



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Fall 2017

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."*

Paying It Forward

"I have without a doubt made some poor decisions to get myself in here — ones that I deeply regret and would take back if I could. However, I am taking the time over these next few years to better myself and hopefully come out stronger so that I can help someone else one day. I can't go back... I won't go back and make the same mistakes and then wind up back here. I am very blessed that I didn't get more time. I am currently going to meetings and would like to start taking the Steps." — **Rebecca L., South East Region**

"I always make sure I pass this newsletter on to other members of A.A. here. Every story of inspiration and sobriety that we read helps us to cope with our own struggles and to never give up. I am a life-without-parole male, which means (at this time) that I'll never see the free world again. After 30 years of incarceration, I'm okay with this. I merely took responsibility for my actions and accepted my punishment. End of story. I've also taken actions to alter those character flaws that were harming me and others, and I'm paying it forward as best I can from in here. Staying sober is a part of paying it forward, and I thank whatever Higher Power there is for that. I'll keep trudging on and being grateful for people like yourself who are trudging the road with us." — **Robert C., Pacific Region**

"This is my 29th year of incarceration. I have always believed that my alcoholism deprived me of the ability to mature like others. I have so many areas where I just can't function. I do know I'm powerless over alcohol, and life can only go up from

here. I don't suffer from the drinking anymore, but the emotional trauma still controls every aspect of my life. The alcohol is the symptom; it's this emotional damage done by alcohol that I fight to overcome. And then there's the question of *why?* Why do I fight so hard, knowing I'll just die in here anyway? That is when I pray that my life, my pain, my suffering may help someone else who feels alone and believes no one else knows their pain. I have suffered every kind of abuse known to man — mental, physical, emotional and sexual — yet when I wake up in the morning, I pray that God will put just one person in my life and give me the ability to help others." — **Danny B., South East Region**

Corrections Correspondence Service

"I am very excited to speak to someone from A.A. about the program and the Steps and all that. I am so very hopeful to make this connection with someone through the Corrections Correspondence Service, and I eagerly await contact. I just

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wanted to write and thank you so much for helping me make this connection. We were having monthly A.A. meetings here, but after we spoke to the volunteers who bring them in, they started coming every other week. My one-year sobriety date was June 8, so receiving this news about the Corrections Correspondence Service is just so awesome! Knowing that I'm not alone in recovery means the world to me, and setting myself up for success for the day I finally do get out is crucial! I just wanted to say thank you and that I am so excited for this next step, no pun intended. Thank you again so much!" — **Lauren L., South East Region**

"I am corresponding with an outside A.A. member, and it has been a great experience to grow and to learn about my recovery every day. I am within six months of my release date now. I can make arrangements before I'm released so everything will be in place and I can hit the ground running. It's a small community where I live, but I know there is a recovery network as well as A.A. meetings." — **Mike S., East Central Region**

“A Profound Personality Change”

“As with most of us alcoholics, I had to hit rock bottom to finally come to the realization that for me to drink again is to die. I have been in and out of A.A. for many years, but for all the wrong reasons. Now, at last I have a desire to stop drinking. Thank God, a spiritual awakening has hit me like a sledgehammer. My life depends on my sobriety and the help and direction of Alcoholics Anonymous. In my eyes I wasn’t arrested and sent to prison. I was arrested and saved! I hope my story will help other alcoholics. Maybe they will want what I have: serenity and sanity.” — Roy S., South West Region

“It hit me when I opened up *As Bill Sees It* and read, ‘But anyone who knows the alcoholic personality by firsthand contact knows that no true alky ever stops drinking permanently without undergoing a profound personality change.’ That’s me. I’ve come to realize that all the rehabs and all the meetings in the world won’t make a person stop drinking unless he or she desires to. By getting together and helping others along my journey, I believe this will help me to remain sober as well. That’s what it’s all about. One alcoholic who can relate to another alcoholic. I felt like I was trying to kill myself one day at a time while in my full-fledged alcoholism. Now, since I’ve been sober this long, I want to live and I want to help others live. Alcoholism is a terminal disease. Incarceration has started me on the right road.” — Roberto C., West Central Region

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“I have spent 17 years in prison. There have been numerous opportunities to allow God and this program to work. But because one of my character defects is closed-mindedness, I continued to repeat the same mistakes over and over. Not working the Steps and not listening to my sponsor, I have manipulated myself into a relapse over and over again. So, my past is filled with prison sentences. My disease took me places I would never have gone. I can’t explain it, but something is different today. Maybe it’s a spiritual experience: I just know my thoughts and feelings are different today. Even in here, a person can drink or use on a daily basis if he so desires, but I haven’t had that desire for 19 months.” — Joel H., South West Region

The Power of A.A. Literature

“I have read the Big Book twice now, and there’s not one story that I didn’t identify with. I need help. I have started praying daily, which seems a little weird to me, but that’s one of the ways I’m going to stay sober!” — Alan L., South East Region

“So, I was sitting by my window drinking a coffee, reading the A.A. Grapevine Prison Issue, when I was surprised to get a printed letter from you about my story being forwarded to Grapevine publications. The letter starts with you saying that you

are delighted to be in contact with me again. When was the last time I heard those words? A long time ago! But all will change one day at a time as I follow the path of our Fellowship, which consists of so many great people. I start every day with my *Daily Reflections* and *As Bill Sees It* readings. I take 30 minutes to meditate, reflecting on what the words mean to me, and then I journal the thoughts that come to me. It’s a great way to start my day; it keeps me focused and centered so I can have a good productive day. (I will continue doing this after being released.) Then, I go to breakfast, and when I come back I read out of *Living Sober* or *Grapevine* (when I have one — I wish I could subscribe, but I will when I’m released). Then I do a little workout until lunch, then come back in and read the Big Book. I have underlined my favorite story, ‘Acceptance was the Answer,’ where it reads on page 417, ‘Until I accepted my alcoholism, I couldn’t stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life’s terms, I cannot be happy!’ I struggle at this one day at a time, one minute at a time, but I’m feeling better than I ever! Thank you for everything that you have done, and I look forward to doing the same when I am released. I am in the process of writing a letter about bringing in A.A. meetings to the pod where I’m housed.” — Josh L., North East Region

The Courage to Change

“I am currently serving a sentence for my fourth DWI. A friend in here told me about Alcoholics Anonymous, and I would like to learn more. The trouble I find myself in right now is directly related to my drinking. It has affected every part of my own and my family’s lives, and something definitely has to change.” — Jose G. M., South West Region

“I’m going to be 52 years old this year, and like they say, ‘enough is enough.’ I don’t make any excuses for who I was, and I don’t plan on making any excuses on who I’m going to be when I parole. I know from my past experience how easy it is to forget everything I’ve been working for while locked up — when I first walk out of these doors and wait for a bus or whatever the situation might be. I’ve been involved with A.A. every week since March 2013, and my plan is to stay connected and involved with A.A. when I get out and stay out.” — Gary G., South West Region

“Today was the first time in my life that I’ve ever gone to an A.A. meeting. I told my story in front of about 30 other guys, and, I tell you guys, it was very liberating. The main points we went over were about change and patience. Thank you for everything you guys do.” — Ryan S., South West Region

“Over the past several months I’ve had this urge to write this letter to A.A. However, I allowed denial and pride to interfere. Reality has set in, and I know it’s time for a change. I can’t continue to live like this. Alcohol has been an issue. It’s just an easy way to cope with a life of pain. It started out when I was 10, when I lost my mother to cancer. I went into foster care and bounced from home to home, and when I was 12, my dad went to prison. At 12, I was in a juvenile prison, and a year later, I found myself at a state prison. The bottom line is, it’s time for a

“No effective mental defense against the first drink”

“I used to commit burglaries, and in 2012 I got caught and was sentenced to six years. In October 2016, I got a lucky break and was accepted into a work-release program. I got a job selling women’s shoes and clothing. By the second month I felt too self-conscious, and that’s when I began to drink. The alcohol worked, and I liked the way I behaved while under its influence. I began to drink cheap vodka every day. My manager told me I smelled like alcohol; I told him it was cheap perfume. To make a long story short, I met a lady and became conscious of my lack of money. Being drunk at the time, I went into a building across from where I work and did a burglary in an office that was closed. Thirty minutes later I was still drunk, selling the stolen computers and planning on taking this lovely lady on a date. When I got back to the facility that night, I was shackled up and sent to a maximum security prison. I didn’t get to go on the date. Now I am waiting to go to court on this new conviction that might add four to seven years to my incarceration. Drinking alcohol did this to me, and I hate that I had to end up back in prison to realize I had such a problem with alcohol.” — Jeffrey O., North East Region

change. As of today I’ll put my trust in my Higher Power and in you all to help me with this journey. I’m a changed man today.”

— Joshua L., South East Region

Hitting Rock Bottom

“For me, alcohol was a friend and a buffer of sorts. I come from a very dysfunctional and abusive home. When it came to alcohol, my experience was one of tremendous turmoil. My entire family used alcohol to have fun or to drown sorrows — or simply because it was the legal fix that was readily available. I wanted to fit in: I wanted acceptance, and I never had the courage to seek help. I can now relate to sharing the road to sobriety.”

— Willie H., Pacific Region

“I used to be a professional race car driver and an exotic car dealer to some important people, but that is all on hold now, due to my third DWI and my chronic relapsing with alcohol. I’ve been going to A.A. on the outside since 2007; I had sponsors, but I didn’t listen. I’m embarrassed that I’ve been in jail several times in the last 10 months, but I pray a lot and go to A.A. meetings in here.” — Jimmy P., North East Region

“I am an alcoholic. The crime I committed would never have happened if it wasn’t for my drinking. I’ve been to well over 20 rehabs, and my life is a complete mess because of alcohol. I need help. I am not new to A.A. or the Twelve Steps, but I have never worked them thoroughly with a sponsor — someone who can guide me to the path of freedom that I’ve seen others achieve.” — Travis H., South West Region

“I’m an inmate incarcerated for two DUIs. I thought I had everything going so well. Wow, was I ever destroyed because of my hard-headed selfishness. Now I’ve lost everything. I guess the most important thing is that my family was and is hurt the most, all because of my drinking. I had it all — vehicles, a very good job. I’m 61 years old with nothing now, and I have to start life all over. I’ve been going to A.A. meetings. I’m at my rock bottom. I’m determined to take it one day at a time because it’s now or never.” — Steven W., North East Region

“I am an alcoholic and have been for many years. My decisions

have landed me here, and it’s all from the fact of my drinking. I have lost my job, home, daughter, girlfriend — and my freedom. My life has spiraled out of control badly since 2014. We have started an inmate-run A.A. group here in our pod. It consists of seven to 10 members. I have been going every day for the past three weeks, and it has helped me a lot. I really have my mind set to keep going once released.” — William W., North East Region

The Insanity of Alcoholism

“I started drinking at the age of 13. It started off with weekend drinking, but soon grew. Then, in 2008, I nearly lost my life when I got on a motorcycle while drunk and ran into a parked car. I should have known to quit drinking after this traumatic injury, but all I did was continue to drink more and more. The actions that have me in jail now are the absolute worst. I’m not sure exactly how, but I took a woman’s life. I cannot recall the entire night I did this. I know I’m being charged, and being guilty of murder is very extreme, and I hope I can still become a member of Alcoholics Anonymous on the outside. One of my good friends is a recovering alcoholic and sent me the Big Book. This book is very profound and gives me high hopes of being able to lead a normal life.” — Joseph M., East Central Region

“My life has been consumed with chasing my next drink and high. I can now see how insane I have become as a person. I hurt everyone that I am close to, and now I have nowhere to go and no one to turn to. I want to change everything about myself. I hate the person I have become. I want the A.A. program; I want a sponsor to guide and help me become a better person. I want to know who I really am, to find myself. A person was in here with me: he had an A.A. book, and he explained to me everything about A.A. and how people have changed their lives. I want to change mine in so many ways. I had to start with access to an A.A. book. Thank you for helping me with an A.A. book. I will forever be in debt to pay you back, and I will do my best to help someone who was in the same downward spiral as me.” — Harley J., South East Region

Gratitude

"I have been in numerous recovery programs and many A.A. meetings, but until about a month ago, I did not have the willingness to accept the fact that I was an alcoholic. I have no doubts today that the disease of alcoholism has its own way of life. I thank God numerous times a day for allowing me to surrender at the age of 27. Some people are not so lucky. Cunning, baffling and powerful — so deceived I was by alcohol. I've spent my entire life holding onto resentments and self-pity — 'poor me' — and now I know that I was both the victim and the perpetrator. I caused my own unhappiness and bitterness, and A.A. opened my eyes to it. I've let go completely of all the trash. I feel like a new person. I just want to thank A.A. as a whole and to let you know that I will humbly seek to reach out to the still-suffering alcoholic for the rest of my life."
— Paul S., East Central Region

"The Big Book states that alcoholics either get 'sobered up, locked up, or covered up.' I detest this place, but in all honesty I realize if it wasn't for this place I wouldn't know where to establish myself in the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am so grateful to be in prison because, truth be told, if I wasn't, I would be either committed, covered in cardboard behind the local liquor store, or dead." — Jesse B., Pacific Region

"Honestly, the A.A. program of recovery has been a tremendous blessing in my life. It gave me hope when I first came into jail almost four years ago and had none. The people I first met loved me until I was able to love myself, and it's been said that in order to keep what I've been given I must also give it away. So it's been suggested through prerelease contact that I get to a meeting as soon as I can, and that's what I want to do."
— Edward T., North East Region

"A Fearless and Thorough Moral Inventory"

"I've struggled with alcohol and drugs for most of my life. I've done several prison terms only to get out and do the same thing again. I'm currently on my Fourth Step and taking a really good hard look at myself. I know there is a better way of life, but only if I truly go through the changes that are necessary."
— David C., South East Region

"I drank for the first time at the age of 11. I have had as much as four years sober, but I went back out. For me, I had to have a five-year prison sentence to make me look at myself, to really look. That rigorously honest stuff? Yeah, I finally had to do it. Not half-measures, not changing sponsors: the message is loud and clear — just do it! So now, I've worked my Steps, and I sponsor women in here; it keeps it fresh for me. All of this is working toward my ultimate goal. — Susan M., South East Region

Soundness of Mind

— *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*

“Few indeed are the practicing alcoholics who have any idea how irrational they are, or seeing their irrationality, can bear to face it. Some will be willing to term themselves ‘problem drinkers,’ but cannot endure the suggestion that they are in fact mentally ill. They are abetted in this blindness by a world which does not understand the difference between sane drinking and alcoholism. ‘Sanity’ is defined as ‘soundness of mind.’ Yet no alcoholic, soberly analyzing his destructive behavior, whether the destruction fell on the dining-room furniture or his own moral fiber, can claim ‘soundness of mind’ for himself.”

"I'm an alcoholic, and my drinking has led to many incarcerations. This is my fifth time going to jail or prison. Drinking led me to commit crime, and it is at the root of almost all of my life problems. I have been doing Step work; I've done Steps One, Two and Three. I asked to do Step Four, and that is when I was given this form for correspondence. I am very serious about my sobriety, and that's why I was told about the Corrections Correspondence Service. I've tried to stop drinking on my own, but I know I can't do that, and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to stay sober." — Donald F., North 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).