



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 Summer 2013

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."*

'... LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE.'

"My name is Paul and I'm an alcoholic. I've been incarcerated for nine months for drinking-related charges. My drinking started at an early age and really escalated when I went into the armed forces. My drinking has always been to excess. I've destroyed my relationships with women, family and jobs. I've been on the edges of A.A. for years, but always thought my willpower would see me through. We all know how that works! This is my third time in prison (all alcohol-related crimes). I jumped back into A.A. about six months ago on the date that happens to be my biological birthday. I'm tired of getting my life together only to lose everything by picking up a drink. I read a lot of A.A. literature and the Big Book and I'm looking for someone to work the Steps with; I want a new way of life. I knew A.A. worked, I just couldn't seem to surrender (until now). I'm actually ok with where I am (in prison). I hang out with like-minded people in here and I thank my Higher Power every day for helping me to be open and honest, which is a big change in my life."

—Paul G. Jr., Northeast Region

"Here I sit in my upstate cell. I lost my girlfriend, friends gave up long ago, and my family is on their last nerve. Yet in the 25 years of my alcohol-based existence I have never felt so understood. I just finished drinking in every word of the Big Book and know I am not alone; I have hope I haven't felt since I was a child. Please send any and all information you can, I thirst for more. I intend on starting to go to meetings in here but I realize their limited nature. However, come July of this year, I will be in a room on the outside introducing myself as a newcomer." — Gary M., Northeast Region

A VERY STRONG MESSAGE

"I was sober for almost six years. I did time in prison, about six years, got out and did well. I started a family and turned my life around. The promises do come true. Staying sober, my life turned around more than I ever thought possible. I met a young woman in A.A. and she wasn't clean. It was hard to deal with and I didn't work the Steps. I would get to Step Four and stop. Meetings worked for awhile. I ended up relapsing and things just got worse. I'm in jail now. I've got four kids and the state took them. The part that hurts the most is that I was sober once and had it together. On top of losing my kids and my home, I'd been locked up for about a week, withdrawing and all, and I got into a fight and had my jaw broke, my nose broken, and stitches

in my face. It gets worse sometimes before it gets better. I'm so stressed out. I just want all this to go away. So I reached out for help, and I'm getting it. This place really makes me think. I've got almost 30 days sober, praise God. It sure doesn't take much to mess things up. I'm just glad my kids are safe and I'm somewhat sober. I look back over my life and it's hard not to feel hopeless. I've been in and out of jails and rehabs. I'm sick and tired of living like that. I thought all that stuff was behind me. I guess if I would have done what people were telling me, I wouldn't be in jail again. Meetings work for awhile — I'm trying not to be mad because of the way things are. In the Big Book it says anger is not for me, only normal people. I can say that it doesn't get any better back out there drinking. I'm just thankful that I did not kill someone! Please have someone write me! I want to stay sober more than anything. I know A.A. works, it did for me and I can say that when you go back out, it's hard to come back to sobriety."

— Gary K., Southeast Region

C.C.S. & PRERELEASE CONTACT SERVICES — THEY WORKS!

"I am participating and have extremely benefitted from the Correctional Correspondence Service of A.A. Me and my A.A. friend share our strength and hope. I lack the words that truly express the kind of support this opportunity has granted me. Before coming to prison, I was in a county jail awaiting court for over 13 months. It was there that I began to work this program. Although familiar with A.A., it was not until last year that I seriously began to take a real look at myself and my life. I am very grateful that my Higher Power has kept me alive long enough for such a blessing, for many pass away without ever knowing or even wanting a better life. I've never known freedom like this before. I am free falling into recovery, yet it doesn't feel like falling. It feels like allowing myself to be me. I deserve my recovery, and I intend to give it my strongest stand; I'm tired of running in circles. A.A. has been a breath of air, a doorway to my Higher Power, the only one who has been able to quench a deep thirst. I am forever grateful; I am home. My mother and sister believe that religion is all I need to change my life, and until I turn my life over to their concept of 'God' I won't make it. They don't believe meetings of different types of fellowships work because they've seen me fail at so many rehabs and hospitals, and of course return trips to jail and now prison. I understand where they come from; I too have strong faith in my Higher Power, that's why I know this Fellowship of A.A. was laid out before me as part of His will for me. The wonderful members that have given of themselves so freely and without reservations their most precious gift — time. I've never known such compassion than that of my Higher Power and the Fellowship of A.A. Thank you. Please don't ever stop carrying the message." — Yenja H., Southeast Region

"My name is David and I'm writing to you in hope of being connected with a temporary contact to help me proceed in my sobriety after I'm released. I'm no stranger to the rooms of A.A. After my last battle with my alcoholism it ended as it always does. Since my incarceration, I turned to the comfort I always find within the rooms of A.A. No matter where—inside or out—everyone is caring, and the love and hope makes me feel at home. I don't know why I always go back out and try it alone. I've always had a problem asking for help,

not wanting someone to have to inconvenience themselves with my problems. This time I finally took a deep look inside at where I go wrong, how I think, and at changing all of it. So I really need to do things differently upon my release. This means for me to get a sponsor and work the whole program. I'm stepping out of my comfort zone and finally going to try and use some resources to help me keep my sobriety. I know I can't do it alone." — **David D. E., Northeast Region**

"I am so very happy to inform you that I am at last under six months prior to my release date of October 15, 2013. It seemed like this time would never come, now that it has, could you please try to arrange a contact person for me in my home town? Just so you know, I am in contact with an A.A. member from Tucson, who you gave my information to. We write each other often, and we plan to keep in touch after I am released. I am so anxious to finally have the chance to experience a life of sobriety on the outside, find a home group, and hopefully a sponsor. My new life begins in less than six months. I'm jittery, but I'm more than ready. Thank you very much for what you've done, and I pray that you are being rewarded for your efforts." — **Christian S., Southeast Region**

READING A.A. LITERATURE

"My sponsor suggested that I write and ask for any and all information you may have for people who are within a year from being released from prison. I have been working the program of recovery since 2005, but I started working the Steps in 2006. I have been reading *Daily Reflections* every day. I still read the Grapevine daily and work my program by writing a daily moral inventory in the morning and evening, always praying to ask that my thoughts be directed away from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives and asking for guidance. This is a rough yard for recovery at this moment. I am the only person working the program of A.A. on this pod; however, I will help anyone who reaches out for help. It has been a daily battle to maintain emotional sobriety. I can now say the reading and re-reading of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *Daily Reflections*, and *As Bill Sees It*, all this time has helped. So now that I'm at the end of my time here I can say that I have been sober 2,852 days. In 2006, I wrote G.S.O. for help through the Corrections Correspondence Service and two people wrote. One became my sponsor. It's been over seven years and he has helped me with the Steps and suggestions. I am within a year of being released and I need help again." — **Donny R. M., Southwest Region**

"My name is Justin. I am an alcoholic, among other things. I just received a copy of the Big Book. I want to let you know that 'The Doctor's Opinion' and the chapter 'We Agnostics,' may have just changed my life. I am allergic to bees, but would not go into the hive for a taste of honey; that would be suicidal. And a 'God as I understand Him?' That opened my mind to the program. I was under the impression you all were Bible beaters, but I was found wrong. I want to live. For me to drink is death, but I continue to drink. I am in forced sobriety now. But what to do when I get out of jail in eight months? I was reading about resentments. I only have one: *me*. I am the reason for everything that's wrong in my life. How I deal with that and all the wrong I've done, keeps me that way. I read in the Steps about making a list of people I've harmed, but I would think the Twelve Steps are in an order for a reason. I'm not there yet." — **Justin J., Southeast Region**

'WHERE TWO OR MORE . . .'

"There are no meetings here but there is one other recovering alcoholic, with whom I have become friends. In the beginning, we transcribed the A.A. Preamble and 'How It Works' from memory, then followed with an open discussion. We now have a Big Book, sent in from my amazing mother, a long time A.A. member. I can't describe the comfort that comes from having our small, formal meeting here. Many of the best moments in my life have been in sobriety and I am grateful to have been given the opportunity once

more." — **Daniel W., Northeast Region**

'I AM MENTALLY FREE'

"Inside prison men often ask how a man of almost 20 years of incarceration says he is free. 'I am mentally free,' I reply. 'The physical freedom is not the blessing God has shown me.' I know millions of human beings outside of these prison walls are in stronger and darker self-imposed prisons right now. I am praying for all of you. Today the God of my understanding wants me to work in this garden and sow the seeds of this A.A. miracle, which is the life I live today. So I am inside of here to be of service. I will one day be blessed to come and live in a community outside of here, and my commitment and love for others will be brought to the service of others in that community. So many wonderful people in A.A. have mentored me and influenced me; God has brought these critical people into my life at the opportune times to help me help myself. I am so grateful and humbled to acknowledge these blessings today." — **Daniel S., Pacific Region**

"My name is Matthew A. I'm 23 years old, and I'm an alcoholic. I have been working my Steps and it's changing my life. I have a sponsor and I'm on Step Four, which I have not started yet. I'm still scared, but I'm doing what he says. I'm willing to do whatever it takes. I have been in prison for almost three years and have had a pretty crazy life. I used to hate my life, but A.A. has saved me, because even though I'm in prison I'm free inside." — **Matthew A., Pacific Region**

'I WILL NEVER BE ALONE'

"Hello, I sit here before this letter as a 23-year-old man with tears in his eyes remembering the pain that the past 10 years of being an alcoholic brought me. I'm currently on my second prison term, barely making it back to prison alive. Before I came back into the system, I lay on a hospital bed losing my life after a night of being drunk. I did lose my life that night and was brought back. I was first introduced to A.A. when I was 18 years old, and never once worked the Steps; my reason was I was agnostic. Well, I always went back to drinking and I never read the Big Book. Then I came here. I chose to come here, to one of two treatment prisons in the state. They have A.A. a couple times a month. I go every chance I can. But I also chose to pick up my Big Book for the first time and I read the first 164 pages. And when I read them, every single page was talking about me and I had to set the book down. A spiritual awakening was the only thing that came to mind, I never felt anything like that before and can't really explain it. Only thing I can say is if you're feeling like no one will ever know your pain, or you're all alone and alcohol is your only way of escaping you pain, pick up the Big Book and read the first 164 pages and don't look back. My goal now is to help every alcoholic in prison to beat this alcohol problem and when I go home to do the same. Today A.A. gives me hope for life and tells me I will never be alone." — **Anthony J. G., East Central 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) and approximate release date, 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 A.A. on the "outside."

We look forward to hearing from you.