



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 Spring 2010

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."*

'... AS THOUGH THEY WERE TELLING MY STORY'

"Hello, my name is James and I am an alcoholic. Alcohol in the beginning was not that great for me, but lo and behold, it didn't take long to get used to it. The only time I would stop was when I would black out and wind up in jail, not knowing how or what I had done to get there. I didn't drink to get drunk. I just drank until there was no more. In 1998 I attended my first A.A. meeting. At first I said this is some real live B.S., but as people began to tell their stories, it seemed as though they were telling mine. At that point, I started to really pay attention to these strangers who were just like me. I started to get involved in the program because being able to help others made me feel good about myself. Today I religiously attend the one meeting we are allowed. I have chaired for several years at the prior facility. Here I do what needs to be done as far as sharing my experience, strength and hope. Today I am grateful to say 'I am an alcoholic named James.'"—**James B., Southeast Region**

"I was sitting in jail and started reading the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book. In Step Two, there was a paragraph that said your "Higher Power" could be anything, such as even A.A. itself—which works for me, because I am still struggling with the whole 'God' theory in general! So I've decided for now that A.A. would be my 'Higher Power.' Step One: I could admit that I was an alcoholic, but I hadn't yet given into the fact that I was *powerless*—now I have! Then, as it turns out, I went to the A.A. meeting and there were two speakers, and between both of their stories, there was me—right down to the details—experiences, habits, actions, justifications, even their reasons—all of it. *That was me!* At this intersection of my life, being in jail for alcohol-related reasons, I got so much clarity it is almost scary. This morning, the meeting, the words, and the clarity were the first things I thought of when I opened my eyes! I am ready to embrace life without drinking—not just being sober, but being without the need to drink! Maybe that's why I came to jail when I did, so that I could have this awakening and moment of clarity! Now I am ready to go, 'one day at a time,' to a better self and a better life!"—**Nicole B., Northeast Region**

'... THE SUPPORT TO VOICE MY DARKEST SECRETS'

"Today is my biological birthday and my two-year clean and sober birthday. Last year, while at a different prison, our outside sponsor, who has since passed, recommended that I be grateful and not proud on my one-year sobriety point. Though that awesome brother has passed on, his words echo on, defining my sobriety. I started drinking around age eleven and wound up in juvenile hall not long after. For the last thirty odd years, that rollercoaster ride and everything that goes with it has been all I've known. I used to love the effects of alcohol when I drank. I wouldn't be so self-conscious or feel like a weirdo. It took me many turbulent years of pain and destruction to finally just get embarrassingly, candidly honest and admit what it was that I was trying to drown. Alcoholics Anonymous provided me that arena and the support to voice my darkest secrets and, like vampires, most of those demons just lost their power in the light. I found I wasn't the only one with deeply rooted issues of every nature and that by sharing I encouraged others to be honest as well. I love the A.A. program. I'm still coming to grips with a lot of things and I've got a long way to go. I am so grateful for my sobriety, this program, and the Fellowship."—**Tommy K., Pacific Region**

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

"When going over the long list of crimes I committed, I suddenly realized that alcohol played a major part in them all. Suddenly, I thought, 'I am an alcoholic.' For the past three months and for the first time in my life, I'm doing something about it. I just finished reading the Big Book. If I'd read it sooner, who knows? I go to meetings daily and I have someone who is walking me through the Steps. Even in prison I have never known peace like what I feel today. And I've only just begun. For once in my life I have hope for my future."—**Timothy H., Northeast Region**

"I am a recovering alcoholic who has been given another opportunity at life. For the first time in my life, I actually care about what I'm going to do upon my release. A.A. and God have shown me that I no longer have to continue destroying my life. This time in prison I really put forth effort to change and be around people who wanted more out of life than prison. I have been very active in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have a sponsor and I sponsor. I work the Steps to the best of my ability. I now actually believe I have a purpose in life and it involves a lot of giving back. I want to have a decent home plan coming out of prison because I *refuse* to go back down that road that's kept me in bondage for so long. Today, I've actually set some goals for myself over a ten-year period. I need your help in locating somebody to help me get through this. These past sixteen months I've learned how to live in prison, alcohol free. I know I can't do this by myself, so I'm reaching out. This is my first time caring about what happens to me my first day out. I want to be in a meeting that day. I read that if I go to A.A. my first day out that I would probably stay out."—**Christopher A., Southeast Region**

“My name is John and I’ve been an alcoholic since 2003. My alcoholism has taken away my wife and kids, caused incarceration and, at one point, hopelessness in life. I was blessed to find A.A. in prison, which caused me to make a conscious decision to do something different—Live! I’ve had a sponsor, but he was shipped out to another facility. My fellowship suggested writing to an A.A. correspondent to share my strength, hope, experience and fellowship with someone on the outside. My life is better today and, because of A.A., I have hope, which I was missing before. Today, there’s a chance of a better future, as long as I do what is suggested and believe in it, things will turn out okay. I need help with the Steps. I’ve only gotten to the Fifth Step so far. I’m willing and hope to hear from someone soon!”—**John B., Southeast Region**

“My name is Samson, I am doing great, thanks to God, my higher power. I have been incarcerated in the prison system for crimes due in part to being drunk out of my mind and trying to show off how bad I could be. I do not blame my actions and poor choices on being drunk, but I now acknowledge that my judgment was severely impaired due to it. I have been sober for many years, and I’ve never been happier, even though I am still in prison. I’ve been attending A.A. since 2002, and it helped me to realize many things about myself—past and future. God bless you and yours.”—**Samson H., Pacific Region**

THE BIG BOOK— ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

“My name is Berry. I am in a county jail and will be here for some time. I have been in and out of A.A. for about 20 years and until now I have never read the Big Book. But something happened when I got here the night I turned myself in. The guard gave me a Big Book and I have not stopped reading it. I do have a Higher Power and I know it works. It’s me that has had a hard time doing what I need to. I am somewhat isolated, but that is not going to stop me. I want correspondence to help me work with the Big Book. I want a new way of life.”—**Berry E., Northeast Region**

PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

“To this day I still can’t imagine why I turned to the bottle. As a child, I hated alcohol and everything about it. I started down that road at age twenty-five. Life, loss, and living on my own started to get the best of me. I became powerless over alcohol and my life became totally unmanageable. It only took around three years before I became a felon. I know it wasn’t all the alcohol because I just flat out ain’t perfect! There’s always progress though, rather than perfection! I have a little under a year to get myself back on track and restored to sanity! I know that I will need support and a life in A.A. I *have* made that decision, and my will and my life are in God’s hands now!”—**Jose E. A., Southwest Region**

‘... A GLIMMER OF LIGHT?’

“I am serving a sentence for crimes I committed as a direct result of my alcoholism. After being sober for three and a half years, (well, actually I was on a dry drunk) one day, while on vacation, I thought I could handle just one, just this once. Without thinking of the consequences, I asked my wife, a drunk, if she would like to get some beers as we watched the sunset on a beach. That was the beginning of the end. Although we had a great time that day the usual fights soon followed and we both were unable to put down the bottle. The more we fought, the more we drank, and the more we drank the more we fought. About a year later, after several police visits, I was arrested. This time I am not court ordered or pressured in any way by anyone to attend A.A. My counselor has been a great inspiration to me. He told me to read page 30 in the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, everyday. Well, I took that suggestion a step further and made a decision to read the entire book for the first time

in my life. I finished reading the Big Book yesterday (Yea!)! I read it from cover-to-cover and what an amazing adventure it was. I laughed, I cried, but most of all I saw myself in its pages and I began to hope. My counselor posed the question, on the first day of treatment class, ‘What am I going to do the first day I get out of prison?’ On my first day out, I am going to make a meeting or two and get a sponsor. We don’t have access to any sponsors or even any way to really work the Steps. We usually just talk, mostly about jail stuff, and we read the literature, of course. So I would also like to be put in contact with an outside A.A. correspondent. Thank God for A.A. For the first time in my life, I see a glimmer of light through a very dark tunnel.”—**David N., Southeast Region**

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

“A.A. has helped me transform into a man society can be proud of. A.A. has led me into a faithful relationship with God and my fellows. A.A. helps inmates recover. We know this. My experience has always been positive from the responsible, productive A.A. members who have come in, rain or shine—even on holidays.”—**Glenn R., Southeast Region**

“My name is Terry. I’m currently an inmate who has found peace in life through A.A. and it has been a blessing after 13 years of being in and out of jail and prison due to my drinking. I’ve found a new way of life through working the Steps and having a sponsor who is also a fellow inmate. He has a good many years of sobriety and is serving a life sentence. He has shown me how the principles of the A.A. program can work in my life.”—**Terry I., Southeast Region**

CSS

“Through the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) [see next entry], I’ve gained a tremendous amount of support. I was introduced to the service through a friend at another facility and had no earthly idea that many months later I would still be corresponding. It’s through our letters that I gained the determination to start my Steps. This is something that I’ve never done before because I thought I could do it on my own. My correspondent has helped me to pinpoint areas in my life that I’ve kept hidden for years. She is my friend. She’s also my sponsor, the first one I’ve ever had in all my many years of alcoholism. From day one, she’s showed me nothing but support and understanding. She has helped to build me up where I was torn down. At times it’s not easy to correspond with an inmate due to circumstances that we can’t control, but no matter what, she’s been there by my side. Today I thank you for providing such a service to the incarcerated, sick and suffering alcoholic.”—**Mildred G., Southeast 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), 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.