



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

Winter 2020

Dear A.A. Friends,

Let's open our meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the A.A. Preamble:

Alcoholics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."*

Freedom While in Prison

"My name is Ken, and I am an alcoholic. I would like to share my story with you, in hopes of helping somebody else who may need it. Someone else helped me, and I have been sober now for several years. I am trying to help other inmates who are alcoholics. I started drinking beer at the age of 7. I would steal beer from my mother and father when they passed out from drinking. My drinking got worse, and I began to stay up late. When I was 14 years old, I passed out at a party and my friend's mother took me

home. I got spanked, but that did not stop me from wanting to drink. At 16, I started drinking whiskey — I would ask a friend to buy it for me. Then, my drinking got so bad I would pass out behind my grandmother's church. My grandmother's pastor would take me to grandma's house to let me sleep off the alcohol. Sometimes I used to cuss him out for trying to help me. The best day of my life was getting this life sentence: that was the only way I was going to stop drinking. I have been without a drink of any kind for 15 years now." — **Kenneth N., South East Region**

"Today I have taken one day at a time! I can say that being in prison saved my life. I do believe that I would have not gotten my life saved and that I would be dead if it were not for the grace of God. I see the error of my ways and continue each day to do what I need to do to be free and to stay that way. I do not have any more second chances. I have been in and out of jail since I started drinking. God has given me a chance to prove that I can be the person I was meant to be. This is just a taste of the life." — **Dwayne B., Pacific Region**

"I have been working with a sponsor for the past seven years and have been blessed with his guidance and support, as I work the Steps and navigate through this very challenging time and environment. Now, as I am preparing for my release, I realize the importance of helping another who is in the same position as I am. I will never forget how much sponsorship has helped me. To be able to be truly honest with someone without the fear of being



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judged has been vital part of my growth. It would mean a lot to me to be able to help someone in the same way. I may not always be, but today I am grateful that I have been given another opportunity to make a life for myself. I am thankful for my sobriety and newfound friendships, and I will never forget that it was through God and A.A. that this new life is possible.” — **Paul K., North East Region**

Looking for Literature

“I am an inmate in Kentucky. I am in recovery and working the Twelve Steps using spiritual principles to combat my character defects. There does not seem to be a Big Book in this place. If there is a way to get one it will not only help me, but others in this cell. COVID-19 has stopped all meetings, but I am still trying to share hope. Getting the Big Book would be a blessing. Thank you for your time and consideration. God bless you.” — **Donald M., South East Region**

“The best day of my life was getting this life sentence: that was the only way I was going to stop drinking.”

“My name is Walter, and I am a 42-year-old man. I am an alcoholic, as well as a drug addict. I am currently doing time for possession of a stimulant. I have attended A.A. in the past and it did make a big difference in my life, but I fell back into drugs and drinking. Why I am writing? Here in jail we have no programs at all, and with the COVID-19 crisis things are more difficult, as far as any kind of church or outside volunteers coming into the facility. There is an A.A. group here, but they do not have contact with the jail. Whether it is lack of interest from the jail administration or A.A. locally, I cannot say for certain, but I was told to take it upon myself. That is how I got your address; so here I am. Like I said before, we have no Twelve Step programs or any type of self-help, such as literature from A.A. It is my hope to acquire some through you. It would be much appreciated if, somehow, I could get a softcover Big Book and any other literature you could pass along. I was wondering if you have any kind of correspondence programs or A.A. members I could correspond with about A.A. matters. I am going to lay it down to you how it is: I am here and I want to better myself. I stay to myself mostly in here because, as you can guess, it is not a positive place. When I go outside my cell it is all loud yelling, negativity, and nothing but trouble. On the streets, before I came to jail, a close friend of mine was shot in the chest. My dad died due to drug and alcohol overdose on Christmas Eve in a back-alley stairway, cold and alone. I am pretty much in here alone; I want to change and I need help; any kind of direction would be helpful. Thank you in advance.” — **Walter T., South West Region**

“Greetings from sunny California. I hope all is well with you. I opened my mail and there was your letter waiting for me. Yes, I did receive a new pen pal. He is from the Chicago area and we are writing. The G.S.O. Correspondence Program is going full swing as

far as I am concerned. Thank you for the hookup. Stay healthy! I am sending my respects to you, and I hope you are doing well.”

— **David G., Pacific Region**

Reaching out for Correspondence

“Hello, my name is Billy D. I am writing from California. I have suffered from alcoholism since the age of 5. I have been in and out of correctional institutions my whole adult life. I have had a lot of time in the Fellowship and have managed to put some time together in the past. I have kept journals and tried my best to work the Steps. However, I have no access to meetings or sponsors. I do have a subscription to Grapevine, which gets sent to me. That helps a lot. I also have a Big Book and *A.A. in Prison*, where I read something about a prison correspondence program. I am interested in possibly acquiring a sponsor with whom I can work on the Steps. Please write back. I have the desire to be sober again for the first time since my last relapse in 2017. Having an alcoholic on the outside would be very helpful. Thank you for everything you do.” — **William D., Pacific Region**

“Hi! I wrote your office a couple of months ago. I was moved to another prison within the last month, which is probably the reason I never heard back. I mentioned having a sponsor, but he is busy most of the time. I feel kind of isolated, and in the Big Book it was said ‘we’ do not have to do this alone. I want so badly to feel like I am part of the Fellowship. Right now, I really feel alone and that no one cares. I just want someone to correspond with and talk about the program and share my experience, strength and hope. Once I get some money, I will get a subscription to Grapevine. I love the articles; they make me feel like I am part of the meeting. COVID-19 has stopped outside visitors from coming in and conducting meetings. I will probably try to start my own meetings here soon. I just finished the Fourth Step, and I’m waiting for the right time to take the Fifth Step with my sponsor. If you guys can think of any way I can be of service while I am here, I would really appreciate it. I feel like a service position would help me get out of my head. Again, I would like to have a couple of people to write to about A.A., and for a way for me to be of service.” — **William B., South West Region**

Gratitude for A.A.

“Thank you for your help and time. Also, I just thought about this: I would like to thank all the people involved in A.A., all the way back to Dr. Bob and Bill W. This program has saved my life; without it I would surely be dead. Thank you for all the future souls that will be saved by the continuing efforts of all the people that make up A.A. — the ‘lifesaving machine’ that it is. Thank you to the person who is reading this letter, for taking the time out of your day to respond to this letter. Whether you can help me directly or not, I am just thankful you exist and care enough about humanity. From my heart to yours, God bless you, and may your life be full and safe while fighting these dangerous and trying times. I hope to hear from you. Until then, goodbye for now.” — **Adam B., Pacific Region**

“I always thought that if you looked good and worked out then everything was good. I am 43 years old now. My whole life was a party on the surface, but deeper down it was not; it was all bad. I partied from 6:00 a.m. until I passed out. I was always in

the wrong place at the wrong time. Due to drugs and alcohol, my mind I was in a crazy place. That got me into things I should have never done, like ending up in jail with a 10-year sentence for robbing a bank. The only thing that keeps me above water are my two sons, and knowing I still have a chance.” — **Sean S., South West Region**

Finding a New Way

“I’m finding a new way. My name is Walter B., and I am an alcoholic. I started drinking at 12 years old, and now I am 61. The most time I have been sober is four and a half years (from 2016 up to now) — my five-year anniversary is coming up. A couple of weeks back I was sent to the parole board for the third time. While sober, I have done both of my program’s therapeutic community violence prevention sessions. The COVID-19 virus has slowed things down. I have been reading the Big Book (the first 164 pages). Some of the stories sure remind me of those drinking days — how I could not wait to get that beer and liquor in me because I needed it to talk to people and to dance. I was the life of party. But now, I know that I am powerless over alcohol and that my life is unmanageable. When I was in the T.C., I always helped the newcomer.” — **Walter B., South East Region**

“My name is Michael, and I am an alcoholic. ‘Thank you’ seems inadequate, but it’s all I’ve got. Although I have not had a drink in 20 years, I am still and always will be an alcoholic, and I have only recently truly begun my recovery. People continue to stress to me the importance of support and sponsorship, so I am knocking on doors (figuratively speaking, of course) to see if I can convince someone to assist me on my journey to remain sober for the rest of my days. I used to be a very bad man, an angry man. However, along with other recovery pursuits, A.A. has begun to assist me in growing and in finding a better way. I am gaining self-awareness and personal understanding. I attended A.A. and N.A. meetings here in prison, and I started doing so because the parole board wanted me to. I used to sit in the corner and sleep through the meetings, until one day something got through, and then something else, and before I knew it, I was beginning to identify with my alcoholic brothers. I started to pay attention. I like to say that I caught the recovery bug. All institutional groups have been suspended due to COVID-19, so I am looking to continue pursuing my recovery every way I can. I need all the help I can get. I am finally really learning to reach out and ask for that help. I am a baby in recovery, and I need help learning how to walk this walk. Any assistance or information you are able to provide me will be greatly appreciated. Again, many thanks to you for your time and efforts on my behalf.” — **Michael F., Pacific Region**

I have been working the Twelve Steps on my own, especially through this COVID-19 pandemic. In Step Four, I made a fearless moral inventory of myself. At first, I had a really hard time understanding where to start. I started drinking alcohol at a very young age, but I did not start to harm others until I was 12 years old — when I made the choice to join a gang. Through this fearless moral inventory, I was able to understand some of my character defects: anger, depression, fear, and whole lot of resentment. I started making a list of people I have harmed, and I became willing to write amends letters. I had never thought about

how much harm I had caused to others, and it really hurts me because I understand that hurting people is not normal. I wish I could take back all the pain that I have caused. That is not simple though! Through material I have read, I have learned that if we are remorseful and truly sorry for our wrongs to others, then we should become people of service. To be of service, I need someone to talk me through the Steps. I do not know if I am doing this right or wrong. Is there anyone there who can help me? Thank you.”

— **Salvador C., Pacific Region**

Feeling Discouraged

“I do not think I have a good reason to stay sober anymore. On May 27, 2016, I got sober due to a DUI and thought that was my bottom. I was forced by a judge to go to meetings for a year, so I did. I got myself a seat, because it was the last open door left and I had a keg at my house. More often, I had whiskey, but I did not even walk in my house without a beer in my hand. I lost my job due to my second DUI. As a result of losing my job, I also lost my house in a nice neighborhood. Then, my wife left me because she did not like me sober; she lost it after having to go all these weird places. Due to my sobriety I have lost contact with my dad; we used to talk every day, until I got sober. I have worked the Twelve Steps, called hospitals, had a sponsor, and worked with others. I was in the middle of the Third Step again with my sponsor when I was put in jail based on the lies of an A.A. member. I am currently the GSR of a group, and I talk to my alternate GSR through letters. I got this position because the group said I had fire in my eyes when it came to A.A. I used to chair open meetings and book study sessions. I worked as honestly as I could; I can recite so much of the A.A. literature. When I got to jail, I ordered the Big Book and *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* because I needed A.A. in my life and I needed to spread the word of A.A. to others. I went to our area’s 25th conference three years ago, where I heard a lot people share great stories. But I feel lonely going through this; I have less in my corner than when I was a drunk. So, when the day comes, I will walk out of here — they cannot keep me here forever — and go back to a simple life of forgetting what feelings are. On my 2013 pickup, I have a sticker that says, ‘Friend of Bill W.’ yet I have no such friends. One is a lonely number.” — **Cole S., Southwest Region**

“A.A. has begun to assist me in growing and in finding a better way. I am gaining self-awareness and personal understanding.”

“Edging God Out”

“My name is Antoine, and I am an alcoholic. I am writing to get the readings used at meetings. Some of us are unaware of the impact that sobriety has on staying free — not only on the outside but very much so on the inside. Just because we may have relapsed and ended up here does not mean everything is over. Here we repent and again find our higher power and start our journey. Here in jail I had some sober time and I even worked in a treatment facility. You know the story: EGO. I Edged God Out of my

life. My ego got the best of me. But my true calling in life is to help others, and that is what is helping me. Hence the reason I am writing you. I am willing to make the difference that needs to be made. Who knows where this will lead from me taking a small risk — a good risk — that can make a difference in someone else's life? I am also writing the administration of the jail to get permission for a set time of day to have meetings. I do have a Big Book and I read it every day. Having the readings will make the experience more official and much more like when we leave here and attend on the outside. But I wanted a meeting and to start to build my foundation for my recovery in here. If possible, can you also send on "A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic"? For some reason, my people do not want to show their weakness in other groups outside jail. That is where I come in and help them and let them know that people of all races and color are in the meetings to save their lives. I feel that this is something I must do. This is one of the reasons I am here, and God will reveal to me what to do next. — **Antoine S., North East Region**

"Hello, my name is Justin, and I am an alcoholic. I am writing you first and foremost to let you know how grateful I am for Sharing From Behind the Walls. Since my 33rd birthday, I have not been to a meeting due to my incarceration. It is a very heartwarming and sobering experience every time I can read your new posts. Thank you. Alcohol has been the root of most — if not all — of my problems growing up and coming into adulthood. Cunning, baffling, and powerful are the only words I can use to describe the way the disease alcoholism has been in my life. It has blown me away. My problem is and has been my failure to recognize this disease, as the cause of most — again, if not all — of my difficulties in life. The blatant disregard to give myself a break and trust my higher power has led me to learn through trial and error that my disease will only get worse, not better. What happened? I do not know. As a young child I grew up in a very hardworking household, full of love and respect. Was I a black sheep? I do not think so, due to the fact that all I have is a younger sister! How could I be the sibling who chose to destroy his life with alcohol? I do not know, but I do know that ego, lack of self-control, and the "I can do it myself attitude" have led to lack of humility time and time again. The first sponsor I ever had in A.A. taught me that humility is the equivalent of staying teachable. It means taking on service commitments and keeping my word that I will finish them; it means staying in the Fellowship and helping anyone in need who has questions about alcoholism. My criminal history is not pretty, but neither is my disease of alcoholism. Treating myself like I have a disease is not easy, but it is the only way to never come back to this jailhouse and to never hurt myself again. I have been sober for 22 months, according to the date I got locked up. It is more difficult to stay sober in this jail than it is on the street. My sobriety is key to my survival in here, as it will be one day when I leave. Staying sober is the challenge of my life and I am not giving up anytime soon. A.A.'s four most basic prayers help me get through my despair most days: these are the Serenity Prayer, the

Third Step Prayer, the Seventh Step Prayer, and the Prayer of St. Francis. Times are rough now, but I know things will get better. Through meetings, sponsorship and working the Steps I will continue to do my best in overcoming my self-contempt. Alcoholism is a disease. Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous." — **Justin D., South East Region**

"My name is Hillary. I am 33 years old and I have struggled with alcoholism since I was 15. In the past few years, it has gotten to the point of being uncontrollable. It has caused me to lose my family, my friends, jobs, and places to live. It was also my main motive to drop out of college. In the past year and a half alone, I have been to jail four times; all of these were for alcohol-related situations. As of right now, I am incarcerated for the first time in 10 years, but it is my third lifetime DUI. I am ready to admit that I can completely and undoubtedly change my path. But I truly need help from something stronger than myself — obviously. I have tried A.A. meetings in the past, but they were always court ordered. I will admit it: I had never taken them seriously, like I should have. I see now that I avoided such programs because I was scared to see myself for who I really am. Without doubt, I am an alcoholic. I am writing A.A. to ask for help. I finished reading the Fourth Edition of the Big Book a couple of days ago. I enjoyed it. I found the material incredibly useful and relatable. However, I felt as though I genuinely need more information to continue. As of right now, there is no longer an operating program that comes to the jail, or even in my small town for that matter. So, I was wondering if you could send more information to me. Anything you have available would be appreciated. Reading the Big Book gave me a lot of hope that I can change for the better. I am keeping my fingers crossed that I hear from you soon. Thank you for your time." — **Hillary R., West Central Region**

Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.)

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have at least six more months to serve. We randomly match an outside A.A. from another region, with men writing to men and women writing to women. We do not provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers or court officials. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you make contact, an outside A.A. member may be willing to sponsor you. If you have an interest in sharing about your experiences as they relate to sobriety and problems with alcohol, then please write and request a form. We appreciate your patience.

Prerelease Contact

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have a release date scheduled three to six months away. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you have transitioned from "inside" A.A. to "outside" A.A., someone may be willing to sponsor you. We try to arrange for an outside A.A. in your home community to temporarily write to you just prior to your release. You can request a form, or write to us, providing your release date and destination (address, city, state, phone number).

If you are receiving this newsletter and you would like to have an A.A. member write to you and share their experience, strength and hope, please fill out and mail in the attached form.