



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Summer 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."*

Expressing Gratitude

"Hello, I am Laura and I am an alcoholic. I just finished the first 164 pages of the Big Book. I am writing to let you know how grateful I am for this program and the loyalty of the members in the A.A. program. My act of service here and for the program is that I pass around A.A. reading material daily for all the meetings that are brought in by facilities and work-based programs, as well as by rehabs, transitional housing and residential with bed-to-bed transfers. People from the programs come in to speak to us. I am writing this letter to say thank you to A.A. and its members for saving my life, and to let you know how powerful this program is and that it's everywhere (in jails and institutions). Just one hour a day can save someone's life. One of my favorite meetings is when volunteers bring in Grapevine." — Laura G., South East Region

*"I am grateful every day for coming here.
My time here will not be in vain. Good will
come out of this."*

"I am still looking for A.A. correspondence through the mail. I have had clean time before. I started two and half years ago, but I started slipping with pot, then alcohol. Needless to say, here I sit with 15 more months to serve. I am grateful for my time here. I ended up so bad in my relapse that I can only pray that that was my bottom. I have literally lost everything — most importantly, my life, my relationships with my kids (20-year-old twins). But

by the grace of God, I am still here, and my children have not officially given up on me. I am grateful every day for coming here. My time here will not be in vain. Good will come out of this." — Sophia W., South East Region

The Support of A.A.

"My name is Raymond, and I am an alcoholic. I had my first drink at the age of five with my stepfather after receiving all A's on my report card. From there, we would drink on the weekends together when I went to work with him. And after that, my first job was at the liquor store, which allowed me to drink every day at the age of 14. Drinking has always been a major factor in my life. Even before my first drink, I was used to people drinking. I thought drinking every day was what everyone did. You handle your business, go to work, come home, drink. Then, you wake up and do it all over again. By the time I was 18, everything that I had accomplished had been achieved under the influence of alcohol: academic awards, championships, sporting events — even passing my driving license test was accomplished under the influence of alcohol. Working and partying became my life after graduating from high school. Unfortunately, that lifestyle led to an event on March 9, 2016: Tired of allowing alcohol to control my life, I checked myself into a drug and alcohol treatment center. I completed impatient in 30 days but decided to stay in outpatient for six months, determined to maintain victory over my disease. I completed my six months of outpatient and reentered society independently as a 35-year-old. I was an employed college student and single father of two children. My life was wonderful, and I was finally living life confidently. I had survived a suicide attempt January 18, 2009, which left me confined to a wheelchair for four years. I was strengthened to walk again, and only through our Father did I overcome alcohol on March 9, 2016. Today I sit 43 months sober, imprisoned unjustly, as my children sit deprived of a father. Until this day, it is my involvement with A.A. that keeps me grounded. My situation is bad, but I know there are many people whose situation may be the same or even worse. The difference is they may not be blessed with the skills, mindset or strength to endure their situation. I pray that my involvement, along with the support, strength and sharing of others in A.A., will help others get the tools they need, as well as a positive outlook and the security of having support to endure their struggles and situations. I have come to realize the fact that I also may still need support to continue to reach my goals." — Raymond S., East Central Region

Committing to Recovery

"I am 32 years old and a 10-year habitual drinker. I have been sober for the past six months because I am currently incarcerated in a state prison for the third time. In July 2014, I faced my first prison encounter, and served eight months for a DUI. I was paroled in late February 2015, two weeks before my 28th birthday in March. I figured I could celebrate my release and the special occasion. In September 2016 I returned to prison. That whole term, I wrote letters and made phone calls making promises to my girlfriend (fiancée now) and kids, telling them that I was done with drinking. I was released in late July 2017 and remained sober for three months on my own. Eventually I started drinking again. I would abuse alcohol. I started to feel guilty and decided to tell my wife my secret, that I was drinking behind her back. I continued to drink and lost my job and the trust of my family. As you know, I'm in prison now, as of June 2019, facing a three-and-a-half-year sentence. I really want to quit drinking for good for the betterment of my life. My strong desire, dedication, and commitment is to overcome the devil's poison. I am turning my life over to A.A. to remain on the path of a sober life for many years after I am released, with no turning back." — Angel C., Pacific Region

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

"My name is Miles, and I am an alcoholic. I am very grateful for your service. I received the spring issue of 'Sharing from Behind the Walls,' which I enjoyed a great deal. I have shared the stories with other hopeless inmates who are here in this pod, and they have enjoyed them, too. I am now sober for six months, and I'm very grateful, even for the jail time. I am the guy who goes into A.A. meetings for a few years, then relapses over and over. I have always gotten worse, never better; yes, the disease is very progressive. I now want to work with as many alcoholics as I can to insure my own sobriety, one day at a time. I got a copy of the 1939 first edition of the Big Book — it's a reproduction book they have here in this jail; it is a red book. I have read and studied a lot, and for some reason I can relate to the stories in the back. I love anything about A.A. history. 'Safe Haven' is a good story in the fourth edition, too. I know the directions are in the first 164 pages, too. Thanks again, G.S.O. You helped a guy like me. The mental health office here does not have any Grapevine issues. The issue I received in the mail was for March 2020. I don't know about the various things in it; we seem to be safe and clean in here. I am the guy who cleans the pod; it is my service work in jail." — Miles B., South East Region

"Hello, my name is Markus. I am an inmate in Florida. I am 20 years old and have been using for seven years. Never had I believed that A.A. would work for me: I ignored the fact that working this program and these Steps on repeat has saved countless others just like me. Tonight, I found myself relapsing in my thinking while incarcerated. I know that this thought process has brought me here numerous times. I have read the first 164 pages of the Big Book (understanding and making sense of all that seems to be necessary) as well as a few stories. Recently, they did a massive search, and my A.A. book is now gone. I will get a new one as soon as I can. Without sobriety I became useless. My

cellmate said it would be a good idea for me to talk to one of you. Am I one of you?" — Markus S., Southeast Region

"My name is Paula D. and I am an alcoholic. I started drinking at 12 years old. I am now 42. From the ages of 12 to 39, all I could ever put together in terms of sober time was nine months. I am currently in prison. I have been sober now for three and a half years, and I saw a parole board last Tuesday for the first time. I have been in and out of the rooms from Florida to Texas, and I know I need to do 90 meetings in 90 days. Please send me a Big Book and as many others as you can. I am so serious about my life in recovery. Please help me." Paula R., South West Region

The Path of Destruction

"My name is Bill, and I am 52 years old. Alcohol has been a big part of my life since I turned 16. I have hurt a lot of people while on my path of destruction. Before I was sentenced to prison back on February 7, 2018, I had begun attending A.A. meetings and learning about myself. But it was too late; my probation was revoked. I did receive my nine-month coin before my sentencing, and I am proud to say as of March 5, 2020, I have been 34 months sober. I am spending the final 10 years of a 30-year sentence taking A.A. seriously, working a good program, using the experience I have gained to carry the message to other alcoholics; practicing the principles in all my affairs. I wake up each morning saying the Third and Seventh Step prayers, and when I lay myself down at night, I thank God for helping me stay sober and ask for another 24 hours. I read my Big Book, *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions* and *Daily Reflections*. There is a sponsored meeting every Saturday, where members from different communities come into the prison. This means a lot to me and helps me with my sobriety. I signed up for the Corrections Correspondence. I am looking forward to being able to correspond with an outside A.A. member — to be able to tell my whole story and to hear theirs. I do look forward to receiving parole and being able to give back what was so freely given to me. But for now, I will be of service to my A.A. Fellowship in here. God granted me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." — Bill O., West Central Region

"I have been an alcoholic and addict for 40 years, and I am 47 years old. I have been using since I was 6 years old. I have been in and out of the system since I was 13, and I have been on a path of destruction over the years. I am just exhausted and cannot continue doing what I have been doing over and over. I need help, and I am willing to accept it and listen today. I am grateful for the program and to everyone. I really want to succeed in my path to sobriety. God bless you all." — Markus A., West Central Region

Living Life the A.A. Way

"My name is Francisco and I am an alcoholic. I am 46 years young and serving a 32-month sentence. As a qualifier, my current arrest and subsequent imprisonment were due to my inability to stop drinking. I was pulled over for a traffic violation back on February 1, 2018. Besides the vehicle violation, the usual suspect: no tags with current registration. Irresponsibility at its best. But then the

cops found drugs in my vehicle. I have been familiar with the halls of A.A. for a very long time; I have been in and out of the Fellowship since the late '80s. I have been clean and sober since my arrest in early 2018. I bailed out on October 22, 2019. I pled guilty to possession for sales. As mentioned before, I was sentenced to 32 months at 80 percent. Now I do my best to live my life the A.A. way. I am not going to lie and say it has been easy, because it has not been. I live one day at a time, allowing my higher power to guide me. I am in a constant struggle with myself. This is why this time I am doing all I can to be of service, to pass the message along and to smile more. Being locked up tends to dampen the spirit a bit. However, today — just for today — I remain sober and faithful to the A.A. way. By the grace of my higher power! In closing, all I am doing today with these lines is reaching out to the Fellowship. I know it cares for an alcoholic like me. Thank you for your patience and time." — Francisco H., Pacific Region

Unconditional Love

"My name is Mark and I am an alcoholic. I am currently incarcerated. I am the only one in my family (including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) that has ever had a problem with alcohol and drugs, or at least had an arrest and prison term as a direct result from my addictions. I graduated from high school in 2005 and continued my education at a local community college, taking random classes while trying to find a career path. After a couple of years, I received an associate's degree in photography and took a break from school. Up to this point in my life, I never really had any problems with drugs or alcohol. I enjoyed beer or hard liquor on occasion at a party or family get-together, or I'd smoke marijuana to relax for a bit, but nothing that I would consider a problem at that time. While there is a lot of drug use in my story, I chose to become a member of Alcoholics Anonymous because I feel that I have alcoholic behaviors, and alcohol was always my 'legal' safety net when the drugs were not available, thus making it the easiest addiction for me. I always had a problem in large crowds, and growing up I always had the feeling that I was automatically the center of the attention wherever I was and that everyone was focused on me. Being new to the billiard world and having lots of nervous energy, I decided to enjoy a couple of pints of beer a few nights a week while playing. After about six months in the pool league, I started playing four to five nights a week, which meant my bar tab was increasing. One drunken night, I was having bad back pain as a result of degenerative disk disease in my lower back and arthritis in my shoulders and neck. I have suffered from chronic back pain since my late teens. A buddy offered me a prescription painkiller, and after about a half-hour, not only did my pain go away, but all my nervous energy and worry seemed to disappear as well. I felt like a champ who had just found his competitive edge. Like most addiction stories begin, after this point I gradually grew to enjoy my new miracle drug more and more, which continued for another eight years. Yes, I was still living with my parents and did not pay rent, but I was able to make my own car payments and to cover my car insurance, health insurance and everyday expenses like food and entertainment. The last few years of my addiction, my life started to spiral downward. I was using all my money on drugs

and alcohol and ran up a huge credit card debt for the rest of my daily essentials. I ended up filing for bankruptcy for \$20,000 of credit card debt, totaling two cars, and getting arrested for a DUI after a car accident. Unfortunately, I ended up taking a man's life as a result of the DUI. Throughout this period of addiction, I also ruined multiple relationships and friendships, and stole thousands of dollars from my parents. As a direct result of my drug and alcohol use, I now have a violent felony strike on my record for a DUI with GBI (great bodily injury, inflicting serious injury or death), and a 52-month prison sentence. All in all, I will be serving about three years of the prison sentence, due to programs offered by the prison system. This is one part of my story where gratitude plays a major role. Not only did I get arrested for being under the influence, but I also took the life of a human being. Even though it was not a premeditated or planned-out event, I ultimately did take someone's life and I can't imagine the pain to his family and friends. To this day I am deeply grateful for the sentence I received. Yes, three years locked up and away from all your family and friends seems like a long time, but it's nothing compared to the 12 years it could have been. I honestly can say that I think I needed to get arrested and to do prison time to get sober; otherwise I would have been dead by now from my addictions. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to all my family and friends who have supported me through this recovery journey. Most of all, I am forever grateful to the men and women in the rooms of A.A.: without your support and encouragement, I would have given up a long time ago. The most amazing part of my story is the unconditional love I have received from my family. I put my parents through a literal hell, with years of stress and worry because of my addictions. I cost them tens of thousands of dollars in lawyers' fees, stealing and lies, and financial support (when they kept me afloat while I was spending all my money on drugs and alcohol). Even though I caused all this pain and heartbreak, they are still here by my side, supporting me, and making sure I am comfortable. After I was

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placed into custody, when I took my plea bargain, the first visit I received from my parents was the very next day — on a phone, through the protective glass in county jail, with me wearing a jumpsuit. My parents told me how proud they were of me for getting sober and for being a mature adult and accepting responsibility for my actions. If that is not something to be grateful for, then I don't know what is. As you can see, gratitude is important to my recovery. While I was out there in my disease, wreaking havoc and spiraling out of control, I never took the time to take care of myself. When I get released and I am able to go back into normal society, I hope to be as actively involved in A.A. and my recovery as I am now. My only regret now is not being able to be there for the newly sober to share my story and to encourage

them to keep coming back, just like you guys all did for me." —
Mark G., Pacific Region

Tending Our Spiritual Garden

"My name is Thomas and I am an alcoholic, who, for about 30 years now, has had a fatal obsession to drink along with a physical allergy to alcohol. This allergy to alcohol led to a mental addiction to drugs. By the grace of God, I have been sober now for over two years. I am currently in a Florida correctional facility for alcohol- and drug-related crimes, and I have lived the last two years here locked in fear of my addictions. I have no family or sponsor to help me with my pride, anger, self-pity or fear — all seeded in me. After two years of sobriety I feel like a sick, lonely, empty and useless person. I still feel like I just want to drink and do drugs to take the pain away. I continue to be overwhelmed with thoughts of my release from incarceration with thoughts of people, places and things. I have no family to speak to, so I will not have tools or help from others to tend my spiritual garden; the weeds of drinking and drugs won't be pulled out, and they will block the sunshine of sobriety. I am writing to you under the Responsibility Declaration of A.A., which states, 'I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help....'" — Thomas J., South East Region

Never Quit!

"I am a 34-year-old woman. I am sober and I have found my spiritual self. I have met three ladies who bring my A.A. meeting every Tuesday. I am pretty sure they are not done helping with the rest. So, let me tell you about my A.A. experiences. The very first time I tried this program, I was one of those who thought it was a church for drunks. I did not believe in God or anything else, and I thought that, like many others in my life, these people would quit me. I tried the whole sponsoring thing, and I'm not going to lie — she was amazing, but I wasn't ready. Again, denial is a huge river, and I was drowning in it. I picked up on little sayings from others, but again, I wouldn't touch a Big Book. After some binges and drug-induced nights, I decided to take off from Louisiana to Florida. Well, here I sit in Mississippi. This time I have to face the facts: I am an addict. I've done all the things I heard people talk about in A.A. meetings. I also started to listen to the other girls about God and started seeing so many blessings. For everyone who is new to this, I beg you to find a group where you feel at home. It doesn't matter how long it takes. Keep on going even if you don't yet believe in it; eventually you will see that these people love you and will not give up as long as you try. Don't feel like an alien. Trust me, most of them have been where you are; your life is worth being sober and you are not beyond repair. Work this program at your own pace. You do not have to rush. There is no set day for you to finish the program. Never quit. Just keep on trying and call for help when you need it, no matter the time. A.A. folks love to give back; it is what they do. Thank you for listening to my story." — Catherine G., South East Region

The Grace of God

"My name is Juan D., and I am 36 years old. I have been in prison since 2006. My addiction to alcohol started from the day I got

incarcerated. It seems like the life sentence I was facing didn't really matter to me. At first, I used to think I had everything planned out. Over time, all I could focus on was making a good batch of brew to drink. I thought drinking alcohol was something normal, because it's legal. As time went on, I continued with my same mentality of it all being okay. My habit grew as time passed, and then I started realizing that every time I drank, I ended up in some sort of trouble, because I acted stupid with people when drunk. I never stopped drinking; I thought I had it under control, and I never realized I was starting to have problems with alcohol. Alcohol always made me act differently. When I drank it seemed like my life was easy — no problems, no pain, and everything was cool. It made me forget that I was facing a life sentence. But it always brought anger — a lot of anger — out in me that I didn't know I had, or where it came from, or why. About three years ago, I started attending A.A. groups only because I needed to for my parole board hearing. I continued to drink; those meetings didn't stop me. But shortly after I started attending A.A. groups, something happened. One day, early in the morning, I started drinking brew. When I had no more, I continued with straight alcohol (moonshine). That day I got into a big argument with the person who lives with me in the cell. The corrections officer took notice of it, and they decided to have me move out to a whole different building. I was so drunk that when I was carrying my property to my new building, everybody on the yard noticed how drunk and stupid I was acting. That day I embarrassed myself in front of grown inmate men. The day after I felt ashamed of myself. It's been about two and a half years that I have been sober and attending A.A. groups. That's my story of how I stopped drinking. Today I participate in Alcoholics Anonymous, and I am trying to learn why I had so much anger when I used to drink, and why I acted like a fool. By the grace of God, who is my higher power, today I don't drink, and I am happy with what A.A. has taught me." — Juan D., Pacific 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).