



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2013

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."*

'THE LANGUAGE OF PAIN...'

"I love A.A. I attend meetings here at the jail once or twice a week. English-speaking A.A.s come in every Tuesday night and Spanish-speaking comes in on Wednesday night. I do not speak Spanish at all, but I still go to that meeting because, as I tell them, I may not speak Spanish but I understand the language of pain caused by alcoholism. I speak and understand the pain of every alcoholic, no matter how it's communicated. I see the similarities in our stories and in their eyes. I am comfortable in any A.A. meeting and I try to participate appropriately. I want sobriety with all my heart. I have no family to speak of and although I am constantly on the look out for members of the Fellowship amongst the other inmates here in the jail (and there are a few). I do not really have a lot in common with the average inmate, our roads in life are different. However, I am always there if they want to talk about sobriety or any other positive, productive topic. Thank you A.A. for being there for me. I promise to freely give back what I've been so freely given." — **John L., Pacific Region**

CREATING AN A.A. MEETING

"First, thank you for responding to my letter, it absolutely made my day. It is Veterans Day today and I don't have to work. I will spend one and a half hours in A.A. this morning. That's what keeps me centered in this environment. I can be content so long as I keep first things first. I spoke to my sponsor yesterday; he is coming to pick me up at prison, at midnight, in three months. I can't wait! I don't know where A.A. might be if it weren't for people like you all. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. I will have one year of sobriety a month after I get released, God willing. I will be around people who love me. Please pass on to anybody that may be where there is no A.A., that it's possible to create a meeting by doing the following, at least that's my experience: Serenity Prayer, Preamble, read Grapevine, read *A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate*, then write someone in A.A., close with a prayer, put a stamp on it, drop it in the mail, and I swear it's as close to a meeting as I can get — it works for me!" — **David P., Southeast Region**

AN ANSWERED PRAYER

"My name is Larry and I am an alcoholic. I was introduced to and adopted my life to the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous a few years ago. Well, in the past year I relapsed and got my life and others'

back into a whole mess of turmoil again. I have managed to get myself into county jail, where I have been for a few weeks now. One day, in all sincerity, I shouted, 'Lord, please help my lost, twisted soul!' Five minutes later, another inmate and myself were messing with the T.V. set in our dayroom when I heard a loud and distinct 'thud,' only to then hear the other guy say, 'What's that?' I looked down and I swear on everything I love, you can guess what I looked down on. I said, 'yup,' it sure as skunk was a Big Book! I responded to the other guy, 'That my friend, is my prayer being immediately answered with exactly what I need and have been almost deliberately avoiding!'" — **Larry M., Southwest Region**

A.A. LITERATURE

"Hello, I thought I'd finally write to say thanks. I've gone through the Big Book to Chapter 7 now. I've also read a couple of the stories in the back and over half of the stories in *A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate*. I've found much about me in those books. In this place, the only real serenity I experience is when I read my A.A. books. Thanks to all of the A.A. members in the U.S. and Canada for making contributions which enabled you to send me some complimentary literature. I expect to be paroled soon. I plan to continue daily reading of the literature and go to a meeting the day I get out — I'm going on the 24-hour plan. Seven months sober today! Wish me luck! Take care and God bless." — **James P., Pacific Region**

"I'm a 43-year-old widow and a single parent of two beautiful (inside and out) daughters, ages 21 and 13. My daughters lost their father to suicide and now I have been diagnosed with acute pancreatitis. Currently I am in a county jail. If I continue to drink they are giving me 1½ – 2 years to live. That was a year ago, after my 14th visit to the hospital due to my drinking. I was court ordered to an addiction treatment center. I was angry then, but grateful now. I have grown spiritually and become more knowledgeable about the phenomenal craving that I have. I have heard the stories from the Big Book but I had never read the book until now. It has given me an inner calmness and peace of mind. I want to say, 'thank you' for such an amazing book and I hope to be a part of the Fellowship and contribute my good works to the community." — **Tammy R. L., Southwest Region**

MAKING AMENDS

"As we do Step Eight, followed by Step Nine, we sometimes ask ourselves, 'Is there any reason to do all of this work if nothing comes from it?' I have asked myself that same question, and then I wrote a letter of amends to my sister, who I haven't seen in over 15 years. Then I wrote a letter to my ex-wife, who I haven't spoken to in eight years. Now, understand that I didn't expect to get any return mail from either party — my sister, who I just stopped talking to, and my ex-wife, who, after years of abuse, I never dreamed would ever forgive me. Well, I was shocked and surprised when my sister sent me a return letter in under a week, and three days later I received a letter from my ex-wife telling me that she forgave me years ago. I was shocked to find that both of these people still cared about me. It was me (in my drinking days) that broke communication off with them. This lesson taught me that it's my responsibility to right the wrong that I have done. I remember my life was like a tornado, leaving a path of victims four miles wide. Now we keep in touch with

each other. Wow, if only I had taken these Steps years ago. Now I realize that you only get out of this program just what you put in. Making honest amends and my responsible actions not only bring me closer to the spiritual principles of this program, but closer to God. It's because of faith in my higher power that I'm able to make amends to anyone." — **Daniel V.E., East Central Region**

PEOPLE LIKE US

"I am currently incarcerated in a state correctional institution and I am an alcoholic. A couple of years ago, I was introduced to A.A. by a fellow inmate. At these meetings I found that there were people who sounded just like me and how I needed the help of others. Since that time, I have been regularly attending A.A. meetings. I am so glad I attended that first meeting because it really changed my life."

— **Chris T., Northeast Region**

"I have been incarcerated for the past 32 years. Over the years I've attended A.A. on and off at various institutions. This is the first A.A. group that I've really become involved in and, although I'm never getting out of prison, I've learned to try and help others; giving them positive encouragement and knowledge that they can use to stay out and stay off alcohol and drugs when they return to society." —

Daniel T., Southeast Region

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

"I started drinking at 11, but didn't believe I had a problem until about the age of 15, when I woke up from a blackout after running my car off the freeway into a ditch. Denial? Yes, because not even after that did I think I had a problem. Filled with a lot of hurt, anger, and pain, I continued to drink and went through a number of similar experiences, all resulting in hurting others as well as myself. I've now been incarcerated for the past 20 years for a crime I committed at age 16. That boy is not the man that I am today, and whom I continue to strive to be. Over the years I've been in A.A. and many self-help programs. Yet it wasn't until I gave my life to God that my healing process began, and that thanks goes to Alcoholics Anonymous, because that is where I learned about having a Higher Power. I'm sincere about my sobriety, and I believe the help from A.A. will continue to help me in my recovery." — **Joseph W., Pacific Region**

"I can't describe how truly grateful I am to you and the members of A.A. I've been in and out of A.A. for over 15 years, as well as in and out of prison. My drinking, and many blackouts caused many arrests, I can't remember what I did. I'm so grateful to be sober it's unreal. My health is back. It's crazy how I feel. A sense of calm just comes over me because I'm home, truly home with being sober. I have hope and faith, and I am doing all the things that are given to me from other honestly-recovering A.A. members." — **Loy W., Southeast Region**

GRATEFUL EVERY DAY

"My name is Justin, I'm 24 years old. I've been in prison for a year now and have 'only' seven years left. I was beyond belligerent drunk the night of my crime. I don't remember most of it. I've struggled with drinking for as long as I can remember. Before my incarceration, I would party and drink *every* night. I would fight all the time and hurt my family; I had no remorse. I was sentenced to nine years, four months, and two strikes on a case where no one was hurt and for that I'm *very* thankful. I first joined A.A. in county jail. I've not had a drop since then, although I think about it a lot. But I'm winning. I thank God every day for blessing me with a release date and for my loving family. I look forward to the future." —

Justin G., Pacific Region

"My name is Arthur and I am a liberated and grateful recovering A.A. member. Thanks to the God of my understanding and A.A., my life and mind are beginning to improve. The physical scars on the outside of my body are petty in comparison to the mental and emotional damage on the inside. In 2008, before a criminal state judge, I was ordered to undergo a six-month inpatient treatment program that included meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'll never

forget the looks on the faces of the men in the room, when I told them: 'You're all crazy and I hate all of you and I don't need any of this!' This was the very first time that I was asked to speak. Six months and well over 180 meetings in 180 days later, I had become a true 'Big Book Thumper' and 'Meeting Maker.' From then until now, I am still an active member who is continuously learning to listen and hear the message of recovery through A.A. As for my day-to-day life as a sober and happy recovering alcoholic, my past drinking struggles can never come anywhere near the comfort, peace, and emotional healing that the men and women bring to me through the program of A.A. Thanks. Sincerely, with love and strength." — **Arthur P., Southeast Region**

A DAILY ROUTINE

"I think one of the things I look most forward to when I get back home is being around my old support network at my meetings. I will be able to pick up a one year chip and I want to do it at our Sunday night meeting. When I stand to receive it, I want everyone to realize that they don't have to go down the path I went down. I didn't want to spend this first year sober in prison, and no one else should have to. But coming to prison was what it took for me. It was the big eye opener. Here was where I was finally able to awaken my spirituality and connect with my Higher Power. Here I was able to start Twelfth Step work once again. It is very important for me to carry my message to other alcoholics. Every day I start and end with my *Daily Reflections*. I read it upon waking, meditate on it, then read it again at night and see how I applied it to my day. Then I try to focus on the big picture and see how I can apply it to my life. I dig into my Big Book every day, seeking new and old knowledge — always on the hunt for some phrase, sentence, or passage that is going to strike me in a new way or remind me why I mustn't stray too far from my chosen path." — **Erby P., Southeast Region**

"I have recently surrendered to the fact that my will keeps me coming back to institutions. I'm a three-time loser who has given up my freedom to finally 'Have Freedom.' Before, I used to wallow in emotionalism and call it a spiritual experience. Today I'm proud to confess I have a Higher Power that I call on, on a daily basis. Thank you A.A. I have worked with a sponsor on the inside now for one year. I don't have a lot of time. However, I have been trying my own way for 20 years and getting the revolving door. Today I'm on solid ground." — **Stacy S., East Central Region**

THE LOST & FOUND MEETING

"My name is Phil B. and September third was my three-year birthday. I started my recovery here at this prison A.A. group. We have some good meetings thanks to guys coming from the outside. We did have a setback here; we lost our meeting room. But thanks to the A.A. way of life, and Concepts, and Twelve Traditions, we got to set back up in the chow hall. Not the best, but we still have our meeting!" — **Phil B., 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.

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.