



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Winter 2008

Dear A.A. Friends,

We have been getting so many permissions from inmates to include a portion of their letters in this newsletter that we decided to go to a special four-page format, just for the holiday issue, in order to make sure that all of your voices are heard. We can't think of anything more meaningful at this time of year than the experience, strength and hope of those who are finding freedom and peace through the Twelve Steps of A.A., no matter where they may be. We thank you for this gift of your sobriety.

— G.S.O. staff.

Now, 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."*

'A NEW WAY OF LIFE'

"My name is Lee and I am presently doing time. I have come to realize I have a problem—I'm an alcoholic. I have been drinking since I was 14, and I have been in and out of jail due to it. Now I'm 39 years old and know I have to quit. The judge said he was tired of seeing me and gave me prison time. Alcohol is easy to get even in here. I was still drinking in here till a month ago. I went to the jail library and I came across a blue book called *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I was very curious as to what it was about, so I checked it out and began reading it. As I kept reading I realized I was just like Bob, Bill, Jane and many more in the book. We are all alcoholics. Well, I got a notice in the mail yesterday that the book was overdue. So I went back to the library to renew it and was told I couldn't since it was overdue.

"I would take that book with me wherever I went. I took it to the yard, dayroom, etc. to read. But that came to a halt when I had to give it back. One day I went to outside recreation and found a fellow inmate reading that blue book. We talked and shared our stories. Everyday since we have met. We now meet at recreation

and talk about our alcoholism and he reads aloud from the blue book. By the way, we now have seven of us who meet everyday out there to talk and read. We are in the process of trying to see if we can start a group for alcoholic inmates who can meet in the chapel once a week. This is for anyone here who wants to come, but also to keep our little group outside recreation going. I have learned a new way to live without the alcohol due to that blue book I found on the library shelf. I know without finding that book, I would have never tried giving it up or even thought about it at all."—**Lee C., Northeast Region**

"Before I came to prison this last time, I had completely given up. I really just wanted to die; I had made several attempts in the past. But not like now, I truly did not want to live. I isolated, lived in the swamps of Florida, stole for my beer and drugs. It was like a death sentence and I did not eat for days or even weeks at a time. When

I was arrested—rescued is a better way of putting it—I felt like a great load was lifted. I live one day at a time and I'm trying to repair the damage I did to my family. I pray my father hears my prayers because I didn't get a chance to tell him before he died. We don't currently have anyone that comes in from outside A.A., but I've been blessed with two friends in my dorm that share the need for A.A. as well as me. We have the A.A. Big Book and through reading we share our experiences with alcohol and the desire to stop. They have helped me a great deal, and I truly believe it begins here, not just when I get out. I'm currently working on my Fourth Step, and it's taking me a little while, mainly because of trust issues. But outside of my new found A.A. friends, I would like to have someone to correspond with on the outside,

who could maybe help me with questions I might have, and my Twelve Steps. I look forward to hearing from someone, and I think it's great that you guys help us here in prison."—**Jerry C., Southeast Region**

'THE BOOK THAT FOUND ME'

"My name is Jesse and I am an alcoholic. I had been to some A.A. meetings many years ago but, as you can see, I did not make it through even the Second Step. It has been many years since then and one marriage. But here I am, by the good grace. I still retain my family, but I am well aware that this is by a thread. Also, my health is going. All that aside, I have definitely had thoughts of sobriety for some time—starting and stopping like a yo-yo. I had



been extradited from another state and when I finally landed here, I just happened to find the best book I might ever read next to the Bible. This is the A.A. Big Book. I can't explain the relief of having time to actually read this and, as for the spiritual experience, it was almost immediate. I am positive that I have attained Step Three. As far as Step Four, this will take me awhile and some guidance. I'm taking it, day by day. Today, I'm good. Thank you again for your time and 'The Book' that somehow found me."—**Jesse W., Pacific Region**

"Since my incarceration I've been seriously considering my fate. I am certain that if I don't stop drinking I will end up dead or in prison for a very long time. Clearly, my alcohol abuse has cost me my physical freedom, but it has also cost me dearly as far as my mental and emotional health is concerned. I'm an embarrassment and outcast to my family and the majority of my friends have long since abandoned me. This caused resentment beyond belief and only fueled my desire to drink. Other inmates have mentioned A.A. meetings taking place, but since I've been here there have been none. This disturbed me because I wanted to attend meetings. One day I noticed one of my fellow inmates had a copy of the Big Book. He didn't seem to be reading it so I asked him if I could read it and he graciously obliged. The book is nothing short of amazing! I saw myself in those pages – the same pain, confusion, fear, loneliness, and most importantly – the same hope. Excitement is running through me even as I write these words. I firmly believe that through God and A.A. my life will be saved and my sanity restored. I'm writing to ask for any help or information available."—**Justin M., Southeast Region**

"I'm brand new to your—for lack of a better word—service. I'm a 25 year old, presently incarcerated. Recently, I had a chance, a golden opportunity, to meet with one of your members here at this prison. And this member decided to lay upon me a copy of your Big Book. The point of all this is to say thank you. You and what you represent, well, just thank you. There's nothing more I can really say. For years, I truly believed I could beat this disease by myself. But as you can see from my current situation, I was, and am, powerless. My whole objective in writing was to display to you how grateful I am."—**Jason S., Northeast Region**

"I'm Phil D., 46 years old and in jail for two years. I also know I'm an alcoholic. I was sober for 5½ years, went out for 1½ years give or take, then I finally put 14 months together, and like a dummy drank that day. I ended up here. I take it that I hadn't had enough. I've had enough now, have had some time to think and—when given the chance—to work on myself. I do have a couple of guys who I can talk a little about recovery with. But what got me was I kept trying to get a Big Book for days, couldn't get one. I prayed and wow—a couple of days later there was one on the dayroom table. It has no covers but its good for me. I read Bill's story and Dr. Bob's. Then I was reading how to get in touch with A.A. Thinking of the people who can't get to a meeting, or there isn't one close by, I don't have it that bad. If there's a way for me to do some Twelfth Step work from here, sign me up. Thank you, and I wish you the best."—**Phillip D., Northeast Region**

THE FIRST 164 PAGES

"I want to let you know how thankful I am to A.A. for sending the literature and the Big Book. I started reading it straight away and just reading the first 164 pages brought me at ease and I can face what I have to do and start getting ready for the outside. It is unbelievable how just reading it can help that much; we all can relate to the way it is written. I will share the literature with others in here so I am maybe helping someone the way you have helped me. I didn't know if I would hear from anybody, but A.A. didn't let me down. Thank you again. If I can help in anyway from where I am, let me know."—**Bob K., Southwest Region**

"I just finished reading pages 1-164 in my A.A. Big Book for the first time in my life. I must tell someone how much this means to me. I've been an alcoholic for 20 years and I'm only 35 years of age. I have heard about the program and I have also had over ten A.A. books in my life. But it took God to give me a 17-year sentence in prison and place me in the hole for awhile in order for me to read this book for the first time. I must say I feel like this book was written for me. Now that I know that there are others out there with the same sickness I have, I really want to search out for help. Just a few suggestions on what I need to do next, to further my recovery and finding my Higher Power and a new way to live life sober. Is there anything you can help me with? I would be truly thankful."—**Edward F., Southeast Region**

HOPE

"My name is Brad. I've been attending meetings of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous for the past 16 months. Before my incarceration, sobriety was a foreign language to me and I had no understanding of its meaning. My marriage, my children, my entire free-world life was lost behind my desire for alcohol. Drinking landed me in a world of turmoil, the outcome being a 10-year prison sentence. At first I thought my life was over and I was almost to the point of giving up. Then a very close friend introduced me to A.A. It gave me a sense of hope—a relief that I no longer had to carry it all alone. Sobriety was beginning to be a beautiful experience for me and it still is some 16 months later. I would very much like to know how I would go about sharing my experience, strength and hope with another A.A. friend."—**Brad W., Southeast Region**

"Hi, my name is Todd and I am an alcoholic. I now, at 38 years old, finally believe the phrase we use, 'Jails, institutions and death.' I have experienced two out of three so far and now feel in my heart that the death of myself or someone else is next if I don't take this disease seriously, for if I drink again I will die. I am in prison for the first time, for DUIs and also for my behavior while under the influence of alcohol. I am a born and raised east coast guy that ran from three other DUIs back home there—running, running, running from myself, the truth and the law. It's true that where you go, there you are."—**Todd R., Pacific Region**

"After reading a few stories in the A.A. literature I began to have hope. Well, I'm going to prison. However, I spoke to my lawyer and what I thought was going to happen isn't. I might still go to prison but for less than two years. Last night I prayed to God, which has been a long time coming. Here's the kicker—I didn't pray for myself. I wanted God to watch over some of the people I did harm to, so no harm would come to them again. I believe there's a connection! Thank you again—very much appreciated!"—**Scott M., East Central Region**

'AN INNER PEACE'

"Drinking for me was the great escape. I used alcohol to cope with my life, and just before I got incarcerated I was probably at my worst. I tried time and again to sober up, but I always relapsed. I understand now that I just wasn't ready then. I isolated myself and was actually in more of a prison then, on the outside, than I am now—ironic as that may sound. I first found A.A. at 19 years of age, but after 10 months I started drinking again. It was only when I came to prison that I fully and truly understood what A.A. was about. The Fellowship, along with God, are my lifelines and I've come to appreciate them both so much. So much good has happened in my life. I'm rebuilding a relationship with my father, also an alcoholic, and have developed an inner peace no amount of alcohol could ever provide."—**Elizabeth M., Pacific Region**

"I am very thankful to have received my Big Book from A.A. members and am now well on my way and know that there are people who do care about people like me. I may be in jail, but I'm free and feel good without having to sell my body today. Just for today I'm not drunk, I'm not scared, I'm not homeless, I'm not hungry, I have clothes on my back, I have shoes, socks and shelter. I have not taken a drink and have come to realize all of these things. I want what you have, but now I realize I may really already have it! God Bless, and I continue doing it one second at a time."—**Castanita F., Southwest Region**

"I'm a chronic alcoholic, 47 years old and have been drinking since I was 12. I've hit bottom so many times I've lost count. I've lost everything I owned four or five times over. I have been in and out of treatment and jail many times. I've had periods of being sober off and on for over 35 years. I've seen people in life that weren't as fortunate mentally as most people. I would end up saying (about them) 'the wheels are spinnin, but the hamster's dead.' However, I never realized until this year, 2008, that *this* 'hamster's wheels are spinnin, but this hamster's in a drunken coma.'—That's me! I was sober from August 2007 until February 2008 when I got into a car accident. The accident was not my fault. However, I was driving on a suspended license and without insurance. Well, I relapsed; I went on a four-day binge, and then dialed 911. You know, there's been many times in my life when the pain of living seemed too much, but the last night I drank, I felt the pain of dying. It was the worst pain I've ever felt in my whole life. I now live sober in recovery. I've lived sober before, but never in recovery. There is a big difference. I now read the Big Book in a whole new way. I see things in it I've never seen before. I've read the Big Book at least a hundred times in my life, if not more. After my near death experience, it's like I'm reading it for the first time. I am truly living sober (in recovery) now. You all are not alone and are in my every prayer."—**Harry B., Northeast Region**

'TWELFTH STEP WORK ROCKS!'

"I wanted to thank A.A. so much for their help. I'm in jail. My drinking did mess up my life. But after writing to you guys, we now have meetings here. We get 13-20 people every Thursday. I made a super poster for our group and I have shared the Big Books and pamphlets A.A. sent me. Twelfth Step work rocks! I'm also finding wonderful stuff in the Big Book which I missed the first 300 times I read it. I may be stuck here for a while, but with a sponsor and A.A. as a whole, it will pass and I'll see freedom again. My Higher Power put me here not to be punished, but to help others, and that's what I plan on doing. Thanks a ton. God Bless."—**Randy H., Northeast Region**

"My name is James and I'm an inmate. Since the age of 13 I have suffered severe anger problems resulting in many behavior problems which have led me to the use of drugs and alcohol. When I found alcohol, I had found a lifetime friend, lover, muse. My ultimate soulmate. I have spent most of my life in institutions, then on to jails and prisons. Many people, friends, family, counselors and caseworkers have spent a lot of time trying to separate us. About June '02 I finally came to understand what people were going out of their way to get me to see—I am an alcoholic. Armed with this new information, I have spent the last six years teaching myself to be whole again. This I have not felt since I was about eleven years of age. I take the program seriously and I do what my sponsor tells me, especially when I disagree with what he's telling me. I have also found God again in my life. Apparently He was not the one with the problem after all. Many of my fears have subsided. Unbelievably, my family is back in my life and I can even have conversations with my children that don't leave them scratching their heads thinking that their father has actually lost his marbles. I owe A.A. a debt that I will never be

able to repay, however I do my best to give back. I make sure to do a lot of Twelfth Step work."—**Jimmy L., Southwest Region**

RECOVERY... DISCOVERY... PRACTICE

"Getting sober completely transformed every fiber of my being. Imagine my joy when I discovered the spirit of Step Nine. First came recovery, then discovery and then practice. Before the "*who I am*" foundation was secure, my morals, values, boundaries and passions were strong. These spiritual principles represent who I am. When I make amends, I reaffirm to myself the kind of person I am today as a result of the spirit of Step Nine. Getting sober really changed my life and my entire belief system. I got a complete overhaul. I was a deep, low-bottom drunk—worthless, hopeless and everything else. My bottom actually had a crawl space underneath it. I was terrified to leave. All I cared about was staying drunk—it became my lifestyle, it became me. Today, sober, I'm good at many things that I am very proud of. I genuinely care about what I do with my life and the people I am able to help. I love Alcoholics Anonymous! and I love the joy of giving it away."—**Carl K., Pacific Region**

"First, let me thank A.A. for the material. I have been reading the Big Book, as well as several of the books I received from fellow A.A.s involved in the correctional A.A. program. I have also accepted it as my duty, per se, to inform others of this literature and, when appropriate, to present it. I believe A.A. has made me a better person. I can also say that, although I am in jail and will likely be for some time to come, I am happier now than I ever was in the months prior to my arrest. I want to make this feeling possible for others as well. I can do that now, thanks in part to the literature A.A. made available to me. Contrary to what many may believe, alcohol—hooch—is easily made and available in large quantities in prison. But I believe that through A.A., I will be stronger than it. A.A. helped me to see when I thought I was walking blind. It turns out I just needed to open my eyes. Simple."—**Cody R., Southwest Region**

'I GO TO MEETINGS BECAUSE MY LIFE DEPENDS ON IT'

"I was sober for 14 months before I came into the criminal justice system. I was out on bail as my case dragged along. I didn't even sober up until 13 months after my arrest—my denial died a hard death. Once I did get sober, I immediately got myself a sponsor and worked with him until I came to jail. As I moved through various facilities at the beginning of my sentence there were no A.A. meetings. I knew there were correctional meetings, I just wasn't in any facilities that had them. All I had were visits from my sponsor, who came to see me several times. That was no mean feat—the receiving jail I was in was two hours from his home. This was my first incarceration and fear of the unknown was my constant companion. For that first time I had the Third Step prayer and those occasional visits. After I was sent here things got much better. I got to my first meeting after a friendly inmate, who offered me a cup of coffee, turned out to be the group chairman. We went to my first meeting the next evening. The group has three meetings a week: the Open Discussion, which I currently chair; a Step meeting where we read the Step; and a Big Book meeting where we read a chapter or a story every week. I go to these meetings because my life depends on it. I am sober in here and intend to stay that way. It would not be impossible to slip in here. But my life has gotten immeasurably better since coming back to the A.A. rooms. I have no intention of returning to my old way of thinking while locked up. I see many other inmates struggle to maintain a positive outlook on life in jail. I can't imagine trying to do it without A.A. Both in and out of jail, A.A. has been a lifeline for me. I thank God every day for the people who make it so,

especially the outside guests here at the jail. Thank you for saving my life.”—**Christopher B., Northeast Region**

A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

“Hello, my name is Curtis H. and I am an alcoholic. I’m doing time in a maximum security prison. I’m writing to let you know how helpful the book *A.A. In Prison: Inmate to Inmate* was—is—for me. The book was given to me by a substance abuse teacher of sorts. We can’t have meetings on my compound. He gave me a substance abuse program to work. It wasn’t an A. A. program specifically, but I went to A.A. on the street and correlated most of the program with what I’d learned in A.A. in the free world. He gave me the *Inmate to Inmate* book, and a Big Book as well. I’m not able to attend meetings, like most of the A.A.s in the book *Inmate to Inmate* aren’t. Once I get off of close security I’ll be able to attend meetings. I believe it will help. I’ll need it too. They’ve got booze in here. Some of the A.A.s in the book said their facilities didn’t have it, or they couldn’t get it. Some did though. I’m one of the latter. The Big Book is a very useful tool/text, but *Inmate to Inmate* has been a real close-to-home kind of book for me. In A.A., it takes an alcoholic to truly get through to another alcoholic. Sometimes, it takes a convict to get through to another convict. If prison has taught me anything, it’s this: I don’t want to return to my old life. *Inmate to Inmate* gave me examples of A.A.s I could relate with. The Big Book gives me comfort. It reminds me that there is hope for any alcoholic who will honestly follow the simple suggestions in the Big Book. I owe my life to these books and thus to each alcoholic who had the courage to be selfless and make the books available to me.”—**Curtis H., Southeast Region**

JUST 24 HOURS

“For 25 years I’ve been locked up. I cannot tell you how my life was until 1980, when I really hit bottom. Thanks to the Fellowship of A.A. I learned how to be responsible for my life today. The outside members who come in to our A.A. meeting to carry the message to alcoholics behind these walls are a great asset to my recovery. I learned how to use the 24 hour plan. When I am tempted to take a drink, 24 hours seems too long to fight the urge. I learned to think in terms of 20 minutes or even five minutes. Just as long as I don’t relapse. I like my life and who I have become today. I am grateful for being sober and for the grace of G_D in my life. I can feel the freedom, even through I am behind these walls, one day at a time, no matter what the future may hold. I learned how to control my anger, and let things go, so that G_D as I understand him can be in my life and work things out His way. By exercising this concept in my life, I am doing easy time, not hard. I am fortunate to have found A.A. because I can always find the strength, consolation, and courage. As a member of A.A. here, behind the walls, I can go to other members when I have personal concerns. It helps me a lot, since going to meetings behind these walls have become more difficult. If nobody comes, there will be no meeting. So I have to do what I can to make contact with my fellow A.A.s, as the notion of anonymity applies to me and all members alike. So, my message is to stay sober by using the Twelve Steps and the message that recovery depends on spiritual maintenance through the grace of a Higher Power, one day at a time.”—**Ronald A., Northeast Region**

“I was adopted at age six by wonderful parents, a loving and supportive family, and I always wanted to be the best at everything. I now see that even included drinking. At 19 I became a flight attendant; my drinking was at times heavy and this continued through various airlines. At one point I was so embarrassed about being fired due to my drinking that I lied to everyone about

my job. I am now 32, almost 33, and am serving 36 months in a state prison. I was never in a family of trouble as both my parents were active in A.A. for a long time; as it says, no one is immune to the disease of alcoholism. My drinking took me to a level of happiness, fun, excitement that was all in my head. I finally found the great girlfriend, apartment and had the love and support of family and friends, but I still needed the bottle, whether it was a good day or a bad day. I thought this was the escape from all my problems. My lies started to build as did my drinking and soon I was in the rooms of A.A. After 1½ years, I stopped going to meetings and soon I was back to the races again, thinking I had conquered the drink. As a result I ended up in a situation that cost me my freedom and career.

“Yet my girlfriend, family and friends are by my side and supportive of this desperate alcoholic, even as I sit here as a felon for the next three years. Now, a day at a time, I have five months sober even behind bars. I read the A.A. literature of the many who went before me who were alone, yet they never were lonely when reaching out to others in the program, even behind these fences. I, too, see a fence ahead of me, but I must remember that each day begins by making the right decisions and also doing the Steps. Thanks to two others who were like myself, I have found once again that my desire to live free and sober and happy begins today. Now I look forward to being a part of what I once loved, but did not pay attention to because of my ego and machoism. Now I accept being powerless over alcohol and that I need to turn my life over to the care of God as I understand him. Thank you for giving this lost soul another chance to find the path to a sober life.”—**Paz U., Pacific Region**

“I’m currently in jail and just started going to A.A. here three months ago. I like what I see. The guy that comes and puts the meeting on is great. He’s old, funny, sober and tells terrific stories of the old drinking days. He’s been sober 20 years. You guys and gals of A.A. are a godsend. Thanks for helping me. Your literature is so much help to me.”—**Jason M., Northeast Region**

“I am getting close to release. Currently I’m going to meetings here at this facility, and am working the A.A. program to the best of my ability. I am also allowed to attend outside meetings and am establishing myself with A.A. on the outside. Everyone is welcoming me and making me feel a part of A.A. here in the local community. Let me stop by saying how much I appreciate your service work in A.A. Ya’ll have helped my sobriety in prison more than I can say.”—**Bland H., Southeast Region**

CORRECTIONS CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE (CCS)

If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months (but not in a jail), 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 release date and your destination (city and state), 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 “outside” A.A.

We look forward to hearing from you.