

Gratitude in Action

July, 2012

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!”**

Opening Remarks at the 2012 FA Convention by WSI Chair

Welcome to the 11th Annual FA WSBC. My name is Elissa and I am a food addict.

Although we are all food addicts here, it is quite possible that each of us comes to this convention with varying intentions. We may be here to do service in a new way, to learn more about a committee, to vote on motions, or to just spend a weekend with two hundred of our favorite food addicts who are not eating addictively. Whatever our personal reasons, it is certain that we have one common denominator. We all support and believe in our primary purpose - to stay abstinent and to carry the message to the still suffering food addict.

The annual World Service Business Convention helps guarantee that FA will continue to be available for all food addicts in need. By addressing the business at hand, we help FA function effectively at an organizational level. In turn, our work can help support individual meeting groups, who in turn, support the individual food addict. Being here at this convention is one way to ensure that any person, suffering right now from food addiction, has a way to get help, and that every budding food addict who may suffer in the future, has a place to come when they realize their powerlessness over food.

Clearly we are on the right track. As an organization we are thriving: We have a solid set of governance documents. We are financially sound. We have a well-functioning central service office and clear guidelines for hiring employees when needed. We have a system for addressing concerns from within our fellowship, and a plethora of communication tools for sharing recovery internally. Further, we have strong resources for sharing FA with the public, all around the world, not the least of which are a new and improved FA logo and web site.

Our foundation is strong. We have something to lean on. We can have faith that FA, as an organization is here to stay. We will not crumble. However, as the Big Book tells us, “Faith without works is dead.” So, we must continue to do our part and not “rest on our laurels.”

FA grows as an organization when we as individuals take care of ourselves. We must continue to live the twelve steps to the best of our ability. Recognizing our powerlessness over food and our need for a higher power, and then taking the action and inventory steps in sequence, ultimately allows us to make conscious contact with G-d and to practice the principles of recovery in all our affairs. Simply put: the twelve steps, well lived, makes each of us available for service.

As the Twenty-Four Hours A Day book says, "A life of service is the finest life we can live. We are here on earth to serve others. That is the beginning and end of our real worth."

Recovery has shown me that my purpose here on earth is to get well and stay well, so that G-d may help me help another food addict get well and stay well. Despite this strong conviction, living life on life's terms is not always easy. Sometimes my self-worth and my sense of purpose can get rattled.

For the past nine years, I have had and cherished the luxury of primarily being a housewife and mother of two, working outside the home just one day per week. One year ago, a change in our financial circumstances prompted a need for better employment. I accepted a position last fall and have been working full-time now since November.

Balancing this new lifestyle has been intense, with a capital "I"! Sometimes it has felt as if I've been given more than I can handle. At times, fear, doubt, and insecurity have unwantedly crept back in. However, time and again I am shown that service consistently converts those negative feelings into something much more useful. Fear, doubt, and insecurity are replaced by faith, trust, and hope, and an even deeper appreciation of this recovery. Doing service doesn't eliminate the reality of my current situation. But taking action changes my focus, renews my perspective, bolsters my attitude, and let's me feel closer to G-d. Stepping out of self-centeredness keeps me far from the food; I get filled up instead on the possibility of easing someone else's discomfort.

Serving is one small way that I am able to repay the debt that I owe to G-d, and to this recovery, for saving my life. When I reflect on my personal beginnings here, I am genuinely moved by how much collective service is behind any occurrence of reaching just one person.

At 9:00 a.m. on July 20, 1996, I weighed 200 pounds and was consumed with feelings of self-hatred and despair. By 12-noon on that same day, I felt less heavy and more hopeful. How did that happen? A good friend drove 35 minutes from her house to mine, to take me to the 10:00 a.m. meeting, one and a half blocks away from my front door. During the sharing at the meeting, someone spoke from her heart, humbly stating that she used to be 90 pounds overweight, but because of recovery she has been in a right-sized body for 15 years. At the break, someone took the time to introduce herself to me. At the end, someone was available to sponsor me. Behind the scenes, others made sure to handle business matters so that I could leave the meeting with the literature and phone list in hand. This kind of giving, this abundance of spiritual generosity, is a demonstration of gratitude in action; combined with a reliance on G-d, it is a significant part of what makes FA, FA.

The FA program gives each of us daily opportunities to serve. And, in serving we are insuring our individual recovery, as well as insuring the ongoing existence of the FA program. By being together this weekend, we are a pure embodiment of service in action. We have all made sacrifices to be here, but no doubt, this will result in something very worthwhile. Each time we take quiet time together before a business session, each time we do committee work, each time we share a meal together, each time we enter into G-d guided debate and discussion regarding the motions -- each time we do any of these things, we are doing worthwhile acts of service for one another, and we are that much closer toward sustaining FA, so that the program may continue to serve others. I am so grateful to be here with all of you! Thank you for your willingness to be here too.

That being said, let us move onward with our agenda so that the work we do in here can keep reaching the newcomer out there.

Closing Remarks from the 2012 FA Business Convention by WSI Vice-Chair

I'm Dave and I'm a food addict.

Sixteen years ago I raised my hand and said for the first time in an AA meeting that I needed help. There was no FA fellowship in Canada at that time and for the next twelve months I shifted between OA meetings and AA meetings in an attempt to find a program that would provide me with a solution to a problem that was slowly taking my life. Bingeing and purging between meetings, with suicidal thoughts, bouts of depression and rage, and an increasingly unmanageable life, I just kept going, somehow trusting that one day I would find a way out. Eventually, by the grace of an unseen power that to this day I do not understand, I went to a meeting where two women had flown more than two thousand miles from Boston to speak in a city that had no FA program. An indescribable sense of relief came over me as I felt joined together with two other recovering food addicts. Hope was born in me that day. I was no longer alone. Soon after, I asked one of these women to be my sponsor and began a journey that has saved my life. Eighteen months later I went to my first meeting in the Boston area, at Luke's Church in Chelsea, and sat with what seemed like a hundred other recovering food addicts. Once again, I was inspired. Once again hope was born in me. I knew then that if God could do this in Chelsea, that God could do this in Canada.

While the recovery in this room is, for many members now over three decades, today Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous is fourteen years old. This means that while we are far from being a new organization, we have not yet "come of age." We are still in adolescence, approaching maturity, but not there yet, and as such cannot escape the challenges and responsibilities that come with a growing organization.

The work that has been done at this convention over the past forty-eight hours is the culmination of thousands of hours of service this past year in committee meetings, conference calls, information sessions, supporting outlying groups, writing and proofreading, developing motions to help our fellowship grow, leading and sharing at meetings, and of course, sponsoring. That's why I love this program. ***It's a program of action, not a program of analysis.*** Every one of us, by doing our part to help reach a suffering newcomer, also does our part to make FA what it is today, a growing fellowship that is spreading across the planet.

As we prepare to travel to our respective destinations after another amazing business convention and celebration of this program and our recovery, I wish to send you home with three messages:

My first message is that as we move toward the next stage in our organization's maturity, we need to continue to trust God and trust the strength of our recovery.

I came into this program at the age of forty with the emotional maturity of about a four-year-old. I dealt with every problem in my life, whether in my relationships, my career, or myself, by turning to food for the solution. Instead of developing the resources and capabilities to solve those difficulties, I turned them into irresolvable food problems with yet another diet or exercise regimen that would eventually lead to failure, despair, and self-hatred.

I had to be re-parented. For the first six months, I had to be told everything: what to eat, what time to call my sponsor, what time to get up, what time to go to bed, how to deal with my wife when I was angry, and how to deal with the day-to-day challenges and stresses of life. At first, I had to learn to be honest and to surrender, which I learned was the foundation of my recovery. I did this by trusting my sponsor and letting go of my will. Like a child, my dependence on her was intense. I learned to stop fighting, to take the food off the scale when it got to 6.0 ounces, and to choose the medium fruit. Then, it was time to grow up. While my food plan and my meetings will always belong to my sponsor, and the fundamental disciplines of surrender around my food will be with me a day at a time for the rest of my life, every other area of my life will continue to be a work in

progress as my sponsor guides me to my own truth and to my own experience of God.

Just as a child must mature into adolescence and eventually into adulthood, so too must our fellowship. I often hear statements of fear and self-criticism, even among members with long-term abstinence... Such as:

- “I can’t be trusted because I’m an addict.” Or...
- “My mind is a bad neighborhood. I can’t go there.”

I have my own version of this. For several years, when I came to this convention as a voting member, I didn’t think for myself. When it came time to vote, I looked across the room and voted the way my sponsor voted. Like a child, I wanted someone else to make my decisions. But this over-reliance on my sponsor kept me chained to immaturity and simply wasn’t good for my recovery.

We learn in AWOLs to “know thyself.” By being honest with ourselves and others and being willing to live a life that we believe God wants for us, the understanding of ourselves deepens and in the process we come, through humility, to trust ourselves. While my contented abstinence needs to be the framework for all my decisions, sometimes I am confused. In these times it is important to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n enough to be still and listen and trust my inner voice, the voice of my Higher Power. Of course we need to share our confusion, fears, and uncertainty with our fellow members when they arise. But ultimately, we must risk making a decision, even if we aren’t 100% certain, and then take responsibility for the consequence of that decision. If I make a wrong decision, God will help me make another decision later to correct it. We might be wrong, but unless we risk, we can’t grow. ***I have learned that there is a God in my life, even when I make mistakes – and that I’m never really free until I live with trust, knowing that I’m in the stream of goodness, carried on this path to recovery.***

The reason I am saying all this is because it is time for us to feel good about ourselves; to step forward with confidence; to trust that our motives are solid and our recovery strong; “to appropriate, not supplicate” (24 Hour A Day); to know that we have something to say and something to offer; to bring this fellowship another step forward in our continued responsibility to reach newcomers around the world. This will not only be good for our maturing recovery; it will also be good for our maturing fellowship.

My second message is to bring courage into our commitment to do service. Everyone in this room understands the vital importance of service in our own lives and for the future of FA as a whole. The 24 Hour A Day book asks to take a periodic inventory:

- Do I feel a deep sense of loyalty to the whole [FA] movement?
- Am I not only grateful but also proud to be a part of such a wonderful fellowship?
- Is there an opportunity somewhere to advance the world of [FA] that I have put off?

This fellowship will continue to grow, in part, due to the courage of the convictions of every person in this room. However, we all understand the gravitational pull of complacency, especially as our years of abstinence increase and our lives get fuller. ***Now, more than ever, courage is needed in the lives of each and every person here.*** In this fellowship there are a growing number of members who are disconnected with the way many of us work this program. We now have members in outlying areas who’ve never heard of committed meetings, quiet time, the discipline of three phone calls a day, the 24 Hour A Day book, or even that there is a WSI or an annual business convention. Not only are some of our members drifting from their roots, many aren’t even aware that there are roots! Courage means standing tall on our convictions. Courage means sharing in our meetings and our phone calls the actions we take each day to stay abstinent. Courage means taking on that one extra sponsee, even though we are afraid it may disrupt our morning. Courage means sharing our experience, strength, and hope beyond our own meetings by making the extra effort to bring our stories into public venues where we are invited, including health fairs, high schools, college classrooms, and health-care associations. Courage means talking to our physicians about our recovery and about what this program means to us. Courage means taking the time to submit articles to The Connection magazine. Courage means resisting the tendency to let others do the service. On behalf of those in outlying areas, one of the best ways to be of service to us is to continue to return the phone calls of the newcomers who call you. ***Courage means***

being willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of our fellowship and to act our way through our fears and our complacencies.

My third message is to continue to bring unity into our fellowship.

As long as I am asked to serve in the capacity as vice-chair, and as long as I give these remarks you will hear me talk about unity.

It appears to be human nature that when societies form, polarity emerges. In the United States, you have dealt with the North/South division. You have Democrats and Republicans. In Canada, we have Liberals and Conservatives, and French and English. In our program we have the “West Coast” and the “East Coast.” We have those who read one page of the Big Book at night, and those who read two. Those who say “thank you” after someone shares and those who don’t. ***While diversity and debate are essential for the survival of a democratic society, leadership in recovery requires stepping back and transcending these divisions, while reaching for higher order thinking and responding that will reach for the common good, the underlying and unifying force that binds us together.***

I am in full support of our commitment as a conference to have clarity as to what makes an FA meeting, to educate and support groups who have been either misguided or are run with self-will. This is our work. We must continue to be a light not a judge. ***This is a time to listen and understand, not govern; to attract, not promote; to share, not preach.***

Diversity is a gift because it provides us with an opportunity to learn something about ourselves. I recently found myself judging a man I work with. By sharing the situation with my sponsor, I discovered that this man reminded me of my father who was inappropriate and embarrassed me when I was a child. He triggered judgment in me because I had not yet accepted who I am. Learning this has helped me be more accepting of this person, of my father, and, most importantly, of myself. As a result of working through this “difference” and potential conflict, and applying the 12 Steps, I’m a better person. People who trigger us are here to teach us.

For a long time I would come to meetings with a subtle, unacknowledged judgment that there was one “right” program for anyone who wanted recovery from food addiction – and I had found it. Deep down, I arrogantly believed that I “knew” what this program was and that anyone else who didn’t work the program the way I worked it, had less recovery than I did. This led to “tolerating” people rather than respecting them. While I acted the part of a spiritual member who tolerated people who were different than me, I was still filled with judgment, tension, and fear. When I’d go to meetings I’d get uptight just driving into the parking lot when I saw the cars of people I secretly wished wouldn’t be there. If this is meant to be a program of attraction, I certainly wasn’t very attractive.

What I’m coming to learn is that recovery in a fellowship means respecting each individual’s right to find the kind of program that is right for them. ***There is no one “right” program for everyone, but there is one “right” program for me.*** This goes beyond tolerance to a deep respect, acceptance and appreciation for others without the need to make anyone different. As we read in the 24 Hour A Day Book. “The human mind is so delicate and so complex that only its Maker can know it fully.” Who am I to judge how anyone else works their program or what kind of program anyone is called to live? I have a hard enough time knowing what is right for myself, let alone what is right for anyone else.

Every problem, every conflict, every challenge, every loss, comes to us as a spiritual opportunity. These are opportunities to turn to God, to reacquaint ourselves with an abiding Higher Power that lies within us to support and sustain us, to retake Step Three, and to learn from the experience. ***By doing so we have an opportunity to find true meaning in our mottos, “Let go and let God,” “Live and let live” and “Easy does it.”***

While we reflect on the evolution of our fellowship since its conception in 1998, we may not be unified in a way

that many had hoped, but it doesn't mean that we can't experience unity. We need to let go of the expectation of everyone doing the program the same, and create a new vision in the challenge of diversity.

My vision of unity is to attain a sincere respect for the diversity of the human – and thus recovery - experience. Thank you God we, as a fellowship, are unified around our definition of abstinence, our commitments to AWOLs and working the steps, and our obligation to adhere to the meeting guidelines as established by this body. Our challenge, in the next stage of our maturing fellowship, is to let go of the idea that unity means conformity. Unity is not the same as everyone doing the same thing or thinking the same. To mature we must learn that unity means acceptance amidst diversity. That is the challenge ahead of us. We have nothing to fear if we lean into the strength of the God of our own understanding, if we are confident in the strength of our convictions, if we maintain, with humility, an open mind, and are willing to seek to understand before attempting to be understood.

There is an old First Nations saying that goes: "What we do not listen to, we do not understand; What we do not understand, we fear; What we fear, we seek to destroy." How we treat minority ideas and how we learn to embrace diversity will be a test of our spiritual maturity, both within ourselves and within our fellowship.

From The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions (Illustrated) we read:

"This we owe to AA's future:

To place our common welfare first

To keep our Fellowship united

For on AA Unity depend our lives

And the lives of those to come."

We read in the 24 Hour A Day book this morning that, "**Love is the power that transforms our life.**" As I look over this audience, I know that the love and gratitude I experience from each and everyone of you has indeed transformed my life.

Travel safely, my good friends. **Our fellowship and our very lives depend on the contribution that each and every one of you makes.**

Mark your calendars

The 2013 Business Convention will take place from June 7th-9th. It will again be held at the Coco Key Hotel and Water Resort (formerly known as the Sheraton Ferncroft Resort) in Danvers, Massachusetts. Please check the FA website at www.foodaddicts.org to get more details and to register.

Do you have feedback for Gratitude in Action?

Please email your comments to GIA@foodaddicts.org.

