



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 Summer 2016

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 controversies; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."*

'AN A.A. BOOK . . . ?

'Way up toward Point Barrow in Alaska, a couple of prospectors got themselves a cabin and a case of Scotch. The weather turned bitter, fifty below, and they got so drunk they let the fire go out. Barely escaping death by freezing, one of them woke up in time to rekindle the fire. He was prowling around outside for fuel, and he looked into an empty oil drum filled with frozen water. Down in the ice cake he saw a reddish-yellow object. When thawed out, it was seen to be an A.A. book. One of the pair read the book and sobered up. Legend has it that he became the founder of one of our farthest north groups.

As Bill Sees It, p. 245

THE BIG BOOK, ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

"I found a copy of the Fourth Edition of your Big Book in a trash can. I started reading it and stopped lying to myself. On the street I was a functioning alcoholic. Everyone thought it funny or cool the amount of hard liquor I could consume without being drunk. A lot of personal tragedy in my life led to more drinking and bad behavior. That led me directly here. My life is in shambles. Your book has given me hope; I wish I had joined your program years ago. I would still have a life and freedom. There is no A.A. program at this camp, it is a dismal place. Your book opened my mind unlike anything I have ever encountered. Everything I read has been like it was written especially for me." — **James S., Southeast Region**

"I thank God for the Big Book, and the A.A. program. I am a long-addicted person, drugs, alcohol and, of course, fear and self-delusion. I have not been able to put the book down since I picked it up. I am amazed that I can't find a page that does not tell my story or a hope that does not sing to my soul. In short, I want what you have and I'm willing to go to any lengths to get it. I have deciphered the Twelve Steps as best as I can without help. I have become willing to ask for help, which I want desperately." — **Shane A., Pacific Region**

"Every time I get out of prison I stay clean and go to meetings, and help people, and do all of the wonderful things of a sober life. Until something happens or I feel lonely and unloved again. Then it's the same old song and dance. I have just finished reading the A.A. Big Book all the way through and I'm trying to teach myself

how to work, *really* work the A.A. program this time. I'm trying to write a searching and fearless moral inventory." — **David S., Southeast Region**

...AND OTHER A.A. LITERATURE

"This is the first time I have picked up an A.A. pamphlet and to my surprise it has some really powerful words. Inspiring words. It has given me a different picture of what takes place in the meetings. I was the one who said I can do this on my own. I guess you can say I have woken up and smelled the coffee, finally realizing it's not going to happen that way. As it states in the Big Book, you really need a support system. So I'm hoping to get it right this time. I've been drinking since the age of twenty. I have lost both parents due to this disease. For me, it's about time to turn that page in my life." — **Anthony G., Southwest Region**

MEETINGS . . . 'VITAL TO MY SENSE OF HOPE'

"I have nearly two months of sobriety, and the daily meetings we have in our pod are vital to my sense of hope. Any Grapevine copies would be greatly appreciated and well utilized to carry the A.A. message to not only me, but other men in this unit who are trying to change their lives, one day at a time. Thank you for doing what you do to help continue the A.A. legacy of helping people recover from a hopeless state of mind and body." — **Robert C., Southeast Region**

"What I love about A.A. is that there are men and women out there like me! I think it is great that there are people who take the time to come to jail and share their time and their stories with us. They come in three times a week here, and I think it is great that they do. We will be having a meeting tonight. I hope it will be a good meeting because I need one." — **Mike A., Northeast Region**

"At our meetings we usually have between 60-80 inmates, as well as nine A.A. volunteers that come from the outside. They are the most amazing people. They are all a part of our lives. I've been blessed to be able to ask them so many questions. I do it so that I know what I will be up against when I am released. Each week we work on a Step and our guests talk about the Step for the week. To me, the First Step and the Serenity Prayer are key in finding what you are looking for in the program." — **Lisa S., Pacific Region**

"When I first came to prison I was really down. I had been back out drinking non-stop. I was functioning, but my life had definitely become unmanageable. No wife, no home, no chance of getting out for seven years. Not at the bottom yet! We alcoholics can be so stubborn! I've been with our 'Free on the Inside' group for over three years — being of service, chairing meetings, talking with newcomers. That always helps me as much as it helps them. We voted not to have coffee because guys will come only for the coffee. That keeps our meetings sincere and honest. Our outsiders say it's the most powerful meeting they attend all week, more so than their outside meetings! It's a struggle to remain positive here in prison, but using the Steps and just taking it one day at a time, this nightmare will soon pass." — **Michael R., Southeast Region**

“Since I have been here at the facility I have been very involved with the A.A. fellowship. I did attend meetings on the street as well, but that’s all I did. I didn’t participate or get involved in any other way. But since I’ve been incarcerated I have decided that I do indeed want something different in my life. So I have become very open minded and willing to practice this simple, spiritual program, and to be completely honest, my life has been transformed because of it. I am truly a happier person today — and I’m in prison! It’s kind of surreal. I’ve learned that it’s not about where I’m at or what situation I’m in, it’s about what I do with the situation and how I handle it. I’ve come to the conclusion that a spiritual life is an all-around better way of life and I love it.” — **Jason G., East Central Region**

“I am just getting around to getting out of my denial stage — blaming others for why I’m here. Like my family has been telling me, I put myself here. I had all the essentials a guy could want: a nice vehicle, a nice house, a good job. Then I stopped the meetings and the A.A. way of life — started hanging around my old hangouts. Wham! Before I knew it I slipped right back into the scene. And instead of asking for help and going back to A.A. I kept on, because I thought I could do it on my own. My relationship started getting rocky and I just didn’t use the tools A.A. so freely gave me. Now I see with a clear mind and clean soul where I went wrong. I’ve reached out to my old sponsor but have not heard back from him. After my release I want to get right into meetings, find me a sponsor and get a decent job.” — **William L., Northeast Region**

“I have been in prison for almost 20 years, but up until a few years ago I did not see sobriety as a realistic possibility in my life. Basically, when I don’t drink or do drugs, I don’t do crimes. As I said, being clean for a few years now I have truly accepted the fact that I can never use or drink again. I am writing to you so, hopefully you will be able to help me with a sponsor who will encourage me to stay on a clean and sober path.” **Wayne S., Pacific Region**

‘THESE ARE THE STEPS WE TOOK’

“My Higher Power keeps telling me that I should send a letter to you and get started working the Steps so that I don’t come back here right after I would walk out of here. I don’t want to lose ground in the war that is raging inside of me. I really would like to be the daddy my kids had started to grow up with and not the monster of a dad that they became afraid of. I know that I have to do this for myself. So I want to work the Steps and start changing what I can to give me a jumpstart on the day I can walk around without this ball and chain around my legs anymore.” — **John S., West Central Region**

“A lot of men who are gang members grew up in a family where gang activity was normal behavior. It’s deeply ingrained in us, so to abandon our defects of characters and shortcomings is very hard because abnormal defects are deeply rooted. My inventory in Steps Four through Eight helped me heal, own my past behavior and identify where my pain came from. I was able to forgive those who hurt me, and forgive myself for those I harmed. Step Nine helps me make amends for those wrongs. The opportunity to make amends is so beautiful and amazing. And it’s so awesome that I’m able to give back by changing people’s lives with the Twelve Steps. Those of us who’ve completed the Twelve Steps are examples of integrity and honesty, and we help others see that change is possible.” — **George R., Pacific Region**

DAY BY DAY

“Jail is a very humbling experience. It really has not been an easy thing to go through but, thankfully through the help of A.A., I have been taking it day by day. Keep me in your prayers. Thank you for all your concern, effort and time. Jail really is a place where people have to start all over again. Just needed a prayer at this moment that things will get better.” — **Agressa P., Southeast Region**

DON’T STOP BEFORE THE MIRACLE

“Recently I was placed in a correctional hospital room and informed I would remain in that room until I expired. The doctors said there was nothing else they could do for me. Each day the sun would shine through my window and these arches of light would appear on my walls. I called them my angel wings. My Higher Power, my Father, God was sending his angels to watch over me and protect me. A.A. is one of the best ways to improve one’s life. I just knew that my A.A. brothers back on my unit were praying for me. You ask, how could I know this? Because I was also praying for each of them.” — **David J., Southeast Region**

“For many years I thought that alcohol was the only thing on earth that could make me feel normal. I’ve been mandated to rehab a few times. That’s when I was first introduced to A.A. About 15 years ago I started to take it more serious after having kids, but sadly even they couldn’t make me stop. I’m tired of spinning in circles, hurting the people I love, feeling awkward, drinking and coming to prison. I finally made my mind up and started going to meetings, got a sponsor (he’s in jail but he has good clean time). I’ve come to realize that the life that I want for myself won’t happen unless I’m sober in A.A. I don’t want to waste any more of my life stuck on spin cycle. Since I’ve been going back to meetings I feel great and I’m making some progress. I believe the more contact with sober people I have the better off I’ll be.” — **Nick W., East Central Region**

‘ACCEPTANCE WAS THE KEY’

“I’ve been in jail for three months. There was a brief period of being released but I was put right back in the pokey only four days later. Since then, I’ve picked up the Big Book. Getting past page one of Bill’s story was the hardest! I’ve been trying to get past that page since I was 20 years old! Six years! Now I’ve got underlines, stars, circles and squares around passages that I relate to 100%! The best quote for me, that I will say every day until the day I die is, ‘I’m a success today if I don’t drink today.’ The story, ‘Acceptance Was the Answer’ was very moving. Family life has been a real struggle. I have a five-year-old son. I have a beautiful girlfriend whom I was supposed to marry this year but I managed to botch those plans. I’ve been sober for two weeks and one day. I just want to thank everyone committed to spreading the word of A.A. Today I can already see a willingness to change and a difference in attitude and thought. All by admitting I’m powerless and believing in a Power greater than myself.” — **Ryan B., Pacific Region**

“The last thing my children remember is me in the back of a police car, and the last thing I remember is tears in their eyes and my ex-girlfriend pulling them away. Alcohol has tortured my life. Destroyed my dreams. I don’t know what my future holds, but I am willing to do whatever I need to do to restore what’s left of my life. I look forward to your help, God Bless.” — **Richard G., 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) 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.