



# SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 Summer 2009

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."\*

## FROM 'OUTSIDE' A.A. MEMBERS

Dear A.A., I wanted to tell you that another A.A. member and I were able to use the *Sharing From Behind the Walls* newsletter on our last visit to the county jail. I usually conduct the meeting using Step One from the Twelve and Twelve or Chapter 3 from the Big Book. The inmates were totally into the stories and wanted to take *Sharing From Behind the Walls* with them back to their cell to use it for their daily meetings with one another, when there is nothing else. I needed to share this information with you for all 15 of us in county jail on Tuesday night, it makes my favorite meeting list!" — **Keith M., East Central Region (outside A.A. member)**

"Seems funny that it took 15 years of sobriety to get involved in corrections, especially since I got sober in the local prison. In my first few years I got heavily involved with my district. Once I felt that I had done my part I withdrew from all of it. I moved 130 miles north last year and I saw a great need for a D.C.M. and I took that service position; then I saw a huge need for corrections, so I started doing prison meetings and got involved with the area. It took an act of Providence for the state prison to let me in, because I had drug sale charges against me while I was awaiting trial in the county system. The funny thing is that there is nothing great in what I am doing. I am merely keeping myself sober. And in the grand scheme, I am not even putting in half the effort as I did to drink and do all the other things. Thanks and God Bless." — **Artie D., Northeast Region (outside A.A. member)**

## IT'S A 'WE' FELLOWSHIP

"I want to thank you guys for caring about us alcoholics. Everything I read about A.A. mentions helping others. Looking back on my life I can't think of one time I really truly helped someone. When I did something for someone, I was planning or thinking about what I would get in return. I hurt a lot of people and myself. After reading the Big Book my eyes started to open up, not to mention that my mind started to

relax a little. I had a different feeling about life after reading the Big Book. I can't even start to explain how I felt." — **Charles H., Southeast Region**

"My name is Mike and I'm an incarcerated alcoholic. I'm finding sobriety while I have been incarcerated. I'm still pretty young at only 25. I've been down for two years so far. I only have eleven months left before I'm set free into the outside world. I've been an alcoholic throughout my teens and into my adult life. I've been to two rehabs that never supported the A.A. program. I have been finding out what A.A. is all about while I've been incarcerated. Meetings are limited to twice a week and I try to attend every one that I possibly can. I have only been going for about a month, but I feel that this program can be really beneficial to my recovery when I walk outside the gates. I have family that has been in the program for 30 something years. It has helped them through the good, bad, and ugly. If only I had listened and started going to A.A. with my other siblings, I wouldn't be in this position. But then, again, I wasn't ready." — **Michael G., Pacific Region**

## 'A.A. RESTORED MY SANITY...'

"Hello, my name is Jonathan. I have attended A.A. since I came to prison in June of 2008. The men have helped me through many things in these meetings. Working the A.A. program has changed my outlook on life. Not only have the Steps helped with my alcoholism, they have helped me with my everyday situations. Learning to accept life on life's terms, my personal inventory, knowing that a power higher than myself is now in control. Drinking alcohol landed me in the penitentiary. I got in a severe car wreck in January 2007, and my roommate lost his life and I almost lost mine. I am very lucky for this second chance that God has given me. I, and my friend alcohol, destroyed a life, tore families up (including my own). I broke my neck, skull, back, and jaw (the lower mandible). I have learned a lesson that I wish had not needed to be taught. My lesson did not hit home right away. I was so blinded by alcohol I drank all the way to my sentencing date. Prison saved my life. The Alcoholics Anonymous program restored my sanity by sharing with other men with my same problem. Many nights I lay in my bunk behind these walls and realize how close to death I really was. Whether instantly, like a vehicle wreck, or slowly, by destroying my liver and mind. I want to thank the men and women who are affiliated with this program for helping men and women inside and outside of these walls. It is a privilege to be part of something greater than myself." — **Jonathan R., Southeast Region**

## 'ACCEPT—AND GO FORWARD'

"I dodged A.A. for years, which was not in my best interest. A.A. could have really helped me years ago, had I known about it. When I came to jail, a guy in county with me suggested I go to a meeting. He knew I was in jail for crimes committed while

totally intoxicated. It was so amazing to listen to people who had gone through the same things I had, done the same things I had. Now they were past it; the alcoholism still lives within them, but they have hope—something, at the time, I didn't have. I had gone as low as I could go. I had lost everything I had and the worst part was the people I depended on had given up on me. I was on my way to prison, and as far as I could tell no one cared if I ever got out. Then an old guy in A.A. with forty years sobriety made me realize that it was O.K., I had done it to myself. There was no way to change the past, but I could change the future. I had to believe in something more powerful than myself and I had to follow the Twelve easy little Steps. Right! Easy! Are you kidding me? I can't do this. What if none of the people want me to make amends, what if they don't believe me? He said, 'Guess what, they probably won't. You have to accept that fact and go forward. You can't undo the damage you've done, but you can learn from it so you don't do it anymore.' I can't go to any meetings at this time, but hopefully that will change soon. With God's help, the Blue Book, and hopefully someone on the outside to answer my questions and give me advice when I need it, I will get through those Twelve easy Steps." — **James S., Pacific Region**

"I have been trying to get a handle on sobriety for about 26 years. I only had a few problems: 1) I refused a higher power; 2) Was not honest with myself or others; and 3) Didn't let go of anything. Recently I had a spiritual awakening after a suicide attempt. It was a miracle I survived. The doctor asked me why I did it and I stated, 'Because it was all I could control.' She laughed and asked why I survived, could be I wasn't in control but God was. It was as if the light had finally been turned on. Finally, I am not just reading the Steps but understanding them. To say my life has changed would be an understatement. I have been locked up one year, but have been abstinent for almost three. Recovery is not going to come looking for me, I have to go looking for it." — **Mario S., Northeast Region**

### **'DRINKING=JAILS, INSTITUTIONS & DEATH'**

"I am incarcerated for drunk driving. I recognized I was an alcoholic at age 20, attended my first meeting at 21, and remained sober for 15 years. At age 36 I went out and proceeded, over the next ten years, to get sober for a couple of years here, then drink for a couple of years there, and so on, until the sleeping tiger grew large and ferocious enough to assist me in getting my first DUI at age 43. I am now 46. I have not hurt anyone while driving, which is, obviously, extremely fortunate. But I could have. Despite my deep understanding of the A.A. program, the Twelve Steps, sponsorship, surrender, honesty, effort and action, once I relapsed, my drinking and subsequent behavior had begun to follow the precise path that A.A. describes: warped mind, continuation of drinking, etc. = jails, institutions, and death." — **Jennifer E., Pacific Region**

### **'BRAVE, WITH HONESTY'**

"I have just finished reading your pamphlet, 'It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell,' after getting out of an A.A. meeting not too long ago. It's a very good pamphlet and very helpful. The two people that came to visit us and tell us their personal stories are brave, with honesty. They have really inspired me to do better when I get out. Every one of my charges has been alcohol-related. Reading your pamphlets and talking to your members has helped me more in two months than any alcohol rehab I have ever attended. The professionals look like amateurs compared to talking to fellow A.A. members. I have had seven of my close friends and relatives die in car accidents, due to drunk driving, in the last year alone. My first D.W.I., I was with a friend who was passed out in the passenger seat. From what I read and heard, I was doing 87 mph in the wrong lane,

and I blew a 0.27. I was blackout drunk when I got pulled over. If I would have wrecked my '87 Oldsmobile and killed my friend, I would have killed myself before going to prison. Instead, I look at it as a blessing in disguise. This is my third time in jail because of alcohol, and I don't want there to ever be a fourth. While I have been in here, this last time, I have found God and attended every A.A. meeting available to me. I believe that everything happens for a reason, and I am just glad that I learned my lesson before I killed someone or myself. I look up to you guys. It is much easier to just say 'screw it' and drink the rest of your life away, rather than stepping up and doing something about it. Those of you who have succeeded are heroes to me. I want to do what you have done and do something with my life." — **Ben D., Northeast Region**

### **PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO MEETINGS DON'T HEAR ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO MEETINGS**

"I am currently doing two years on a repeat D.U.I. offender charge. The reason I am writing is that between D.U.I. #4 and D.U.I. #5 I had ten years sober. I had my 4th eleven years ago. During that ten years, I worked the program the way the book and my sponsor instructed me. As you probably guessed, I stopped going to meetings, stopped calling my sponsor, and didn't return A.A. phone calls. 'I didn't need to be doing all of this. I was O.K.' I put all this stuff on the shelf and 'was going to get on with my life.' I lasted exactly twelve days. Memorial Day came and 'I had a few.' Fourth of July I was locked up with D.U.I. #5." — **David M., Northeast Region**

"I achieved 13 years of continuous sobriety until I started getting too tired to go to meetings or call my sponsor. It wasn't too long before I started showing up to work with alcohol on my breath and being told that I could not go on call. I am one of us who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders. I have been diagnosed as bipolar and have post traumatic stress disorder, and I am medicated for such. I don't guess that I hit my bottom until 2007, when I was confined, my wife divorced me, took the children, and I lost everything and everyone. In 2008, my step-father was murdered, my biological father died from health complications, and I was denied parole. I have learned many things: that it is not safe to drink after a long period of sobriety, it only gets worse, not better. For the first time I see myself in Dr. Silkworth's classification of alcoholics in the chapter 'The Doctor's Opinion' (Big Book) as a 'chronic alcoholic,' and that I have a disease which, when activated by alcohol, destroys me mentally as well as physically and spiritually; and finally I have learned that I am not incarcerated because of criminal behavior, but because of drinking alcohol, which led to criminal behavior." — **Jason H., Southwest Region**

### **CORRECTIONS CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE (CCS)**

If you will be incarcerated for *at least six more months*, and are interested in corresponding with an outside A.A. member with whom you can share your experience as it relates to your problems with alcohol, please write to A.A.'s General Service Office to request a correspondence form. This is a random match with men writing to men and women writing to women.

### **PRERELEASE CONTACT**

If you write to G.S.O. *within three to six months* of your release date and give us your destination (city and state), we can try to arrange for someone to write to you just prior to your release. This would give you a chance to have an A.A. contact in your home community to help with your transition from A.A. on the "inside" to "outside" A.A.

We look forward to hearing from you.