

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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FOUR-FOOTED ANGELS



I remember when I went on a compulsive hunt for a new girl to fill my Sheila's paws. I went to the humane society when I saw that they had a young cattle dog. I jumped through the hoops so that they would take her out of the kennel for me. I played with her, realizing the same thing: this is not Sheila. I thought back to what led me there, sitting in the gravel where a hundred barking dogs surround me.

I realized, driving home from a meeting, I wasn't going to be greeted by my girl. Now this doesn't happen very often anymore – that sharp jolt of reality, followed by loneliness.

I drove past the area where Sheila had been found, 14 years ago. Maybe I would find the dairy she came from and they would have more? Ludicrous, I thought. But still, I ended up in gravel with a dog that wasn't Sheila.

I brushed off my jeans, washed my hands, and went to buy steaks for dinner. I called my sister-in-law and confessed my secret life of abandoned-dog shopping. That I had taken a two-hour detour to learn the same lesson - again. I better understand the early days of being clean and sober. The hole it leaves in life. The compulsion to fill - and while I spend hours and hours in spiritual pursuit and loving

and living, I suddenly find myself in gravel, with a poor sweet creature that doesn't belong to me. That can't possibly fill the hole in my heart just so. The rims of that empty space are healing, just as the precious creature that I hug too tight is reeling from loss and loneliness and anxiety.

This search, should I pursue it, will be a starting from scratch deal. I need to dust off my expectations like the gravel. All things being equal - accept a new girl on life's terms. Maybe this is just compulsive behavior that must stop. Maybe I'm not ready to give up my expectations because I am afraid of losing the memory of a girl that saved my life. I don't know. But I'm embarrassed.

My sister-in-law said, "I think you are doing what you must do. Getting stronger. Finding out. Sharon," she said, "Sheila was amazing. I can only imagine how you feel." I said, "She was so special. I just miss her."

My heart truly did heal from the loss of dear Sheila. I realize today what an enormous comfort and friend a beloved pet can be during times of tremendous stress and pain. Sheila was a witness to the decline of my precious son and the death of my drug-addicted mother. She saw my grief, my hanging on, my isolation and my rising from those ashes to truly living again. When

she left, I didn't need her in the same way I did in the beginning. But oh how I loved her for her devotion and unconditional devotion. We rescued a new cattle dog puppy soon after her death. When I cuddled that blue little creature, I shed my last tears for Sheila.

Shelby Rose is not at all like Sheila. She is 100% cattle dog and her herding instinct did not sit well with our two aging bulldogs. So she goes to work every day with my husband. She herds the employees back to their desks and cubicles. Each of them has special treats for Shelby and each has a unique relationship with her. She calms their hearts when there is trouble. They miss her if she stays at home.

My son is living out his recovery by being a case manager as a substance abuse counselor. He found his deliverance and healing quite apart from me. God had just the time and place and people that spoke to his need and heart. He has a wonderful wife and beautiful infant son, River. Our grandson, so peaceful and unique.

God gives such good gifts - four-footed angels, sobriety, and wholeness. I need only keep my hands open to receive.

Sharon M

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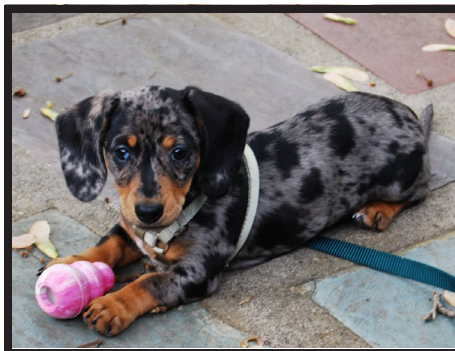
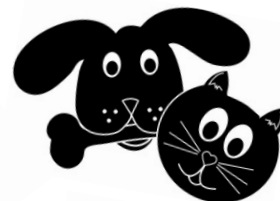
Namrata N, Bangalore, India

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**To all the members
who shared their pet
tales of recovery ,
thank you.**

**Follow the paw prints,
through-out this issue, to read
all of these wonderful stories.**



Let's talk...

Do you think there is such a thing
as spending too much time and
focus on self-improvement?

Send your reflections to:

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Please continue to send your submissions to
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Topic Ideas

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

*Send your ideas to
RagEditor12@gmail.com*

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BROKEN WINGS - BROKEN TRUST



Thinking back to a memory of when I was a kid to an alcoholic dad. We left him for a week, as my mother took me and my sister to visit my grandma. I was seven and my sister was five. My dad was to paint the apartment and take care of our pet parakeet. We came home to find that my dad had forgotten about the bird. No food, no fresh water and paint fumes - you can guess the rest.

The bird was my sister's pet. Oh, how she cried. She was hurt and angry and she voiced it. My mother was angry, and voiced it. I remember, more than my own feelings, was the hurt that my sister expressed. It sure didn't set up confidence and trust -- that he would take care of much, including us. My mother was the responsible one -- we never knew what to expect from my dad. I learned not to rely on him - until years later, when he was well into recovery.

Remarkably, and joy-filled -- about a week later, a parakeet flew out of the sky and landed on my grandmother's shoulder. We had a cage for that bird -- who was sickly. We nursed it back to health, and enjoyed the antics of a bird who was quite vocal: "Pretty boy, Ricky. Your deal, Ricky!" Ultimately, thankful for the laughter and recovery.

Joanne M

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.

Maya Angelou



WHEN I FINALLY GOT ALL MY DUCKS IN A ROW,
I REALIZED THEY'RE NOT EVEN MY DUCKS.
LET GO OF THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL.

FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

HOW CAN YOU "SPREAD THE WORD" BUT REMAIN TRUE TO FA TRADITIONS?

Do you:

--feel some relief and contentment after attending a local FA meeting?

--have the desire to provide this same opportunity to others?

--know how to go about this?

The source that is available to provide us with information on how to get the word out about our FA meetings, while remaining true to our Traditions? This source is Spread The Word About Families Anonymous.

This newly revised booklet covers such topics as Becoming Known and Public Information Contacts. It also includes Announcements and Community Referral Listings, as well as other pertinent topics to assist you and your group in making a plan to "spread the word."

A number of additional topics covered in this 20-page guide, include: The FA Meeting, World Service PI Support, Public Information Materials, as well as Planning Tips for executing your public information (PI) initiative. The ideas for plans within this booklet can help you spread the word about FA and remain true to the Traditions that guide us.

So, do the questions and topics above pique your interest? If so, this brochure can provide you with appropriate ways to provide the public with an opportunity to gain the same comfort that you have been experiencing through your local FA meeting.

Order #7007 - Spread The Word About Families Anonymous

A Day Worth Noting

I remember a time when I was staying with my elderly mother, taking care of her as she dealt with chemo. Back home my husband was dealing with other issues.

We had two dogs -- a young yellow lab and 13-year-old golden retriever. The golden is our daughter's dog but has been living with us since she joined the family. Our daughter spent most of the past several years in an out of rehab, homelessness and other states of addiction, so we've always had her dog with us.

Our daughter had a good job, her own apartment, paid her own bills and may or may not be sober all the time. Her life, not mine. This past weekend was a real test for her. Her dog, the gentle and sensitive golden retriever, always knew whether she was sober or not. It was amazing to see the dog react -- open and happy equaled sober daughter; reserved and distant equaled drugged or drunk daughter. That weekend, her dog stopped being able to walk. Our daughter joined her dad at the vet ER on that Saturday night -- filling out forms, making sure the doctors knew her dog's health history, calling me for details she didn't have, and comforting her dad. Then, daughter and dad had to do the difficult thing -- decide that

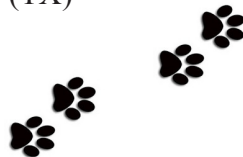
it was time to end our golden girl's suffering.

While it is very painful to say good bye to a steadfast friend, I was so proud of my daughter's progress. She left work to be with her dog at the end. She mourned the loss of her childhood pal. But that evening she went to be with her dad to be sure he was okay since I'm was not there. She comforted our lab who was missing her running buddy. She called her uncles to tell them so they could check in on her dad. She checked on me and her grandmother and told me not to worry -- she was sad but it was good that she was having feelings -- kind of cool being sober.

This was amazing because the year before that time, we had her involuntarily committed to a psych unit followed by a year-long inpatient program. And one year later, she was a sensitive, caring adult, stepping in to take care of things that needed her attention and acknowledging loss without trying to hide from it with drugs.

And she did it without my "help."

Jeanne (TX)



Reasons to Smile

We lost our pet after 10½ wonderful years. The dog served as a kind of link between our daughter and her departed grandma. It was a sad and poignant time despite remembering our dog's happy life. Her passing came at a difficult time when our daughter happened to be really struggling with being away over the holidays.

On the way home from the vet, after our pet had peaceably passed, on an impulse I emailed a local breeder expecting that she would have a new litter available in the spring. Within a few minutes the breeder called with one of those stories. She had a fall litter that had just been placed but for one girl puppy. The woman who had already selected her unfortunately had a bad fall and broken leg so that she had to defer until a future litter. The upshot was that we went up to meet with the breeder and had a new puppy by the weekend.

Our dogs have been "Newfies" (Newfoundlands), so you can imagine how trying having a rambunctious, rapidly growing, shedding and drooling dog can be. But she's been a blessing and a respite, a distraction, and a reason to smile even when we are all worn down with events

Mark McP.

Live
like someone
left the gate
open.

*The only way love can last a lifetime is
if it's unconditional.
The truth is this: love is not determined by
the one being loved but rather by
the one choosing to love.
— Stephen Kendrick*

The Face Behind The Fear

“Be prepared to pay a higher ransom,” said the text I received from B., the intermediary on this Saturday before Thanksgiving, 2014, after my 100-mile drive from home. My family was not happy that I’d come alone. Yet here I waited, in a coffee-scented restaurant, in the town where my son lived out his downward spiral.

As everyone with an addicted loved one knows, fear lies center stage in our everyday struggle. Our imagination soars with intruding visions of faceless associates: people our loved ones party with, buy drugs from, sell drugs to, and so on. How many nights do we go to bed imagining our loved ones in the company of frightening strangers?

In those last few months, as my son’s life fell apart, he and his cat Sonny lived in his car after being evicted. Then his girlfriend, also an addict, gave his cat to yet another user for safekeeping. Thankfully, my son, age 29, homeless and penniless, was now safe in detox, with ten days clean. He said he wanted to change; this time he seemed serious.

Here in the coffee shop, staying calm was a challenge even as Families Anonymous taught me the importance of controlling my thoughts. More texts came from B., a “clean” friend of my son. “I’m warning you that he’s wanting more money,” B. texted. “Tell him what you’ll pay, but I wouldn’t mess around with this guy if you’re serious about what you came for.”

Feeling uneasy, I counted out \$260 in bills, tucking them into my left pocket, with another \$40 into a right pocket as back-up, and \$10 in still another pocket.

Heading to the mall where B. awaited, my mind raced: Was I enabling by not letting my son be responsible for the circumstances he had caused? Why had I not been a better mother?

As I pulled into the parking lot, B. stood by an outdoor table. Seeing me, he signaled to a young man in dark glasses emerging from a car. I drew my jacket around me.

The young man carried a cat, thin with patchy fur. Under one arm he carried a notebook. After handing the cat to B., he sat down at the table, where he opened the notebook. He flipped to a page filled with handwriting, neatly formed, though I couldn’t read the words.

“\$260,” I said, wanting to get this exchange over.

“Expenses come to more,” said the young man without looking up.

“\$280,” I said.

He shook his head.

I asked myself what I would do if he demanded more money than I carried. Trying to hide my anxiety, I thought of what FA taught: compassion, patience, and faith. “\$300,” I offered. “Clear cash.”

When he didn’t answer I said, “I’ll go \$310. You can leave right now with this cash and that will be the end of it. That’s my final offer.”

With his head still lowered over the notebook, he seemed to be studying the lines on the paper, though I couldn’t tell where his gaze fell. He reminded me of a boy rather than a man. What if he refused my offer? As he brought his pen into his fist, I wondered what my next move would be. “No hassle,” I assured him.

“Fine,” he said at last. He scratched out a figure on the page which I now saw was \$435; this figure was replaced with \$310 as if a serious business transaction was taking place. He pointed to the bottom of the page, indicating that I was to sign. Before signing, I read what amounted to a receipt:

Received from P’s mom, for four months care of cat, ending any further claim.

After I signed, he signed his name next to mine. “He loves salmon with gravy,” he said. “Be sure to give him lots of gravy. And would you please text me when you get him home so I know he’s alright because he’s very scared.” I was struck by this request from a young man with his head down and eyes hidden.

That evening, having safely returned home with Sonny the cat, I kept thinking of the young man: his sunglasses, concern for the cat, the meticulous receipt. I thought of the advice I wished I could give him. Maybe he didn’t have a family. Then I remembered the Serenity Prayer, which tells me that the choices of others lie beyond my control.

The living room was already dark when I texted him, telling him that Sonny was safe and eating salmon with gravy. Within a matter of minutes, a reply came, lighting up the room:

“I can’t deny the fact that I sat in the car and some tears came, as I loved that cat. If you decide not to keep him, please let me know.”

These words stunned me. What could I possibly say? I wanted to give this young man a hug. I wasn’t his mother and I wasn’t his Higher Power. I was powerless, and all I could do was pray for him.

Four months after I rescued Sonny, he’s putting on weight. His fur is growing back. My son now has 115 days in recovery. I think of the young man. Though I couldn’t see his eyes, I got a glimpse of his heart. Compassion, patience and faith helped me to get Sonny back. The face behind the fear may have been mine in the beginning, but now I realize it was the addict’s.

Kimberly A. E. and Sacramento FA

My Cats



I know. I know.

they are limited, have different needs and concerns.

but I watch and learn from them.

I like the little they know, which is so much.

they complain but never worry,
they walk with a surprising dignity.
they sleep with a direct simplicity that humans just can't understand.

their eyes are more beautiful than our eyes.
and they can sleep 20 hours a day without hesitation or remorse.

when I am feeling low
all I have to do is watch my cats and my courage returns.

I study these creatures.

they are my teachers.

Charles Bukowski



STEP FIVE

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

FA 12 Promises

#5 - No matter what we've been through, we will see how our experiences can benefit others.

FA 12 Traditions

#5 - Each group has but one primary purpose: to help those concerned with someone who may have a problem of drugabuse or dependence. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of this program, by encouraging and understanding those affected by this illness, and by welcoming and giving comfort to the families and friends of individuals with acurrent, suspected, or former drug problem.

My New Life

Calling all members !

What do you do for yourselves to cope with and enjoy life.

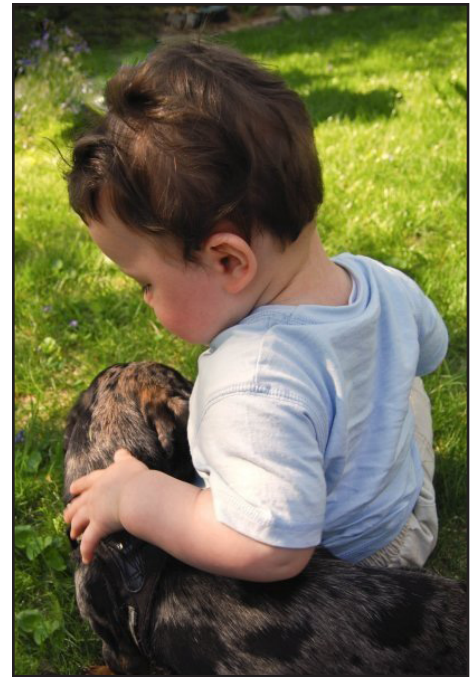
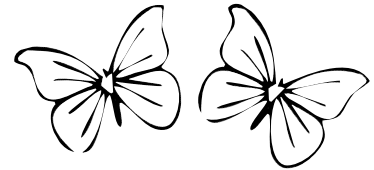
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Milford, CT



I have found that when you are deeply troubled, there are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source. - *Doris Day*



FA Convention Miami, Florida June 3-5, 2016

“STEPS TO SERENITY”

With the help and support of many FA members and groups around the country, the South Miami Group 134 will host the 44th Annual FA Convention on Friday, June 3 through Sunday 5, 2016.

SPEAKERS, WORKSHOPS, FELLOWSHIP AND FUN!

The Friday evening program will include fun activities to get to know your fellow FA members from around the country, a talk on “Steps to Serenity” by Maty H., and an FA meeting. Saturday will start with a breakfast keynote by Judge Steve Leifman on the topic “The Stigma of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness Often Co-occur,” followed by a day of 16 speakers and workshops to choose from, and a lunchtime talk by Cleve B, Executive Director of Riverside House, on the topic “Celebrate Spiritual Recovery.” Saturday evening we’ll celebrate our fellowship with a dinner, great silent auction, a DJ, dancing and fun. Sunday morning the Convention will conclude with a closing breakfast and spiritual speakers Rabbi Chaim Albert and Father Roger Tobin, on the topic “Stepping Out of the Darkness and into the Light.”

Some of the workshop topics for the convention will include:

Serenity is “Making Healthy Choices”
Recovery Process and Intimacy in the Marital/Parental Relationships
Serenity through Spirituality
Letting Go by Accepting God’s Will, and Not Just for Me
Is Addiction Treatment a Success or Failure?
Living the Twelve Steps and Saying No and Meaning It
One Foot in Front of Another to Reclaim Serenity
What Seemed to be a Nightmare Turned Out to be a Miracle and Blessing
The Key to Survival – an Experience with Detachment
Serenity is Choices and Changes for the Family
Legal Aspects for Wills and Trusts
A Retired Police Officer and Grateful AA Member Shares his Experience,

(Note: all speakers and programs subject to change.)

ATTEND THE CONVENTION!

The Convention will begin Friday evening and conclude before noon on Sunday. Registration: The Convention registration fee is \$185. The registration fee includes: Friday meet and greet; Saturday breakfast, lunch, dinner and entertainment; Sunday breakfast; and all workshops and speakers. Information for registering online or by mail is available at www.2016famiamiconvention.org. For reservations, contact the hotel directly at: Hilton Miami Airport Hotel, 5101 Blue Lagoon Dr., Miami, FL 33126, (800) 445-8667, www.hiltonmiamiairport.com. Use Group Code "FAS" when registering. The hotel provides free shuttle service to and from Miami International Airport.

SUPPORT THE CONVENTION!

If you’re unable to attend, but want to support the Convention, please make a donation online at www.2016famiamiconvention.org/donate/, or mail a check payable to “FA 2016 Convention” to 2016 FA Miami Convention, 6619 South Dixie Highway, Suite 339, Miami, FL 33143. For other ways to support the Convention, such as donating Silent Auction items or buying space in the Convention Program Booklet, visit www.2016famiamiconvention.org/event-fundraising/.

For more information,
visit the convention website at
www.2016famiamiconvention.org
or email
2016famiamiconvention@gmail.com
or call Pam C. at 305-302-8698.

Lesson in Letting Go

This morning, I had my volunteer duty as a turtle patrol permittee and had a few nests to dig for data . In one of those nest I encountered a live turtle and since it was very early and the sky was covered in clouds - it was okay to release it right then and there as oppose to waiting for night time. In any event, this release reminded me that - this little guy was being let go in the big Gulf of Mexico to fend for himself and hopefully to live a productive life and produce more little turtles when becoming of age. I watched - without helping or assisting - as he crawl on the sand and soon started swimming when he felt the water. I kept my eyes on him as he kept coming back up for air. It was with a smile that I watched as he kept on going further and further away from me.

Little ones are loaned to us and then we need to let them go - they have their own journey and so do I.

Namaste.

France

STEP SIX

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

FA 12 Promises

#6 - Those feelings of resentment and self-pity will disappear.

FA 12 Traditions

#6 - Our family groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

Never discourage anyone...who continually makes progress, no matter how slow. — Plato



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