



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Fall 2018

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."*

Our Lives Had Become Unmanageable

"I have been an active alcoholic since high school, and over many years my life has become progressively more unmanageable. I am a physician who was arrested and sentenced to two to six years. My sobriety began not because I saw the light, but because I felt the heat. I have been through the Steps twice, and I use them in every aspect of my life. Right now, I am working on Step Four, and most of my focus is on pride and resentment. My list is quite long!" — **John M., North East Region**

"I'm 44 years old and serving a 12-year sentence for a D.W.I. I'm involved in A.A. here. I chaired meetings for a while (four and a half months). I passed that torch on around a month ago, as we regularly do every three months or so. We're around 20 to 30 strong in attendance every week. A really good group of guys from all over the state have wound up here because our lives became unmanageable due to alcohol." — **Matthew W., South West Region**

"I am an alcoholic. I started drinking at the age of 21. I was arrested for stealing a water truck — I thought I could drive drunk. I parked in the plaza at the gas station, and the guys from the water district came up to me and asked me for the keys and I was arrested." — **Matthew M., Pacific Region**

The Gift of Desperation

"Hello, my name is Sarah H., and I am a severe alcoholic, serving my second prison sentence. I realized I was an alcoholic and was

physically dependent on alcohol 12 years ago, and I have struggled in recovery, relapsing countless times ever since. I am a blackout drunk: every time I have been arrested, I was drunk, and usually in a blackout. I am desperate to get this right, as I know I'm running out of chances. I should have died several times over. Drinking is just another way to self-destruct. I am almost 40 years old and have five children who desperately need a mom who stays around and sober. My family thinks A.A. didn't work for me, but in reality, I'm the one who didn't work A.A., never fully giving myself to this simple program." — **Sarah H., South West Region**

"By the time I was 16, I was able to drink from the time I woke up until I decided to go to sleep, and it didn't matter how many days or weeks it was until I went to sleep. I puked, stumbled, fell and drank my way into a serious mental health, drug-addicted, alcoholic downward spiral that over the years has caused me to do a lot of serious jail time. I also spent the past 25 years doing drugs with alcohol... I am done: I made a choice and here I am today! I am committed to staying sober, because if I don't, I am going to die... and I don't want that." — **Joseph K., North East Region**

"I am 31 years old and have been an alcoholic since the age of 13. I have had long periods of sobriety, but the relapses have become worse. My self-resentment, shame and guilt have weighed me down, and my disease has now put me in this jail. I finally have hit my bottom with no one to turn to for help, and no

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one to talk to. I found the Big Book in here and have begun to conduct meetings with other struggling alcoholics on a daily basis. The Big Book and A.A. have restored my faith and opened my eyes." — **Salvador S., Pacific Region**

"I've been drinking and abusing alcohol since I was 12 years old and now I'm 45. I'm a mother of three and a grandma of four. And I'm really ready to give it up. I hit bottom before coming to jail: I was homeless and had been that way for the last three years. I want different results this time around, so I'm ready for change." — **Pearl H., South East Region**

Gratitude for A.A. Meetings

"I'm an alcoholic in county prison for yet another stupid alcoholic episode. I woke up here with aggravated assault and threat charges that I don't remember acquiring. I am lucky, though, that no one was seriously injured or killed because of my actions. I'm also lucky that A.A. comes in once a week for a meeting. I'm working a good program and I'm ready to start Step Four, with the spark in me to stay sober." — **Aaron B., North East Region**

"I have just started going to A.A. meetings in jail, and I must say they are really helping me! Every night I read one chapter out of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I enjoy A.A. and I'm eager to read more and work on the Steps. Thank you for creating this program! Without you I'm not sure how my life would be." — **Justin K., Pacific Region**

*"With the experiences I have had,
I wouldn't be the woman I am today if
it weren't for A.A."*

"I attended A.A. on the outside, sporadically, both by choice and court-ordered, but I never took it seriously. Now here I am in prison due to some poor life choices while under the influence of alcohol. I celebrated five years of sobriety in February of this year. I am eternally grateful for a second chance at life and the opportunity to live my life in the way my Higher Power intended me to — sober — and to continue my involvement with A.A. throughout my days, one day at a time. I currently chair our Sunday morning Second Chances Group of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am grateful for the service positions I have had the honor to be elected to, and for the opportunity to attend A.A. meetings in prison." — **Mike C., Pacific Region**

Don't Quit Before the Miracle Happens

"My name is Victoria. I hope you're doing well. I am doing amazing. I have been going to A.A. for six years on and off, and I absolutely love it because it has saved my life. With the experiences I have had, I wouldn't be the woman I am today if it weren't for A.A. I go to meetings here every Monday, and I am so grateful for them. The volunteers are awesome people. I have a sponsor; I am still getting to know her. I hope and pray to do the Steps with her. Thank you for keeping A.A. strong. God bless." — **Victoria S., Pacific Region**

"I'm 52 and have spent about half my life in prison. I'm a 'puke through the first pint at 5 a.m.' kind of drunk. I have tried everything that chapter three in the Big Book ('More About Alcoholism') mentions to beat my disease — just to be beaten a bit harder by alcoholism! The last eight or ten years, I've been sober about four of them in total — a cycle of sober a year, off and running a year, then sober, only to fall once again. I finally found my way back here into the rooms of A.A., where I got a new understanding of my Higher Power and solid recovery. I have only 55 days today, but the miracle happened — no more white

knuckling it. It's nice to be a part of the Fellowship and I'll keep coming back." — **Robert R., Pacific Region**

Turning It Over

"Another A.A. member encouraged me to stand on faith about receiving a Big Book. Soon after, he brought me one while I was on my job in the kitchen (I'm a cook). I'm very proud, very proud. For me it was proof of how the Third Step instructions of turning my will and life over to the care of God as we understand Him works! I view this as encouragement to stay sober, to share honestly with my A.A. brothers, and to listen carefully for a sponsor. I'll listen carefully when someone shares something interesting. When the student is willing, the teacher will appear. Lately I've been meditating on freedom from resentment. Resentments are active negative emotions that fuel revenge. To judge the faults of others becomes a kind of imprisonment — the mind holds us hostage to the damage and pain of past events. With a heavy heart, I see this in my past, and I see its ill effects on the faces of my children. But for now, I'm learning how to appreciate this prison experience as a guide to help me focus on what is right in front of me." — **Aaron G., South East Region**

Acceptance Is the Answer

"I only seem to get in trouble when I am drinking, so I decided to come to A.A. All of my jail times have been linked to alcohol and violence, which is why I've reached out for the hand of A.A. When I used to drink I'd become very angry and egotistical and would often turn to violence to solve my problems. I have been sober now 19 months, and have finally decided that I cannot drink anymore. I should have realized back when I was doing my last sentence that I can't drink, but I wasn't ready to give myself to this program. But here I am. When I got released in 2014, I had 20 months sober. I attended meetings regularly once a day, but when I met the person who is now my ex, I started drinking again. Needless to say, that relationship ended in flames. I now have accepted that I can't drink like normal people, and this program has changed the way I think, act and feel. I have done almost 10 years of jail time since I was 18, so it's time that I get on the right track, because I'll be 30 before I know it and time is going faster every year." — **Matthew K., Eastern Canada Region**

"The reason for my letter is that being in here I have had time to think about the true nature of my wrongs. I have come to believe that the reason I continued to get incarcerated is that just maybe I have an alcohol problem. Being in here I have found a copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* with some pages missing, but it has opened my eyes to the problem that I have. Admitting to myself that I have an alcohol problem, I know that I am taking the First Step in my recovery! I understand about going to A.A. meetings to become strong so that I never pick up alcohol again. These meetings are located all over the world." — **Lazaro P., South East Region**

"On June 2, I had one year sober. Some outside volunteers in the meeting said it didn't count because I was locked up. Well, I guess

they've never been locked up before because I don't see any prohibition here! Things pretty much flow the same in here: you can get whatever you like for a price, but that's not for me. If I indulge here, I'll be the same or worse when I get out, so no thanks. One year sober feels pretty good." — **George U., South East Region**

Applying the Steps

"I am Taylor, and I'm an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. I began drinking as a teenager and if I had known then what I know now, I would have realized I was an alcoholic. Alcohol became my best friend, giving me confidence and comfort. I would steal from my stepmom or biological father, who gave me my first beer and a beat-up van, which is all he ever gave me. I got married in 2003 and was a dry drunk for five years, until my ex-wife and I had a problem and my work became difficult. I started drinking and lost my wife and home and everything in a year. I've been to the bottom and to the top, back to the bottom and top again, in and out of jail, switched between alcohol and drugs, and even participated in A.A. Only until I began really doing the Steps did I see how my life could change. Thank you for reaching out to me." — **Taylor O., South West Region**

"For many years I have had a problem with alcohol, but I have been clean and sober for a few years now, and keeping my sobriety is a must. I have been applying the Twelve Steps in my life on a daily basis." — **Tony H., Pacific Region**

A Way Out

"I am addicted to alcohol. I was molested when I was younger and grew up in an abusive household. I have scars all over from getting beaten when I was younger. My mother and stepdad (or her man of the week) — all they did was drink and use drugs, so from a young age I would sneak off with their beer and some weed. I liked that it made me feel like I was someone different, and it helped me forget what I was living with. I was addicted from a young age. Of course, things only got worse with time, but I am learning a new way now that's been in front of my face the whole time." — **Michael H., South East Region**

"My name is Johnny V., and I am a drunk, an alcoholic! I'm in prison for a DUI and I have joined A.A.! I moved on to Step Two of the Twelve Steps today. I'm struggling with my heart and mind, but I believe A.A. is my answer. I believe A.A. — after 34 years of the abuse, I can finally see a way out!" — **Johnny V., North East Region**

"I am an alcoholic; I have been in prison for almost 20 years; and I attend meetings weekly here. I have a good chance to make parole in March next year, and I am very grateful for the program. I must start going to A.A. on the outside on the first day of my release. I was only 16 years old when I came to prison. I never want to live with bad feelings for myself or for anyone else. I want my second chance to be one that I can be proud of, without the shame of not getting it right. I have not attended a meeting on the outside yet." — **Gregory P., North East Region**

Prison Saved Their Lives

"As I sit in my cell, I wonder what to write, what to ask for... forgiveness is first! All I can say is that I wish my Higher Power had been in my mind and body the moment I took that first drink, which has put me where I am. It isn't much time, but even one day is too much! I guess this is my intervention! Guess this is the way it goes when you want to drink yourself to death. But the Creator has other plans in store for me. I have hep C and the beginning stages of cirrhosis, which began three years ago, so maybe being hemmed up in here will give me a chance to recover." — **Gabriel L., West Central Region**

"I'm an alcoholic who is currently serving a one-to-three-year prison sentence. I have my Big Book with me, and for the first time I have read it. When I get released, I plan on getting involved in the program. I've been to meetings in the street but was so caught up in my alcoholism and drug use that I never reached back to anyone. I am from New Jersey but caught my case in Manhattan. Luckily, I was arrested, or I believe I would have died out there. This sentence has given me some time to think about my problems and how to solve them." — **Richard C., North East Region**

Cunning, Baffling, Powerful

"My name is Robert P., and I am also an alcoholic. I have attended A.A. meetings in the past, mostly because I've been ordered to do so. This time around, I am going because more than anything in the world I want to stay sober. I'm scared to death. I know in my heart that I never want to drink again. But even with that being said, I'm still having thoughts of drinking, and quite frankly it makes me mad. However, I have actually read the book this time and have started working the Steps; in fact, I'm on the Fourth Step currently. The guys that run the meeting here are great and very helpful, but I can tell this will definitely be a

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lifelong battle. I have high hopes I can do it. I just want to tell A.A. thank you, thank you, because I believe it has saved my life. I'm going to keep going and keep working on my sobriety." — **Robert P., East Central Region**

"Just a few minutes before I started to write you, I wanted to get high. But God came to me and I saw your letter. It said that alcoholism is a progressive illness but that we can stay sober. I don't have to get high; I can do this, but man sometimes I don't know if I can. Still, I believe God will do for me: I got to 30 days today, and I want to stay sober. We don't have A.A. coming here, but I pray that we will. (We have a program that I am in — we

have something like A.A. but not exactly A.A.) So all I got is it y'all right now. Have you ever wanted to get drunk and your Higher Power steps in and tells you not to — but you do it anyway? I just pray, and God guides me in what to do, but I guess I still need to work on that. Sometimes I just can't see the light of day.” — Eric M., East Central Region

Willing to Go to Any Lengths

“My name is Pat and I am an alcoholic. I am 25 years old. I have no access to any sort of library, church, or meetings such as A.A. I wrote to addiction services here in the prison about nine months ago and asked for a Big Book, which I received about two months ago, and I read it daily. Since I was 16 years old, I have spent nearly six years incarcerated for things that stem directly from my use of alcohol and ‘dry alcohol,’ and I feel if I continue on the path I was on before being incarcerated this time that I will go to the ‘bitter end’ quickly. I believe that I am truly at my bottom, and I’m willing to go to any lengths to maintain my sobriety.” — Patrick O., North East Region

Feeling “A Part Of”

“My name is Bridget J., and I’m an alcoholic. I’m 35 years old and very new to A.A. Even though I’ve known that I’m an alcoholic for quite some time, that did not make me want to stop drinking. While under the influence, I made some poor decisions, and now I’m serving time in jail. I’ve never been in trouble before this and was raised by a good family; I have a college degree and I’m an RN by trade. At first, I started attending A.A. meetings as a requirement following a DUI, and while I did take something from every meeting, I felt sure I would never find a home group. Then I attended a meeting — oddly, on the street I grew up on — and I knew right away that it would be my home group. For the first time, I felt comfortable in a group, and I really liked the people I heard participating. There’s always lots of laughter in that group, and people are always commenting on how much they love that group. I look forward to seeing those people again one day. Having reached my bottom and being new to the program and A.A., I’m excited about recovery and being sober for the first time. I’m reading all the A.A. literature I can get my hands on, and I really love input from senior members. I’ve not yet done the Steps and have been apprehensive about the idea of having a sponsor. I’m very open-minded, but I am having trouble with accepting a Higher Power.” — Bridget J., South East Region

“I have paid a high price — many years in and out of jails across the country. Loss of family, home and possessions. But all of these losses, among others, have been my doing — no one else’s. At 50 years of age, I have traveled a long and sorrow-filled road. But through A.A. and various other programs, I know I don’t travel this road alone.” — Melissa T., South East Region

“I have joined the A.A. group here. I have been an alcoholic for 30 years. It has gotten me nothing and nowhere except prison.

So, I have been welcomed to our A.A. group, and I love it. Finally — people who understand me and my problem.” — Robert D., South East Region

“Read it. Just read it”

“I owe my sobriety to the program of A.A., because without it I would have one boring sober life. But because of the program, I get to come together once a week with other recovering alcoholics and talk about where we’ve been, what happened, and what it’s like now. The spiritual awakening that I am currently walking through as a result of this program is undeniably one of the most precious gifts that I have ever experienced — and I still am experiencing it ... as long as I keep coming back! I keep coming back because it is working. You know, I walked into my first meeting when I was 19, and all I remember them telling me was to ‘keep coming back — it works if you work it.’ Well, I did the first half of that saying — ‘coming back’ off and on for 12 years — but the program didn’t really start working until I finally decided to do the other half of that saying and to ‘work it.’ That’s when things started changing because the saying is true: it does work if you work it. I turned my unwillingness into willingness when I decided to try some of the things suggested to me, with an open and honest mind. The very first thing that a member suggested to me, at 19, was, ‘Read the first 164 pages of the Big Book and call me.’ Well, I don’t know where that man is today, but I finally took his advice and read it two years ago. I cannot get back that time I lost to my active alcoholism, so please, if you are like me, give yourself a break and read it. Just read it.” — Donald C., Pacific 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).