



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Fall 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."*

Getting Honest

"My name is Sarah. I am currently incarcerated in Texas on a 15-year sentence. This is my third time in prison. Something has to change; it already has in my heart, and I need to learn how to change everything else. If I ever get in trouble again, I am facing a life sentence. I refuse to do that. I have worked the Steps before

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... but honestly did not dig deep. A.A. was required at rehab, so I did it half-assed, and begrudgingly. I think my biggest hang-up at the time was being mad at myself and at God. And, I just didn't want to face reality. Everything was someone else's fault, never mine. I am acutely aware that the world does not revolve around me or for me, and that nobody owes me anything. I am responsible for myself and my choices. It's funny that you have to hit rock bottom and be in absolute shambles before you realize that God is all you need, when He's all you've got. Anyway, I am

beyond willing to work this spiritual program, and I would like a good sponsor to help me through. I have a Big Book; I have stamps; and I have time. Please help me." — Sarah L., South West Region

"I have learned that Twelve Steps is not enough. I did well for the first six months to a year in my recovery. I can't drink just one alcoholic beverage because of my compulsive brain disorder. I came to believe this because I have a problem with alcohol and drugs. My brain tells me I can have just one drink. Then that one becomes 20 — too many. I have given my life back to my Higher Power. For many years I kept telling myself I could handle my alcohol, but that was a lie. Alcohol takes away the kind-hearted person I am: just a couple of drinks turns him into the most disrespectful person anyone could ever meet." — Claude R., South East Region

"Hello, my name is Brandon. I am 41 and I am an alcoholic. My last drink was February 5, 2013. This was also the day I was sent to prison. At the age of 35 I began an eight-and-a-half-year sentence. Upon arrival at prison, I took stock of my life. I realized my attitude toward life was upsetting. I was totally selfish and self-centered; my pleasure and my comfort came first. To all that I said, 'No longer.' I began experimenting with alcohol at the age of 15. For 20 years my life as an alcoholic became more and more unmanageable — I was full of self-pity and dishonesty. I felt like I had to go through each day fighting myself and everyone else. It also caused me to unknowingly take advantage of others. I had constructed a prison with bars of self-will and self-indulgence, from which I could not escape. I waged war in a losing battle." — Brandon E., North East Region

Gratitude for Outside Members

"First, let me say thank you so much for giving an outside member my information, because they wrote me. I was so excited to receive the letter and to know that I am really not alone in this battle. At age 48, I really believe that I can stay sober with the help of God and my new A.A. family. A.A. members really care about us still out here struggling. In September I will be sober two years. It all started when I wrote and asked for a Big Book and

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began to take suggestions and now I have a real live A.A. friend. Unbelievable! I wrote them a two-page letter so I hope that I didn’t scare them away. I just never thought that I could be happy or sober in prison, and today I’m both. Thank you!” — **Terrence A., South East Region**

“I look back at my first experience involving alcohol. I was detoxed from alcohol several times as a juvenile. While I was using drugs, alcohol was always there. In 2011 when I first sought recovery, I relapsed on alcohol, thinking it was okay. When I got released from jail, after serving 11 months for second-degree assault, I went back to drinking on weekends, which eventually led to other drugs. Not one time was alcohol not there: It was always playing a key role in my downfall. So, while here, I joined the prison’s A.A. group. The meeting is held once a week, on Tuesdays. We named it Hard Living. The attendance is small, but the content is always there. We build off each other’s experience, discuss the literature, and support each other through any hard times. We had an outside visitor at first. Now we are told we will be getting one again. I think seeing someone who has transitioned to long-term sobriety will be very helpful to my recovery, as they will bring hope, experience and knowledge of the program.” — **Larry H., North East Region**

The Power of the Big Book

“I have been incarcerated since August 24, 2017, as a direct result of my drinking. I’ve been an alcoholic since I was about 13 years old. I was introduced to A.A. in February 2017 and I absolutely love it. I love Big Book studies, and Step work really sets me on fire. Learning from the Big Book and getting an understanding of what I am and suffer from, and to see it explained and laid out really helped me. I absolutely swear by Big Book studies. I still read and re-read my Big Book today, every day. When I finish, I start over at ‘The Doctor’s Opinion.’ My drinking renders me completely hopeless. (It takes every piece of you from me.) I leave everyone behind. I have an angel of a daughter, and my drinking breaks both our hearts. I don’t want to drink anymore. I struggle with complacency at times and with guilt and forgiving myself. I’m in a therapeutic community now and addressing these issues. I do something positive every day to keep from getting complacent in my recovery.” — **Eileen K., South East Region**

Part of a Worldwide Fellowship

“I am definitely an alcoholic, and the good thing is that the chairs in A.A. rooms are one-size-fits-all! As I said in my first letter, I

have started an A.A. meeting here in the pod, and it’s really taken off, with standing room only. Actually, it’s been great chairing the meeting and seeing others’ faces when that light turns on in their eyes, when they get it. I saw on your letterhead that there’s a convention coming up next year in July, and I think I will attend, God willing. I’ve been to two conventions in the past; one was in Syracuse, New York. I’ve just got to hope I can afford the trip to Detroit because I’d really love to go to an International Convention! Must be very powerful having 30,000 friends of Bill in one place with the same goal! As they say, God gives us what we need, right?” — **John P., North East Region**

“My time in A.A. has taught me that I am strong, and I keep giving away what was so freely given to me. My life is full of disasters past and present, but by remembering my Serenity Prayer I focus on what can be changed instead of dwelling on what can’t. Sobriety is good, and my version of God will never give me any more than I can handle. Just sometimes I think He overestimates me. At those times I pray for a stronger back. In sobriety I have had good teachers, and I have always had smart ears. My A.A. family has been and always will be there for me.” — **John A., East Central Region**

A New Freedom and a New Happiness

“I am 45 years old. I have three sisters and a strong mom. I’m working on my freedom as of now. I’ve got some business plans to keep my life in order as much as possible. I’m also recovering from alcoholism. I started drinking at 14 years old. I would wait until my mom and uncle were asleep and drink their hard liquor. Beer, cognac, whiskey and wine. I drank all kinds of wine, whatever got me drunk. My life was really tough. Since I was 13 years old, I had to fight a lot because I was a big guy and people would test me — the only boy in the family. Plus, there was all the hell I put my mom and sisters through. Now, I do everything I can to make the right choices, so I can get out of prison and have a good, successful life, crime free. That’s what it’s about.” — **James H., Pacific Region**

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“My name is Christopher, and I’m an alcoholic. I’m incarcerated at a correctional institution in Wisconsin for fighting with the police while under the influence. I’m 29. I’ve been here since 2016. I get out next year on March 17, my 30th birthday — St. Patrick’s Day (of all days, right?). I would like to get in touch with people in the program who are maybe close to my age and who are like me. I believe I earned this for myself, and I take full responsibility. I’m

kind of glad this happened, because if I hadn't been sent to prison I'd likely be dead. I'm eager to change and move on, and hopefully I can achieve good things for myself after this. I intend to go to school and develop a career. I have different ideas about what I'll do. I'm in a construction program here right now. I'm a musician, an artist, and I like fitness and academics. I could use some friends and people who can help me out now and after I get out of here. I could use some guidance in the program. (I need a sponsor. Please help me when you can.) I look forward to hearing back. Thanks for your time." — **Christopher E., East Central Region**

Working the Steps

"I'm 22 years old, and drinking became a big part of my life at age 15. Alcohol caused me to hate everyone and myself. I've lost close relationships due to my moods. This lasted three years. At age 18, I did some county time. I did go to a couple of meetings but just to get out of my cell. Once released I started drinking. I lasted 45 days and went to prison for the first time. I was placed in a therapeutic community program but I quit after seven months. After serving two years I was released again. This time I only lasted 55 days; I committed a crime one night due to drinking, so here I find myself doing another prison sentence. This time I requested the same TC program I dropped out of a couple years ago. I'm five months in; I'm happy and have learned a lot. I'm also working the Steps, which has helped, and I look forward to showing people I have changed. Thank you, guys." — **Scott B., North East Region**

"My name is Felipe M., and I am a 39-year-old man currently serving a 25-year sentence in the state of Washington. I have been locked up nine years so far and have spent at least half that time in solitary confinement due to me constantly getting drug and alcohol infractions. I guess I've been a hopeless drunk and drug addict since I was a young teenager. I've spent most of my life between treatment centers, jails and four prison sentences. What I also want you to know is that I think I'm actually starting to figure this A.A. thing out. This month I got my six-month coin. I'm actually really proud of myself. I swear I've been to thousands of meetings in my life and never really understood when people said their lives were improving. I'm getting it now. Listen, I'm not going to tell you my whole life story in my first letter. I would love to have someone to talk to about A.A. stuff. I don't get much mail. I look forward to hearing from you." — **Felipe M., Pacific Region**

"Step Two" (a poem)

"Each time that I thought I had it under control, I failed; deeper in depression I went and wailed. Sip after sip I was losing my mind, making that sober path hard to find. Alcohol led me to be reckless with my decisions and thoughts, battle after battle I fought, and I fought. Alcohol consumed me until it became

greater than me, in the midst of my alcoholism I was destroying me. I couldn't go to sleep without it, and I needed it when I awoke; whenever I'd try to walk away — to my heart it spoke. I came to the understanding that I couldn't do it all by myself. If I continued down this path, I would continue to hurt my loved ones and eventually destroy myself. In a power greater than myself, I came to believe. In doing so, lesser drinking occurred, then my sobriety I achieved. Before accepting the grace of my Higher Power, I was down and out; close to being done. By staying in tune with my Higher Power each day, a battle is won." — **Cody R., Pacific Region**

Identifying As an Alcoholic

"My name is Breanna H. I'm hoping you could please help me and several other girls in here struggling with this topic. We can only get books or pamphlets without staples and only if they are new. I'm Cherokee Indian, Sicilian and Puerto Rican, but unfortunately I'm stuck on the fact that I'm not a Christian, so the one chapter that helped me the most was the story on page 452 of the Big Book, 'Listening To The Wind,' because that's what I believe in. I have been questioning if that's wrong or not. I would be lying to myself if I claimed to live as if I believed in God, because I'm more spiritual than religious. I am also an addict, and it wasn't until I went to my first A.A. meeting in here a few weeks ago and received my Big Book (and started reading it) that I realized I'm an alcoholic above anything! I've been drinking since I was 12. I've been sober since April 27, 2019. Not long, but I'll be sober much longer, I hope, with help from you guys! Any books or any guidance will help!" — **Breanna H., North East Region**

"I've been to thousands of meetings in my life and never really understood when people said their lives were improving. I'm getting it now."

"I am writing this letter in the hopes that I might, as the back of the Big Book says, correspond with another alcoholic to help me stay sober. Coming to prison has been a huge eye-opening experience. I have tried and failed at staying sober every single time I attempted it. I know this is due to the fact that I never really attempted the Steps that are suggested to us. And, I have never, up to this point in my life, been honest with myself about my alcoholism. I now accept that I, like so many before me, am an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. All of my past attempts have been in vain. I guess I never really was ready to take that honest look at myself for fear of what may wind up looking back at me, although it cannot be any worse than the monster I become when I am drunk." — **Mark W., South East Region**

Looking for Contacts

“My name is Joseph T., and I am in prison because I get angry when I drink alcohol. Since I’ve been in prison, I have changed my life around. I have a little daughter I haven’t seen in a year or so. She was five months old when I got into trouble. She will be two when I get out. My release date is February 29, 2020, and I will be going back to my hometown. I will be starting my life over — scared and alone, probably in a hotel, a halfway house or a boarding house. I’m scared I might go back to drinking. I was hoping you might know of people out there you can link me up with, and a place to go to meetings — or even a sponsor. That would be great! Thank you so much for your time!” — Joseph T., North East 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).