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SERENITY MESSENGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FELLOWSHIP

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

SERENITY MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship



EDITOR'S NOTE

The pandemic and the limitations it has brought can make us feel like we are stuck in time. For those of us who have faced the effects of addiction in our personal lives, such a feeling is not entirely new. We've felt this pain before--the pain of no progress, little hope, and tiredness from it all. We know what regret feels like, and we have ached at the thought of everything that might have been--the joys we could have shared with our loved ones if it weren't for addiction, the things we now think we might have done better, the time we lost out on. The Serenity Prayer takes our exhaustion and powerlessness and turns it into a blessing of wisdom. It teaches us to let go of that which can no longer be, that which might have been. Overcoming thoughts of regret can be an everyday struggle, but we are learning to accept that we can do nothing to control anyone else or to change anything that has already occurred. We are learning to forge forward.

Slowly, by accepting our losses and focusing on ourselves, we can regain our self-confidence. It might be late for some of our dreams, but it certainly is not the end of all hope. We know that we are not alone in our experiences because our pain is shared and understood within this FA fellowship. We can learn to withdraw from the drama that addiction orchestrates in our lives and invest that time instead into ourselves. Getting back to singing, painting, going for a walk, cooking a loving meal or just daydreaming. Whatever it is that brings us peace and serenity, if we have lost our way and forgotten our little joys, may this be the year we find our way back.

IN FELLOWSHIP, ELIZABETH

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WORD FROM THE BOARD

SERVICE ON THE FA WORLD SERVICE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (WSB) AND THE FA TRADITIONS

Families Anonymous is incorporated in the state of California. As a U.S. corporation, we are required by law to have a functioning board of directors. In FA, this responsibility rests with our World Service Board of Directors (WSB). The WSB has a legal and fiduciary responsibility to keep the fellowship financially viable as well as a moral responsibility to act as good stewards of the fellowship.

It has been my privilege to be a member of the WSB since October 2008. In my over 12-year tenure, I have found, and have seen in action, that the best way the WSB can act as good stewards of the fellowship is to apply many of the FA Traditions that apply to our member groups.

To illustrate, each of our monthly WSB meetings begins with a reading of our Tradition 1: "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity." While our deliberations are sometimes spirited and animated, the WSB strives for unity (or at least consensus) in all our activities.

We are also very cognizant of our Tradition 2, which tells us in part that "Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern" and especially our Tradition 4, which states "Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or FA as a whole". Often, the Group Outreach committee brings to the attention of the WSB a particular problem a group may be having. Our approach and any recommendations we make to resolve the problem are always guided by Traditions 2 and 4.

Two other traditions that the WSB consistently applies to our activities are Traditions 6 and 10. The sixth tradition reads in part "Our family groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise," and the tenth Tradition reads "Families Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy." The WSB often deals with requests from outside organizations to affiliate or work with FA in various endeavors, and this tradition guides us in our interactions with outside programs.

Another example of how our traditions impact WSB activities is Tradition 7, which states "Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." In keeping with the spirit of this tradition, WSB members receive no compensation of any kind.

During my tenure, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication, energy, wisdom, and enthusiasm of these members of the fellowship who have freely given their time to guide and help FA grow and prosper. As I prepare to leave the board in June 2021, I am proud to have been associated with (and to learn from) these remarkable and selfless people. They will be missed as both my colleagues and my friends.

IN FELLOWSHIP, GEORGE R.

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SERENITY MESSENGER

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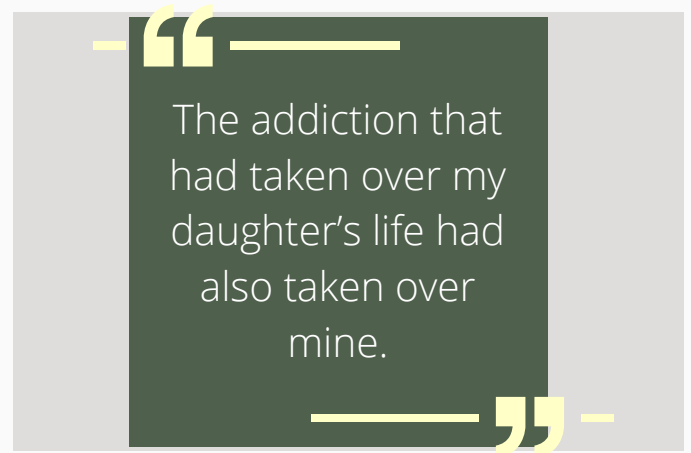
When you say you're "enjoying yourself," you usually mean you're "having a good time." But what about enjoying "your self"? In that sense, the phrase means something very different: it's reveling in who you are; celebrating your uniqueness. That may be fun, but it's also much more.

Before FA, while my daughter was in active addiction, there was no way I could "enjoy myself" in the traditional sense. That's because, although I didn't realize it at the time, I was in active addiction too. I was addicted to trying to cure her drug addiction and to solving her seemingly endless issues of living. I was addicted to her. While I was enmeshed in that hopeless web of my addiction to her problems, I was unable to enjoy anything in life. I was miserable.

My identity and self-esteem were buried under a mountain of self-deception, self-justification, and guilt. I was going through the motions of going to work every day and maintaining, on the surface, a normal relationship with my wife and my other children. But it was all a sham: in the background, driving everything I did, was my obsession to the overriding mission of saving my daughter from the horrible drug addiction that had taken over her life.

The addiction that had taken over my daughter's life had also taken over mine. My wife and I tried everything to make her change, to stop using drugs and find recovery. We gave her material support including cars, free rent, clothing, and cash. When that failed we turned to relentless encouragement, "cheering on" the smallest achievements (if she got out of bed before noon we were thrilled), and when that failed to motivate her, we engaged in moral attacks including anger, browbeating, and threats (never carried out) to completely withhold further material support. My wife and I whipsawed from one fruitless approach to another to try to change her.

Worse yet, because my wife and I couldn't agree on what we should do to help our daughter, we ended up doing every crazy thing that either one of us thought might work. It's no surprise that nothing helped. She got worse and we got crazier. The more engulfed our daughter became in her world of irresponsibility and drugs, the harder we tried to help her out by engaging, over and over, in the same enabling actions we'd tried dozens of times before.



As a result of years of pursuing my fruitless quest to control the uncontrollable, I had no energy to devote to relationships with anyone, including my "self." I certainly wasn't enjoying myself; I was miserable. My "self" had disappeared and was replaced by this angry, obsessed person bent on rescuing my daughter or dying in the attempt.

Around eight years ago, before we'd even heard of FA, we'd been trying to fix our daughter for nearly ten years. We'd sent her to a number of rehabs, counselors, and other recovery programs and professionals. None of them was doing our daughter any good—she was still using drugs and living irresponsibly, with no end in sight. Worse, the cost of those rehabs was draining our retirement accounts at an alarming rate.

ENJOYING MY SELF

(cont'd)

We'd sent her to a thirty-day rehab facility in Pennsylvania that seemed promising—at the end of the month, there were glimmers of hope that she might change. Still, nothing was certain. We'd seen her rise temporarily after treatment before, only to fall further once she returned home.

The Pennsylvania counselors recommended we move her to their Florida facility for a longer-term recovery program. Given the immense cumulative cost of all the treatments we'd tried to that point, we were reluctant to spend that money. But we were desperate, and, despite all the prior failures, we still held out hope for her recovery. Ironically, the tenacity that had driven us for years to continue the madness of endless enabling also spurred us to spend the money, one more time, for an organized recovery program.

There was one difference this time: we told our daughter that we'd pay for the Florida long-term facility, but that this was the last time we'd be paying for her to attend any kind of rehab. We were done. If this one didn't work, she was on her own—and she saw that my wife and I were in agreement, so it made an impact.

Still, when we attended “family day” at the Florida facility a month later, our daughter reverted to classic form. My wife and I, along with our two sons, were attending one of the first group sessions. We hadn't seen our daughter for a couple of weeks. We were sitting on chairs in the center of a circle surrounded by other family members and their addicted loved ones. Our daughter was sitting in a chair facing us. We were supposed to engage in a dialogue.

We felt awkward and strange, but hopeful that something good would come of this last shot at rehab. Not knowing what to say, we told her we were glad to see her and asked some kind of innocuous question like how she was doing, or how she liked it

there. Our daughter responded with a vague answer that amounted to something like “It's okay here, but I'm only doing this for you. How are you going to reward me if I finish this program?”

Mind you, those weren't the words she used. She did it with a lot more finesse than that, so much so that I didn't realize at the time she'd said anything improper. It felt to me like the start of any number of our “normal,” pre-rehab conversations. In retrospect I can see that she was, in her sly way, trying to push our emotional buttons and to evade accepting responsibility for her own bad life decisions.

The counselor supervising the group session immediately jumped out of his seat, agitated and angry. He ordered her to stop talking and leave the circle. He sent her to a far corner of the room, alone, and told her she didn't deserve to interact with us.

What happened next shocked us—the counselor ordered that, from that point on, we couldn't have any contact with our daughter for a full six months. We couldn't see her, talk on the phone, exchange snail mail or emails or electronic messages of any kind. No contact whatsoever. If she left the rehab facility, they'd let us know, but apart from that, we were to be incommunicado for six full months.

“For today, we're living our lives and enjoying happiness that, during our daughter's active addiction, would have been unthinkable.”

ENJOYING MY SELF

(cont'd)

The counselor explained that, from what he'd seen, the relationship between us and our daughter was so toxic, so fundamentally flawed, that we needed a clean break. During those six months she would continue to do her work in the rehab facility, and we were required to attend weekly meetings of this group called "FA." At the end of the six months, he explained, we all should be better prepared to have a healthier relationship. That's when our journey in Families Anonymous began. We've been attending FA ever since.

Our daughter, thank God, found recovery and has been clean and sober for most of the past seven years. Through FA, we found out how we'd inadvertently been helping her to continue in her disease, and how we'd been subordinating and ignoring our own spiritual and emotional lives in our misguided attempts to "fix" her. It was hard, but we gradually, in our own time, stopped doing those things (or at least started doing them less often). We changed, and then she changed too. While the changes my wife and I made as a result of attending FA didn't necessarily cause our daughter to find recovery, they surely didn't hurt.

We're all better off now than we were then, but we're certainly not "all better."

For today, we're living our lives and enjoying happiness that, during our daughter's active addiction, would have been unthinkable. We still regularly attend our FA meetings and practice the 12 Steps because we know that her disease of addiction, and our disease of codependency, could flare up at any time and shatter this precious peace we've found. We're determined not to let that happen. We're also committed to sharing the lessons of our journey in hopes of easing the pain of others whose loved ones are still abusing drugs or alcohol.

One incredible result of these years in FA is that I can enjoy myself again. I've learned to release my daughter to her higher power, and to rely upon my own. I've gotten my life back. Through prayer and meditation, and by working to stay in conscious contact with my higher power, I can also enjoy the unique combination of strengths and weaknesses, foibles and flaws, that make me who I am. I can enjoy "my self" again, too.

BOB S., GROUP #2056, BRADENTON, FL

THINKING OF SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE OR ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE SERENITY MESSENGER?

For our upcoming issue the deadlines to submit articles
and announcements are February 10th and February
23rd respectively.

We'd love to hear from you!



FOCUS: GROUP

GROUP 494
Winnetka, IL

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

FA Winnetka was started over 40 years ago. We have been in the same well-located Church for many years, which has consistently provided a welcoming, accommodating and supportive environment.

As secretary for the past 13 years, I have had the privilege of welcoming a continued stream of newcomers as well as many seasoned veterans that show up for those walking through our door for the first time.

The 12th step always reminds us of the importance of giving back to the program. We want to provide the same comfort, validation and respect that we ourselves received on that first night when we were greeted warmly, with no judgement, and made to feel instantly welcome.

We came to FA because our sons and daughters were broken, but we may not have been aware that we were broken, too.

We wanted to “fix” our loved ones, but for those who chose to be open to the wisdom of FA, we learned that we had to change what we were doing. We shared the difference between helping and enabling and what we could and could not control. We discussed how to release guilt and anger and re-evaluate our expectations.

We learned from the program about setting boundaries to protect ourselves, what co-dependency sounds like, how to rein in the worry and fear. But best of all, we continued to emphasize how we deserve to be happy and are allowed to have a life of our own, while just simply loving them despite the choices they are making. The journey can be a long, bumpy road and FA encourages us to take small baby steps. It is “Progress not Perfection.”

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We have implemented an additional open 12 Step Class on the first Wednesday of the month preceding our traditional meeting.

” —

The Winnetka group has made some recent changes. We have found that a sizable number of our members come to our meetings because of a loved one who has both addiction and mental health issues. So we have embraced both substance abuse and mental health. We can apply the FA principles to both, and as we all know, when there is substance use there is often an underlying mental health issue lurking below the surface, leading to self-medication.

We have implemented an additional open 12 Step Class on the first Wednesday of the month preceding our traditional meeting. Using the FA workbook, we can share the wisdom of the 12 steps in a small group setting to learn together as well as from one another how to apply them.

FOCUS: GROUP (CONT'D)

Winnetka, like many groups, has a rotating leader each week, and they select the topic of their choice. Our red book, "Today a Better Way" is a point of reference as are many other pieces of wisdom in our FA literature. A group favorite is "What do I say?" When we learn how to communicate with our sons and daughters in a calm, brief and clear manner, it can improve our serenity. Listening more, talking less and sticking to a limited number of non-personal topics can help keep the lines of communication open.

We also talk about giving our loved ones the dignity to figure out how to solve their own problems. To step back and stop fixing everything can be empowering for them and stabilizing for us.

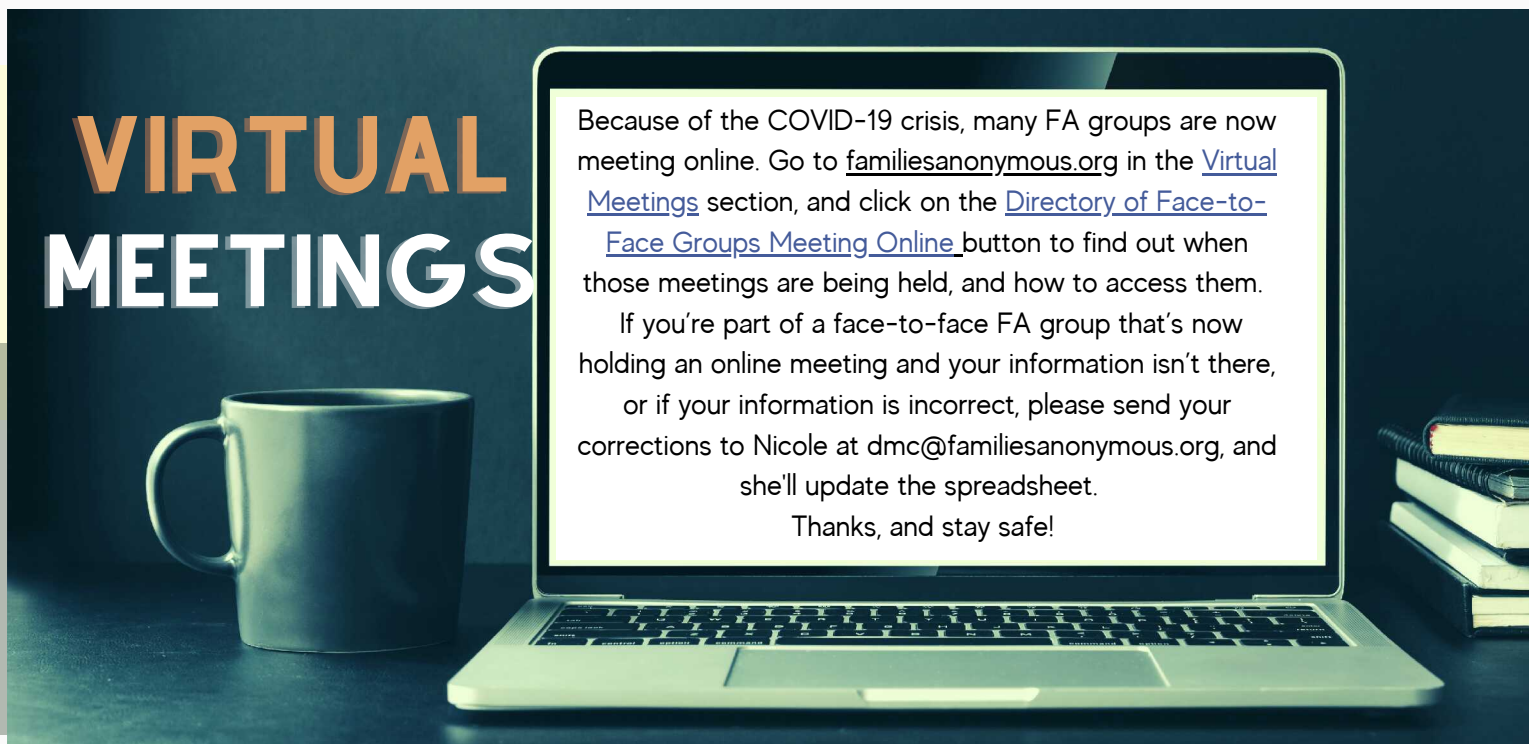
Our meetings pre-Covid were on Wednesday nights from 7:30-9:00 p.m., reserving the last 20 minutes for any newcomer to share what brought them to us. The best part of the evening was casually hanging out together at the end of the meeting to give support and maybe even share a laugh.

Now that we are online weekly, it's a different feel and we are down to one hour. We stay on a little longer for those who may have questions or need to share. We do the best we can under the circumstances. Members are encouraged to use the phone list between meetings; to always feel free to reach out to someone they think can be of help. We hope to be back in our comfortable "family" room together, in person, again soon.

We find that many are not ready to hear FA's counterintuitive message, but we are grateful that we are pretty consistent with weekly meetings of 18-25 people. For those who have worked the program, we have witnessed remarkable metamorphoses. We in the Winnetka group know that "It works when you work it," that the Serenity Prayer keeps us sane and that we keep adding to our tool box each week.

In Gratitude to the FA program, our Chicagoland Intergroup and the FA World Service.

CARLA L., GROUP 494, WINNETKA, IL



BECAME WILLING

Making Our Recovery Our Foremost Priority

Over and over, I have come to see that the 12 Steps are a unified whole. Initially I worked each step, one at a time, without realizing that by working one step I was working them all. Each step is linked to every other step. They cannot be separated from each other and still make any sense. They are dependent on each other and lead to each other. The reason for this unity is spelled out in the words “became willing.”

Each step requires that we become willing, that we are ready to undergo change and development and accept that the greatest change must be in our own thinking. Although I came to the steps reluctantly, my need for the change and healing that the steps provide have overcome my reluctance—but only insofar as I became “willing” to make the necessary changes. Here is where I have had to lay down my ego and accept that those who have successfully gone before me know something that I don’t know. They have found the path to the healing that is so desperately needed, and they have laid out the steps for all of us.

The work is not easy. Sometimes it can be excruciatingly difficult, and it can only be done when we have become willing: willing to persevere through the pain, willing to allow our Higher Power to do His part, willing to let go of control of the entire process, willing to become humble as we walk this path and admit to our own failures.

Anyone who embarks on this 12 Step journey is actually on a journey of “becoming.” There is always more to see and learn on this journey if we are true and faithful to it, and in the end we will hopefully be surprised and pleased by the person we have become.

The 12 Step Contract

I didn’t realize when I first began working the 12 Steps that I was entering into a contract with myself. The contract is to do everything in my power to recover. The contract is “written” as I work each step and continues to be “written” and refined as I work the steps over and over.

Now, after four years in Families Anonymous, I understand that if I remain true to the steps and my contract, my recovery will continue and deepen. If I abandon the work, I will lose ground, and either my recovery will stall or I will relapse.

Working the steps is difficult and demanding. Sometimes, with all the other demands of life, it becomes impossible to stay the course, and then relapse is inevitable. Sometimes my anger or depression, anxiety or self-pity, resurface and I just can’t “work it.”

I allow relapse to happen. I know that it is my responsibility to at least keep up with my program, but sometimes the exhaustion is just overwhelming and I can’t. A relapse is not a reason to further beat myself up. It can actually be a positive if I realize that it is a warning sign that I am not working the steps as I should. It doesn’t invalidate my contract with myself. It shows me that I have not been as vigilant about my recovery nor as committed as I need to be.

— “ —
Each step requires that we become willing; that we are ready to undergo change and development and accept that the greatest change is in our thinking.
— ” —

BECAME WILLING

(CONT'D)

Recovery is only a part of my life, but I need to make it a priority. Without it, the rest of my life will collapse into a long-term or permanent relapse, where anger, anxiety and depression will once again overwhelm me. I could not function well before recovery; I will not be able to function well without it.

So I press on. I cannot skip this step or the next step or any of the steps. They are HARD. Sometimes I don't want to work them. I don't want to be humbled, but humility is a crucial part of the becoming, part of the change. Can I arrogantly expect or require that addicts have to change but I don't? No. I have to do this for myself and for them. I have to set the example. I have to make all of my relationships right. Before I can actually do it, I have to become *willing* to do it. The willingness has to become a part of me. It will change me. It will be healing for me.

DIANE S.



Want to learn more about how your FA group can thrive and grow? Go to familiesanonymous.org, click on "Members" and go to "Group Materials," where you'll find an array of helpful, informative publications concerning group dynamics and management.

Still have questions? Send an email to GO@familiesanonymous.org.

Have a great meeting!

A sixties child who once sought peace from Vietnam war just wants peace from the chaos of addiction today

Usually there is much drama and trauma in the dance between my son and myself. But it's a quiet time right now between him and me, and I like it. I like the sound of peace, I like not feeling anxiety, and I like listening to the whispers that come into my mind because all is quiet. I am basking in peace, akin to the feeling that something needs to be healed in order for me to go forward into a new phase in life; and for one of the few times in my life, I am allowing it, and it feels right and good.

“ ———
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phase in life
————— ”

I am also not judging all the times that didn't go this way; maybe those times needed to happen for me to be able to appreciate this quiet time.

I have learned a few things that stand out when I reflect on my journey in FA. One is that I can't control my son or his addiction. That lesson was big for me. Probably for many of you, too.

Addiction is scary. It ruins lives and families. It hurts so many people so badly, not just the person who has the addiction. It kills people we love. I have witnessed this first hand, seeing my friends in FA lose their children and mates. But, as scary as it is, I don't have to go through it alone anymore, because in FA there are people who are going through the same things. And if I need them, I can reach out to them. They understand it all. I feel no shame or embarrassment with these people. I feel no need to dignify a bad situation, to put on airs, to make excuses or offer apologies... they are on the exact same page. They just get it.

We lose people we love to the disease of addiction. I am at this place right now. I have lost the son I once knew, a person who had health and vigor for life. That person is gone and most likely not going to show up again in my lifetime. But I have learned something about this, too. The line between life and death is huge. I have a choice, and I am working on loving him just the way he is, as he is today, mostly high, sometimes pitiful, sad, angry, suffering; and when I can't bear it, when he becomes obnoxious and abusive, I have learned to have boundaries, to walk away from him to take care of myself.

I am working on not hating him and his drugs, but on loving him as he is today because that is what I have to work with right now. Maybe he is that way for me to work something through. Who really knows? There could be a Higher Power in this picture, too.

Speaking of the Higher Power, I am not as skeptical as I once was. When I am quiet and at peace, I am allowing the Higher Power to speak through me. Guiding me in different ways: sometimes a more patient way, a silent way, a reflective way, a wait-and-see way. All different than the way I was before. I like the adventure of it, of not knowing just how to get there, but handing over the steering wheel and letting my Higher Power navigate and trust that it's taking me where I need to go for my growth.

I am a child of the '60s. Peace is my word. I once wanted peace from the Vietnam War, from the chaos in my childhood home. Today I want peace from the destruction of addiction. Lately, when I get quiet on every level, I find some peace in taking life in stride.

DENISE M.



LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

#1009 *The Twelve Step Workbook* and #1009S *Manual de los Doce Pasos*

One of Families Anonymous' most useful publications, **The Twelve Step Workbook**, is now available **in Spanish** as well as in **English**.

This workbook is the ideal way to work the Steps—either on your own, or as part of your group, or (better yet) with your sponsor.

If you are already using the English version #1019, you're aware that it includes the full text of #1004 *The Twelve Steps of Families Anonymous*—PLUS it provides a personal workbook for recording your responses to a full range of exercises for each Step in our Twelve Step recovery.

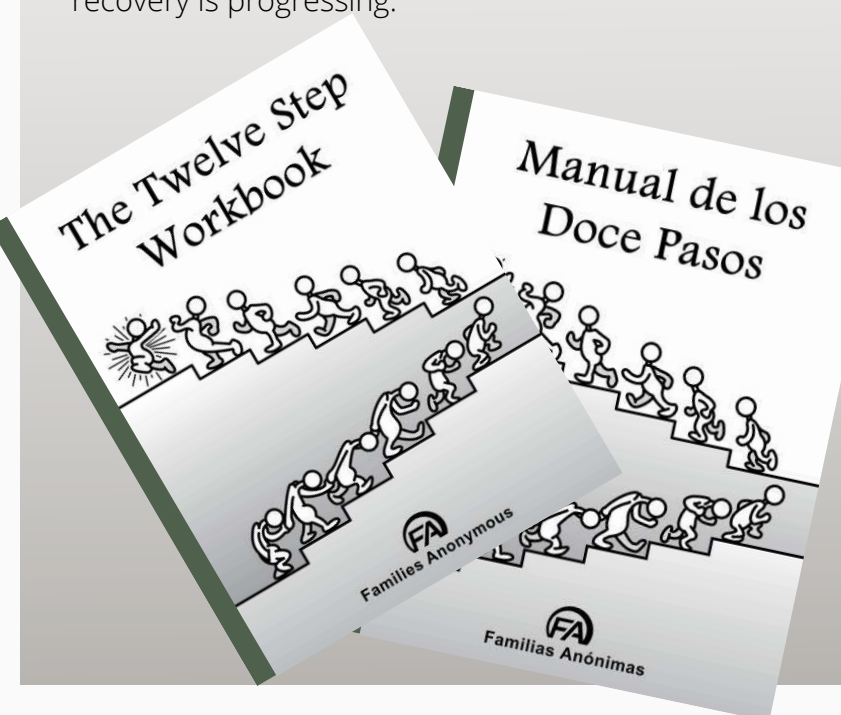
The same is true for the newly published Spanish version—**#1019S Manual de los Doce Pasos**. It contains the full text of #1004S *Los Doce Pasos de Familias Anónimas* PLUS a complete and accurate translation of all the #1019 exercises for each Step.

Both workbooks consist of three-hole-punched, loose-leaf pages that you can place in an 8½" x 11" three-ring binder.

This set-up makes it easy for you to add as many blank sheets as you want after each of the exercise pages. So you can rework the Steps over and over, without writing directly on the workbook pages. Comparing your responses from one go-around to another will give you a real feel for how well your recovery is progressing.

Each of these publications---#1019 *The Twelve Step Workbook* and #1019S *Manual de los Doce Pasos*---is priced at just \$10 and can be found on our online shop ([click here](#)).

Purchase a copy for yourself today—and perhaps do a Step Twelve service by purchasing a few additional copies for some FA friends. You're sure to find this workbook to be an invaluable resource on your road to your personal recovery.



THE FA LITERATURE COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU!

DO YOU HAVE IDEAS FOR NEW LITERATURE FOR OUR FELLOWSHIP?

DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE AND/OR EDIT?

DO YOU HAVE SPECIAL SKILLS, SUCH AS GRAPHIC DESIGN?

DO YOU TYPE WELL?

If you have any of these skills or others that could benefit the Literature Committee (LC), please consider joining us! Serving on the LC is a great way of giving back to the fellowship, enhancing your own recovery, and making new FA friends in the process.

Thanks to the modern conveniences of telephone, email, and online video conferencing, the LC can include FA members from all over the U.S.—and, in fact, from anywhere in the world. All you need are a fluent command of English, a strong grasp of the FA program, a willingness to work both independently and as part of a committee, and a desire to spread FA's written message of hope and recovery to people both within the fellowship and beyond it.

The LC has two teams of members:

- Our ACTIVE TEAM MEMBERS are able to work consistently on the LC's projects and be involved in the committee's decision-making process. Active members are expected to meet once a month by telephone or video conference call.
- Our RESOURCE TEAM MEMBERS have special skills that are needed occasionally; or they have special interests that they choose to focus on (such as doing graphic-design work or translating FA's literature into Spanish). Resource members need not attend the LC's monthly conference-call meetings on a regular basis, but rather can join the meetings as needed or let the LC Chair report their progress.

WE ARE WAITING TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please contact the WSO at (847)294-5877 and leave this information for the FA Literature Committee:

Your first name and last initial _____

Your telephone number _____

Your email address _____

Your special skill set or interest, if any _____

The LC will respond!

SHOP online for a full selection of FA's literature offerings for your group or personal use.

READ through our comprehensive literature catalog to see what's offered:

- **PAGES 1 AND 2:** Search by content, such as *codependency*, *grief*, or *laughter*
- **PAGES 3 THROUGH 5:**

Browse through descriptions, catalog numbers, and prices of **all** our literature offerings (books, pamphlets, bookmarks and more)

Look for specific publications (such as *Today A Better Way* or *The Twelve Step Workbook*)

See literature for specific uses (new members, groups, public information, etc.)

Discover e-books and free downloads, which are especially ideal for virtual meetings

- **PAGE 6:** Explore our growing list of Spanish translations (*literatura en español*)

www.familiesanonymous.org/shop

DONATIONS

Commemorative Donations

- In memory of Mark Joseph S., son of Richard and Barbara S., by Barbara and Steve B.
- In memory of Mark Joseph S., son of Richard and Barbara S., by Rosemary B.
- In honor of Jeffrey H., by Renee and Frank
- In honor of Winnetka, IL (Group 494), by Joanna B.



Group Donations

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| • GR 33 CT, West Hartford | • GR493 IL, La Grange | • GR1906 GA, Roswell |
| • GR171 IL, Arlington Heights | • GR579 OH, Columbus | • GR1958 SC, Columbia |
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