EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

Behind the Walls: A Message of Hope

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.

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Retitled: February 2022

Formerly "Memo to An Inmate Who May Be an Alcoholic"

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14M – 12/25 (DG3)

Behind the Walls:
A Message of Hope

Part I

Behind the Walls: A Message of Hope

WHAT IT WAS LIKE

Booze wasn't something we liked to talk about — it was something we liked to drink. We drank top-shelf, bottom-shelf, and everything in between. A lot of us didn't even know we had a problem with booze until it was too late. Alcoholics Anonymous gave us a second chance.

Many of us have been in custody ourselves. And booze played a big part in our crimes — much bigger than we thought.

"I'm 57 years old, sober for eleven years in A.A., have an executive position in an industrial firm, and have the respect of my family. But it wasn't always this good; 25 of those 57 years were spent in prison."

When we were younger we enjoyed drinking. It made us feel good. We could be part of the crowd or be alone, it didn't matter. When we drank, it seemed to make us feel better. We could dance, tell jokes, or just stand in the corner being cool. We seemed to be braver, smarter, even better-looking when we had a drink or two.

People were more fun. We could go places we always wanted to go. Things were easier. And it seemed to make us happy. We could forget our problems for a while and relax.

"I got drunk for the first time at the age of thirteen. Four years later I ended up serving an eleven-year sentence."

But sooner or later, things didn't go our way. We got angry. We drank to show people they couldn't mess with us. Sometimes we even forgot what we had done. We got angry with our families and friends. If people asked us about our drinking, we lied. Sometimes we even bragged about how much we drank.

"When I first went to prison, I had no feelings left except one — anger."

We began to wish that people would just leave us alone. We saw other people who seemed to be okay, and we couldn't imagine how they did it.

Some of us could see that booze was turning on us, others couldn't. But it didn't matter anymore. We felt like somebody owed us something and we began to grab for what we thought was ours.

"A few months later, I broke into a drugstore. It was the same thing all over again."

We found out what it was like when the prison door shut behind us. For many of us it wasn't the first time. When everything else was falling apart, we thought we needed booze. We figured it was the one thing keeping us together. The future looked pretty grim. Many of us began to ask, "What good is a second chance?"

Part 2

THERE WAS AN ANSWER

Few of us had started out to drink ourselves into real trouble. But that's where we'd ended up. Something had to change. Maybe drinking had something to do with it?

"My parole officer told me it was mandatory for me to attend the weekly A.A. meeting. So I went; I know the anger that surrounded me made people uncomfortable, but that was fine with me."

We had tried so hard to prove that we could drink normally. But we always had the same result — we got drunk. We kept thinking it would be different, but it never was. And things weren't getting any better, they were getting worse. We decided to take a look at our drinking.

"I entered the program as a skeptic. I still felt I could handle alcohol. Little did I realize how glad I would be to be sober."

On our own, we really thought about our drinking. We looked at the good and the bad. Sure it was fun, but there was the other side of it too.

For many of us it was the first time we got honest with ourselves about booze. We saw how we drank even when we didn't want to. How we couldn't stop once we'd started. How we'd hidden out behind a bottle.

"When an A.A. group formed in the institution I was in, I made fun of it. But later when an old drinking partner of mine joined the group, I started going to the meetings myself. I liked what I saw and heard."

We had been in so much trouble already, we decided to try not drinking. Even if it was just for a while. Many of us had heard of A.A. Maybe we were ready now?

"For years I resented my first wife for sending me to prison. I resented the cops for picking me up, and my friends for not lending me more money to drink with. Now I try to realize that each one, in his or her own way, did me a favor by pushing me closer to my present sobriety."

One of the first things we heard in A.A. was that we had a choice. We could choose not to drink. We could tell the people in A.A. knew about drinking. But they also knew about not drinking. We decided to listen to what they had to say.

Even if we weren't sure about it, but thought we *might* have a problem, we were welcomed at A.A. meetings. We didn't have to say we were alcoholics. A.A. didn't want us to stop drinking unless we wanted to.

They said if we didn't think we belonged, we could just go out and have a drink. They wouldn't stop us. But they let us know they would still be there if we wanted to come back.

A.A. didn't care how much we drank, or what we had done in the past. It wasn't important whether we drank whiskey, wine, beer, or home brew. All A.A. cared about was whether we wanted to do something about our drinking.

"My walls were coming down and I didn't know what to do. All of a sudden I couldn't wait for the next A.A. meeting."

We heard what A.A. was telling us about having a choice, and we wanted to know more. Just like getting honest about our drinking, for many of us it was the first time we ever really asked for help — and meant it.

We learned that some people just can't drink safely. Nobody really knows why. Doctors call alcoholism a disease.

From A.A. members themselves we learned that willpower never worked. Neither did drying out for a while. Sooner or later, these members told us, they picked up a drink again. It was like an allergy, they said, and they found out the hard way they were allergic to booze.

In A.A. we heard there was no such thing as being a little bit of an alcoholic. But if we could admit to ourselves that we had a problem, then there was hope.

"Once I was willing to listen and to accept that I was not a bad person, that I was capable of loving and being loved, that I could hold my head up and respect myself, then I knew it would be alright."

Many of us had a pretty rough time with drinking. We were broke, homeless. We slept in doorways and panhandled. We hit skid row, or were in and out of mental institutions and jails. We were violent and full of rage. And many of us have the scars to prove it.

But not all alcoholics have these kinds of troubles. There were many of us who never lost our jobs, our families. But we had the scars too — scars on the inside. We had the same problem the others had — we couldn't drink safely.

We learned in A.A. that just like booze, alcoholics come in all different packages. We heard it's not how much you drank, what you drank, or how long you drank. It's what drinking does to you.

"They tried to introduce me to A.A., but I told them, 'What the hell good is A.A. in here?' Besides… that A.A. stuff was for bums who lived by the riverbanks and drank canned heat."

Most of our lives we had always looked at somebody else and said, "That's an alcoholic." But now, we kept the focus on ourselves and our own drinking. It didn't matter anymore who drank more than we did or who drank less. We weren't trying to get anybody to stop drinking but ourselves.

ARE YOU AN ALCOHOLIC?

The list of questions which follows has helped a lot of people find out where they stood with booze. But remember, you are the only one who can say if you have a problem or not. Even if you've been told you do, the important thing is that you decide for yourself. All we ask is that you try to be honest.

And whatever you decide after looking at the questions, we'll tell you some more about A.A. in the next part of this pamphlet.

	Yes	No
1. Did you lose time from work due to drinking?	❑	❑
2. Did drinking make your home life unhappy?	❑	❑
3. Did you drink because you were shy with people?	❑	❑

4. Has drinking affected your reputation? ❑ ❑
5. Have you gotten into trouble with money because of your drinking? ❑ ❑
6. Did you associate with people you didn't respect and hang out in places you didn't want to be in when drinking? ❑ ❑
7. Did your drinking make you careless of your family's welfare? ❑ ❑
8. Has your drinking decreased your ambition? ❑ ❑
9. Did you want a drink "the morning after"? ❑ ❑
10. Did you have a hard time sleeping because of your drinking? ❑ ❑
11. Has your ability to work decreased since drinking? ❑ ❑
12. Did drinking get you into trouble on the job or in business? ❑ ❑
13. Did you drink to escape from problems or worries? ❑ ❑
14. Did you drink alone? ❑ ❑
15. Have you ever had a complete loss of memory as a result of drinking? ❑ ❑
16. Has a doctor ever treated you for drinking? ❑ ❑
17. Did you drink to build up self-confidence? ❑ ❑
18. Have you ever been arrested, locked up, or hospitalized on account of drinking? ❑ ❑
19. Have you ever felt guilty after drinking? ❑ ❑
20. Did you have to have a drink at a certain time each day? ❑ ❑

If you answered *"yes"* to three or more questions, you may be an alcoholic.

But remember, we in A.A. follow this program voluntarily. No one forces us to admit we are alcoholics. No one forces us to stay sober in A.A. We do it because we like what A.A. has to offer.

Part 3

HOW IT WORKS

Many people have their doubts about A.A. They wonder what the angle is. "Why do these people want to help me?" they ask themselves.

WE ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS

Some people get paid for the work they do with alcoholics. They are doctors, counselors, psychiatrists, or social workers. We in A.A. do not get paid. We are drunks. We are drunks who have found a way to stop drinking that works. We don't claim to have all the answers. But we do want to share what has worked for us. And we do it because it helps us stay sober ourselves. In fact, our primary purpose is to stay sober and help anybody else who wants to stop.

As a whole, we have no opinion on anything other than A.A. But we do know one thing: It's the first drink that gets us drunk.

Many of us thought it was the third drink or the last corner in the bottle that did the job on us. But we learned in A.A. it was the very first drink. Once we took it, we were certain to take the next one too.

We don't oppose alcohol, and we don't say A.A. is the only answer. All we can say is that it works for us.

WE ARE NOT RELIGIOUS

A lot of people in A.A. talk about God or a Higher Power. But A.A. is not connected with any religion. The only reason a lot of us talk about God is that it helps us, not because we expect you to believe in the same things.

Religion is a personal thing. You don't have to believe in God to be a member of A.A. All you need is a desire to stop drinking. You can have any Higher Power you want, or none at all.

WE TALK ABOUT IT

A.A. got started by one drunk talking to another about booze. And it still works. A.A. is not group therapy or a church confession.

But we found it sure helped to talk to someone who knew what we were going through with booze. We asked other A.A. members how they quit drinking, and we listened to what they said.

We found out there wasn't a set of rules we had to follow. But if we could learn from the suggestions of people who had been there, we could probably save ourselves a lot of wasted time.

WE DO IT FOR 24 HOURS

When we really want to drink, we try putting it off for 24 hours. Sometimes that is too long. So we break it down to six hours, or one hour, or five minutes at a time.

Using the "24-hour plan" also helps when we get down on ourselves. We heard, "If you have one eye on yesterday and one on tomorrow, you'll be cross-eyed today."

We can't change the past by getting angry about it, and we can't predict the future by worrying about it. But we *can* do something about the way we feel right now.

STAYING STOPPED

For some of us stopping drinking was easy. We'd done it plenty of times. The trick was staying stopped.

We began to understand what A.A. members were saying about not picking up the *first* drink. And we heard the results of people picking up that first drink even after being sober a while. And the results were the same. They got drunk.

We began to get the idea that staying stopped was the hard part of A.A. But that's also where we got the most help, one day at a time.

THE STEPS

Lots of members talked about "working the Steps," and it took a while for us to catch on. We found out that the Steps were the heart of A.A.'s recovery program, and some people referred to them as "the steps we took that led us to a new life."

THE TRADITIONS

The more we learned about A.A. — how there are no bosses in A.A., how our common welfare comes first, why the second "A" of A.A. means "anonymous" — the more we could see the importance of the Traditions. If the Steps were the heart of A.A., then the Traditions were the backbone.

USING A.A. MATERIAL

There are lots of A.A. pamphlets and A.A. books, and we tried to get as many of them as we could. Even if we thought we'd never read them we picked them up. Almost always they turned out to be just what we needed. There were also a lot of slogans that A.A. members used that started to make sense to us in our day-to-day lives. We heard "First Things First," which helped us out of a lot of jams. And "Easy Does It" was good advice when we started getting riled up about things we couldn't change. We also heard about "HALT" which stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired. It was suggested that we not get too much of any of these. This idea helped us to "Keep It Simple," and when we took care of these things first, we felt a whole lot less thirsty for a drink.

A.A. also has a magazine called the A.A. Grapevine that comes out every month, and we tried to get hold of some copies. In it we read about A.A. members all over the world, and it helped us to better understand how the program worked.

For those of us who liked to write letters, we discovered that A.A.'s General Service Office (GSO) had a Corrections Correspondence Service that would put us in touch with an A.A. member "on the outside." Many of us wrote letters and in return received mail. We found this a powerful way of sharing our thoughts and at the same time learning more about A.A.

LIVING SOBER

We realized that what we were learning about A.A. was great. But we had to put it to use in our daily lives. Nobody could do it for us. Eventually we came to a point where it was sink or swim.

All A.A. has to offer is its experience, its strength, and its hope. We will gladly share it with you, any time you are ready. *The decision is up to you.*

Part 4

PERSONAL STORIES

The stories that follow were written by A.A. members

Charlie M.

Nearly eight years ago, I woke up one morning in jail. I'd been there before, so I wasn't too concerned. But it sure was a shock to find out I'd been there for three days, not one night, like I thought. So right away I tried to arrange for my release. Another shock. Instead of being released, I was going on trial for armed robbery. I came away from that shock with a sentence of 19 years.

I went to prison full of every bad thought you could imagine, especially resentment against the world and contempt for all prison officials. For a full year, I was difficult, depressed and determined to hold onto my anger.

Eventually though, I started to notice these outsiders who came into the prison regularly and seemed to be holding meetings of some sort. I found out they were A.A. members — alcoholics who didn't drink anymore. Personally, I thought they were screwballs, but I noticed every so often a woman would come in with the group. So, I started going to the meetings for no other purpose than to "gaze upon the fair sex."

Meanwhile, my wife on the outside had been exposed to A.A. She got sober herself and wrote to tell me she was happy that I was on the right track, too. To impress her, I memorized passages from the A.A. books and included them in my letters.

Unfortunately, she saw through this pretty quick and advised me to quit kidding myself and get honest with myself and with A.A. My first reaction was to explode with anger, but when I cooled off a bit, I decided to really think about some of those passages I had memorized. Pretty soon, I had to admit I'd been conceited, egotistical, and self-centered nearly all my life. I also had to admit I was an alcoholic and that I needed help.

After that I made real progress in A.A. The next four years were happy, even in prison. My record was clean — no disciplinary actions, thanks to A.A., and I

made more honest and true friends through A.A. than I had ever known before. My wife stood by me, and after six years of my 19-year sentence, I made parole.

My first contact upon release was an A.A. group in my home town. I was accepted for what I was — a human being. The group knew I had just been released from prison, but they treated me as an equal. In a very short time I was elected group secretary. Soon after, I was selected as one of the principal speakers at the state A.A. convention. My wife and I were two of the happiest A.A.s in the world.

Had it not been for A.A. in prison, with the honest and sincere help the outside groups gave our inmate group, I would still be behind bars. Society seldom gives heed to the consequences that sending a man to prison entails. But I do thank God for the ones who believed we were worth trying to salvage. I thank God for A.A.

Lisa T.

I'm 25 years old, soon to be 26. But I feel a lot older than that due to prostitution, drinking and drugs. I've been into all that for about six or seven years. I gave birth to twin daughters and had to give them up for adoption. I've accepted that because I wanted them to grow up with more than I did. It still haunts me, but I know I did the right thing. I can feel in my heart that they are happy and well-loved.

When I was five and a half years old, my own father raped me and I think that is one thing that festered and boiled inside of me and caused a lot of pain, anger and resentment. After that happened, I always despised myself. So I ended up getting into all the wrong things. I felt like I had to do what I wanted at all times. I wouldn't listen to anyone.

I'm real surprised my mom and my brother didn't give up on me. But they stuck by me. When I got into trouble they would help when they could.

I was always in trouble with pimps, police and everyone else around me.

I got drunk and high at first to be able to go to bed with whoever. They always reminded me of my father in some way, so I would treat them terrible.

I quit the steady use of cocaine about two years ago and just drank. And the booze finally just took over. I lost all my control. Then I really filled up on hate. I hated everything in life — even booze — but I couldn't seem to quit. Then I started the suicide

route. I tried several times in the last couple of years. The last time I really came close, and since I even failed at that I came to realize there must be something else planned for me.

Today, I thank God and the program of A.A. I don't think I would be alive today without them. For the first time I'm learning about A.A. and all that it involves. And I feel good about myself for the first time in years.

John K.

As a kid I stole bicycles to get money for booze. Later, a buddy and I stole cars, drove them across the state line, and stripped them. One year we stole nearly $20,000 worth of copper wire, burned it so it looked used, then sold it for a couple of hundred dollars. We used the money to drink.

Eventually, I got married, got a good job in a steel mill, and had three little baby girls. But I drank up my salary on a regular basis until my wife had me arrested for nonsupport and took me to court for divorce. The judge ordered me to make the support payments, but sometimes I only made "partial" payments, and sometimes I made none.

I knew I was in trouble, so I left the state. I stole a car, got drunk, and wrapped up the car on a highway pole. In return for a couple of drinks from the police, I signed the extradition papers and they sent me back. I got three years in the state penitentiary.

They tried to introduce me to A.A., but I told them, "What the hell good is A.A. in here?" Besides, it was obvious I was no alcoholic. That A.A. stuff was for bums who lived by the riverbank and drank canned heat.

The day I finally made my parole, I got drunk right away. I was supposed to go to this city where I was paroled to a priest, but I missed my train. Ten days later, I finally showed up.

I attended A.A. meetings, but I didn't work at it. At one of the meetings I met a woman who was having trouble staying sober too, so we got together. Pretty soon we got married and our drinking went downhill to the point we were drinking some pretty weird stuff just to get high. Once I even set the house on fire when I was drunk.

Finally, we both realized we were alcoholics and were powerless over alcohol, just like they said at the meetings. So we went back to A.A., this time because we *wanted* sobriety.

Twenty-four hours at a time, all the way up to right now, we've had a good, sober, happy life. Yes, my employer knows my record, but recently he said I was the most dependable man he had working for him.

There are things I now know to watch out for — the foremost being resentment. For years I resented my first wife for sending me to prison. I resented the cops for picking me up, and my friends for not lending me more money to drink with. Now I try to realize that each one, in his or her own way, did me a favor by pushing me closer to my present sobriety.

George W.

I'm 57 years old, sober for 11 years in A.A., have an executive position in an industrial firm, and I have the respect of my family. But, it wasn't always this good. Twenty-five of those 57 years were spent in prison.

My parents were pretty well off, and I had a lot of advantages some youngsters never get. But, by the time I was 20 I also had a long record of arrests for fighting, driving while drunk, and other assorted charges. I was married twice — one marriage was annulled and the other ended in divorce, and as my arrest record grew I began associating with bootleggers and gamblers. Most of the time, though, I was able to stay out of jail by paying all kinds of fines and hiring lawyers who could fix things for me.

Gradually, I began to move closer and closer to the underworld. I worked in a couple of gambling houses, but lost each job as a result of my drinking. I hooked up with a bunch of safecrackers and one night I tried to rob a speakeasy all on my own. But I started drinking booze from behind the bar and passed out before I even got to the safe. They found me there in the morning, still asleep. I got five to 15 years for that one.

Seven years later when I was paroled, I was determined not to go back to the same old ways. But six months later, after a binge of drinking, I cracked up a car and was arrested for driving while intoxicated. They returned me to prison as a parole violator, and I served out the rest of my term.

My first stop at the end of that term? Another bar where I started a drunk that lasted six weeks and landed me back in jail, this time for house-breaking.

Four years later, I was up for parole again — this time with a big bankroll from some of the rackets I was involved with in jail. But the bankroll disappeared right quick and I had to hook up with a burglar I'd met in prison.

A few months later, I broke into a drugstore. It was the same thing all over again. I started drinking up the inventory of cough syrup and passed out before touching a dime. A cop on the beat noticed the smashed front door, and this time I went away for 10 years — with no opportunity for parole.

For the first seven years of this term, the only interest I had in life was gambling and getting as much alcohol as I could.

When an A.A. group formed in the institution I was in, I made fun of it. But later, when an old drinking partner of mine joined the group, I started going to meetings myself. I liked what I saw and heard.

I made a decision to accept that I was an alcoholic and that A.A. could help me stay sober. I became active in the group and started helping other alcoholics. And even though I still could have gotten it, I didn't touch another drop for the last three years of my term.

Since I've been out, I've kept my sobriety — mostly by working closely with local A.A. groups and trying to help other alcoholics who are still in prison. I do the best I can, and it works — for me.

Norman S.

I got drunk for the first time at the age of 13. Four years later, I ended up serving an 11-year sentence. When I got out, I found a good job, met a woman, got married, and we had four happy years.

With the upcoming birth of our first child, though, the marriage began to have problems. I wasn't ready for parenthood, and we started to quarrel a lot over minor irritations. One night, I stormed out of the house to have a few drinks and cool off. I didn't get back home for four months. My wife refused to let me see the baby and forced me out of the house. So I turned to alcohol again and started stealing to pay for the drinks. I kept trying to get back together with my wife, but she was disgusted with me and threatened to have me arrested. The drinking got worse and I was basically in a continuous blackout.

I came to one night after an accident involving a police car. Both myself and one of the officers in the other car were seriously hurt. I also discovered I had committed another crime, for which I am currently serving my sentence.

One of the prison doctors asked me if I wanted to join an A.A. group that was forming, and I agreed, mostly just to satisfy him.

I entered the program as a skeptic. I still felt I could handle alcohol. Little did I realize how glad I would be to be sober. I've since learned many things from the A.A. program. One of the most important is that I was not a mature person.

But, I've learned to live a day at a time and to face problems instead of running away from them. I have also found many, many good friends in A.A. who will stick with me for the rest of my life. Believe me, no one understands an alcoholic like another alcoholic.

Geneva

When I first went to prison, I had no feelings left except one — anger! It was like a raging fire that was burning my brain. Why? — they locked me up for five to 15 years, away from my best friend — alcohol. For the next two years my every thought was of my next drink. Even when sleeping, I dreamed about the bars, my drinking friends and, yes, even the hangovers.

My parole officer told me it was mandatory I attend the weekly A.A. meeting. So I went; I know the anger that surrounded me made people uncomfortable, but that was fine with me. I was a one-woman blowtorch. I didn't want anyone to speak to me or touch me, and when those A.A. people smiled I wanted to strike out at them. So, for almost two years, once a week I sat in an A.A. meeting, not speaking and not listening. I saw absolutely nothing wrong with my life, and couldn't wait to get back to it.

Much to my dismay, these A.A.s were the most persistent people I had ever met. They were slowly chipping away at my anger, and I didn't even know it.

One night, in my cell after an A.A. meeting, I experienced another feeling mixing with the anger. I didn't know what it was, but I knew that I felt like I was going to explode and I couldn't trust myself around anyone. I went to sit on my bed, but instead found myself on the floor on my knees, with big hot tears flowing down my cheeks. The only words that came pouring from my mouth were, "God help me. I can't take it anymore."

The next morning some of the anger was still there, but there was also fear and confusion. My walls were coming down and I didn't know what to do. All of a sudden I couldn't wait for the next A.A. meeting.

That Friday I went down the hill actually looking forward to the meeting. When I walked in, there was

a stranger standing in the hall, looking very scared and nervous. I found myself walking over to her and shaking her hand, thanking her for coming. We became good friends.

Something else happened. I was hungry for knowledge and the love that was shown to us in those meetings, but there was only *one hour* a week that I had to look forward to.

Before I left that prison we had five meetings a week and numerous other activities involving the women and families. The day I walked out of prison, a wonderful A.A. person met me at the door and, for three or four months, led me through life. It was not easy adjusting to life on the "outside" without alcohol. But I had a lot of support. No one cared where I had been or what I had done — they were only interested in where I was going, and they were there every time I stubbed my toe.

That was almost seven years ago. I still go to A.A. and continue to help and support other men and women who are alcoholics. None of it has been easy. But it gets easier each passing day that I don't drink. A lot of good things have happened to me. And none of it would have happened if it weren't for those persistent, loving people in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Once I was willing to listen and to accept that I was not a bad person, that I was capable of loving and being loved, that I could hold my head up and respect myself, then I knew it would be all right. The people who gave me back my life are numerous, and "thank you" is so very little to give back. So, for myself first, and for all those who reached out a hand, I will try to remain sober one day at a time and reach out to those who follow.

Fred S.

My last sentence was for three to five years. I have been a member of the A.A. group since my first week in prison. I have found real hope. At first, I just listened to the other members. But, because the speakers said, "Get active," I did so. I was determined to help myself, and I have tried to pass along what I have learned.

Why do I think the program is working for me? Well, when I became eligible for parole recently, it was denied. I have a wife and four children, who are of the greatest concern to me. To be with them is something I wanted so bad I could taste it. Yet, when the decision was handed down, I accepted it without

bitterness, knowing that there was nothing I could do about it. "Accept the things you cannot change," I heard in A.A. And I found I could accept this disappointment.

From the beginning, I had been told that A.A. would not do anything for me but help me keep sober; that it is not a social service or an employment agency, and that it would not get any inmate a parole. And I know that when my sentence ends, A.A. cannot be expected to do more than help me preserve my sobriety.

Since joining A.A., I have met a lot of people, all sharing the same problem. Some say they haven't gained much in the way of material things, but most of them certainly seem to be better off than they were. The thing that impresses me most, however, is the fact that every A.A. member I have met who has been in A.A. for any length of time seems to be happy with the way of life offered by the simple program of recovery.

In my own case, even under conditions not of my own choosing, by working the suggested Twelve Steps to the best of my ability, I have found that life has an appeal it never had before. I'm not kidding myself. Maybe life in the free world won't be the utopia I'm hoping for, but I feel confident that it won't be the unmanageable mess that it used to be. Keeping sober and living one day at a time will bring me the fringe benefits, a happy life with a happy family. Who could ask for more?

What A.A. Does Not Do

A.A. does not:

1. recruit members;
2. keep membership records or case histories;
3. do research;
4. affiliate with social agencies, though many members do cooperate with such agencies;
5. follow up or try to control its members;
6. make medical or psychological diagnoses or prognoses;
7. provide hospitalization, drugs, or medical or psychiatric treatment;
8. engage in any controversy about alcohol or other matters;
9. provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or other such services;
10. offer religious services;
11. provide domestic or vocational counseling;
12. accept any money for its services or any contributions from non-A.A. sources;
13. provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials;
14. furnish initial motivation for alcoholics to recover.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him,* praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: www.aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
AS BILL SEES IT
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
BLACK IN A.A.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN A.A.
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES — AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER — MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US: AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION — HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

VIDEOS (available on www.aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, www.aagrapevine.org)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, www.aalavina.org)
ABOUT A.A. (digital-only, www.aa.org/about-aa)

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible…

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: **I am responsible.**

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

ISBN 978-1-940889-38-2

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