



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2011

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."*

FROM THE BIG BOOK, p. 132

"We think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others."

'... IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS ...'

"I'm an alcoholic who is seeking what only A.A. can give me. I'm 40 years old and I am sick and tired of my unmanageable life. I am currently serving a seven-year sentence. I'm in what's called the 'fish tank,' waiting to be classified and sent to a permanent resident facility. I'm in isolation and trying to find myself and my Higher Power! Whoever was in this cell before me left an A.A. pamphlet here. God works in mysterious ways! Anyway, I got this address off of it. I truly want sobriety. I want to be a better person. I want what Bill talks about. I have a long, hard road ahead of me. Change is hard!"—**Elliott W., Southeast Region**

"An A.A. member came into the jail for the first time and I got a chance to listen and talk with him. It was very important to me. It was strange how it played out. I almost closed my door and stayed in my cell that day. I just didn't feel like coping with people here, but I decided to not lock myself in. I left my door open and I just stayed in bed for the first hour of 'out time.' I almost stayed in the whole time, but I decided I'd left my door open for a reason. I didn't expect an A.A. to just show up. Well, some guy told him the guys were busy. This A.A. fellow said something that caught my ear, 'That's fine. I'll just sit here and read.' I thought, 'WOW!'—how *not* pushy! Now here was a man who was at ease. A man who was here if needed, but not making himself needed, just making himself available. I was kind of in a daze. I'd asked for help and here was a man willing to help, even if he didn't come for me alone—he was there for me and I was not going to pass this up. I thought, 'What if I'd stayed in bed all day?' Toward the end of our out-time, I started clock-watching, wishing I had just 15 more minutes. I wanted to ask,

'Did you come for me?' But I was afraid that he might say no, and I wanted the magic to linger. I decided it didn't matter why or if, all that mattered was 'now' and I am grateful. Of course, if this A.A. member returns, I'll be pulling chairs, but if no one is able I still got the taste I need. I got back into my cell and watched this man leave and I thought, I see why people go to 90 meetings in 90 days. I get it! Someday I hope to be able to do this for another. God willing, I will. Thank you for reaching back when I reached out."—**Zachariah S., Pacific Region**

HOPE

"I have been sober just four months, as long as I have been incarcerated. I am in an alcoholism lockup and I am learning a lot about myself and the disease of alcoholism—like how it tricks me and my thinking into believing that one more drink will be OK, or that life will be more interesting drunk. Now I know that's not the case, because while getting sober I went through some changes, especially in the way I was thinking. I felt happy, sad, anxious, scared, crazy and, sometimes, all these emotions at once. Today I have learned ways to deal with my feelings through A.A. I have also come to believe that a Power greater than me could restore me to sanity and make life tolerable. If I feel a certain way, I pray and turn everything over to my Higher Power, who I now believe can do anything as long as I ask. I have been attending A.A. meetings in-house four days a week and outside meetings twice a week. If I miss a meeting, I get spiritually sick. The more I open up, the more I listen and hear, the more I realize that I'm not alone anymore and that you fellows of A.A. are just like me. Every time I listen and take suggestions, I believe now that life is about the journey and not the end result. The Fellowship of A.A. and my Higher Power gives me the tools to deal with life on life's terms. The A.A. Fellowship gives me hope for my future. So thank you A.A.s, you give me what I need and I thank God for everything."—**Ralph D., Northeast Region**

"I work very hard to try and remain positive, because if I let go of hope I will surely fail. My situation would easily allow me to lose hope, but my Higher Power helps to give me strength and courage to make it through each day. I don't have any family or anyone else out there, so I don't get mail, I don't use the phone, I don't get visits, and no one sends me money for the canteen. I haven't made canteen since 2009 when what money I did have ran out. So you see, it would be very easy for me to just give up and wallow in the self-pity that my disease tells me I so much deserve. My sobriety and recovery mean everything to me. It's all I have left."—**Russell M., Southeast Region**

IDENTIFICATION

"Although I have been an alcoholic since the age of 13 (I'm now 20), I have only recently accepted this hard truth. When I finally sobered up from a two-month binge, I wasn't at all surprised to

wake up in a jail cell. This seems to be where all of my ‘good’ parties end up. I made light of my situation as I always do and told the story (or the parts I remembered) with pride. I could think of no better life for me. Out of sheer boredom and a lack of other material, I started to read the Big Book. I only needed to read a few pages before it was rather apparent that the people and symptoms it described were rather shockingly identical to me. Still I was skeptical. I had been court ordered to attend several meetings a week and I never thought much of them simply because I was missing the most important part of the equation...God. I soon realized that I was constantly drunk in a feeble attempt to escape the reality that I hated myself and what I’d become. I believe that the only way I didn’t kill myself was the divine will of God. He has seen me through many car wrecks that should have killed me, and two suicide attempts. I got down on my knees and surrendered myself to God. I didn’t pray for sobriety, I didn’t pray for freedom. I simply prayed that his will be done in me and I immediately felt a change. All at once all desire to drink was gone from me. I was happier that I’ve been in years and I’m behind bars!!! I wake up everyday with a new sense of hope. I no longer feel helpless. With A.A. as my support and my relationship with God, I cannot fail.”—**Josh J., East Central Region**

‘... TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN ...’

“I’ve been state-to-state trying to change people, places and things. But what I realized is the change has to start with me. I’ve been in and out of A.A. I’ve lived a life of prostitution and have been homeless for most of those 30 years. What I swore I wouldn’t do, I did! I know if I don’t work the Twelve Step program and get a sponsor, I will die. I know life is not meant for us as human beings to be miserable. I remember times when the alcohol was what I lived and breathed. I no longer want to be a slave to my alcoholism.”—**Tracy P., Southwest Region**

“I feel lucky to be in jail and not dead. I can say I’m sober today and it does feel good. This getting caught may have just saved my life. I’m not mad for being locked up, I’m mad at myself for being a drunk. I am ready and willing to change my life.”—**Brian D., East Central Region**

JOY AND PEACE

“My name is Israel H. and I am an alcoholic. I have been learning about what I can do about my alcoholism. I am grateful for the pioneers who gave of themselves so that other alcoholics need not die or live in misery, hurting over and over not only ourselves, but those that love us. I stayed away from my family because of my alcoholism. They don’t trust me because I always wanted to fight and my selfishness has cost me my own family and I now have two failed marriages. But today, through the Big Book, I learned there is hope, love and guidance. I would like to work the Twelve Steps by thoroughly abandoning myself to A.A. I read it and love it for I feel no heavy burdens or helplessness. Today I feel God has removed my old dirty stuff and is in the process of rebuilding me. I have joy and peace today no matter what is going on.”—**Israel H., Southwest Region**

“My life was unmanageable, to a certain extent, at an early age without alcohol. I started drinking when I was eight years old. I had access to it no matter where I went. I saw my father drink a lot and I wanted to be like my father. This aspiration led me down one dark and narrow path that would inevitably lead to the destruction of my life. This disease has taken many things from me. But with the help of God and Alcoholics Anonymous, my life is coming back

together. I have my family. They love me again the way they used to. I have the ability to show true appreciation for things today, big and small. I’ve never been this happy, joyous, free and sober. I’m getting my life back. Thank you Alcoholics Anonymous. This Fellowship helped save my life.”—**Robert H., Southeast Region**

“I am very grateful that as chronic as it got, I am alive and safe. This is the safest A.A. meeting place I’ve ever been to. I am not disappointed or angry that I’m here. In fact, I’m grateful. I have the time now to study my A.A. Big Book and my Twelve and Twelve and really develop an open honest relationship with my Higher Power with no excuses.”—**Tamela R., Pacific Region**

‘... NOTHING TO LOSE.’

“I’m sick of drinking. I’m not supposed to drink at all. Because of this alcoholic way of living, I ended up with Hepatitis C. The sad thing is I drink like I have four livers, like a frog! I’m 37 years old and feel like I’m in my late 40s. I’m going to give this book a chance. It’s probably my last rodeo, and if it doesn’t work, I figure I’ve got nothing to lose.”—**Adolfo R., Pacific Region**

“At age fifteen I started drinking excessively, and continued until age twenty-three. Right now I live in a jail facility serving a nine-month sentence because of my alcoholism. I’m powerless over alcohol and I realize I cannot manage my own life without the help of my Higher Power. The way I see it, upon release from jail, I have a nine-month jump start on my sobriety. My plan is to keep my sobriety and work the program of A.A. to the best of my ability every day for the remainder of my life, because I found ‘God,’ and trust him to restore me to sanity.”—**Derrick V., Southwest Region**

“Before I was arrested, I was deep in the throes of alcoholism. I had crossed almost every moral line I’d set for myself. I took advantage of family members, friends and strangers. I was a liar and a thief, bound for death and hell. Thankfully, God literally saved my life and gave me this time to better myself through reflection, prayer, and involvement in A.A. My family, specifically my uncle and father, are involved in A.A. and both have 20+ years of sobriety. Drinking brought out horrible qualities and numbed my conscience until I did not care about anything besides acquiring alcohol. It led me to homelessness, suicidal thoughts, loss of all my loved ones and self-respect. Finally, it led me to jail and prison, places I abhor and never imagined I’d see. So, despite all of this, I’m grateful I’m alive, I’m grateful to A.A. and to God, and very thankful to be sober today.”—**Alex F., Pacific 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), 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 “outside” A.A.

We look forward to hearing from you.