

VOLUME LIII | ISSUE 4 | AUG-SEP 2019

THE 12 STEP RAG

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS
CONCERNED ABOUT ANOTHER'S USE
OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR RELATED
BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

THE BI-MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER OF THE
FAMILIES ANONYMOUS
FELLOWSHIP

Image Credit: Shlomo H

2019 Board of Directors

Chair

Barbara S. Cherry Hill, NJ

Vice Chair

Maria S. Bradenton, FL

Treasurer

John S. Whiting, IN

Recording Secretary

Christy R. Riverside CA.

Board Members At Large

Alan B.- Kendall, NJ

Ann P. - Cazenovia, NY

Beverley B.- London, UK

Donna D.- Sayville, NY

George R.- North Chesterfield, VA

Hank H.- Cedarburg, WI

Helen L.- Lutraci, Corinth, Greece

Jeff S. Roswell GA

Marc B.- May Field Heights, OH

Marcia C. - Glenview, IL

Robert S. Bradenton, FL

Odalys A, Miami, FL

Vince M. S Scoresby, Australia

THE 12 STEP RAG

Families Anonymous, Inc.

701 Lee St., Suite 670

Des Plaines, IL 60016

12StepRag@FamiliesAnonymous.org

Editorial Team: Elizabeth S., Bob S

EDITOR'S NOTE

Like seasons, life passes through its shades and moods. Sometimes we are positive, things seem to be working better than our expectations, our loved one is making recovery decisions that make us so proud and we stand in awe of their inner strength, at other times, our loved one is back in a rehab and we are sent back to our knees with helplessness. Being hopeful, serene, positive, forgiving, angry, disappointed, bored, discouraged, none of these are permanent positions. Recovery is not one mood, a single state of mind that we will always be in. Striving for serenity means learning to accept the good days and the bad ones.

Like our addicted loved ones, we fall, but we learn to get up, just this one time, again. Sometimes, we go through a lull and can feel like nothing is changing. Recovery seems like the dipping sun, far in the horizon, a beautiful dream that's unreachable, it's slow and laborious as if nothing exciting is happening. The lesson perhaps is to be still, to learn to be serene, not endlessly 'seek' improvement – ours or even anyone else's. Addiction has made us reactionary. We're always thinking, what can we do to make this go away, to change this other person, to fix a situation, to dull the pain? We cannot just be, merely exist. Maybe as a butterfly rests, we can allow ourselves to rest, to be hidden away like the caterpillar in our cocoons for sometime. And who knows, the transformation perhaps happens when we're doing nothing at all and in spite of us. We're probably being prepared for a metamorphosis that we cannot dare to imagine. Each of us came to FA yearning for a loved one's change and as time passes, our hearts have begun to transform and we know we are working on our wings!

Thank you to everyone who has sent in submissions for this edition. Please keep them coming!

In Fellowship, Elizabeth

The Art of Letting Go: A Child of Alcoholic Parents

As a writer – and as a member of the Queer community – I am no stranger to criticism. There is no harsher disparagement I face, though, than from myself. In fact, when I was just a little nugget, my parents would routinely find me hiding behind the door in my room; when they'd ask what I was doing, I'd say, "I didn't color inside the lines... or I broke one of my crayons... so I gave myself a time-out."

I have always put a tremendous amount of pressure on myself to do more – and blamed myself when I couldn't be more for the people I love. Whether it was revising essays for the 9th time that were probably more than passable after the 3rd, being the designated unlicensed therapist for all of my friends and thereby leaving no room for my own introspection, or being the self-imposed keeper of my qualifiers, my hyper-empathy and intense self-deprecation kept me from being the best version of myself.

This was especially evident when I was in grade school. When my dad would go on business trips, the very first thing he'd say would be, "take care of Mom." While most children would perceive this

harmless father-to-son plea as, "watch movies and keep her company," I translated this to "make sure she can physically get from the couch to our bedroom without hurting herself." I made it my mission to take care of others before I even had the mental, emotional, or physical capacity to take care of myself. And so began the pattern I still to this day struggle to break.

I have always put a tremendous amount of pressure on myself to do more – and blamed myself when I couldn't be more for the people I love.

In August of last year, my mother was at her bottom. She was less than 100 pounds, barely able to climb down a half flight of stairs, and she was substituting meals with glasses of chardonnay and rum chasers. On the morning of the 18th she had a grand mal seizure and hit her head on the corner of her dresser, leaving her unconscious on the floor. My dad was – ironically – away on business, so I witnessed this firsthand. When the ambulance arrived, my very first thought was, "I should have done more to take care of her." It was then when I realized my parents were not the only addicts in our immediate family. Endless weeks of two-hour nightly sleep cycles followed this traumatic event. From that point on, every phone call from my mom or my dad sent me straight into a full-blown panic

attack; not just because I'm a Millennial and have an innate aversion to talking on the phone, but because I had been conditioned to think the absolute worst. I consistently ruminated over the ways that I had failed in getting them clean; doing mental gymnastics so effervescently that I now believe a gold medal is in order. I realized I had hit my own bottom, and I was desperate to make a change.

My therapist at the time subtly hinted Families Anonymous to me (and by subtly I mean she may as well have hit me in the face with a pamphlet and driven me there herself, but that's neither here nor there.) I was extremely reluctant to attend a program that shifts the focus to purely self-examination. I grew up with two alcoholic parents who enabled each other throughout my childhood, often going drink-for-drink each evening as if in quiet competition until one of them eventually passed out, fell down, or both did. I had become so numb to this mutually self-destructive cycle and found it to be as routine as brushing my teeth. I hadn't taken the time to uncover or even begin to process the implications of their addiction, as I was consistently avoiding how my reactions were affecting my journey to self-actualization. A hyper-empath to a fault, I



took on the adversities of my loved ones and gave myself a solid out from processing my own trauma and shortcomings.

When I first arrived here, I felt as though I was a newcomer at a gym, trying the stairmaster for the first time – with this big group of professionals on either side of me, barely breaking a sweat on Step 12 while I was burning the candle at both ends on Step 1. I'm working the steps at my pace, and for the first time in my life, I'm taking care of me. I am more

communicative with my partner, with my friends, and with my parents – with clearer boundaries. I have the courage to start difficult conversations without fearing they'll turn into confrontations. I

am honest about how I am feeling and I stick up for myself. Most importantly, I will still always be willing to lend a helping hand, so long as it means I get to keep my own. Whether you're halfway through the Steps for the seventh time over or you're a newcomer, this family is a giant personal trainer, not intimidating you but rather challenging you to achieve your goals and be the person you were meant to be. I love you all immensely, and thank you so much for welcoming me into this space. **By Nick W**

Live in Anguish, Live in Joy

Learning that suffering brings us no rewards

I came to FA on the recommendation of my son's rehab. Like many others, in the beginning, I viewed FA as just another potential resource to investigate what might help me to help my son not want to live in addiction. I am not religious at all and the Steps were off-putting to me too, at first. With that mindset, I was here for a while, and then I quit this group for about a year. I was still busy

And once I chose joy, I began to notice the moments of wonder that are

enabling and I wasn't ready to stop. If I know anything for sure in this murky, messy world of loving an addict and finding recovery from co-dependence, it is that things happen for a reason, and this journey takes T I M E. My journey to recovery only began in earnest when I reached the point where the pain of

living in misery and anguish for my son's addiction was greater than the pain of letting go of all the enabling and finally allowing my heart to break, which I had been avoiding, because it really hurts. I experienced this as a tipping point. Once I crossed over to a fierce desire to live in gratitude and live in peace, nothing else mattered as much. I felt tremendous grief in the final honest and unflinching recognition that there is nothing, nothing, nothing, that can be done to save the life of my son and make him want to get well from a disease that is systematically destroying his essence. However, there is also tremendous freedom and light in that recognition. For the only life you can live is your own, and your life is precious. Live in anguish or live in joy. It is that simple. And once I chose joy, I began to notice the moments of wonder that are always there. Whether it is God or the higher power of the collective experience, strength and hope of my FA group, I do not have to journey alone.

By Susan

Calling all members! What do you do for yourselves to cope with and enjoy life. Is it photography? Yoga? Painting? Pottery? Writing? Share what you do and how it has helped you. And be sure to send in photos of your work. Submissions or questions can be sent to: 12steprag@familiesanonymous.org

MAKE THE BEST OF TODAY

Today is All We've Got

Our friend is in his early fifties. He's happily married, with two teenage children, and lives in a well-kept home in a secure suburban neighborhood. He's got a job he likes and a wife he loves. Life is good.

He awoke one morning a month ago and couldn't speak a single word. Of course he went to the doctor and they ran a battery of tests. Suspecting a stroke or some kind of blockage or tumor, they took x-rays, MRIs, and did every other routine diagnostic they could think of to figure out the problem. They found nothing.

After a week they decided to do a spinal tap to see if there was something more elusive going on deep within his nervous system. The surprising answer: he was suffering from Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, otherwise known as Mad Cow Disease. Less than a thousand people in the U.S. contract it each year, and he was one of them. He'd apparently eaten tainted beef during a visit to the U.K. many years ago, and the disease had lain dormant in his brain ever since.



There's no cure. Most people lapse into a coma and die within thirteen months of showing symptoms. He's "gotten his affairs in order" and is preparing to go into hospice care because his disease is progressing more quickly - the doctors have told him he has less than a month to live.

Sounds like a morbid story, right? It's certainly a sad one. But how different is this man's story from ours? Life can change in a heartbeat. The advice to live "one day at a time" recognizes that nothing's permanent: happiness, sadness, boredom, depression, whatever you may experience or feel will eventually change and disappear. When life's good, enjoy it. Don't taint the joy of today by fretting over the past or worrying about the future, because you can't change either one.

When life's bad, savor the good and take comfort in knowing the bad will pass. That, too, is a valuable lesson we can take from "one day at a time" – pain, like joy, is transitory. Even in times of pain, there's joy to be found in each new day, if we can only focus on it.

The day before our neighbor lost his ability to talk, he was having a normal day. He had no idea that his "normal" was about to change drastically. Would he

have spent that last routine day differently had he known what the next morning would bring? Would he have hugged his children, reached out to an estranged relative or friend, told his wife how much he loved her? Would he have done any one of a hundred other things to

savor every moment of that precious day? Probably.

In that sense, he's no different from us. We all have only one day to live: Today.

By Bob. S

TO LET GO

To LET GO does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.

To LET GO is not to cut myself off, it's the realisation I can't control another.

To LET GO is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.

To LET GO is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To LET GO is not to try to change or blame another, it's to make the most of myself.

To LET GO is not to care for, but to care about.

To LET GO is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To LET GO is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.

To LET GO is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own destinies.

To LET GO is not to be protective, but to permit another to face reality.

To LET GO is not to deny, but to accept.

To LET GO is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.

To LET GO is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.

To LET GO is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.

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

A Twelve Step Testimony

I meet with my best friends every week. We spend over an hour helping each other be better people along the path of faith -- which has 12 steps. As any one of us makes progress, the whole group moves forward with them. We support each other, listen to each other, reflect pride in each other's achievements, applaud victories, mourn losses. But These friends have stood by me and helped me through the darkest times in my life.

Recently, when one member lost his wife suddenly, the first 6 people to show up at the hospital where his wife had died were FA members past and present. That's the kind of love and caring we routinely see in our group and throughout our wider fellowship. I know the group will be there for me in any crisis because I've never seen them to fail.

But why does 12 step work function as it does? Perhaps, one reason is because we have 'mirror neurons' in our brains. That is, when listening and observing others we subconsciously learn their moves and ways. One researcher was rewarding a monkey with peanuts each time the monkey performed a function properly. After a while the researcher thought, "I'm hungry, I think I'll take one of the peanuts." As he did, the monkey (who had sensors in a helmet on his head) experienced his brain functioning just as though HE

had eaten a peanut. Even though the animal didn't move, he was learning by watching. This is why sports teams view the videos of their opponents' previous games, to learn their moves even without practicing against them. During the actual game, they will respond better to their opponents because their mirror neurons had learned and 'practiced' the correct response.

While in a meeting you hear others tell their stories and what they did. Your mirror neurons in your brain are absorbing information at an

We grow, learn and improve -- slowly, but surely we all do.

astounding rate. That's what makes improvements possible when a situation arises that 'USED TO BAFFLE' you. Don't we say, "Keep coming back, it works if you work it, so work it, you're worth it," after the Serenity Prayer? That's our group habit.

Now you know why I've been in FA for over 25 years.

Dale H., Group 171 Arlington Heights
IL USA

Learning from Yesterdays

Can we learn from the Past instead of being stuck at Regret

The past haunts us. We all look back in the past and this has consequences - both good and bad. The bad ones are many.

First comes the guilt. By feeling guilty about what I did and what I didn't do, I destroy the present, I undermine the future and block my recovery by getting carried away making new mistakes. They do not let me live for today and make proper plans.

Second comes fear. Remembering what I have experienced, I feel afraid, I will relive them. Fear provokes immeasurable harm.

It may be good for someone to use the past as an example to avoid, or as a lesson. But bravery and humility are needed to see one's mistakes, admit them and, simply, not repeat them again. Well, absolute dedication to the program is needed. With

its help I can avoid the soul destroying messages of the past.

"We forget about the past," in my opinion, is a naive and superficial phrase. It's unforgettable! It comes and goes like a ghost in our sleep and when we are awake. We just need to manage it properly. The memory of the past can help me when, instead of it reminding me of my own mistakes, can make me learn from them and most importantly force me to 'see'.

"We forget about the past," in my opinion, is a naive and superficial phrase. It's unforgettable!

The Odyssey refers to some demonic creatures of the sea and of the waters - the Sirens. They had a raptor body and a female head. Their voices and their promises were nice, so beautiful, that they hurt. Their songs seduced, lured and thus they captured people. If one listened to the Sirens then he would forget who he was and his ship would fall on the rocks and sink. If on the way anyone met the Sirens, they would lose their way and then their families would not see them again. How do the Sirens manage to be heard? They call us close to them, but our logic warns us not to



get closer. They attract us like opposite poles.

The wolves, on the other hand, according to Greek mythology are polite, lonely and proud animals. But what do their howls mean to us? Do they attract or warn us? They do both.

But the Sirens wake me up at nights. They are ghosts whose voices do not resemble the voices of the wolves. What do I listen to? Sirens or wolves? I feel it at last, it's a warning! I sat down and wrote these thoughts, because I repeatedly hear the howls of the wolves on the one hand and the songs of the Sirens on the other hand. Their cries are nailed like hooks in my mind. I'm wrapped in the net of my tragic memories. So, the Sirens of memories, mistakes, guilt do not let me hear the howls of wolf warnings. Personally, I have escaped from guilt for some mistakes. They are mistakes of ignorance and no longer torture me. Those that I cannot forget that come back again and again like voices of the sirens and ghosts, are the mistakes of easing my addicted daughter.

Knowing the behavior of our daughter, 30 years now in drugs, I remember the experience of a damned past, I am afraid and anxious that something bad will happen again. Our agony melts us and prevents our recovery. Our daughter is not

well, she is still very aggressive and I'm afraid that I'm very likely to make new mistakes. Fear is a very bad feeling. You cannot live for today, with the bad memories of the past and the fear of tomorrow. Many resort to dreams or vain hopes and help. Dreams may or may not be temporary and may be more pleasant than reality. But whatever success we will achieve it by adapting our lives to reality.

This is how life passes. I try, day by day, to bravely interpret my role in this ghost comedy. We talk about love, good and evil, philosophy and culture, and we stick to

The incessant sigh does not bring redemptive release. Francesco Petratka, an Italian scholar, poet, wrote, "Every family experiences unhappiness in their own way."

thoughts and images like "what will the others say?" And the farce - comedy continues and the reality, the life, escapes us. Quite often, when I come out of a dream, I find myself frozen and make futile and wrong decisions. Often the

comedy evolves into a tragedy.

But these different ways have found their common points here in at FA. We were twinned through our common pain. Our program penetrated and warmed our soul by providing us with knowledge and showing us ways to escape, promising us peace, provided of course that we will work with it. Then this works! I want to be well but I cannot do it alone. Though song of the Sirens lurks... through the program, our sharings and contact with each other, both

with personal as well as telephonic we can open our ears to the good song.

Considering everything above, with a stomach upset, I think that eventually this may be life: a lot of despair, but also a few moments of beauty in which time is no longer the same. You can call it the notes of

music, the music of the program, put a parenthesis to time, a suspension, a somewhere else. *By Kostas K, Group 2090, Thessaloniki, Greece*

Literature Announcement (New Spanish Translations)

It's with great pleasure we can announce three new FA publications are now available in Spanish, with these three Spanish (enEspañol) translations being:

#5003S – Formatorecomendado para las reuniones
con las lecturabásicas

(Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings)

1013S –El folletobásico de FA
(The FA Basic Pamphlet)

6005S –Se abreunanuevapuerta
(A New Door Opens)

All three are available through the literature catalog. Also, please note #5003S is available for a free download!

Is there a topic you would like to see covered in the Rag? Send your ideas to 12steprag@familiesanonymous.org

Taking My Life Back

I have given my children enough of my time, thoughts and sorrow. I have cried enough tears; I have lost enough sleep. I will no longer sacrifice my health, my peace of mind or my vitality, at the altar of their insanity. I have squandered enough of my heart and soul. I am bowing out gracefully. I am ready to reclaim my life. It is no longer up for grabs. This is a matter of life or death, and I choose life. I commit myself to peace: peace in my mind, in my speech and in my actions. I am ready for freedom: freedom from the melodrama and emotional abuse; freedom to choose happiness that is not dependent on how my son and daughter behave. I am willing to forgive them, for they know not what they do. I now distance myself from harmful, obsessive thoughts, and I replace them with thoughts that uplift, heal and love. I now practice gratitude and I transform my life into one of humble thankfulness. I accept that, presently, I am but a shadow in my children's life. I understand that nothing might change with time. No matter what happens, I know that I am safe and loved, and I can accept whatever unfolds. I am taking my life back

Donations

*In Memory of FA member Cori R,
Donation by GR 2023*

*In Memory of Carol M,
Donation by Group 1844 made a donation*

TWELVE STEP RAG 2019 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

| ISSUE | FEATURED TOPICS | ARTICLES SUBMISSION DEADLINE | ANNOUNCEMENTS/ DONATIONS/ADS SUBMISSION DEADLINE |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| NOV/DEC | -Step 6 - Just for today | Nov 10 | Nov 23 |