# SERENITY MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FELLOWSHIP

### SERENITY MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship



### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

It had started maybe a week or ten days earlier; I wasn't sure. Day by day, I'd noticed a blur in the vision of my right eye, as if there were a bit of floating mucus that would disappear with a couple of blinks. But it never did disappear. If anything, it was getting a little bigger.

So, on June 30, the Friday just before the long Fourth of July holiday weekend, I managed to get a 10 a.m. appointment to see an ophthalmologist. She examined my eye and quickly determined that the blur wasn't mucus; my retina had partially detached. I had to see a retina specialist ASAP.

Within an hour, I was at the specialist's office, and he confirmed that I needed immediate emergency surgery to repair and reattach the retina to avoid losing sight in that eye. He agreed to do it that evening.

By 12:30 p.m., I was en route to a hospital thirty miles away for presurgery blood work and an EKG. By 3:30 p.m. the tests were finished and I was in the surgical suite, wearing the mandatory embarrassing open-back gown and blue paper hairnet. At 5 p.m. the anesthesia began to flow, and the young surgeon I'd met only hours earlier started sticking needles into my right eye.

All went well. My retina appears to be back where it belongs and healing as expected. The surgeon thinks I'll lose some peripheral vision, but nothing catastrophic. We'll know more in a month or two. Whatever it is, it'll be better than blindness.

I have to thank FA and its teachings, particularly the Serenity



Prayer, for how well I was able to handle this health crisis. The moment the ophthalmologist told me that my retina was peeling away from the back of my eye, I knew my condition was serious. It was also precarious, because the detachment was ongoing and potentially getting worse by the minute.

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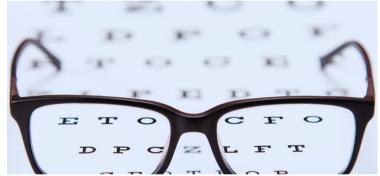
Did I panic? Not for a moment. I recited the Serenity Prayer to myself, accepted reality, and carried on. Don't get me wrong. I was alarmed and concerned, but I felt no fear because my course was clear: get the surgery as soon as possible, and hope for the best. I felt almost cheerful in my clarity of purpose, knowing I couldn't change what had happened (the serenity to accept), and that I was promptly taking the steps needed to fix it (the courage to change).

Even now, facing weeks of still-blurry vision as my eye heals, and the uncertainty of how my vision will ultimately be affected, I'm at peace. I have high hopes, but no unrealistic expectations or unwarranted fears. However this turns out, I've done the best I could do.

The final result is in the hands of my higher power, and I'm fine with that.

For today, I'm healthy, and healing, and confident that I have all the tools I need to deal with whatever tomorrow may bring. Which, I suppose, is a good mantra for any day.

IN FELLOWSHIP, BOB S.



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

For our upcoming issue, the deadline to submit announcements is September 23rd.

We gladly accept submissions of original articles, letters, poetry, or artwork at any time!

Email us at <a href="mailto:newsletter@familiesanonymous.org">newsletter@familiesanonymous.org</a>.

We'd love to hear from you!

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#### **Editorial Team**

Elizabeth S., Bob S., Nicole G., Ann P., Chris Y., Marcia C.

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### **WORD FROM THE BOARD**

### We welcome Cristina B. from Lisbon, Portugal, who has recently joined the WSB. Here, she shares her thoughts on finding FA.

My name is Cristina. And the person that led me to my first FA meeting four years ago is not the reason why I kept coming back and applying the Twelve Step program in every aspect of my life. I find this to be one of the greatest lessons of this fellowship, reminding me constantly that I am the most important person of my life, and that therefore I can only be responsible for changing my own attitudes and behaviors, releasing control, and trusting and loving others.

I attended my first FA meeting, anxious and distressed, one day after my then-17-year-old son had left home. I had told him, "If you leave now, I won't allow you to come back again." I never thought I would be able to keep this promise for even a day. It's been 1,407 days so far. In FA, I learnt to honour my own limits. We all have the power to choose. He chose to leave. I chose to seek help for myself.



I attended my first FA meeting, anxious and distressed, one day after my then-17-year-old son had left home. I had told him, "If you leave now, I won't allow you to come back again."

Bear in mind that I didn't kick him out. He had an option. He realized that I had set a boundary, and for the first time I was able to honor it; it wasn't a vain threat. Action speaks louder than words. In the almost 4 years that have gone by, my son has grown from a teen to a young adult. He is now 21 and still in denial. I am applying tough love and renewing hope in the sharing of my beloved FA groups. One day at a time.

FA has taught me that dwelling in the past is a destructive force. Harboring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. But I will rewind a bit and start my story from the beginning, so that you better understand my spiritual journey of awareness and change.

I was a teenager in the 1980s and '90s. I lost my youth, stuck in the middle of an insane and unmanageable life, with parents who were desperate to solve my brother's drug addiction. I was a good student and tried to live my own life. In fact, I had no alternative, because they were not giving me the attention and

guidance I, too, needed at that age. Today, I have already amended this. I have forgiven myself for these feelings and have also forgiven them. I know they did the best they could with what they knew at the time. I no longer blame them. This indirect amends has brought me enormous relief. No resentment, no negative feelings for the past that can't be changed.

My parents had the Twelve Step program, but they've abandoned the practice. Possibly because my brother has been in recovery for many years now. Regardless of whether or not our loved one has recovered, we must focus on our own personal recovery from codependency. This wise program is for us.

### WORD FROM THE BOARD (CONT'D)



I put myself first. I had the courage to see myself as a woman first and only afterwards as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend....
I had to invest in self-care.



I felt I grew up sooner than I needed to. I decided to leave my parents' house to live with my boyfriend. Unconsciously I was choosing my mental health amid the chaos. Eventually we got married, four years later, and my brother came from Germany to attend our symbolic wedding party. It was a happy day.

We had two sons, and I do believe we were happy while it lasted. Then we got divorced. I was 40. I put myself first. I had the courage to see myself as a woman first and only afterwards as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend.

I had to invest in self-care. Putting a life jacket on others is not the solution. I learnt this the hard way from years of being around addiction and codependency. I knew I had to put on my oxygen mask first, breathe, observe, and only then help others around me.

I cannot save others or change them. I can only change my attitudes, feelings and emotions. And through my change, I may inspire change in my loved ones. But I must carry on with no expectations of the outcome. I can, and I must, spread my tough love. It is very hard. It doesn't happen overnight, but when it does happen it is extremely rewarding.

And if being a sister of a person with an addiction was already traumatizing, being the mother of one showed me a totally different side of myself. I could not abandon my son, I had to fix him, I could treat him. I stepped in the role of God Almighty to protect him from falling and getting hurt. I shielded him from all sorts of lessons in life. From where I stood, with my background, it was easy to say, "I know best, because I've been there." Obviously, I was being arrogant and not admitting I was powerless over drugs; I could not distinguish my son from his disease. This is extremely important. It makes all the difference.

All the anger, hostility and violence from my son were not directed at me, as his mother. I believe that, unconsciously, he will always hurt the person he loves the most. But I can be compassionate to admit that it is his disease acting and speaking on his behalf. So, I can change the way I receive these messages; I can learn to act and not to react. I can learn to sit still and be quiet. I don't need to have the last word. How important is it? Release my ego, put it into a nap and honor my soul.

So, my son's journey was like that of so many addicted teenagers: He struggled with low self-esteem, was sensitive and in need of validation. It was easier for him to find comfort in drugs to hide his feelings and escape discomfort. He was and still is manipulative, of course, a common negative action in people struggling with addiction—in his case blaming his parents' divorce for his addiction, for instance.

### WORD FROM THE BOARD

For the past three years, he has been living with my parents, who could not accept that their grandson might otherwise be homeless. My parents paid a lawyer to have him released from all of his court cases. From my perspective, they were and still are interfering on his path of recovery.

Furthermore, I must remind you that I am a mother of two, and I do empathize with my younger son as having a brother who has the disease of addiction. So, I try to amend in a way what my parents couldn't with me. If you're wondering: Do I regret anything that I did? I must be honest: I don't regret anything. How can I regret a past that I can't change? Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is a mystery. What I do know is that today is the most important day. And I am committed to my personal progress. I will keep coming back. My story goes on. There's no ending until the happy end.

CRISTINA B., WSB MEMBER AT LARGE



What I do know is that today is the most important day. And I am committed to my personal progress. I will keep coming back.

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This is my first time serving FA outside my country and native language. What a challenge! I chose to contribute to the WSB most of all to learn more, to offer my best skills and precious time in order to keep this worldwide community alive, inspired and hopeful. I am giving back the good that FA is giving me.



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 the Group Outreach Committee at GO@familiesanonymous.org.

Have a great meeting!

### A GRATEFUL SOJOURNER

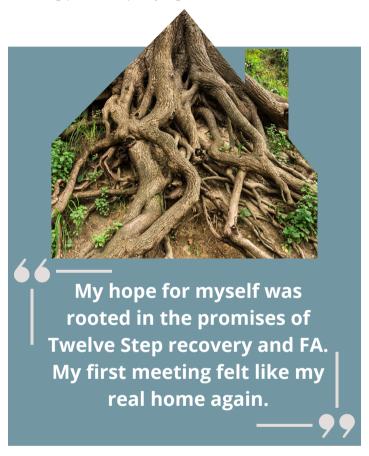
#### FA member Colleen W. created a new life for herself in the fourth guarter of her life

Coping with chronic illnesses, like a mental illness, alcoholism, and substance abuse, is a challenge for anyone, even on a great day. Addiction is a chronic illness that also impacts our families and friends. We suffer along with our addicted loved ones and develop unhealthy ways of living and thinking. We form negative thoughts, collect toxic resentment and pain, and practice patterns of behavior that make our lives and situations worse, thereby perpetuating the cycle of addiction. Addiction is a family illness. It took me many years of working the Twelve Steps and attending meetings to uncover how deeply my life, health, and mental health were being impacted.

Growing up as a child in a violent, alcoholic home with a mentally ill mother, I learned to not trust and to not be critical like my family was. Sarcasm was the predominant language in our family, and compliments were few and far between. In my recovery readings, I learned that sarcasm comes from a Greek word meaning "to tear flesh." I abandoned the sarcasm and learned to replace it with loving, supportive, yet rigorous honesty.

"I moved away to a new area and now live happily at the beach."

With the strength I was able to muster over years of codependency recovery, I left my husband in order to protect myself from the progression of his illness, his violence, and his gambling. During the same period, my daughter was also drinking and using drugs. She was leaving her children for me to watch so she could, unbeknownst to me, be out drinking, smoking pot, and partying with her husband.



I felt afraid for my grandchildren but knew it was time for me to take care of myself. I moved away to a new area and now live happily at the beach. I am close enough to visit family but far enough to give myself space and to continue with my recovery retirement plan. I am living my new life, designed by my Higher Power and me. Getting settled in a new place meant reaching out for a meeting and a new Twelve Step home group. My hope for myself was rooted in the promises of Twelve Step recovery and FA. My first meeting felt like my real home again.

### A GRATEFUL SOJOURNER (CONT'D)

Reaching out, a kind FA member had given me more information about this wonderful group of people. She made me feel included by inviting me not only to the meeting but also to an aftermeeting coffee and fellowship with other group members. I was given meeting information and emails to connect me with Zoom meetings and other area meetings. She also emailed me the information about the digital Serenity Messenger. Her service gave me hope that even though I was new to the area, I was not alone. There is always more to learn in the program, and wherever I am, the program is with me.

As I reflect on my experiences with Families Anonymous, my favorite quote from a favorite author comes to mind: "In the face of uncertainty, hope is always appropriate." FA offered me hope, through daily readings, new meetings, and working on the Twelve Steps. I experience a peace beyond my comprehension when FA members share their journeys, successes and pain.

Many new and wonderful experiences are happening to me because of the rigorous self-care I am learning and practicing in this fourth quarter of life. But that is for another time. I decided to write this article to express my gratitude to all my sojourners who walk the path of this amazing program that leads to our spiritual awakening. I look forward to reading your sharings in the next editions of the Serenity Messenger.

66

Many new and wonderful experiences are happening to me because of the rigorous self-care I am learning and practicing in this fourth quarter of life.



COLLEEN W. SHALLOTTE, NC



#### **WE ARE FAMILIES ANONYMOUS!**

LET US ALL PULL TOGETHER TO **STOP**FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FROM BEING A
"BEST KEPT SECRET!"



### DO YOU NEED FAMILIES ANONYMOUS?

A Questionnaire for Concerned Family Members and Friends



Ask yourself the following questions, and answer them as honestly as you can. Fill in each blank with the name of the person who is causing you concern.

- 1. Do you lie awake worrying about \_\_\_\_?
- 2. Do you feel frustrated in your attempts to control \_\_\_\_?
- 3. Do you disapprove of \_\_\_\_'s lifestyle?
- 4. Do you argue with about his or her friends?
- 5. Do you find it increasingly difficult to communicate with \_\_\_\_?
- 6. Does \_\_\_\_'s behavior have you "climbing the walls"?
- 7. Do you often ask, "Where have I failed?"
- 8. Do you feel it is necessary to protect \_\_\_\_ because he or she is unusually sensitive?
- 9. Are you trying to compensate for some family misfortune, such as divorce, death or illness?
- 10. Are you embarrassed about discussing your situation with a friend or relative?
- 11. Do you find yourself lying or covering up for \_\_\_\_?
- 12. Do you feel resentful or hostile toward \_\_\_\_?
- 13. Do you find it increasingly difficult to trust \_\_\_\_?
- 14. Do you worry about \_\_\_\_'s behavior affecting other members of the family?
- 15. Do you blame others for \_\_\_\_'s problems?
- 16. Do you blame yourself?
- 17. Are \_\_\_\_'s problems starting to undermine your marriage?
- 18. Do you find yourself playing detective, fearful of what you might find?
- 19. Do you go from place to place seeking help for \_\_\_\_?
- 20. Is concern for \_\_\_\_ giving you headaches, stomachaches, or heartache?

Three YES answers: This is an early-warning sign.

Four YES answers: Chances are, you could use some help.

Five or more YES answers: You are definitely in need of help.

[EXCERPTED FROM FAMILIES ANONYMOUS—FOR ME?, PUBLICATION #7003 IN THE FA LITERATURE CATALOG, AVAILABLE AS A FREE DOWNLOAD UNDER THE LITERATURE TAB AT FAMILIESANONYMOUS.ORG]

### **BEING THINGS**

FA member Palos uses the analogy of looking for a waterfall through a trek to wonder what it is we are all searching for.

There's something beautiful about a waterfall. Maybe it's the way the water at the top of the falls surrenders to gravity, free-falling through time and space toward an uncertain end. Or maybe it's the way the falling water hits the ground running, never looking back, always moving forward.

I was in search of a waterfall when I started my hike, my journey. I knew I was going in the right direction because there was a stream running right next to the trail I was on. But the closer I got to the waterfall, the wider the stream became, until finally I reached a point where I had to cross the stream to continue my journey. I wasn't the only one who had come this way. Neither was I the only one trying to get to the waterfall.



In the stream there were logs and stepping stones that people who came before me had used to try to get to the other side. They were left behind to help other people. But they looked dangerous. The stepping stones looked unstable, and the logs looked narrow and slippery. In the middle of the stream was a rock, large enough to sit on, an oasis in the midst of the turbulent water. "If I can just make it to the rock," I thought, "I'll be alright."

I stepped out onto the first stone, and it seemed solid; so I took my time and went to the next stone, which wasn't so solid. It teetered back and forth. Scared, I hurried onto a log but I felt it shift under my weight. Balancing on the log was like walking a tightrope. Just one slip and I could fall into the current. With each step, I was less sure of myself, so I went faster and faster. Now I was beginning to panic, so I leaped from the log, trying to reach the safety of the rock.

When my foot landed on the rock, I breathed a sigh of relief until I felt the cold water seeping into my other shoe, a shoe that was now soaked. I was uncomfortable and even a little angry. If only I could have found a bridge over the creek, it would have made the journey so much simpler. But at least for the moment I was safe.

Sometimes I think maybe our lives are a search for the waterfall. When I found out my son Jack was addicted to heroin, I wondered what he was searching for.

I climbed to the top of the rock and sat. I could hear the birds singing and the wind rustling through the trees. I swore that I could hear the waterfall in the distance, and I felt a sense of peace, of oneness with the world; and even though it wasn't my destination, that rock was a source of strength for the road ahead.

Sometimes I think maybe our lives are a search for the waterfall. When I found out my son Jack was addicted to heroin, I wondered what he was searching for. I did everything I could think of to cure my son's addiction. I looked everywhere for answers. And it turned out that I wasn't the first one to take this journey. Other people had come before me and had left stepping stones to help me navigate the stream. They told me that my job was not to DO things for the person I was trying to help but to BE things.

### BEING THINGS

And while that made me feel better about my failures, it begged the question, "Who or what was I supposed to be?" See, I had spent so much time trying to find a bridge to my son's recovery that I had lost myself, so much time trying to do things that I had forgotten how it felt to just be. Well, I knew I couldn't be the waterfall with all of its beauty. I knew I wasn't the trail that led to my son's dreams; that was something he had to find on his own. I didn't want to be the stream, the turbulent water that he was trying to avoid falling into, and so I thought perhaps I could be the rock, the one stable thing in the chaos that was his life, the one place where perhaps he could find a sense of peace if only for a while, not his destination, but a source of strength for the road ahead.

BOB M. GROUP #853, PALOS PARK, IL "Other people had come before me and had left stepping stones to help me navigate the stream."





FA CHICAGOLAND INTERGROUP CONVENTION, NOVEMBER 4TH IN DOWNERS GROVE

MORE INFORMATION TO COME!





**SIGN UP TODAY!** 

If you don't want to miss an issue of the SERENITY MESSENGER and other FA announcements, subscribe to FA Emails today!

Visit <u>familiesanonymous.org</u>, scroll to the bottom of the homepage, fill in your email and hit Subscribe. It only takes a minute - do it now!





### LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT



#### Bereavement, Healing and Hope: Heartfelt Stories from Parents Who Have Lost a Child to Addiction (#1035)

Bereavement is not usually a topic we prefer to ponder. Unfortunately, though, we all face the loss of loved ones at various times in our lives. Some of us lose grandparents or even parents when we are very young; others mourn the loss of friends, siblings, or other peers our own age.

But the loss of one's child must be the most devastating of all, a loss from which some people never recover.

In the booklet *Bereavement, Healing and Hope*, FA members tell their stories of how they were able, with the help of their FA program, to find solace and courage after losing a child to drugs or alcohol.

None of us in FA is a stranger to loss and grief. We have mourned what we no longer have, such as trust in the loved ones we thought we knew so well. We have grieved for the relationships we once had with them and for the lives we've watched unraveling. We have felt fearful. But with the support of our fellowship, we have become stronger, more hopeful, and grateful.



In *Bereavement, Healing and Hope,* the heartfelt true accounts of FA members dealing with the loss of a loved one are painful. But, at the same time, they are filled with hope, gratitude and love. Their stories are encouraging, comforting and inspirational. They remind us that we are not alone and that we can survive and eventually find some serenity.

This booklet opens with a beautiful dedication. In the subsequent introduction are an explanation of bereavement and descriptions of the six stages of grieving that we go through, not necessarily in a certain order, but that culminate in acceptance. Then come the personal stories written by FA members, which make up the bulk of the booklet. And finally, the booklet concludes in the best way possible, with the Serenity Prayer.

Bereavement, Healing and Hope:

Heartfelt Stories from Parents

Who Have Lost a Child to Addiction (#1035)
is well worth the \$4.00 investment for the inspiration, beauty and love you will find inside.





### WHY YOU SHOULD WRITE FOR THE SERENITY MESSENGER



Many of you may have experienced the relief and healing that comes with sharing your stories. Sometimes it's just talking to friends; at other times, when you sit down and write something in a journal, you feel as if a load has been taken off you. The thoughts you did not know you could articulate make their way on their own. All you need to do is just sit down and write.

Sharing our stories is an integral part of being in the fellowship. We do it each week when we have our meetings. Our newsletter is an extension of this sense of community. It provides a platform for being heard in a safe space. When we share our stories and learnings with one another through the newsletter, we are encouraging other people in ways we might not have thought possible. Our stories impart valuable insights and words of wisdom that others can learn from for years to come.

In recent years, as the submissions to the newsletter have dipped, we have republished some very old stories from the archives. Our readers are finding that these stories, regardless of when they were written, still resonate deeply within the fellowship.

If you're looking for what to write about and how, we have some pointers in our guidelines. It could be what brought you to the fellowship, what you have learnt or are learning, your thoughts on stepwork, etc.

Your story doesn't have to be perfect. Nobody's is. Your language doesn't have to be impeccable: our editors will help you shape and fine-tune your ideas. Just take a deep breath and dive in.

### HOW TO SUBMIT ARTICLES TO THE SERENITY MESSENGER

Original articles, poems, photographs or artwork can be emailed to the Serenity Messenger at <a href="mailto:newsletter@familiesanonymous.org">newsletter@familiesanonymous.org</a>.

Even if you don't think so, your story and experiences are unique and important and can help someone else in ways you can't imagine. Write down your thoughts in whatever way you can, and send them to us. Our editor will work with you to help you tell your story!

Below are some of the formats that we usually publish. You can also read older issues of the Serenity Messenger on our **website** to know what kinds of stories we publish.

**Cover stories**: Personal essays between 700 and 800 words. If you have a story idea in mind and want to work with our editor while you write it, feel free to send a few lines explaining what your essay will be about.

Articles: Shorter articles between 300 and 450 words. These can be on any subject of interest to FA members. Some of the themes we often include are –

- Reflections on the 12 Steps
- How you came to FA
- How FA has impacted your life
- Your relationship with your addicted loved one
- Reflections on self-awareness
- Gratitude



Think of something you may have shared at a meeting that you felt seemed particularly enlightening or interesting, and explain that in a few simple paragraphs. If you need ideas to awaken your creativity, open and browse through some past issues of our Newsletter under the archived section of that page.

**Focus:Group**: This section gives a different FA group in each issue the opportunity to tell the fellowship what's special about its approach to meetings and/or the 12 Steps. If you'd like to volunteer your group, or if you know of a group you think would like to write a Focus:Group article, please let us know.

We welcome your poems, too.

#### SUBMISSION SPECIFICATIONS

- Articles must be typed in Word.doc (preferably in the font Times New Roman, size 12 pt, single-line spacing) and attached to your email.
- Scanned artwork and photographs (originals only!) must be attached to your email. They should be in .jpg or .png format and no greater than 5 mb in size.
- Include a line or two in your email explaining the context of your submission, and mention your group if you're comfortable.

We encourage you to think about answering this call TODAY!

### **DONATIONS**

### **COMMEMORATIVE DONATIONS**

- In memory of Vickie N., on behalf of Group 1806
- In memory of Aaron W., on behalf of Group 1806
- In memory of Rachel, daughter of Vicki O., on behalf of the e-Meeting (Group 1651).
- In memory of Harry K. from Garden City Group #262 for his dedication, and for starting many FA groups on Long Island; on behalf of Donna D., Group 279
- In memory of Harry K, on behalf of Group 262.

"Harry gave the guarantee if you work the program your life will get better. He was a very compassionate man that we have had the honor of knowing; Harry also founded the Garden City Group 262 many years ago. Harry will be missed."



### **GROUP DONATIONS: May & June 2023**

#### \$101 to \$500

- GR0134 FL, So Miami
- GR0173 IL, Park Ridge
- GR0252 NJ, Summit
- GR0494 IL, Winnetka
- GR0976 NJ, Colts Neck
- GR1480 Canada, Winnipeg

#### \$101 to \$500

- GR1522 IL, Chicago
- GR1651 E-Meeting
- GR1773 WI, Madison
- GR1806 OK, Oklahoma City
- GR0590 NY, Islip Terrace GR1811 MI, Clinton Township
  - GR2056 FL, Bradenton
  - GR2105 PA, Lafayette Hills

#### Up to \$100

- GR0121 CA, Torrance
- GR0279 NY, Amityville
- GR0469 NY, Hicksville
- GR0554 NJ, Rockaway
- GR0777 IL, Chicago
- GR0831 IL, Skokie
- GR1097 KS, Shawnee Mission

### Up to \$100

- GR1615 MI, Birmingham
- GR1812 IA, Dubuque
- GR1836 FL, Delray Beach
- GR1844 WI, Mequon
- GR1906 GA, Roswell

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

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

Your contribution is tax-deductible.



Serenity Messenger