



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2021

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." *

You're OK in My Book

"Here is a card for all the holidays and birthdays coming up. It covers all the big ones I might miss. You are OK in my book. I always wanted to write to someone in A.A., and you have hooked me up. Thank you. I am sending my respect your way! Have a good one and stay healthy. Thank you for all the members of A.A. One Day at a Time." — **David G., Pacific Region**

Grateful God Put Me Here

"Dear A.A.: I am currently incarcerated at a federal detention center. Last month I wrote a letter to your Grand Central Station address, and I was very pleased with the response I got. I received some wonderful literature that I found extremely beneficial. This facility I'm in does not offer much regarding recovery, not even reading materials. Covid-19 makes it only that much more difficult. One more reason I am so thankful for A.A.! I have attended A.A. meetings on the outside, but apparently not enough, hence my current situation. Next month I will celebrate six months of sobriety, the longest ever for me since I started drinking at 12 years old. It took being locked up to do it, so I am grateful that God put me where I am. I will not go into my story, except to say that I have

struggled with alcohol just about all my life, up until my present age of 39. I am writing because I recently came across another posting for A.A. in a general prisoner resource list mailed to me. The information listed was the Corrections Correspondence Service, Prerelease Program, and other resources. This caught my attention. Would you be able to send me information on these services and anything else related that you feel might be helpful to me? I really do not have any support here, so the more material and information you are able to provide, the better. Another inmate and I have started A.A. meetings in our cells. It is just the two of us for now, but it is a start. We meet daily (at least we were — until we went on lockdown 24/7 for the past two weeks due to a Covid-19 outbreak). Now we are working our way through 19 weeks of Big Book workshop. Like many, I have never made it past the Third Step, but I will be attempting to soon. Also, I have never had a sponsor, something that I will be seeking." — **Peter F., North East Region**

Feeling Alive

"I began drinking when my maternal grandfather died in 1984 (I am 53 years old now). I started taking one beer from the family, and then when I got old enough to buy my own, I did. I managed to graduate from high school in 1986. I did a few years of community college, but I was drunk or did not go to class. Instead, I would be at the local bar or at home stealing money from my family. I got married in 1991, but that did not last long. I was either drunk, high, or cheating through most of my marriage. In 1994, I got arrested for the first time. I was with D. and we got into some trouble. The following summer, I went to jail for one month and then to a state psychiatric hospital. I was there for three and a half weeks. I stayed sober for two years, going to A.A. meetings in the town where I lived at the time. Then, in August of 1998, I relapsed big. I cheated on my husband; I was plowed. I'd been driven over to his friend's place and it went from there. When I got home that night, I passed out in our bed. That next morning, I came to realize that I had made a big mistake. I had to quit drinking for good. In April 1999, while I was in yet another hospital, my

husband said he had had enough, and he walked out. I was mad: How dare he leave me? I thought. Years later, I saw that he had to save himself. In 2000, our divorce was final. I wish I could say I stopped drinking, but I did not. I went back to jail from a new city in 2010. I fell in with a group that was not very good for me. I did one year in jail. I was on strict probation, too. I still managed to drink. The final straw was

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on July 24, 2012. Earlier that year I had heard about an arson that was being planned. I wanted no part of it, but since I had gotten involved in this group in 2010, the leader told me I needed to do something. I still said no, but to no avail. When things came to an end, and the group was arrested, for once, I was sober. I turned myself in to the police because I found out there was a warrant for me, too. Now, eight years later, honestly, I can say I feel alive. I am not drinking, and I am filling my time doing things that are constructive, not destructive. I choose to read and crochet, and I love being sober. We do not have many A.A. groups where I am, but I will go when I can.” — Laura M., North East Region

A Newfound Sober Lifestyle

“My name is Ryan M., and I am an alcoholic. I am writing because I recently read the Big Book, *Daily Reflections* and *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*. I have been in and out of A.A. and jails as much as the next alcoholic, I suppose. I am currently incarcerated and waiting for my court date. I would like to learn more about A.A. If there is any free information or books you could send me that could help with maintaining my newfound sober lifestyle, like *Daily Reflections* or any self-help books or pamphlets, it would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.” — Ryan M., North East Region

Never Giving Up

“Dear A.A., I am writing not only for myself, but also for several people I love and call family. I was raised by an alcoholic father and mother. I have had friends and aunts and uncles alike who have suffered and passed away due to alcoholism. I was fortunate enough not to follow in those footsteps. I did, however, become addicted to the street. It has caused just as much of a problem in my life as alcohol has caused so many other people that you guys reach out to. I hated myself, loved others (mainly women). I was caught in a G-ride, a stolen car, at the age of 22 and ended up going to prison for three years. Hold on, let me back up just a little. I should have mentioned that while I was in prison, I watched

a man get stabbed more than a dozen times over a seat at lunch. I was 160 pounds soaking wet when I went in. I started lifting weights with a couple of guys. I also became cellmate with a known murderer who got me to start doing even more stupid things; I started popping pills. When I was released, I started using again right away. I met my future wife and began using and drinking with her. My parole officer told me that we could not be around each other while I was on parole, but I decided to disobey and we ended up living together. We continued using and partying, despite my parole officer's orders. She got pregnant, and I got stupid. We ended up going to live with my mother out of state, which only lasted a few months, and got married when we came back. We were married less than a year and mostly stayed in hotels and with her friends. I continued my charade of being this tough ex-convict gangbanger, which I was not. I was abusive, both verbally and somewhat physically, with her and the children (her 3-year-old son and the child we had together). We spent several months drifting apart — arguing, accusing, and tearing each other apart. I should also mention that I cheated on her the night our son was born. Throughout our relationship she would need a break from me, and we would be apart from each other and get back together. Our marriage lasted around eight months. Then I walked out on my own family. I got involved in crime again; this time it was cashing checks. I went back to prison several times in the following years, at which point I fell upon the doors of A.A. and N.A. I was a dedicated member of the program every time I was incarcerated. I would attend weekly meetings. I read the Big Book, as well as the Twelve Steps. I loved the program and the people who attended the meetings with me. The sad truth is that I would get out of prison and relapse and end up right back in prison. Dealing with homelessness, the stress of unemployment, and hating myself all over again, six years after I separated from my wife, I started to want to clean up my life. I was always alone, talking nonsense, either to myself or to anyone who was around me. I thought God hated me. I thought my family had disowned me. I basically had nothing and no one to turn to. I was down and almost out. Then, I met a woman in her 50s. I am in my late 30s. She had been clean and sober for more than 25 years. She took me in and offered me help in every way she could. I remember her always talking so wonderfully about A.A. and how much it helped her stop drinking and using. How her sponsor had helped her stay sober for such a long time. Then I went back to prison in November 2019 and thought I could stay clean when I got out. I used the first night out. I now have it in my heart that I am done! I owe the program and its members a great big thank-you! You all have helped me stay motivated and not give up on myself, no matter what. I recently read Grapevine's *One Big Tent*. That book

helped me find my strength and hope once again. Now I can look in the mirror and not hate the man looking back. I recently lost my uncle during my last time in prison. One of the things my brother made sure to tell me was, 'Yeah, bro — and mom said he had stopped drinking and was getting his life back together.' My dad quit drinking and has been sober for

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many years. I just wish my aunt could have found her sobriety before she passed away. I am now on the downhill slope of my latest prison sentence. I am paroling to a sober living recovery program and I am going to work on staying sober. Just for today, thank you again for everything A.A. has done and for everything it continues to do for others like me.” —
Craig S., South West Region

Blessed and Humbled

“Dear A.A.: My name is Ryan; I will explain myself in the following few pages. My sobriety date is July 11, 2011. I am almost 10 years sober, God willing. I am currently detained and awaiting trial for an alleged attempted murder that took place in 2012. Needless to say, the past nine years have been interesting and honestly one of the greatest miracles I have ever witnessed, which is why I am writing this story to you. I hope someone takes the time to read it and sends a prayer my way. My alcoholism journey started when I was as young as I can remember, having a deep case inside of me that I cannot explain. I remember watching my parents fight. I would wonder why and if it was my fault. At the age of 8 I had a not-so-great thing happen to me, and I cannot explain it. As a result, I began to act out violently. I got suspended from elementary school on several occasions for fighting with other kids. This also turned out to be the year I got drunk. It was at a New Year’s party with my father and his friends. He thought it would be funny to give me tequila shots. I remember pretending it was not the purest form of fire I had ever felt, and they all thought it was so funny. At the age of 8, three shots, and I was feeling great, to say the least. Suddenly I became the life of the party; I was suddenly an adult amusing my peers. The following nine years became a replica of that night. I would steal drinks from my alcoholic mother and drink them with my friends. I quickly became the cool kid who could get booze for all the juvenile delinquents I associated with. We were called the Latchkey Boys. I was a tall kid and mature, so I looked older than I was, and with the character of an alcoholic, I quickly became a honcho and easily manipulated my peers. I was also incredibly violent. I was expelled from middle school

for fighting and shipped off to live with my father. This was the beginning of a speedy decline into the abyss of alcoholism. Alcohol was always the constant. In this new environment, I worked hard to achieve my tough guy reputation and quickly advanced into hardcore addict. I remember having barely one coherent thought around this time, just a haze of impending doom and a never-ending quest for more booze and drugs to slam back into the void of nothingness and numbness. I was kicked out of high school for fighting and started a cross-country trip at the age of 14. Between semi-pro skateboard competitions and the occasional trip home for a shower and change of clothes, I was lost to the power of alcohol. I slept in caves. I would bury a lot of rocks under my fire to heat them up, and then sleep on top of them so I would not freeze to death. I stole a scooter and made it to Las Vegas. Once in Las Vegas at the age of 15, I was able to find the ghetto and score all the booze and drugs I needed. I was quickly arrested and shipped to a locked-down facility. I found that the court mandated A.A. meetings, and they started to become the brightest days in my life. Also, I started making several lifelong friends. At first, I substituted sex for my drinking and drugs (another program). I did, however, acquire a sponsor. I will always remember getting down on my knees and saying an honest Third Step Prayer (being my daily mantra for the remainder of my sobriety). My spirituality, on the other hand, grew slowly. I was the one in the room no one expects to last long; I had four short-term relationships in the first year. I was struggling to stay sober and was homeless. I found an opportunity to start a new life in Florida (another miracle yet to be explained). We walked into a hospital where young people meet, and I soon became involved in the local young people’s A.A. This group became my first higher power. I was still an angry 22-year-old with a serious chip on my shoulder, accompanied by a super-sick model girlfriend. But I started to see people smiling for the first time in a long time. Not to mention, most of them were older. The tough persona started to strip away, and I, too, smiled at last. I wish I could go into

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details of the magic of the following nine years, but it is nothing short of a miracle. I was given a job, a family, a house, and a friend in the program. I never missed a day of grueling labor in the hot Florida sun. I loved it. I slowly became less of a piece of excrement, and I kept working hard. After three years, someone was insane enough to ask me to be his sponsor. Today, he is five years sober. But on August 20, 2020, my past

finally caught up with me: I was arrested. Today, as I write, I am closer to God than ever in my life. The Third Step Prayer has proven to give me acceptance and serenity. My God provides me with the miracle of sobriety and so much more. I was finally able to prove my innocence and hopefully will be free soon and have a happy life with my soon-to-be wife and her daughter. My wife will be part of the process in this program. I owe my life to this program, and I am so blessed and humbled to be able to share my story. — Ryan W., 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).

If you are receiving this newsletter and you would like to have an A.A. member write to you and share their experience, strength and hope, please fill out and mail in the attached form.