



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

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

Spring 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."*

Hustling for My Sobriety

"I was released in 2015 after serving a five-year prison sentence. I was sober, but one day I went left when I should've gone right. I walked into a bar and, overwhelmed with it all, I said, 'Screw everyone, I'm doing this for me.' I had two drinks and was fairly intoxicated as a result. The effect was welcome. I went back the next day, and then again and again, each time drinking more. I needed to spend more money to achieve the same effect. I started buying bottles at the store and drinking before going out to the drinking establishments. Within a month, I went from two drinks a day to a 1.75-liter bottle a day. Alcohol became my master. My

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work suffered. I found myself by the river most mornings, contemplating jumping in to end the sadness, depression and alcoholism. That eventually landed me in prison. My detox was the worst physical sickness I've ever been through. In prison, once my sponge brain evaporated, I found myself with the old depression and anxiety, made worse by the consequences of my actions. I was at rock bottom from 2016 through 2017. My son reached out to me by sending my mother a picture of him at his graduation. I evaluated my life up to that point. I didn't want to

die in prison or die alone of my sickness. I realized that I had something to live for and that I wanted to get better. I also realized that I would have to get sober on my own, that no one would bring it to me. I had to be willing to put in the work to heal. I had to hustle for my sobriety. So, I've been a member of the Courage to Change A.A. meeting here for a year, and I've been living on the recovery unit for ten months — it will be a year in January. Last month I was hired as a peer assistant for the therapeutic community program. There have been challenges. I was very vulnerable in June when I found out that my brother died. My grandmother passed last year, too. If I weren't in here, I would have followed my brother to the hereafter. So I have to keep going. I just turned 44, and I have a lot more to live for. That's my story, in a nutshell." — Noble C., South East Region

"I know this works..."

"I grew up in an alcoholic family; we all were broken and abused. I also grew up in and out of A.A. halls while my father got sober. He has 25 years, so I know this works. But I got to put in the work, and talking and asking for help is part of it. Just doing this is a big help. I will wait to hear back. Thank you for your time, and I can't wait." — Russell S., North East Region

Forever Grateful

"My name is Bobby. I must say that I am a bit excited. First things first, I always wanted to write to you. But I must be honest; fear ruled the day on many occasions, and most of the times that I desired to write, I was too chicken to follow through and do so. I have been associated with A.A. since '84, from the moment I walked through the Fellowship's doors. Today I am working on staying sober and doing my Step work and inventories. And with my Creator's grace and blessings, I will have reached six years of complete and continuous sobriety come the 29th of December. My purpose for writing is that I need a sponsor, and I am reaching out because I need outside correspondence with someone. Today I am trying to live in the solution and do God's will — to the best of my ability. I am taking action and desiring someone who I can share my experience, strength and hope with. It sure would be nice to hear from you. Thank you, and tell Bill and Dr. Bob and Ebby and all the gang I said hello and that I am forever grateful for all the work and service that has been done and provided all these years." — Robert H., Pacific Region

Running Out of Time

"My name is Adam G. I'm a 39-year-old man who seems to have tried everything in his power to stop using. While alcohol has not been in my system in quite some time, I've gone to other drugs to take its place. I'm sitting in jail in northeast Tennessee, waiting to go to prison for the second time because I cannot stop drinking and using drugs. I have two daughters, 14 and 17, who have all but given up on me ever being anything more than just a prison number. I hope when I reach prison I can find an A.A. group and start working the Steps. But in nine county jails, it's very hard to do. I have been able to get a copy of the Big Book and the 'Twelve and Twelve,' so each day I read and then reread. I know this alone is not enough — that's why I'm reaching out to you. I don't know what to do if I go back out. I'll die the next time. Today I know I'm powerless and that my life has become unmanageable, but that's about all I know for sure. On the outside, I like to put on a front that I am just this guy who studies nutrition and is all about health, but behind closed doors, I'm killing myself and can't stop. I don't know what I'm wanting to come from my writing this letter, but I feel as if I'm running out of time. I'm at the end of my rope. Any words back responding to this letter would be welcomed." — **Adam G., South East Region**

Thank You for Your Support

"My name is Tyler H., and I'm currently incarcerated. I have two-and-a-half years left on my sentence. I've been incarcerated 24 months and have just started attending A.A. meetings. Thank you for your support. This season is going to be different for me. I'm the same person I've always been, but I'm changing some of my habits. I feel like I can express myself and have people to relate to. I no longer have to keep my thoughts to myself. I think that in time, A.A. will give me the structure I need." — **Tyler H., South East Region**

"I would like to say thank you to A.A. and the Fellowship. On December 17 I will reach my one-year anniversary of sobriety. Even though I am incarcerated, I couldn't have stayed sober without A.A. I lost my mom two weeks ago and I know down deep in my heart that if I hadn't gotten involved in A.A. and didn't have anyone to talk to, I would have relapsed and been worse off than I was when I was drinking daily." — **Michael B., South East Region**

Reaching Out for Contact

"I'm currently serving a 15-year prison sentence for a crime I committed while intoxicated on alcohol back in November of 2013. Before I continue, my name is Harold A. I am 35 years of age, and I am Lakota Sioux from South Dakota. I've been an alcoholic for 23 years, and both of my parents were alcoholics. I would like to be in your correspondence program. I truly believe that being in contact with someone will help me grow stronger mentally and spiritually. I've been in and out of lockup because of my alcohol dependency. One thing I can say for sure is that I have found a power greater than myself, which is God." — **Harold A., Pacific Region**

"I am 69 years old, seeking an A.A. outside sponsor who will help me work the Twelve Steps through written correspondence. I am a U.S. Army Vietnam combat veteran, having served as a helicopter door gunner out of Pleiku, Vietnam. I first heard of A.A. back in 1957 because both my parents were alcoholics. My mother was a prescription drug addict. My point is that I know just a small amount about A.A., though I have heard about it for many years. I will be glad to share more of my story when I hear from you. Please have someone from your office write me back when you receive this, just so I know you received this letter. Thank you for your service and time." — **Michael M., Pacific Region**

"My name is Michael, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is July 19, 2014, the day after my last arrest. I've been locked up ever since. July 2019 will be five years. I've been drinking and doing drugs over the past 20 years, off and on. I've had times of being dry for one to two years, then a bad relapse because I never worked the Steps. I've been attending A.A. meetings here the past 3½ years, and I've come a long way since my arrest back in 2014. Even though I went to some A.A. meetings on the streets, it was only because my parole officer told me to. I didn't take it seriously, and now I'm back in prison for the third time. Since being here, I've really put forward some willingness and worked the Steps. I feel a new sense of freedom, and hope someday to be able to come back here and share my experience, strength and hope. I'm writing because I ran across an A.A. pamphlet with information about your Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) program. I've run all of my family away with my alcohol use. I believe they still love me but want action instead of words. All I have now is God and my A.A. family. I just think it would be nice to have someone I can open up to and be honest with." — **Michael J., South East Region**

"I realized I was an alcoholic in 2003 when I first landed in jail and read the entire Big Book twice. It was exactly me. I didn't drink for eight years after that, but I never worked the Steps — I just went to a few meetings. Please explain in detail or as best you can how I can do Step Four. It seems very complicated. The worst alcoholics I've ever known took better care of themselves than I did. I would go a week without eating, a week without a shower. I'm glad I found this publication in that meeting in jail as well as a faith-based Twelve Step program that I attended a few times on the street. Little by little, alcohol has destroyed me. When I was released July 9, I had plans with my roommate to attend an A.A. meeting the following Sunday, but I never made it. That was stupid. I need help. I should have gone straight to a meeting. Thanks in advance for helping with the Steps. I hope I hear from somebody soon. I don't have a Big Book in this pod, but I will in minimum security." — **Milo J., East Central Region**

"After my seventh DWI, I sobered up, got a sponsor, made 49 meetings in my first 20 days, and thought I actually had a chance at recovery! Well, October 2017 my sponsor died, then me and my also-addicted girlfriend had a fight. So I went back out and got drunk, and days later I'm in a county jail facing a sentence of 25 to life. I've got 14 months sober now. I had been working the Steps at a weekly group, but I was transferred. Now I have my Big

Book and a lot of Grapevines. I've written my home group in Texas, but no one writes me back. It would be a blessing to be put on the list of inside members who want or seek outside correspondence." — **Christopher D., South West Region**

"My name is Walter. I am ending my sentence next July and I've found peace and hope in the pages of the Big Book. It's unfortunate that I had to go to prison in order to actually make the time to read and take in the path and suggestions so many people have changed their lives with. Once I got here, I realized how it could have all been different if I had taken the message to heart. My wife recently passed away from cancer while I've been here, which leaves me alone and without any support! But I am determined to stay sober after my release so that my time here will not have been a waste and my time moving forward can be of service to others in the program. I am 57 years old, and I need every day to count. I realize it can happen if I stay connected to the wonderful people in A.A. I am hoping you can help." — **Walter B., Pacific Region**

"I want what A.A. offers."

"I find myself in a place that I now call home for the seventh time because of my choice, my love and many worldly addictions. I was blind to stopping drinking. I gave in and lost all hope. Powerless over alcohol and, yes, my life was unmanageable. I was very dependent on alcohol and all that came with it. I did not or could not do 24 hours clean. Without the use of such, misery was my best friend. I knew of A.A. I knew in my heart of those, who with the help of God and A.A., were now free and different. Today I'm six years sober and clean. I enjoy reading 'How It Works,' which demands rigorous honesty. I have decided I want what A.A. offers, and I am willing to go to any length to get it." — **Tony J., South East Region**

"I'm 60 years old and have been an alcoholic for all of my adult life and part of my childhood. I've been in and out of prison (mostly in) and A.A. I'm doing 4½ years here and should get parole sometime in late 2019. My kids have not talked to me in about ten years, due to my going back to prison again and breaking their hearts. Can't blame them. So now I'm in stage two or three of cirrhosis with hepatitis C for about 25-plus years, and I have hit bottom. Facing your mortality has a way of getting your attention and pulling your head up out of the insanity. In September, I will be eligible for parole with five years of standard probation. I will go to a halfway house. I'm working on Step Four right now along with Five, and I'm talking with another buddy about things I've never told anyone. It helps like I never thought it would. But it's hard to find a sponsor on the yard. We have about 14 full-time A.A.s out of 1,300 guys, and some good guys who are working the Steps hard and help a lot, just no one I've found for a sponsor." — **Leland C., Pacific Region**

"Hello, my name is Carlos. I'm currently 39 years old. For the majority of my life I've been an alcoholic. Alcohol became part of my life at the early age of five. Drinking became a coping mechanism, with me thinking it was the best and only way to

unburden my feelings. I saw my parents drink their feelings away for many years, and I followed their example. Over the many years I've learned that drinking my feelings away is not the solution. I had to teach myself to make a searching and fearless moral inventory. I learned that when I admitted I had a drinking problem I had found the solution I've always looked for. And placing that solution into action will help me prepare myself for a true existence of happiness with sobriety. I've come a long way and invested ten years in a life-changing experience through prison. Currently I have taken responsibility for my life, and I'm focused on the future. I've turned the corner, doing everything in my power to move forward. I'm determined not to have another relapse. I aim to build a network of people who can help me stay sober and provide peace of mind and support while my life unfolds. My current ambition is to receive positive feedback on what I can do to best ground myself to battle my alcoholism. If your organization can help in any way possible, please do so. Your support and guidance will be meaningful and of value to me." — **Carlos R., Pacific Region**

Deep Gratitude to Volunteers

"We have our own A.A. chapter at GCI Sandstone, a federal prison located in Minnesota. We have inmate-led Twelve Step meetings once a week, but we also have two Tuesday night meetings led by outside A.A. volunteers. The second Tuesday of every month, approved A.A. volunteers from a nearby Friday night meeting join our meeting. The fourth Tuesday, a different A.A. group, who meets on Mondays, makes the drive to attend our A.A. meetings. Words cannot express the gratitude we inmates have for the outsiders who demonstrate Step Twelve to us on a regular basis. I write this short article for two reasons. I want to encourage inmates to reach out to the area A.A. groups, share this article with them, and ask if any would be willing to be approved as an outside visitor to assist at a meeting once or twice per month. And I want to encourage local A.A. groups to consider a prison or jail service and contact the one closest to them to inquire about what it takes to become an approved visitor and assist in a meeting. Many inmates have not attended a Twelve Step meeting prior to prison, thus, they really benefit from the real-world examples shared by outside volunteers. As we know, meeting makers make it! Our outside A.A. volunteers remind us inmates that they can only keep what they have (sobriety) by giving it away (service work)." — **Jack G., West Central Regions**

Willing to Keep Trying

"I've been in prison for almost five years and have two years left. Seven years ago, after leaving a bar, I was in a car accident and killed one person and injured another. That's why I'm here. I'd never been in trouble in my life. Before the accident I wasn't an alcoholic per se, but I was certainly a serial abuser, and I used alcohol to deal with problems. Every few weeks or months, there would be an interruption to my otherwise normal life with binge drinking and blackouts. I would deal with the hangover, sometimes swear off booze for a period, but the cycle would

inevitably repeat. I went to a few A.A. meetings after the accident, before I was sentenced, hoping it would help somehow. I didn't typically enjoy the group, although the people were pleasant enough. A lot of what they passed along, I couldn't relate to. My first prison didn't have A.A., but when I came to Avon Park in the summer of '16, they had a group. At first I balked at the idea, but I eventually started to go because I thought it would help me get to a residential transition program (it didn't). But I discovered I genuinely enjoyed going. The volunteers cared, and I could relate to the other inmates. I still semi-regularly go to these meetings when I can, although my prison job sometimes keeps me from going. Anyway, one of the volunteers brought this "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell" pamphlet. I've wanted to write — I just haven't really known what to say. I have two years left, but I will be eligible for work release. I hope to be gone by the start of 2020. I'm going to want help finding local A.A. meetings and a sponsor in Florida when I get out. I can't afford to fail. This experience has been traumatic for me as well as those around me. I have a disconnect from the people I directly hurt. It's almost as if the episode was a bad dream because I recall none of it, but I have to live with the very real results of my actions. My past aside, I don't have room to screw up anymore. My family is loving and supportive, but both my parents are now in their 70s. I have reconnected with the girl I consider the love of my life, but she's made it clear that if I drink again, she's gone. I'm 34 now, and I will be 36 when I get out. I have to deal with my anxieties and worries. I guess I'm just looking to connect with someone who can help with that. And I would really like local information when the time gets closer for me to go home." — **Matthew N., South East Region**

"My name is Calvin S., and this is my third attempt at sobriety. Even though I'm in jail, it's not always 100% dry in here. But I've managed to stay away from everything that has been offered to me, including tobacco. I want to live a different lifestyle than what keeps ending me up in jail. This is the first time I have worked the Steps with God as my Higher Power, and I pray daily for my sobriety to last past my imprisonment. The jail I'm in unfortunately does not offer an A.A. meeting for the men, but I do have an A.A. Big Book and a 'Twelve and Twelve'. I have thoroughly worked Steps One through Eight, and I am ready and willing to do a Ninth

Step when and where it becomes available. I'm constantly working Steps Ten and Eleven, and I feel sure that if I come across anyone willing (even in jail), I am ready to work with them. Because I don't have a sponsor, I sent an honest Fifth Step on paper to a trusted family member, just so that I could say I'm trying. But I have an exact copy set aside for sponsor correspondence should one pop up." — **Calvin S., South East Region**

"My name is Tyler, and I'm a real alcoholic. I get out of prison in June 2019 after serving six years. My sobriety date is July 13, 2013 (the day after I self-surrendered). By the grace of God, I have been blessed with the gifts of willingness and desperation to stay involved in A.A. and active with our principles. The Steps are my pathway to God's will. Today I have the power to change my attitude and perspective for the better and positively affect the people around me. What a concept! God will constantly disclose himself to us if we draw near to him. My sponsor once said, 'The still small voice doesn't speak softly, it shouts.' And I listen!" — **Tyler A., Pacific 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).