



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Summer 2019

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."*

Finding Forgiveness

"Thank you for the Grapevine; it is always good to have. I have three years until my release date. I am in a prison where alcohol and drugs are constantly in high supply and demand. I am considered a creep and lame because I say I'm not interested. I battle alcohol addiction, and I also battle drug addiction. My mother passed away when I was 28 years old and I still shed tears when I talk about her. My story starts when I was still in my mother's womb: she was locked up so I was born in jail. My mother was an alcoholic and heroin addict all my childhood years, and my brother and I were left to raise my two sisters. I was changing diapers at around 9 or 10 years old, so I never had a childhood. I had a lot of resentment toward my mother. It is only after my own personal experience with alcohol and drug addiction that I earned great respect for my mother, but I never got the chance to tell her because she was gone by then. I thank God that all of my siblings and I never were separated by foster care, and this is where I realized just how super a mom I had. She kept her family together no matter what the cost, and that's a hard task for an addict. I wish I could have told her I loved her, and I now understand she did her best. I am a native New Yorker who moved to North Carolina in 2010. I have not been back to New York since then, so I have not seen my only brother and youngest sister in going on ten years. I plan to get work release my last two years and save up some money so I can buy myself a little ride and take a trip to New York! I will close by saying I just

finished reading the Fourth Edition of the Big Book from cover to cover." — Darryl P., South East Region

"We Would Be Glad To Hear From You..."

"Hello, my name is Francisco M., and I'm 24 years old. I have read the book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 'the story of how many thousands of men and women have recovered from alcoholism,' Fourth Edition. And as I finished reading the whole book, I saw there was an address with a line that read, 'We would be glad to hear from you.' So, I'm here, writing a letter to the address. I'm here in prison doing hard time, all because of one day of getting drunk, deciding to drive and getting pulled over by the law. I went to jail. So, I sit here in jail thinking, 'Why did I drink for fun?' As I read the book, I see that it gives many answers to life.... I tell myself and I share with others that you don't need to drink to be happy. To stay sober is the best feeling. There are a lot of people in the world who need help with alcohol and I pray that will change. As I finished reading the book, it began to make me change my life. I would like to see if I could receive more information about Alcoholics Anonymous; I would appreciate the help. Thank you." — Francisco M., South West Region

"I've spent lots of time in my A.A. book. I began writing you folks in New York, being prompted from reading the last page in 'A Vision for You,' Chapter 11. In my own estimation, I can see how

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someone's letters can give the reader an idea, if any, on how much 'progress' may have developed in the writer's spiritual maturity department. I'll call those letters my 'reports' to you of Alcoholics Anonymous and, most of all, the authors of our Big Book — those authors being the same in spirit as my own Higher Power at this point in my recovery. On the first of this month, I was interviewed again for parole. This will be the fourth time a decision will be made about my chance to be free and out of prison. I've been locked up since September 19, 1992, which is also my sobriety date. I am anxious to attend and be part of an

A.A. group on the outside. I am a believer: I finally began learning how to listen. Thanks be to God! I look forward to listening."

— Robert A., South West Region

Reaching Out for Correspondence

"My name is Holly and I am an alcoholic. I am currently incarcerated in Manitoba, Canada. The last time I was in jail nearly a year ago, I realized that even though I had been sure that drug use was my only problem, alcohol use was the root of most of my issues. I finally came to terms with the fact that I am an alcoholic and vowed to do something about it upon my release. I have now been sober for ten months. On the outside, I was

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regularly attending and chairing meetings, participating in service work and working closely with a sponsor. I was very proud of my sobriety. In jail, it's harder. I just recently got a Big Book, and in the three months I've been here, I've only been able to go to one meeting. I think groups come in once a week, but there are lots of different blocks here, and it's not always our turn. I am writing because I would like some help. I'm lonely and I never get any mail, and I can't talk to my sponsor as much as I'd like. I would greatly appreciate being sent some A.A. material or info about A.A. in prison for inmates and correspondence with other alcoholics." — Holly Z., Western Canada Region

"My name is Mindy, and I am an alcoholic. Currently I am an inmate at a prison in Connecticut. I was hoping that you could help me. I was wondering if it is possible for me to be connected with someone in A.A. who could correspond with me and guide me through the Twelve Steps and be my sponsor. I am on the waiting list for A.A. meetings here and do not have much access to recovery materials. I desperately want and need to work on my recovery if I am going to have a chance at staying sober and hopefully one day a real life. I was hoping you could please help me and or point me in the right direction." — Melinda H., North East Region

"My name is Angela and I'm an alcoholic. I'm sick of doing things my way because my way lands me right back in prison every time. I am reaching out to ask for help because someone sent this prepaid envelope down. I have no excuse to not inquire and ask for a better way that might help me to live as close to normal as possible. I'm tired and broken. I cannot do this alone. I have no friends or family left. They are all tired too; I've really made an ass of myself. I've lost everything and am ready to start moving forward. I will give myself to a program in hopes of redemption. I have been to three meetings and found more spirituality and more answers that made sense to me than I have found anywhere else. People there are desperate and willing for real instead of for show, and I love it. Please guide me on my new path. I'm eager to get started." — Angela L., South West Region

"I am the chairman here at the prison of the A.A. group. I'm looking to be a part of your correspondence service. I've been incarcerated for 19 years and I know the world has changed in so many different ways. I've come so far, and the last thing I want to do is get out of here and go backwards, because I know if I don't remain strong, I can be one blunt or one drink away from relapse. So, to start getting in touch with brothers and sisters that are on the same path as me, I think it's important to start receiving the encouragement now. I was 20 when this nightmare began; I'm 40 now and God has allowed me to see the light. I went back to school and got my diploma in 2013, and two years later, in 2015, I graduated in paralegal studies. Then I published my first book. Right now, I know I have been through a lot and have come a long way — from near-death situations to losing both of my parents while incarcerated. I don't want to come home and fail, so I know it's important to cultivate the right friendships now and to receive encouragement and guidance from my brothers and sisters in A.A. God bless you! I look forward to hearing and corresponding with those who are walking the sober life." — Jermaine W., North East Region

Prisons Can Be Built From Within

"Hi, my name is Steve, I'm an alcoholic who's been redeemed. My home was a nice one. All my family members are college graduates — so am I — but death and murder came a lot in my past. No one raised me; they were at school or work., I had all the material things money could buy. My home was in a real ghetto, according to Cook County, Illinois, standards. Shootings were regular, and violence was a way of life. Outside my window all but one of my friends died or were murdered one by one, and most of my family has died. I have a dad in prison, a brother in another prison, and a sister I haven't seen in 12 years. The rest of my family are not alive. Never did I grieve; never did I know how to really communicate. God blessed me with an IQ of 147. I know what it's like to make \$140,000 a year and what it's like to make a minimum wage. Funerals and death I know as well. I've been stabbed and shot. Alcohol was my communication; I did not deal with grieving. I came to A.A. because of alcohol. I continue to go because I can see now alcohol was a symptom of my issues with facing and dealing with my past in order to actually live in the present. The past and the future are not real, and neither is money. I live in the now. Some call it 'today, one day at a time.' In prison I am no victim. People around me do heroin daily; they yell, scream, fight, stab. It is controlled chaos. It is the environment I live in, a sea of chaos. I'm saved: A.A. has done that for me. I'm saved inside. Prison is in the mind. Prisons are built from within. It's difficult to be something I was never exposed to. Today, because of A.A. and three years of college, I was once blind, but today I see. I see that to live one must strive to live. Change does not randomly just happen. Change comes from the deep desire to want, plan and execute a continuously changing plan. I thank God for everything good and bad because I'm not selfish like I once was, before A.A." — Steven C., East Central Region

Acceptance Is The Answer

"I am writing from a prison cell in Missouri. I want to connect with the people who have saved a broken man like myself and who helped me to get personally acquainted with God as I understand him. The person to whom the Big Book introduced me and who has made the most impact was the real me — me, the beautiful and maladjusted alcoholic — and my discovery has led me into healing from my disease. I started going to meetings in 2014 in the prison chapel. I was skeptical, but for some reason I kept going and finding a chair in the meeting that my Higher Power used to transform my entire being. I haven't used any substances one day at a time for five years. The turning point was when a member directed me to page 417 of my Fourth Edition Big Book. After reading the two paragraphs on acceptance, I felt the presence of a new life, and the only thing I needed to live that new life was acceptance. God makes no mistakes and I realize that all I have to do is to work on me, and the path I travel will be paved with peace, love and generosity. May God bless Alcoholics Anonymous!" — Kenneth R., South West Region

"It took many times in and out of jail and prisons for me to realize that I needed help with my drinking. As I looked at my whole criminal history, it clearly showed I was drunk when I got arrested for something. I never got in trouble otherwise. These episodes have caused me to suffer in so many ways with my family and those who used to care about me. Due to my drinking, I had lost everything over and over again, right down to my own dignity. I knew there had to be an answer, so I decided to open my mind to other possibilities. This wasn't easy to do especially after so many years doing it 'my way.' One of my favorite stories from the Big Book is 'Acceptance Was the Answer.' I could relate so much to that story. All my pride and ego I carried around with me, never wanting to depend on anyone or anything besides myself. What a false reality I lived. I had to stay in control of my life, I felt — if I didn't, I was going to lose. Things were going to happen to me that shouldn't. I had no idea until now how small of a person I am compared to God and his will in my life and all creation. Today, through God and A.A., I am learning to depend on God and his will for me. Some days I have to remind myself I don't belong to me anymore, but I am glad I am aware of my self-centeredness (my worst enemy) and I am kicking it. Today I look forward to what God has in store for me, and I do less to outthink him. I know he loves me and has my best interest in mind. Thanks to all those in A.A. worldwide for being an outlet to those and myself who are alcoholics. With unity: there is strength in numbers!" — David L., South East Region

"For many years my life was unmanageable. I was hopeless and helpless on my own, and I was very dependent on alcohol and all that came with it. I was deep in, over the cliff, blind; I gave in, was glued up, and lost all hope and belief. Was it worth it? That question comes to mind as I look back over the years of alcohol and addictions. Surrounded by a mass of concrete and steel as well as an abundance of fear, hopelessness, sadness and misery. I really thought life was about drinking and drugs, and that

partying was the cool deal. Today I know it is not worth the thrills. It was like a revolving door — I was constantly in and out of jails and prison for my drinking. Years of drinking and drugs — I went off the deep end in a demonic bondage of 41 years to such. I would lose touch with reality and self at that point; I just wanted to die. I'm thankful and graced that God allowed me this blessing of prison and A.A. Today, one day at a time, I am six years sober and clean. I needed a helping hand; I needed a rallying point. For me, that was Step Two: 'Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.'" — Tony J., South East Region

Gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous

"My name is Jason, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is September 19, 2018 (this is the date I was arrested). I enrolled into a substance abuse program here at the detention center shortly after being incarcerated and started the Twelve Steps of recovery. It is supposedly one of the first county programs of its kind in the country. I graduated on January 7, 2019, and am currently a peer mentor here. It is a 90-day program, however, and I am still dealing with the judicial system. I have been fortunate enough to be able to give back to my peers. The purpose of my letter is to show my gratitude towards Alcoholics Anonymous. I have been diligently working the Steps and gotten myself a sponsor, and I have to acknowledge how much my life has been changed in only this short period of time. It hasn't been the easiest to look at my character defects. Now that I have been looking at them on a daily basis for about six months, I am so thankful to have an instruction manual, per se, that is my guiding

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light. I firmly believe that the suggestions in the Big Book should be used by even the most sober of human beings as a way to live their lives. I believe that one of the most important things that I am learning is how to be honest with myself. The humility that comes with being a person of integrity is fulfilling in so many ways. I am becoming more courageous every day to give back in whatever ways needed by my peers — whether it's to be just an ear for someone to speak to, to help others with their Step work, or to speak and run the classes in front of 90-plus other inmates. I will forever owe gratitude to God and Alcoholics Anonymous for the courage that I now have. I should be getting out of jail in May of this year. I believe that I will be going to a sober living house and continuing with six months of aftercare through this program. I am so excited to continue my journey of sobriety and hopefully to be able to give back what I have so gratefully received. I totally understand that I have a long road ahead to trudge, and that I must practice the principles I have learned each and every day.

I am a new person now, one who wants to help others just like me — to share my experience, strength and hope with all people who suffer from our disease of alcoholism so that they can find recovery through the Fellowship." — Jason H., South East Region

The Power of Literature

"I just wanted to send a letter of appreciation. One thing A.A. has taught me is that anytime I approach someone with the words 'Thank you' or 'I'm sorry,' I should accompany them with some appropriate action. As it is, this letter is my only means of showing my appreciation when I say, 'Thank you for your service and for all the literature you send me.' I have no request with this letter, as I am currently immersed in *The A.A. Service Manual* (as well as my routine reading of the Big Book and 'Twelve and Twelve'). I will be writing for more literature soon, but for now I just want to say thanks. I'm a pretty avid artist, so I will be sending art soon as well." — Jason C., South West Region

"Thank you, guys, so much for the book! It's just what I was needing, and the central and intergroup office addresses too. I really needed those. It's people like you who really change people's hearts when they have been in dark places for too long. Bless you all." — Dillan W., South West Region

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart! We really appreciate the *Daily Reflections* and Grapevine donation. We don't have money resources here for A.A., but we get by with our desire to stay sober! Without this program, I am not sure how many of us would actually make it alone. I, Shelby B., respect A.A. and all the great things it has done to allow people to get their lives back. I got my second DUI in August of 2018. I'm serving my time for my second DUI currently. I was sentenced February 1, 2019. I'm now heading toward my seventh month of sobriety, and even though I'm incarcerated, I'm certain I have never been this serene and happy from within my whole life. I want to share what A.A. has to offer to anyone that wants it too. Thanks so much. I can't imagine how my life would be without A.A." — Shelby B., East Central Region

Into Action

"Hello, my name is Tom. I'm 30 years old and have been incarcerated in prison since April 2016. I was incarcerated due to my alcohol and substance abuse problems starting from when I was 13 years old. I received a five-year sentence and I'm due to be released sometime in May of 2020 pending all my merited

good time. I was introduced to A.A. at the age of 17, as my drinking caused problems for me early in my life. Unfortunately, for most of the next 13 years, I thought I knew an easier, softer way. Boy, was I wrong! I've now been sober for the better part of the last three years but totally dry since my 30th birthday on September 24, 2018. I have made it through the first seven Steps, and as I write I'm doing my Eighth. Man, I wish I could go back to 17 years old and slap myself. I'm doing the work and I notice the Promises materialize for me daily. It took coming to prison with nothing but some paperwork, pictures and the clothes on my back for me to gain the humility to finally give my will over to God. I am so grateful for this program and all the people that live their lives by these principles. I've finally given up my favorite drug — my ego. Man, it feels great." — Tom H., North East Region

"My name is Deborah R., and I currently reside in a state penitentiary for a crime I committed while under the influence of alcohol on May 17, 2015. I will be incarcerated until July 29, 2025, and I am desperate to work my program while I'm here so I can reduce my chances of returning upon my release. I've been drinking for around 25 of my 38 years, and I realize now the power of this disease! It's horrific to me! I would greatly appreciate some help from you folks in my recovery endeavor."

— Deborah R., 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).