



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Winter 2021

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 people 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."*

Helping Others Helps Me the Most

"Hello, my name is Christopher, and I am writing you this letter to describe what drinking was like for me. Drinking was a devastating blow to my existence. It really got a grip on me, and I thought it was going to be the end of me. Drinking made me lose things like my house, cars, relationships, friendships, and, of course, my freedom. Drinking made me a self-centered, irresponsible piece of garbage. It progressed until I ended up in here for almost a decade. I got into A.A. about 12 years ago on the outside, but never took it seriously. I went to meetings, but I did not put in the work. It was mainly a social hangout for me. Today A.A. is so different for me. I am putting in the work; I do the Steps. I help others and that is what helps me the most. I look forward to hearing from you." — Christopher M., Southwest Region

"I am glad there are people who care about other people. Bless you and your organization for helping people. That is what I want to do. I have been incarcerated for 24 years and I'm finally getting a chance to be free. I drank a lot when I was younger, from 13 to 28, until I went to jail. I thought I was a good person, but one night I turned into a monster. I am not

blaming drinking for my actions, but drinking was the problem that was in my life. I know now that drinking and drugs are not a good combination when you are angry and sad. I have been clean and sober for 24 years, but you never know when circumstances change. It is great being clean. I know I can't heal my hurt, but I would love to help others. I have to stay clean and tell my story, which was so devastating to others. I see the parole board in October 2021 and would like to show them I am serious about staying clean and sober, and about helping others." — Franklin W., Southeast Region

"My name is John, and I am a person in custody in Canada. How are you? I hope you are feeling fine. As for me, I am doing well. Currently I am serving a life sentence, and I have been in prison for 30 years. I am part of the facility's A.A. group, and I have been sober for 26 years. We have many members in our group; we meet each Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. I am the one who makes the coffee for the group; I really enjoy doing this. I would like to have my own Big Book because I take my sobriety seriously." — John P., Eastern Canada

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A Wonderful Program

"Hello, my name is Ryan, and I'm from Bend, Oregon. The reason for this letter is to let you know that I am finally breaking through the stigma of A.A. here in jail. Up until this point, I have had a hard time attracting anyone here to the program and the promises it puts forth. I am excited to say that my meetings are starting to take root, and more inmates are wondering, 'What are these guys doing?' and coming over to the table. As you know, with Covid-19 restrictions it has been difficult with only video visits. I would say we have had two outside meetings total every month for the last nine months I have been here. I am grateful that others have been able to be of service and make it in. Someone even sent in a

purchased subscription to the Grapevine. I love the experience, strength and hope shared by the members on the video visits. Thank you for your service, from my heart and that of my family. This is a wonderful program. Our spirits are shining from the West Coast to the East.” — **Ryan S., Pacific Region**

“I was alone and the only one injured. I feel like for most people this would be a turning point, a bottom, where they reevaluate their relationship with alcohol. For me, this was just the beginning. There would be four more DWIs, encounters with the law, and failed relationships, across four different states. I believe I have been a true testament to ‘Where you go,

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there you are.’ No matter my location, my alcoholism followed. I always seemed to convince myself that a change in geography would surely be the ticket to my happiness, a fresh start. Sadly, this was never the solution. I had been told at a young age by my father that alcoholism ran in our family and that I needed to be careful with my drinking. Dad just celebrated 30 years sober. I was not going to be like him. I wasn’t going to have to go to those meetings my whole life. I was different. Looking back over a span of 20 years, the only difference between us is that he didn’t end up in prison; he surrendered to a Higher Power. He still does this one day at a time. I used to think my dad was a hypocrite, trying to warn me of what might be to come, the warning signs he saw. Now I admire him for his determination to stay sober, despite witnessing me choose the path I followed, knowing full well what the outcome would be. At one time, I viewed going to meetings as a chore. But being locked up during a pandemic, I wish I could just go to the meeting. I would give anything to gather with some fellows. I still have my Big Book and can pick up the phone. I am thankful to this program. I have a home group in Astoria, Oregon, with members who loved me when I could not love myself. I am still in regular contact with them. I can’t wait for the day to catch the 7:00 a.m. meeting of the ‘Sunny Side Group.’ Hopefully I can pass on something to help someone not get to the point I currently find myself.” — **Bradley M., Pacific Region**

Needing Help from Another Alcoholic

“I was reading the Grapevine and I came across some information I have never before seen or heard. I was surprised to find out that there are outside sponsors available for us in

prison. This is a plus for me. I need a sponsor to help me and guide me through sobriety. I am in A.A. in prison, and I am planning to continue the program through the time I am here through our A.A. meetings. I learned a lot of things from other members’ perspectives through our discussions, and I opened up to share my problems with other members. I see myself more through other members’ problems. I understand we all have an addiction and that is why we are here: to get help. Please write me and send me information or brochures on this Corrections Correspondence Service. I thank you very much for your time.” — **John X., Southwest Region**

“Hello, my name is Billie. I am a 33-year-old Native American, and I am an alcoholic. I am currently serving nine years in an Arizona correctional facility. I am looking forward to working the Steps and learning how to use the tools this program provides. Honestly, I am at a place in my journey where I just feel overwhelmed and lost. I want to let go and let God in, but I am not sure how to completely do that. I know another alcoholic might have some experience on how to go about that. Mainly, the family, the kids I left behind, the appeals process, and my obligations are all I have. I have been trying to build my relationship with God, but it seems like I am talking to myself. I am working on that with my Higher Power, but I believe corresponding with an A.A. member on the outside would be helpful in my journey.” — **Billie G., Pacific Region**

“I am writing you from a correctional center in Connecticut. My name is Lawrence, and I am going to be incarcerated for about five years. My incarceration is related to alcohol and nights at the bar that led to my arrest. A little about myself: I grew up in two small towns in Connecticut. My parents were two artists, struggling to make ends meet. I always made my way back to the home, my father’s studio; this was a magical place. One thing that comes with the arts are the people who like to party. So, I grew up around that kind of lifestyle being acceptable. This got me in great trouble. I spent a lot of time in the city. It would be great to correspond with someone in the New York or Connecticut area. There are no support groups at this time in my facility because of Covid-19. Please, I would love some literature and someone to correspond with.” — **Lawrence L., Northeast Region**

“My name is Matthew, and my story starts while I am here in jail. I have been locked up for a while now. The whole time I have been here, I have become aware of my new self. I know for a fact that I can grasp a strong position in the life I have dealt myself in the past two years. I am now 41 years old and have a lot of good left in me. I am full of energy and good spirits. I want to give this back to my family, my surroundings and my self-worth. I am just an average guy who really loves

and misses his family. I know I am an alcoholic and an addict who got caught up in everyday life. I am working through so much lately. My addiction took my left leg and my freedom (I don't know for how long). Today I am trying to live life sober and handicapped. I have not made the best choices since this accident, and now I am sorry and in jail. Need help." —

Matthew L., East Central Region

"I am currently incarcerated in a facility that does not have any kind of A.A. or N.A. services. I have been an alcoholic and an addict since I was 13 years old, and I am currently 30 years old with one year clean and serene. Right now I am locked up due to a bad decision. I thought I hadn't relapsed; I believe I had a mental relapse because I let myself grow complacent. For reasons I still do not know, I decided to steal something from a store and got caught. I am very grateful for staying clean through all of this. I made it one year sober, and it sounds crazy to me. When I get released, I will be going back home to a small town in West Virginia. The last time I was in West Virginia, there were not any A.A. or N.A. groups. I have been studying the Big Book to practice the A.A. principles in all my daily affairs. I really have high hopes of being able to go back home and start an A.A. or N.A. group and try to spread the message of recovery in the small town where I grew up. I do try to keep my ears and eyes open to exercise the Twelve Steps. Until then, this self-help method can help me stay in good spirits (in a place that is known to break spirits down). This will help me be better prepared to help the next struggling alcoholic (like I was 12 months ago). I hope to hear from you soon." — **Christian L., Southeast Region**

"I learned a lot of things from other members' perspectives through our discussions, and I opened up to share my problems with other members. I see myself more through other members' problems."

"My name is Timothy. I am a 39-year-old Floridian, currently incarcerated for a nonviolent offense. I have been 'in the rooms' of recovery for years, both in and out of jail. My sobriety date is February 12, 2021. I never want to drink or use again. I will be released in August 2022. Next year I plan to start my life again in South Carolina, where I will be close to my mother and extended family. I am feeling intimidated about leaving behind my hometown of Miami, all my old friends, and habits. I know that my sobriety is the single most important thing in my life. I welcome any of your guidance along the

way." — **Timothy G., Southeast Region**

A Chance to Live a Productive Life

"I have read the entire *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book, and I love it. In my opinion *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* by A.A. World Services is one of the greatest books of all time. My favorite part is the prayer 'With each passing day of our lives may every one of us sense more deeply the inner meaning of A.A.'s simple prayer: God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.' Thank you for your time, and I look forward to applying these principles in the real world, and all my affairs."

— **Jose G., Southwest Region**

"I am writing this letter to your organization because I believe I have truly hit rock bottom with my life because of my 20-year active alcoholic lifestyle. My ability, or lack thereof, to cope with the disease obviously has not been working and unfortunately, I have wound up in my current position, in jail. Fortunately, I was able to obtain a copy of the Big Book and found your address in the back, where it said no matter how isolated I am, I would be invited to carry on a correspondence that will help insure my sobriety. I have been in and out of rehabs and hospitals for approximately 13 years, while being out of the A.A. program that entire time. I never really made it past Step Three, turning my will and life over to the care of God. I thought there had to be some way for me to do it myself, but I was wrong. The entire year of 2021 I have been in and out of hospitals for seizures, including spending three weeks in the ICU. I don't remember any of this, or of the first two weeks of jail at all. I have been here since June 23, 2021, and my next court date isn't until October 25. I have been sober for two months, and if I am released in October, it will be my four-month mark. I am sick and tired of being sick and tired, and for all of the hurt and mistrust I have put upon myself, my family and loved ones. There is not an A.A. group in this facility due to Covid-19. The day I am released I will have the option of walking one direction — to go to a meeting — or the opposite — to go to the store. I want to have the strength and will power to walk right to the meeting and continue the rest of my life walking that way. A new person in custody just walked up to me while I was writing this letter. After seeing me with the Big Book beside me, he decided to tell me he has been a friend of Dr. Bob and Bill W. for the past 30 years. He said he recognized me from going to a few meetings in the past as well. God sure does work in mysterious ways... I am 39 years old, and I think I still have a chance to live a productive and sober existence from now on." — **Tim P., Southeast Region**

"I am Jorge, and I am an alcoholic. I wanted to thank the G.S.O. Corrections coordinator for sending me the Big Book. I also have a sponsor here in prison. He used to be an A.A. member in the outside world. I think he used to be a coordinator, too. Anyway, I just wanted to say how grateful I am, and thank you for all the help you have given me. Also, I want to thank my Higher Power. I am ready to tackle the world as soon as I am done paying for my damage. Now I know I can walk the path with the help of the groups and my Higher Power, one day at a time. I wish to help other people who have my disease. Alcohol is the worst drug there is. I am glad to be alive, and I want to share the message with other people like me." — Jorge G., Southwest 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).