

# 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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## The Brass Medallion

It was the second week of December, 2013. My son, an opiate addict, was taken into custody for probation violations. His original charge, two years ago, was felony possession of a large quantity of assorted pills. I struggled with very conflicted feelings over the whole situation. At the time of his arrest, my son was a shell of himself, unable or unwilling to have any sort of meaningful relationship with us. Our lives in relation to him were simply a struggle to hold him at arm's length so as not to respond to his sporadic attempts to draw us into various dramas related to his addiction. He was sleeping on the floor in a bed bug ridden apartment. Often ill, he would tell us stories of being robbed at gunpoint in drug deals gone badly.

At first, his arrest seemed to be a surprise. But it really wasn't. It was only a matter of time. We experienced frequent phone calls from the jail as he detoxed with little medical attention. I went to the room he was renting in an attempt to recover some of his possessions. I didn't want to, but my husband pointed out that he'd eventually need clothes. I threw away bag after bag in the trash-filled apartment. I discovered proof he was an IV drug user. Unable to really talk with him in jail, my husband and I struggled with what course of action, if any, to take with this 24-year-old man-child.

Fast forward seven months, we sat and watched our son "graduate" from a six month, faith based rehab. We watched and assisted as he moved into a sober living house. We were cautiously optimistic. I struggled to maintain boundaries, and questioned what I was willing to do. He got rehired at a large call center, receiving a better job as a customer service rep for a large cable TV provider. We saw him move out of the sober living house as soon as he had enough cash to do so. We watched him return to drug use. We saw progress again and decline again. It was never to what it had once been; still there was a lot of drama and chaos. We tried to live one day at a time with him; fearful, yet grateful. Struggling to be supportive yet not enabling.

Next thing we know, he was called back into court for not paying probation fines. Drug tests were ordered, taken, and failed. He was sentenced to six months in a criminal justice rehab facility. Not a lifetime, not even years. Some, including

me, would say that maybe that was a blessing.

And so, two weeks before Christmas, my husband drove him to the jail, where he sat and awaited transport to the facility. We were unsure how long he would be in county, and it was just before Christmas. The previous Christmas had been almost "normal," with our family together and relating to each other. And now this.

I struggled with sadness, frustration and anger. My son just thinks he can do what he wants and get away with it. My husband is a wreck. My adult daughter, his younger sister, has anger/control issues I know must be related to our family situation. I tried to remain positive, yet found myself having difficulty relating to people in social and work situations. Even now, almost four months later, I still have trouble with this.

My son is transported five days before Christmas. We were limited to one 20 minute phone call per week and no visitations. I am to put together a box of hygiene items for him. He has two weeks to receive them, after that, no more. I felt like this was a weird twist on packing up a kid for camp or college. Packing up your kid for jail.

I was feeling pretty down. I practiced my steps. I read the FA promises. I tried to keep myself in the moment and be grateful for the good stuff in my life. But there is no denying the grief that comes when a beloved family member is making such distressing choices and then has to experience the consequences.

I have a number of work and church activities I participate in. One of them is cooking breakfast at my church. So, on this particular Sunday, feeling sad, struggling to feel grateful, I am going through the motions of participation. The folks from the early service had cleared out and the next service hadn't come in. I was talking to a friend and we both glanced down at the floor, where a small disk was lying. My church does a Bethlehem reenactment every year and they give out wooden coins (dinari). My friend thought it was one of the dinari from the Bethlehem service. But when I picked it up I saw it was a brass medallion.



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## Submission Guidelines for Today A Better Way: Volume II

The format will be the same: a short reading, ending with a “Today I Will ...” call to action. FA members are encouraged to share the experiences that have moved them. A list of suggested topics is on the FA web site.

### Things to keep in mind when creating a TABW: Volume II reading:

1. Share something that has happened to you regarding your recovery. Please write in the first person.
2. Limit your story to no more than 300 words.
3. End your story with a “Today I Will ...” call to action.
4. If your story is about a problem or situation, please tell how you worked through it. Your story should end with a lesson learned or a description of how your life has changed.
5. If you are sharing a reflection on one of the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, or 12 Promises, please quote the specific one at the beginning of your share.

### What a TABW: Volume II reading is NOT:

1. Advice driven.
2. About religion, politics, or any outside issues.

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

FA Traditions and FA principles need to be followed.

### Submission Details:

1. Submissions must be your original work.
2. When submitting your work, please understand that you are releasing all rights to Families Anonymous, Inc. for use in its publications and literature.
3. Do not submit stories previously published. The only exceptions are pieces that were published in any FA newsletter.
4. Submissions should, whenever possible, be sent by email to: [newtabw@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:newtabw@familiesanonymous.org).
5. A member without access to email may fax his or her submission to Families Anonymous, Inc. (847-294-5877) or send it by postal mail (701 Lee Street, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016).
6. When you submit your story you will receive an email response that simply says, “Thank you. Your TABW Volume II submission was received.” No other acknowledgement will be sent. If you are submitting by fax or postal service please include a return fax number or mailing address for acknowledgement purposes.

Any questions please contact Lisa W at [newtabw@gmail.com](mailto:newtabw@gmail.com)

**Topic Ideas for Today A Better Way: Volume II can be found on page 4.**

## A JUMBLE OF THREADS

### Live in Anguish or Live in Joy

I came to FA on the recommendation of my son's rehab. Like many others, in the beginning, I viewed FA as just another potential resource to investigate that might help me to help my son not want to live in addiction. I am not religious at all and the Steps were off-putting to me too, at first. With that mindset, I was here for a while, and then I quit this group for about a year. I was still busy enabling and I wasn't ready to stop.

If I know anything for sure in this murky, messy world of loving an addict and finding recovery from co-dependence, it is that things happen for a reason, and this journey takes TIME.

My journey to recovery only began in earnest when I reached the point where the pain of living in misery and anguish for my son's addiction was greater than the pain of letting go of all the enabling and finally allowing my heart to break, which I had been avoiding, because it really hurts. I experienced this as a tipping point. Once I crossed over to a fierce desire to live in gratitude and live in peace, nothing else mattered as much.

I felt tremendous grief in the final honest and unflinching recognition that there is nothing, nothing, nothing, that can be done to save the life of my son and make him want to get well from a disease that is systematically destroying his essence. However, there is also tremendous freedom and light in that recognition. For the only life you can live is your own, and your life is precious.

Live in anguish or live in joy. It is that simple. And once I chose joy, I began to notice the moments of wonder that are always there. Whether it is God or the higher power of the collective experience, strength and hope of my FA group, I do not have to journey alone.

Susan/WA  
E-Group

Recently I purchased a sweater in a striking pattern of grey, pink, and aqua. When I turned the sweater inside out, it somehow reminded me of the way my life was before Families Anonymous—just confusion of thoughts, a jumble of threads. You wonder how all those threads could turn out so beautiful. It made me think that practicing my program is much like my sweater—a maze of threads that will eventually flow into something beautiful.

Each week, as we seek to change, another coloured thread is added. At first, there are days of great confusion and pain—our grey days. But as we persevere, the motif starts to show, and the middle of threads (our life before F.A.) starts to emerge into a beautiful piece of work.

We have to work hard, follow the program, practice the steps, slogans, and the Serenity Prayer. Take it One Day at a Time for this to work into a definite pattern (way of living). If we rely on the program and our Higher Power, we can get control of our lives and part of a pattern uniquely suited to our individual taste.

When all the colours blend each day, a beautiful design emerges. We call this design Serenity. This is what we strive for! It takes devotion and faith and one day at a time, week by week, for the pattern to show. Even though it sometimes seems difficult or monotonous, we finally have a showpiece—a new life.

So if you slip or have a bad day, think of your personal sweater and its jumble of threads on one side and a personal masterpiece on the right side. Only you can decide. And with our Higher Power's guidance and help and practicing the program, you can knit (make) your own pattern that will be uniquely yours and truly beautiful.

Patricia  
#1770 Freedom Group  
Winnipeg Manitoba

## FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

### *FA Healthy Group Tune-up*

Is your group having to contend with issues such as:

- \* Domination?
- \* Same old, same old?
- \* Slipping anonymity?
- \* Cliques or factions?
- \* Five readings shortened or set aside?
- \* Personalities above principles?

These are warning signs that your group might benefit from the ***FA Healthy Group Tune-up***. One copy is all your group needs; the pages may be duplicated!

There are thirty pages of ideas, methods, suggestions, and examples—based on the Group Inventory questions (which are included)—that can help your group.

Every meeting benefits from a little maintenance! Tune up your meeting and enjoy the results. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose! Order the ***FA Healthy Group Tune-Up*** (#5007) @ \$3.00 from FamiliesAnonymous.org.



Emeeting:  
[www.tabw.org](http://www.tabw.org)

&

Meetings Without Walls:  
<http://tabw2.fr.yuku.com>

(Continued from page 1)

One side had the Serenity Prayer imprinted on it, and on the other side there was a triangle with a circle and the words “To Thine Own Self be True,” and “Unity, Service, Recovery.” There were also some Roman numerals. I felt like this was a message for me from the Higher Power and I instantly felt more peaceful. I looked around to see whom it might belong to but no one was around. I slipped it into my pocket feeling extremely grateful for its message and determined to find and return it to its owner. I Googled the Roman numerals and learned it was a 44-year chip from a 12 step group. The week after Christmas, I showed it to the members of the recovery group I attend. Unbelievably, one of the attendees knew who it belonged to. She contacted the gentleman, he contacted me, and the chip was reunited with its owner.

The feeling of peace that I experienced as I held that simple brass medallion remains with me. It was a reminder that I truly have to accept what I cannot change. And a reminder of the promise that my Higher Power has a plan for me. I need only to stay on my path, work on myself, and live my life. My loved ones have their own Higher Power who has a path for them, which is not in my control.

Many of us struggle with feelings of grief and helplessness as our addicted loved ones experience events and consequences related to their choices. Over time, with reflection, reading and making the FA Promises part of my life, I have come to a place of acceptance and peace. It's not a place of overwhelming optimism, or happiness, but it is a place of acceptance. This acceptance enables me to live my life with simple joy and gratitude, setting aside bigger problems and concerns which I cannot solve. It's nice to get a nudge now and then, showing that I truly, have only to accept *that a Power greater than myself can restore me to sanity, as I consciously turn my will and life over to the care of my God.*

Alison T

## The Power of Friendship

You, sitting across the room, you may not know this, but I call you my friend.

You, sitting in the back or beside me, you may not realize this, but I call you my friend.

You, who answers my calls in the middle of the night, you who has the patience to hear my story over and over again, I call you my friend.

When I was in a place of hopelessness and desperation, feeling shamed and disappointed, embarrassed and depressed, I found the power of friendship. First by one, then by many.

I came looking for an answer and found much more. Wisdom, compassion and friendship.

We may not meet for coffee, make plans for a movie, or chat about the weather, but I call you my friend.

You share my world that others do not understand. I share yours in more ways that you know. I think of you, cry for you, hope for you, and cheer for you. Why? Because I call you my friend.

Today I will...cherish the gift of friendship that I have found in Families Anonymous.

FA = Friendship Abundance

Marci  
Gr1318

Friendship is born  
at that moment  
when one person  
says to another:  
“What! You, too?”  
Thought I was the  
only one.  
--CS Lewis

## Topic Ideas for Today A Better Way: Volume II\*

A reading for each of the 12 Steps  
A reading for each of the 12 Promises  
A reading for each of the 12 Traditions  
Grandparents—fear, helping, responsibility, relationships, acceptance  
Grandparent dealing with the loss of contact with grandchild  
Family disease—parents of younger addicts; parents of older addicts; siblings of addicts; partners, spouses of addicts  
Obsession - Blame - Fear - Resentment  
Regret - Shame - Loneliness  
Thoughts—“Eliminating the Negative”; changing your thoughts  
Healing—through art; through journaling  
God—belief in; no belief in; support from; anger toward  
Fellowship—benefits, strength  
Humor - Laughter - Reflection - Courage  
Sponsorship - Boundaries  
Breathing - Control - Powerlessness  
Walking—stress release; getting grounded  
Responsibility—who owns what?  
My Life—and living it.  
Patience - Forgiveness  
Faith - Compassion  
Holidays - Spirituality  
Happiness - Love  
Letting Go - Understanding - Grace  
Emotions felt during grief—shock or disbelief; denial; anger; bargaining; guilt; depression; acceptance and hope  
A reading for each of the 12 FA Tools of Recovery—meetings, literature, Steps, Traditions, telephone, service, meditation, prayer, anonymity, integrity, inventory, amends

*\* Remember that these topics are just suggestions. Members are encouraged to write about the experiences that are close to their heart.*

Dear Rag Editor,

One of our members, Suzanne, has been really struggling due to the estrangement with her two children. Obviously, Mother's Day is very difficult for many of us.

Her husband sent her a letter which I thought was so touching. Suzanne and Ray gave permission to use it in an issue of The Twelve Step Rag.

Suzanne's 32-year-old daughter was adopted. Suzanne has maintained a very positive relationship with her daughter's birthmom. The second letter came from her daughter's birthmom.

Submitted by  
Sandy R  
Downers Grove, IL  
Group 801



**YOUR  
STORY  
HERE**

Without YOU we don't have a newsletter. We need to hear from you. Please send us your poems, art, musings, questions, stories, bios or group history.  
[rageditor12@gmail.com](mailto:rageditor12@gmail.com)

## ***Topic Ideas***

*Is there a topic  
you would like to see  
covered in the Rag?  
Send your ideas to  
[RagEditor12@gmail.com](mailto:RagEditor12@gmail.com)*

Dear Suzanne,

*Mother's Day is supposed to bring happiness and a feeling of connection but I know you don't feel that each Mother's Day. I see the longing look in your eyes when sons and daughters are with their mothers. You've expressed the heartache each Mother's Day when you receive little or next to nothing. If you were my mother I would be so happy knowing you cared and loved me. This Mother's Day you need to remember that if I was your child I would shout to the world "I LOVE YOU" and I would do anything for you as you have done for me. This is a special day and you are a special person: that's why I love you. Please let my love fill part of the void in your heart.*

*I love you more than...  
Ray*

Dear Suzanne,

*I wish I could take away the pain you feel on this day, and each day. I have never had a moment of regret in placing my baby - your baby - in your arms. You are her mother in every sense of the word. You are everything that I hoped for her all those years ago. And not only am I blessed that you are her mother, but so is she. You have given her the best life, and I know it may not feel like it, but she knows that. She has told me, and she does love you. I pray that she finds her way out of this darkness, so you can feel that love from her. It is there. You deserve to bask in the glow of it.*

*Please know, if anything good has come from everything of late, it is our friendship. I am so grateful to have you in my life. There have been days I would not have gotten through without you. Please know how very much you are loved!*

# In a Moment of Grace

In a moment of grace, I realized I suffer.  
In a moment of grace I realized trying to control was to suffer times ten.

In a moment of grace, I realized repeating this behavior to find peace, that peace illuded me times ten.

In a moment of grace, I faced and understood powerlessness.

In a moment of grace, when lost, I return to this place we call step one, to be refreshed times ten.

In a string of moments of grace, the power returns, impersonal. Without the facade of false authorship. In a moment of grace, life is richer and fuller as the wave and the ocean begin to flow.

In a moment of grace, the joy and the sorrow are accepted. In a moment of grace there is no need to escape nor compare.

In a moment of grace, the opposites bring the fabric of life. In a moment of grace, the end is the beginning.

Deb C



## SPECIAL THANKS

FA would like to give a special thanks to the Chicagoland groups & the 2014 "A NEW WAY...A NEW LIFE" Convention Committee for all their hard work.  
**We are truly grateful.**

## Host Needed for 2015 FA World Service Convention

Any questions please contact the Convention Liaison chair, Barbara S at: [barbaras@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:barbaras@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](mailto:rageditor12@gmail.com)

## Today A Better Way: Volume Two

Send submissions to: [newtabw@gmail.com](mailto:newtabw@gmail.com)

## Memorial Donations

 In Memory of Gerry W a longtime, valued member by Group 1348 Peoria, IL

In Memory of Jeff son of Linda  by Frances N Group 1958

 In Memory of Sandra M by Group 1027 Troy, MI

In Honor of My Loving Wife, Laurie  on Mother's Day by Daniel W Summit, NJ

## Convention Reflections Wanted

Don't forget to share your convention experiences with the Rag readers. Send your reflections to: [RagEditor12@gmail.com](mailto:RagEditor12@gmail.com).



## The Sponsorship

### Mail Bag



*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](mailto:sp@familiesanonymous.org).*

# CHANGE

By the time I first came to FA, I think it's about five years ago, I had been struggling with my son's addiction for about seven years. I had my own obsession: it was him.

Like most people, I originally came here thinking it would help my son. I had resentfully resisted it for a long time because I believed it would just be one more time-suck in a long line of time-sucks centered on my son's addiction; all the rehabs, all the counseling, all the programs, yet he was still using and using hard. Somehow I managed to show up.

At my first meeting, I listened to everyone share their various experiences. When it was my turn to speak, I cried like a baby. Though there was a deep sadness in me about my son's illness, my tears that night were mostly of relief. For even though I understood that very first night that this meeting was not about my son but rather about me, I felt immediately comforted by the fact that I was not alone. There were other people, good people, good parents, that had struggled too. Many of whom still were. People told me that I didn't cause it, that I couldn't cure it and that I couldn't control it, and though I was somewhat skeptical of that at first, I started to feel the first of many changes, and that was hope. Hope that somehow I could have some happiness despite my son's illness.

I came to the meeting faithfully week after week. I listened. I took phone numbers. I called people. When the meeting was over, I counted down the days until the next one. Between meetings I read the little red book and meditated over it. I began to accept my powerlessness and subsequently, by tiny increments, I began to let go.

I listened to the old-timers and admired their wisdom and humility. I wanted their serenity. I tried to emulate them so that I could have what they had. Although I had always had a god in my life, I had lost my conscious contact with God. I was too busy trying to be God and direct everyone's life the way I thought it should be. Instead, I started to pray. I asked God to simply lift this burden and replace it with trust. Trust in God's power. Trust in destiny. I heard it said that the first three steps simplified are: I can't, God can, why don't I let God? That was very hard for me but I found that the more I practiced, the less anxiety attacks I was having, so it seemed to be working. Really the only thing changing was me and somehow, that made everything feel different.

I got a sponsor; a sponsor with time in the program who was gentle and non-judgmental and who I trusted and admired. I began to take a look at myself and think about the way I was doing things versus how I could be doing them based on the program. Like praying for the wisdom to know the difference between what I could not change (my son's addiction) and the courage to change the things that I could (my reaction to it). I began to take my own inventory rather than being obsessed by his. I began to try and discard behaviors that didn't work that were harmful to me. Yelling: didn't work. Demanding: didn't

work. Wishing: didn't work. I was letting go more and more. I became more aware of my own actions and as a result was able to take responsibility for them and therefore, change them.

Through all of this, my relationship with my son got better. Though he was still using, I understood better his sickness and that the insanity was HIS OWN unless I chose to partake in it. By then, I had asked him to leave the house and though this was contrary to everything I had ever believed about parenting prior to living with an addict, I knew that I was entitled to live in a home without drug use, stealing, and all of the wreckage that accompanies addiction. I was able to feel this entitlement only after I stopped taking responsibility for his addiction. I knew by then that my son had his own Higher Power. I felt compassion for him without the accompanying need to solve it. Thank you, FA. Thank you, God.

I began to take better care of myself and find things to do that I took pleasure in. Always a runner, I quit smoking and began to run farther and in places that I loved; beaches and parks, and quiet, pretty neighborhoods early in the morning. Always I would stop at some beautiful spot and feel the presence of God and say thank you for all the wonderful things I do have, rather than what I've lost. My youngest son and I began to run an annual 5K together. I renewed my relationship with writing by taking a creative writing course at the local college. I have since taken many courses and joined writing groups and met some great friends. I published a piece for The Twelve Step Rag and was invited to help edit the next version of Today A Better Way. I realized, through FA, that there is so much more to life than my son's addiction. I realize too, that my son and I, though tied by love, are very separate beings. He has a journey entirely different from mine and I should allow him that dignity. As it says in the "Helping" reading, "...I will give others credit for attempts at progress and for having had many victories which are unknown to me."

Today my son lives in Pennsylvania; he went there to get clean and comes back only occasionally to visit. He considers that to be his home now. He works hard and rents a house with some friends he has made there. He says he is the happiest he has ever been.

Because of FA, my life has changed in ways I could never have anticipated. If I made any of this sound easy, it was not my intention; it is hard to retrain my brain. It has been difficult at times to keep the faith and the trust to follow the program, especially for someone as headstrong as I am. It takes vigilance and practice and dedication and sometimes utter surrender. There are many days I slip, but I keep right on trying. I am a very grateful work in progress.

Callen C  
Garden City, N.Y  
Group #262