



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 2023

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 people 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 New Meaning of Life

"Hello, my name is John L., and I am a person in custody in Texas. I am in a recovery housing program to help persons in custody learn to overcome their addiction to alcohol before they are released. I have life with no parole. With the opportunity to be part of this 18-month program, I've found a new meaning of life and that is to help these men understand and discover a more meaningful second chance at life. I have made a pledge to use the time I have to help others recover from their past and walk them through the Steps. I am in a unit with 45 men, all with the hopes of getting and staying sober. Thanks to our outside volunteer, who brings A.A. meetings to our unit, we have 60 Big Books. I am very grateful for the donation. A.A. is one program the facility offers with most people feeling they can overcome their alcoholism on their own. I know my truth and what works for me. As of two-and-a-half months ago, I started chairing meetings on Saturdays for anyone who needed help doing or going over Step work, along with teaching what A.A. is all about. Since I started, our numbers have doubled. We went from three to six members. I say that is a win because

*Copyright by the A.A. Grapevine; reprinted with permission.

we go by attraction rather than promotion. If I can truly help just one person, I feel I have done what I set out to do. With six members, I feel blessed sixfold." — John L.,

Southwest Region

"Hi, my name is Stephanie H., and I am an alcoholic. I just finished the Big Book, and it is my single favorite book now. I believe A.A. is going to save my life. I just want you to know

"I have made a pledge to use the time I have to help others recover from their past and walk them through the Steps."

how grateful I am for Alcoholics Anonymous. I am in custody in a county jail in southern Texas. I go to every weekly A.A. meeting. I know one day when I get released, I will be an active part of the Fellowship. Again, thank you. Sincerely."

— Stephanie H., Southwest Region

Amazing People Inside the Rooms

"Today I have exactly 60 days of clean and sober time. My name is Tony. And what is crazy is that I don't think about my sobriety at all. I am constantly thinking about the rooms and the beautiful and amazing people inside them. For the actual first time, I am really reading the Big Book. I just finished the story 'Our Southern Friend,' and I am about to read 'The Vicious Cycle' once I complete my letter writing for the day. I am finally starting to understand the true meaning of 'thy' will and not 'my' will. I have always believed in God, yet my trust has been in question for many, many years. Reading the Big Book is like finally finding a key to the lock or placing the elusive piece to that difficult puzzle. I now know that it is my purpose to help God's children, and we are all God's kids. I am to give back, even if that means spending the rest of my life in jail. I am okay with that because I finally understand that it is God's will and not mine. What gets me emotional, though, is my A.A. family. They didn't get the chance to see

me make 30 + 60 days and may never see me again. They put so much time, effort, and energy into me, from Los Angeles to Sin City Las Vegas. More likely than not, they knew I was not ready. But when I was hungry, they fed me. They didn't care for my antics outside of the rooms, but when I was dirty, they gave me clothes and hygiene products, and in most cases, a place to change and sleep. I personally know that a lot (if not all) of them were tired of my refusal to let go of people and a past that had dragged me through the doors of A.A. in the first place. Worst of all, they will never know how much I

"I hope to hear from someone in the near future. And if my story sounds like anyone else's who is reading this, please know you are not alone!"

really respect and love them from the bottom of my heart. Chapter 8 of the Big Book talks to the wives and describes four different versions of an alcoholic. I honestly believe I may have at one point been all four, so what I am trying to say is that the sponsor has to understand I am a work in progress, but I am willing to work, and trust that God (not my sponsor) will provide my needs and that my sponsor will give suggestions when life happens on life's terms. I go back to court December 2, and I told God that whatever he wants or needs for me to do, I am ready. Being autistic is so tough, but because I am high-functioning, people expect so much and I do as well. But now, learning to let go of my past, I trust that God will put the right people in my life and put me in the right situation at the right time. Thank you A.A. family; I love and respect each and every one of y'all to the moon and back!"

— Tony N., Pacific Region

Cannot Do This on My Own

"Thank you for the literature you sent me while I was at a detention center in Wisconsin. I did as instructed, and I filled out the necessary forms and mailed them to the General Service Office. It was nice receiving the *Sharing from Behind the Walls* newsletter. I was able to share the A.A. Preamble with my friends. It's amazing what a letter received from another person has done for someone like me. I am speaking with my brother, sister, mother, father, my oldest daughter, and my granddaughter. If any literature can be spared, I will gladly share whatever I can with the other persons in custody. This is my first time going through the prison system. I have been a member of A.A. since the age of 14, and I am now 48

years old. You would think with that much time around the rooms I would know better than to think I can do this on my own. Again, thank you for all A.A. does for all of us." —

Nathan G., Northeast Region

"Hello, I'm an addict, and my name is Christopher. All drugs and alcohol are a problem for me, but alcoholism is the thing I have had the most trouble with. I am in custody in a state prison in Pennsylvania. I am serving a 6-to-15-year sentence to be followed by 5 years of special probation. I have currently served almost 10 years of my sentence, and I am now sober for 9 months. I am 37 years old. I have reached spans of over 2 years without a drink but have repeatedly succumbed to my illness and weaker willpower. I have tried religion (many different faiths). I have found that sober living is possible for me only through complete and total surrender to a higher power, concentrating on a pagan concept of 'as long as you aren't doing any harm, do what you wish' and remembering to take it 'one day at a time.' I have been to A.A. meetings while I was on the streets. I can truly say that the greatest feeling of family and support came while I was in the rooms of A.A. My relapses came whenever I thought, 'I got this,' 'I can handle it,' or 'I will have just one drink.' Unfortunately, that one drink was never enough. In fact, one drink was always too many and a thousand was never enough. So, I would relapse, and I would lose everything I had built for myself. It was a pattern for me. I would get clean, work a job, find a girlfriend, get an apartment (not always in that order). I would be doing good and then something would happen. Times would get tough, money would be tight, or any other number of reasons to justify picking up a drink and just relaxing. That was always the beginning of my downfall. I would drink more and more often. I would drink in larger quantities, and sure enough, I would miss more and more work, push away more and more loved ones, or act/blame everyone else for every little thing going wrong in my life. I would find myself alone, *again*! So I would drink. Drinking made the pain go away. Eventually, I found my way to a church/hospital or someone's doorstep, and a few times, a prison cell. I would make the decision to get sober and stop drinking. Promising God, friends, and family I was done. I would go to meetings and would get my life back on track. I would be doing good again, and when times got tough, I would drink again. The cycle was endless. Then I went to state prison for my current offense. I thought, 'I am gonna die here, and I deserve it.' I was settled into that thought process and had accepted it. One day, in 2019, a friend from the past reached out to me. Over time we talked more and more, and now we talk daily via phone calls

and e-mails. He helped me to see my self-worth. I started investing in me. I have had a few relapses since then and called or e-mailed this friend as soon as I had a chance. I have now been sober since February 2022, and I am taking one day at a time. I hope to get paroled when I see the parole board in September 2023. I plan to find a meeting upon my release. I plan to return to the rooms of A.A. I would greatly appreciate being part of the Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.), and I look forward to sharing my experience and learning from the experience of others. I know I cannot pick up that first drink. I know I cannot do it on my own. I know I have a problem. I need help, I want help, and I want to live a life alcohol-free. I hope to hear from someone in the near future. And if my story sounds like anyone else's who is reading this, please know you are not alone! You are not the only one, there is hope, there is help. Respectfully." — Christopher B., Northeast Region

Sobriety Offers Freedom

"My name is Daniel. I am currently three years into a 12-year prison sentence in the Florida Department of Corrections for a crime I committed while in an alcohol-induced blackout. I had been in A.A. before but allowed my meeting attendance to lapse, and I stopped practicing the principles in all my affairs, which resulted in my picking up a drink after almost two years of sobriety. I currently have almost a year and a half sober now. It is definitely not easy to stay sober in prison. We have very limited materials, meetings, and fellow sober persons. Most of my sobriety now is relying on things I learned in meetings on the outside and reading my Big Book. I recently came across the July 2022 issue of the *Grapevine* and its topic on staying sober in prison. What a breath of fresh air. It gave me a renewed hope and strength to stay sober and continue to do what is right. It also gave me the address for the A.A. Corrections Correspondence Service. I am interested in getting more information and being able to get in contact with other A.A. members on the outside. I would be entirely grateful for anything that is available. I look forward to what the future holds, continuing with the freedom sobriety has to offer." — Daniel D., Southeast Region

"I am Craig B. The main purpose of this letter is to ask if it is possible that I can have free softcover literature sent to me here, such as a Big Book (large print), *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and a *Daily Reflections*, through the mercy of the Creator because they don't have meetings here at the jail nor in this county when I was out there. I normally would do virtual meetings as much as I could, so this might

be an opportunity for me to do the will of the Heavenly Father, such as start up a meeting here inside the facility. Now if there is a group or contact person here in this particular county who I can correspond with until I get out, please give them my name and ID number so they can write to me on a metered postcard because they are very strict with security here. And maybe you can provide a contact list when I get out of here. I am still asking around and seeking resources as I go along and trying not to be too impatient in this process because I fully understand I put myself here. If there is a local meeting list in the area, it would be truly appreciated. So, I send my prayers to the world service center and all the recovering, sick, and suffering alcoholics around the world." — Craig B., Southeast Region

The Program Saved My Life

"I hope all is well upon receipt of this note. I am George R. Having read today an A.A. pamphlet 'It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell' — a really good and wonderful publication for beginners or really any alcoholic — I learned of the Corrections Correspondence Service and decided to connect. Although I am not exactly a beginner, since I joined A.A. in July 2012, I always feel like a beginner. My A.A. groups were in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, and included weekend retreats that were a joy. At this time, I am in jail for an arrest of driving with a suspended license (sober) and a tragic auto accident caused by nighttime temporary loss of vision from

"The program saved my life and has given me a whole new way of living."

bright traffic lights. I long for A.A. meetings for alcoholic inmates, especially for kids (20s and 30s) who strongly desire and need A.A. meetings. This institution I'm in has canceled A.A. meetings and the recovery programs since 2020. I share my Big Book with other alcoholics here, and we try to read the Steps and 'How It Works' through the jail bars. But we all wish for real meetings. Personally, as an elder professional, I have a strong belief in A.A. The program saved my life and has given me a whole new way of living. I came from a nonalcoholic and hardworking family, and alcohol came into my life when I was in my 20s, as a college undergraduate. The insidious disease slowly and progressively destroyed my life in every respect. I became an experienced professional and achieved success and good prosperity in my field. In time, alcoholism took everything from me: family, children and

profession, and led to jails, institutions and death. For me, Steps Two and Three, along with intervention by my Higher Power, which to me is God, stopped my drinking and death march. I choose to call my experience a miracle, but there are so many miracles in the program. In any event, I am interested in corresponding with A.A., perhaps sharing some insightful literature and generally staying connected with the program. Thank you for your consideration and follow-up contacts. Regards.” — **George R., Northeast Region**

“I am Steven C, and I am 55 days sober. My sobriety date is 11/8/2022. By the grace of God, I am not dead. I had about three-and-a-half solid years of collective recovery, the most I have had. At one time, I was two-and-a-half years sober, then I stepped off the porch. I ended up on my Fourth Step, and I became hopeless of obtaining sanity. Please forgive me for being angry at my family. I played the victim card and blamed A.A. for me not having a sponsor or [for no one] being there when I got locked up, but A.A. is here and it’s by the grace of God that it is. I would ask what I can do to make it right, but I am already doing it. Thank God, I am still here. I love you all for giving me life. I had not life that I knew of before I found you. Please don’t give up on me. With love and plenty of heart a member of A.A.” — **Steven C., Pacific Region**

Thank You

“I got the Corrections Correspondence Service letter today, and I was so glad that God answered my prayers. I want to thank you. My name is Terry, and yes, I do have a real bad drinking problem, out there and in here, but not for many months. I have about five months now without drinking any ‘prison alcohol.’ I hope y’all can and will help me. This Alabama prison does not have any kind of A.A. program in here. We do have these tablets, so I try to listen and read books about A.A. Also, I listen to podcasts about A.A. recovery. I have 20 years in here, so I will be here for a long time — I do get out in 2032. Thanks again for writing me back and helping me. Stay safe and sober out there, and God bless everybody at A.A. and G.S.O.” — **Terry T., Southeast Region**

“I wrote to G.S.O. back in February 2022, and I just want to thank you or whoever gave me the *Grapevine* subscription. Man, it helped me! Thanks again. My name is Gary, and I am about to be released from prison in the beginning of March. I am looking forward to attending meetings. I do have some meetings lined up and have sober-minded people picking me up, so I am going to be all right this time. I am sober today, and that is all that matters at this moment. Thank you again for all that you could have possibly done in my situation. I read my Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* every day, just to ask my Higher Power to take away the obsession to drink. It really works! I am also going to be helpful when the time shows itself, so It’s going to be okay today. Thanks again. Peace! P.S. I really like this quote by Bill W.: ‘How dark it is before the dawn.’ ” — **Gary S., East Central 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).