



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2020

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."*

It's Time For Hope

"I am a 46-year-old woman, and my sobriety date is January 2019. I have been incarcerated since May 20, 2019. I have five DUIs. Drinking caused my fifth DUI in another county, which gave me another year of house arrest, another year of driver's license suspension and another hefty fine. Oh my God! I could have gone to Italy with my family at least three times. I had a retired cop helping me who knew the judge. He suggested that I go to A.A. meetings and sent an encouraging letter on my behalf. My employer wrote a letter, too, including Hope Program letters. The judge waited two months for my Gag 2 hearing, which was July 19. He gave me 14–28 months, including the months already served. I haven't had female friends since grade school, and I have had the opportunity to develop some great relationships with my peeps from the Hope Program. Anyway, I had to start realizing that I no longer have control over the simple things in life. Well, I've got a busy day scheduled: 12:30 'slop' is over; it's time for hope. But I would love to hear from you." — Sara F., North East Region

Forgiving Ourselves

"My first experience with the Twelve Step Program of A.A. was at the age of 14, when I went to a meeting with my father. I went again at age 19. I moved into a sober home called 'Sober Services,' which lasted three weeks. I have been to the federal penitentiary seven times, all due to my addictions. I truly don't like to focus on the mess; I want to speak on the solution. My last time free — it was a period of five years — I had a real life, a wife, home,

garden, vehicle, A.A. meetings, a sponsor, a church, a wonderful relationship with my mother, father, son and brother. One good thing is that I have forgiven myself; it is the Ninth Step in recovery, making amends. It starts at home. From the church I attended, my sponsor took me into his house. He was the chief of police corrections officer, and we went through the Twelve Steps. For some length of time I have been putting in work to change my life, and I feel ever so confident that I am a changed gentleman." — Justin H., Pacific Region

The Big Book Is My Bible

"I am in prison due to my alcohol addiction — some criminal charges came with a D.W.I. I am 35 years old this month, and my first A.A. meeting was when I was 16 years old. Of course, I didn't listen. When I was around 12, my sister, a cousin, a friend and I started smoking weed on the weekends. This was the mid '90s, and life was awesome. Rock music and rap were great when we were high, and so was anything else. At 15, I started stealing shots of whiskey from my uncle and my dad when they were at work. By the next year I was drinking every weekend, doing crazy stuff. We would record our parties on video and watch them the next morning and laugh the headaches away. Then, when I was almost 18, my mom left my dad, and I felt abandoned, although I was hardly home anyway. We would rage all night for two or three days straight, feel like crap for a week after that, and then do it all

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over again. We put our minds and bodies through hell. The drinking continued for years. At 25 years old, in 2009, I took a friend to a party with me to drink some beer and we drank two cases. Next thing I remember was waking up when my friend was carrying me to the car. My head hurt so bad, and I was passing in and out of consciousness. A guy had smashed the interior right side of my skull and face in, completely shattering the bones. I remember the ride to the hospital; I touched my head and I am sure I touched my brain. Just the pain alone knocked me out completely. I awoke to the cops asking me what had happened.

The next morning a surgeon put me back together with all titanium: a forehead, eye socket, temporal area, jaw hinge, and nose bridge — all new titanium. I stayed with my aunt and uncle, the one I had snuck shots of whiskey from at 15. I did a 90-day court order in a local halfway house, which is where I found A.A. But I had a hard time keeping things going, all while still attending A.A. once a day. Forty-eight hours later I was headed to detox and back to prison. Lost my rights to my baby girl whom I had worked so hard to keep. I have had a religious belief and found myself unsatisfied on scientific facts, so I stopped reading my bible, only praying to a God I knew was real. A couple of days later I found an A.A. Big Book sitting in the day room here in prison. So now I write down everything I remember from my sponsor and I have made a structure to live by again. The Big Book is my bible. I have had a great spiritual experience, freeing my mind and body. I have forgiven myself for my actions; I am trying to have a good plan for my release. My children are fine. God put them in a good home, and I talk to them a lot. I will soon be back, just as they are getting ready for their teens. They are six and nine years old now. Time flew by, and I've got to stay in this program if I am to be a good father." — Levi D., South West Region

On an A.A. Mission

"I now sit in this prison seeking forgiveness and redemption for all the wrongs I have committed in my life. I have been incarcerated pretty much my entire adult life. To be honest, alcohol is literally the demon for me; it makes me evil, and that's truly not who I am as a man. I become hateful and violent; I have no compassion and no love for others — I'm just a completely different person. It has taken a lot of courage for me to admit these things, but Steps Four, Eight and Ten allowed me to make a breakthrough I never thought possible. Also, Step Twelve has had a huge influence on me and helped me on my spiritual walk. I feel I have had a spiritual awakening. One thing I have learned is that every time I go back

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and rework the Steps, and listen to others' interpretations and opinions, I learn something new and see the Steps from a different perspective. I am on an A.A. mission while I am here incarcerated. And once I reach society again — about eight years from now, and after 30 years in a place like this, I'm excited about that! — I will be very grateful, humbled and thankful for another chance at freedom and for the opportunity to be a very active member in A.A. Nothing else in my life has given me the drive and sense of purpose that A.A. has. God made me realize something so profound that it gives me goose bumps and cold chills. In my heart I heard a voice that said, 'Charlie, you know how to die, but do you know how to live?' " — Charles J., East Central Region

Starting a New Life

"I've seen the Big Book for many years because my Dad is a recovering alcoholic, but I never picked it up to read it. He used to

take me to meetings when I was a young kid and my mom was sick with cancer. He would take my two older brothers and me with him so my mom could rest, I guess. Growing up as a kid in Brooklyn — especially living by the beach — was awesome. I remember my mom saying that she hoped she could live until I turned 18. I wasn't registering that she would leave me so soon. Unfortunately, she passed away when I was 10 years old. It's been 25 years since I lost her, and the pain is still there. Even after all these years, at times it feels like it just happened. I had a beautiful family at one time with a woman I loved dearly, but I guess we barely knew each other when we moved in together. When we met, she already had a five-year-old son. I raised him for many years, but I wasn't the best stepfather to him at first. When his mother and I moved in together, I had almost been murdered, so I wasn't right mentally. My anger would burst out. I needed counseling, which I never sought out. I put them through hard times when they were living with me. Many years have passed, but my stepson still loves me. He's 16 years old now. What a blessing to me." — Emanuel N., North East Region

Many, Many Thank-Yous

"I am writing you, first and foremost, with the utmost gratitude for responding to my letter and a humble, heartwarming answer to my prayers that A.A. has a subcommittee forum for members to help with inmate correspondence. The support, fellowship and simple camaraderie would be graciously appreciated — not only by me, but by any members who sincerely devote themselves to this amazing program. Thank you! Thank you! Secondly, I received the copies of A.A. literature — the Big Book and *Daily Reflections*, which I have begun to read (I am halfway through the Big Book). I meditate every day on the inspiring food for thought provided by those daily messages. Thank you! Thank you!" — David S., Pacific Region

"My name is Joseph, and I am an alcoholic. I've been sober for 17 years; I've been in prison for 20 years. I have been with A.A. for 16 years. The first year of my sobriety I tried to do it on my own. Then I wanted a drink very bad, and I decided to go get one. I ran into my friend June, and he asked me why I was going to the unit that's known for drugs and spud juice [alcohol made in prison from fermented potatoes, vegetables or fruit]. I told him I was going to get me a drink. He asked me to walk with him for a couple of laps on the track first. I said OK. During our walk he not only reminded me about why I didn't want that drink, but he talked me into attending A.A. So I made that meeting, and I haven't missed one since. I started drinking when I was 12 years old, but I remember my dad giving me beer when I was seven years old. I am in prison for felony/murder. I assaulted a man and took his money for alcohol and weed. The man died two months later. I was sentenced to life without parole. I plan on filing a commutation soon. It's my only hope at getting out of here. My spirituality is very strong. I am a minister with the Sacred Name Service. My Higher Power has helped me more than ever, but I still get tempted. A.A. is the tool I use to maintain the gift of sobriety I've received from my Higher Power. Thank you for your time." — Joseph G., East Central Region

"Dear Sir/Ms., Merry Christmas! Thank you so much for sending

me *Daily Reflections* and the A.A. book. I am so grateful and joyous that you have done this for me. I don't have a lot of money, and I am serving a long prison sentence. Things like this offering you have given me light a fire in me to be a positive light in a sometimes-dark world. Thank you so much!" — **Chris H., South West Region**

This Time, Things Will Be Different

"I have burned bridges; I've apologized numerous times to my family, especially my mom, saying that this time, things will be different. My mother suffers from alcoholism, as does my young sister. I have no family support at this moment, and I understand why. I am the problem. I had a dad who passed away while I was incarcerated. He had a drinking problem and also suffered from a cocaine addiction. I got myself into trouble recently and I will be looking at some time. I have had a sponsor on the outside. As of this year, I've only completed 11 Steps. I had a year of sobriety and I gave it all back to the streets. I had a hard time enjoying life. Since then all my relationships never lasted, and when a problem occurred, I turned to anything that numbed my feelings. I am 25 years old and wasted most of my 'good years' because of my alcoholism, and now I am incarcerated in a county jail with some folks who know about the A.A. program." — **Eric H., Pacific Region**

"I am a 44-year-old man currently serving a 50-years-to-life sentence. I have been incarcerated for 19 years. During the prison time, I have learned about myself. In 1991, I came into the U.S.A. and I struggled with the language barrier and different culture. It was hard for me to adjust myself to fit in society. I didn't know how to deal with my own problem. I was normalizing violence and drinking as a way to escape my painful reality, to take control of how I thought and felt about myself. I was wrong! Today, I have changed. I have been sober almost 19 years. I have learned that my drinking habit has influenced my whole life. Around two years ago, the prison gave me a new youth offender parole date, which means I will go before the board in 2024. This program helped me wake up to all my prospects." — **Jae K., Pacific Region**

"Since being incarcerated, my A.A. life has not stopped. I need the Big Book, and I meditate every day. I still talk to my sponsor on an occasional visitation. Looking back through my story, I have come to learn the facts on a couple of different topics that I had trouble with in the past. Seven percent of A.A.s surveyed are under 30 years of age, and among those, many are in their teens. As for the flack that I was catching, I believe that it came from my selfishness and self-centeredness. I also have found that I can only rid myself of these habits by making a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand him. In turning myself over to the A.A. program, I have found that age does not have anything to do with staying sober. I have found that sobriety has little to do with hope. My sobriety today has nothing to do with my incarceration. It has to do with my getting up every day and making a decision to stay sober. It has to do with continued service commitments and unity with my fellow A.A.s. Though things are not so good, I have reason to believe they will get better because I have not given up on the program. The program is a way of life for me now that I would not give up for the world. It has taught me

forgiveness that I have never known, and on a daily basis it is allowing me to regain self-respect. My family is grateful for A.A.; my friends are grateful for A.A.; and most importantly, I'm grateful for A.A. There is no endgame in my life anymore when it comes to the disease of alcoholism. All I have is a daily reprieve dependent upon my spiritual condition." — **Justin D., South East Region**

"My name is Beverly. I am 25 and I am an alcoholic. This is my story. When I was little, I had a decent childhood. Although my parents got divorced when I was young, it didn't bother me. I am a momma's girl anyway. Around the age of 16, I dropped out of school; I was in ninth grade. I started drinking not long after that. I loved beer and liquor. I went to a party every time my friends had one, which was like every day. Around 17–18, I caught a few charges for drinking in public and sneaking into any bar I could get into. I went from drinking beer and liquor to just plain liquor. I had my child at 19, which was the only time I really stayed sober. After I had her, I was at it again. I went every day, drinking a pint before work; and while I was at work, I would drink a pint. If I didn't have a drink at work, I'd try to leave to go get a drink. My drinking went from bad to worse. I thought that since I was working, I was doing okay. After losing my house, my car and my job, things got worse. Being in and out of abusive relationships didn't help. I caught more charges from fighting with them while drunk. Sometimes I wish I had stopped drinking and chosen better friends. Maybe I wouldn't be here today in jail. I finally broke down and had to admit that I am only as sick as my secrets. And my secret to myself was that I was an alcoholic. As soon as I admitted that, I slowly started to feel better. The ladies at A.A. gave me the A.A. book with all these wonderful stories in it. My favorite was 'Safe Haven.' Slowly but surely, working the Twelve Steps and attending these A.A. meetings and Bible studies is working, one day at a time. I would not make it without A.A. Mentally, they are saving me. Thanks to the warden allowing A.A. in this jail, I am able to turn my life around. I will continue to go to A.A. when I leave here. Not because I need to, but because I want to. I want to get out of here and be the wonderful mother I know I can be, all thanks to A.A. Thank you for reading my story. I hope anyone who thinks there is no hope will please get to an A.A. meeting. Never give up; it will get better!" — **Beverly T., Southeast Region**

Serious About Recovery

"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 is 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 toward early release for attending and participating. You can imagine — the meeting is filled to capacity. So, I started a LGBTQ group for those who are serious about recovery, and I put it out that it was open to all, and all are welcome, since this is by choice, one alcoholic helping another. I am grateful the Fellowship has made me so extremely grateful. God was looking out. Right when I was down, I received my book. This is why it is so important for me learn and study this book, so I can be of service, and share my experience, strength

and hope with other alcoholics. Thank you all.” — **Jonathan S., Pacific Region**

“I have been taking the program seriously since being incarcerated. After attending multiple meetings a week, I began taking everything seriously for the first time in my life. I definitely realized I should have done this long ago, but as we learn in A.A., a lot of us A.A.s don’t hit rock bottom until we meet 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 see that the program can help me live one day at a time in a sober lifestyle. 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 wanting to take recovery seriously, and they have no issues sending helpful tools for me to do it. 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**

“My name is Frank, and I am a former alcoholic. I struggled with addiction. I am trying to overcome alcoholism and that is the reason I am in prison. I was drunk at the time of my crime. I made a bad decision that changed my life forever. I might be spending the rest of my life in prison. I pray to God above to change my drinking habit. I plan to stay involved in A.A. if I get released. I need guidance and understanding about A.A.” — **Frank E., Pacific Region**

Staying Focused on Today

“I am an A.A. member and have been for the past three years going on four. I was strongly active in the program up until my relapse back in August 2018. That relapse was one hell of a setback, which eventually led to this prison sentence I am currently serving. I was sentenced to 26 months at the D.O.C. last year on March 1, 2019. I am planning and taking the actions for better years to come. By doing this I am trying to stay focused on today. I have never done any recovery correspondence before. This is new to me. Eventually I am willing to open up more in my writings. Until then, Happy New Year to my fellow A.A. members!” — **David H., South East Region**

“Nine years ago, I was the guy who stopped drinking and admitted he was powerless, who worked a Fourth Step, but only partially; the guy who had spiritual belief, but no deep spiritual purpose. I was the classic example of Relapse Brenda. I had wonderful friends and lived a productive life without alcohol, until I got drunk. Then I went into a walk-in cooler behind a restaurant to steal more beer. Burglary of a structure and petit theft. For this I received 13 and a half years in prison. Oh man! A lot of sadness, disappointment, regret, shame and guilt had to be worked through. But not one little bit of hate, bitterness or resentment toward the system for such a heavy sentence. Several years ago, I experienced a powerful awakening and realized there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. There is only now, this moment. So, I devoted myself to awareness and mindfulness of the now and the Higher Power.” — **Hubert K., South East Region**

“I believed an alcoholic was a skid-row type of individual and not me. I didn’t want to acknowledge or admit I was powerless, because I saw that as being weak. Coming to realize that I used alcohol to numb my emotions and to deal with my life problems, I saw my fault and finally admitted my addiction to alcohol. I have been drinking since the age of nine, after it was introduced to me by an older cousin. Drugs crossed my path, too, after I felt the effects of alcohol. I have not had a drink since June 23, 2012. However, I still would not admit I was an alcoholic. While working on myself, I’ve met an alcoholic who has been well on a path of recovery. He’s guiding me to understand alcoholics and encouraging me to share at meetings as well as working with me on my denial. I have come to realize I am an alcoholic.” — **Daryl F., Pacific Region**

“In 2015, while attending an A.A. meeting in prison, God began opening my eyes and ears. Then and there my spirit started returning to life. My Higher Power, whom I call God, continues revealing more things to me about myself. I was the extremely hardheaded type. I simply refused to open up and listen, and to let go of old patterns in my thinking. And I never contributed at the meetings; mostly I was hoping to hear something I had not heard already. Then I would just go to see if I agreed or not whenever the word ‘you’ was mentioned. Today I am so happy, and I feel somewhat emotional when I get the sense that he (God) is in control. I prayed to God for so long for the faith he is finally forming within me. I am very grateful. Everything good appears to be flowing in my direction for real! Everything has its price. I heard the recommendation clearly and the words were spoken for me to hear without a doubt. I heard, obeyed and followed what was said to me for my own good: that I had been following my own thinking, and that my illness had been having its way with me.” — **Robert A., Southwest 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).