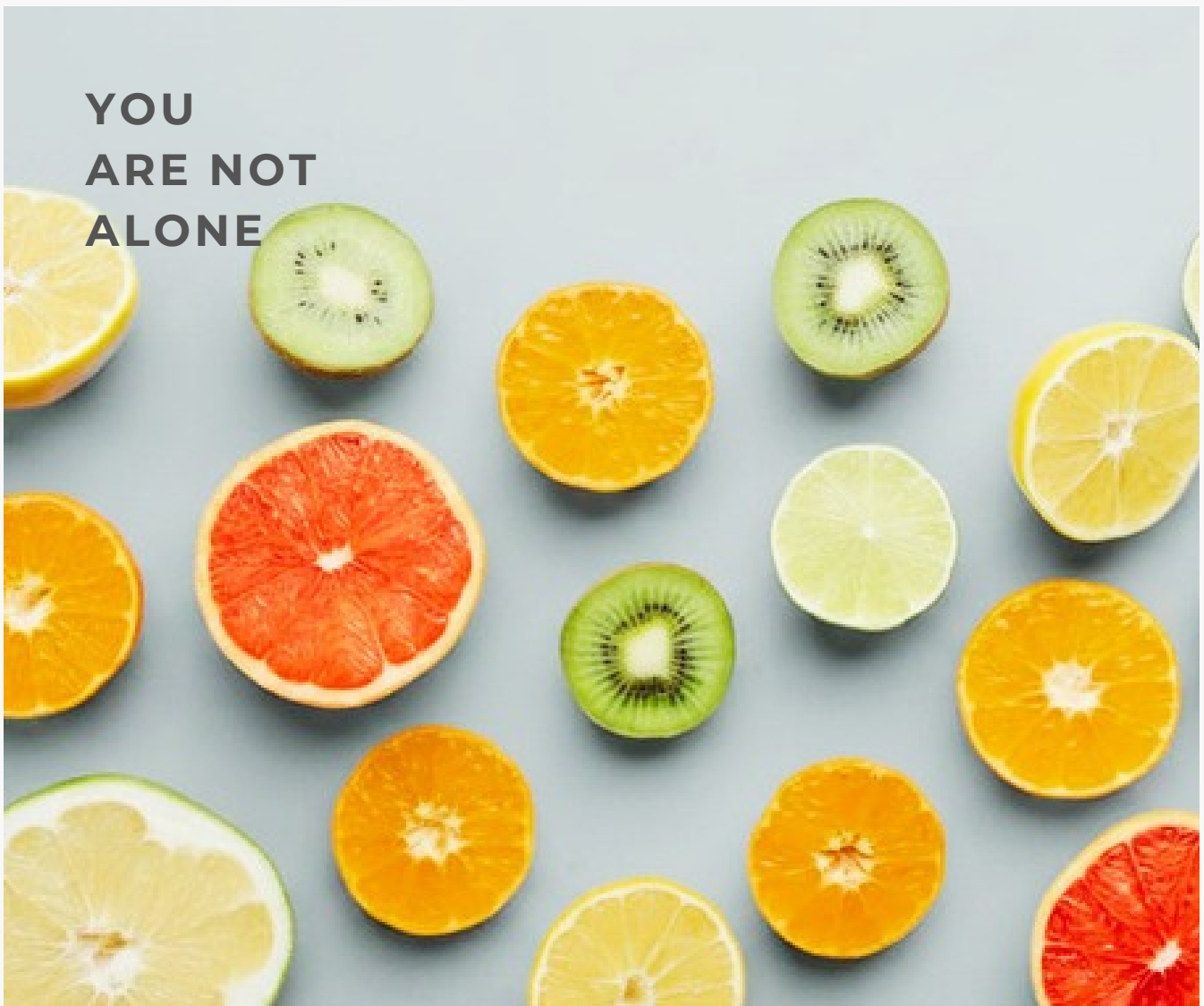


SERENITY MESSENGER

The Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship

*For relatives and friends concerned about another's use of drugs,
alcohol, or related behavioral problems*

**YOU
ARE NOT
ALONE**



EDITOR'S NOTE

One of the great gifts I've received from FA has been discovering that I have choices. As strange as it may sound, I needed to hear that. I had felt trapped for so long in the dysfunction and claustrophobia of the addictions around me that I could never imagine such a thing.

Being in a family with an addicted parent, I felt I had no control over anything. I found I couldn't make decisions like other adults could. Instead, I felt lost. I internalised feelings of deep helplessness because I couldn't see a way out of the situation. I was in pain, and I was stuck.

Starting from my childhood, I had been conditioned to accept "my fate," as it were. I had become used to feeling as if the only role I had to play was that of a victim. I had no other option than to participate in the chaos created by an addicted loved one. My life felt busy and dramatic, but with unpredictability infused into it by someone else. Along the way, I had begun to believe that staying and enduring difficult situations and difficult people was a mark of my loyalty, that I would be recognised and loved for completely abandoning myself.

When I came to the FA program, the suggestion that there was a way out, one that didn't require me to cajole, change or control others, was a completely new idea. I was able

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to think differently for the first time. I could imagine myself as a human being with agency, and I slowly came to own that truth. Even now, when I feel helpless and overwhelmed about certain circumstances, it is the program that reminds me to have the courage to change the things I can. It's easy to relapse into my old ways of thinking (which I do too often). But I am reminded that even in the most difficult situations, I have choices, one of which is to let go and let God.



PS: Submissions to the newsletter have dipped in the last few years, and we encourage FA members to send in their stories. Your sharing will help countless others find their way.

IN FELLOWSHIP,
ELIZABETH

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Serenity Messenger

Families Anonymous Inc.
701 Lee Street, Suite 670
Des Plaines, IL 60016 USA

newsletter@familiesanonymous.org

Editorial Team

*Elizabeth S., Bob S., Nicole G.,
Ann P., Chris Y., Nadine W. Julia C.*

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WHAT MY FA GROUP MEANS TO ME

Nadine W. Shares What Keeps Her Coming Back

WHY
MY FA GROUP
MEANS SO MUCH TO ME

I've been in my FA group for about six years, regularly attending in person or on Zoom. I feel very lucky to have found a group of kind people who are trying to figure out how to live fulfilling lives with their addicted loved ones, as I am. A shared goal brings people together, even though our individual problems may be different.

In my group, about 75% of us are parents of adult children with substance use issues. About 60% of us are women; 40%, men. We have core members who have been coming for anywhere from two years to two decades or more. We usually have between five and twelve people at meetings. Some of us have our addicted loved ones living with us.

I've been thinking about why my FA group means so much to me.

Everyone Is Welcome and Appreciated

Other than with family and friends, I've never had a group of people who are always happy to see me and who care about how I'm doing. I feel appreciated for just showing up, even if I don't talk. I think that's hard to find nowadays.

We treat anyone who attends with kindness and respect, no matter what they share. I feel appreciated because I see how my shares have had positive effects on others.

We welcome new people regularly. Some of them come back; some do not. I don't take it personally. I didn't try FA until two years after my therapist suggested it. I just wasn't ready. Some new members come to the meeting to find a fix for their loved one. When they realize that is not FA's purpose, they may not come back.



WHAT MY FA GROUP MEANS TO ME *cont'd*

It's a Safe Space to Express Oneself

In my group, people share their feelings honestly. This creates a closeness, as we listen to each other's innermost thoughts. We support each other in the ups and downs of life. I sometimes feel like I'm on a roller coaster with my son's moods. I always feel better after sharing my feelings, like a weight has been lifted. My group has helped me release my anger, guilt, resentments, some fears, my need to control others, my frustrations and self-pity. I've learned from FA to let my higher power take over when I'm overwhelmed.

I love that all emotions are welcome. It's OK to cry or express anger. I'm happy when someone who's struggling starts feeling better. One member progressed from feeling guilty about her son's addiction to not blaming herself for it. We rejoiced when a member's son



got clean. The group offers encouragement when someone is struggling or their loved one is not doing well. When a member's son was in jail, we tried to give her support. We grieved for a member whose son died. I've grown to care about many of our group members and feel that my caring is reciprocated.



I Can Work the Twelve Steps with Others

My group does a Step a week, in order. This helps me focus on one Step at a time and learn new ideas every time we get to each Step. I love seeing how different the interpretations are of the same Step. When we get to Step 11, for example, some members say that meditation helps them, while others prefer activities such as hiking, journaling, puzzle solving, praying, etc. The Steps also help me in other areas of my life, like communicating with my elderly mother.

WHAT MY FA GROUP MEANS TO ME *cont'd*

We Encourage One Another

We empathize and try to support each other no matter the situation. Our meetings are a judgment-free space. All people are respected. A person came to our group for the first time and was in tears. I told her a lot of people cry at their first meeting. (I cried, too!) Months later, she told me she really appreciated my saying that.

FA is there through all our ups and downs. We encourage members when they are seeing progress in themselves. One member is now doing much less for her son and is letting him be responsible for his choices and consequences. She used to help him find jobs, fix his car and make his medical appointments but now she has pulled back and is letting him make his own decisions.



I Learn from Others



It's hard to find people who understand what it's like having a loved one with addiction issues. Sometimes people pity me for my situation. But that's not what I need. I need practical advice which FA literature and meetings give me. A friend of mine said, "I don't know what would help you because I am not dealing with the things you are." I really appreciated her honesty.

Shares that express my issues give me ideas for my recovery. A member shared that she learned not to tell her son she would kick him out of the house if he used again— until she was really ready to do so. That was good information for me to hear. I changed my boundaries and stopped making empty threats.

FA Members Respect Confidentiality

I've never worried about confidentiality because my group adheres to FA's rules. We are able to share phone numbers, if we desire, but are not pressured to do so. When I have seen members in public, they are discreet.



WHAT MY FA GROUP MEANS TO ME

cont'd

I Just Have to Show Up, Every Week



Every week, no matter what time of year it is, I can attend our group's meetings either in person or virtually. I find comfort in knowing there's always help if I'm having a bad day. The consistency of the meeting structure is reassuring. A member recently noted that knowing what to expect every week was very comforting to him. There are always print resources available if I want them. I like that my group donates to FA's World Service Office and helps others in need.

Connecting After Meetings

I find that talks after a meeting, usually about shares, can be just as helpful as what I hear during the meetings. We give each other positive ideas for solving problems, or sometimes we just listen. I suggested to a member that she seemed to feel responsible for her brother's actions. She admitted that she was obsessed with fixing her brother's problems. I said, "You can still live your life while being there for your brother." She thanked me at a later meeting for that observation. Sometimes an objective observer is what you need.



If you haven't found a group like mine, keep looking. There are many FA groups that meet on Zoom or other online platforms. Look on the [FA website](#) for a listing of all the meetings available.

Keep coming back!

NADINE W., GROUP 1301, SYRACUSE, NY



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 the Group Outreach Committee at GO@familiesanonymous.org.

Have a great meeting!

FINDING HOPE

Joanne M. Reflects on How She Found Hope in the Midst of Her Son's Addiction

There was a time in my life when I felt like it was futile to hang onto hope. My beloved son hit wall after wall. So smart, so talented, so kind, yet beginning when he was 15, his own behaviors, reactions and decisions were causing him much trouble and harm. His sister, four years older, had launched and was away; one of my most difficult experiences was trying to "explain" her brother to her.

Parenthood does not come with a manual or assurance, and it was clear from early ages that my children were, and still are, very different in many ways. Raised by an alcoholic father who turned to AA and sobriety when I was 10 years old, addiction was not new to me. But I would never have guessed it for my son. By the time he was 20, my husband and I, who had grown together for 37 years, began to talk of divorce. I chose my marriage; my son turned 21 in rehab. He remained in that faraway city for three more years, going back to the rabbit hole. I got myself to FA soon after he left town, 17 years ago.



Raised by an alcoholic father who turned to AA and sobriety when I was 10 years old, addiction was not new to me. But I never would have guessed it for my son.

I'VE OFTEN SAID THAT "MY WORST PROBLEM IS ALL BETWEEN MY EARS."

I've often said that "my worst problem is all between my ears." FA helped me get out of my head and away from stinking thinking. At a time when I was wondering, "Why?" and asking, "Is there a God?" FA was encouraging me to believe in a god of my understanding, not an easy task for me. Life, for most people, is not without struggle or failure.

A former US president ran his campaign on the principle of the "audacity of hope." His approach focused on the premise that resilience is built through continuous effort, learning from failure, and fostering unity to create lasting change. I came to understand this focus through the FA community. Resilience. If I had contributed to my son's illness, had I deprived him of resilience? I could change, and FA gave me a path forward (no matter what my son was doing or not doing).

FINDING HOPE

cont'd

After 10 years, including four years away, our son hit another wall, this time a wall that caused him to change. Jobless, penniless, homeless, a college dropout more than once, he became sick and tired of being sick and tired. He returned to our city and slowly began to rebuild his life, with much support from his NA meetings. Today, after years of hard work and commitment, he is celebrating 13 years of sobriety, has married his high school sweetheart after a 10-year separation, and has finished a graduate degree. I enjoy watching him being a dad to their daughter.

He knows that I never quit loving him, even though there were plenty of times and years when I didn't like him very much. Patience took on a whole new meaning, but I'm glad that I never lost hope. I share my story with the hope that you, and your loved ones, will also find and maintain wellness today, one day at a time.

JOANNE M., SOUTH FLORIDA

HE KNOWS THAT I NEVER
QUIT LOVING HIM, EVEN
THOUGH THERE WERE
PLENTY OF TIMES AND
YEARS WHEN I DIDN'T LIKE
HIM VERY MUCH.



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

For our upcoming issue, the deadline to submit announcements is **August 10th.**

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

Email us at newsletter@familiesanonymous.org.
We'd love to hear from you!



FROM “WHAT NOW? TO “NOT NOW!”

Costas G., an FA Old-Timer, Shares His Lessons on Detaching With Love

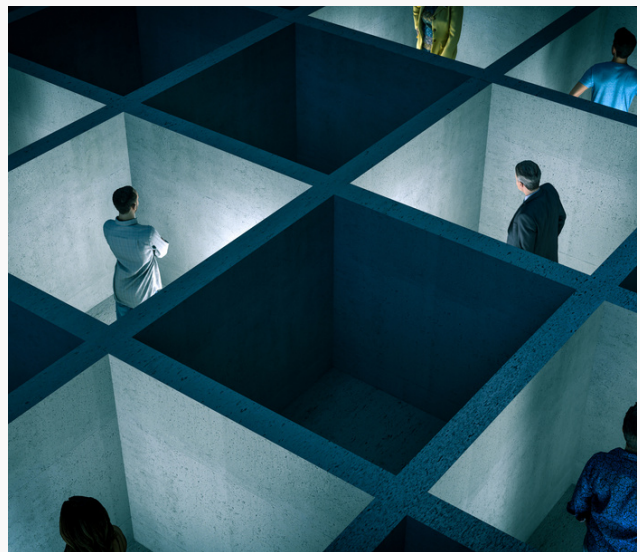
I am an FA old-timer with a long personal journey in our program—an odyssey, really, coming back every week, year after year, to my beloved two FA families: the Englewood (New Jersey) Friday night group and the Bradenton (Florida) Tuesday night group. When I first joined FA, I was constitutionally unable to understand that FA, like all Twelve Step programs, is asking us (not anyone else) to become humbly ready, both emotionally and spiritually, to accept a power greater than ourselves. I did not realize that I needed serenity in my heart and mind to accept the things in my life that I could not change, to develop the courage to change the things I could, and finally, in the context of “progress, not perfection,” to reveal the wisdom to know the difference.

DURING MY DAYS AS A NEWCOMER, I FELT COMPELLED TO ACT ON THE SPOT, RESPONDING IMMEDIATELY TO THE NEWS OF YET ANOTHER SCARY CONSEQUENCE OF MY ADDICTED DAUGHTER’S DECISIONS.

During my days as a newcomer, I felt compelled to act on the spot, responding immediately to the news of yet another scary consequence of my addicted daughter’s decisions. So, facing another “what now?” drama, I automatically sprang into action, driven by fear and a blind codependent belief that this time my emotional and financial enabling would have positive results.

I was trapped, doing the same things the past had proved ineffective but insanely expecting a different result. I would witness progress and growth made by other group members and would hear, “If nothing changes, nothing will change;” “Let go and let God;” “This program is for us, not for those who brought us here;” and “The less we do, the more we help.” Intellectually, I could accept these messages, but my fears held me back and kept me responding and acting as a codependent.

I WAS TRAPPED, DOING THE SAME THINGS THE PAST HAD PROVED INEFFECTIVE BUT INSANELY EXPECTING A DIFFERENT RESULT.



I entered a long period of emotional and spiritual “solitary confinement,” a result of gripping fears and a persistent lack of courage to change and embrace FA’s program. But I kept coming back. And sick and tired as I was, two emotions started to grow in me. The first was a longing to

FROM “WHAT NOW?” TO “NOT NOW!” *cont’d*

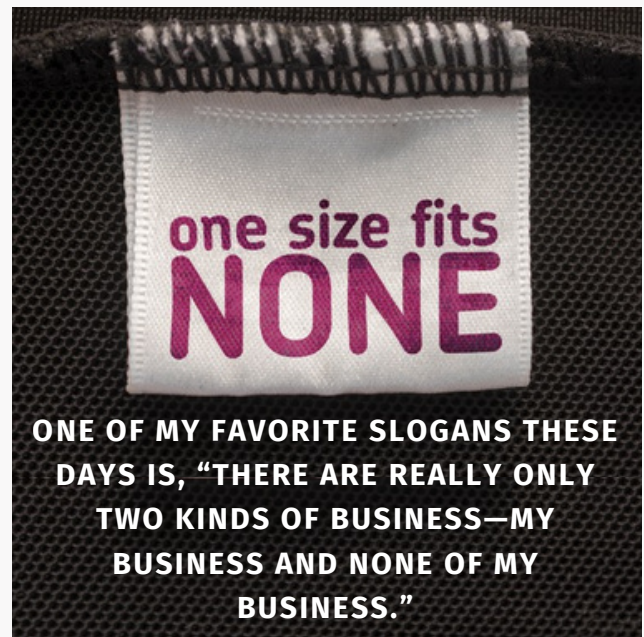
be like other FA family members who were practicing the program and seemed fairly content and serene. I wanted to be like them. The second was feeling progressively more sick and tired of being sick and tired. In that worn-down state, I began to accept the limits of what I could and could not do and, most importantly, began to accept my powerlessness over my daughter’s life.

I BEGAN SUBSTITUTING MY OLD “WHAT NOW?” WITH “NOT NOW,” REPLACING MY SELF-INVOLVEMENT WITH A QUIET RESOLVE TO DETACH, ALLOWING OTHERS TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO THEIR DIFFICULTIES WITHOUT MY HELP.

Being powerless over other people’s lives allowed me to understand that a spiritual power greater than myself had always been with me, as it is with everyone on this Twelve Step journey. This acceptance allowed me, for the first time, to have a constant spiritual companion to rely on and feel comfortable with, even in the midst of unsettling, unanswered questions and fears of a future fraught with uncertainty. Feelings of peace and calm began replacing my frantic life of constant drama. Whenever troubling and scary news found me, I began substituting my old “what now?” with “not now,” replacing

my self-involvement with a quiet resolve to detach, allowing others to find solutions to their difficulties without my help.

Feelings of freedom and peace grew stronger as I practiced taking better care of myself, respecting the decisions of others through healthier boundaries and a determination to focus on my own business. One of my favorite slogans these days is, “There are really only two kinds of business—my business and none of my business.”



Without the program and my continuing connection to my two FA families, I would not have arrived at this understanding. By saying “not now,” I embrace the wisdom I receive in the rooms of FA, made available to me through the honest shares of people struggling just like I am. “Not now” means I practice what our

FROM “WHAT NOW? TO “NOT NOW!” *cont’d*

literature and experiences suggest. I pause, detaching with love from my addicted one’s problems, and focus on my own spiritual condition, grateful for the brighter, more hopeful place this program has allowed me to enter.

Finally, sharing this newfound understanding with my own family—my wife, daughters, and grandchildren—has fostered its being practiced by us all, contributing to healthier and richer family relationships, a blessing for which we are all grateful.



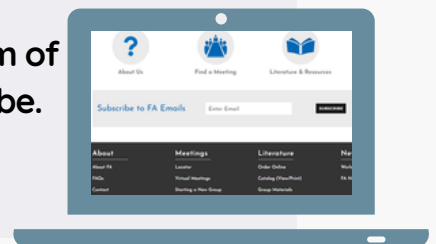
COSTAS G., GROUPS #2056, BRADENTON FL, AND #1152, ENGLEWOOD NJ



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It only takes a minute - do it now!



BIRDSONGS AND REFLECTIONS

Bob S. Finds Peace and Meaning in the Melody of Birds



**THE BIRDS SING BECAUSE
THIS NEW DAY IS THE
ONLY DAY THERE IS.**

It's early on a summer morning, and I awaken to a busy mix of tweets, chirps and trills outside my window. The patter of the birds' blended songs ascends and recedes, then repeats, flowing like sweet water through the air.

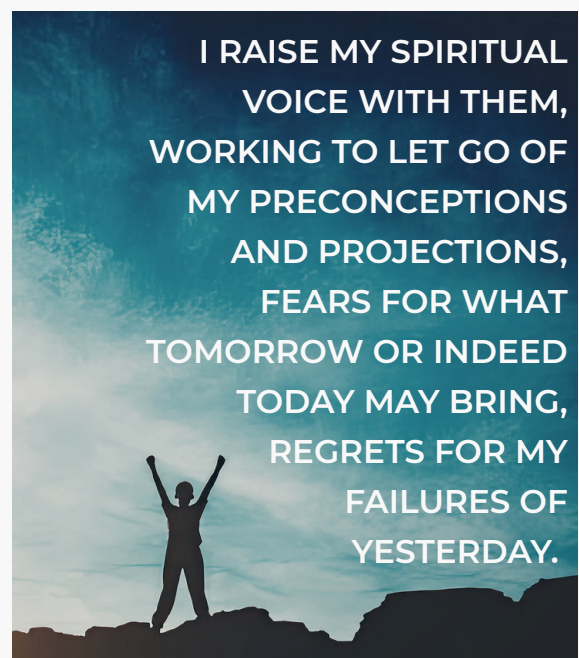
I lie in bed enjoying my musical companions as I watch the dawn's glow that's outlining my windows grow from a hint, to a sliver, to a gentle river of light spilling across the floor.

They went to sleep at sundown neither expecting another dawn nor mourning the loss of light, but simply because they were tired; their day was done; it was time. From that place of no expectations, that place of simply being and accepting what is, they slept peacefully through the dark hours.

And now that dawn has awakened them, they rejoice in its promise of another day of life. For some of them, it may be their last day; for others, it will be yet another in many days to come. None of them can know either of those things as they unite in song to praise the light.

But if they did, the knowledge of either outcome could only diminish the pure, positive energy of their jubilant songs. I raise my spiritual voice with them, working to let go of my preconceptions and projections, fears for what tomorrow or indeed today may bring, regrets for my failures of yesterday.

There's no trace of fear for the future or regret for the past in birdsongs. I suspect only humans, with our ability to rationalize ourselves into all sorts of mental and emotional corners, are capable of such dissonant thoughts.



**I RAISE MY SPIRITUAL
VOICE WITH THEM,
WORKING TO LET GO OF
MY PRECONCEPTIONS
AND PROJECTIONS,
FEARS FOR WHAT
TOMORROW OR INDEED
TODAY MAY BRING,
REGRETS FOR MY
FAILURES OF
YESTERDAY.**

BIRDSONGS AND REFLECTIONS

cont'd

The birds sing because this new day is the only day there is. They know all they need to know: that life is happening now, starting now, and for that reason alone it's good. It calls for joy.

Keep it simple, they say. This day has begun. Whether it's bright and warm or cloudy and damp, it's a new day and I'm alive in it. I feel good or bad or tired or ill, full of energy and anticipation or a little slow to get started, but I feel. I'm in this moment, and it's the only moment there is. I may be fortunate enough to have another moment after this, but that's not in my control. All I can do is savor this momentary slice of living, this wondrous gift that my higher power has laid at my feet.

The birds have quieted now. I imagine they're flying off to the business of the day, to find food and water, to tend to their mates and their young. Whatever the day brings, they'll be in it one hundred percent, one moment at a time. One moment to one moment to one moment more. Strung out like pearls, they make a life.

And each is precious.



BOB S., GROUP 2056, BRADENTON, FL

THE THREE CS OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

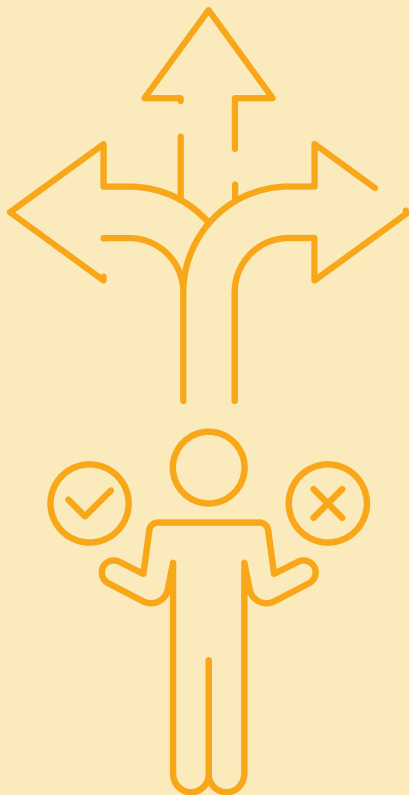
WE DIDN'T **CAUSE** IT.

WE CAN'T **CONTROL** IT.

WE CAN'T **CURE** IT.

THE THREE CS OF OUR RECOVERY FROM CODEPENDENCY

WE MAKE DIFFERENT **CHOICES**



- We make quality **CHOICES** about how we will conduct and improve our life.
- We **CHOOSE** to be good to ourselves and to enjoy life. A day wasted in misery is gone forever.
- We **CHOOSE** to accept that our addicted loved ones have the right to make their own **CHOICES**.
- We **CHOOSE** to stop trying to control or direct their CHOICES. We **CHOOSE**, instead, to get out of their way and focus on making **CHOICES** for ourselves, not for them.
- We **CHOOSE** to allow them to experience the consequences of their **CHOICES** without trying to rescue them.

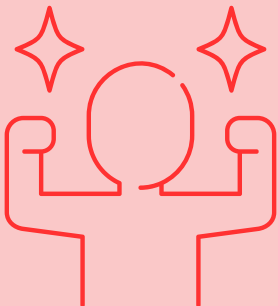
THE THREE CS OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER *cont'd*

WE MAKE **CHANGES** IN OURSELVES



- If what we did before hasn't been working, doesn't it make sense to try something else?
- We recognize that as we **CHANGE** ourselves, we are setting the stage for our loved ones to **CHANGE** themselves as well.
- We **CHANGE** our thoughts and actions by following the advice of our "Helping" reading: stop doing things for our loved ones, and start simply being present for them.

WE HAVE THE **COURAGE** TO COMMIT FULLY TO OUR OWN RECOVERY



- We stop being the victim. We have the **COURAGE** to say "no."
- We stop being the enabler. We have the **COURAGE** to "let go."

(THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE THREE CS X 2: THE THREE CS OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER & THE THREE CS OF OUR RECOVERY FROM CODEPENDENCY, AVAILABLE AS #1033 IN THE FA LITERATURE CATALOG.)

CHRISTOPHER, I MISS YOU

Christopher, I miss you,
More than words can ever say,
The light you brought into my life
Feels distant, dimmed, and far away.

Thirty-eight years of laughter,
Of dreams we built, of moments shared,
Now echo in an empty room
Where once your gentle spirit cared.

I see your face in fading skies,
In shadows cast by evening's glow,
A whisper in the autumn breeze,
A presence only I still know.

The world spins on, yet here I stand,
A heart in pieces cracked and worn.
Each day without you feels so long,
Each night a weight too heavily borne.

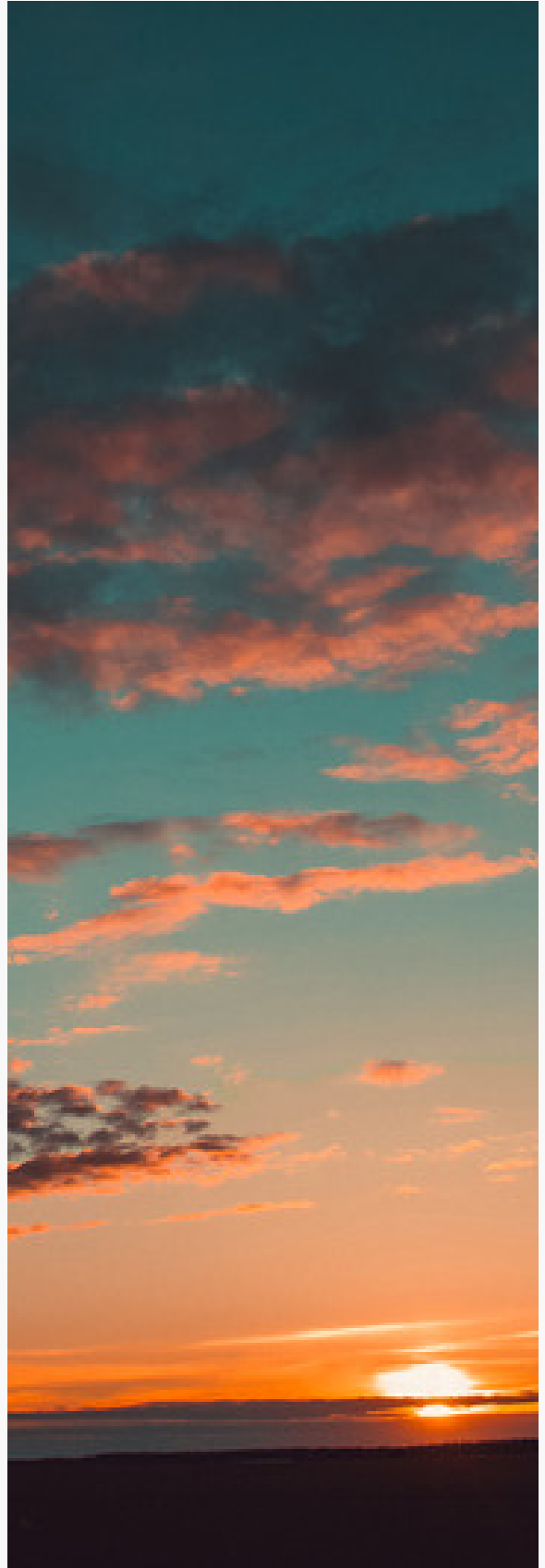
I wonder if you have found your peace,
Beyond the pain, beyond the fight,
Released from chains that held you back,
Embraced at last by endless light.

But still, I miss your voice, your smile,
The way you brightened every day.
Your kindness and your quiet strength
Now lost to me in life's cruel play.

Christopher, I miss you—
In every breath, in every tear.
Yet, in my heart, you will always stay
Forever close, forever near.

Until we meet again, my son,
In the place where souls are free,
I will carry you with love and pride,
Your memory, my legacy.

BILL B., GROUP 1739, LAUREL, MD





SPOTLIGHT ON LITERATURE:

*Rewards of Recovery:
Exploring the Twelve Promises of Families Anonymous*

Newcomers to FA often refer to *Helping* as their favorite basic reading, and this was true for me as well, until I heard the *Twelve Promises*. More than any other reading, the Twelve Promises helped me understand that I could feel hope again. Not hope for my loved one necessarily (about her, I felt hopeless for a long time), but hope for myself, that I would be able to survive this disease and have a life again.

Going on 20 years later, the *Twelve Promises* still speak volumes to me, and surely I am not alone.

Now, with the introduction and publication of *Rewards of Recovery: Exploring the Twelve Promises of Families Anonymous* (#1041 in the literature catalog), the understanding and promises of a better life for all are greatly expanded.

"The Twelve Promises assure us that our lives can change in many positive ways if we engage actively in the program: by attending meetings, by diligently working the Twelve Steps, and by living the program through principle, attitude and action."

The following are clips from the discussion of various Promises to spark your interest in reading more:



WE ARE GOING TO KNOW A FREEDOM FROM WORRY AND A NEW HAPPINESS.

"In FA, we seek progress, not perfection. We might never be completely worry-free, but we can eventually recognize the appearance of worry more quickly and put our FA tools to work counteracting it. ... When we are surrounded by other people who are also working the program, and when we glean insights from their stories and experiences, we can borrow and apply their knowledge and feel supported. We listen to learn, absorbing their strength and hope. A new attitude begins to arise: *If it works for them, it can work for me, too.* ... Holding onto worry is a choice; it has nothing to do with how much we care."



WE WILL COMPREHEND THE WORD SERENITY.

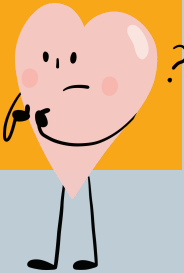
"Comprehension is a beginning. ... Serenity needs to be nurtured and practiced, as part of our recovery journey. Serenity does not arrive immediately but, rather, is a layering process of gaining insights, changing our actions and attitudes, internalizing our new perspectives, and calming the habitually frantic nature of our needs and fears."



SPOTLIGHT ON LITERATURE:

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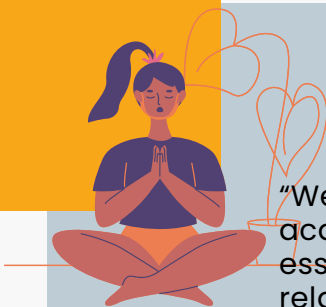
PROMISE SIX



THOSE FEELINGS OF RESENTMENT AND SELF-PITY WILL DISAPPEAR.

"Our loved ones, when in active addiction, give us plenty of reasons for resentment, to which we might easily respond with self-pity. *Why?* we ask. *Why me?* How we respond to those questions is up to each of us. We can choose to answer as we have answered in the past, or we can choose something different. ... Problems often start with our failure to clearly articulate our plans or boundaries. Then, when our loved ones cannot read our minds and life does not happen our way, we default to becoming upset and resentful. We can begin changing this dynamic by developing better communication skills, which will hold us in good stead in *all* our relationships."

PROMISE ELEVEN



WE WILL INTUITIVELY KNOW HOW TO HANDLE SITUATIONS THAT USED TO BAFFLE US.

"We often refer to intuitive knowledge as a 'gut feeling.' ... We acquire intuitive knowledge by taking a deep dive into the essence of ourselves and by nurturing a receptive, trusting relationship with our Higher Power. ... Our human bodies store the emotional fallout of traumas, past and present. Many of our traumas are directly linked to the problem that has brought us to FA. Now, on our path to intuitive knowledge and recovery, we need to face these traumas, deal with them, work through them, break free of them, and finally let them go. This is much easier said than done, but it is an essential part of the changes we work towards in FA. ... Within this freedom, there is a universal **HOW** to working the program: with honesty; with an open mind; and with a willingness to change."



SPOTLIGHT ON LITERATURE: *cont'd*

Be one of the first to purchase
*#1041 Rewards of Recovery:
Exploring the Twelve Promises of
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