

Gratitude in Action

July, 2015

Welcome to the latest edition of Gratitude in Action

What is Gratitude in Action?

Gratitude in Action is a newsletter published by the WSI 12th Step Committee of Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) to inspire you to get involved and do service so that you and others can be helped. We will bring you the latest FA worldwide information, remind you of tools and resources available within FA, and highlight upcoming FA worldwide events. Remember – “Service keeps us abstinent!”

In this issue....

We will recap the opening and closing remarks from the 2015 Business Convention for those of you who were unable to attend. It took a village of almost 100 people to organize the convention from start to finish. There were 469 people in attendance and eight different countries represented. The level of service was inspirational and resulted in a seamless weekend of productivity, fun, and fellowship.

2015 Business Convention Highlights

Four hundred sixty-nine members attended from Australia, Canada, China, Taiwan, Great Britain, Israel, Norway, and twenty-eight of the United States. Business sessions included a general overview of FA’s structure; opening and closing remarks; our treasurer’s report; four motions; acknowledgement of outgoing chairs; election of the 2015-16 World Service Board; highlights from the Maine Chapter, the Western Area Intergroup, the Eastern Area Intergroup, and several WSI committees; and an FA Sharing Session that focused on two topics: “Moving From Fear To Faith,” and “Developing and Maintaining a Spiritual Connection.” There was also a session called “Passing on the Basics,” by members with 20 years or more of continuous abstinence in FA. Other events included the recording of four new qualification CDs, a writing workshop for connection magazine, WSI committee meetings, and the 3rd Annual Mocktail Party and dance.

Details of the *four motions* that were adopted by the Conference can be found in the Bylaws Committee report on pages 12-15. *In summary, they are:*

- **Motion #1** amended the FA World Service Bylaws to now read: “An FA meeting group is a local association of two or more food addicts who regularly meet together in person to share experience, strength, and hope about recovery from addiction through the Twelve Steps of FA. FA meeting groups are the primary service bodies of FA.”
- **Motion #2** changed the Meeting Format language to read: “We ask that you not bring infants and children to the meeting. However, those who have identified themselves as having a problem with food are welcome.”
- **Motion #3** also involved a Meeting Format language change, adding the following options to the tool of Service: REV 15 0630 2 “....doing whatever needs to be done for FA, including supporting intergroups [and chapters]* [and local service groups]* and attending business meetings ...”
- **Motion #4** created an alternative version of the Sample FA Meeting Format.

You'll also want to note all the Take Away Items at the end of the Convention Report, especially the document regarding reasons FA Meetings are defined as in-person meetings. You will find these items will be helpful to your group and to your recovery. One of the most important things learned at the conference was the World Service Board needs to step up our work and our focus to better reach those on the frontier. It became abundantly clear that this organization needs to do a better job making FA and its founding principles more accessible to those who live on the frontier. The 12th Step Committee began acting on this commitment by gathering ideas in their Sunday session of ways to better build a bridge with those on the frontier. The board will go through these ideas and put resources, technology, and time into better reaching those who live in outlying areas. This is a huge opportunity and will be a high priority for the board in the coming year.

REMINDERS • As of the close of the convention, over 11,000 of our FA books had been sold worldwide. In order to continue with projects like the book, and other services to reach the newcomer, members are encouraged to continue to give generously to the 7th Tradition.

Please mark your calendars: The next WSBC will be held June 3-5, 2016 in Danvers, MA. The next FA Fellowship Convention will be held in the fall of 2016. Stay tuned for details!

On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to every member of this wonderful organization. Together we ensure that our program will continue to be available for every food addict who desires to stop eating addictively. On a personal note, I would like to express sincere appreciation to all the attendees at the convention who were so supportive and patient with me as chair of my first FA Business Convention. I could not have done it without an enormous amount of love and work from so many, many people.

Yours in service, Dave I., WSB Chair

World Service Board (WSB) Vice Chair Opening Remarks Jamie M., WSB Vice Chair

Good morning. I am Jamie, a food addict.

Welcome to all of you. For many of you this may be your first FA convention and I want to extend a heartfelt welcome to you, in particular, because I still remember my first FA convention 14 years ago. I was just under a year abstinent and I attended because my friends were going and I didn't want to miss out and also because I had witnessed the early formation of our local Western Area Intergroup and I didn't want to miss what I thought might be something of historical significance, the first FA Business convention in Manchester, New Hampshire. I wanted to see and try to understand this program from the ground up and I wanted to be part of this history. I was richly rewarded! I vividly remember attending the World Service Board Committee meetings and thinking "so this is how it all happens." It was new, impressive and I was trying to soak it all in. I observed the level of maturity of fellows with long term abstinence and I wondered "would I ever be able to understand the voting process and the issues at hand, much less Robert's Rules of Order?" Sometimes, I have to say, I still don't understand those rules of order but I am always so impressed, each time I attend the Business Convention, by how the group conscience works so effectively! Watching this process, I know God is in the room and that we are collectively infused by spiritual principles which motivate us to do service, help us to overcome our differences of opinions and put the needs of the newcomer and the still suffering food addict first.

Is it a coincidence that today is May 30th and the Thought for the Day in the 24 Hours A Day Book is about service? I don't think so!

I have had the privilege, for the last five years, of chairing the Inquiry Response Committee. This committee was established by the World Service Board and is responsible for handling inquiries made to the FA World Service Board or to the FA World Service Office. On this committee we have had the perspective of being troubleshooters and what we deal with are those issues which are of concern for people in and out of our fellowship. There are often concerns about meetings, about sponsorship and about AWOL's. In answering some of these inquiries we lean heavily on the collective wisdom of our fellowship as expressed in the voice of the conference. We look towards conference approved documents and motions to guide us in our advice. Often times one of our members or one of his or her sponsees has personally experienced a particular issue and we speak to their experience. One of the recurring issues is regarding meetings and ways in which very well meaning fellows have tried to change the very basics. Over the course of many years we have seen what works well for us to serve in our primary service which is to help the still suffering Food Addict who arrives to the meeting as a newcomer. We have found that the disciplines and the basics of our 90 minute "in-person" FA Meeting is what is best for the newcomer and that is reflected by our unanimous approval of the Meeting Requirement Details by the World Service Conference in June 2011. We are addicts and we need to adhere to the simple disciplines of this program because for us it is our medicine, it is the difference between a life of addiction or one of freedom.

Our phone calls, our connections with others, our quiet time, our connection with God and our honesty, this is what has worked for decades. These fundamentals lead us to honesty, to faith, to God and then to the letting go of the fears that drove us to addiction. All of these disciplines arise out of our spiritual principles and when we surrender to what has worked we are promised freedom from hunger and addiction.

Three years ago I had an experience which truly taught me that in practicing the basics of our program I will always be carried. My husband and I, while out on a late afternoon walk, were hit by a car. I remember lying under the car and looking at my husband and thinking, "Oh thank you God we are alive!!" Only after I got up and out from under the car did I realize how bad it was. Life threatening? No. Life changing? Yes. I looked over at the gruesome scene, my husband's mangled leg and damaged limbs, and I started to get faint. The paramedics arrived and escorted me to the curb so that I wouldn't faint on top of my husband. I remember sitting there saying the serenity prayer over and over and thanking God over and over that we were alive. The next few months changed our lives in ways I could never have imagined. I had been praying to God, before the accident, for more time with my husband and I had no idea how that prayer would be answered. Wow, did I get a lot of time with him!! I had nightmares for the 2 months that he was bed ridden and they were all about breaking my abstinence. I know that was my sub-conscience telling me how important and precious is my recovery. I had the support of my family, my fellowship, my sponsor and God. Now 3 years later, thank God, my husband has healed and we have an even sweeter relationship than I ever could have imagined. During this period I continued to go to all of my meetings and to lead my AWOL because they were my anchors; I needed to be with my fellows. I felt so carried by my program of recovery in FA.

I tell you this story because it illustrates how important this program of FA recovery is to me, how it will always give me what I need to sustain through whatever life brings me, what a gift it is and I know that I can keep this precious gift by remaining grateful and by doing service.

When I reflect on my cumulative time in FA, I have to ask myself these questions: has the quality of my life improved since I have joined FA? To that question I can answer a resounding "Yes". I was overweight and consumed with consuming food. Do I stay true to my beliefs especially the ones that I believe are guided by the spiritual principles of this program? Am I holding on to old self-serving and destructive beliefs and unwilling to look at things from different points of view or with an open mind? Do I have freedom from addictive eating and do I continue to make healthy choices for my mind, body and spirit? Every morning when I wake up I can be a force for good and God. Am I continuing

to grow in my spiritual life? Do I actively look for ways to do service and help to improve the lives of others?

We are here this weekend to do service, to make our message clear and accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world. Today we are a healthy organization. Fourteen years later we are a growing and mature fellowship and we have witnessed what works and what doesn't. We came here this weekend with a shared focus to do service. I presume we all started our day by some kind of communion with God involving prayer, our 24 Hours A Day reading, and our quiet time. We all had an abstinent weighed and measured breakfast and we are all abstinent at this very moment. When we gather together we get to see all the things we have in common. We are all looking healthy, feeling good and ready to do service and God's will. The differences between us can fade away. Let's take this feeling of unity that is engendered by our recovery, and let us share with each other what we have together. I hope that what we share in recovery is the primary focus of this weekend. Let's carry it out the door with us when we leave the convention and throughout the year. The only way we are going to remain healthy and of service is to be grateful, to focus on what we have in common and to focus on doing service.

World Service Board Chair Closing Remarks

Dave I., WSB Chair

My name is Dave. I'm a food addict.

Before I say anything, I simply want to pause, look out over this amazing group of people, and take a moment of silent gratitude...

From our humble beginning with a mere few hundred members, our fellowship has grown to over 6000, with nearly 600 meetings registered, in eight countries and 34 states. It's remarkable, when you stop to think about it, especially when you consider all the different food fads and diets that are vying for people's attention today.

But even more important than the quantity of our membership is the quality of our individual recoveries...

As I stand here in front of you, my mind goes back to a beautiful Sunday morning nineteen years ago. At that time, however, I could not experience the beauty, the sunlight, or the emergence of a grateful life that I experience with you today. On that spring morning, the drapes were closed. Hung over after a binge the night before, I awoke with a decision to stay in bed all day. "That way," I told myself, "I wouldn't eat." I told my family I had the flu.

An hour later I was up wandering aimlessly through the kitchen in my pajamas. I couldn't stand myself any longer and, in a state of utter hopelessness, started another despairing day of binging and purging.

Later that night as I lay helplessly in a fetal position on my bedroom floor. I thought, "I can't go on like this." But I had no idea how to change it. Alone, I abandoned all hope. I fell asleep on the floor, and awoke, engulfed by a tsunami of self-pity. Dried tears covered my unshaven face.

What could possibly drive an intelligent, successful businessman into a hopeless, depressed ball on his bedroom floor? On the outside, everything about my life appeared to be prospering. On the inside I was emotionally and spiritually bankrupt. I was in such unbearable pain – both mentally and physically – that I couldn't imagine that anything would ever change. I didn't want to live, and I didn't want to die. My tortured heart was consumed with depression and despairing anguish.

Not long after that Sunday, through a series of miraculous experiences, I was led out of that darkness and into the sunlight of recovery in this program.

I stand here now and see the difference these years in recovery have made. This morning I was up at five am, had a shower and quiet time, read the 24 Hours A Day Book, and got myself ready to do something useful in the world. When I stand here, my tormented and addicted past behind me, I feel a presence. I feel a fullness that comes from being a part of something - being connected – something that I sought aimlessly for in food for decades. Food never gave me what I have here. I was stuffed, but I was never *full*. It is in these rooms that I have learned what *enough* actually feels like.

Last year, I spoke to one of our members shortly after the business convention. She told me that it was her first

convention, and how wonderful it was to see how her small group fit into a larger FA world. She was so grateful to understand the real meaning of terms such as WSB and WSI and WAI and EAI and Chapters, and where our 7th Tradition money goes. She was amazed by all the work that is done in this organization. She then shared that the night she came home from that convention, page 368 was the page in the Big Book that she read:

"I no longer have the sense of impending doom. I no longer wish for death to stare at me in the mirror with loathing. I have come to terms with my Higher Power... I have a full and happy life, with friends and loving family... I have traveled throughout the world... and I have returned to my home group with an extended family that is international in scope, all the members of which are joined by bonds of shared pain and joy."

I recently watched a short YouTube video that showed the expression on people's faces who had been deaf all their lives and through the miracle of technology, were given the gift of hearing. They screamed, they cried, they laughed, their eyes opened – to absolute wonderment and unexplainable, exquisite joy in having been brought out of the silent world of deafness and into the sunlight of sound.

That is how I feel about the work we do here. Certainly we have differences and our difficulties in working together. Without doubt, our character defects surface as we invest in our spiritual family together. But as we prepare to travel back to our homes around the world, I am here to tell you that no satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than watching men and women emerge into lives filled with a new purpose and meaning, and above all watch them awaken, in the words the Big Book, "to the sunlight of the spirit." This forms the substance of what we receive as we remember our singleness of purpose – both individually and collectively – to carry the message to those who still suffer from this horrible disease that is killing so many each day.

However, in the words of Bill W., *"as a people who have nearly always learned the hard way, we shall certainly not congratulate ourselves. We shall perceive these assets to be God's gifts, which have been in part matched by an increasing willingness on our part to find and do His will for us."*

I have three messages for you to reflect upon as you embark on your journeys home.

#1. The strength of our collective unity is dependent on the depth of our individual recovery. The strength in this room is not in the organization. The strength is in our individual, personal recovery. The roots of individual programs must form the foundation of service. Service must emerge out of recovery, not the other way around. Watch for and listen to, in an FA meeting or a phone call or a conversation, what has kept people abstinent for more than 20 years. Focus and deepen your connection to the program that has kept people out of food for decades and you will strengthen your capacity to serve and be useful – both in these rooms and in the world. The roots are in the recovery, not in the establishment.

Unity is built by recovery. Working the steps. Staying aware of our defects. Keeping the focus on the relationships in our lives on ourselves, and our side of the street. Learning to let go and let God. These are ways that we stay useful to others...

#2. We, as the World Service Board, are here to serve, not mandate. I want to remind you all that this is a bottom-up spiritual organization, not a top-down corporate institution. The 12 Traditions and the 12 Concepts allow us neither to govern nor to rule.

When I came into this program I was broken, damaged, and in need of healing. The healing that followed came from stability. I needed a solid, secure armchair to rest in, a foundation to support and sustain my unmanageable life. I didn't need an organization that was continually in flux. I needed structure and boundaries around my food and around my meal times. I needed committed meetings with the same format, in the same location, at the same time. I needed regular, consistent, simple disciplines.

When I was newly abstinent I wanted to rewrite the Big Book, and The 24 Hours A Day Book, and, while I was at it, I wanted to rewrite the meeting format and the way that meetings were run. I actually wanted to change everything I could about this program. I wanted to change the program because I was afraid of the program. I felt that if I could control the way it was run then it wouldn't run me.

I am grateful for a firm and loving sponsor who did not let me to change anything! What I learned was to let go, trust, let God, and observe the results. I learn, and continue to learn, to relax and let the program remain an anchor, a stable

foundation for me.

This year has been a year of more change in my life than I've ever had since I came into recovery. My brother, as many of you know, continues on his cancer journey. His inoperable brain tumor will take him soon but he continues to hang in there. My mother-in-law is dealing with dementia. My brother-in-law is dealing with the effects of a stroke and a heart attack as a result of food addiction. I have been dealing with some chronic pain. My business continues to be redesigned and transformed. Our youngest daughter graduated from high school, and my oldest daughter, along with my grandson, have started a new, life after a horrible marriage and divorce. I have taken on the position of chair. After working with my sponsor for more than eighteen years, I had to find a new one. And three weeks ago our family dog died...

Today, when I work this program, when I come to meetings, when I make calls, I need stability. I need constancy. I need a foundation to rest on. I need to know that what I have been so generously given will be preserved. For it is in this program I find a bedrock of spiritual nourishment, my wellspring of emotional and mental strength. Many people have shared with me a similar concern. I know I'm not alone in this. All of us in this room have been offered a most precious gift, the fruits of an impossibly good and deeply sufficient life.

Does the program need changing? I think not. As addicts, we are always trying to improve things, make them better. But what makes this program a true anchor in our lives is actually the stability it provides. When I go to meetings, it's not good for me to wonder if the format is going to be different. I get uptight when the room we are meeting in has been moved! I don't need a revised format or an upgraded, newly improved AWOL. I rely on this program for strength and constancy. All of us who are recovering from addiction need repetition, not continuous improvement. We need permanence. We need stability, not uncertainty. We need an unchanging structure, not an organization that reacts to the whims of desire and impulse.

I believe our focus should be on preserving FA's foundation that our fellowship rests upon. Too much change is not good for an organization, and particularly an organization where people seek recovery. I'm not closed minded. It isn't that I don't think we need to grow and evolve. But we need to maintain our foundation. With the help of an extremely competent and supportive board, we, as a WSB, will consider and weigh suggestions and responses from the fellowship that will help evolve this organization.

In my mind, there's a difference between "growth" and "change for change sake." Growth means supporting the fellowship to continue to flourish with a continually renewed infrastructure and offerings. Growth is about keeping our website and literature updated, using technology in new ways to get our printed materials, such as the *connection* magazine and the FA Book in electronic format. I have already stated in this convention that the World Service Board has not done an adequate job of reaching those who are struggling to work this program on the frontier. It will be one of the board's highest mandates and priorities to change this in the coming year. Technology will help us greatly with this. These changes are healthy and necessary, along with others proposed by various board committees who continue to work to better our outreach to the food addict who still suffers.

The kind of changes I am concerned about deal with changing the fundamentals, the basics of our program, like the meeting format, AWOLs, and the fundamental disciplines of the program that have been passed down over the decades and are woven into the fabric of our history and our recovering lives. We need to keep to the basics. If you aren't sure what the basics are, ask someone with more than 20 years of abstinence who was around at the inception of FA. The basics are what create a personality change that keeps people abstinent, not just for days or weeks or months or even years, but for decades.

What I am committed to change is myself. I will work hard at changing the way I live, pass on this program, and lead. That's enough on my plate.

#3. Grow into the discomfort of service. When I was less than a week abstinent I remember starting to feel anxious about one day being a sponsor. *"How will I ever be able to have the time – or ability - to sponsor?"* I asked myself. *"I don't have time to even get myself together in the morning. How on earth will I have time to take care of anyone else? This program is way too demanding!"*

Thankfully, I didn't have to sponsor anyone in my first week – or even in my first several months. I have learned that we grow into service, just as we grow into recovery. We are not given any service opportunity or challenge or responsibility we are not capable of learning from and responding to. This is as true in life as it is in our recovery. We are given just

what we need (even though it may not be what we think we want).

Quiet time was horrible for me at the beginning. I hated sitting still almost as much as I hated eating plain yogurt and cooked vegetables. But now, quiet time is one of the favorite aspects of my program. While cooked vegetables remain the least favorite part of my food plan, I grew into tolerating them. Business meetings have been, over the years, my “cooked vegetables” of the program. Taking service positions in our fellowship can be, at times, hard to swallow, but they are good for us. Dealing with the various personalities at the group and even conference level is not easy. I can only imagine what it would be like to work with me in my fellowship. But learning to make decisions together, to work through our differences, to listen and be heard, are all just so much more rewarding than sitting at home, alone, isolating and safe...

It’s been said that ships are safe in the harbor, but this is not what ships are made for.

I am grateful to take part and to do my part. It’s important that I get out of my house, show up, and engage willingly in helping grow the organization that helped save my life. Nothing I do, or any of us do in the name of service in this fellowship, has to be done perfectly. But let’s, at least, be triers. It’s important – and it’s good – to give back.

I asked my sponsor once, “How many sponsees should I have?”

“One more than you’re comfortable with,” she responded.

That’s been a good axiom for me to keep growing – in sponsoring, in service, and, in life. Keep nudging the edges of your comfort zone. It’s good for the soul and it’s good for our recovery.

In conclusion, I offer you a quote from Bill W.

“While I thank God that I was privileged to be an early member of AA, I honestly wish that the word “founder” could be eliminated from the AA vocabulary... When you get right down to it, everyone who has done any amount of successful Twelfth Step work is bound to be the founder of a new life for [another alcoholic]...”

Bill went on to say, “AA was not invented! Its basics were brought to us through the experience and wisdom of many great friends. We simply borrowed and adapted their ideas.”

We are *all* founders of a new way of life for those we help. And what all of us being founders really means is that *none* of us are founders. Instead, we are simply agents bearing the message of experience, strength, and hope. God does the work. And we get to share in the rewards of that work, so long as we remember that God gets the credit for it!

It’s our job to keep showing up – and then relax, let go, and let God do the rest. As Bill Wilson wrote, *“let us always love the best in others, and never fear their worst... We come together in our weakness, and grow together in our strength.”*

Easy does it, everyone, in your travels home and in the transition back to your families, communities, and friends. Always remember: The problem in front of you is never as great as the power behind you. Be safe, and may God be with you until we meet again.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to serve and grow in this position.

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### **Traditions Review Committee (TRC)**

**Inquiry:** Meeting Space Requiring Security Sign In — The secretary of a meeting inquired whether issues of anonymity applied to their meeting facility which requires that members sign in at a front desk before going to the meeting. For security reasons, they ask for both first and last name and the purpose of the visit, though no ID is requested. Particular concern was expressed about newcomers being put off if they think this is supposed to be an “anonymous” meeting.

**Response:** The Traditions Review Committee (TRC) reviewed this issue in light of both Traditions 11 and 12. Tradition 12 focuses on the concept of individual anonymity, asking that we conduct ourselves from a place of personal humility and respect for others, regardless of personality. Tradition 11 concerns our relations in the public sphere. The committee does not see any conflict with either of these Traditions in a request for a security sign in, as long as its

intent is to ensure our safety and the safety of others in the building. And in fact, many FA meetings are held in facilities such as hospitals and public/government centers, which require sign-ins.

If the group wishes, it may ask the building contact for assurance about how the list will be used. FA members who are uncomfortable may choose to sign in using their first initial and last name, use their middle name, or simply list “meeting” or the room number as the purpose of the visit. Generally, most newcomers won’t know about “anonymity” at their first meeting unless they have experience with other 12 Step groups. If such a person questions this practice, another member can simply explain the assurances received from the facility and that the information is kept secure.

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Service Group Support Committee

Some of the ways this group has helped spread the word of the FA:

By donating FA books to multiple libraries in at least six states, coordinating multiple *connection* writing workshops, helped to coordinate Information Sessions in multiple states (two states had outstanding turnouts with many new members), coordinated non-FA sessions for doctors offices and conferences, established region-specific toll-free numbers so newcomers can speak with someone locally when they call to ask about FA, helped spread the word about FA through newspaper articles, radio interviews, and tri-folds and provide support to smaller meetings.

Next Service Group Support Committee Call

Sunday July 19th 12:30-2:00PST
Conference Call Numbers: Access code for all is 997569# Australia +61 (0) 3 8672-0100
Canada: +1 661-673-8605 UK: +44 (0) 330-606-0180 US: 1-424-203-8405

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**Save the Date**

**2016 Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous Business Convention**

- June 3-5, 2016
- Double Tree by Hilton Hotel, Danvers, MA

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Do you have feedback for Gratitude in Action?
Please email your comments to GIA@foodaddicts.org.