

Newsletter of the Families Anonymou Fellowship

EDITOR'S NOTE

At our weekly FA meeting this past week, a long-time member observed that our experience in FA may be helpful to us as we try to navigate the ups and downs of the worldwide COVID pandemic. After all, he said, we're used to dealing with a disease that's implacable, deadly, and hard to defeat. We know how hard it can be to cultivate and nurture an attitude of serenity and positivity despite a plague of uncertainty that seems to permeate every aspect of our lives.

By practicing the 12 Steps, we've learned (or, hopefully, are at least learning) how to center ourselves even as a storm rages around us. COVID, like addiction, is an equal opportunity disease: it can strike anyone regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or political or religious affiliation. Also like addiction, COVID probably isn't going away anytime soon. But we've learned that by courageously taking action to change those things within our control, and – perhaps even more difficult – by letting go and trusting our higher power to take care of those things beyond our control, we can relax, live in the present, and find some measure of joy.

Our experience in FA also gives us valuable perspective on how others who aren't part of the fellowship may be feeling right now. I'm sure we all remember the fear, dread, anger, uncertainty, and other hair-trigger emotions that filled our heads as we tried, unsuccessfully, to deal with our addicted loved ones. When I attended my first FA meeting, I felt all those things and more, because I wasn't sure anyone could help me out of the emotional hole I was in.

It wasn't easy to admit that I was part of the problem, and that I needed to change if my life was ever going to get better. But as promised by the FA literature and by the helpful members of my FA group, as I gained time and experience in the program the horrible feelings of anger, dread and confusion began to fade and slowly were replaced by a sense of hope and, incredibly, a newfound happiness in living.

Contents

- 02 Bob S.
- 04 WORD FROM THE BOARD

 Maria S.
- 06 WSB ANNOUNCEMENT
- 07 CELEBRATING HOW FAR WE'VE COME Anonymous
- 10 WSB ANNOUNCEMENT
- 11 UNLEARNING OVER-GIVING Anonymous
- 12 FA BEFORE AND TODAY

 Judy O.
- 13 SEEKING LAUGHTER Anonymous
 - 4 PLANS AND RESULTS
- 15 DONATIONS

EDITOR'S NOTE

(CONT'D)



Most people, fortunately, haven't had to deal with the emotional rollercoaster that comes with having a relative or friend suffer from the disease of addiction. Perhaps, unfortunately, however, they know little or nothing of the comfort and guidance offered by FA and the 12 Steps. As a result, many simply don't have the tools to deal with the almost overwhelming uncertainty, fear, and other emotions that seem to engulf us with each new twist in this pandemic.

In effect, they're like the newcomers to this fellowship we once were, like all the newcomers we see come into our meetings so emotionally fraught and fearful they can hardly function. When newcomers arrive at their first FA meeting, everyone makes an effort to welcome them and to treat them with the utmost understanding, compassion, and respect, because we, too, were once new in this fellowship. Perhaps we should be doing the same for our friends, neighbors, and others who suffer as they try to make sense of the random, deadly madness of the COVID pandemic.

Maybe, in these times, that's part of what it means to practice these principles in all our affairs.

IN FELLOWSHIP, BOB S.



WORD FROM THE BOARD

Approximately nine years ago, I walked into my first FA meeting. I felt anxious, not knowing what to expect...wondering whether or not I belonged there. I had the same feelings when I attended my first FA convention seven years ago, and when I volunteered to join the FA World Service Board (WSB) a little over six years ago.

It turns out those were among the best decisions I've made in my lifetime. Each afforded me opportunities to learn more about myself, to meet people who would have a positive impact in my life, and to participate in a community that provides encouragement and support to others. My first role on the WSB was as Recording Secretary, which I did for four years. I then served as Vice Chair for two years. This past June, I began my term as Chair.

One of my other activities for the WSB is serving as Chair for the World Service Office (WSO) Committee. In that capacity, I serve as the liaison between the WSO and the WSB. This role gave me the opportunity to get to know and interact with our two WSO employees: Angel R (Manager of the WSO) and Nicole G (Data Management Coordinator).

If you've ever called the WSO, the friendly voice on the other end is Angel. She's been with the WSO now for ~10 years. Besides handling incoming calls and mail, she oversees literature orders and inventory, handles incoming donations, prepares postal mailings to group secretaries, and is responsible for the daily management of the office. Most importantly, Angel is the person who helps those individuals who call in, struggling with the family disease of addiction, and redirects them to available FA group meetings.

Nicole works with our Technology Committee on the maintenance and improvements you see in our website and e-store. She oversees the management of our electronic files, maintains our databases, and works with WSO Board members and Committee Chairs to provide the information they need to do their work. The beautifully designed email blasts you receive are Nicole's handiwork. Most recently, she has taken on the responsibility for the layout of the Serenity Messenger and also assists with editing.

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SERENITY MESSENGER

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WORD FROM THE BOARD

(CONT'D)

The above are just some of their contributions that come to mind. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to liaise with them.

Most recently, I've worked with other Board members on an Ad Hoc Committee to provide assistance to groups that are meeting virtually as a result of the pandemic. The FA website now has a directory of groups meeting online, and guidance materials to assist those doing so. We're also working jointly with the Public Information Committee to get the word out to the general public and to others in the recovery community about FA and our many groups that are now meeting virtually.

I can't emphasize enough how important FA and its members have been to me. I'm grateful that I'm able to help in any way I can, and to give back. If you'd like to give back, serving on the Board is a great way to practice Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Information about the WSB can be found on the FA website, under "Members" -> "WSB."

FA WSB Member Responsibilities and Guidelines (PPG-17) provides details.

Please consider reaching out to me at WSB_Chair@familiesanonymous.org if you're interested in joining the WSB and making it part of your recovery journey. It may be one of the better decisions you make!

YOURS IN SERVICE, MARIA S.



If you'd like to give back, serving on the Board is a great way to practice Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs."





Want to learn more about how your FA group can thrive and grow? Go to <u>familiesanonymous.org</u>, 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!

WSB ANNOUNCEMENT:

ONLINE LITERATURE STUDY - JOIN US
TO EXPLORE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT!



The WSB and Education Committee proudly invite you to our first literature study meeting which will be held on October 23rd at 1:00 pm (EDT)

& GoToMeeting

All FA members are invited to participate in this interactive meeting. We will be using GoToMeeting so download the app today.

Meeting Link: https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/581153661

01

Dial in using your phone: +1 (872) 240-3412, access code 581-153-661

Gifts of the Spirit (#1025) will be the featured publication, focusing on the gifts of love and joy. (click here to purchase - not required)

Members who choose to participate will be invited to read a paragraph and share, following the Suggested Format for Virtual Meetings. Screen sharing will be used.



WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO "SEEING" YOU ON OCTOBER 23RD AT 1:00 PM (EDT)

PLEASE CONTACT DONNA D (<u>DONNAD@FAMILIESANONYMOUS.ORG</u>)

WITH ANY QUESTIONS.

CELEBRATING HOW FAR WE'VE COME

A Member Shares her Thoughts on Being in the Fellowship for Five Years

This year I completed five years of attending Families Anonymous. I learnt from others that this calls for a celebration. Some of the earliest 'recovery birthdays' I experienced were at AA's 'open meetings' in the city where I lived. When the school that hosted recovery groups ran exams and the meeting rooms were unavailable, people from different groups joined an 'open' AA meeting. We were served cake, chips and coffee sponsored by the member who was celebrating what I assumed was his birthday. He shared briefly about his recovery journey: He'd been on the path to sobriety for 30 years. In the beginning the road was bumpy, with him stumbling in and out of recovery, but as the years rolled on, he was able to be sober for several years. His greatest regret was the distress he had caused his son and wife, who, he was grateful, had not left him. After the meeting, when we socialised, I wished him a very happy birthday. He explained to me that it was, in fact, his recovery anniversary that had been celebrated.

I came to FA two years after my father stopped drinking. Though we had given up on him years ago, the shadow of active addiction of a family member that I had wrestled with most of my life now seemed to have finally lost its hold. Now there was an unexpected emptiness. I didn't have to walk down the road looking for my father at random bars and didn't spend my evenings squabbling with him, asking him to eat or trying to keep him quiet so the neighbours were not disturbed. I was relieved that the biggest nightmare of our lives had ended abruptly when my father decided to quit drinking one day, out of the blue. My biggest prayer had been answered. But this did not fix everything in my life as I had expected.

The self-help book I was reading at the time recommended that those who grew up with parents with addiction problems join a recovery group for family members. I had heard of Alateen, a group for children of alcoholics, from a counsellor when I was in school. But I was too young to decide for myself if I could go. To my mother, the idea of sending children to recovery meetings was a bizarre solution when it was my father who was the problem. The logistics of coming back from work, cooking dinner and taking children for meetings, all the while dealing with a spouse's addiction, was nearly impossible.

Almost twenty years after I had heard of Alateen, I dialled a number from the Internet. What pushed me to the wall was a perpetual, heavy anxiety that was fueled by my long-term partner's emotional abuse: a pattern of love and understanding, interrupted abruptly by name-calling and hostility. Every time my partner lost his cool or raised his voice, I kept quiet in fear: what if my reacting made him angrier? When I felt the storm of his erratic rage had passed, I would confront him, lovingly, trying to draw him into a 'rational' and civil conversation about his behaviour. It was simply impossible for me to accept the person he was becoming.

The disappointment was crushing. I felt a familiar pain. I knew these feelings were not new. From the time I was a young girl, I had helplessly watched my father's descent into hell. He went from a few after-work drinks to free-falling into a dark, deep abyss of steady inebriation that lasted decades.

A childhood of caregiving for a parent had already prepared me to be a dutiful girlfriend. I could endure great amounts of emotional uncertainty and still retain empathy. This was my superpower.

No matter how poorly my partner behaved, I felt an inability to express my anger. Instead, I slipped under the blankets in the middle of the day, drawing the curtains, pretending it was time to sleep. I cried as good children do, without much noise, without creating a fuss. From being consumed by worry for my father's addiction, I was now entangled in dread for my partner. What if he was bipolar? Did he have depression? Would he hurt himself? Does he need medication? How can I understand him better?

CELEBRATING HOW FAR WE'VE COME

(cont'd)

A childhood of caregiving for a parent had already prepared me to be a dutiful girlfriend. I could endure great amounts of emotional uncertainty and still retain empathy. This was my superpower. I had always told everyone I had a wonderful father. He was creative, loving and caring. He was all of those things, when he was not drunk.

"Hi, my name is Becky. I am a daughter of an alcoholic." It seemed surreal to hear my own voice utter these words. I do not know if it was luck or fate, some friends say with certainty it is the higher power who had led me in strange ways to the fellowship. It was just what I needed at the time in my life when I was staring into a great void that had paralysed me. The future looked blank and I had no energy to forge ahead. I thought to myself, "Today, I will do one thing. Maybe I'll dial that number, Families Anonymous, or whatever that is. Maybe I will feel better if I meet other people and am not just lying in bed."

I didn't struggle to "keep coming back." I was simply drawn, as moths are to light. As if it were destiny.

I began a new journey. I went once. FA members recommended I try attending at least six meetings. I became a 'regular.' I didn't struggle to "keep coming back." I was simply drawn, as moths are to light. As if it were destiny. Sometimes I wish it was earlier, maybe I could have made better decisions. At other times, I wished for my mother and siblings to join the program, but they didn't feel like they needed it. But to me, it was clear, I needed FA. An FA member to whom I confided about my boyfriend told me the fellowship was also for those struggling with emotional problems of loved ones. I resonated intuitively with a lot of what other members would share about their own lives. Today a Better Way was a daily anchor, bringing my focus back on to myself. With FA, I was a little less alone.



Week after week, I heard others at FA meetings share about active addiction of their loved ones, and about their own recoveries. I shared about my childhood, often revisiting old memories about addiction. I felt my own experiences were reflected when members described their struggles and feelings. Often we ask each other, amazed, how is it that we are speaking a common language? That we 'get' one another? FA has taught me that dealing with life, whether mired with addiction or not, is about holding on to ourselves as we travel through life. What happened to us may not be fair. But it is possible to learn some skills so we are not completely lost.

FA was about me. It wasn't about my father, boyfriend, boss or anyone else. In the beginning it was strange to focus so much on myself, to reflect on questions I had never asked before: How did the harmful actions of others make me feel? Was I taking responsibility for mistakes that weren't mine? The life-giving skill of detachment—separating oneself from the tumultuous patterns of someone else's addiction and emotional problems—was something I began to learn slowly. Family members who knew I was attending FA told me I was hanging on to the past and that bringing up memories of my father's addiction from childhood was immature. But for me, not dealing with everything in the past meant I was recreating it in my newer relationships.

FA is not therapy and this is something I appreciate about it. I am not given advice, yet I know I am cared for, maybe even understood in a way I want to be understood. I learnt to be a little vulnerable and honest as I saw others not always covering up their wounds. Little by little, being myself feels less scary.

CELEBRATING HOW FAR WE'VE COME

(cont'd)

The relationship that brought me to FA became better before becoming worse. My partner relapsed into angry outbursts and returned to blaming me for making him angry, suddenly leaving one day. Having been in FA for some time, I was stronger, I had drawn firm boundaries for what I would not tolerate, and we lasted for as long as he honoured them. His breaking point was that I made a big deal of his anger and therefore didn't understand him. Before FA, I would have spent a lot of time explaining how I cared for him, but needed him to treat me with respect. But even so many words felt too many.

Even after five years in FA, I struggle with many of the same issues that I had walked into FA with. At times, I feel the needle has simply not moved. I still feel nervous, codependent, stressed, anxious. But I remind myself of the 12 Steps. I try to make an inventory of my own shortcomings, so I can control my own actions. At other times, I can tell that some of my old patterns are changing, even if just a little.

To celebrate a recovery anniversary is to celebrate not one grand life-changing moment, but many small, imperfect wins, even calling them triumphs.

The day I called FA I could only feel pain and under-confidence. Today I am on the path to recovery, and I celebrate that.



Often we ask each other, amazed, how is it that we are speaking a common language? That we 'get' one another? FA has taught me that dealing with life, whether mired with addiction or not, is about holding on to ourselves as we travel through life.



ANONYMOUS

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

For our upcoming issue the deadlines to submit articles and announcements are October 15th and October 23rd respectively.

Email us at <u>newsletter@familiesanonymous.org</u>.

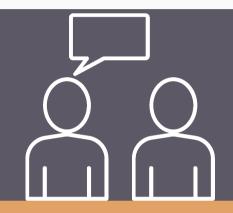
We'd love to hear from you!

WSB ANNOUNCEMENT:

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED - COME AND JOIN US!



The World Service Board is excited to announce the formation of an Education Ad Hoc Committee whose primary focus will be to provide opportunities to support the growth, strength, and health of the FA fellowship. Activities of this committee will include:



Holding interactive meetings on the step and tradition of the month, beginning in January with step one and tradition one

Literature study meetings
highlighting a specific
publication and inviting
member participants to
share on selected paragraphs





Sharing information on presentations / speaker series organized by member groups

If you are interested in joining this committee, or sharing your thoughts about potential opportunities, please contact Donna D

(DonnaD@familiesanonymous.org) or Marcia C

(MarciaC@familiesanonymous.org).

UNLEARNING OVER-GIVING

An FA member's unfortunate record with houseplants gives her an insight into her own over-giving behaviour

I am an admitted plant killer. I cannot for the life of me keep a plant alive. Last weekend I was telling a wise, insightful friend about how I recently had to throw away yet another plant that died on my watch. This one was given to me about a year ago from an old pal who knew about my plant-killing problem and gifted me with a very special low-maintenance plant with the promise that it was virtually "unkillable." And yet, I managed to kill that one within a year.

"What do you think happened?" my wise, insightful friend asked.

"I think I watered it too much," I surmised.

"Yeah, I'm not surprised. You are an over-giver," he said.

An over-giver. My wise, insightful friend said it as a compliment and with the kindest of intentions but a chill went down my spine and a lightbulb flashed on in my mind. I. Am. An. Over-Giver.



I now have a visual for what overgiving can do to a living being—all I have to do is to think of my dead, "unkillable" plant to be reminded that over-giving is not loving.



I overfed the plant; drowned it in water. I over-worried about it and so I smothered it. And I killed it. And there you have it. A metaphor for the part of my parenting style that is diseased. I have the disease of overgiving. That right there is a huge part of why my family is where it is right now. I give and I worry until my giving and my worrying become toxic.

This plant, this dead plant, has become an image etched in my mind; a symbolic representation of the boundaries I cannot maintain with my kids and of the countless times I cannot say no to them. It is a telling metaphor for the times I over-buy for them, I over-spend on them, I over-accommodate for them, I over-worry about them, I over-protect them, I over-compensate for them.

I now have a visual for what over-giving can do to a living being—all I have to do is to think of my dead, "unkillable" plant to be reminded that over-giving is not loving. It's not helpful. It's actually harmful and stifling. It's crippling. And it can kill.

I am here to confess to you that I am a plant-killing, over-giving mother, and it is no longer okay with me. So, for today, I am choosing recovery.

ANONYMOUS FA MEMBER

FA BEFORE AND TODAY

BEFORE FA

TODAY





















Any resemblance to actual persons or events is not really coincidental.

About Judy

Note from the Cartoonist, Judy.O

I've been involved with FA for four years. The recovery process is life changing and very rewarding. I have met some truly wonderful, inspirational souls. My drawings are for the most part just doodles. Ever since I was an antsy young student, I've been doodling in the margins of my notebooks during classes. My blue book of the 12 Steps of FA is also peppered with doodles.

SEEKING LAUGHTER

We Can Learn to Choose Ourselves No Matter What the Circumstances

Recently, I spoke with a good friend about what we do when life gives us lemons. Do we make lemonade out of them or do we let those lemons rot and gather flies? I've experienced a lot of changes that threw me for a loop and I'm working on getting myself through it.

For years, my husband and I had been trying to sell our business and retire, and last April we finally found a buyer. I was so happy and eager to get going with life with my husband. The legal issues that came up were unexpected and really put a stick in my wheel...not to mention a big hole in my bank account. I kept repeating to myself that "worry is optional," and I kept on moving forward and enjoying what I could out of life with the thought that my Higher Power had a plan. This was a stage that I guess I needed to go through, and like everything else, it came to an end with lessons to draw from.

Just when I thought this was out of the way and we could go and play, life threw another curve ball. My husband took a nose-dive with his ability to 'live' life, and it really put me to the test. I found compassion I didn't know I had, and I was really thankful that I had my program to back me up with patience and acceptance of the things I have no control over. I noticed I needed to take care of myself in the midst of all this, even though it felt lonely without my husband with me every step of the way.

So I pushed myself and took classes that I had been interested in and, in the process, met people who had laughter to share and kept things light for me. I also went to some local meetings to get the support that I needed and to be with people who understood. Now, I'm looking into other classes and volunteer work that can help me further with my emotional, physical and spiritual needs. We

talk about laughter and how important it is in our lives. But I found with everything that was taking place in my life, I had to go out and get it. It's not funny when everything comes at you from different angles. But unless I went out of my way and sought laughter for myself, I probably would have been buried in my gloom and doom.

It is a choice how I react to life events. Some days it is easier said than done. My son is "maybe" going to have his trial this month—the trial that was supposed to have happened last October and every month since then. Sometimes it gets me down IF I let myself go down that road. If I concentrate on his issues, his problems, and what he's facing, then I can get pretty bogged down over it.

If I concentrate on his issues, his problems, and what he's facing, then I can get pretty bogged down over it.

Thank goodness I can recognize when I am heading towards that slippery slope and can use the tools of my program to take a different turn instead. Laughter IS a choice! I can choose to let my life's problems get me down, or I can choose to keep on going and do everything that is in my power to get to the light. I choose this path for ME.

ANONYMOUS, FRANCE



INVITING ALL TO OUR CHICAGO
INTERGROUP SPEAKER SERIES VIA
ZOOM. EVERY 6-7 WEEKS WE
PRESENT PERTINENT INFORMATION
AND TOOLS FOR HEALING.

JUST GO TO <u>FACHICAGO.ORG</u>, CLICK ON THE NEWS HEADING AND FOLLOW US THROUGH THE YEAR.

PLANS AND RESULTS

Q: How do you plan the future without planning the "results?"

A: Trying to plan results brings disappointment. This is true for big things and little things. I can plan a nice dinner at a favorite restaurant but I have no control over the meal I get. I can save for 3 years and take my family to Disney, only to find upon arriving that the tour company I booked with went bankrupt and my hotel and car rental vouchers are worthless. (Oh, and it rained 4 out of the 5 days.) I can set important work deadlines and make a detailed To Do list for each day in the month, then welcome a new foster baby, lose a loved one, have a virus run through the house, and another virus kill my work computer.

Plans and results are two different things. Plans we make. Results happen. We can control the plans, we can't control the results. All we can do is control our reaction to the results and make new plans. Sometimes you just need to look forward to dessert, or dance around penniless in the rain, or take deep breaths and realize This Too Shall Pass. --Lisa W

A: I still make plans. I make plans around me, then tell my husband what I am doing and give him the option of coming along or not. When he makes plans that include me, I see what movie is playing just in case the plans fall through. I give myself a back-up so I can say, "Ok, we didn't do this, but I am going to see this movie I've been dying to see."

--Amy K

REPUBLISHED FROM THE RAG, MAY-JUNE 2011



DONATIONS

Commemorative Donations

- In memory of David D., husband of Valerie.
 He was a longtime devoted member of Group 121, by Group 121
- In memory of David P., son of Paula P., by Group 1096
- In memory of Bill C., by Peggy P.
- In memory of Earl and Dorma D., parents of Steve. In support of our friend Steve, members of the McKinney, TX chapter of FA (Group 1391) have made a donation to express sorrow for the loss of his parents.
- In memory of Ruth S., founder of Group 3148., who helped so many to grow with grace and dignity as we learned a better way to live., by Group 3148

Group Donations

- GR0121 CA, Torrence
- GR0134 FL, So Miami
- GR0173 IL, Park Ridge
- GR0270 NY, Massapequa
- GR0288 OH, Pepper Pike
- GR0468 NY, East Rockaway
- GR0478 IL, Glenview
- GR0494 IL, Winnetka
- GR0590 NY, Islip Terrace

- GR1096 VA, Richmond
- GR1318 FL, Boca Raton
- GR1345 NJ, Cherry Hill
- GR1522 IL, Chicago
- GR1598 GA, Marietta
- GR1614 NY, Elmira
- GR1773 WI, Madison
- GR1789 MWW Meeting

Without Walls

- GR1802 MI, Livonia
- GR1811 MI, Clinton Township
- GR1812 IA, Dubuque
- GR1836 FL, Delray Beach
- GR1972 NJ, Voorhees
- GR1974 NY, Syosset
- GR2070 CT, South Glastonbury
- GR3001 IL, Chicagoland

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.