



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Winter 2019

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." *

Grateful for Sobriety

"I've had many failed attempts at quitting drinking. It wasn't until I found myself in jail *again* — only this time I was not going home. I was 35, and the public defender told me I was going to spend the rest of my life in prison. Reality hit me so hard I was crushed. I hadn't realized how out of control my life had become. I was angry, scared, depressed — all that and more, all at once. So, I went to the chapel and started praying; and there I found out they had an outside A.A. sponsor who came once a week for the guys. It was a small group. But I started to go. It helped a lot. I didn't share at first; I just listened. It was so nice to hear how many guys had messed up like me. Sad but true. It helped me face the truth. I've been locked down for three years now, and I've been sober for most of it. It's been rough: I'm trying to make the best of it and learn as much as possible. I'll get out in 2028. So, not only have I sought to become and stay sober, I've also begun to do some soul searching. I've shared in the group and always tell the guys that this is temporary: you've been given this time to get yourself right again. Call it a Higher Power, call it karma, call it whatever it is. I'd rather be here than dead." — **Jeff M., South East Region**

"My name is Juan D., and I am 36 years old. I've been in prison since 2006. My addiction to alcohol started from the day I got incarcerated. It seems like the life sentence I was facing didn't really matter to me. At first, I used to think of it as if I had



everything planned out. For a long time, all I focused on was making a good batch of beer to drink. I thought alcohol was something normal — it's legal, after all. As time went on, I continued with my same mentality of 'It's okay.' My habit grew as time passed, and then I started realizing that every time I drank, I ended up in some sort of trouble. I acted stupid with people when I was drunk. I never stopped drinking, but I thought I had it under control. I never realized I had or was starting to have problems with alcohol. Alcohol always let me act differently: when I drank, it seemed like my life was easy — no problems, no pain — and everything was cool. It made me forget that I was facing a life sentence, or to think I was better off serving a life sentence. But it always brought out anger — a lot of anger — that I didn't know I had, or where it came from, or why. About three years ago, I started attending A.A. groups only because I needed it for the Board. I continued to drink. But shortly after I started attending A.A. groups, something happened. One day early in the morning, I started drinking beer. After I ran out, I continued with straight alcohol (moonshine). That day I got into a big argument with the person who lived with me in the cell. The corrections officer noted it, and they decided to have me move out to a whole different building. I was so drunk that when I was carrying my belongings to my new building, everybody noticed how drunk and stupid I was acting. That day I embarrassed myself in front of full-grown inmate men. The day after, I felt ashamed of myself. It's been about two and a half years that I have been sober through A.A. That's my story of how I stopped drinking. Today I participate in Alcoholics Anonymous and I am trying to learn why I had so much

anger when I used to drink, and why I acted like a fool. By the grace of God, who's my higher power today, I don't drink, and I am happy with what A.A. has taught me." — **Juan D., Pacific Region**

"This letter is to thank you and express gratitude for the great paradox of A.A., which is 'keeping what we have by giving it away.' We have been able to attract newcomers to the meetings. I am now sponsoring two newcomers, which is something I've never had the privilege of doing before. Frankly, it has been difficult to show gratitude and let go on this difficult road that I now travel. I thank God for my past, because as a result of those experiences and the solution — which is gut-wrenching but simple — I now have a light to share in this dark place during these dark times. It would seem that God is, once again, doing for me what I could not do for myself, and for that I am grateful." — **Osvaldo R., Pacific Region**

Starting a New Life

"I am the chair of an institutional A.A. group I have been in for 12 years now, yet my sobriety date was seven and a half years ago! I am writing to relate a positive experience I had this past July. I asked for and received an escorted pass to attend an A.A. meeting in the community every Friday night. I've been going there for about 18 months now. It's really good to see and feel how a real-world meeting operates compared to an 'inside' one: for one, there's fuller, more genuine participation and, more importantly, a complete acceptance of us — no judgment — which is indeed refreshing. It sure is good to feel normal for a couple of hours a week! Just last August, I asked and received permission to be escorted to our district council meeting. I was, reportedly, the first inmate to attend a council meeting in this district. I gave a two-minute talk about my journey (getting approved to be escorted took about a year of persistence) and reported on the status of our institutional group (for example, I

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explained that it was a big deal for many of our 'inside' members to contribute two dollars to our group when the average wage is close to three dollars a day). The reception I received was very warm and encouraging. My takeaway was that there was real, authentic warmth and support from many if not all in attendance. Imagine this: a convicted murderer and a retired cop, shaking hands and expressing best wishes to each other. Yes, that happened! Only in such a Fellowship as A.A. could this have been possible. It lifted me up and gave me additional hope, which is the main reason I am writing. Service maintains our sobriety. So, get involved and stay involved." — **Stuart F., Eastern Canada Region**

"Dear Bill W.: Thank you for giving me the courage to be honest with myself and to face the ugliness within me. My highest aspirations amounted to nothing more than dreams of material success or winning the admiration and approval of people around me. Deep down I couldn't even see how truly selfish it was. I knew nothing of love, forgiveness, abiding patience, enduring hardship, or true generosity. I really didn't know anything about the realm of the spirit. I was totally lost, confused, adrift, blinded by selfishness and vain pursuits. Deep down not even believing that any person could truly care about another person; or better yet, believe in a power up above, capable of mercy, compassion, grace, or understanding, even having a plan or a will for me on an individual basis. Thank you, Bill W., from the bottom of my heart for showing me that there was a way out. I've found forgiveness. Even though I'm in jail, stuck here waiting for a bed to open up at the treatment center; sick, tired, scared, lonely, unsure of when I'll finally be released for treatment. At the same time, there's a funny feeling. It seems a miracle has occurred, and I don't even have a care or a worry at all. I may have accumulated something else, something unheard of — maybe it is called patience or maybe acceptance. Though my connection to a power from above feels frail, tenuous most of the time, maybe he will begin to absolve me of all of the hatred, worry, and fear that clouded my judgment for all these years." — **Chad M., South West Region**

Using the Tools

"Hello, my name is Reginald M., and I am an alcoholic. To be truthful, for many years (26) I believed I was in control, until three DWIs convinced me I was a liar. I am a U.S. Navy veteran with some college, and I never thought I would have such a broken life. Attending A.A. meeting after A.A. meeting only worked for a limited time. Three years of sobriety, one year of sobriety, months of sobriety, but drinking always returned. Looking down on myself. Self-pity, feeling dishonorable to my loved ones. I was lost until I finally read the pocket edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. All this time going to meetings, hearing the life stories, watching others change — I never put in any work until jail and prison time came knocking at the door. God heard my cry and he gave me the pocket edition Big Book. I read it and a light came on." — **Reginald M., South West Region**

"I am writing in reference to emotional sobriety and how my life has become more manageable, more peaceful, easier and freer because of the A.A. program. Surprises throw me off: for instance, once I failed a test at a local technical college here in Panama. Instead of slowing down and finding a meeting, I made the problem worse by drinking, and I drank because the thought of never being able to pass the test again was rolling in my mind. I know now that if I stick to the program and focus on unity, service and recovery, I will not have new surprises in my life, even when incarcerated. Focusing on unity, service and recovery also brought a whole lot of long-awaited peace into my life, even though I am in jail. (It is harder to find peace in here compared to on the outside.) When I was drinking, the chaos that alcohol caused in my life brought me absolutely no peace." — **Justin D., South East Region**

“My name is Jason, and I am currently serving a sentence for robbery. I was first introduced to A.A. in county lockup during my arrest. My lawyer’s advice was to enter rehab and to at least give the appearance that I was seeking help. After five more months of misery, I entered rehab, where I began attending daily A.A. meetings. I still didn’t believe that sobriety was possible for me. I did what I needed to do in order to get my certificate of program completion for my lawyer. I did not continue to take the advice of other recovered alcoholics and addicts, thinking I knew what was best for me. I came back home hoping things would be different, and for a couple of months I didn’t drink. What I also didn’t do was work on the internal defects of character that caused my self-destruction to begin with. Eventually I was seeking and using the same solutions I did before — and guess what? I got the same results. But, this time it came with a sense of desperation I couldn’t ignore. I was finally willing to do whatever it took to get sober. I went back to rehab, but it was actually six months after rehab when the magic really happened for me. The courts pushed back my trial long enough for me to attend a sober living facility in West Palm Beach, Florida. This turned out to be the most valuable time of my adult life. I got a sponsor who wouldn’t let me do things my way at all. My first hurdle was that I wanted to

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work an N.A. program, because I felt drugs were a bigger part of my story than alcohol. He began taking me to both H.A. and C.A. meetings which were A.A.-based. I had begun speaking at meetings and rehabs in the area and was even chairing meetings when needed. My greatest honor was getting to speak at the very rehab I had attended only six months prior. I found that getting to help others provided me with a feeling greater and certainly more genuine than drugs and alcohol ever did. I entered the program trying to save my backside from prison; instead A.A. gave me the serenity to smile.” — **Jason S., South East Region**

“This letter is so important to me because I want to share my gratitude for what Alcoholics Anonymous has started doing in my life. Two years ago, I was living a life of complete destruction, in and out of jail, extremely sick, ending up in ICU with very bad liver complications. I am a young woman of 28 and knew that if I didn’t turn my life over to a power greater than myself, I was going to die. Luckily, my higher power saw that I was needing to ‘sit down’ and I am currently incarcerated in Kentucky. Life isn’t rainbows and unicorns every day, but I am now in the substance abuse program (SAP) and we have Big Book study and Step class three days a week, where I am learning all about Bill W. and Doctor Bob. The disease concept really makes a lot of sense, too. Page 417 is my favorite.” — **Kimberly A., South East Region**

“I want to be clear that I am still definitely interested in getting an outside sponsor. Honestly speaking, I’m going on two years

without taking a drink and I felt I had this thing under control, so I didn’t see the importance of having a sponsor. But in attending these A.A. meetings once a month (they’re monthly at my current institution), I realize that it’s a continuous fight to remain sober, and I need somebody out there who will hold me accountable when I won’t hold myself accountable.” — **Michael P., Pacific Region**

Thanks for the Books!

“Thank you, A.A., for responding to my letter and for sending me a Big Book. I have been taking the program seriously since being incarcerated, attending multiple meetings a week, taking everything seriously for the first time in my life. I definitely realize I should have done this long ago, but as we learn in A.A., a lot of us don’t hit rock bottom until jails, institutions, or even death. As sad as I am about messing up and landing in prison, having to be away from my fiancée and kids, I am actually really glad I was able to sober up enough to know the program can help me live a sober lifestyle, one day at a time. I’m very glad you responded on behalf of A.A. because at this point in my life it lets me know that there are people who believe in me. Once again, thank you very much for sending the letter and A.A. Big Book to me. It really made my day.” — **Jay S., Pacific Region**

“I am replying to a request that I made in regard to obtaining a Big Book in French. I received it on Wednesday and, what do you know, it’s crazy how the program works. I was having a not so good week, adjusting to my new environment. I was recently transferred to a bigger prison and the A.A. meetings here are not what I’m used to. Here, you get credit for attending and participating toward early release. You can imagine it is filled to capacity. So, I started an LGBTQ group for those who are serious about recovery and I noted that it was open to all, since this is by choice, one alcoholic helping another. I am so grateful for God looking out, right when I was down. I received my book — and yes, this is why it is so important for me learn and study this book, so I can be of service, share my experience, strength and hope with other alcoholics. Thank you all.” — **Jonathan S., Pacific Region**

“Today I received reading materials from somewhere, I don’t know where, and I told our mail lady to go ahead and donate the three books to our jail library for everyone. I want to thank A.A. and my higher power for helping us to help others. I appreciate all A.A. has done for us here. This is so awesome, and I feel honored by you in the offices of A.A.” — **Elizabeth R., East Central Region**

Facing the Truth

“My attorney said everything looked good. ‘You prepared a great pre-sentence investigation — very thorough.’ The probation officer said the same thing. I was good at covering up. I had a lot of practice. When I bailed out of jail, I went to treatment like I told everyone I would, after I spent a week trying to smooth everything over with clients left in the dark for 10 days — no

returned phone calls, not showing up when scheduled. 'A family emergency,' I said, 'I won't be gone long; I will get to you soon.' Sadly, some of them had heard this line before. It wasn't my first time escaping to treatment when my life was falling apart. I wouldn't go to treatment when I needed it months before — before demands and the threats, before the divorce thing, before another DUI. At the treatment center I went to the first time, you left a coffee cup on the wall of the lecture hall and returned to pick it up on your one-year sober anniversary. I hung my cup when I left, but my return to treatment wasn't to pick up the old one, but to hang a new one. 'All rise!' I took my seat, most of my family around me, but my wife absent. How many times had she sat up alone, without me at her side, not knowing if I would make it home, worrying about the children who were afraid for their missing father. *'The State vs. Mr. H.'* I take my seat next to my attorney. Legalese begins: 'Do you understand...?' 'I do,' I respond, already pleading guilty for mercy from the court. My attorney begins speaking, heaping praise and repeating what we had talked about 10 minutes before. Now it is my turn. I talk about my struggles, the treatment, the counseling and follow-ups, the meetings I had to attend, and the sponsor. I ask for mercy: probation would be long — three years — but I can do it, I tell them, I can maintain sobriety. Out of words, I finish my remarks. 'Mr. H.,' the judge says, 'I don't find you a good candidate for probation. I sentence you to a year in the county jail and a year of post-release supervision.' My heart sinks. What happened? Where had it all gone wrong? 'That one bad day you spoke about was not a one-time occurrence,' the judge says. 'You are a habitual alcoholic abuser and have frequently driven after consuming alcohol: isn't that true?' How did she know? Then I realize that she has my wife's divorce filing, with all the damaging descriptions of my conduct. But we are reconciling the divorce, I thought. My attorney said so. How can she use my past against me? I have changed since that time. The judge continues. 'And isn't it true that you have drunk since your release on bond, and that sobriety is a condition of your release?' How did the judge know? I was double crossed again — this time by the ignition interlock in my truck, required by the state, picking up the faintest hints of alcohol when I thought I had waited long enough, that it was out of my system. I had thought, These are minor slips. Wouldn't the state see it that way? 'You are to be transported immediately to the county jail to begin your sentence, to serve no fewer than 190 days.' Immediately? But I was planning to go home and report to jail when I was ready. What about my business? What about the bottle I left under my desk at home? 'Court is adjourned, all rise.' 'Come this way, sir.' My mother's shock and grief; I have no words. 'I will be down to visit you soon,' my attorney says. As I am led away, I think about the first drink, the sponsor I failed to call, the meetings I stopped going to. I thought of the toolbox I was supposed to use from another round of treatments, and of my shoes that were going

to have to walk the walk. I thought about my empty promises, another cup left hanging on the wall." — Jason H.,

West Central Region

"I am a 34-year-old woman. I am sober, and I have found my spiritual self. I met three ladies who bring an A.A. meeting into my life every Tuesday and they help me immeasurably. But, the very first time I tried this program I was one of those who thought it was a church for drunks: I did not believe in God or anything else, and I thought that, like many others in my life, these people would quit me. I tried the whole sponsoring thing, and I am not going to lie — she was amazing, but I wasn't ready. Again, denial was a huge river and I was knee-deep in stuff; honestly, I was drowning in it. I picked up on little sayings from others, but I wouldn't touch a Big Book. After a binge-induced night, I decided to take off from Louisiana to Florida. Well, here I sit in Mississippi. This time I have to face the facts: I am an alcoholic. Finally, I started to listen to the other women (and to God), and I started seeing so many blessings. For everyone who is new to this, I beg you to find a group where you feel at home. It doesn't matter how long it takes; keep on going, even if you don't yet believe in it. Eventually, you will see that these people love you, and they will not give up as long as you try. I don't feel like an alien; trust me, most A.A.s have been where you are. Your life is worth being sober and you are not beyond repair. Work this program at your own pace; you do not have to rush. There is no set day for you to finish the program; never quit. Just keep on trying and call for help when you need it, no matter the time. A.A. folks love to give back, it is what they do." — Brittney G., South East Region

Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.)

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have at least six more months to serve. We randomly match an outside A.A. from another region, with men writing to men and women writing to women. We do not provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers or court officials. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you make contact, an outside A.A. member may be willing to sponsor you. If you have an interest in sharing about your experiences as they relate to sobriety and problems with alcohol, then please write and request a form. We appreciate your patience.

Prerelease Contact

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have a release date scheduled three to six months away. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you have transitioned from "inside" A.A. to "outside" A.A., someone may be willing to sponsor you. We try to arrange for an outside A.A. in your home community to temporarily write to you just prior to your release. You can request a form, or write to us, providing your release date and destination (address, city, state, phone number).