



# THE ABSTINENT TIMES

Fall 2024

## Statement of Purpose

The Abstinent times (AT) is a quarterly newsletter of Food Addicts Anonymous (FAA). The purpose of the AT is to carry the message and inform the fellowship of FAA Board activities and donations to FAA. The articles and features are submitted by FAA members, are not approved by the FAA Board and are not intended to be statements of FAA policy. The articles voice a variety of abstinent experiences, while keeping to our primary purpose: to stay abstinent and help other food addicts to achieve abstinence.

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### Cover Story

#### Getting Better Bit by Bit

I grew up in an alcoholic home with parents who didn't really take care of us at all. Sometimes they did, but it was inconsistent, and we never knew what was going to happen.

Sometimes we had food, sometimes we didn't. Sometimes we had clean clothes and sometimes we didn't. Sometimes we had underwear and socks, and lots of times we didn't. I learned at a very young age to take care of myself, and the way I learned was trial and error.

I had nobody showing me healthy ways to cope with the chaos, abuse, and neglect. I just did what came naturally. And what came naturally was to comfort myself with food. I used to take care of my sisters. I'm the oldest in a dysfunctional family, so I wear that badge of honor well. I'm the perfectionistic overachieving superhero that's going to



## Events

**The FAA Annual Convention** will be held on October 25th – 27th, 2024 at the Crystal Bay Hotel in St. Petersburg, FL. A convention provides a great opportunity to be with other like-minded individuals who share their experience, strength and hope. The convention committee has created a schedule that offers you an exciting weekend full of helpful workshops and relaxing meditations. All meals are included. Join us as we share the light.

**Join us for our upcoming holiday marathon telephone FAA meetings** – Labor Day, September 4<sup>th</sup>; Thanksgiving Day, November 28<sup>th</sup> and Christmas Day, December 25<sup>th</sup>. All marathons are 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern Time USA. The annual schedule of marathons is always listed on the Events tab on the website. The marathon conference call line, handy to put into your cell phone, is (607) 374-1154, pin code 169062#. To sign up to lead a marathon meeting, text Mary Lou at (631) 662-9457.

**New Meditation Book Currently on Hold:** If you are a writer and interested in FAA producing a new meditation book or have submitted an entry for consideration. This project is currently on hold as we seek a new sub-committee chair. In the meantime, entries for consideration may be included as segments in this newsletter. Provide your original writings for consideration to: [FAAatnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:FAAatnewsletter@gmail.com). . Multiple entries are encouraged.

## NEWSWORTHY ITEMS

### Happy FAA Anniversary!

Darlene D. from MD – 5 Years  
Bonnie Jean from FL – 6 Years  
Mary Lillian from PA – 20 Years  
Amie T. from VA – 25 Years



**No Topic is Off Limits!** (We want to hear from everyone in our FAA Fellowship)  
**HOW CAN FAA BETTER SERVE OUR MEMBERSHIP, INTERGROUPS & COMMITTEES?**  
Bring forth any ideas, suggestions, questions, or concerns to help FAA better serve our Members, Intergroups & Committees and extend outreach to the still suffering Food Addict.  
**ALL FAA MEMBERS & INTERGROUPS ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND!**

Although this is a Virtual Town Hall Meeting, members may dial in by phone. Additional information is available at the event tabs on our website. . Mark your calendar and plan to attend.



(Continued from pg. 1)  
save everybody by being a good example.

Meanwhile I was eating 10,000 calories in one sitting, puking it all up every day. I've had a lot of different types of eating plans – from a national weight loss organization, to fasting, to only eating bananas and yogurt, to you name it – I've done it.

I didn't like to admit that I couldn't do this thing called life.

When I got my job and my husband and my home and my car, all the things I thought would make me normal – yet I was not, in my eyes, normal. I had a complete and utter breakdown. It lasted about five or six years, I guess. The food and bingeing and purging wasn't working anymore. I had become a daily drinker and it stopped working too. Next thing I knew, I was using drugs.

Everything was a mess for quite a few years there. Even then, I had a hard time admitting complete defeat. I still wanted to do it myself and after going to a treatment center I spent another two years trying to get clean and sober on my own. Actually, I had no intention of being clean and sober. I just wanted to learn to party like everyone else without ruining my life in the process.

I also liked the fact that I was thinner when I was using these substances than when I was using food. How's that for sanity?

Anyway, fast forward into sobriety and 12 step recovery, I was just shy of 10 years and was still having a problem with food, I was quite overweight. I wasn't purging anymore, but definitely overeating and bingeing if stressed.

So I started talking about it more in the other recovery rooms. It was embarrassing and difficult. I never knew who would judge me, and who wouldn't. I had people talk to me about how we have to remain true to the singleness of purpose. I tried to start groups with my "12 step sisters and brothers" around Food, but nobody could agree on what books to use or how to do it. So, it never happened.

Then my daughter died. I don't remember the first year. I was reaching out for help all over the place. I wanted someone to relieve me of the unbearable grief I was feeling. And guess what – the only thing you can do with grief is feel it. there's nothing like that.

There's nothing strong enough to get rid of a grief like that. However, as time went by, it's been four years now, I started picking up the food like I did when I was a young girl. It didn't take long for me to be completely in the disease of food addiction again, bingeing every night, sometimes purging but not always. My weight ballooned quickly, the health problems rapidly escalated, and I didn't want it to be the food that was the problem.

I went to doctors and specialist to find out why I was in so much pain and why I couldn't lose weight. I still wanted to do it myself even though I had turned the drug and alcohol problem over to God. This food thing felt different somehow. When I hit my highest weight ever at 247 pounds, I could barely walk upstairs, or hardly bend down to tie my shoes, I'd heard enough doctors and specialist tell me that most of my problems would be solved if I just lost weight.

HOW??? became the glaring question.

I knew in my heart that I tried everything there was to try to lose weight. I knew in my heart that I couldn't stop. Finally, one day not that long ago I was speaking and I shared it from the front of the room. I am so damn glad I did. One of our fellow loopers happened to be at that meeting, and she reached out to me, and I've been doing this ever since to the best of my ability.

Now that I've become familiar with the literature and the shares, I'm understanding why I was never able to do this on my own. I'm powerless over my addiction to sugar, flour, and wheat. When that's in my body, I can't think straight. When that's in my body, I have cravings that are beyond my human power to control. Sometimes I still have emotional cravings to engage in bingeing on grey or even abstinent foods when I'm stressed out, but I'm learning that I cannot afford to do this. You are all showing me how to use the tools to manage my feelings so the cravings do not arise.

I'm getting better all the time and super grateful for FAA. Bit by bit.



## Ask Abstinent Annie

**Question: What are the “natural” flavors and “essences” in sparkling waters? Are they “safe” for food addicts to use?**

The term *natural flavor* or *natural flavoring* is defined by the FDA as “a substance extracted, distilled, or similarly derived from natural sources like plants (fruits, herbs, veggies, barks, roots, etc.) or animals (meat, dairy products, eggs, etc.) **via a method of heating, with its primary function in food being flavoring, and not nutritional.**” The FDA further states that natural flavors include the natural essence or extractives obtained from plants.

A first point to consider is that “heating” foods like fruit or vegetables alters the chemical structure of the food molecules. Think of how fruit, when heated, becomes soft and sticky. Just because the “essence” of a fruit is a very tiny amount does not mean that it is safe. For the food addict whose conscious focus has been on taste, more taste and better taste, this sets up a very dangerous condition – a pursuit of taste that secretly amplifies the overpowering urge to eat or drink addictively while appearing totally harmless. This is the invisible and subtle nature of addiction that masquerades as just wanting a 'better' taste. It is the biochemical reaction in the brain, unknown to the uninformed food addict.

Also -it's tempting to think that 'flavorings' and “essences” contain such small trace levels that it won't trigger cravings. **Using the same logic, would it be safe (or sane) to ingest just a trace of cyanide ???**

Rather than risk triggering a craving, food addicts must keep what is ingested as honestly clean as possible to the best of their ability and trust a safe outcome to a Higher Power for protection against whatever may be unknowingly lurking in what they consume, especially when eating out. This is not paranoia - it is just being as safe as possible, because addiction and relapse always have the potential to be life-threatening. This requires committing to the concept that all manipulated flavor additives are just as dangerous to our abstinent life as cyanide is to our physical life.

This is how the use of “flavorings or essences” instigates the puzzling start of cravings, despite all sincere efforts to abstain from recognized addictive foods and ingredients, with the accompanying self-doubt, blame and shame. If the underlying motive for using flavor enhancers is not for nutrition, then using them will not satisfy the real need being felt, which is not physical, but rather emotional and/or spiritual. The real issue must be addressed with the proper emotional and spiritual tools in order to satisfy the true need being felt by a food addict. A good rule of thumb is – if there is NO nutritional benefit to something, then it can pose a threat to abstinence. There is no “neutral” ground regarding what we ingest. Abstinence and recovery are best served by only those foods and behaviors that are “value-added.” Flavor is not a “value-added” quality of food. A major, defining clue is revealed by how determined a food addict is to insist that something (“just a little flavor”) is ok. The more energy that is invested in trying to justify something as neutral or okay, the more proof it provides of the power of addiction.

Wishing you an abstinent, healthy and peace-filled life – Annie (a recovering food addict)



## Awakening the 7<sup>th</sup> Step Prayer

### ***“God, help me listen to my Higher Self”***

1. Who is God to you?
2. What does it mean to help?
3. How do you listen – what does it mean to truly listen?
4. Who or what is your Higher Self?

### ***“As you and I make the changes in my life”***

1. What are some of the changes you would like to make in your life?
2. How do you anticipate making these changes?

### ***“that will allow me to live a free, useful and happy life”***

1. How would you define allow; what do you mean by allow?
2. Describe a “free” life
3. Is your life useful — what is a useful life for you?

### ***“Help me not to find fault with all that I do – and with those who cross my path”***

1. What is meant by “finding fault” – complaining, comparing, judging, criticizing, mocking, gossiping
2. How do you not find fault?
3. How do you identify those who cross your path?

### ***“As I continue to stay abstinent”***

1. How do you define abstinent? What constitutes abstinence – food, behaviors, or both? Identify specific behaviors.
2. What do you do to stay abstinent- identify at least three things you do, no matter what.

### ***Help me be released from the cravings for foods”***

1. What are some of your cravings
  - a. Identify food cravings
  - b. Identify behavior cravings
  - c. What do you do when you experience a craving - how do you or would you overcome it?

2. What does it mean to be released – your actions, your thoughts or both?

### ***“That are not in my best interest”***

1. How do you know when something is not in your best interest?
2. How do you know when something is in your best interest?

### ***“Help me learn that food is to nourish my body”***

1. Define learn.
2. What ways do you practice learning about food as nourishment ?

### ***“So, my spirit can carry out Your Plans for me”***

1. What is your connection with your Spirit?
2. How do you define it?
3. Where do you find it?
4. What is meant by carry-out – how do you execute the process?

### ***“Help me to be compassionate, trusting, forgiving, loving, and kind to myself and others”***

1. Describe when/how you have been:
  - a. Compassionate to yourself
  - b. Trusting of yourself
  - c. Forgiving of yourself
  - d. Loving of yourself
  - e. Kind to yourself
2. Describe when/how you have been:
  - a. Compassionate to others
  - b. Trusting of others, who specifically
  - c. Forgiving of others
  - d. Loving of others
  - e. Kind to others

### ***“As I serve You and the people on earth”***

1. How do you define serve?
2. In the last three days who have you served and how ?



# The Roots of FAA Recovery

## SERVICE      UNITY      ABSTINENCE

The FAA trademarked logo is everywhere – books, pamphlets, convention and workshop recordings, anniversary medallions, official correspondence, The Abstinent Times newsletter, on the internet – anything involving FAA, there it is. It's so commonly present, yet how much conscious thought or acknowledgment is devoted to how and why it communicates the foundation of the FAA message of hope for those seeking peace in their relationship with food. This identity statement can form the basis for understanding, accepting and benefiting from the solutions offered by FAA.

Abstinence, seen in the lower arc within the circle, provides the foundation for our unity and ability to do service in carrying the message of hope in recovery. It represents the answer to the motives which bring many people struggling with their relationship with food – their weight (over or under), or the insanity of their behaviors with food – to explore what help FAA can offer in this struggle.

At face value, abstinence is simple and straightforward: we refrain from eating any and all forms of sugar, flour and wheat (SFW). This simplicity belies the fact that actually eliminating these substances from our food is hard work (but it IS far easier than remaining addicted) in several different ways:

The food industry has created many ingredients/additives to processed foods that are one or more forms of SFW. It behooves us to know the names of these hidden substances that can derail our brains and

sabotage our sincere efforts, leading us back to addictive foods. There can be nothing more discouraging and self-shaming than to genuinely try to stop our food abuse, yet repeatedly fail because we are unaware of the hidden substances that still trip that switch in the brain that triggers the irresistible physical cravings over which we are powerless.

This requires time and vigilance to search for and obtain “clean” food OR to prepare meals from scratch using unprocessed ingredients.

Prepared foods continually develop new ingredients/additives with unfamiliar names which invariably are some form of SFW used to “make it taste better”. (Case in point – why go to the expense of adding dextrose (sugar) to iodized table salt, with dextrose in greater quantity than iodine in the list of ingredients?)

Planning and preparing abstinent meals requires time and thought – a change from old daily routines, and an effort that requires setting new priorities. This preparation becomes simpler and easier as time goes on as we get used to planning the time to prepare nutritious meals.

Surrendering control and accepting direction from outside oneself is not easy. But we have repeatedly proved to ourselves that we cannot do it on our own.

Because of the challenges presented by adopting an abstinent lifestyle, FAA offers numerous tools and supports for beginning and sustaining a journey of recovery from food addiction. Some include:

- Literature offers information, instruction and shared experiences from recovering food addicts.
- Sponsors who serve as guides and mentors who offer their experiences, strength and hope for learning about creating an abstinent lifestyle.



➤ Meetings create a safe, non-judging and supportive environment for food addicts to meet and share experiences where they discover common issues and difficulties regarding the use/misuse of food, as well as their victories and progress, one day at a time. Advances in technology make it possible to have any number of avenues for connecting with support from other food addicts, such as: phone; virtual; online (Loop); in-person, face to face meetings; workshops, annual conventions and retreats.

Service is a most powerful tool that supports abstinence. Strong recovery from food addiction uses service as a means of cultivating self-respect by being useful to others. Sharing with others gives us greater insight and understanding of our own experiences with food addiction. Being useful to a fellow food addict is not limited to what we say. Being useful to others can take many diverse forms: just being abstinent shows it can be done; starting or chairing a meeting; preparing the meeting space; writing an article for the Abstinent Times; offering a ride to a member; sponsoring a newcomer and having a sponsor helps both persons continue their own growth as they walk together on this journey; just keeping in touch with another member; participating in one of the many committees or working groups within FAA; even just attending a meeting are a few of the countless ways to be helpful to others. When we focus on our Primary Purpose of staying abstinent and helping to carry the message of hope to others, it replaces our old, harmful focus on using food for any reason other than as sound nutrition for our bodies.

Service becomes a source of growing self-esteem, giving us a positive purpose in life and freeing us from the prison of our food addiction insanity, to grow and blossom in the sunlight of recovery.



Unity is the glue that gives us strength in numbers, the strength needed to prevail over the power of food addiction. Near the front of the FAA “Welcome Newcomer” booklet is a document titled *Understanding Food Addiction and Why Abstinence is Necessary, A Nutritionist’s Perspective*. It provides a clear view of food addiction as a biochemical reaction in the brain, and reinforces the fact that abstinence from sugar, flour, wheat and excessive volume is the one common and necessary solution for all food addicts. Unity gives us greater strength than we alone can muster to overcome the lure of addictive foods while we learn more appropriate ways to deal with uncomfortable or troubling circumstances in our lives. We learn together to grow up emotionally and spiritually with appropriate ways to cope with life’s challenges. We gain strength and hope in sharing our experiences together in unity.



Next issue will address the FAA Guide to Abstinence as a starting point for newcomers and for those desiring an enhanced recovery program. **Be sure to tune in to our next issue.**

Each quarterly issue of The Abstinent Times focuses on three steps. The next issue (Winter 2024) will feature Steps 10, 11 and 12. Please consider submitting an article for the next issue. Submissions due by 1 October 2024.

## There is No Recovery Without

### Abstinence

A noted 1955 book titled “No Man Is An Island” was followed by the 1962 movie of the same title. It was an oft cited and quoted statement that to a young addict sounded like an order, an edict from on high. And it was equally responded to, at an early age, by this food addict with a defiant “Why not? And Says Who?” Thus it became one of the many “rules” of a lifetime to be fought against while trying to prove it wrong by seeking to succeed in aloneness in life. It was a slow and tortuous journey to finally understand that this is not a “rule” decreed by some “dictator,” but a conclusion based on centuries of observing humans and the nature of their existence physically, spiritually, mentally, socially and especially emotionally.

“There is no recovery without Abstinence” was a strong parallel in my life, recognized only after I heard about the notion of “recovery.” I also believed that I was destined to always be alone, not needing or expecting help or support from anyone, anything or anywhere. Life was dominated by one question: “What am I?” It was never “Who am I?” I had always believed that I just enjoyed the taste of food, the only pleasure I had in life, even though I sensed that it was controlling my life. I believed that I was born with a rebellious, self-destruction destiny. I had NO CLUE that the one pleasure in my life was the real cause of my dark existence.

By the grace of a wise and loving Higher Power (which I believed was irrelevant in my life), the true source of the dreary gray of my life was finally revealed to me by a member of Food Addicts Anonymous when I was at rock bottom. It was magic and miraculous.

Over the years since then, I have come to respect and believe in all the tenets and principles of abstinence and recovery taught in FAA. **This is a program of honesty.** And the reality is that if I decide on any given day to only do 60% of what is prescribed and be willing to settle for 60% of what’s promised, I will likely get nothing of what the program provides, because it’s a package deal, all or none.

Many guidelines are “suggested” or “highly encouraged,” but I have followed, to the best of my ability, the whole prescription FAA provides for becoming a more responsible, more mature and honest member of the society and world I live in today. I do this because I truly want and really do deserve all the freedom and beauty in life that FAA promises.

I understand that I cannot carry a message of strength and hope for a better life, by word or deed, if I do not have the clear mind and caring for others that can only come from abstinence and doing the work of recovery outlined in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions.

Recovery

12 Steps Healing =  
12 Traditions

Abstinence +

