted up asking for healing.

Slowly I breathe again, take in the sunlight
and feel light again.
More hopeful, less fearful and so grateful
for FA meetings!

With thanks and hope for all,
Robin
Medina, Ohio

Easy Does It

Keep It Simple



To place a literature order call

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Mon-Thurs. 8-3 (cst)
800-736-9805.

Or email at
famanon@familiesanonymous.org

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Today A Better Way: Volume Two

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Topic Ideas

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