



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2018

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." *

A New Freedom

"A.A. literature lifts my spirits and brings me hope when I read it. I've been doing the jails-and-institutions thing for 18 years now, with several year-long periods of sobriety. Looking back on it, these were the best years of my life. I'm tired and have now surrendered to my disease since being incarcerated again these last four months, and I have turned everything over to my Higher Power (whom I finally found here in state prison after many years searching). Locked in a cell, I once again found freedom, which I plan to carry with me through these doors when my day comes. Funny how I had to lose my freedom to find it. I'm not mad anymore that I'm here: I'm relieved and grateful! I sometimes get strange looks when I share that, but I'm only speaking my truth. Before I got in here, during my last run, I spent six months sleeping under a bridge and on the sidewalk. Although this is a low point being in here, I have learned from experience that it can continue to get worse." — Brent W., North East Region

"I am a friend of Bill who is doing time. I'm happy to say, though, that I am free on the inside; however, to keep my sobriety I need to work more on my recovery. I am a very grateful recovering alcoholic and I owe my life to A.A. Without the constant reassurance that we do recover, I would have given up long ago. The promises do come true, even on the inside. This life is good today." — Jammie A., South West Region

"I have discovered the Fellowship of A.A. and truly see value in it. I'm now 40 years old and in prison for hopefully the first and last

time. I have struggled with alcohol and other substances since I was in elementary school. This trip to prison has turned into a blessing, as I can now learn how to become sober for the first time ever." — Christopher G., East Central Region

Willingness Is the Key

"My name is Edward F. I am currently serving a two-to-six-year sentence and I am an alcoholic. I took my first drink when I was about 13 years old. However, I don't honestly think this was when my alcoholism began. I think I was born an alcoholic, as I had two alcoholic parents. I am now 21 and grateful to my Higher Power to realize all of this early in my life. I have been through several rehabs; however, the willingness wasn't there. Fighting the Fellowship and living in denial ultimately ended with me here. I have a 10-year-old sister and a mother at home who love me dearly, even though unfortunately it took me being in prison to realize this. I guess what matters is that I am powerless over alcohol and I want to change my life while I still have time. I need help!" — Edward F., North East Region

"I started drinking at a very young age and was an alcoholic by the time I was out of high school. I became a licensed minister

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and was sober from the age of 26 to 50, when my second wife threw me out and moved my best friend into our house. I packed up and went straight to the bar, and I drank pretty heavily for the next three years over what was done to me. In one year's time I received two DUIs; the second involved my brother, who was riding with me. I am in A.A. here at the prison. I'm not required to go, but I am going on my own because I know what will happen if I don't get help." — Douglas K., North East Region

"I've read the Big Book from cover to cover, and now I'm on my second time reading it all the way through. I still have a very strong willingness to follow through with this program. I have been sentenced to a prison term, so I'm going to be in here for a

while. I have no way of joining any kind of program until I get classified, and I would really like some help through the Corrections Correspondence Service with taking the Steps in the Big Book.” — **Robert H., Pacific Region**

“Since I have been here at the facility, I have been very involved with the A.A. Fellowship. I did attend meetings on the street as well, but that’s all I did — just attend. I didn’t participate or get involved in any other way. But since I’ve been incarcerated, I have decided that I do indeed want something different in my life. So, I have become very open-minded and willing to practice this simple, spiritual program and to be completely honest. My life has been transformed because of it. I am truly a happier person today and I’m in prison — it just seems kind of surreal. I’ve learned that it’s not about where I’m at or what situation I’m in; it’s about what I do with the situation and how I handle it.” — **Jason G., East Central Region**

Getting Rid of Old Ideas

“Hi, my name is Donald and I am an alcoholic. I am proud to say that I am an alcoholic with a capital ‘A’ because of our blessed Fellowship, which I have come to believe in. I’ve lived a wild life of drinking. It seemed like as much as I have been in a hurry to fix myself up, another part of me — my alcoholic mind — has been in the same hurry to destroy me. I have had a love-hate relationship with my Higher Power, because with the help of A.A. and the Twelve Steps, my Higher Power has been showing me all of the damage my active alcoholism has caused. At first, when I started A.A., I thought I could hold onto my old ideas and my old way of thinking, but the more that I make the time to go to meetings, read the Big Book and other A.A. literature, and keep coming back, I realize that I do have to let go absolutely. I cannot go backward if I am going forward, nor can I go forward if I am going backward. I did not know how messed up I was until I got sober, and I did not know that I am not alone and that there is a

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way out until I read the entire book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I used to think I was insane, but from those stories, I now want something better for myself. I know life is not going to just hand me a better life, but the Fellowship has carried the message of hope.” — **Donald C., Pacific Region**

“I want and have the desire to stop everything I used to do. I’m so happy that my Higher Power has taken this time to sit me down and make me think. I want to stay strong in my sobriety. I want and need to find freedom from the hold drinking and drugs have had on me.” — **Stephanie H., South East Region**

“I am an alcoholic. I am 34 years old and I have struggled with

drugs and alcohol since I was 11. It has robbed me of everything that I cherish. Currently, I am incarcerated, serving a 24-year sentence after a continuous cycle of destruction, not just in my life but in the lives of everyone I came in contact with. I’ve been incarcerated now for 11 years and have had some time to reflect. Call me crazy, but with all the trouble that alcohol has caused me, I can’t say for certain that I am done. What I know for now is that I do attend A.A. once a week on Monday nights; it is helpful being around people that also struggle with sobriety. The A.A. literature I read says that many of the volunteers have also been down these same roads as me, and may have a better way or some advice on sobriety that may be helpful. Right now in my life I can use all the help I can get.” — **Jamell C., North East Region**

Gift of Desperation

“I received two years for a probation violation for drinking alcohol. In the last four and a half months, I’ve read the A.A. Big Book, *Daily Reflections* and all the old issues of Grapevine here in this jail. I paid for my own subscription and received the military issue from October. I do not want to go back to drinking again. Why have I been in treatment in the past but to no avail? It’s because I didn’t truly want it. I do now, and I want to refresh my tools and learn all I can to be successful at staying sober. I am desperate.” — **George U., South East Region**

“My problem always starts with alcohol, then I turn to drugs, and then I end up in jail. But this time, I am doing a 10-year sentence, and I am losing everything that I find dear to me in life! These Twelve Steps of A.A. are beginning to save my life.” — **Heidi W., South East Region**

“I am currently serving a two-year sentence with two years’ probation, due to receiving my fifth DUI. I have been going to A.A. faithfully in here since day one. I was also attending A.A. on the outside until I relapsed. Now I am back in here because I thought I could beat alcohol, which never has and never will happen.” — **Neal O., East Central Region**

“Alcohol destroyed my life — quickly. I did not drink until I was in my 30s, but in no time it led me down a path of utter destruction and despair. I chose alcohol over my family, friends, jobs, responsibilities and self-respect. It stole my connection with God and made it very difficult to reestablish that. While incarcerated, I have made a strong effort to surrender my life to God. This has helped me with many behaviors, feelings and emotions. I fully believe that Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps are integral to long-term sobriety, and I want to do all that I can now and upon my release to stay involved.” — **Tracy M., North East Region**

The A.A. Way of Life

“For the last 11 years I have been an active member of A.A. at several institutions, and I have learned a lot about myself and how to let go of resentments and fear, thanks to reading stories from the Big Book. I believe that coming to prison was a message from my Higher Power, due to the fact that I was on a road to

“A.A. Teaches Us How to Handle Sobriety”

“The Big Book says, ‘A.A. does not teach us how to handle our drinking... it teaches us how to handle sobriety.’ It also says, ‘God willing, we may never again have to deal with drinking, but we have to deal with sobriety every day,’ and that is exactly where I feel there will be a struggle for me. I believe that regular meetings and the help of a sponsor are going to be the right path for me to keep my sobriety. As of now I have been sober for almost 18 months. By now I thought I wouldn’t want to drink anymore, but time has only made the temptation easier to deal with — it hasn’t erased it. At this point in my life, I realize where drinking will lead me. Everything in my life used to revolve around my drinking. I spent all the money I could spare while trying to keep a normal semblance of living. I drank at home, at work, socially and alone; it stopped mattering what the occasion was. Over the years people told me that I was an alcoholic, and I shrugged it off. I told myself, ‘I keep my grades, I keep a job; I never wrecked a car or hurt anyone. How could I be an alcoholic?’ I’ve come to realize I was nothing more than a functioning alcoholic. I understand now that if I don’t stay sober, it could very well kill me. I have family that I’d like to stick around for, but the temptation to have ‘just one drink’ — even though I’m unable to resist having another — is strong. Before this, I never would have admitted to needing help for my alcoholism, but now I’ll be the first to ask for help and support.” — **James D., South East Region**

death, but the A.A. program in prison saved my life. I had tried killing myself several times. The last attempt was two days before I was arrested. I had the gun in my mouth, but the thought came into my mind that my girlfriend’s daughter would have been the one to find me. Every time I read the Big Book I get something new out of it, and I thank all who shared in this book. I can’t wait to go to an A.A. meeting and learn about others, share my story, and live sober and happy. Sobriety in A.A. is not a fad — it has to be a way of life!” — **Michael P., South East Region**

“I started drinking at a very young age, sneaking beer to school to drink with my friends before the homeroom bell rang. At first, I drank because I thought it was cool, and I found I was gaining acceptance from the people who normally would never talk to me. Later on, I continued to drink to party and have a good time. Then, one day my baby sister took her own life accidentally, and I found myself drinking because of grief. I became someone that looked for any reason to drink, a person I never wanted to be. I went to prison in 2011 and was mad at the world. Back then I was still in denial about my alcoholism, even though alcohol had led me to make poor decisions and made me lose control of my life. I lost my wife and children, but I didn’t think alcohol was the reason. I tried to learn self-control but instead my alcoholism progressed. I caught a DUI with my son and his friend in the car. Thank God no one was hurt or killed. You would think something would register, but even with that, I drank more while waiting for my sentence, and I got picked up. Inside here, I finally walked into A.A. and have enjoyed every meeting I’ve attended. I’ve even shared my story in front of a group of 71 guys. It felt great! I have now found a place where I can be myself and be accepted without drinking, and that’s in A.A. I am ready to finally work the Steps and live a sober and productive life.” — **Johnathon R., North East Region**

“I have been struggling with alcoholism for 17 years (I’m only 29) and it has caused me to spend almost seven years of my life behind bars. This ongoing issue has robbed me of everything I’ve ever had and left me with less than nothing. I was first involved in A.A. when I was young, 16 to 18 years old, but I continued

drinking and lied about it. Now in A.A., I work toward truthfulness, happiness, and contentment in life, without alcohol.” — **Brandon C., North East Region**

“I am just getting around to getting out of my denial stage — blaming others for why I’m here — but like my family has been telling me, I put myself here. I had all the essentials a guy could want — nice girls, nice vehicle, nice house, all the nice guy toys, a good job. Then, when I stopped the meetings and the A.A. way of life, I started hanging around my old hangouts. Wham! I slipped right back into the scene and instead of asking for help and going back to A.A., I kept on because I thought I could do it on my own. My relationship started getting rocky, and I just didn’t use the tools A.A. so freely gave me. Now I see with a clear mind and a clean soul. After my release I want to get right into meetings, find a sponsor and get a decent job.” — **William L., North East Region**

Gratitude for the Fellowship

“The first member I wrote to stopped writing, but I was able to find another one right away. We’ve been thoroughly taking the Steps every week via mail and things are great. I still have some years to go, but I’m free already. You may have noticed I was given a transfer to lower security. This was a good thing in many ways, but I lost a very good home group and some awesome fellowship. There’s only one meeting here a week, but I’m thankful for it. This prison is in the middle of nowhere; we have two dedicated volunteers who come in faithfully to carry the message. One has 42 years sober and has been coming to this prison for over 16 years! The other’s a lady who blesses our socks off, too. Thanks to the Pink Can Fund, the outside local A.A.s have provided us with all the books and literature we need. We also usually have a guest speaker on the last Saturday each month. This is the perfect time to study the *A.A. Service Manual* and figure out what I’m going to get into in the future. Some others are also interested in reading through it with me. By the grace of God and my surrender to Him, I got my seven-year chip last May. I always keep the people who serve in A.A. in my prayers. I’m just a

coffeemaker guy in here, but someday I hope to 'Step' up." — Jeffrey S., South West Region

"In just two months our A.A. group has grown immensely. We now have two meetings being conducted daily throughout the jail. You have no idea how good I feel that I've helped start meetings that have never been allowed in this facility before! Knowing that fellow inmates — alcoholics — have a place to go to daily makes my heart swell. Officers and inmates alike thank me and tell me how awesome it is to have this. My sponsor has also told me how proud he is to see this. He says it makes his 'eyes sweat.' If I can help save one fellow alcoholic, then all this was worth it. I still can't thank you enough for all your help. (Maybe one day I will get the honor of meeting you and thanking the General Service Office personally for your help with our group in the jail.) It started with one, and turned into many, forever." — Chad S., North East Region

"Doing time is much easier knowing that I am sober and that I have a large Fellowship who has my best interest at heart." — Benjamin L., South West Region

"I remember the first time I spoke at a meeting. Because I am transgender I knew that what I had to say could impact others. So, I talked about how we judge others and how we aren't put here for that. We are put here to help. At our meetings we usually have between 60 and 80 people, as well as about nine different A.A. guests who come from the outside. Each week we work on a Step and our guests also speak and talk about the Step for the week. They are the most amazing people in the world. They are all a part of our lives. I've been blessed to be able to ask them so many questions. I do it so when I am released I will know what I am up against. I constantly remind everyone that the First Step and the Serenity Prayer are key in finding what you are looking for in the A.A. program." — Lisa S., Pacific Region

Embracing the Twelve Steps

"I've come to the conclusion that I'm going to embrace the values of A.A. the best I can and fight for my sobriety. I've attended meetings here and there, but now I really get it. I enjoy the sense of community and self-worth. I have a Big Book and a schedule of meetings in my area for when I'm released." — Christopher B., North East Region

"I want to say thanks for Alcoholics Anonymous, because without A.A. there would be no hope for many of us alcoholics. I have read the Big Book from front to back. I have highlighted points of interest throughout my reading. I used up a whole highlighter and started on a second one before I was done. I can just kick myself for being a dry drunk for 12 years before I fell off the wagon. If I had attended A.A. and picked the darn book up and read even a part of it, I might not be in prison today. Now, A.A. has changed my life, and today I try when I can to give hope to others who are also tired of their alcoholic ways." — Matt H., Pacific Region

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"I had heard people talk about waking up in jail without remembering what happened, but I always thought of those stories as 'dramatic' and 'exaggerated' until I had my first (and, God willing, last) blackout. I would have never identified my drinking problem if I hadn't woken up in jail not knowing exactly what I had done. Now the Twelve Steps are the life preserver to which my drowning self clings. Thank you, A.A., for another day sober and alive." — Jaymee W., Pacific Region

"In my mind I've been running all my life; I really need help letting go and letting God 100 percent. Please help me help myself. I was 11 months sober before coming to jail drunk. After an explosive and very emotional court hearing, I stopped reading every morning, stopped counseling and stopped going to meetings. I started to beat the hell out of myself mentally again. I bought a gallon of vodka. I can't go on this way. I'm dedicating my life to A.A.'s Twelve Steps because they work. I'm 100 percent sure of three things: that I am a true alcoholic; that A.A. works; and that I'm willing to follow everything the program says. I need help with the Twelve Steps. I want to admit my faults, work through them and clear away my past. God willing, I will find someone to help me dig myself out of the hole I have dug — mentally and spiritually." — Steven C., East Central 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).