# 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



The garden is where I often find solace and space to be myself. My thoughts immediately shift from worry to a preoccupation that is positive: looking at a new flower blooming, a critter crawling, leaves shedding, plants self-seeding, and new life emerging all over again. Nature has always provided a distraction from the stresses of life I've found difficult to accept.

The pandemic in particular has become a time for me to scan nature around me and to pay attention to every small creature that is close. At the peak of the pandemic, when restrictions on movement were strict and people felt scared, anxious and trapped, I was grateful to have a tiny yard I could escape to. Here, I watched butterflies with wonder, in a way I hadn't done since I was a child. Though the plants were always there, and these butterflies had been fluttering around even before the pandemic, I hadn't been paying attention to the details of their lives. Now I had time to observe which plants the butterflies laid their eggs on and to watch as the eggs hatched and the caterpillars grew through different stages before finally transforming into winged wonders. This metamorphosis has become somewhat of a cliché used to describe every change unimaginatively. Yet, to watch this journey each time in the garden is to witness a new miracle, to learn a life lesson.

What strikes me about the caterpillar is how diligently it cares for itself, single-mindedly feeding itself so it grows, molts, grows some more, throughout its days working towards its own transformation. When the caterpillar is ready to move to the next stage of its life, it confines itself to rest as a pupa in a cocoon or chrysalis, completely letting go and oblivious to the world outside. At this point it can be exposed to any danger of the outside world, which is out of its control; yet it appears to be at peace, motionless, sure of the promise its future holds. One fine day, as it finally emerges from its pupa, it has completely abandoned its old self to which it now has no resemblance. As a new creature, the butterfly goes where it wants and no longer needs to spend all its time working hard to change.

In our own journeys we need to be assiduous in attending to our growth, meeting our needs. Sometimes, though we do the work our FA program guides us to do, progress might not be evident; yet we can hold onto FA's promises, and we can rest. As we change in various aspects of our lives, we need not be anxious that we don't resemble our old selves as we used to. Maybe this is a sign of growth. Even if we don't see it now, we are working towards being our newer, better selves.

IN FELLOWSHIP, ELIZABETH

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#### WORD FROM THE BOARD

#### Work the Program by Volunteering and Giving Back to FA

An ideal way to perform service to the fellowship is to volunteer to become a member of a World Service Board (WSB) Committee.

There are a variety of WSB committees, each focused on a different aspect of keeping our fellowship growing and thriving. This results in a continual need for volunteers with various skills, experience, and backgrounds.

Do you have a background in marketing, sales, or advertising? Perhaps our Public Information (PI) Committee would be of interest. The primary goal of the PI Committee is to foster general awareness of our program and its benefits. They also are responsible for ensuring that important information about the fellowship is rapidly and effectively communicated to the membership.

Do you like to write? Do you have a background as an editor? Our Literature Committee is responsible for all of our powerful FA recovery materials. They create, develop, and revise our FA literature including bookmarks, pamphlets, and books about the Families Anonymous program.

Have you been an FA sponsor or benefited from having an FA sponsor? The Sponsorship Committee communicates to the fellowship the importance of this tool in one's personal recovery. They assist the Literature Committee in the development of sponsorship source materials which assist individual members in accomplishing the Families Anonymous program goals of personal recovery. They also provide guidance for individual groups to establish sponsorship programs.

Would you like to personally contribute to the growth of FA? Our Group Outreach Committee encourages and supports the healthy growth of the FA fellowship through establishment of new FA groups and providing guidance to new groups as they get "going and growing." They also provide guidance to groups that may be struggling with low membership, traditions issues, or other group problems.

Are you experienced in office management or customer service? Our World Service Office (WSO) Committee is responsible for ensuring that the WSO provides a high level of customer service to our members and the public at large. They oversee all aspects of WSO operations and supervise the office staff.

Do you want to help our members and friends share stories of recovery? The Newsletter Committee oversees the creation, publication, and distribution of our bimonthly newsletter, the *Serenity Messenger*.

#### CHAIR

Barbara S. - Cherry Hill, NJ

#### VICE CHAIR

Maria S. - Bradenton, FL

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Robert S. - Bradenton, FL

Odalys A. - Miami, FL

#### SERENITY MESSENGER

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newsletter@FamiliesAnonymous.org

#### **EDITORIAL TEAM**

Elizabeth S., Bob S., Nicole G., Pamela M., Chris Y., Marcia C.

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#### WORD FROM THE BOARD

(CONT'D)

Interested in technology? The Technology Committee explores technologies which can provide and improve communication with the public and members of the fellowship using the internet and internet-based strategies.

Volunteering to join one of our WSB committees is an ideal way to "give back" to the fellowship. You can have a significant impact even if you only have a few hours a week to give. Most committee work is done via email, internet collaboration, or video-teleconference.

Working our program means living our program. Want to live the twelfth step? Step up and work with one of our committees. If you do not, who will?

If you would like to discuss joining a committee or have questions about WSB committee work, please contact Barbara S at wsb\_chair@familiesanonymous.org.

IN SERVICE, GEORGE R.



Step up and work with one of our committees. If you do not, who will?





## **MANAGING STRESS**

#### Incorporating FA Tips for Staying Calm During the Pandemic

Let's face it, we are all pretty inexperienced with living through a pandemic. But a pandemic is upon us, and it brings unwelcome guests: stress, depression and anxiety. The thought of maintaining social distancing, wearing a mask, CDC daily statistics, economic strain, racial unrest, political division and personal isolation can push us into the COVID black hole. It is normal to feel fear, anger and frustration during these uncertain times, but with some practical self-care tips and keeping the FA principles in our back pocket, we can potentially minimize the stress.

What can you do to combat the stress during the next several months?

**Stay connected:** Be brave enough to ask for help from those you trust, especially members of your FA family. Have a copy of your group's phone list handy. There is zero shame in seeking help. During this time of isolation, push yourself to utilize electronic communication. While video calls can never replace a warm hug, they do still allow us an opportunity to share laughs and good energy.

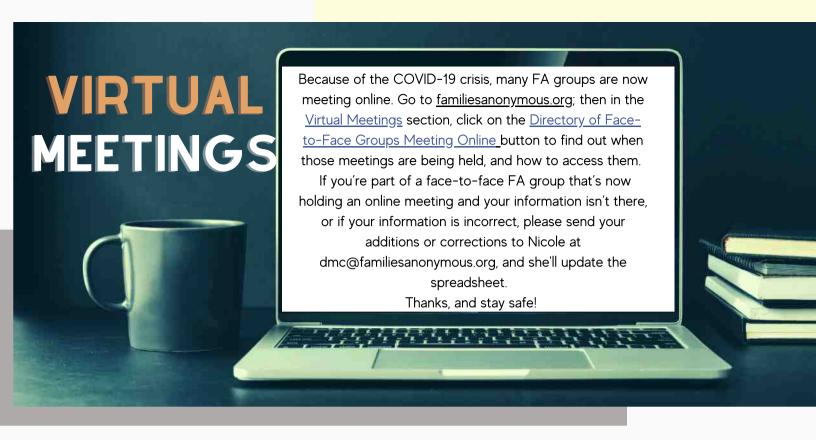
**Be realistic and try not to expect the "ideal" gathering:** I think we can all agree, there is nothing ideal about these unprecedented times of self-quarantine and social distancing. We are dealing with outside forces that most of us have never experienced before. Family gatherings and social events have changed. Choose a few traditions to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.

**Learn to Let Go:** As time goes by, we realize that life does not always go as we planned. In FA we learn that it is not our responsibility to keep our loved ones clean, sober or on a healthy mental path. They control what they do every day. Being able to release them with love, and without feeling guilt, is important.

**Give Yourself Permission to Feel:** Know that the emotions you have are legitimate. Last year and continuing this year, things have been so hard for so many reasons. Acknowledge your feelings as simply what they are – it is okay to not be fine all the time. Check in with yourself. Are you feeling anxious? Have you left the present to contemplate the past or project the future? Try to identify the feeling – what is causing it – release it – come back to the moment.

**Make time for things you enjoy, and treat yourself well:** Prioritize time to do things you enjoy. Seek simple and meaningful ways – however big or small – to bring happiness or contentment to your day. This will help bring calmness to events out of your control.

**Manage expectations:** It is important to examine your expectations. Far too often, families have expectations that do not reflect reality but instead are rooted in a "Hallmark movie." Stressful seasons of life are times when you need to be kind to yourself and recognize your own limitations.



#### MANAGING STRESS (CONT'D)

**Seek out the positive:** All too often we feel overwhelmed by the ongoing negative news coverage. Evaluate how you cope with negativity. It is unlikely that consuming news highlighting suffering and sadness will benefit your mental health. Instead, take a break from it and seek positive stories or books.

**Recite the Serenity Prayer:** The Serenity Prayer reminds us of the principles of recovery. It is a great confirmation of how we are powerless over other people, places and things. Recite it daily to help you decide whether a situation is worth getting upset over or whether it is beyond your control. See if the Serenity Prayer can help you find some peace and calm in that moment.

Right now is a difficult time for many of us. Know that you are bigger, stronger and more powerful than whatever life has thrown at you. When the panic is rising in you and the emotions are wearing you down, build yourself back up by practicing self-care.

Before FA, I was filled with the overwhelming job of being the ultimate "fixer" for my son – always on duty, day or night, ready for the next disaster. Today I practice the skill of listening instead, and my most powerful tool is reading the Red Book every day. Finding balance and peace in my life is a constant journey, and with my FA group I continue to learn ways to stay steady in this unbalanced world.

BARBARA E., GROUP 494, WINNETKA IL

## LIVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC ONE DAY AT A TIME

One day at a time, that's what they say. My wife and I are firm believers in that. But with the pandemic, and with our self-imposed (but we believe necessary) restrictions on interacting with others to stay virusfree, the past nine months can feel like one long day. It's the same routine: Get up, shower, take a short walk with the dog, then eat breakfast. Luckily, we're here in Florida where the weather is usually pretty good, even in the dead of winter.

Read the news. Maybe run a brief errand to the supermarket; maybe not. Maybe drive to the pharmacy to pick up a prescription; maybe not. Do a little more reading. Pay some bills. Answer emails or messages from family and friends, maybe phone someone we know who's alone and could use some cheering up.

With faith in the future and a little perseverance, we can live through this extended "one day at at time"

Once in a while, we take a ride, maybe to the beach to watch the waves or just to look around, see what stores are open, what restaurants have shuttered for good, how many people are out and about and what they're doing. We're careful not to interact with anyone up close, but just being out is a nice change of pace.

About once a week I play golf with friends. We're careful to keep our distance and to not talk directly into each other's faces when we're riding on the golf cart. I wear a mask even then, just to be sure. But overall, being outdoors in the sun, with a breeze in my face, feels totally safe.

Back to our routine: Eat lunch, then take the dog for a longer afternoon walk. After that, read or relax a bit, maybe play my guitar a little, or maybe grab a nap, before preparing dinner. Eat and then settle in to watch a little TV. Maybe enjoy a FaceTime call with one of our grandchildren. Have a cookie or ice cream for dessert. Then go to bed, read, and drop off to sleep.

Get up and repeat.

And repeat. And repeat. And repeat.

The routine's comfortable, and in its predictability somewhat comforting, but I guess many people would see it as deadly boring. Perhaps it's evidence of my own shallowness that I've become inured to it and don't feel particularly burdened by it at all. I'm just taking it day by day, secure in my perhaps irrational faith that sooner or later everything will get better.

Our younger son gave me a dessert cookbook for Christmas that arrived the other day, so to change things up, I baked gingerbread cookies. We couldn't (shouldn't) eat all of them ourselves, so we made up plates and gave them to a couple of our neighbors, just to break up the routine. I'm thinking of trying a brownie recipe next week and doing the same thing: baking for the fun of it, and then just giving them away.

## LIVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC ONE DAY AT A TIME

(cont'd)

And bread. We've got a recipe for no-knead bread that results in a crusty, dense, perfect loaf that you can make for dinner if you start the dough in the morning. On the days we do that, the prospect of having hot, fragrant, fresh-baked bread at the end of the day makes the rest of the routine much more tolerable. Even having something so seemingly small to look forward to changes the day and makes it unique.

We read our FA literature and faithfully attend a meeting online once a week. Connecting with our FA family and reaching out to help those suffering from crises with their addicted loved ones help us maintain our perspective: our life may seem difficult, and a bit scary, but it's still very good. We're healthy and share a deep love for each other. We have children and grandchildren who love and miss us and look forward to the day, as do we, when we can be together again.



With faith in the future and a little perseverance, we can live through this extended "one day at a time" by relying on our inner strength, leaning on each other when we need to, and trusting always that a higher power will eventually guide us to better days.

This too shall pass.

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 April 10th and April 23rd respectively.

We'd love to hear from you!

## SIMPLE HACKS TO STAY ON TRACK

A mother finds that reading has become her tool to keep her focus on herself

Life's problems often feel worse when it is bedtime. Despite my loved one's active addiction, I make it through the days okay, appreciating relationships, engaging in daily routines, and trying to use FA tools as needed. In the evening, I enjoy a few TV programs. But as I am getting ready for bed, terror can fly into my mind. Is he having an alcoholic seizure? Is he alive?



I am able to get in bed, turn on a book, enjoy myself a bit, and fall asleep



Since I still pay for his cell phone (I can't handle complete separation), I take a moment to look at the mobile app and usually can see that, yes, he is still making calls and sending texts. But still, thoughts of him remain and also return when I awaken in the night.

Self-care is important, and getting enough sleep is a basic self-care measure that promotes both physical and mental health. Here is a suggestion for the nighttime terrors.

For the last five years, my tool for various night worries has been listening to books. I download them to my cell phone from the library using the free apps. For nighttime listening, I don't download serious books but rather mysteries and other light reading. It is easy to adjust the speed of the reader and set a sleep timer.

So I am able to get in bed, turn on a book, enjoy myself a bit, and fall asleep. When I awaken in the night for a bathroom break and my son immediately pops into my head, I simply turn the book back on and "read" some more. This is a tool that works for me. Give it a try -- it might also work for you!

MARY W.

## HANG ON TO FA PROMISES

We are always going to have some nagging angst caused by our "special" person(s). But per our FA Promises, we WILL instinctively know how to handle or react to them.

When you get a troublesome flashback situation or memory, try to pick it apart and make it positive or funny (even if you have to laugh at yourself). Eventually, the bad times do become bearable memories. They certainly have for me.

Give yourself credit for having come through those situations. Give yourself credit for all the good and healthy support and help you gave your "special" person, in spite of the bad times all of you suffered.

We don't always have the luxury of understanding exactly, but I truly believe things happen for a reason. Maybe we are not meant to – or need to – understand. Hang on to those FA Promises, and let them become part of your life.

GARY W., OHIO IN MEMORY OF OUR SON WHO WAS LOST TO THE DISEASE, MARCH 2019

## LEARNING TO MAKE AMENDS

A mother reflects on how her preoccupation with an addicted daughter could have harmed others

Step Eight in The Twelve Steps of FA asks us a lot of questions. Many of them start with, "Had we ...?" Had we harmed the rest of our family with our preoccupation about our daughter's life? Had we fallen into the pitfall of doing what was comfortable?

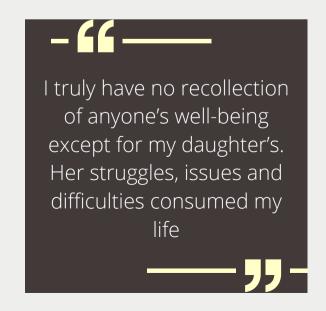
**Step 8** – "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all"

Right away, this step reminds me of how I may have let others down. I don't remember calling my son during his freshman year of college to see how he was adjusting. I guess he must have become an independent young adult pretty quickly! Maybe he didn't want to burden his father and me about how much he might have been struggling, or maybe he didn't care to celebrate his successes with us. But I could have checked in.

The first part of the Step Eight discussion seems to reflect on how I was harming my family. Was I being a neglectful wife, friend, daughter? I truly have no recollection of anyone's well-being except for my daughter's. Her struggles, issues and difficulties consumed my life.

But then the Step Eight discussion transitions to how I might have been indulging her in what she needed: money, a place to live, emotional support. The hardest part for me to understand was the statement, "Denying them the freedom to fail, had we also denied them the satisfaction of their successes?" This idea was very different from the written words I had read earlier in this step. Why would I want her to fail? How was failure going to get her out of the depths of despair?

But as I worked on changing my actions, reactions and attitudes, I realized that she was also making her own choices. Although her choices were not always what I would have wanted, the outcomes overall were improving.



#### **LEARNING TO MAKE AMENDS**

(CONT'D)

There were boyfriends who were not a perfect match; yet I could find some serenity when I learned she was with someone older and more mature. There were high school relationships I had no knowledge of until later on, and hearing about the risky behaviors were terrifying. But, after several years, I no longer blamed the boyfriends, co-workers or friends that she chose to hang around with. She chose to experiment with drugs, consume alcohol, and get behind the wheel of a car which she did the night she was arrested for a DUI (driving under influence). Was she aware of the devastating consequences that could have occurred?

I no longer blame anyone she came into contact with. I know I was not perfect. I need to give myself a break. As I witness others raising children, it concerns me that many parents expect their children to be great at everything and are not giving them an opportunity to fail.

I spent years listening to seasoned FA veterans share their stories and talk about making amends to those they had reacted to in a judgmental manner. There was plenty of blame to go around, but what would blame accomplish? My bitterness and negativity were not doing me any good, but time could heal, and acceptance could be the answer. I made the decision to let go of the past and use my amends as part of my healing process.

So, I would advise us to reflect on those we may have harmed and, if appropriate, to make our amends.

BONNIE C., BLOOMFIELD, CT GROUP



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!

#### **JOURNEY TO HOPE**

My head was bowed in shame and sadness My head raised now with hope and love

Beginning in frustration and disappointment Emerging into content with the situation and possibilities

I was lost, alone, and in darkness Now walking with friends on lighted path

I was a rudderless ship in fearful darkness Now enlightened, my course is clearly charted

My soul was confused and bitter Now it is clear and forgiving

Our family fell into the fog of addiction Families Anonymous showed us the light of recovery

I had fear and uncertainty
I now have peace, hope and love from FAmily

Fear and sadness overwhelmed me Daily gratitude and courage strengthen me

I felt alone and isolated in my pain Newfound wisdom brings peace...most of the time

I came to FA feeling isolated and helpless I now stand in community and empowered

My heart was broken and shattered in pieces My faith now mends my heart from within

Into the darkness then out through the light Life is now brighter and showered with hope

My heart was full of fear and despair Now, faith, gratitude, freedom, strength to walk daily

When darkness, shame and bitterness clouded my view A lighted path with fellow travelers guided me

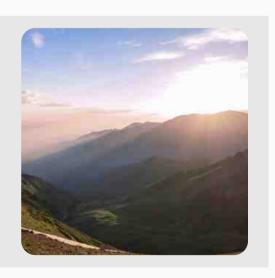
I entered defeated and broken Now I am educated and empowered

Stumbling down a dark lonely road Feeling the strength of others guiding me along

I was once down in my own valley Now I am climbing up to His mountain







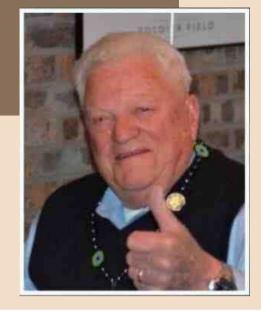
EACH POETIC COUPLET AUTHORED BY A MEMBER OF GROUP 1806
THE REFLECTION GROUP OF FAMILIES ANONYMOUS, EDMOND, OKLAHOMA

## TRIBUTE TO BILL C.

FA Members Fondly Remember Bill C., a Senior FA Member

While I have met many amazing people during my last three years in FA, one person will always stand above all in my mind and in my heart. That person being Bill C.

After Bill gave his last 40 years to FA, the Lord recently called him home at the age of 91. Bill was well known to the Chicagoland FA community. Most importantly to me, I am proud and lucky to say I was a member with him in our Edison Park home group.



My memory of attending my first meeting of the Edison Park group is filled with Bill C. His story and longevity in FA, along with his soft and gentle demeanor, truly struck me, inspiring me to return.

I will always remember, at the end of that first meeting, Bill coming up to me and, while giving me a hug, whispering, "Finally, another man in the group."

IN MEMORY OF BILL C.
By His Fellow Members of The FA
Literature Committee.

WITH FOND MEMORIES AND ...

GRATITUDE FOR HIS VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO FA LITERATURE,

RESPECT FOR HIS UNDERSTANDING OF FA PRINCIPLES AS APPLIED TO DAILY LIVING.

ADMIRATION FOR HIS HUMILITY AND HIS REVERENCE FOR HIS HIGHER POWER, AND

Appreciation for His Awareness of the Blessings of Our FA Program.

He will be greatly missed.

We in the group will continue to refer to "Bill'isms". One being his question of, "Are there really coincidences or just our Higher Power?" and another using "Oh!" as a single response to our addicted loved ones when we have nothing else to say to them.

Those who have attended the annual Chicagoland FA convention have probably heard him speak. I had the distinct privilege to sit on a panel with Bill at the last Chicagoland convention. Bill always looked forward to the convention and sharing his experiences and wisdom. When he asked if I would join him, how could I say no? It was special and I am so glad I accepted.

Bill's dedication to the FA program is also evidenced by his work on the FA pamphlet *The Gift Of Awareness*. While Bill would always deflect credit for the publishing of the pamphlet to other FA members who made it possible, once I read it, it was clear it was Bill's story along with how FA changed his view.

If you have not read *The Gift Of Awareness*, on behalf of Bill, I strongly urge you to do so.

Along with FA, Bill has given me the gift to be aware of what I was before FA, aware of how FA has changed me for the better, and aware of the type of person I can be if I continue to practice the tenets of FA and the teachings of Bill C.

RANDY D., A VERY GRATEFUL MEMBER OF FAMILIES ANONYMOUS

#### Some of the comments from those in the Edison Park, IL group with Bill:

Such a wonderful, kind, wise man. He'll be missed by many! - Mary H.

Was my privilege getting to share time with Bill, listening to his wise advice and honest story. RIP Bill. - Sara

> He gave so much to each and every one of us. He was a model for us as we struggled with challenges in our lives. Now we move on with gratitude for his life, his faith, and the gifts he gave us for many years - Mary R.

The short time I knew him, he taught me a deal. Forever great grateful to have crossed paths with him. He will be a shining star above for sure. - Karin

A fine man indeed. He gave so much to and other organizations all his life. He will missed by many.

- Helen

Finest person I had the honor and privilege of knowing. He gave so much to the world around him.

- Randy D.

I will never forget the first time I heard Bill speak at an FA convention in Chicago. His quiet loving manner and thorough grasp of the program made him such an inspiration to me. He and his kind words will never be forgotten. - Roberta C.

Some people are larger than life - radiating love compassion to everyone they meet. Bill was definitely one of those people. I am thankful he graced our group for as long as he did. We will have many Bill'isms to quote in the future! Bill will live in our hearts! leanne

> I will always remember Bill and his message of love. I will always be grateful to him for reminding me of the bigger picture. - Julie

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# DONATIONS

#### **Commemorative Donations**

- In memory of Sarah F., daughter of David and Mindy F., by Group 1806
- In memory of Sue Ann H., by Louise and Edward M.
- In memory of Bill C., by Kathy S.
- In memory of Bill C., by Dale and Anne H.
- In memory of Bill C., with love and gratitude by Angel R.
- In memory of Bill C., by the FA Literature Committee
- In memory of Brandee B., by Ruth F.
- In memory of Brandee B., daughter of Barbara and Barry B., by Barbara and Jake S.
- In memory of Judith D., by Jessie and Sandy G.
- In memory of Judy D., by the Naught Nines
- In memory of Carly J.
- In memory of Ken (Kenny) H., a 17 year member of Merriam, KS Group 1097., by Group 1097. He will be greatly missed.
- In memory of Paul C., a member of Massapequa, NY Group 270 for over 40 years who originally founded the group. Paul also helped Amityville Groups 278 & 279 get started. Group 270 members are grateful for his dedication and service throughout his lifetime.

## **Group Donations**

- GR0134 FL, So Miami
- GR0173 IL, Park Ridge
- GR0250 ND, Fargo
- GR0270 NY, Massapequa
- GR0288 OH, Pepper Pike
- GR0469 NY, Hicksville
- GR0478 IL, Glenview
- GR0494 IL, Winnetka
- GR0519 Canada, Regina
- GR0641 CA, Redlands

- GR0853 IL, Palos Heights
- GR0888 MI, Essexville
- GR1096 VA, Richmond
- GR1152 NJ, Englewood
- GR1187 CT, Bloomfield
- GR1318 FL, Boca Raton
- GR1522 IL, Chicago
- GR1561 VA, Charlottesville
- GR1735 NJ, Ramsey/Mahwah
- GR1806 OK, Oklahoma City

- GR1820 IL, Westmont
- GR1849 TX, Plano
- GR1906 GA, Roswell
- GR1972 NJ, Cherry Hill
- GR2087 Russia Kolomna
- GR2114 Russia
- GR3001 IL, Chicagoland
- GR5003 Portugal NSB
- GR5004 Spain NSB

As per the Seventh Tradition, each group should be self-supporting. Your donations help support the activities of the World Service Office. For more information on how to donate, please visit www.familiesanonymous.org and click DONATE NOW!

Thank you for supporting the many activities of FA World Service.

Your contribution is tax-deductible.