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# THE 12 STEP RAG

*The Families Anonymous Bimonthly Newsletter*

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# NEW YEAR, NEW OUTLOOK

## *A MESSAGE FROM THE FA WORLD SERVICE BOARD*

We send best wishes to all of our members and their loved ones for a happy, healthy, and serene 2018, and are enthusiastic about new and upcoming opportunities for growth within our organization.

In the coming year, we plan to launch a new, updated FA website. It will be easier to navigate and to be found with an internet search.

Another focus for this year is getting the word out about FA. We are brainstorming strategies to spread information about our groups to all who are in need of support. Please let us know if you have ideas to make this a year of growth.

In addition, we are looking for volunteers to serve as members of the World Service Board of Directors. It takes many people to keep FA running smoothly. Organizational efforts surrounding literature, group outreach, conventions, or public information—just to name a few—don't happen by themselves. Also, the bylaws and policies that govern us and keep us on the right paths need to be updated to address our ever-changing world. There is no traveling involved—everything is done over the internet. We have members from all over the globe, including places such as London,

Greece, Australia, and India, who are serving or have served. To be on the Board, you must meet the following requirements:

- Been in FA for at least one year
- Be fluent in speaking and writing in English
- Have a willingness to serve
- Have access to a computer with internet



Please consider joining us and giving back to the Fellowship that has given you so much.

We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead! We will be holding our annual convention from June 8th to 10th at the Westin in Mount Laurel, New

Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia. The programming will be phenomenal, with the presence of some of the top leaders of the recovery industry. You won't be sorry that you made the trip. We promise, you will leave there with more knowledge, more recovery tools, some laughs, and a new and improved sense of fellowship. More details on the convention can be found in the following pages.

Yours in Service,

*The FA World Service Board*

## 2018 Board of Directors

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*Marc B. - Mayfield Heights, OH*

*Susan S. - Livingston, NJ*

*Sylvia S. - Goleta, CA*

*Vince M. - Scoresby, Australia*

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## THE 12 STEP RAG

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Editors: Lilly C. and Elizabeth S.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**By Lilly C.**

Greetings, FA fellowship! I am lucky to have the opportunity to be one of the editors to put together the 12 Step Rag. I am immensely thankful for the previous Rag editor, Lisa, for her guidance, and the hard work and love she clearly put into the newsletter over the past eight years. I am also grateful for the support of the World Service Board and for my coeditor Elizabeth, who is embarking on this new journey with me.

As I transition into this new role, the appearance of the Rag will transition as well. We are taking this opportunity to upgrade the look and feel to something more colorful, modern, and optimized for digital viewing. The changes will evolve over the next few issues as we solidify a design that can hopefully be used for years to come. We are also considering expanding the content through new sections and informative articles, but will strive to keep the editorial integrity that has been established over so many decades.

On that note, I have been so humbled by this community as I have become more involved over the past couple of months. As you'll see in the following pages, your submissions are powerful, touching, beautiful—and plentiful! I hope you will continue to be inspired to contribute content, feedback, and ideas as the Rag grows and changes. After all, this is YOUR newsletter—a collection of universal experiences and ideas that you can share, learn from, and contribute to. Isn't it amazing that the struggles and wisdom shared in these pages are so universal?

In fellowship,  
Lilly C.

## A PARENT'S RECOVERY

**By Neal S.**

I was crying. I was crying in meetings, crying at parties, crying a lot at home with my wife. My rabbi and cantor got a full dose one evening when I was at the temple for a meeting. Anytime anyone asked me about my older son, I started crying.

We all know that there is no crying in baseball thanks to Tom Hanks in *A League of their Own*. For me, there also should have been a rule that there is no crying in client meetings. Just think about this with me for a second: you are meeting with your financial advisor, you're exchanging pleasantries, and your advisor starts crying! I can share with you that this does not inspire confidence.

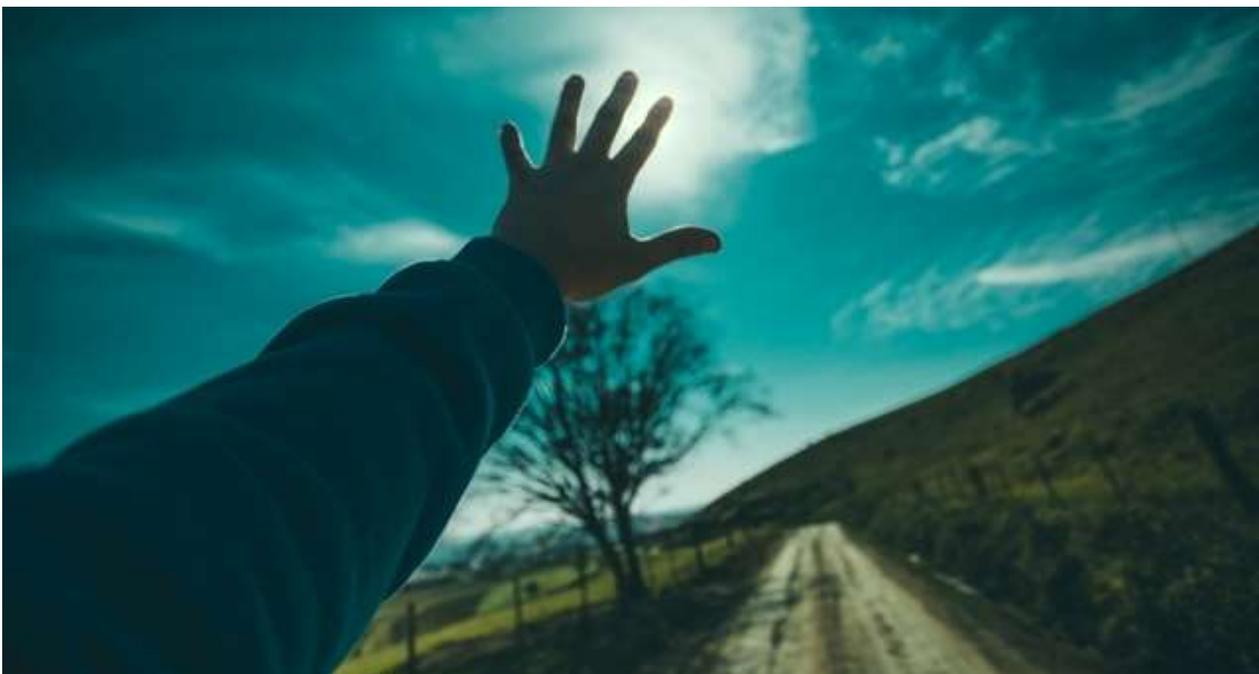
I was crying because my life was out of control. My wife and I were learning that our oldest son is an addict. That statement alone is hard to accept, hard to repeat, and very hard to live with. Learning to live with it

*Anything I do for him that he can do on his own, robs him of the chance to try and rebuild his self-esteem*

comes with lots of crying.

You have a choice when a loved one is an addict. You can define your life, your emotional and financial well-being, by the choices the addict makes, or by the choices you make.

You will take the first path initially—you have



to. No one can stand by and watch this terrible story unfold without trying to help their loved one. Unfortunately, in so many cases, nothing you do will help. You will spend countless hours, a mountain of cash, a river of tears, and the situation will likely only get worse. This is the curse of addiction. My goal is to share with you what I have learned to help me live a happy and productive life in spite of my son's disease.

My oldest son is still somewhere between addiction and recovery, but only he knows where. The last six years have been a journey from constant frustration, fear, and misery to

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*We have come to  
believe that recovery  
can only begin when  
the addict is ready.  
Nothing we do can  
accelerate their  
decision to change, but  
by doing nothing,  
sometimes we can.*

---

acceptance, peace, and some serenity. It has not been an easy journey or a smooth one. What has allowed me to make this transition are a few simple thoughts.

First, my son's problems are not mine to solve. Anything I do for him that he can do on

his own robs him of the chance to try to rebuild his self-esteem. Without rebuilding that self-esteem, he will never have the emotional strength to fight this disease.

Intervening in his life to shield him from the consequences of his actions robs him of the opportunity to learn from his mistakes. Without suffering those consequences, he will never have the motivation to change.

Addicts in active addiction do not act rationally. They make choices that are so dangerous and destructive it boggles the mind. Addicts do not care what you, their loved one, thinks of their choices. If they did, they would not steal from you, lie to you, and manipulate you. They would accept help and not run from it—sometimes literally. They would not need multiple detox or treatment centers; instead, they would learn from their mistakes.

We learn that less is more, NO is a full sentence, and those natural consequences, no matter how severe, are the only real impetus for change. Learning this takes time. It also takes faith. That is lesson number two.

To reach any type of serenity, you learn to accept that your loved one's problems are not yours to solve. Today, I am very comfortable saying that I have turned this problem over to God. Only He can intervene for my son. My prayer today is that God will send that spark of divine goodness into my son to give him strength to start his long and difficult journey back to a life of purpose and happiness. I have learned and accepted that I do not have the power to give my son that strength—if I did, I most certainly would have. My

continued failure to “fix” my son’s addiction shows me that I was truly powerless over other people’s actions. It has also taught me that to be of any help to anyone else, I had to be helped myself. I learned that I could not do this alone, I needed a community that truly understood the upside-down world I was living in. That is lesson number three.

My wife and I found a community called Families Anonymous that could help us. I learned that my addict, my wife, and I were not the only ones suffering. This alone has opened the door to my growth. We were not alone. Each week, at least 30 and sometimes as many as 80 people, mostly from this area, from all walks of life—doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs—all meet and all share a similar story.

It is easy to feel that your problem is unique, that you as a parent, have done something terribly wrong. You are desperate to “fix” this problem. Over a few meetings, you learn the truth. You are not alone. Your loved one’s path of destruction has been walked by many other children and loved ones. Your turmoil is not unique. And, perhaps most enlightening: there is wisdom in that room that can help you.

You learn in the room that this is not a short journey. I will never forget when, in my first few meetings, I heard stories of addicts still on their destructive paths two years, five

years, 25 years later. Their stories paralleled with frightening accuracy what we were seeing with our son. We could be dealing with this crap for the next five years? I couldn’t see how I was going to live through the next five weeks! I think in that moment I realized I had to do something different.

My relationship with my other two kids was also being impacted. That is lesson number four. In Families Anonymous we call the other kids in the house without a problem the

Cellophane  
Children.

They become  
made of  
cellophane  
because you  
stop seeing  
them.

My youngest  
was the most

affected. He had to live through the endless hours of drama, crying, and screaming. His every move became a litmus test to see if he was traveling a similar path as his brother. His high school years were as if he was a parolee on house arrest. He was not open to this level of parental guidance, so he did not walk to college out of state—he ran.

It has taken several years for all of us to realize the damage that had been done and to try to consciously fix it. Had I not learned the lesson of the cellophane child and become aware of the damage done to him I could very well have lost two children instead of one. Today, my youngest and I have the best relationship we have ever enjoyed. I am far less controlling of his day-to-day life. He is

*You are not alone. Your loved one’s  
path of destruction has been walked  
by many other children and loved  
ones. Your turmoil is not unique.*

charting his own course and doing a fine job of it.

My respect for him as an adult and my lack of hovering in his life is allowing him the independence he needs to grow into his own person. I am just as powerless over his choices as my addict's. By stepping back and allowing my youngest son to make his own choices and live his natural consequences, he is learning how to become a successful adult.

I no longer offer unsolicited advice and the result is that he actually asks for guidance

*It is said in my recovery program that where there is life, there is hope.*

*I still have hope.*

more often and sometimes, even listens to it—kind of a miracle! My addict taught me I could not control other people's choices. That lesson has helped me repair my relationship with my youngest son.

I have three boys. My youngest, the one who ran to college to escape the cyclone, is an absolutely great kid; an English major, rock climber, and funny as can be. My middle son just graduated from an Ivy League college and is kind, supportive, a quiet and total mensch. I could not be prouder of both of them.

My oldest son is not a failure. That may sound strange, through any normal lens. It would be easy to say that a kid who dropped out of

college, has bounced between treatment centers, the streets, jail and God know where else for the last six years could be labeled a failure. This is the last lesson.

We judge our kids by our expectations. For an addict, expectations are a lead weight around their neck. Our healthy loved ones navigate our expectations and their own in an elegant dance that evolves on their journey to adulthood. This allows us, the parents, to slowly accept their charting of their own course. Some of us accept it better than others.

An addict often violently destroys a normal life progression: dropping out of school, blowing up careers, spending time in jail, even living on the streets. They wreak havoc on expectations in nuclear fashion. Learning to let go of expectations other than a life in good recovery is a true key to my recovery. I pray every day for my son to choose a path that will bring him happiness and allow him to enjoy a productive life in whatever shape it takes. I have let go of any other expectations of him. Good recovery is a big enough job—nothing else really matters. This helps me stay grounded.

Today, I have an uneasy truce with my son's disease and his journey. I have started to learn how to live with an unsolved problem. My son is not in good recovery. He is not in a place that any of us would be happy with, but he is alive, and it is said in my recovery program that where there is life, there is hope.

I still have hope.

# Gifts of Having a Child Suffering from Addiction

By Mindy F.

1. You will find that acquaintances will become prayer warriors for you and your child, and people you considered friends will not pray for your child but gossip about them.

*Gift: You will know people's true character.*

2. You will find people will discuss addiction with absolutely no knowledge about the disease of addiction. *Gift: You will have an opportunity to educate people about the disease of addiction. If they are not willing to learn about the disease of addiction, let them be. Someday they might contact you with a desire to learn.*

3. You will find when you are open with people about your experience with the disease of addiction; they might confide in you that they or someone they love struggles with addiction. *Gift: You can help another person.*

4. You will never hear another story about a person who is struggling with addiction and not feel great empathy for them and their family. *Gift: You will no longer be judgmental of such people, which frees you to love people unconditionally.*

5. You will learn that each person's recovery is their own recovery, and you are not responsible for their recovery. *Gift: It helps you focus on making yourself a better person.*

7. You will have some of the craziest experiences. *Gift: You will have some great stories to laugh at with friends...But only with friends who have a child who is an addict. No one else could possibly understand.*

8. You will be emotionally broken. *Gift: Sue Birdseye says it beautifully in her blog: "The*

*brokenness of our lives allows God to shine through us."*

9. You will fear for your addicted child's life. *Gift: You will realize that you should never again worry about small things.*

10. You will meet the most amazing people in the recovery community—and that in itself is a gift.

## Spotlight: Spanish Translations of FA Literature

A new translation of an old favorite is now available!

*Letting Go/Letting Grow* (#2012) is available in Spanish as *Desprenderse, dejarcrecer* (#2012S).

*Letting Go* is a well-known recovery resource that has been around for many years.

But *Letting Grow* is an FA original. It contains many thoughts about how we can encourage our addicted loved ones to grow by giving them the freedom to make their own choices and experience their own failures and successes.

Consider these examples from the *Letting Grow* bookmark:

*Letting Grow* is allowing the other person to have some discomfort.

*It is refusing to be a safety net for others, so they will learn to weave their own.* The healthy way to help our addicted loved ones is by getting out of their way and letting them grow.

Order copies of the new Spanish bookmark for just \$.25 each—or the original English version for just \$.75 each. (The English bookmark is laminated; the Spanish bookmark is not.)

# HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS

*The holiday season can be a challenging time for friends and families of addicted loved ones. Members reflect on their experiences and find the beauty in small victories.*

## A Different Kind of Christmas

**By Jennifer S.**

I used to decorate our home like a store window. Every room was decorated for Christmas. I loved doing it. The Norman Rockwell holiday. Then, when our son's addictions began to infiltrate our lives, I found myself decorating the tree while I sobbed. But I was not going to let the house not be decorated properly. Today, I like the lights and the candles and the smells but decorating seems to take a back seat to things that feel more important to me.

This year my husband and I were sick with a respiratory illness. I got better after two weeks, but he didn't. We were planning to have a turkey dinner here on Christmas Day with some friends. I did not hesitate to cancel the dinner here.

In the past I would have plowed through and made myself do it. Now, it is just not that important. Our health is more important. I have learned to pace

*I have learned to pace myself, to say no to prevent myself from being overwhelmed, to prioritize more easily, to not feel responsible for others' holiday happiness.*

myself, to say no to prevent myself from being overwhelmed, to prioritize more easily, to not feel responsible for others' holiday happiness.

It is important to my husband to be Santa at a beach gift giveaway for disadvantaged kids on Christmas morning. Last year there were almost 400 kids there. My husband grows out his white beard and really looks like a jolly Santa. So our goal was to get him well enough to go do that and then we could bask in the joy of giving to those children and just take care of ourselves.

The night before Christmas, my husband got into his



Santa outfit (white shorts, red polo shirt and Santa hat...we are in a tropical climate so that is appropriate) and we went to the Malecon—the main walkway along the beach—where all the local families walk and buy food and enjoy being out. He had a big bag of Christmas candy. He passed out the candy to kids and adults. I was amazed at the big smiles and joy from everyone. Every child and adult said gracias/thank you. There were many photos taken of him with the families. It so warmed my heart to see the joy he was giving to so many people simply by being Santa and being giving. There is a lot of poverty here, yet these are among the most grateful, polite, joyful people I have ever seen. To me, this brought a lot of joy to my holiday.

On Christmas morning we will go to the beach, where there will be many children and their families lined up to receive gifts that people donate. Many are kids who will not receive gifts otherwise. My husband is their Santa for this event. We are far away from our family, so this is a wonderful thing we are so happy to be part of on Christmas morning. There is a feeling of fulfillment to be part of bringing joy and giving to others.

We will talk on the phone with our two sons who live a long way away and be grateful for their current sobriety and the relationship we have managed to have with them. There were many years of strained relationships and no relationships. Today, we are not the perfect family, but we manage to love each other, appreciate our differences, and share our joys. My home may not look like the Norman Rockwell Christmas anymore, but I have a healthy respectful relationship with my sons and that is way more important to me now.



## A Christmas Story

By The User's Parent, Group#1806

My son sat silently and without emotions as he witnessed a rare event, Christmas Eve with family—he looked emotionless as he witnessed his family members opening presents, smiling, laughing, loving. He could not enjoy this special time as addiction had blocked his ability to experience the emotions that create joy.

I watched him, he looked at me, and I smiled. I said, “I love you and I am so glad you are able to spend some time with us.” He looked down at the floor then raised his head, and I saw the tears running down his cheeks. I said, “I understand son, it's okay. You are loved.”

He relapsed before New Year's, and it would be another long stretch before I would hear from him again, through a collect call from the county jail.

I no longer allow the sadness to overwhelm me. Yes, I still get sad. I have grieved the child of my dreams.

I no longer experience fear. I enjoy and love the son that is. It is exactly as it should be, and I am at peace.

I gave control over to God. I worked the FA Twelve Steps with a sponsor. I work hard on myself daily now, and will forever more.

A transformation has begun, and I remain at peace. Praise God.

# A Christmas Gift to the Community

By FA Group #101



The FA groups in our area have been searching for ways to publicize our program and the service it provides to the community.

For seven years, *Tinsel Trail* has offered free holiday fun to the public in downtown Huntsville, Alabama. The Christmas tree displays have themes that match the organization's mission. In 2017, for the first time, FA Group 101 sponsored a tree, and members decorated it with many handmade signs. A box was placed on the fence in front of the tree with two different pamphlets of FA literature. After the tree was decorated, it began to take on a life of its own. As people gathered by the tree, they would take in the message the tree provided.

From over 300 trees, FA's was pictured in our local newspaper. What a great way to spread the FA message and bring recognition to the program!

## New FA Chapters—Welcome to the Fellowship!

#2081 Winnipeg, MB, Canada  
First Nations Community Church  
Started: Jan 5

#2082 Louisville, KY, US  
Middletown United Methodist  
Church  
Started: December 7

#2083 Washington, PA, USA  
Harmony Life Center  
Start: November 13

#2084 Poolesville, MD, USA  
St. Peter's Parish  
Start: December 12

#2085 Dallas, TX, USA  
Center for Spiritual Development  
Start: February 8

#2086 Nashville, TN, USA  
Green Hills Office Suites  
Start: January 29

#2087 Kolomna Town, Russia  
Shans  
Start: January 11

#2088 Chicago, IL, USA  
New Hope United Methodist  
Start: January 23

#2089 Colorado Springs, CO,  
USA  
The Sanctuary Church  
Start: February 1

# FAMILIES ANONYMOUS NEWS



## 2018 Convention Details Announced

**June 8 to June 10**

The Westin, Mt. Laurel

555 Fellowship Road, Mount Laurel, NJ

08054, [www.faconvention.com](http://www.faconvention.com)

Our Convention Committee is happy to let you know we have completed the schedule of all the speakers and workshops for the Convention! We are excited to have so many great programs and speakers for you.

Registration includes four meals and a jam-packed schedule, including:

- Friday evening “Meet and Greet” followed by an FA meeting featuring a panel with local members and their addicted loved ones in recovery
- Saturday breakfast with keynote speaker

- Saturday morning workshop/speaker schedules with multiple sessions
- Saturday luncheon with keynote speaker
- Saturday afternoon workshop/speaker schedules with multiple sessions
- Saturday evening banquet with the comedy of Matt Bellace, a silent auction, raffles, and a keynote speaker
- Sunday morning with an uplifting and spiritual end to the weekend with two speakers

Besides two published authors—Diana Clark and Krissy Pozatek, who work in the field of family recovery—William Lorman JD, Ph.D, MSN, PMHNP-BC, CARN-AP will share a presentation called *Addiction & Recovery: What is going on in the Brain?* You can also try a workshop to release stress with mindfulness and much more!

Registration forms, winning a free registration raffle, and more information is available on our website, [www.faconvention.com](http://www.faconvention.com). Have questions? Email us at [faconvention2018@gmail.com](mailto:faconvention2018@gmail.com).

Book your hotel rooms with the convention rate at [www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/FamiliesAnonymous](http://www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/FamiliesAnonymous). Convention rates are available at the Westin from June 6th to June 11th so that you can explore the South Jersey and Philadelphia areas.

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*Join our lively e-meetings! Visit [www.tabw.org](http://www.tabw.org), sign up, and join the conversation!*

# DONATIONS & MEMORIALS

Please consider making a financial contribution supporting FA. The FA PayPal account is a generous and thoughtful way to make monthly recurring donations. The Families Anonymous fellowship depends on contributions and literature sales to keep it financially sound. Your contribution will be acknowledged in the next edition of the Rag. Thank you very much!

*To the Fellowship,*

*I am Barbara S., Chair of the World Service Board of Directors. (not the same Barbara S. below). I want to share a letter we received at the WSO. While we don't usually mention individual contributions in the 12 Step Rag, I thought this particular donation drive deserves special recognition. I would like to thank the members of Group 1725 that contributed so generously. Please read the letter below and share it with your groups.*

Hello from New Jersey:

Group 1735 has been in existence for 13 years now. In keeping with the Seventh Tradition and the Twelfth Step, we asked our members to make a dedicated donation to the Families Anonymous World Service Office. We started running an annual donation drive to raise funds for the World Service Office in 2011. In the past seven years, we have sent you \$13,335. Perhaps you could encourage other groups to do something similar. These donations are in honor of past, present, and future members of group #1735 of Mahwah/Ramsey New Jersey.

We are pleased to tell you that this year we collected 25 checks totaling \$2,005.00. We are sure that this will help to spread the word about the wonderful things that FA can do.

Steve and Barbara B

Jim & Lauri M

Theresa R

Debbie C

Barbara M

Ardie R

Kathleen M

Richard and Barbara S

Bernie and Marge B

Paul & Joan D

Rich & Margaret O

Diane E S

Dawn L

Pat S

Marlene K

Carol & Chip S

Teresa S

Andrea D

Neal & Sheryl B

## Memorial Donations

**In Memory of Cory W.,  
Son of James And  
Barbara**

*by Timothy and Julie W.*

*Jeffrey B.*

*Mary D.*

*Bridget P.*

*Richard and Lanae R.*

*Mary Ann and Lawrence S.*

*Stephanie O.*

*Jill P.*

*Rosemary and Jeffrey R.*

*Mark and Julie*

*Griffin and Alexander P.C.*

*Tim and JoAnne A.*

*Gerald K.*

*James and Barbara W.*

*Parsippany Hills*

*Men's Soccer Parents*

*Association*

**In Memory of Kelly  
Daughter of Wendy K.**

*by*

*Group #1096 Richmond, VA*

**In Memory of Ellen's  
Mother**

*by Group #468 East*

*Rockaway, NJ*

**In Memory of Bruce J.**

*Longtime member, friend,*

*and group secretary for*

*many years. He will be*

*missed.*

*by Group #515 Lexington,*

*KY*

# IN MEMORIAM

## *For* Nina L

Group #831 has lost a longtime beloved member, Nina L. Those that know Nina will never forget her. Nina imparted the FA program to countless individuals through her spunky and steady presence at meetings, her consistent openness and empathy, her genuine interest in others, her quick and lively humor, and through her loving calls and contact between meetings. Nina had a gift with both newcomers and long timers, as she made everyone feel welcomed. Nina collected quotes and slogans that she effectively shared at every meeting, along with program literature that she had kept over the years. She consistently led meetings and she clearly took her program beyond the meetings; her 12<sup>th</sup> step service was a steady current of her life. As our group tries to grasp this loss, some members have written their personal thoughts about Nina:

“She was a strong woman; she will be missed in our FA meetings.” **Helene P.**

“Nina...you are forever in our hearts and will be greatly missed. I remember your experience and service, always reaching out to those in great need. Your wisdom, humor in the face of adversity, and ability to always have and instill hope and strength. You have helped me so greatly, in ways too numerous to mention. I will always remember you, Nina, with admiration and gratitude.” **Karen S.**



“Nina was such a wonderful unique personality. She had a great sense of humor, told stories with a moral to them, and was a very thoughtful person. Always crocheting, she made a blanket for my new grandson and took the trouble to find out the colors from the flags from the countries of the parents’ origins. She tried to teach me to crochet, but, to no avail! She is missed.”

**Donna F.**

“Nina means to me: a strong spirit felt by everyone, a sense of humor helping others in their darkest times, made everyone feel special. I didn’t have the opportunity to know Nina like the others in the group, but was blessed to have learned from her through others in the group.” **Kim J.**

“Nina was my mentor, she kept me calm with her calm and quiet presence at our meetings. She taught me to keep coming back, keep it simple stupid (KISS), and will forever be with me in spirit.”

**Paula C.**

“Nina was the first person to make me laugh after I broke down. Nina was the person that called me when I missed a meeting. Nina invited me to her church. Nina gave me her coin to take on my first trip to see my brother in treatment. Nina said, “Once you step aside, there’s a line of dancing attendants waiting to step in.” I am so grateful for Nina.” - **Brooke L.**