



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Winter 2012

Dear A.A. Friends,

We hope you will find a measure of comfort during the holiday season from the uplifting sharing that follows. At this time of year, many of us feel especially lonely and cut off from our families and home lives. But as these messages illustrate, we can find a new freedom and a new family in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Thank you for these words — a heartfelt gift for all of us in need of a little understanding and hope.

Now, 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."*

'A FELLOWSHIP OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE...'

"As an alcoholic, I was an unloving, uncaring person. I was selfish and it was all about me, not about others around me. I received three drinking-related charges, neglected my family, friends, and others around me. Finally, it landed me in prison because of unclear thinking and actions while drunk. I was a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When I drank, I did so to become insanely drunk. I've been a member of A.A. in my prison home group since 1993. It helps me to be a better person. It has helped me to get re-established with family and friends.

"A.A. is not about any set religion. It's about fellowship and a Higher Power as you understand Him, because becoming sober is something I could not do on my own. A.A. is about our experiences, strengths and hopes for a brighter future.

It's a Fellowship of like-minded people, caring for our fellows and solving our common problems. In A.A. we make many friends and a fellowship has grown among us that is a wonderful thing to feel a part of. I really have a joy of living—even with pressures

and difficulties—that I never had before." — **Tom E., East Central Region**

"My first reaction when I was placed in a holding cell was 'Well, at least I can't have a drink.' I was at my end in life and just plain 'sick and tired of being sick and tired.' But I knew I had a problem and I had suffered so long without knowing how to get help. It was there in jail that I was blessed with an introduction to Alcoholics Anonymous. This would be my first time ever seeking help. During the time I spent there, I was able to find out who I really was and what my problems were. I learned my body was allergic to alcohol, causing the very need for it. I remember the first time a guest speaker came in to share. What she shared hit me and made me feel I was not alone. 'Could these A.A. meetings actually work?' I wondered. Everything kicked off from there. I wanted

help. I was tired of my life being a story told to me by someone else because I was always too drunk to remember. I was tired of being known as the party girl who stayed drunk. I was tired of being frightened, scared, and alone. Finally, here are people who understand me." — **Amorita Q., Southeast Region**

'... IN THEIR EYES I SAW UNDERSTANDING.'

"It wasn't until I got to prison that I started attending A.A. meetings. I remember being reluctant to go, but one of my friends insisted. From that very first night I was hooked. I remember telling my story to the other members and in their eyes I saw understanding.

They all accepted me in their hearts and minds and for once I had found calm in the torrent. I have been an active member for over a year now. Even though I am still incarcerated, my spirit is as free as it has ever been. I know that there is no way that I am going to be able to apologize for my friend's death, but the way that I live the rest of my life can be my testimony to his honor. Any of the people there that night may not realize it, but his death saved my life. If I would have continued on my path, I most certainly would be dead right now. I owe him the utmost gratitude." — **Armando B., Southwest Region**

DOING SERVICE ...

"I've been sentenced to a one to three for a drinking-related charge. I'm a 54-year-old alcoholic of 40 years. I've been lucky, in my experiences with the law, not to get hard time, even though the last couple of years have taken everything except my life. My spiritual



growth and/or recovery always fell short. Death, divorce, and unemployment seemed to haunt me; I continued to fall back and forth in the systems and in recovery. I really believe God saved my life by incarcerating me this time. I attend A.A. meetings here and I'm now completing my sixth month. We are blessed to have two meetings and two different men come in to help share what A.A. can do. I do service work and volunteer to make coffee, set up the meeting, and greet people." — **Faron B., Northeast Region**

'...A.A. MEMBERS WHO ARE LIKE FAMILY TO ME.'

"I am 56 years old and doing lots of time. I have been in and out of prison for many years due to my alcoholism. I have attended many A.A. meetings since I have been incarcerated. I have been in for 11 years now and I just got my 11 years sober. I do my best to work with others in here. I have brought many inmates to A.A. meetings, hoping they will prepare themselves for when they get out, and what they can do to stay sober. I may never get out, but I will let people know how A.A. has changed my life. I have met some really nice people who take time to come to this prison and show us inmates that there are people who care for us. I have no one out there in the free world, but I have A.A. members who are like family to me. Like I tell inmates, if you don't have family out there go to A.A. meetings and you will feel they are like family."

— **Richard C., Southwest Region**

SURRENDER AND WIN

"My life went to hell starting at 26. I'm now 54 and have been locked up between the ages of 26 and 54. I went from being a chronic drug addict to being a chronic alcoholic. I found out through A.A. meetings my life didn't differ from most. I always meant well, wanted to stop the madness, but the only thing I ever surrendered to was my alcoholism. I went from riches to rags, from a nice comfortable bed to a hard metal bunk with a fan blowing hot air. I finally figured out that God knows what he's doing and the only help he needs from me is to surrender. Finally, after all these years of misery I've surrendered to God and A.A. God changed my attitude and A.A. has changed my way of life." — **Marcelino A., Southwest Region**

THE STEPS

"I have a good understanding and knowledge of the Steps and how they work, and are worked. My self-will and self-centered fear have been a real problem. I'm only turning over *parts* of my will and life to God, but still trying to control other stuff. So I'm working on my inventory, trying to be as thorough and fearless as I can be. I know this is all the garbage cutting me off from God. My first day out will be spent going to a meeting, getting a sponsor, and keeping first things first." — **James B., East Central Region**

"I was introduced to your A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism about four months ago when I arrived at the prison. The A.A. program at this prison consists of about 60 guys who meet regularly. I've burnt bridges and lost everything materially, but also everything I loved and cared about—including my family—due to my alcoholism. I have no money at all because of the problems I've caused and no one outside of here will help. In the last four months, A.A. has changed my life. I'm learning to grow up and mature as a man, and face issues from the past without the use of alcohol and drugs to cope. I can look at myself in the mirror and be happy with what I see. I have a sponsor in here who is a great person and helps me with my Step work. I destroyed my life and now I'm working on putting it back together." — **Kenneth R., Pacific Region**

THE BIG BOOK

"I'm writing this letter from a county prison. I'm 40 years of age, and have been in this prison 11 times, all related to drinking one way or another. Somehow this time I found the A.A. Big Book; I've read something out of it every day. For the first time ever in my life I have hope of breaking this vicious cycle. Alcohol has destroyed the last 25 years of my life. I feel A.A. is a life raft for me. I feel I'm as desperate as a drowning man." — **Ralph P., East Central Region**

"My name is Eeva Marie. I have read most of the Big Book and found it very enlightening. Right now, I am incarcerated in State Jail on a drinking-related felony offense. I was attending A.A. meetings in County Jail and will soon be attending A.A. meetings here. I had gone to mandatory meetings back in 2005 that were court-ordered, but had no desire to quit. When I was arrested at the beginning of this year, I still felt like I wanted to drink and could try to 'control my drinking.' Then my fellow inmate, who was also arrested for a drinking-related offense, introduced me to her book. She stands to lose her license to practice her profession if she is found guilty, but told me she would no longer drink, ever, and said she had the Big Book to thank. I thought she was crazy, because I still wanted to drink, but just needed to control it. Then, I attended an A.A. meeting with a speaker who helped me see the light. He said, 'Think about every time you ever got into trouble, and I can bet you the majority of the times, it was alcohol-related.' This was the first time I ever evaluated myself and my drinking and I realized he was right. I have since admitted that I'm an alcoholic and know that I *never* want to drink again. I'm a binge drinker, but it's still alcoholism because during those times I can't quit until I'm completely out of options on how to find more alcohol. That's pretty sad. Anyway, I want to keep on reading the Big Book."

— **Eeva Marie., Southwest Region**

"My name is Alonzo, I'm an alcoholic. I have been drinking since the age of 16. I didn't drink every day; I wasn't that kind of drinker. But when I did drink it would sometimes change me into someone nice, but at other times not so nice, although I am a good person. Over the years alcohol has affected my life. I was blind to admit that, but as time went by and wisdom set in, I came to the realization that I am an alcoholic and I need to work on my problem. I had an accident that brought me back to incarceration, a serious accident. I am sorry for that and I wish not to drink again. I think your Big Book can help me steer away by learning more than I ever have on this subject." — **Alonzo C. Sr., Northeast 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.