

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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Detaching and Tough Love

Remember when our children were very young and learning to walk and navigate their world? They would often stumble and fall, skinning their knees and palms, sometimes bumping their chin or nose. As they lay there screaming, did we rush over, pick them up, and hysterically say things like, "Oh no! Look what happened to you! You poor baby, you fell down and hurt yourself. Let me carry you around until you are old enough and strong enough to walk on your own. I don't want you getting hurt again!"

Of course not! Sounds funny, doesn't it? I think very few parents would overreact that way. What was a much more likely response, is that we stayed calm and soothing, and matter-of-fact. WE STAYED DETACHED, even when we were very concerned about the goose-egg forming on their forehead, or the blood trickling down their chin. For minor bumps and bruises, I remember often saying something like, "Oops! You went boom! (Being careful not to show alarm on my face while I checked my sobbing child out.) Let's see. . . Oh! You're okay!" They would take their cue from my facial and vocal expressions, and after taking appropriate action if I needed to, I would cheerfully send them on their way to continue exploring their world. Appearing detached was for their benefit, so they wouldn't become frightened and learn to be afraid of toddling around and possibly getting hurt. And guess what? They learned to take the corners slowly, to go down the stairs one at a time, and to not run in socks on the slippery kitchen floor. We couldn't save them from taking all their lumps and bumps as they toddled around under our watchful eyes, and they

eventually learned how to navigate their world more safely.

Well, now our toddlers are grown-ups. While they are able to walk just fine, and get around in their environment, they are now doing things that they take great care to conceal from us, that they know we don't want them doing, and that are potentially more harmful than a few bumps and scrapes. Why do we let ourselves get drawn into their falls and relapses? I think it's because it is so excruciatingly painful for us to see our child suffer the negative consequences of their actions and choices. Our job was to protect them when they were young from doing things that they didn't know any better not to do. Now that they are adults, they have made choices for themselves that have caused them to lose their jobs, their friends, girlfriends, boyfriends, apartments. We fear that their choices may lead them to lose their life, and we are not able to accept that we cannot save or protect them any longer. So we enable; we get drawn into their lives and their drama. We give our money, time, emotional support, food, cigarettes, a place to live, cars, money for rent, motel rooms, and our love. And always, always, is the hope that THIS time they will make better choices, and keep making better choices. That THIS time they will finally realize that they can't keep doing what they're doing, and get help before it's too late.

It seems to me that our addicted children, now grown up, are very much like toddlers all over again, and should be treated as such. What they need from us now is for us to stay detached

as we often did when they were little and hurt themselves, so that they can figure out for themselves that when they choose to do unsafe, dangerous, or negative things, they will get negative consequences; and if they don't like those negative consequences, they will have to learn to do something different. This growth will only come from being allowed to experience the consequences that their choices have wrought upon them--consequences that we, as the same loving parents we were when our children were toddling around, must let them experience no matter how painful it is for us to witness, or how fearful we are of the possible outcome.

No amount of our time, money, hope, or love will teach our addicts what they need to know now. They must be allowed to take their lumps and bumps in order to figure out for themselves whether or not they want to navigate their world in a different way. Trying to save them from the consequences of their using only delays the learning process and holds them back from possibly wanting to make the positive choices we so desperately want to see them make. Our job now, as loving parents, is to stop enabling our addicts, and to allow them to experience the full weight of the consequences of their drug abuse. Tough love? Absolutely! But if we can endure the pain of seeing our children falter and fail, and not rescue and enable them, they have a real chance at turning their lives around. And that's what we want more than anything, isn't it?

Maria K

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FROM THE EDITOR

As you may know, The Twelve Step Rag will only be published in digital form. It can be found on the FA website by clicking on the link labeled The Twelve Step Rag .

In addition, you can subscribe to the email list to get notification of the Rag publications, by clicking on the WSB NEWS link found at the bottom of the home page of our site. There is a spot to sign up for our bulk emails labeled "FA News."

Please continue to send your submissions to the Rag by email to: RagEditor12@gmail.com, or fax them to 847-294-5837, or mail to Families Anonymous, Inc., 701 Lee St, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508.

In Service,
Lisa W
Rag Editor

Growing Recovery in the Garden State

2015 FA World Service Convention

May 29-31, 2015

at the Westminster Hotel in Livingston, NJ.

For Registration forms and further details, log onto the NJ Convention website: 2015njfaconvention.weebly.com, or log onto familiesanonymous.org and click on the *2015 World Service Convention* link at the top of the page.



Welcome to the
FA Fellowship
Group 1998
Fairbanks, Alaska

**Today A Better Way:
Volume Two**

Send submissions to:
newtabw@gmail.com

Topic Ideas

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

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My New Life

Serenity-

Sometimes during this time of the year, things can get quite depressing. Shortened daylight hours, bad weather outside, the sadness of having an addicted family member... especially around the holidays, can get you down.

How does one get on a positive path? Two ways I have found are outdoor activities and a hobby. When there's a snowstorm predicted, that's my cue to get out the snowshoes and head out into the woods for an hour or so. If it's going to be below zero and blowing, I dress up and go out for a hike.

It's facing the reality of your environment, just like we face the reality of our addicted loved one's situation. It's like a training exercise in facing down adversity. For me, I get some introspection and healing when I'm engaged in this type of activity just because of the way raw nature is acting upon me. I always feel better after doing it.

When the weather is gray, foggy, and downright gloomy outside, that's when I head to the basement to engage my other pastime, model railroading. This hobby is like three-dimensional art. It brings out my creative instincts on many levels such as: historical research, carpentry, scenery construction, and running trains like a real railroad.

These activities have helped me achieve a measure of serenity, and when you've achieved a little serenity you are more effective in reaching out to others to help them.

Hans S
Cedarburg, WI



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?
Needle point? 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

Weathering the Storm

A column featuring articles written by members of FA Bangalore, India, Group 1815 for their 5th anniversary celebration in 2012.

Rain and Sunshine

Through rain and sunshine
Busy or at rest
Muddled up or at peace
When I make it to my meetings
What I bring back home
Is a wide smile, some peace,
Hands aplenty to hold my difficult times
And at least one to push me through
To take a bold step or two.

Giving Space

A friend in FA once told me "Treat your addict like your friend's son." I tried and it worked. This brought out the best behavior in me. My learning to respect him and not trampling on his feelings gave him more space to be himself. I realize that this way, he will grow in his own time in recovery.

Love

Loving someone means giving my undivided time to be able to listen to another the way my loved one wants to be listened to. It also means feeling the way another feels and being there for another. Whenever I have done this, it has helped me in my growth and the one who unburdens has felt light. Where else can I find friends who can talk and understand my language other than in FA?

Intimidated

When I first attended the FA meetings, I benefited from others sharing. But when it was my turn, I felt intimidated, wary of imaginary comments from another. Attending meetings regularly, week after week, I realized that my in-depth honest sharing is a huge part of the life line to my being in recovery both before and after working the twelve steps. I slowly learnt to open up in FA until the program became an integral part of me.

Misery is optional!

Having a bad day? “Misery is optional!” said Peter Fine. So, what does that say to us in recovery as we do our best to “walk our walk” each day? We absolutely CHOOSE our reactions to whatever happens in our lives. Yes, we do get worn down; we do get frustrated; we do get frightened when situations feel like they may overwhelm us; and yes, we do at times lose our way. While we can try to justify our actions, it is critical that we be honest about owning our actions and attitudes. We are 100% responsible for our behavior. Getting honest about that takes an important first step towards getting and staying healthy. Each of us can recite a litany of why and what are very good reasons to be miserable; but we cannot afford that luxury, that excuse that can take us down to a very dark place that ends up in destructive self-pity. Someone once said, “Our ALTITUDE depends on our ATTITUDE.” And that is so true. How “up” and “good” we feel is rooted in our attitude, and that is another thing we CHOOSE. As our program teaches us, a good tool is to “fake it ‘til you make it.” It is incredibly impactful that how we THINK leads to how we FEEL and that leads to how we will ACT. And how we ACT can lead to how we FEEL and that can lead to how we THINK. These are all connected. There is even a Bible verse that reads, “As one thinks in their heart, so are they.” So let’s own our stuff, for the “health of it!”

Patty
Willoughby, Ohio

In my opinion, misery is what happens when we let fear, worry and grief take control of who we are. One of the most important things I have learned through FA is that I have a choice each day to stay stuck or move forward. The Serenity Prayer helps me to figure out which direction I want to take and it is useful in all of my affairs.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Having my God walking beside me is a reminder that I always have choices I can make. Setting aside misery and gaining peace, forgiveness, understanding, joy, and serenity are gifts I have received.

Maggie

There are times in life you can’t avoid pain, or the source of the pain, but you can choose to not live in continuous misery by sabotaging your peace and happiness.

Pain is unavoidable but misery is optional. Everyone experiences pain in their lives whether physical or emotional. Much of life is beyond our control including pain. What we have is free will in how we react to pain. Holding on to feelings, we become miserable, and become our own victim. Even living in misery, it is possible to make a decision to change our life by a change in thoughts and the actions that can follow a thought.

If I accidentally touch a hot surface and get burned it is painful. I didn’t choose it to happen but I now have to deal with it. If I keep my hand on the surface to continue feeling the pain, it is my choice to continue to suffer and live in misery.

Sometimes, I continued to suffer until I realized what I could change. It wasn’t as clear as removing my hand from a hot surface. Even when it seemed overwhelming, I knew I could make that choice and act on it when I was ready. Misery is optional because we have free will and the capability of change.

June

I remember reading this quote and believing that misery was not a choice people made. At the time, misery was my constant companion. It was there, next to me, in the middle of a fitful sleepless night. It was waiting for me in the morning. Riding along inside my head and my heart every day. I can remember looking at a candid picture of myself taken at a family reunion and being struck by how sad I looked, hardly recognizable as myself. Misery had invaded my inner self and was leaching out across my face.

Today, I believe misery is optional when a true commitment to recovery is made and worked. My antidote to misery has been a sponsor, a good therapist, exercise and healthy eating, FA and other readings, step work, and the practice of living in gratitude. I believe we are what we pay attention to, and I refuse to pay attention to misery. I have left it to wither alone, and without my constant attention, it has faded away.

Misery truly is optional.

Susan/WA

Do you remember the movie of the same name from a Stephen King novel? That character survived misery and then some. It was physical, emotional, life threatening, and entirely insane. It was an uncontrollable situation at the hands of a very sick person.

Does any of this pertain to us? The person who loves an addict is in a vise of misery. You believe beyond any hope that your life is an everlasting pain filled merry-go-round. At every turn, you are tortured by the anxiety and fear of losing someone you love.

When did this become your life? When did you stop being a healthy person? When did you adopt the role of savior? When did you become so miserable?

I was determined to save my son. He would not fall to the streets; die on my watch. I remember the twist in my gut when I would see him drunk, so sick, so lost, and crying to end this insanity.

I was introduced to FA at one of the rehabs my son was in...some seven plus years ago. I went willingly, believing these people would tell me how to fix him. After all, hadn’t I been on a discovery tour accumulating data? It didn’t matter that nothing had helped; I was determined after all.

This FAMily stopped me in my tracks. Not so fast. He is NOT fixable by YOU. You let him go and work on reclaiming your life, your serenity, your joy. I went back. Again and again. I listened to torturous stories of grief. My story at times seemed tame.

(Continued on page 5.)

Misery is optional!

(Continued from page 4.)

I was in need of help...for me. I could not stay the course anymore. Misery was and is optional. I had to save myself as the character in the movie did. His life had value - so does mine.

My strength returned and I was able to move on. I healed slowly, learning that I was not the answer to this disease of addiction. That is an inside job. My son chose recovery....one day at a time. I did nothing to make that happen. He was ready to surrender, thankfully.

Today, I hope we both stay the course, choosing for ourselves what is best. Time. That's all it was. Time to see the truth that was there if we had been open to that truth.

Cookie

Misery - a state or feeling of great distress or discomfort of mind or body. As you rise above it, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. It is psychologically painful to witness the poor decisions that our addicts make while using, or in early recovery. They are impulsive, with little thought for the future. For example, my s/a (clean now over 60 days) recently quit a job by just not showing up for two shifts instead of calling and letting his manager know he was terminating his employment. He had promising leads for other jobs at the time, but no definite offer. That job was his only source of income to pay his rent. Can you spell... IRRATIONAL? Actions such as these I find disquieting and when the thoughts are allowed to linger, then I become downright miserable.

Misery - our ALO's are quick to blame us for their problems. If we had done this or that, then they would not have relapsed. My son angrily told me that since we did not come to visit him (in another city) as promised, in his words, "blew me off," that he felt unloved. I tried to explain about all the plates we were juggling the time, and he would not accept any excuses. Time simply slipped away from me. It was not a deliberate act on my part, yet in our addicts brains

everything revolves around them. He had the nerve to say that we have not shown our love or support. Unbelievable! My FAMily knows how ludicrous that accusation is.

Conversations with our addicts can be quite emotionally charged. I will admit to a few sleepless nights dwelling over those talks, with my brain in overdrive. Trying in vain to process information my son told me that did not jive with my moral compass, or reality for that matter. In times of emotional turmoil I chant the three C's: I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and I can't cure it. We are a work in progress, as are our addicts. We have to go easy on ourselves. Stay the course by working the steps and talking to our sponsor. This is not a road easily traveled. We need to prepare for bumps along the way. We must take time to climb out of the trenches and smell the roses...lest we become miserable. Giving in to the misery will not put our beloved addicts in recovery or keep them there.

Only they have the power to do that.

Kris

Do I see the glass as half empty or half full? For me, the answer lies in my thoughts and perspective. I believe that misery is a choice of response. Responding with misery is not in my own best interest. As I've heard in FA, a day wasted in misery is gone forever.

I learned to be miserable, and I chose to unlearn it. I accept that I don't have control over others, either by my actions or my expectations, but I CAN control my responses to what happens in my life. I can have a pity party and moan, or I can be grateful for rainbows after a storm and recite the Serenity Prayer. I can accept responsibility for my feelings and work to stay willing to get well, and choose not to be misery-able.

Joanne M

2015 FA Convention Silent Auction

The 2015 Convention Committee is planning to have a silent auction at the annual convention in Livingston, NJ. We are hoping that all FA groups will choose to be part of the event by donating one "quality" item to place in the auction. If possible, this item must be small enough to travel packed in baggage on a plane. The silent auction will help defray costs of the convention. If we are successful, it might also make it possible to donate proceeds to the World Service Office general fund.

For more information on how the silent auction works, donation ideas, and the donation form, please visit the convention website at www.2015njfaconvention.weebly.com

**The 2015 Convention
Committee members
thank you for your
support!**

"At some point you just have to let go of what you thought should happen and live in what is happening."

--Heather Hepler

About Amends

I learned something important recently. It has to do with making amends. Lots of people involved with 12 step programs are part of groups where one meeting a month is devoted to a focus on one of the 12 steps. And many of those start each January with exploring Step One followed by February with Step Two and so on. That makes September Step Nine, which goes something like “Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.” I have long pictured the action as knocking on the front door of Johnny’s house to tell him I am sorry for hitting him in the nose when we were eight. Or something similar -- maybe more recent, maybe more serious, and maybe laced with more of a sense of guilt. But still a matter of standing in front of the person and expressing my remorse.

At the step meeting in September we talked about Step Nine. I found myself talking about my relationship with my oldest son, which from age 13 to age 19, was a sad and perpetual series of brief, negative, often explosive, verbal exchanges. It was god awful painful. Over and over again. I found it very difficult to imagine ever reaching a truce, much less a peace. But our interaction did eventually change, slowly, over time, and it happened in part, because I eventually learned to let go without resentment. The only way I could avoid conflict with Ryan was to step aside, to turn and walk away, when the decibel level started to rise. And he learned to do the same.

After one significant exchange we both turned away. He went upstairs and I moved to the kitchen counter and sat down in front of my computer. Ten minutes went by. Ryan came down the stairs and walked into the kitchen. As he passed behind me he gently put his hand on my shoulder for no more than three or four seconds. The feel of his hand comforted me. It produced a warm sensation that spread through me and stayed with me. The memory of it has lasted for at least eight years. I know it will last until the day I die. Ever since that day, our interaction has been mutually respectful, and my love for my son, never in jeopardy even during the darkest of times, has blossomed into a genuine liking for him. He lives the mantra I have repeated to all three of my sons more often than they care to hear: Be honest, Be thoughtful, Be careful.

I’ve told the story of his hand on my shoulder at least 100 times, trying to reach parents in the middle of similar bleak periods in their relationship with a loved one. My perspective has always focused on the palliative benefit that they too will likely experience at some point in the future. I have never thought of it in terms of amends, perhaps because I haven’t thought much about how others might express amends, and in part, because I have not considered amends without verbal expression. I’m not even sure I have thought much about what I might experience when someone attempts to make amends with me. Right in the middle of telling the story for the 101th time, it hit me. Yes, like a two-by-four between the eyes! Ryan’s hand on my shoulder for three or four seconds was his attempt to make amends with me. Given the right circumstances, no words need be spoken. In fact, in our situation, I believe that words could well have interfered with the amend.

As I have been typing this, an additional thought has entered my mind. I noticed Ryan’s touch immediately. I appreciated it immediately. But I did not speak either. An honest offer of an amend has to be without any expectation of a response. We do it because it releases a burden. How it is received is up to the other individual. If we have no expectation of a response, we do not look for a response. If we are looking for a response and do not get a response, we are likely to conclude it was not accepted. Was Ryan looking for a response? I don’t know; I have never asked him. But I do not think he was, because that moment marked a noticeable change in the way he and I interacted. Since then, neither of us has raised our voice toward the other. Since then, he has been honest with me, thoughtful toward me, and careful to protect our relationship. I did tell him several years after it happened how meaningful and important it was to me. But he already knew that.

Richard O

Memorial Donations

In Memory of
long time member

Joan S

We are missing your wisdom and experience. Because of the nature of our meeting your words still resonate.

Watch over us , “Just” Joan.

by

The E-meeting Group

GR 1651



In Memory of

Justin K

by

Penn Toyota

Greenvale, NY



In Celebration
of our group’s
one year anniversary.

GR 1974

Syosset, NY



In Honor

of past, present
and future members

of Group 1735

Ramsey/Mahwah, NJ



Recharge, Renew, Reinvigorate

I can't believe that I've just completed my registration for the FA World Service Convention being held this year in my home state of NJ. How is that possible? I'm as excited about attending this year's gathering as I was when I attended my first in Cleveland. It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting and debating if I should attend. No one in my group had ever attended a World Service Convention. It was a foreign concept. Thanks to the urging of some long-time members of the fellowship, I decided to make the leap and see what it was all about.

I remember meeting members that I had "spoken" to on the E-meeting (TABW), but had never met face-to-face. I met members from around the world that I have since developed wonderful friendships with; and most importantly, I had the opportunity to truly immerse myself in a weekend of fun and a celebration of my recovery. This all happened while my qualifier was still in the midst of active addiction. Back then, I needed the energy that the convention gave me to help me continue putting one foot in front of the other.

I directly attribute my convention experience and the close ties that I have made over the years, to my service work in the fellowship. My recovery grew because of what I call the four S's – Service, Study of FA Literature,

Strength in fellowship (meetings), and Sponsorship. I learned about all these through the formal workshops, keynote speakers, and the quality time I spent talking with other members at the conventions.

There hasn't been one convention that I have attended that I haven't taken away a new and greater understanding of the FA program. Without fail, every gathering has had inspirational speakers who have shared their experience, strength and hope. It didn't matter if they were other members of the fellowship, or outside presenters, all provided me with a perspective that helped me. Best of all, they have provided me with something new to share with my group so that we could all benefit from the convention.

Over the years, Elaine and I worked to convince one or two members of our group to join us. Most of the time, however, we went alone. Our persistence, however, did pay off when five other members made the trip to Chicago to experience the excitement we had talked about. In fact, they were so moved by their experience, that upon their return, they set out to bring the convention to NJ.

Please take this as a personal invitation to come to New Jersey and share your recovery with us. We will all be the better for it.

With love in the fellowship,
Marc M.

FA CONVENTIONS A JOURNEY TO SERENITY

Twenty-five years ago, we attended our first FA Convention. Since conventions were on Memorial Day weekend, I balked about attending, because that was the usual weekend of the Sacramento Dixieland Jazz Festival—which I looked forward to every year. Besides this, my job, at that time, required that I attend numerous conventions relevant to my position. I did not view attending another with pleasure—even if the subject matter would be different. We were already attending a weekly FA meeting to help us deal with our addict/alcoholic son—wasn't that enough? My wife, Juley, convinced me that we should attend the one being held in Santa Monica, CA, for it was within driving distance of our home. She suggested that we register for just a Saturday to get an idea of what FA conventions were like.

WOW!! Did we have our eyes opened! The keynote speaker bowled us over with his presentation on grief. We discovered how we were grieving the loss of our hopes and dreams for our son, and his participation in our family life. Other workshops helped us learn that focusing on ourselves wasn't selfish, that we had not failed in parenting our child, and we could do something to help ourselves. We drove home that Saturday absolutely stunned about what we had learned, and how it had helped us. We were sold on FA Conventions!

Today, our son has been clean and sober 28 years. We are asked why we still attend conventions after all these years, and what we get out of them.

These FA Conventions still provide us with a stiff dose of recovery along with much laughter, wonderful wisdom, and shared experiences.

We experience a driving need to "give back" to the fellowship for what we have received so freely—through more involvement in the fellowship, leadership in FA, and WSB committees.

We are amazed that —still— after all these years, all life is learning!

We look forward to seeing you at the 2015 convention in New Jersey!

Jon and Juley S (Redlands, CA)

WHAT DO CONVENTIONS PROVIDE THAT MEETINGS CAN NOT?

- * Inspirational professional speakers provide current information on addiction, treatment, and co-dependency.
 - * Workshops present ways to apply the guiding principles of the program to our lives.
 - * New literature can be reviewed and purchased for groups (at a discount!).
 - * Old friends are greeted with such pleasure and new FA friends are made from all over the U.S.
 - * Attendees can attend an Annual Business Meeting that offers insight into the structure of the fellowship and provides group representation through group delegates.
 - * Attendees can visit the World Service Board meeting in action to see how our fellowship is led.
 - * Members that attend conventions help decrease the group's feeling of isolation from the fellowship.
- Jon and Juley S (Redlands, CA)

TABW Car Magnets are Here!

You see them everywhere - oval black and white "Euro" car magnets with acronyms for popular names. Now the Fellowship has its very own: a high-quality, full-size (5 3/4 x 3 7/8 in.) oval car magnet with the bold letters TABW, and below that, TODAY A BETTER WAY - for only \$5!* (*Plus \$1.00 postage and handling for each magnet ordered).



Display one on your car to show solidarity with the Fellowship, and your belief in the wisdom of TABW - only you, and other FA members, will appreciate its significance. All proceeds go to support the 2015 World Service Convention. Simply fill out the attached order form and send it to the address listed below.

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