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THE 12 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 12 STEP RAG

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I came to FA as most of us did. Crushed, exhausted and humbled by a life changing understanding that absolutely nothing I did brought lasting changes in the addict. I was powerless. The scales fell off my eyes and the Fellowship began to build strength in me, to peek into hidden parts of myself, where preoccupied by others, I had never dared to look with any real honesty. In recent months, I've realized that I've made most of my life's journey so far in fear – sometimes about what my loved one will do or not do, some other times doubting if I had what it took to meet life's mundane responsibilities and at other times, afraid and worried that I had made too many mistakes. But meeting after meeting, reading after reading, I am reminded that to walk this new path is to move from fear to faith. Though we might not see what we would like to yet, we can know that when we respect ourselves and others (by not controlling them), things will work out.

In this edition of the Rag, read and remind yourself of FA's 12 promises – 'We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us,' is just one of these hopeful assurances we can hold on to.

We have stories from three wonderful grandmothers, two share with us their experiences on dealing with addiction in their families, in another submission, longtime a FA member, Theresa talks about turning 70 and how!

If you've been mulling about being a sponsor or sponsee, take inspiration from Joanne's piece on sponsorship. Don't miss FA member, Mark's heartfelt piece where he writes about his struggle with fear with honesty and clarity.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition, do send us your thoughts and stories!

In Fellowship,

Elizabeth

SOARING HIGH AT SEVENTY By Theresa C

Theresa has been an Alanon and FA member for four decades. Being part of the fellowships helped her cope with the addictions of her husband and her son. She recently threw a party for her FA fellowship to celebrate her 70th birthday. Here, she reminisces her journey so far.

I never dreamt that at seventy I will be in top form—carefree and living my life to the fullest. I am finally doing the things I never found the time or leisure to do before. I have a fantastic set of friends and find myself singing silly and dancing. I have more hobbies than I ever did, I love to dress well, I eat healthy and nutritious meals, I exercise and pray. It might sound like I have the perfect life. But guess what? It took me seven long decades to get here, to be in a state of mind that allows me this freedom.

I was the third in line of twelve children to my parents. Childhood was blissful and my parents made sure we lacked nothing. I finished my post graduation and was employed in a university by the age of 21. I had many dreams and ambitions, I wanted to do many things, but it was not to be. Sometimes, I feel because of my conforming nature I buckled down to a

mundane life and buried all my dreams for decades to come.

When I was 23, my parents found a match for me from the church we attended, as is

It might sound like I have the perfect life. But guess what? It took me seven long decades to get here

the custom in India. My silence was taken as consent to the marriage. I continued working after marriage. In the evenings my husband would take me to his friends' houses where they played cards and drank late into the nights. I would sit like a dressed up doll watching the game—I did not like to gamble or drink. I had to put up with this routine every evening. I became pregnant in the first year of our marriage and went to my mother's house for confinement. My husband fell sick and came over to stay with us, but our house got burgled and I lost all my wedding clothes and jewellery. My son was born during the same year. We continued to live with my parents on the first floor, and I went back to work. It was my father's

advice not to give up my government job, which stood by me during my difficult times.

My daughter was born three years later and meanwhile, my husband began to drink heavily and left the business he was part of. He had no job and no interest in family life. I was the sole breadwinner and took care of my family's needs and my children's education. There were constant fights and no communication between us.

Every day returning home from work my heart would be filled with trepidation and fear, wondering if I would see him drunk or sober. I would go straight to my father's home and spend some time with him sharing my work-related problems.

My husband was in and out of hospitals and once in a rehabilitation centre. I could not make up my mind on whether or not I should leave him. My children bore the brunt of his addiction, and his debtors were knocking at our doors. At this point, my husband and I began attending AA and Alanon meetings regularly. My first experience in Alanon was simply great. I was surprised to see all the members



smiling and welcoming me. The three Cs, the disease of addiction, and how it affects the family were explained to me. I felt so happy that I wasn't alone. From that day onwards I have been attending Alanon and later, FA regularly. It has now been four decades since I first stepped in and am now entering my fifth decade in the fellowship. My children were young adults and they attended Alateen with us.

My husband passed away of liver cirrhosis when I was on a trip abroad, and I had to rush back home.

Though my husband was gone, addiction continued to be part of family life. It was heartbreaking to watch my son's life being taken over by addiction. He was spoiled rotten with my extended family pampering him. He skipped classes in college and began smoking marijuana and using cough syrup. He would sleep all day and be out at night. He later dropped out of college and worked part time playing music in restaurants.

Life spiralled downward with my son's addiction to drugs and drinking. He started harassing me and abusing me, both verbally and physically. I had to leave

my house temporarily to escape him. Later, with a heavy heart and help from relatives, I mustered the strength to ask him to leave home. I even complained to the elder's helpline. He began attending NA programme and was in a rehab centre as well. He suffers from OCD and bipolar mood swings that oscillate from rage to care and it is difficult for me to manage him.

Sometimes, I wonder whether I could have done better. My daughter would say I was never there for her. It's true because I was busy attending to my alcoholic husband and neglected my children. But the programme has taught me to have no more regrets. I have learned to live and let live, with an attitude of gratitude. I try to be good to myself, no more sacrifices or playing the martyr's role.

I will continue to attend meetings,

*I have learned to live
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because they are my lifeline. The fellowship has helped me manage my life. It is here that I can open up without judgment. I find a listening ear from others, and take home for myself gems from others' experiences, strength, and hope.

Through all the vicissitudes in life I have not buckled down. I believe that by keeping myself busy I don't allow myself to wallow in self pity. With my daughter's encouragement, and strength from the fellowship, my life today is packed with hobbies I only dreamt of pursuing. I sew, knit, bake, swim, sing, garden, volunteer with a charity, do yoga, play sports and paint among other things!

Today, I feel that my higher power has blessed me. The good, the bad, and the ugly are all part of the journey. I take long and deep breaths when I feel stressed. I believe in the goodness of people. My daughter tells me to cut off ties with my son completely. I can never do that. He is part of me and as a mother I will pray for change.

I am thankful to Alanon and FA Principles that lit life's path for me. I keep in touch with my friends from all walks of life. It is my friends who keep me active and sociable. I deal with one day at a time today and at 70, I feel more alive than ever.

GRANDMOTHER'S TALES

FA members talk about looking after their grandchildren while dealing with their children's addiction



I have learned peace and serenity through detachment in dealing with my daughter and grandchildren. Due to recent events, our daughter and her children have been present in our lives, bringing chaos that has left me reeling. I had a meltdown with my husband and reached a new low. Our daughter is not polite or respectful, and my interactions with her felt like they went in one ear and exploded into splinters that I had to remove with a tweezers, one by one. My family said that I can't let her affect me like this. Well, she

did, and I needed to pull myself up by my bootstraps and get right again. I had a good talk with my husband and we understand we need boundaries...a lot of them.

I did not enable, just listened, and it was truly more than I could take. Some of her activities involved the grandchildren, and I'm having a very hard time forgiving her for that. My husband and I agreed that we will make every attempt to spend time with our grandchildren once a week, with limited contact with our daughter. They are at a very impressionable age and need honest answers, especially now with an incarcerated parent. My granddaughter recently told me in confidence that she wished her dad would die. I listened and said I did not wish him any harm, but I did understand where she was coming from. Her eyes welled up and she said her life was boring. They are not involved in any activities, and friendships are affected. I ordered an awesome book that an addiction therapist put together from drawings of children living in addiction. It's shocking, stark, and honest--shocking for me that children witness such ugly things.

Through all this I see that I am a work in progress, and many times when we fall it is a lesson that some areas of our life need shoring up... i.e. boundaries. What doesn't kill us makes us stronger. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1989, a therapist who ran a support group found that no one in the group would want to exchange their diagnosis for anyone else's. I too did not want anyone else's. So true of our bag of troubles.

SHEILA.D (Image -Painting by Boris Schatz)

CHANGE AS A VERB

Deb C writes about her role as a grandparent through her daughter's addiction

The amount of courage it takes to relinquish the desire to fix my granddaughter's world is not found alone. My precious granddaughter is 13 and is exposed to much unnecessary drama. Through FA, I have found that by taking great care of my mind, body and spirit, I can let that be enough. I can then provide a safe space and be a positive role model. I have found that small line that allows me to help my granddaughter while not enabling my daughter's drama. Through outside help, I now understand not to cross the boundary into my daughter's life by talking about my daughter in front of my granddaughter. I answer questions in a manner that gives her coping skills, rather than criticizing her mother and father. This helps her to work hard in school, sports and music. She has a support group at her school that arrived just in time. After several years of my own recovery, my relationship with my daughter has improved. No one likes a helicopter parent or grandparent. The 3Cs and the serenity prayer are a daily routine for me. The 3Cs tell me to

I now understand not to cross the boundary into my daughter's life by talking about my daughter in front of my granddaughter.

remember addiction is not my fault and that I don't have to pick up the blame or fix everything. The 3Cs introduced me to choices. The serenity prayer reminds me when things happen that I didn't cause them. However, sometimes I need to face something and correct myself.

A new perspective is born, with my higher power and FA by my side. I've learned to never underestimate the power of a smile, a compliment, a listening ear. Those actions towards me always help. So I should be wise to share.

I was looking at a childhood book that is in my personal library. Would you believe that Mother Goose was very wise?

To quote..
"For every ailment under the sun,
There is a remedy or there is none.

If there be one, try to find it.
If there be none, never mind it..."

I learned that the trick is telling them apart. Circumstances don't make me happy or unhappy. I can choose to react or choose to accept. Reaction is a bitter pill. Acceptance is the First Step.

DEB C

“

The Room

His disease
like the sky
covered everything,
Including my hope!

Giving up on life,
my pursuit of happiness.
Witnessing the end,
coming too soon.

Frozen in fear
of each moment.
Institutionalized by addiction,
locked in despair.

My head bowed.
A gentle voice
whispered my release,
keep coming back.

”

The User's Parent, 1806

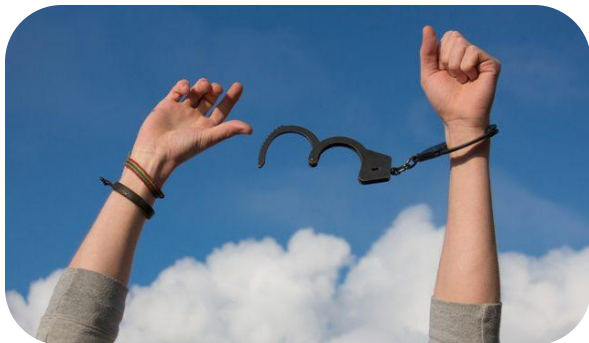


FIGHTING FEAR

FA member Mark talks about the subtle, yet damaging fear that underlines many of our lives as codependents

I was at a FA meeting recently where the topic was fear. There was a lot of good discussion about the nature of fear, its sources and impact on our programs and lives.

I didn't share during the meeting but got to thinking about myself and how I've often struggled with an apparently sourceless but pervasive sense of impending fear. I haven't been able to trace it back to some prior trauma or obvious character defect. In that room and in that moment, I was brought back to my earliest memories of my family of origin and my childhood among a close,



caring and clanish family who spoke to each other in a language of belittlement and ridicule. I was well loved and cared for; there was no alcoholism in my immediate household. But I wonder today if my parents were then adult children of alcoholics? It would be one explanation for the biting and cutting character of our discourse. I am certain no harm was intended me. But after a lot of time and thought I am also certain I

was nonetheless harmed. When I would make an inventory of my positive qualities, I would become physically flushed and feel this rapidly rising tide of resistance within me. I couldn't tell you why I was wrong in listing my positive qualities but I knew to a powerful degree that it felt deeply wrong. With help and encouragement of my sponsor, I used my intellect to nonetheless set down and validate my strengths and good qualities. But I was left with this lingering and vague sense of unresolved inadequacy that has been a constant feature of my life. I've often felt like an imposter and have been socially phobic and self-isolating - A playground for codependency and the impacts of addiction.

This occurred to me with particular force and immediacy within that meeting room. I was surrounded by people who accepted me and loved me in that special program way, yet I struggled with thoughts that while it was true for the group, they were faking it when it came to me. This kind of irrational fear is flexible and portable and I can bring it with me wherever I go. Since its effects can be subtle or hidden, it might be out there anywhere and everywhere and all the time. And it is available to me in the best of times and the best of company.

I am grateful that this has been manageable for me and that I've never suffered much or become more seriously phobic. But it's been helpful to recognize the way this has colored and limited my life and relationships. The rooms and the Fellowship have been the safe places and the company I needed to let go of that nameless fear and reach out.

MARK McP

FA'S 12 PROMISES



These Promises will come true—sometimes quickly, sometimes gradually—as we study and work the Twelve Steps and practice making them a fundamental part of our lives.

1. WE ARE GOING TO KNOW A FREEDOM FROM WORRY AND A NEW HAPPINESS.
2. WE WILL NOT REGRET THE PAST OR WISH TO SHUT THE DOOR ON IT.
3. WE WILL COMPREHEND THE WORD SERENITY.
4. WE WILL KNOW PEACE.
5. NO MATTER WHAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, WE WILL SEE HOW OUR EXPERIENCES CAN BENEFIT OTHERS.
6. THOSE FEELINGS OF RESENTMENT AND SELF-PITY WILL DISAPPEAR.
7. WE WILL LOSE INTEREST IN TRYING TO CHANGE OTHERS, AND WE WILL GAIN AN APPRECIATION FOR THOSE SPECIAL PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES.
8. SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL SLIP AWAY.
9. OUR ATTITUDES AND OUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE WILL CHANGE.
10. OUR INSECURITIES AND OUR FEAR OF OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS WILL LEAVE US.
11. WE WILL INTUITIVELY KNOW HOW TO HANDLE SITUATIONS THAT USED TO BAFFLE US.
12. WE WILL COME TO REALIZE THAT GOD IS DOING FOR US WHAT WE COULD NOT DO FOR OURSELVES.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WALK ALONE- THE GIFT OF SPONSORSHIP

At my wit's end and fearful, I kept crying to a friend, who repeatedly told me about FA and suggested I go to the meeting. I finally got there and witnessed new perspectives from people who had been there for years. After a bit, I said out loud, "I need a sponsor." I was confused, that no one raised their hand to volunteer. What I know now that I didn't know then is that they were/are codependents in recovery – no longer 'volunteers' to help a someone who is not yet willing and ready to help themselves. I kept hearing about courage in the meetings. One night, at a point of desperation in my relationship with my qualifier, I listened to a sharing by the leader and thought: "I want what she has (peace and serenity --despite unresolved problems with her daughter).

I mustered the courage to ask if she'd be my sponsor. It was disappointing that she said no, but I could understand her reasons. Sponsors need to have boundaries, too. I was also attending 'meeting without walls' (via the FA website), and was attracted by the peace and experience of a member who lived states away. Privately, I asked if she'd be my sponsor and she agreed. That was ten years ago; our relationship has changed several times through the years, but it has been constant and mutual, and we remain friends even today. From the outset, she made it clear that she was generally willing to take my calls, but she was only willing to 'work' with me if I gave her something to work with. I bought the FA Step Workbook. It was my job, as sponsee, to contact her; we did not maintain a regular schedule, and the timing of my own recovery was up to me (it took me well over a year to work all the 12 Steps). I would read a question or two, think about it as I went about my day, and then typed out the question and my response;

after completing an entire Step, I'd email it to my sponsor (via email). She inserted comments when moved to do so, in a different color font—sometimes it would go back and forth to look like a rainbow. As needed, we spoke on the phone about some issues that needed more 'skin' on them. After I completed the Steps, I had that work product (along with her input) to refer to as 'refresher' when needed.

I recall being on Step 10 when another member asked if I'd be her sponsor. My first reaction was to say 'no, too green' -- but I spoke to my sponsor about it. She said she thought I'd be a wonderful sponsor –by applying the same experience and technique I have had that opportunity to work my Step 12 with others.

- JOANNE, GROUP #1651

While it's up to each of us to work the programme, we can have the gift of sponsorship to help us stay on track. This is the first of our articles in a series on sponsorship which will appear in every issue of The Rag. If you have a story about sponsorship you'd like to share with us, do write to us

HELPING

My role as helper is not to do things for the people I am trying to help,
 but to be things;
 not to try to control and change their actions,
 but through understanding and awareness, change my reactions.

I will change my negatives to positives;
 fear to faith;
 contempt for what they do to respect for the potential within them;
 hostility to understanding;
 and manipulation or overprotectiveness to release with love.

I will not try to make them fit a standard or image,
 but give them an opportunity to pursue their own destiny,
 regardless of what their choice may be.

I will change my dominance to encouragement;
 panic to serenity;
 the inertia of despair to the energy of my own personal growth;
 and self-justification to self-understanding.

Self-pity blocks effective action.
 The more I indulge in it,
 the more I feel that the answer to my problems is a change in others and in society,
 not in myself.
 Thus, I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my energy in mulling over the past with regret,
 or in trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive.

Projecting an image of the future—
 and anxiously hovering over it for fear that it will or it won't come true—
 uses all my energy and leaves me unable to live today.
 Yet living today is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others,
 neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on,
 for in such expectations I am really trying to create or control.
 I will love and let be.

All people are always changing.
 If I try to judge them, I do so only on what I think I know of them,
 failing to realize that there is much I do not know.
 I will give others credit for attempts at progress
 and for having had many victories that are unknown.

I, too, am always changing,
 and I can make that change a constructive one,
 if I am willing.

I CAN CHANGE MYSELF.

Others I can only love.

Hosting a convention is even more exhilarating than simply attending one! For those of you that have ever attended a Families Anonymous Convention or, even if you have never attended and are part of our FA family, we hope you will ask your group to strongly consider being our next host group. The excitement throughout the year during the preparation is truly rewarding and will bring your home group much closer.

2019 FA CONVENTION

Secretaries, please make this a priority at your next meeting to spread the word and remember that giving away what we have is working the 12th Step!

Hosting a convention is not quite as daunting as you might think, and the model will be available for your group by a previous host group. We have outlined, in detail, a complete plan to use for each committee and the wheels are in full motion for your group to take this excitement to fruition. We have FA members that are on the World Service Board and are willing to hold your hand throughout the process and will be happy to share their experience, strength and hope throughout the year!

P.S. One more thing to keep in mind is that two or more groups can merge to host the convention; remember the more the merrier... Please let me know your thoughts via email at SBS2nott@aol.com

*Regards,
Susan S - WSB Convention Liaison*

40th Annual Chicagoland Families Anonymous Convention

Strength Through Sharing

Sunday, November 4, 2018 8 AM – 3 PM

Join us at: Presence Resurrection Medical Center – Conference Center

7435 W. Talcott Avenue, Chicago, IL 60631

Park in Lot 1 and use Entrance 1 (Main Entrance)

(Take Bank N Elevator to Ground Floor and follow signs to Conference Center)

Schedule: Registration/Continental Breakfast 8 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Program 8:45 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Includes speakers, workshops, and lunch.

Cost: Special group rate– Mail 4 or more registrations together for \$35 per person. (Must be received in the office by October 19th)

Early individual registration - \$45 (Must be received in the office by October 19th.)

Registration after Oct. 19th - \$50

Please make checks payable to: Families Anonymous Chicagoland

Mail to: Families Anonymous Chicagoland Convention, 701 Lee St., Suite 670,
Des Plaines, IL 60016

Fund Raiser-Raffle with cash prizes: Six tickets for \$5.00.

Contributions to help with convention expenses are appreciated!

**If you have questions, call the Chicagoland FA Office: 847-795-8320 or
email: fachicagoland@aol.com**

Memorial Donations

*In Memory of Keith P
Group 1806
Edmond, Ok*

*In Memory of Bill W
Group 1806
Edmond, Ok*

*In Memory of Brenda C,
Longtime FA member of the now
defunct Flushing chapter
IL State*

*In Honor of Aaron,
Son of Georgina and Paul
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*In Memory of Pat R
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*In Memory of Jonathan Hammond,
Son of Sherry and David H
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DONATE NOW. Thank you for supporting the
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SEND US YOUR SUBMISSIONS

Each of us has a story to tell. The Twelve Step Rag needs to hear from you. Without member involvement there is no Rag. Submissions can be emailed to 12steprag@familiesanonymous.org or mailed to Families Anonymous, Inc., 701 Lee St, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508. The Twelve Step Rag is a recovery tool publication about you and for you. So, let's hear from you!