



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Summer 2017

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."*

HAPPY, JOYOUS AND FREE

"Hi, my name is Charles, and I would like to share a story about my home group. I am currently incarcerated, but when I am at my home group meetings, I feel free. It's like an out-of-body experience: for one hour each week, I feel happy to be alive. We have the best volunteers in the world: they take time out of their day to come and share with us every week. I am not just achieving sobriety: I am becoming a better man." — **Charles G., North East Region**

"I'm very lucky to have people from A.A. in my life. Your info and help have made it much easier for me to hold my head up high, even in the situation I am in. I still have a lot of work to do to feel whole again. I am a responsible human today and that feels great. I no longer need to run and hide in a bottle. That is a blessing and the taste of true freedom. Yes, even being incarcerated, I am a much happier person." — **Jamie T., North East Region**

A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

"I think while sobering up these last few months I have had the spiritual awakening that I have read about. I would so very much like to share that with my fellow alcoholics. For many years of my drunken life I have been exposed to A.A., and while I always respected what they did, I had absolutely no desire to stop drinking. However, now, at what seems to be the most abysmal time in my life, I have found the quiet calm I have needed within A.A. We have one meeting a week at the jail I'm in, yet I find myself having several unofficial meetings with other inmates in between." — **John L., South East Region**

"Here there is only one meeting a week where A.A. members from the outside come in to hold the meeting. One of the members suggested I go through the Steps again. I asked, 'How can I, in here?' But I dug deep and found a God of my understanding and gave my will to him. I made a thorough and honest inventory and shared it with the chaplain. I prayed and meditated for God to remove my defects and added to my list to make amends when

possible. So I made a plan of action, then continued to take personal inventory and admitted when I was wrong. Quickly I started to see changes, and I'm experiencing a new outlook on the world. So now, being convinced I had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, I do my best to help the people I am around and invite new people to the weekly A.A. meeting. I now understand how to live one day at a time and to think before I act. I finally feel like I am moving forward. It is kind of funny — through the freedom I have gained by working an honest program of recovery, I don't feel that I am incarcerated." — **Cody E., South East Region**

THE JUMPING-OFF PLACE

"My name is Paul A. I'm writing you in response to an article in the Grapevine that was left in my cell. I would like to become the man I was before the drink took me away. From what I've been reading about A.A., it sounds like this might be possible. There is still some part of my broken life that can be salvaged." — **Paul A., South East Region**

"Hi, my name is James S. I'm writing to you because I have seen articles in the Grapevine. I'm getting so tired of being someone that I know I'm better than. I want to become the person I once was and that I know I can be." — **James S., South East Region**

GRATITUDE

"*Jails, institutions and death.* I have experienced each one of them threefold, and I am grateful to have this opportunity to say that I owe what life I graciously appreciate now to this great program and Fellowship. It has not only helped me achieve a sober life, but it has helped me work, change, and overcome character defects that I had before alcohol invaded my system. I am grateful to all my fellow A.A.s inside and outside the walls; we all have one thing in common, but we help one another in many other forms that can only continue to progress if we keep it simple and share. Thank you all for everything, one day at a time." — **Charles M., North East Region**

"Recovery is running wild in this jail. This alcoholic is discovering a new path in life. I am currently in on a three-year sentence and facing 15 more years on a new case. I finally feel God working for the first time in my life. I honestly believe that I don't ever need to drink again. Thank you. I can't say it enough to all of the A.A. members who are helping to carry the message about the program of Alcoholics Anonymous." — **Robert B., South East Region**

"I feel a little sad, knowing that I'll be here in prison for two more holidays. Confusion and lots of anger! Every day, I talk to my Higher Power (God) and look around at who I can be of service to. It really does help to be of use to others, giving my time, service and prayer; sharing my experience, strength and hope with the other women here. About six of us go to meetings in our dorm. Two of us do Step work and share our stories. The Buddhist in me becomes

mindful of my anger. I try to just breathe and let it go. Just sit and be silent. This too shall pass. I work out in the yard, grateful that I am in the presence of our Creator. All I can say out loud, near the fence line (my favorite spot) is, ‘Thank You, God!’ This is my gratitude song. In the Buddhist tradition, I like to say, ‘May you be safe from internal and external harm. May you have a calm, clear mind and a peaceful, loving heart. May you be physically strong, healthy and vital. May you experience love, joy, and wonder and wisdom in this life, just as it is.’ Namaste — deepest bow.”

— **Marcia W., South West Region**

FINDING HOPE

“One thing jail did for me was allow me to be still long enough to open and actually read some of the Big Book. The A.A. Big Book! Now, I only started with the stories in the back because there was nothing else to read, but that action led me to the core of the book. All I can say is that I am finally able to feel as if there may be a future for me yet. The stories in that book have helped me to open my heart and seek my Higher Power. I am still needing help and don’t plan on this experience to be an easy one, but I do have hope that with a Higher Power and A.A. it just might be possible.”

— **Tabitha G., South West Region**

“My story is the same as most alcoholics. Broken promises, broken marriages (now my second divorce), DWIs, loss of jobs and of dignity. Nothing good has come from my alcoholism. These last six months have been the longest I have been sober in my life since I started my drinking career so many years ago. I have read and studied my Big Book since I have been here, and I have learned so much by reading the stories written by my counterparts in the book (lol). Just knowing that the majority of it was written and lived many years before I was born has had the most profound impact on me. I know that if this program can work for so many people since 1935, it can work for me. I will be released very soon and cannot wait to make my first meeting on the outside. I currently have 186 days sober. I have four children that need a sober father, and I need them. I am ready. Thanks for giving me hope and a new shot at life.” — **Mathew A., South West Region**

CARRYING THE MESSAGE

“The jail I am in does not offer A.A. meetings, and when I wrote the last letter about a month and a half ago, I wasn’t sure that my request for a Big Book would even be possible. But, by the grace of God, about two weeks ago I woke up with somebody yelling my name, and when I looked up, I was handed a brand new Big Book. I can’t tell you how much easier my time has gotten because of it. I am now doing a full-blown morning meditation; reading and studying a chapter every couple of days with other inmates in my cell; and doing a nightly review — trying to grow and learn while I’m here instead of just killing time. I want to thank God for A.A. Another whole aspect I just recently experienced from the program was the sense of worth that I haven’t felt in years by being able to actually help another alcoholic, too. To see someone feeling hope again is something else I want for my life now. I haven’t had anything to offer anyone in so long, and it feels great!! Like I said, I’m not sure what I’m expecting, but I just want to do more. Knowing the importance of what this service does for people, I hope this letter keeps someone else sober for at least one more day.”

— **Greg C., South East Region**

“Today is March 22, 2017, and I have been inside since June 2014. I have learned quite a lot about myself. I have come to realize that I am not the center of the universe, and I have learned how my choices and actions have hurt a lot of innocent people, especially my family and children. I’ve heard a lot of guys at the A.A.

meetings share that they have lost a lot. For me, I didn’t ‘lose’ anything — I gave it all away when I drank over everything and everyone. I will be here until 2018. When I get released, I plan to get to a meeting that day. I can feel it down in my bones that I can no longer drink, and the only way to do that is to build my life around A.A. with the guidance of my sponsor. I want to give back, when I’m allowed, to bring the A.A. message back to those who are still incarcerated. I plan to let them know there is a way out and a way to stay out if they want it. I’m living proof; I would not be the son, brother, father and, basically, the man I am today. And for that, I will be forever grateful for the men and women of A.A. who came into the facility to share what they had with me. I am looking forward to giving back what was so freely given to me.”

— **Eddie T., North East Region**

WORKING THE STEPS

“I just found your Fourth Edition Big Book after a relapse got me locked up again. I could not accept that I was an alcoholic until I found the A.A. book. Now I know that I am one, and for the first time I have accepted it. I was doing all I could to not drink by myself when I was on the outside, and it just wasn’t working. I have done a self-inventory and have started making amends for my past as much as I can. I would like to keep my sobriety when I get out of jail and keep on the program in the A.A. book.” — **Billy C., North East Region**

“I’m 31 and have been behind bars since 2007, guilty of drinking and driving, with the consequence of someone being harmed due to my mistake. Since then I’ve come to be dedicated to sober living and growing as a mature human being. I’ve been sober for the past several years and have been a part of A.A. meetings within the prison community. I believe it’s time to work with a sponsor, something I was not able to participate in before. I would like to really dig into the Steps with someone I can build accountability with.” — **Alexander C., Pacific Region**

“I’ve been at this location since 1987. Recently, they have allowed us to go to lower levels if we stay out of trouble. Now I’m at a level III, and I’m going to a level II this year thanks to my positive behavior. There’s now hope in me as well that I’ll get to see the free world again, but that’s far in the future. I do it one day at a time, of course, and stay in the Steps. It’s when I feel comfortable that I remind myself sobriety has to be fought for and remember that my old attitude(s) got me where I’m at. Staying sober is my personal responsibility.” — **Robert C., Pacific Region**

CORRECTIONS CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE (CCS)

If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months, and are interested in corresponding with an outside A.A. member with whom you can share your experience as it relates to your problems with alcohol, please write to A.A.’s General Service Office to request a correspondence form. This is a random match with men writing to men and women writing to women. We appreciate your patience if you do not hear from us in a timely manner. Obtaining outside contacts often takes time.

PRERELEASE CONTACT

If you write to G.S.O. within three to six months of your release date and give us your destination (city and state) and approximate release date, we can try to arrange for someone to write to you just prior to your release. This would give you a chance to have an A.A. contact in your home community to help with your transition from A.A. on the “inside” to A.A. on the “outside.”

We look forward to hearing from you.