

VOLUME LIV | ISSUE 5 | OCT-DEC 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: David Mark

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THE 12 STEP RAG

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I always feel a bit wistful when summer turns to fall. A bright season full of outdoor activity and sunshine gives way to a quieter time, with warm days now buffered by crisp nights. Shorts and tee shirts turn to windbreakers and jeans.

Here in New Jersey, if you take an evening walk in the fall you can sometimes catch the warm smell of wood burning in someone's fireplace nearby. School's back in session, and you can imagine kids working out arithmetic problems on the kitchen table after dinner and getting quietly excited about upcoming holidays.

I've got to fight the tendency to look at each new season as an iteration of something I've seen before - "Here comes fall again," I think, and an array of stereotypical images fills my mind. That's understandable. I've now seen sixty-five fall seasons, so I think I know what to expect. It's also easier, in a way, to look forward to the new season as something familiar, as the return of a cherished friend.

Comforting as that mindset may be, it can narrow my vision and limit my ability to fully appreciate this particular moment. Every season, every month, every single day in this crazy unpredictable life, is a brand new time ripe with unique possibilities. If I see today as merely another copy from a collection of distant yesterdays stored in my mind's eye, I've stopped looking around me. Worse yet, if I devalue today by associating it with a difficult time I may have had with our addicted loved one during the same season years ago, I'm dismissing the potential for endless wonder that this moment, right now, holds for me.

Dwelling on negative memories allows the past to hold today hostage. Obsessing fearfully about what tomorrow, or next month, or next year may hold is similarly fruitless: the future is a fantasy that may or may not play out as envisioned in our hopes and dreams (good or bad). The only thing I can be sure of is being alive today and finding joy in simple things – a fallen leaf crunching underfoot; the plum-like glow of a late autumn sunset; the music of a toddler's laughter upon seeing a goblin-carved pumpkin; the aromas of hot cocoa and fresh popcorn. Small things - fall things. Be good to yourself, and savor each moment of the season.

In Fellowship, Bob S.

SEA GLASS

We all start out broken, with rough edges, and are gradually softened by life

Ever since I can remember, one of my favorite pastimes has been walking along the beach. There's something about the ocean air, the waves, and the beauty of the shoreline that brings me a sense of serenity and oneness with the world. It's no surprise, then, that in retirement my husband and I chose to live by the beach.

Last month a new FA friend from the Midwest came to visit. As he entered our home for the first time, he noticed a jar of sea glass sitting on our piano. He told us he had fond childhood memories of having collected it with his mom, and that he hadn't seen any for some years. He went on to say that sea glass reminds him of his experience in FA. You start out broken, feeling useless and worthless, but gradually you become something more, something better. I was struck by his insight.

Wikipedia defines sea glass as "any glass that originates from broken bottles, broken tableware, or even shipwrecks, which are rolled and tumbled in the ocean for years until all of their edges are rounded off, and the slickness of the glass has been worn to a frosted appearance."

Sea glass exists in an environment over which it has no control, as do we. The ocean is a force of nature: so is addiction. Before FA, I felt like I was at the mercy of the disease,



caught up in the tide of my addicted daughter's actions. It wasn't until I went to FA and began my journey of recovery that my 'rough edges' were tempered by the tools I acquired and the fellowship of others who understood my experience.

There are many sources of sea glass. The ocean doesn't discriminate between soda bottles, jelly jars, or windshields. Neither does addiction. For years I felt guilty because, as a working mom, I thought if I'd only been home more, my daughter wouldn't have turned to drugs. In FA I learned that addiction is just as likely to occur in families with working moms as in families with stay-at-home moms. I was relieved to know that my life choices were not the cause of her disease.

It can take 7 to 10 years in a constant surf environment for shards of glass to become sea glass. Sometimes a piece of glass gets buried in the sand and the softening process is stalled until it's

dislodged. I've been attending FA for 7 years now, and although the benefits of practicing the 12 steps have been transformative thus far, I know I'm a work in progress. I still have some rough edges, and it'd be easy for me to fall back into the enabling behaviors that had sheltered me from pain in the past. I know that for me to become the 'best' me I can be, I have to keep working the program and feel the discomfort of changing ingrained behaviors that haven't worked for me in the past. FA made me realize that I was resilient and could not only survive the journey, but come out a better person for it.

I'm forever grateful for the blessing of walking along the beach. Finding sea glass along the way makes it extra special.

By Maria S. (FA Group #2056, Bradenton, FL)

I still have some rough edges, and it'd be easy for me to fall back into the enabling behaviors that had sheltered me from pain in the past.

Cultivating Gratitude

It Takes Time, but It's Well Worth the Effort

One day at a time... there's an expression that we often hear at FA Meetings. Live in the moment, embrace the day, focus on the now, don't get ahead of yourself or look back. It sounds simple enough on the surface but as our self-awareness grows through the FA program, we realize that it is far from easy, but is actually an ongoing, daily struggle as we seek to achieve serenity in our lives. We each need to work at it and find our own strategy - or strategies - to achieve it. Many days it feels like trying to grab and hold onto mercury.

When we first found FA a little over eight

I am able to break my life down into individual days by doing two things daily: Reading Today A Better Way first thing in the morning and thinking of what three things I am grateful for having happened each day

years ago, we - like most that find their way to their first meeting - were a complete emotional and psychological mess, having reached wits' end after trying to fix, manage and control our older son's long battle with addiction for, what we came to understand, had been over 10 years at that point. He was deep in the madness, having lost everything

but his life - miraculously - to heroin. The concepts of breaking our lives down into one day at a time and achieving serenity could not have seemed any further away. Our lives were chaotic, out of control, and we had to admit that we were powerless.

Nowadays in meetings, I often compare the process of learning through the FA program to a slow drip IV. Each meeting, addiction-related coping skills and experiences are shared with us and, slowly, small learnings - a coping strategy, an expression from a reading, a story from another member that you can fully relate to - begins to stick and take hold inside of us. It takes time, as a dear friend of ours sings so eloquently in a song he wrote about addiction, but each of us at our own pace and in our own way begins to grow and embrace our own recoveries from the family disease of addiction.

Within that process, I found a simple strategy that has enabled me to embrace and live "one day at a time". Early on once we started attending meetings regularly, I settled into a routine of reading the daily reading in *Today A Better Way*, our vital resource the Red Book, over a cup of coffee each morning. Over time, I found that this grounded me and better prepared me for whatever might come into my life that day - addiction-related, personal or business - good, bad or ugly. I felt I was on the road to finding serenity but not quite there.

My personal strategy bookend came into focus for me one meeting about 2 ½ -3 years into attending meetings. The topic that night was Gratitude - another concept that had been inconceivable when we first arrived at

FA. For whatever reason, I had a moment of clarity and realized that intentionally looking for reasons to be grateful every day of my life might help my ongoing recovery. So I tried it, and it has helped me every day since that meeting.

Simply stated, I am able to break my life down into individual days by doing two things daily: Reading *Today A Better Way* first thing in the morning and thinking of what three things I am grateful for having happened each day as my head hits the pillow that night. These two portable, intentional steps bracket my days and, believe it or not, even on a bad day I can always come up with three things to be grateful for. The key is that I have to look for

them, recognize what's good each day in my life.

Today I am grateful for having found Families Anonymous, the incredible family of FA supporters who have become close friends, and for having learned through FA how to live my life one day at a time. Peace be with you all, it takes time but it's well worth the journey.

By Kevin & Lisa - Louisville, KY

Pieces of a Broken Heart

Poem and photo by Kathleen D

What do you do with the pieces of a broken heart?

Fashion them into key chains and paperweights?

Like they did with the ash of St. Helen's,
the crushed stony heart of a mountain?
Or maybe you could root the slips in jelly
glasses of water,
plant them out, and grow bleeding hearts?

What can you do with the potsherds of a heart, once so full?

Gather them up with all the other broken bits
of your life –
the shattered glass, the cracked china, the
splinters of bad-luck mirrors.
Make a mandala out of the wreckage,
a mosaic sparkling and mystical.
Place it in the center of your garden.

What do you do with a heart that's fallen to pieces?

It's Humpty Dumpty all over again –

Superglue, duct tape, bailing wire won't put it back together.

So what's to be done?

With a handful of fresh-picked hope, create a new heart.

Knead gently to keep it soft and flexible;
Don't let it harden! Or become brittle.
Then fill with sweet loving kindness again,
and again,
and again,
until it overflows.



One Day at a Time

An FA member learns from her trek to the Alps that in life we don't have to go all the way at once and we certainly don't have to do it alone.

Last summer my husband and I had the opportunity to take a hiking tour through the Alps. Ten days of repeated ascent and descent over many peaks as we traveled through France, Italy and Switzerland. The vistas were magnificent, more rewarding than I could ever describe, but it was arduous work requiring considerable physical and mental stamina every single day.

We hiked as a group of 10 with a guide, but we all climbed at our own pace, sometimes together but often times my hiking was a solitary experience. I would often stop and take a moment to appreciate my surroundings, the fields of Alpenrose, the birdsong and cow bells in the distance, the expanse of the sky, mountain peaks and clean fresh air. Yet even with all this beauty, there were times when I felt overwhelmed with exhaustion and wondered how I was going to complete this journey. I remember a particular time as I was ascending a steep, rocky exposed section. It was hot and I was so tired that I just had to stop. I never questioned if I could make

What struck me most about her comment was her abject honesty. It took tremendous courage for this member to share her sense of helplessness so openly. Yet isn't that exactly where the journey begins for each of us?

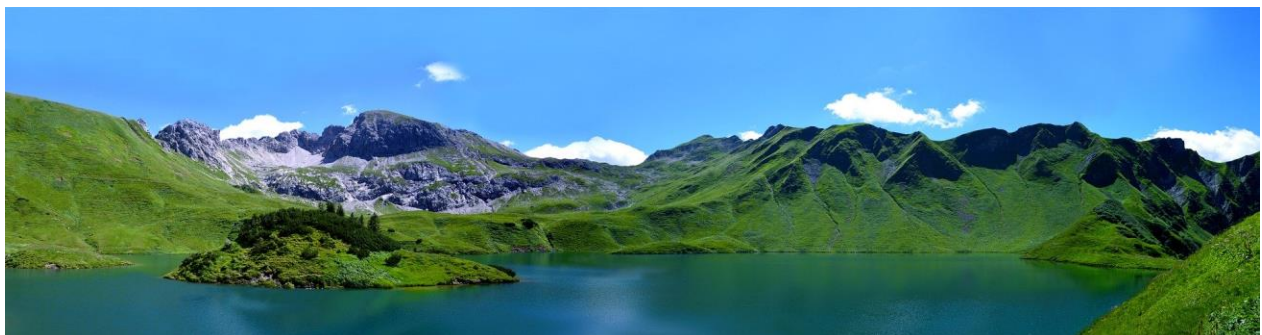
it to the top but I sure was questioning how I was going to manage this when a fellow hiker came up from behind me. I shared my situation and she validated my feelings by saying that she was struggling too. She was a hiker with much more experience in these settings than me.

After a restful chat, my fellow hiker shared that in these difficult times, she found it

helpful to set small goals for herself. She looked at me and said, "Surely we can climb 100 steps together," and so we continued 100 steps at a time up the mountainside. After a bit, another hiker came from behind to join us. They decided to sit and rest for a while, but I found that I had recovered my energy and was able to continue on by myself. We met on top to

celebrate our accomplishment with a well deserved lunch!

A few days later, we were ascending another steep and tortuous section and I was again climbing along by myself stopping to appreciate my surroundings whenever I felt tired. I came upon the



youngest hiker of our group; 18 years old, long legged, fit and usually full of youthful energy. Yet, there she was sitting on a rock along the side of the path, crying. She shared that her legs were in so much pain that she couldn't go on. So I sat with her and encouraged her to drink and nourish herself. We chatted for a while until she calmed herself and then I shared with her how setting small goals can make the journey more manageable. I asked her if she could walk 100 steps with me. And so we went 100 steps at a time up the mountainside until she felt able to go on alone. Again, a celebration followed at the end of the day.

It was a trip of many peaks and valleys literally and figuratively. I learned so much about myself along the way. It was perhaps the most extraordinary thing I have ever done. I could not have accomplished this trek without the support of my fellow hikers and especially my husband who has always been my hiking mentor and a strong, constant, reassuring presence.



I am sharing this now to honor a fellow member who was at a meeting last year when we were addressing the 12th step.

She shared that she had nothing to bring to this discussion because she felt so much despair. I could certainly resonate with that feeling having been there myself a while ago as my son spiraled down into his addiction again and again.

What struck me most about her comment was her abject honesty. It took tremendous courage for this member to share her sense of helplessness so openly. Yet isn't that exactly where the journey begins for each of us? Is that not when we are called to re-evaluate our own progress? Is that not when we offer to walk those first '100 steps' with a struggling member as someone did for us along the way?

I have been on the FA path for 14 years now and as I move through the steps again and again, each time I come to Step 12, I think it is less about action and more

about being: being present to myself and those in pain and trying to be the best version of my honest self each and every day. Even though my FA companions may change with time, the FA principles are constant. Staying the path, working the program, reaching out or extending a hand when needed helps all of us on

the road to serenity. **By Kathleen D**

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

And I Thought

By John D

and I thought he doesn't understand
He has nothing he can share with me
His whole life confined within these walls
and he'll never be set free
and it's been this way since he was born,
Flesh and mind would always let him down
Placed in care for his own good
or is it just so we don't see

Still there was a smile on George's face
Shining light on such unexpected grace
Love of life so shamelessly embraced
Every moment new
Now as I journey through this day
Trying to find the parts of me, lost along the
way
George is still there, sitting in the hall,
Laughing right out Loud

and I thought I must do something now
This habit tearing her away from me
but every time I try to change her path
I wander farther from my own
I feel so injured by her reckless ways
Control a poor attempt to save my pride
Harming my loved one through my best
intent
Not understanding how or why

and so, I pray help me through this day
Find me the strength, give me the words to
say
Now I'm weak enough to cry out for help

As strong as I can be
Bring healing to Joy through her fear and pain
Teach me to love and not stand in the way
Help me listen with intent
Let me find peace

And I thought Phil should be happy
All these precious gifts why can't he see
Then I recall how my own grieving mind
Once left me tired and alone
And Vicki talking to her voices
Ben gets anxious in the calm, quiet night
Sally simply can't remember
We all want to run or fight
and I think we can do better
the change we so need is what we can be
Once we realize our given names
are the only labels that we need

and I know there's hope for us this day
Seeing our differences yet finding we're the
same
We all have our gifts, our hopes, our scars
We all have our needs
and in this crazy world you'll find
Hold others back you're gonna leave yourself
behind
So, look inside, nurture the good you find
To one another and yourselves be kind
To hold securely what we need the most
We must give it away

and I thought he doesn't understand

Three Cs

"I didn't Cause it. I can't Control it. I can't Cure it,

The Steps We Have Are the Steps We Need

For those of us still trapped in the cycle of despair, deception, and pain that comes with having a loved one suffering from the disease of addiction, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or any other major holiday can feel hollow and forced. What joy can there be in our lives if our loved one is still consumed by this terrible disease? How can we celebrate anything when our existence has become so desperate and bleak?

A good part of the answer is in Steps 1 through 3 of the 12 Steps of Families Anonymous. In Step 1 we learn that our loved one's illness is beyond our control; that we're completely powerless over drugs and other people's lives. By the time we've come to FA, many of us are already painfully aware that our lives have become unmanageable. Indeed, that may be exactly why we're there at an FA meeting, feeling desperate and alone. We're seeking help wherever we can find it – and it's right there in the understanding of our fellow FA members, who open their hearts and share their wisdom, experience, and strength with us week after week.

Step 2 calls for a leap of faith – we must come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. My emotional and family life was in such a shambles when my wife and I first came to FA that this Step seemed fairly easy – I was ready to grasp at any thread of hope. I didn't fully believe it yet, but I hoped it was true. Then, after attending a number of FA meetings and hearing about how the program had transformed others' lives, I truly came to believe there was a power greater than me that could restore balance and sanity to my life.

Once I accepted that belief, I felt a sense of freedom and calm. I was no longer responsible for overseeing my addicted loved one's life or trying to change her behavior. What a relief to know I wasn't responsible for trying to accomplish that impossible task!

And how comforting it was to know that my own higher power would care for me too, if I conscientiously followed the Steps and principles of FA. That was Step 3 – with my belief in a higher power firmly in hand, it wasn't hard to decide to turn my will and life over to the care of my personal higher power, and to trust that my life would be better if I did. Once I'd done that, I became truly free. I enjoyed the blessings of each day, one day at a time.

I no longer wasted time worrying about changing our daughter – with a lot of support from our FA family and the readings, I stopped enabling her and simply loved her. I hoped that her higher power would lead her to a life without drugs, but because I wasn't in charge of ensuring her outcomes any more, I could lead my life in peace.

To me, Steps 1 through 3 are the bedrock of the FA program. Once I'd grasped them, I could live a much happier life. I could enjoy holidays and the company of other people again and not live in constant fear of things I couldn't control.

That's not to say the other Steps aren't worthwhile – quite the contrary. Steps 1 to 3 grant us the serenity and strength to separate from the immediate madness of our loved one's continuing addiction (or its lingering aftereffects), and to continue the important work of self-improvement, faith, and

continuing service that runs through Steps 4 through 12.

Step 4, in which we take a searching and fearless personal inventory, is another phase of the work we do to transform ourselves and become better human beings. In Step 5, we reveal the exact nature of our wrongs to ourselves, to God, and to another human being. Once we've done that work, we're ready to move on to Steps 6 and 7, in which we prepare for and ask our higher power to remove our defects of character. These are all hard, soul-searching steps, but the dividends they pay, in the form of greater self-understanding and humility, are invaluable.

Step 8 calls for us to become willing to make amends to all persons we had harmed, and Step 9 calls for us to make those amends. These steps, primarily directed outward, present their own challenges. If we haven't completed Steps 4 through 7 and found the humility and self-knowledge they give, we're not emotionally prepared to approach Steps 8 and 9.

Step 10 reminds us to continue to take personal inventory, and when we're wrong, promptly admit it. In essence, it tells us we must take our Step 4 inventory on an ongoing basis, and periodically ask our higher power to remove defects of character that either return or spring anew within us – because everyone is always changing, and only through the vigilance called for in Step 10 can we hope to ensure that those changes are positive ones.

Step 11 tells us we must always, through prayer and meditation, strive for deeper conscious contact with our higher power, and maintain our humility by asking only for knowledge of our higher power's will for us and the power to carry it out. In other words, having come to

believe in and rely upon our higher power, we can't simply take it for granted. As with any significant relationship in our lives, if we aren't always trying to nurture and deepen it, we risk losing it to complacency.

Under Step 12, armed with the spiritual awakening we've had as a result of studying and practicing the other Steps, we go forward and carry this message to others, and try to practice these principles in all our affairs. Having restored our lives to sanity with regard to our addicted loved one, we bring that same serenity and order to every facet of our lives, and try to pass this helpful knowledge on to others.

Wherever we are in the program today is enough. We do the best we can with what we've got. If we've only got Step 1, so be it. We can let go of unnecessary burdens. If we've got Steps 2 and 3 as well, better yet - we can lay those burdens at the feet of a higher power that can guide us through our lives in serenity and peace.

For today, if that's all we have, it's more than enough to be happy and at peace with the world and ourselves, and it's a solid foundation for ongoing personal growth through the remaining steps. And that's quite an accomplishment.

By Bob S, Group #2056, Bradenton, FL



Want to Host Next Year's FA Convention?

The FA World Service Board (WSB) would like YOU to volunteer to host next year's Convention.

The convention is a unique opportunity to learn firsthand, from experts in the field, about the family disease of addiction and the tools of recovery.

But it's much more than that. It's also a place to meet others from across the nation and the world who've had similar experiences and share our journeys. It's a chance to see old friends and make new ones. There's no substitute for forming these kinds of personal bonds, and the annual FA convention is the perfect place to do that. Believe it or not, planning a convention delivers even greater benefits to the planning committee.

Make no mistake: a lot goes into planning a convention, and it might at first blush seem like a daunting task. But you're not alone. If your group decides to volunteer, the extensive written Convention Policy and Convention Guidelines lay out a clear roadmap, based on the experiences of past convention planning committees, to guide your planning process. In addition, there's a Convention Liaison, who's a member of the WSB, who's always available to answer questions and to provide additional examples of convention materials used in the past.

This is an opportunity to form deep, lasting relationships with people in both your home group and in the other nearby groups who could team up with you to organize the meeting.

It is a bit of work, but well worth it to experience the camaraderie from working with your fellow FA members to achieve a common goal.

Please consider volunteering for this experience. It's a great way to practice and live our Twelfth Step.

If you're interested, or just want to learn more about this opportunity to serve, please contact Barbara S, the WSB Chair and Convention Liaison at wsb_chair@familiesanonymous.org.

Thank you for considering this.

Donations

COMMEMORATIVE DONATIONS

In honor of Doug H., by group Chicago (Gold Coast)

In memory of Alexa W., by group Chicago (Gold Coast)

In memory of Carol M., by group 1844

GROUP DONATIONS

Group Donations have not been listed since our March/April 2019 issue. We apologize for the omission. Many groups have made donations since then, some multiple times. The following list shows group donations made each month during the period from May through September 2019. Many thanks to all for your continued support.

May

GR0171 IL, Arlington Heights
 GR0278 NY, Amityville
 GR0469 NY, Hicksville
 GR0493 IL, La Grange
 GR0746 IN, Evansville
 GR1345 NJ, Cherry Hill
 GR1811 MI, Clinton Township
 GR1836 FL, Delray Beach
 GR1844 WI, Mequon
 GR3001 Chicagoland Intergroup
 GR5001 UK National Service
 Board

June

GR0173 IL, Park Ridge
 GR0278 NY, Amityville
 GR0468 NY, East Rockaway
 GR0746 IN, Evansville
 GR0780 NY, Harrison
 GR0888 MI, Essexville
 GR0976 NJ, Colts Neck
 GR1187 CT, Bloomfield
 GR1318 FL, Boca Raton
 GR1598 GA, Marietta
 GR1802 MI, Livonia
 GR1806 OK, Oklahoma City

GR1974 NY, Syosset
 GR1978 VA, Richmond
 GR2079 OR, Grants Pass
 GR2108 TN, Franklin

July

GR0121 CA, Torrance
 GR0134 FL, So. Miami
 GR0162 IL, Des Plaines
 GR0171 IL, Arlington Heights
 GR0337 TN, Chattanooga
 GR0478 IL, Glenview
 GR0493 IL, La Grange
 GR0976 NJ, Colts Neck
 GR1196 IL, New Lenox
 GR1348 IL, Peoria
 GR1416 VA, Richmond
 GR1480 Canada, Winnipeg
 GR1764 KY, Cynthiana
 GR1773 WI, Madison
 GR1820 IL, Westmont
 GR1974 NY, Syosset
 GR3001 Chicago Intergroup

August

GR0279 NY, Amityville
 GR0288 OH, Pepper Pike
 GR0301 OH, Medina

GR0461 CA, Redlands
 GR0976 NJ, Colts Neck
 GR1301 NY, Syracuse
 GR1382 IL, Schaumburg
 GR1614 NY, Elmira
 GR1844 WI, Mequon
 GR1858 MA, Groton
 GR2023 IL, Buffalo Grove

September

GR0124 CA, Northridge
 GR0173 IL, Park Ridge
 GR0493 IL, La Grange
 GR0494 IL, Winnetka
 GR0579 OH, Columbus
 GR0888 MI, Essexville
 GR0976 NJ, Colts Neck
 GR1348 IL, Peoria
 GR1522 IL, Chicago
 GR1615 MI, Birmingham
 GR1806 OK, Oklahoma City
 GR1974 NY, Syosset
 GR2023 IL, Buffalo Grove

October

GR1097, Shawnee Mission, KS

Four Constructive Forces

4 P's for SURVIVING CRISIS

By Dick D

1. PATIENCE: “Discipline over thoughts when they become anxious over outcome”

You can lower your anxiety by NOT placing expectations on others
And by not worrying about things you cannot control, cause or cure.
There are 86,400 seconds in each day-Take advantage of each one and
Enjoy LIFE - Live it fullyeveryday

2. PERSISTENCE: “To continue without change in function”

Each day is a new start so stay focused and find a NEW path by
doing a good deed for someone. Although life is not fair it is still good.
Do not be a prisoner of your past, but an architect of your future!

3. PERSEVERANCE: “Undertaking we continue in spite of any influences, opposition, discouragement, or judgment”

You can change your thinking by agreeing not to allow others to put you in a role,
And you can change your behavior to let others actually see you as you are.
LIFE is about the journey, not the destination, so be patient and stay the course!
Holding on is believing there is a past -
Letting go is knowing there is a future

4. PASSION: “Emotion we distinguish from reason”

You need to stop logical thinking (Heart vs. Head) and understand that
feelings “just are” and no one can change them but you. Turn your anger and
frustrations into love and focus on the most important and positive
things in your life. Remember, Happiness is not having what you
want but wanting what you have so, always love and always nurture.

SERENITY = ACCEPTANCE + COURAGE + WISDOM

The Hunters in the Snow, 1565
BY PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER



“Today I will keep to the high road of recovery,
relying on my Higher Power, the Twelve Steps, and my FA group
to guide me safely home.”
[from “Having a Destination” in *Today A Better Way™*, December 31]