

# 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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## A Mother's Resistance to Letting Go

I honestly can't make sense of the power that my son and his addiction has over me. I can't understand why I have such an intense need to keep him from suffering. I can't logically find a reason to keep holding on emotionally, but then, of course, addiction is never about logic, and my addiction is to keeping him from a life of pain. I have an addiction to enabling. I am much less addicted than years ago but I still have work to do.

My son's journey started when he was about 15 and he is almost 25 now. It probably actually started much earlier; it was in elementary school when a psychiatrist told me that he had no self-soothing skills. Perhaps I contributed to the problem, and it went back even further, to infancy, when my codependency began. It was in infancy, when the strange bond that's hard to describe between us, took hold. There was always a vulnerable, fragile quality to him that was the perfect antidote to my need to fix or to protect. For whatever reason, my connection to my two other children was very different. They didn't need me as much, or something. To this day, I regret so deeply the fact that I half-ignored my other two children. I didn't know at the time that I was

ignoring them. My life was an intense, year after year condition of low level panic and I was overwhelmed. If you had asked me if I was having a good day I would have to stop and wonder first, is this child having a good day today? If he was then I was. He had a charming charisma about him; a certain energy that is probably common to master manipulators.

By any standard in the FA community, my son's journey has been severe. He was so out of control in high school that we had to hire "kidnapper interventionists" to transport him to a wilderness therapy program, and then later to a residential boarding school across the country. He would run away and we would hire the kidnappers again. I was traumatized by having to ship him across the country too, knowing that his anxiety disorder would be debilitating. In the years since high school his life has been a steady rotation of sober livings, treatment centers, and jail. He has been in jail 12 times and probably in treatment about 6. We have hired lawyers. We have said over and over, this is the last time, but then when we find him half dead on the floor we pick him up and transport him back to inpatient treatment. We have locked

him out of the house, we have not bailed him out of jail, and we have heard his cries for help and turned away in the name of tough love. I need to just stop caring. The truth is though, I have made enormous progress. And because of my son, I have developed a rich spiritual life.

It was years ago, when I was feeling particularly helpless and terrified, that the only door open to me was the spiritual realm. He was the one problem I could not fix. Over the years my identity has shifted from primarily "mother of the addict" to "me, who has a son who is an addict." Sometimes it is "me, who has a son." I have days and weeks where I feel able to detach and I can actually believe and practice the great words of Byron Katie: "Allow others the dignity of their own suffering."

But I think I lie to myself. I am not detached. My son has supposedly been clean from drugs and alcohol for eight months now; I actually believe that he is telling the truth on that. But he's not really clean, because he steals. His adrenaline rush comes from stealing from us, not from others. I think jail finally nipped his shoplifting habit in the

*(Continued on page 7)*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Each of us has a story to tell. The Twelve Step Rag needs to hear from you. Submissions to the newsletter have declined. Without member involvement there is no Rag.

Submissions can be emailed to RagEditor12@gmail.com, faxed to 847-294-5837, or mail 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.

In Service,  
Lisa W  
Rag Editor

## FA Chicagoland Convention

**40th Annual Chicagoland  
Families Anonymous Convention  
Theme: Humility-Unity-Serenity**

Sunday, November 5, 2017, 8 AM - 3 PM

Presence Resurrection Medical Center - Conference Center  
7435 W. Talcott Avenue, Chicago, IL 60631

Cost: \$45 for individual for entire day if registration is received by Friday, October 20. \$35 group rate (4 or more people) if registration is received by Friday, October 20. After 10/20, cost is \$50. Continental breakfast and box lunch are included.

### Topic Ideas

*Is there a topic  
you would like to see  
covered in the Rag?  
Send your ideas to  
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Emeeting:  
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# The Colors of Recovery

More than a decade ago, I attended my first FA meeting. It was just like tonight – an anniversary event. October 2006, in Tenafly. I was dejected and desperate but slightly hopeful – my son was in jail. While I felt ashamed, I also felt relieved. Although I didn't know it yet, that feeling of relief was one of the first paradoxes of new thinking I would have to embrace at FA.

How can a parent feel relief when her child is suffering?

How can doing less for your child help him more?

Why is detaching an act of love?

Today I can say that these paradoxes, these counter-intuitive principles, this better way and new thinking, saved my soul and gave Ben the chance to save his. We were locked in a miserable co-dependence during the “chaos” years (manipulation, drug use, fighting, police, lying, enabling, denial, disrespect, loudness). But once detached, we were able to find parallel paths of recovery; putting trust in a higher power first, and much later our way back to a healthy adult relationship today, as you can see!!

For me, after that feeling of relief, which turned out to be fleeting, I began my journey of accepting powerlessness and change.

It began with Red. Anger. Instead of making excuses for myself and Ben, I stepped out of my denial, and accepted that I could not change my son. This freed me to become angry and see the situation for what it really was: my son was an addict

whose behavior was unacceptable. He was out of control and violent. I was now willing to be appalled at his choices, and because I learned to detach (with an axe), I could now feel that anger. This period lasted for about 15 months, until Ben went to prison – a three-year sentence.

Next came Blue. Depression. Reality hit. I was the mother of an addict and a prisoner. Worry snuck back up on me along with it's friends, guilt and doubt. Had I been too detached? Would he survive prison mentally? Was I a callous human? Did Ben know I loved him? Round and round went my thoughts. Fortunately, I had this room and the wisdom of my mentors in FA to help me build my strength; my second tough love backbone. I called people, met up with them. I learned that less really is more – less talking, less interaction, less concern: let Ben figure it out now, they said. And so I did. And so he did!

Yellow. Hope. Yes, the sun was rising. I made friends in FA. I got healthy. I set boundaries. I practiced saying no to Ben, other family members, co-workers. The truth is, I was restored to sanity. Everyone in the family was breathing and changing without my will in the way. And Ben changed. He went to meetings in prison and later even took a class there brought in by a Rutgers program. The yellow period lasted a long time with some backsliding into blue, but yellow is a solid place to live: day by day, no expectations, grateful, but without projections of the future or relapse into enabling. It was during this period that I grew professionally and became a yogi.

And it was when Ben made his way into his journey of recovery upon his release in 2010. He accepted his parole, worked his 12-step program, attended Rutgers, and grew up.

Now my recovery is Green. Renewal. The trust between mom and son is restored. Conversations are natural. Care is constant. It took seven years to get there and now it has been eleven.

What do the colors of my recovery mean? Well, recovery advances, evolves, increases, and emerges in stages, each with its teachers. Progress not perfection. Reflection. Fake it till you make it. Give time, time. Change.

These colors – stages – are different for everyone but they replace chaos and give us the strength to accept the paradoxes. Allow suffering. Less is more. Detach.

Here is one more: I am the mother of an addict and, I'm going to say it out loud, I couldn't be more proud.

Connie C



# What I Want

I just “love” when I hear “Is this what you wanted?” “Well I guess you got what you wanted” (I hope you can hear the sarcasm). I just smile. I smile because I’m not sure whether to laugh or cry. You see, “my want” with regard to changing my son (or anyone for that matter) sailed away a long time ago--never to return.

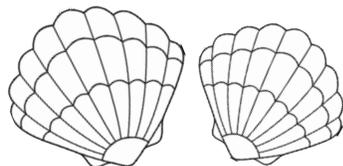
Let me share my experience to better explain. My son always struggled in school and then by age 14 began his journey with substance abuse. My husband and I tried everything we could to “help” with both school, and to “cure” the addiction. For today’s purpose, let’s just focus on the school part. We sent our son to private schools and we were very, very involved with his school work. Perhaps a tad too involved! We simply needed him to pass!! By sophomore year of HS it was obvious that the addiction needed attention. At this point, we did our due diligence researching therapeutic boarding schools (TBS) and sent our son to what we thought was a “great” school. As it turns out, this was a very good school; but not for our son. He chose to keep running away and simply refused to do any work. He even lived on the streets for a month defying everyone’s expectations---he was going to show us! But we kept paying the tuition and, for anyone who’s been on this part of the journey, this is big bucks!

Next, we decided to send our son to a TBS that was very far away--across the country as a matter of fact--hoping he would not run. He stopped running. Our son stayed at this school. Hallelujah! Nope. Every time he got close to earning credits, he walked away. In the end, our son stayed in HS until he was 21 years old. He left with a 10th grade education--certainly not what I ever “wanted.”

So you see, it’s never been about what I want! I want my son to stop taking drugs; to get a job, to get an education, to develop healthy relationships, and to be happy. None of this is happening for my son right now. So today, if you ask me what “I” want: I want to be peaceful and serene, I want to be productive, I want to avoid insanity (and you all know what I’m talking about!). I can do this! I can do this because I attend Families Anonymous and work my 12 step program and I have a strong faith. I can do this because I have hope. It took a long time, with lots of hard knocks and tears, but I can tell you in all honesty that I have learned a great lesson at Families Anonymous---I can only change myself, others I can only love.

In case you haven’t noticed, I use humor often. On a serious note, this is an extremely humbling experience and I recently read that once you think you have humility--you’ve lost it. So I am careful. I know that I am not perfect. I also know that it helps me more than it helps you to be able to share my story. I am grateful and I thank you....

By pkmam



## Boundaries

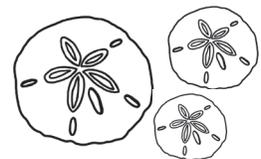
*Here are some realities I have learned:*

1. I have a right to live in a drug free home.
2. I have a right to preserve the drug-free nature of my home, whatever that takes.
3. My son (or anyone else) does not need prior warning before I eject them for bringing an illegal substance into my home. It’s my home; I set the rules.
4. I have the right to peace in my life, and to ensure that peace however I need to.
5. My son (or any of my children) does not have the right to live in my home; they have a right to pursue whatever life they like, but they do not have claim upon me or my resources to support it if I choose not to.

Those are hard realities, but they have been life savers for me.

Paul/MI

From May-June 2013 Rag



“If you spend your life sparing people’s feelings and feeding their vanity, you get so you can’t distinguish what should be respected in them.”

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

# On the Road to Serenity

My daughter is doing well at the moment. But despite where she is on the path of her recovery, I know I need to focus on my recovery and keeping myself healthy – both mentally and physically. It's not always easy but I keep working it. In the past days and weeks I have been noticing signs of serenity and it has done me a lot of good to notice and reflect on them. As I was going to be leading one of my group's upcoming FA meetings, I decided to jot some of them down and share them with the group. The signs were these ...

Shut off my phone

Listened to some music

Went for a walk (or run, or hike)

Said "no"

Got a good night's sleep

Stuck to a boundary

Didn't allow her crisis to become my crisis

Called an FA friend if I needed to

Listened to what she had to say

Didn't change my plans when the "crisis" really didn't need me to change my plans

I hope that everyone in the FA fellowship can find some of their own signs on the road to their serenity and gain some happiness from it, even if only for a moment.

Jeff S. / Group 1858

TODAY I WILL  
live in the NOW

A wise person said, "He who has one eye on yesterday and one eye on tomorrow sees not clearly today."

One thing I surely cannot change is the past. Regretting the past or searching it to find out where I went wrong does nothing to enhance my present, nor does it offer a chance to correct my mistakes. My intentions have been good for the most part.

The Red Book, October 2



Whether the weather be fine  
Or whether the weather be not,  
Whether the weather be cold  
Or whether the weather be hot,  
We'll weather the weather  
Whatever the weather,  
Whether we like it or not.

---

## Responsibility

Today A Better Way  
July 2nd

As newcomers to Families Anonymous, we find it difficult to accept the First Step----admitting we have no control over someone else, especially our own children. We find it difficult to believe we can do nothing to overcome the acts of our sons or daughters. "Why," we ask, "should we not be able to control our children's actions? Isn't that our responsibility as parents?" Sometimes it takes Step Two to help us realize how much is beyond our control. We begin to understand how our reactions may have actually made matters worse. Faith in a *power greater than ourselves* helps us stop fretting. With few if any alternatives, we start to get ready for Step Three, in which we *let go and let God*. In FA, we learn to recognize where our own responsibilities begin and end. We allow others to discover the same boundaries of responsibility for themselves.

*TODAY I WILL* accept my powerlessness over others and claim responsibility for myself.

## Step 12--

*Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

One of the first Families Anonymous meetings I attended focused on this step. It was a dream come true! All I had to do was wade through the other 11 steps and then **-BAM-** I would have a spiritual awakening, my problems would be solved, and I would become an expert on living with an addict and be able to guide others who perhaps had only gotten to Step Five or Six. I couldn't wait for the serenity to occur.

I have been through all the steps at least twice by now, and, of course, not all my problems are solved and I am in no position to give advice.

I did have a spiritual awakening, however. I can look at this step more realistically now. Working, really working, the other steps has helped me to look at the way I deal with living with an addict and life in general. While I don't always succeed at, for example, being pro-active rather than reactive, I realize the possibilities of how I can improve my lot in life. And maybe that's the message for others. Families Anonymous isn't magic. It is a place to feel safe and learn from others' experiences, both positive and negative, so we, as "The 12 Steps" notes, can live comfortably in spite of unsolved problems.

Monica, Simsbury CT

Reprint July-August 2012 Rag.

## COMING TO MEETINGS

I have learned so much of myself and I will continue to come to FA meetings forever.

I had a small magnet on my fridge for years which had the Serenity Prayer on it but I could never say it. Now after eight months of coming to the meetings I can say it by heart. The tears, the anger, and the self pity, are a thing of the past – I stay silent and look at myself first.

I am proud of my efforts, but equally as proud of my son with him going to meetings and helping others, and me with my meetings and passing on pamphlets.

It has been a huge awakening to us all!

Elsa H



In Memory of  
Nona S.  
long time member of FA  
by  
Group 1187  
Bloomfield, CT



Thank you Nona,  
for keeping us ever hopeful.

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# A Mother's Resistance to Letting Go

*(Continued from page 1)*

bud. We become enraged, we tell him he is banned from the house, we kick him out. After sleeping in his car in the heat for awhile he sneaks back into the house and my addiction to enabling kicks in. Once more, I let him stay for a few days. I'm not calling the police again. The justice system is too brutal and inhumane and I don't agree with it. So this is my problem, I know. What's wrong with me? I realized recently that my codependency with my son was similar to that of a battered wife. I honestly never could understand why a battered wife would stay in a relationship. But recently I understood: if I turn my son away, the son who has the mental illness of addiction/anxiety/whatever-you-want-to-call-it, then I am a cruel person. Because deep down, I carry a belief that he can't help himself. Deep down, I believe that he is incapable. My personality is not even that of a helper type. I am not a Mother Teresa type of personality. But with this son, I can't tolerate the thought that I could prevent his suffering. I know this is my problem. I know I am making it worse. I know.

I thought I was actually getting closer to emotionally detaching until a few days ago when I was given a book written by a psychiatrist. It was a good book and I respected his viewpoints, but then he started in on his view of spirituality. He listed six stages of spirituality and he called people in stage one "The immoral". It is now fashionable to blame all one's woes on a dysfunctional upbringing or on drugs or alcohol. Adult sociopaths (as we call such individuals in clinical psychiatry) learn to be very clever in their

pursuit of self-gain. He went on to say that they needed to be locked up, and worse, the people who do nothing to stop them and who put up with it, are barely any better. "All that is required for evil to triumph," he said, "is for good men and women to do nothing."

This book had a profound effect on me. I spent two days trying to take in the concept that my son was a sociopath. I have to make peace with this, I told myself. I must accept that I have a son who literally is evil. I need to stop making excuses, I told myself. Accept the hard truth. I wrestled with this for a day and got a migraine headache. I knew, deep in my core, that this psychiatrist was dead wrong. My son was not evil.

I then found relief in a brilliant spiritual writing about miracles, which had many things to say about evil. The text is extremely challenging and doesn't give all the answers of course, but in essence it teaches that evil is always up for interpretation. When we think we know what is best for all we are deceived because, in truth, only God can know. We all are flawed, we all are seeking love, and evil in fact is a call for love. It is all about forgiveness and about teaching that we can't possibly understand the bigger picture. It doesn't suggest that we don't give consequences, and it doesn't suggest that we should let our addicts off the hook, but it confirmed what I already knew about my son. He is a son of God; he is trying his hardest and even when he commits horrible acts, in that moment that's the best he's got.

Betsy T

## FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

### Do You Remember?

Family life not what you expected or hoped to experience?

Someone you love, causing havoc in your family?

Seeking a source which will help you understand and possibly cope better with the situation?

Where to get help?

These are thoughts and questions that confronted many of us, days before we knew about FA. Fortunately, we found a source that could assist us with these thoughts and many others which were going through our minds. The organization which we found is Families Anonymous (FA). At our meetings we were guided to a specific publication which helped us in answering our questions: *A Guide for the Family of the Drug Abuser* (#1002).

Certainly "all the answers" cannot be provided to us in this one publication, but it is an excellent guide to understanding and coping with the situations we may be experiencing. It's the equivalent of traveling a prolonged road trip, with some directions in front of us, versus attempting the trip without any guidance.

The information in this booklet can assist us in our journey. Why not give it a try, and obtain a copy of this helpful and quite useful publication?

Order #1002 - *A Guide for the Family of the Drug Abuser*, from the WSO website;

[famanon@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:famanon@familiesanonymous.org)

# ***YOU CAN'T PUSH THE STREAM***

Today A Better Way  
June 24th

On a warm summer day, I sat beside a stream in the woods. Wistfully, I asked, "How long, oh God, how long?" Friends in Families Anonymous had said, "This too shall pass." But I was impatient.

I listened to the brook and watched as the water eddied and flowed. Surface reflections of sun and sky changed constantly, but the water flowed along at an unchanging rate.

Then I thought, "I can't push the stream. It flows by itself. I really am powerless."

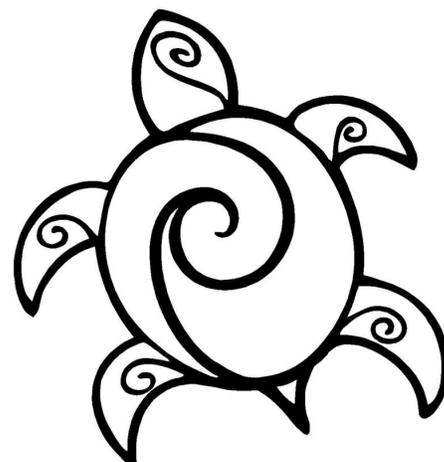
I realized then that I could not push the flow of life around me either. I could only move along with it. It is reassuring to know I don't need to direct the flow. Even more reassuring is the fact that I have a "boat" and some "oars" to help me navigate the rest of my journey-my Twelve Step program.

*TODAY I WILL* keep both oars in the water; my program and a conscious contact with my Higher Power.

*Easy Does It*

*Keep It Simple*

*One Day at a Time*



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