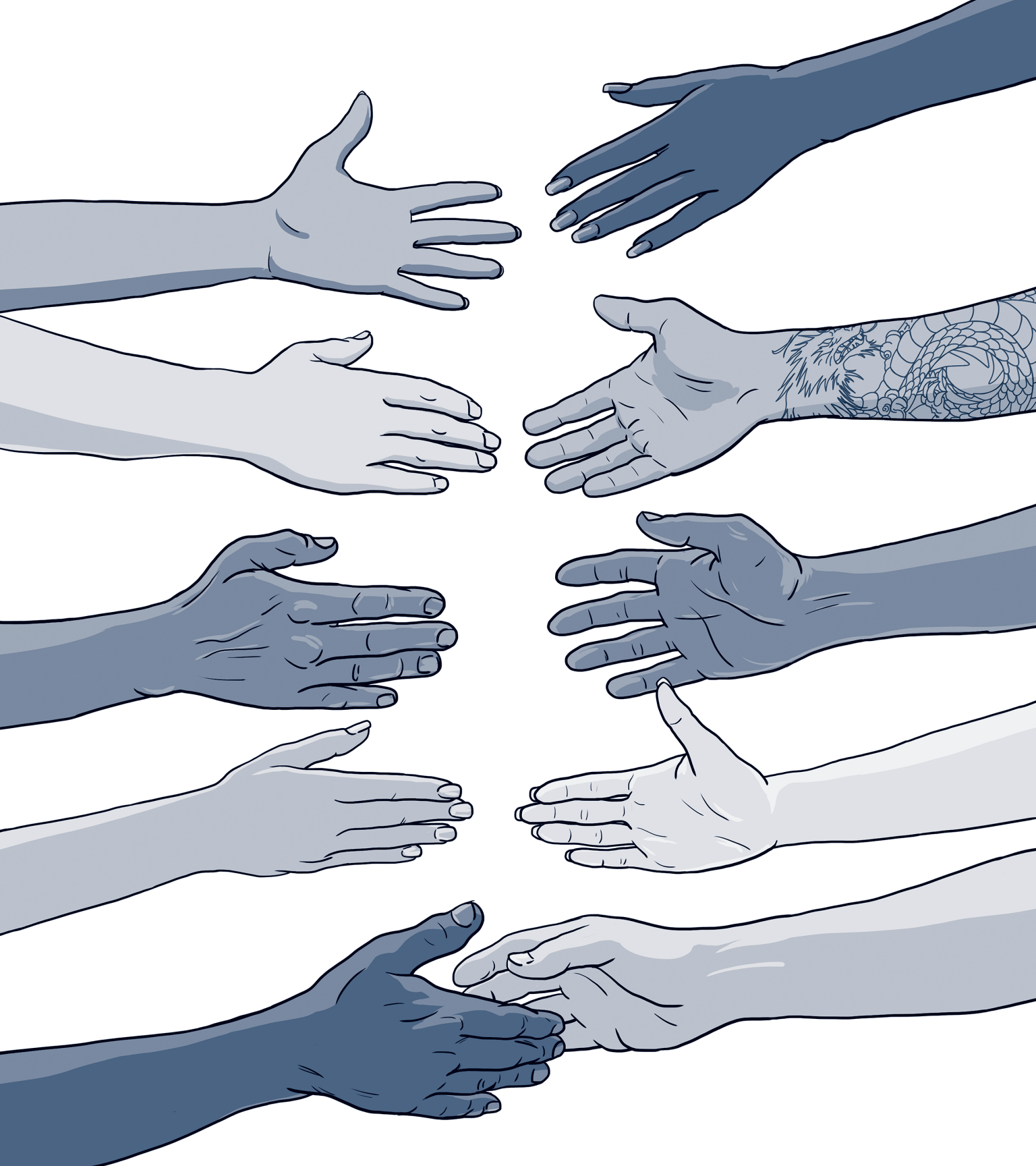


In **Alcoholics Anonymous**, there is no “right” or “wrong” way to get sober. The important thing is that we give it a try. The sharing presented in this pamphlet comes from alcoholics who have been in prison and have found a way to stop drinking through A.A.’s program of recovery. By following the example of A.A. members, both inside and outside prison, they have been able to change their lives for the better.

Alcoholism – and prison – can be a lonely business. We hope this pamphlet will help you understand more about how A.A. works and how we stay sober, one day at a time, wherever we are, from lifers to kids in a juvenile detention center. Getting sober isn’t easy, nor does it happen overnight. But, for those who are willing, experience has proven that the A.A. program works.

It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell



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.

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What we were like

“For twenty-five years I had been doing the same things over and over again, always winding up in the same shape – broken, alone, and locked up. I had abused everything and everyone. Everybody in my life had cut me loose, and rightly so. They were tired, and so was I. I knew I had a problem with alcohol but I didn’t know what to do about it.”

You name it, we drank it. Wine, beer, home brew, rum. Many of us didn’t care too much about the taste. It was the kick we were after. And even if we pretended to be expert drinkers, it was all about how the alcohol made us feel.

With a few drinks in us, most of us started feeling better about ourselves – bigger, stronger, better looking. It was sometimes easier to talk to people when we were drinking, to dance or to party. It could make us happy or help us forget our troubles.

We liked to go out and drink with friends. Some of us drank at home or alone. In the end, it didn’t matter if we drank by ourselves or with other people. What mattered was where – and when – we could get the next drink.

Many of us thought we could control our drinking. We often overlooked those times when things got out of hand and denied there was any problem at all. It wasn’t important if we first tasted alcohol when we were young or didn’t pick it up until later in life. Alcohol was taking us where it wanted to go, not where we thought we were heading.

Car accidents, fights, trouble with the law. Bad things started to happen. Sometimes we did things we didn’t remember or couldn’t explain. We woke up in places and with people we didn’t know. Or maybe we just sat back, never getting involved, just watching as the world seemed to pass us by. Whether we were riding high or hiding in the shadows of life, our drinking finally caught up with us and the things we did, often when we were drunk, landed us behind bars.

It occurred to us that we needed help. So we tried different things to keep our drinking in check. Cutting down. Just drinking beer. Never drinking on an empty stomach. But nothing helped. Eventually we got drunk again, even after declaring, “I’ll never do that again.”

Therapists. Doctors. Friends. Family. Bosses. People were telling us we shouldn’t drink. But what did they know? We began thinking if everybody would just leave us alone, we’d be alright.

As our isolation increased, whether alone or in a crowd, it looked like there was nowhere else to go, nowhere to turn. Our lives were a mess and the future looked grim. We’d run out of answers.

What happened

"I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous while in prison the first time. But it wasn't for me, or so I thought. It was for the winos and bums. Of course, I was just like them; I just didn't know it."

In the end, it didn't matter how we got to A.A. Many of us came for the donuts and coffee. Some of us thought it would help with parole. Whether our minds were open or closed to the possibility of getting help in A.A., we discovered it sure beats sitting in a cell.

And once we got there, many of us who thought we were alone with our suffering found people who were just like us – people who had struggled with alcoholism but had found a way out. By listening to what these people had to say we were able to recognize many of the problems alcohol had caused in our own lives.

"Sitting in a detox cell years later, weighing 118 pounds, and without any hope, I knew it was time to ask for some help. My way simply didn't work. I was completely beaten. That help came from other folks just like me who had found a solution in the rooms of A.A."

The more we listened or read A.A. pamphlets and books, the more we came to believe A.A. might be able to help. We saw how people could

live one day at a time without needing a drink. It prompted us to take a good, honest look at our own drinking. We tried to tell ourselves the real truth, not to kid ourselves. We looked at the good parts of our drinking, and the bad parts. We saw how often we got into trouble while drinking. Many of us never got into trouble *except* when we were drinking. Over and over, our troubles were connected to the way we drank.

We decided to learn about drinking from those who had been there – the drunks in A.A. If anybody knew the truth about drinking, it must be them. We didn't have anything to lose.

Even if we thought we *might* have a drinking problem but weren't convinced, we realized we were welcome. A.A. doesn't care what we drank, how much we drank or even what we did. A.A. was different from other groups we'd come across in the past. It's not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; it has no requirements for membership other than a desire to stop drinking. And each group has just one primary purpose: to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. For many of us who had felt nothing but judgment and rejection our entire lives, this was comforting news.

So we told the chaplain or counselor or some other official that we wanted to go to some A.A. meetings.

For us, it was the first step toward recovery.

What we are like now

“A lot has happened in the eight years since my arrest – some good, some real bad. But through it all I have not found it necessary to take a drink. I know today that is a direct result of the Twelve Steps and my Higher Power (God) doing for me what I could not do for myself. I am free although I’m still in jail.”

For years, we ran from the truth. We wanted to be anybody but ourselves. But after learning more about A.A. and facing the wreckage of our past, we became willing to accept ourselves for who we are. With sobriety, life became manageable. We even started liking ourselves, slowly but surely.

It didn’t matter anymore what other people thought. By accepting A.A.’s ideas, we started having time work for us instead of just doing time. The future started looking brighter, whether we were incarcerated or not.

While nothing had changed around us, we started to feel a new freedom and a new joy – from within. We were able to let go of old ideas, about ourselves and others, and adopt a new way of thinking.

Asking for help had never been a strong point for many of us, but we realized we couldn’t do this thing on our own. By reaching out, a little bit at a time, we found there were plenty of A.A. members willing to help. And, as we stayed sober ourselves, we started to see how our experience could help others, passing it on freely, as it had been passed on to us.

While things didn’t always go the way we planned, we found that with the help of A.A.’s program of recovery, we could deal with life’s many ups and downs. A lot of us never had anything too solid to hold onto in our lives, but we learned we could count on A.A. By using the Twelve Steps, we found a new way of doing things and discovered a kind of stability we’d never had.

In A.A., alcoholism is serious business. Most of us have known the kind of suffering that wrenches the soul. But, through A.A., we have also come to know the kind of hope that makes the heart sing.

Staying sober, one day at a time, we realized we had finally found a home – a home in Alcoholics Anonymous.





THE TWELVE STEPS

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

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.

Experience, strength and hope

“As an alcoholic, the real prison is in my mind. And while the physical restraints of fences or walls are only temporary, alcoholism is a permanent state that needs the dose of medicine that A.A. prescribes.”

There are a lot of things we did to stay sober – both in prison and on the outside. Doubtless, you will discover what works best for you as you continue applying the A.A. program of recovery to your life. But there are a few things we’d like to lay a little emphasis on. We share these with you now because they worked for us.

The Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps are the core of A.A.’s program of recovery from alcoholism. They are based on the trial-and-error experience of A.A.’s early members and have worked for millions of alcoholics since then.

We tried to familiarize ourselves with the Steps and to see how they could be applied in our own lives. Reading the stories in A.A. literature and listening to the sharing of other A.A.s was helpful.

Acceptance of the Twelve Steps is not mandatory in any sense, yet experience suggests that those who make an earnest effort to follow the Steps and to use them in their daily living seem to get far more out of A.A. than those who treat them more casually.

The Twelve Steps represent an approach to

living that is totally new for most alcoholics, and many of us feel they are a necessary pathway to contented sobriety.

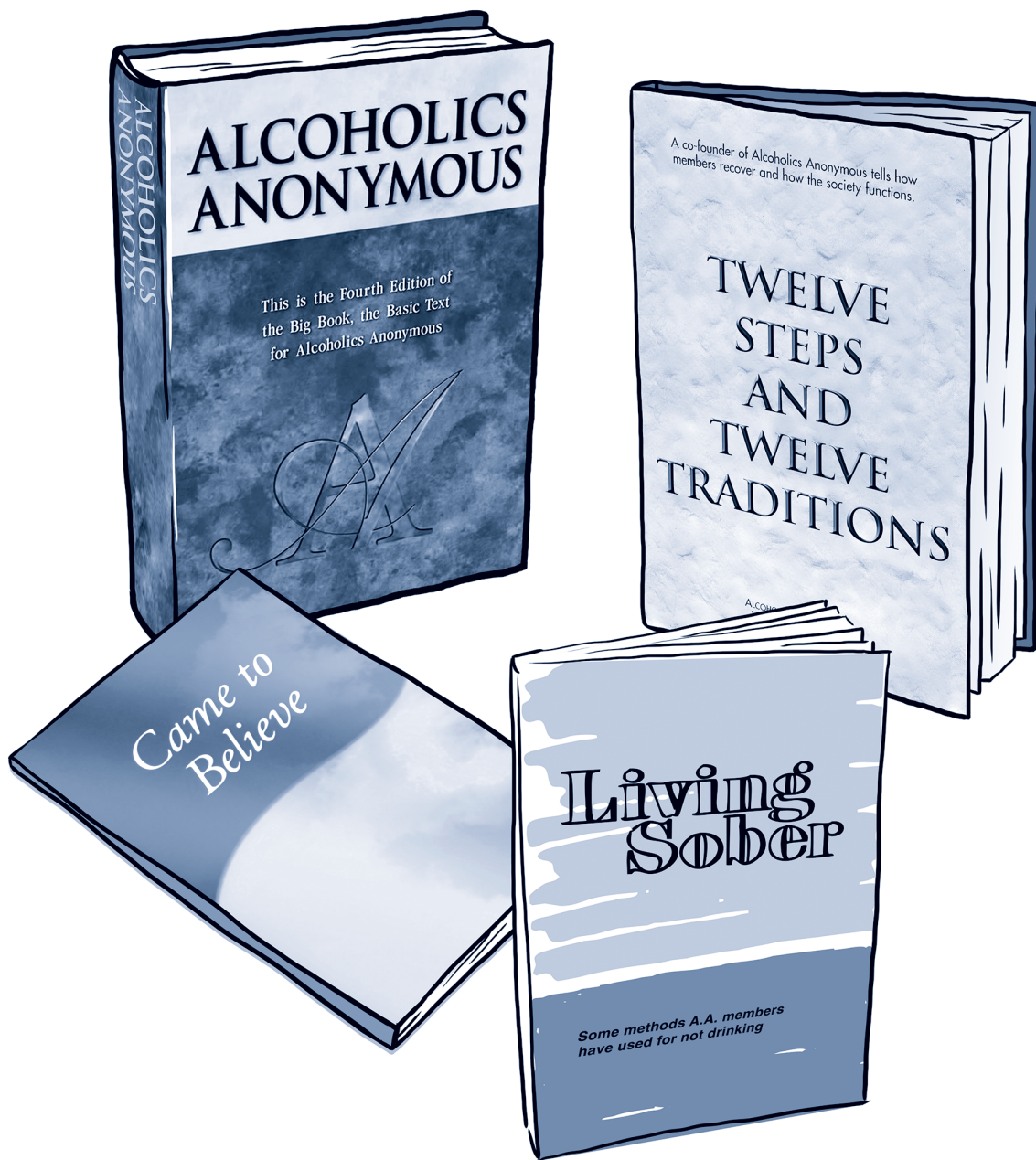
Sponsorship

Sponsorship has been around A.A. since the beginning. When A.A.’s co-founder Bill W. was only a few months sober, he was stricken with a powerful urge to drink. In that moment, this thought came to him: “You need another alcoholic to talk to. You need another alcoholic just as much as he needs you.”

He found Dr. Bob, who had also been trying, without much luck, to stop drinking, and out of their common need, A.A. was born.

“Now, on the outside, I long for the day when I can go back inside the prison to share my experience, strength and hope as a free A.A. member. After all, going there got me here...”





Sponsorship is still a lot like that. An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience with another alcoholic who is trying to stay sober through A.A. It's usually someone we can feel comfortable with, someone with whom we can talk freely and confidentially, and we ask that person to be our sponsor, to help us learn how to live sober.

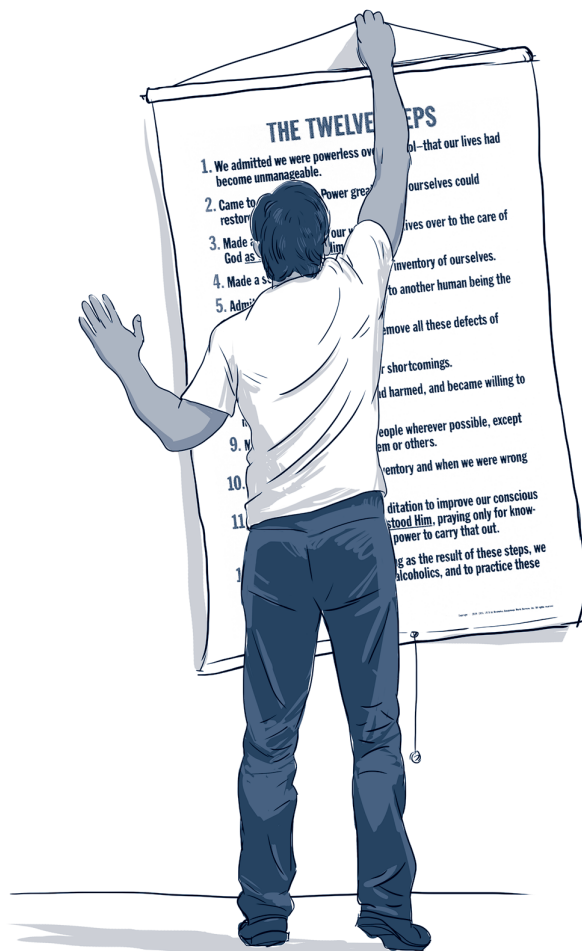
For prison A.A. groups, sometimes there will be an inside “sponsor,” a staff member, chaplain, social worker or advisor from the prison itself; and there can also be an outside “sponsor,” an A.A. member who brings the meetings in on a regular basis. These individuals serve as a vital communications link between the prison and the outside A.A. community.

Using A.A. literature

We tried to pick up every booklet or pamphlet we could find at A.A. meetings. Even if we thought we'd never read it. Plenty of times it turned out to be just what we needed.

We also tried to get the A.A. books and read them all. We discovered that A.A. has a magazine called the Grapevine put out by A.A. members every month. It has stories, news, cartoons and jokes in it, and we read it whenever we could.

We also became familiar with the A.A. slogans – sayings like “First Things First,” “Easy Does It,” and “Live and Let Live” – and would think about what they meant, and how we could use them in our daily lives.



Service

Things don't get done by magic in A.A. Someone has to set up the chairs for A.A. meetings, or make the coffee, hang up the signs, put out pamphlets and books, and clean up after the meeting. We realized we could lend a hand.

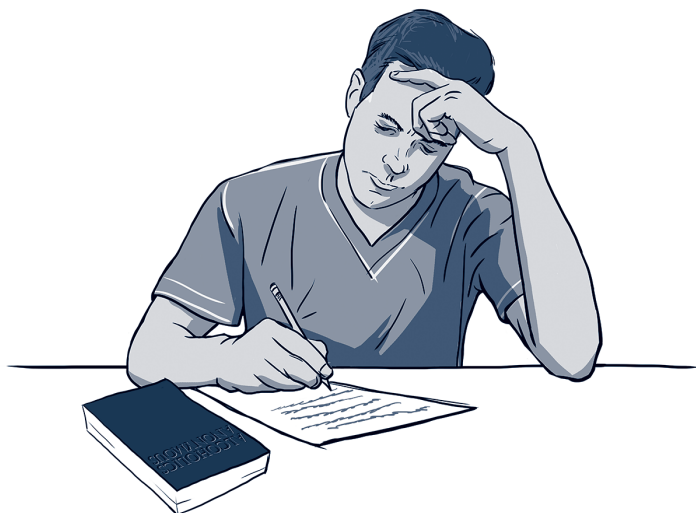
Getting involved in this way helped us feel more connected to the group and doing these things kept us thinking about staying sober.

Most A.A. groups have a secretary, and maybe some other “officers.” But they are not the bosses. They just take turns getting things done.

Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS)

Sharing with another alcoholic concerning sobriety and the A.A. program is an important facet of recovery. Many of us found it helpful to write letters to outside A.A. members who have volunteered to correspond with A.A. members in the inside. Many of them have served time, too, and would be happy to hear from us.

If you are in a long-term facility and have at least six months before release you can write to the Corrections Correspondence Service, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, U.S.A. You will be answered by an A.A. member who will try to help you. The mail you get from A.A. members never says "A.A." on the envelope. It looks like just plain, personal



mail. Many of us have found that writing letters and getting any A.A. mail is good for us.

Prerelease and re-entry suggestions

What we do in the first few hours after release can make all the difference in our future. And based on the experience many of us have had, what we did that first day on the streets decided whether we would stay free or be sent away again.

We realized that before release, we had to make some plans. Many of us contacted A.A.'s General Service Office up to six months before our release date. Through the local Corrections committee they helped find an A.A. contact in or near the town where we would eventually be living. We also discovered that the local committee could sometimes arrange to have an A.A. member meet us when we got out and take us to meetings on the outside.

One way or the other, we made sure to make as many meetings as we could as soon as we were released.

What A.A. does and does not do

The primary purpose of A.A. is to carry its message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers, and A.A. members share personal experience of how they stay sober, one day at a time. Trying to help someone get and stay sober is good for us. That's why we do it.



From reading A.A. material, though, and talking to A.A. men and women, we learned that there are some things A.A. does *not* do. For example:

A.A. Does NOT

1. Give anyone a place to live or clothing, or food, or money;
2. help anybody get a job;
3. solve family problems;
4. give medical or legal advice;
5. fix people up with romances or sex partners;
6. give psychiatric advice or treatment;
7. promise anyone a social life or have a center for arts, crafts, sports, or other hobbies;
8. force us to do anything we do not want to do;
9. provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, or court officials.

Learning to live sober

These are only a few of the many things that worked for us and as you stay sober, you will find what works best for you. But one of the things we realized is that nobody could do the A.A. program for us. We had to do it ourselves.

A.A. has a lot of experience, strength and hope to share, and we could see that A.A. members were more than willing to share it with us when we were ready.

But, the decision was up to us.

What did we have to lose?



The Twelve Steps Of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
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3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
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5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
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12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Here Are Some of Our Stories

We are A.A. members who are, or have been, incarcerated. We have chosen to share our stories with you to show what we were like, how things changed, and what life is like for us now. We hope you will find in our stories a little bit of yourself.

Dusty finally took the hint

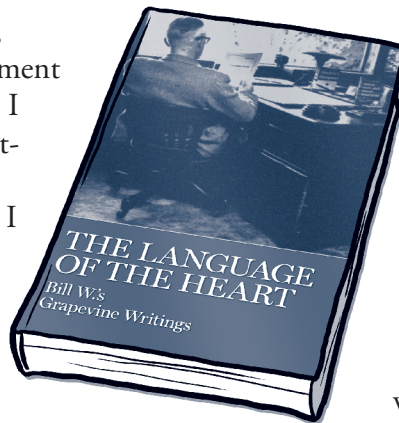
I loved to drink. I liked to get loose and have a good time. I would get a little rowdy, make some noise, start a little trouble. Not big trouble, just a little trouble, or so I thought.

I always had a good time drinking in high school. It was fun and I fit in. As I got older, though, I realized that I drank differently from everyone else. I always started earlier, drank more, drank more often, and drank longer than other people.

At age 22, after a drunken, embarrassing and public argument in front of several co-workers, I decided to try a few A.A. meetings. They seemed strange to me. I still wanted to drink, so I decided that if it ever got that bad, I knew where to go.

A year later, I caused a serious car accident because I had been drinking. I was lucky and didn't get a DUI charge. I still didn't take the hint.

At age 25, after a night of drinking, I got into a fight with a man I didn't even know. The cops picked me up a few hours later. I was still drunk and not even sure what had happened. It was my first arrest: attempted murder. I dried out in a jail cell, hallucinating.



I finally knew it was time. I didn't want to stop drinking, but I realized that bad things happen when I drink. I hurt people. I hurt myself.

The first chance I got, I went to the jail room bookcase and dug up an Alcoholics Anonymous "Big Book." It took all the energy I had just to read the Twelve Steps. My cellmate told me I seemed like a pretty good kid – if I would just put the bottle down. I was secretly resentful that someone sitting in a jail cell was giving me advice. But, I took the hint.

I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting the day after I bailed out of jail. This time a lot more things started making sense. I didn't want to go any lower. I was facing serious charges.

I didn't drink, worked the Twelve Steps with my sponsor, and went to meetings. A.A. taught me how to deal with life one day at a time and my life once again became manageable.

I went to trial for the attempted murder charges and received a sentence of five years for the lesser charge of assault with a deadly weapon. A.A. and my Higher Power showed me how to face the wreckage of my life without needing a drink. I am presently incarcerated, yet I am the most peaceful, joyous person I

have ever been. Thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous my future is bright.

If you have never been in a jail cell, be grateful. Maybe you can stop in time. If you have been in a jail cell, you know exactly what I mean. Take the hint... I wish I had.

—Dusty

Lorraine found the willingness

I did not attend my first A.A. meeting because I thought I was an alcoholic or because I wanted to change the way I was living. The only thing I really wanted to change was getting arrested! Other than that, I thought I was doing okay.

I was serving a one-year sentence at the time, when I heard there was an A.A. meeting in the cafeteria. I had no interest until I heard they had coffee, donuts, and men there.

I attended those meetings every week for all the wrong reasons, with no desire to quit drinking. When I was paroled, I started drinking that same day. Who wouldn't after wanting a drink for over a year? In one month, I was back before the judge for violation of parole, plus a new charge. I was sent back to serve another year – and those same A.A. meetings were still going on.

I started attending again, this time thinking they might just have something that could help change lives. I knew I was too different and too damaged for it to work for me, but I started looking forward to going to those meetings because I would be with people who were hopeful and kind. Sometimes, when I

would leave the meetings, I would have a few minutes of feeling that maybe I could do it. But, those feelings soon passed because I was never willing to put any effort into it.

Seven years after paroling for the last time, my life was hopeless and I felt helpless. Alcohol was no longer working. I had started drinking before I was 12 years old, had married five men who drank like I did, had four children who had all been taken away from me, my parents had stopped trusting me years ago and didn't want me around any of the family. Now, at 33 years old, I couldn't get or stay drunk enough to not feel the pain and regret of it all.

With nowhere else to turn, and remembering how nice those A.A. people were, I came back. The seed of hope and another way of living had been planted in my spirit seven years earlier and now it had taken root. I became willing to put an effort into staying sober by following the suggestions of those who had a better way of living. It was not always easy, but slowly I began to realize that by not drinking, I was giving myself a chance.

A.A. has returned my freedom, and I now have a wonderful relationship with my children, husband, family and the many friends I have made. My grandchildren sometimes don't understand why I stay so active in A.A. because they have never seen me drink – and for that I thank those members of A.A. who brought meetings in and let me just sit there and listen.

I now go back into institutions and bring the A.A. message to women, some of whom are attending only to get out of their cells, while others are questioning if A.A. has anything that will work for them. It's okay with me if they

think that the only thing they want to change in life is to stop getting arrested. I've been there.

—Lorraine

DeJuan woke up to the reality of his life

My drinking career started when I was 14 years old. I enjoyed the feeling it gave me. My life was bearable when I drank, and I found the acceptance I wanted so badly in the bottle.

Pretty soon after, I stopped doing all the things a normal 14-year-old would do and I started gangbanging. I excelled at it! My homies became the family I never had and I felt accepted. I wanted what they had, and I got it all – the money, the property, and the prestige. I looked great on the outside, but I was a wreck on the inside. Only alcohol could quiet my dark thoughts.

At the age of 19, I was arrested and sentenced to over 18 years in federal prison. During my sentence, I was transferred to 13 different prisons. I was self-will run riot; my life was unmanageable, even in the judicial system.

My alcoholism progressed while incarcerated; I was powerless and didn't even know it. Alcohol was a vehicle for escaping the reality of being in prison; it kept me in a fog. The world was against me, God had betrayed me just as my co-defendants had, and I felt that I wasn't responsible for the way my life had turned out.

Fifteen-and-a-half years passed in the blink of an eye. I was now 35. It was just after the 4:00 P.M. count, I remember, and I was sitting in the day room just as I had done for years: I had gotten drunk and nodded out. I could

hear everybody talking and laughing, saying, "Man, he's been like that ever since I've known him." I heard that as clear as day, but I couldn't respond. That hurt. It was true.

In the night I woke up hurting. I had ten months left on my sentence and I hadn't accomplished anything in my life. I called out, "God, if you are real, please help me. I can't go home like this, and I don't know what to do. Please show me what to do. I want to stop drinking, show me what I must do."

The next morning, I woke up and felt like I needed to be quiet and still. As the housing unit was being released for the noon meal and the inmates headed to the chow hall, I went outside to smoke a cigarette. Watching the movement of the yard, I saw one of the counselors escorting a group of volunteers, men and women. I noticed that one of the women was carrying a pink box. I instantly knew that it contained donuts and I hadn't had a donut in all these years. So I followed them. I stood at the door and looked through the small glass when the woman motioned for me to come in. I asked, "What's this?"

"This is a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous," she said.

"Oh no, I'm not an alcoholic," I said.

"Would you like a donut?" she asked, opening the box.

The woman began the meeting with the most profound words I had ever heard, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." Those words shook me to my very core – words

I was later to recognize as the Serenity Prayer in A.A. I was compelled to stay. Then the woman spoke and told my story. She knew how I felt. She knew how lost I was. But, she also said that she had a solution and that she followed some simple suggestions that are described in the Twelve Steps.

My curiosity got the better of me and I kept going back to those meetings. I stayed sober and started walking the yard with some of the people I met there. I started doing things differently and my homies thought I had lost it. They thought all the time I had done had finally gotten to me. I told them, “No homie, I finally *found* it!”

A few years later when I was released, instead of calling my mother to pick me up, I called Alcoholics Anonymous. A sober member came and took me straight to a meeting.

Today, I am all about service and giving back. I have clearance to go

into jails and carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to people just like me. Imagine that! And you know what I tell them? “Come as you are, but don’t leave as you came!”

– *DeJuan*

Steve kept his feet firmly planted in the program

I am currently incarcerated due to my drinking. I drank for 25 years, at least 15 of them alcoholically. The last five years were my bottom – numerous failed relationships, small scrapes with the law, until the night I was on a three-day binge and got behind the wheel of my truck and nearly ended two people’s lives. I called A.A. as soon as I got out of the hospital because I felt like I couldn’t live with alcohol anymore – or without it. I started going to meetings, listening to the oldtimers, and got a sponsor. I was sober for two years while I was dealing with the courts and waiting to find out the consequences. In the end, I was found guilty and sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

There was only one meeting a month here at the facility, but after talking to the counselors, me and a group of fellow A.A.s got a weekly Friday night meeting started. I also have a subscription to the Grapevine, I read my Big Book and keep my feet planted firmly in the program. With the help of my Higher Power I’ve made it through each day.

I’m coming to the end of my sentence, with nine months remaining. I can’t wait to get



back to my home group and share my experience, strength and hope with others. I don't know if I would have made it if not for A.A. and the Corrections Correspondence Service that helped me stay in touch with other A.A.s on the outside.

Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous, for showing me a new way to go through life, inside and outside of the facility.

—Steve

The consequences started piling up for Ruthie

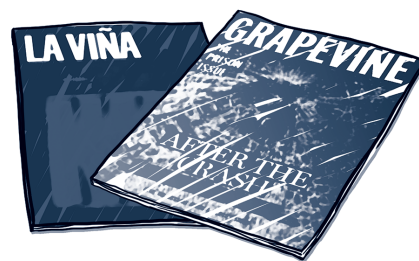
There I was – 23, in jail eight months and looking at going to prison for two or more years. An obvious question kept creeping into my mind: “What happened?” Many of the police officers who had arrested me throughout the years, as well as the sheriffs at the jails I was frequenting, had taken the time to tell me I did not belong in there and that what I really needed was some help. Of course, I had merely dismissed their comments and only allowed myself to ponder that question in small increments, when I was alone and it was dark.

I had been drinking since I was 12 years old, and stealing since before even then. I thought the rules shouldn't apply to me and if I wanted to get drunk, well, then, I should do it. This was the only way I knew how to manage what was going on inside of me.

As far as I was concerned, it was alcohol that had seen me through all the trouble in my life. Take it away and I didn't know me. The tricky part in all of this, of course, was that somewhere along the way alcohol turned against

me and drinking ceased to be fun, demanding more and more of my time and effort. From then on, my options got narrower. Stealing became the quickest and easiest way to make money, and I had racked up quite a record over the years. Consequences were piling up around me and before I knew it, all my scorecards read zero.

While I was in jail, in a rehab program for women, I was introduced to the literature of Alcoholics



Anonymous. I would love to tell you that I was handed the literature and it was an overnight conversion, but, alas, that is not my story. I did go to the A.A. meetings, but not with an open mind. I simply went because I had to. The books remained unopened.

It was only when I got in trouble again and was threatened with being tossed out of the rehab program that I opened up the literature. It was either read the books or do more time, so naturally I opened the books. It was in the literature that I found my place in A.A. All my life I had assumed I was alone in my suffering. Then, along came these books that were describing me in chilling detail. To my astonishment, I learned there were people just like me!

A part of me broke in jail while reading those books, and that part was just big enough to help me graduate that program and get out of jail. From there I went to A.A., got a sponsor and started working the Steps. I could fill pages and pages with what I learned about myself

while working the Steps, but suffice it to say they worked and continue to work for me. I am no longer considered a liar, a cheat, and a thief, and that is exclusively due to A.A.

By no means do I wish to give the impression that this change was easy or that it happened overnight; it required and still requires, work on my part and a willingness to remain teachable and in service. But as long as I fulfill those requirements, the program works.

At no time in my sobriety have I forgotten where I came from, both physically and emotionally, nor have I allowed myself to imagine that if I went back out I wouldn't end up in those same places, and much worse. It is my hope that through my experience, others will know that there is a way out, and a solace to be found in the literature and community of A.A., whether behind locked doors or not.

—*Ruthie*

Outside A.A.s helped Barry let go of resentment

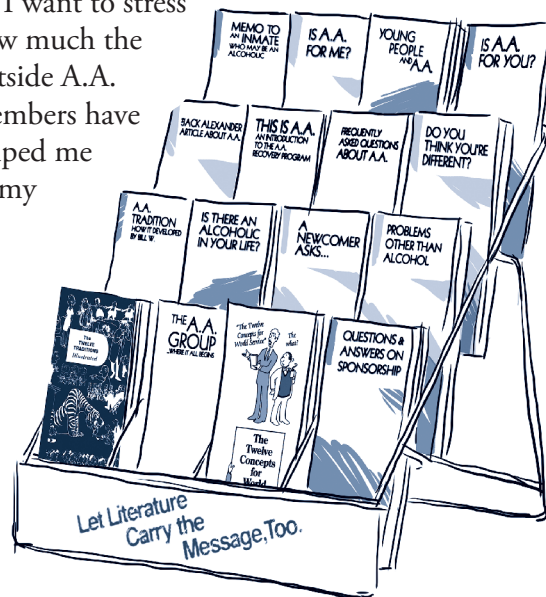
I went to my first A.A. meeting when I was 22 years old. It was like any other meeting except it was being held in the state prison where I was just starting a life sentence for a crime I committed while drunk. Even before this happened, I was being eaten alive by a thousand resentments. At first I only attended A.A. because it got me out of the cell block for an hour. For the first year I attended A.A. while still drinking wine that I made in my cell block. Anything not to deal with the reality of spending life in prison.

I transferred to another prison and an A.A.

member from the outside took an interest in my spiritual well-being. I asked him to be my sponsor. At first I found it hard to accept that my life was unmanageable. Here in prison I'm told when to eat, sleep and even when to use the bathroom, but I couldn't see that my life was unmanageable!

One of my biggest resentments was against my father. But, as I worked the Fourth Step that resentment melted away. I was able to tell my father, who was a tough old WWII vet, that I loved him and for him not to feel like it was his fault that I became an alcoholic. I could see the guilt in my parent's eyes at every visit because they thought if they were only better parents I wouldn't have turned out this way. I was able, for the first time, to accept responsibility for my actions and told them not to feel guilty because I chose this way of life. My father died eight years later, but I had a real relationship with him for the first time. I'll always be grateful for those eight years.

I want to stress how much the outside A.A. members have helped me in my



recovery over the last 18 years. Tonight, as I write this, I just came from an A.A. meeting where our outside sponsor told his story. He came to prison twice because of his alcoholism, but now he carries the A.A. message to those of us who still suffer inside these prison walls.

I have seen countless people return to prison, again and again, instead of accepting this simple program and using it to change their lives. Some of them are not lucky enough to make it back – they die.

I used to dwell in the past, but the program of A.A. has taught me not to regret my past. It has taught me that my past is the greatest possession I have because I can use it to help others. I had to learn that instead of just going to A.A., I had to use the spiritual tools it laid at my feet. The spiritual life is not a theory; I have to live it.

—Barry

Doug burned all his bridges

Who me, an alcoholic? I was 42 years old, had gone through two marriages, three homes and several really great jobs and opportunities. How come no one ever told me?

I really thought everyone drank like I did, all the guys I hung out with did anyway. I have no idea when the first drink was; alcohol was just always there.

Life from my mid-teens was like a runaway train, leaving nothing but wreckage behind. I quit school at age 17; I was only in the 9th grade. I had a teacher at that time who pointed to the rest of the class and said, “See these kids?

They are nice round pegs fitting in nice round holes. You, however, are a square peg, you don’t fit.” I believed her and spent the next 30 years trying to prove her right. Every time I got a good job and made advancements I got scared and shot myself in the foot. I used alcohol to soothe the pain, shame and fear.

I finally burned enough bridges and ruined enough lives with my actions to end up in a jail cell facing multiple life sentences. I even tried to take myself out, but I messed that up, too. A family member who is an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous came to visit. On the way out of my cell, he dropped a booklet on my chest and said, “Here, read this, it may answer some of your questions.” The booklet was “44 Questions” (now “Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.”), an A.A. publication. I did read it and what’s more, I answered yes to about 40 of the questions.

Today, some 22 years later, I am still sober and with the help of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and some really great A.A. members who come inside the walls to carry the message of recovery, I do not have a desire to drink. Best of all, I have been able to share my gift of recovery with many others through the years. It is really a great way of life on the inside, and it sure beats sitting in a cell.

—Doug

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.

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.



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