

Beyond the Bars

Carrying the AA message of recovery in prisons.

Winter Edition



Editorial

Welcome to our Winter edition of Beyond the Bars, this is our last edition to be published this year, and 2025 is just over the horizon, but even before the New Year comes in we have Christmas! For those of us beyond the bars it means spending time with family and loved ones who share their joy in our recovery. Then there are brothers and sisters of the fellowship who are separated from their family and friends over the festive period. So let's just pause for a moment and think of those behind the bars over this festive period, and say a prayer for them.

Just the three articles this time. One by a prison sponsor, Nancy K from California and one from Alan in Barlinnie Prison, Glasgow. There are is also the lyrics of the song The Auld Triangle, an evocative Irish song about prison.

Fine Line Between Who Has The Keys

When first asked to carry the message to a prison, my first thought was “I’ve never been in prison.” My sponsor told me that didn’t matter. They know how to get into prison, what they don’t know is how to stay sober.

Looking back over my life, there were many times I did things that could have resulted in jail or prison time, I just didn’t get caught. This behavior didn’t end as soon as I got sober. I was a liar, cheat and thief and had my first drunk at twelve years old. Having learned to shoplift as a child, this skill worked until getting caught stealing a popsicle by a store manager. After searching me, he took me home and told my three sisters what I had done. That was humiliating, but didn’t stop me, I just got sneakier. Shoplifting turned to label-switching. It would give me a high if no one caught me. I had no regard for other people’s property. If I wanted it, I took it.

After 19 years of drinking, my life was a mess—mentally, physically and spiritually. My children caught the brunt of

my physical and verbal abuse and were having problems in school. The house was facing foreclosure, work was down to three days a week, I was fat and bloated, my teeth were decayed, I had an aversion to bathing, and the nearest nut house was looking like a possibility as my new home. This scrambled mind could not remember the date of my last drink. May 24, 1972 is the date I filed for divorce from that violent marriage. I didn't drink after that day, so that's what I claim as my sobriety date.

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Being single with no husband or sugar daddy to support me and my three children and not wanting to work full time, welfare seemed like a good option. So I filed, fraudulently of course. Neither cash register nor self-honesty was a high priority at that time. My first sponsor informed me that in A.A. we're self-supporting through our own contributions and that meant working for a living and not relying on welfare.

I couldn't continue doing those old behaviors and stay sober. It was chipping away at my sobriety each time I did something dishonest. About nine months into sobriety and no booze to numb the feelings, I felt guilty from my actions and turned myself in to the social worker. She told me it was a good thing because my ex-husband had just reported me. A judge found me guilty and said that I would

be notified. I was willing to go to jail and do whatever was asked of me, however, I never heard from anyone about it. Being newly sober, there was a lot going on in my head that was not wrapped too tight. I tried running over my ex-husband with the car to make him stop bothering me, but he jumped up on the hood instead of standing there and taking it like a man. When he broke into the house, I lowered a baseball bat on his head. He didn't do that again. But that scared me, so I threw the bat into the trunk of my car and roared off to a meeting. I wanted that man dead!

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Using the tools of the program helped tremendously in overcoming the rage I was experiencing. In time the anger passed and I was able to see him as a sick man. I credit using our A.A. prayers for saving his life and keeping me out of prison. Early prayers started with God bless the S.O.B.; asking that he be given what he deserved; asking every day that he be given everything I wanted for myself—health, happiness and prosperity; and finally; God this is a sick man, how can I be helpful? Once I envisioned him as a sick man, he no longer had power over me. I actually cried years later when he died.

At three months of sobriety a member invited me to go with him and a group to Tehachapi State Prison in

California. Listening to the incarcerated men share their stories had an impact. A strange sound welled up from deep within and I realized it was me laughing from identification with these men. It felt so comfortable there that I didn't want to leave. However, it was a men's prison and they wouldn't let me stay.

I was hooked. Since that time, doing Hospitals and Institutions work has been a major part of my sobriety . I know what's waiting for me if I choose to pick up that first drink. It is said that 95 percent of people who do Hospital and Institution work stay sober. I like those odds!

My next prison meeting was 188 mile ride away up the California Coast. One of my many fears was riding on a motorcycle and I wanted to overcome that fear. My first motorcycle ride was to this prison and I loved it. That was a facility where men were held for sex-related crimes. I felt

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uneasy as we walked down the corridor and could feel the men's eyes on me. That was the only prison or jail where I ever felt uncomfortable. The ride back though was exhilarating.

At Chino State Prison, one of the confined men told me the only difference between him and me was that he acted on those thoughts. Oh my, thank God if anyone could see those thoughts that had rolled around in my head, I would

still be locked up.

My first panel coordinator position was at Warm Springs Rehabilitation Center in Southern California, where I collected members to go with me once a month for a rewarding experience.

It was an honor to be the first female director of the Ventura County Hospitals and Institutions Committee and to be instrumental in allowing women into the men's facilities. Our service-oriented band of members carried the message to Camarillo Air Base Work Furlough Program and the Ventura County women's facility. What a pleasant surprise when one of the newly released residents showed up in our local meeting and asked me to sponsor her.

Taking meetings into Glenn County Women's Jail was an experience. They had not had A.A. there for quite some time. We never knew if there was going to be a meeting or not, but we showed up anyway. Sometimes we had a roomful, other times just one or two appeared. But we stayed sober.

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It's been my experience that taking meetings into the men's facilities is easier than the women's. The men seem to be more respectful. Some of the women want to just sit in the back row and visit back and forth or play with each

other's hair. However, they would sit up and take notice if we brought a man in with us.

Rallying gals together to take a meeting in was a joy. Everyone was excited about going into an institution and carrying the message. They had been advised on what to wear and how to act. Take nothing in or nothing out, no blue jeans, no seductive clothing, no profanity or talking bad about the institution or their staff.

One of the facilities had a problem with a uniformed supervisor who had been a former inmate. She had her own idea of how our meetings were to be run and was sure we were not doing it right. She tried to run the meetings herself, which created a problem with the inside ladies as well as those of us coming from the outside. The result was our pulling out of the facility until the issue was resolved.

The Men's Health Care Facility was a pleasure to visit every month until Covid hit. The men were receptive to us outsiders and eager to share. They had their own group structure and participated in General Service agenda topics. Due to Covid, we have been unable to go in for four years now. Communication with the facility has

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proved fruitless and we simply have to wait for the time when we can return.

Meanwhile, it has been a pleasure to participate in the Custody to Community Transitional Re-entry Program (CCTRP). This is a group of incarcerated women who are transitioning from prison life to life in the community. When we are fortunate enough to have them join in our online meeting, there are anywhere from three to ten women. The sharing is honest and heartfelt. Everyone participates in the readings and sharing. Usually an outside speaker will share for about 10 minutes then we open up for discussion or questions.

There are six to eight of us who show up each week and wait to see if we will have a meeting or not. Sometimes the inside ladies don't come in until about 25 minutes after meeting time, but we wait. At first all they had were their Bibles from the facility, now we have provided them with Big Books and the sharing reflects that change. They are always grateful for our bringing the meeting to them. We are fortunate to have such dedicated and responsible gals from the outside who give of their time every week.

In 2016 my sponsor, two other ladies, and I had the privilege of being among the first ones ever to take a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous into a Moldovan prison. This happened to be a women's prison and we were very well received. In September 2024 we returned to find several local women members were taking meetings in every week. One of the inside women remembered our

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going there five years previously. Not only do the women have meetings now, but also the men. Where I live it could take six months to a year for a clearance to go into an institution, but in Moldova, we were cleared in one day. What a thrill to have been part of that exciting experience. I always leave the institutional meetings grateful for my sobriety as I know that I'm only one drink away from being on the other side of the wall. It's a fine line between who has the keys.

in August 2024, my sponsor, her husband and I took a 34-day trip to eight different European countries, where we carried the message of A.A. Bruce B. and I met in Varna, Bulgaria when we participated in a meeting that was arranged for our group. What an honor when he explained about this newsletter and asked me to write an article. Immediately, my service sponsor and a lady I sponsor came to mind for their stories to be included. You will be hearing from them.

Nancy K.

Galt, California, USA

2002 - 2024 till to 4th Nov 2006 (AA BIRTHDAY)

Hi Guys, I am Alan and alcoholic
my route to AA was like many before me
I got a prison sentence, not just any
prison sentence I received a life sentence
for murder I killed a man after a 6 hour
drinks bender this was 2002, the safe
drinking unit in Scotland at this time was
27 units per week prior to murder I had
drunk 240 units a absolute mental amount
of ~~the~~ alcohol
at start of 2003 I completed 2 offender
programmes sensible drinker, alcohol awareness
both these programmes advocated watching
alcohol units and mixing soft drinks
between alcohol drink, these programmes did
have their merits and may well be of use
to some, they were no good for me I had
to find some other avenue 4 yrs into my
life I attended my first AA meeting at
HMP SITTIS I sat and listened to others
share I kept thinking "but you're not me"
differences and similarities at this time
my body was free of alcohol but my mind
I always thought to myself "who would
want to be inside my mind"
The 4 yrs up to joining AA I had embarked
on programme of change I had went from
level 2 Remedial to level 8 under graduate
I got basics of AA programme in 4 month
education and was completely ready to embark on my

②

AA Journey - I will say at this point when it came to seeking a God of my understanding (some February 2007) I had decided to include Buddhism the philosophies of both AA + Buddhism works for me.

In those early days at Hmp Shott I threw myself into SHOTS WEDNESDAY AA MEETINGS CHAIRING, SHARING, TIDYING UP, Anything I could do to connect with AA I was first in line everytime the down side was not everyone in prison gets the AA programme nor initially Buddhism it was GOD SQUAD ~~THIS~~ THIS AND HOW CAN YOU BE A ALKIE IF YOU HAVENT HAD A DRINK IN YEARS and that was JUST THE STAFF HATTA

DO THE 12 STEP PROGRAMME GET A SPONSOR THEN I GOT STUCK INTO THE PROGRAMME MY HONESTY HAS SHOCKED PEOPLE BUT I WAS ASKED TO APPLY A RIGOROUS HONESTY (THE TRUTH) SOME HAVE SAID MY HONESTY CAN BE BRUTAL THATS ME THOUGH I COULDN'T SHY AWAY I GOT MY SPONSOR AND HAVE HAD SAME SPONSOR FOR 16 YRS NOW KAREN, THIS WOMAN SHOULD GET A MEDAL WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER THICK AND THIN BUT KAREN HAS KICKED MY BACK SIDE WHEN NEEDED ~~AND~~ LIKE WISE I HAVE (TODAY) BEEN ABLE TO HELP KAREN ON HER JOURNEY TOO.

DURING MY JOURNEY I HAVE BEEN LUCKY TO BE SPREADING OUR MESSAGE AND BRINGING SOME FACES TO OUR MEETINGS WHICHEVER JAIL IVE BEEN I ALWAYS THINK IF I BRING SOMEONE INTO AA WHO BECOMES AS PASSIONATE AS I ABOUT THE PROGRAMME THEN I HAVE

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HELPED save someone's life, AA saved my life
I am not a selfish person I learned probably
the hardest way possible, to GIVE TO SHARE to
have compassion had I not got a life sentence
then I may well be dead today but I am here
18 yrs of continued engagement with AA
speaking to my sponsor weekly, writing out
our AA work this year 2023-24 we had a
retrospective look at how our decision making
has been influence by the 12 steps, have we
been able to progress our thinking and attitudes
towards others most all am I a better person
than the man who received life sentence in 2002
I was told by law lord I must spend 15 yrs in
prison before being considered for release via
parole board, 9 parole tribunals later I'm still
in prison 22 yrs 7 months but today I am in
semi open prison being tested I work outside
the jail and have had a few days out shopping
visit to museum etc etc these visits are to
judge how I interact with the public not every
inmate can manage these outings I thrive
at these days out luckily for me I don't
suffer any mental health issues I have
excellent people around me, who have helped
me before I've sunk down deep
Today I hold a unique place in Scottish prison
system as the longest attendee of prison^{AA} fellowship
I have been able to pass our great message
on ward and on occasions brought
other inmates into the fold sadly though
not every one gets it some attend a few

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Meetings then stop "saying I went to AA
in the Jail" none stay long enough to
recover some don't get that recovery is a
on going thing life long sadly here at BAR-L
I don't get to AA meetings the powers that
be don't want inmates in semi open mixing
where things can be passed I get that and
I am okay with this decision as I've said
I've had ~~the~~ same sponsor for exactly 16 yr 9 month
we work great together for Karen to tell me I
help her on her Journey tells me, all those
years back becoming a member of AA
fellowship I have taken on board the work
required to support my recovery and help
others along the way on their Journeys.

If you are doing time and believe alcohol
is at root of your offending get yourself to
AA meeting the men and women who visit
Jails can be from any back ground but
have one thing in common with you
Alcoholism. get involved you never know
you may well be able to come back onto
Jail system to help others like us

A life saved

Best wishes to you all

Alan (the user)

Bar-L

The Auld Triangle lyrics

A hungry feeling, came o'er me stealing
And the mice were squealing in my prison cell
And the auld triangle, went jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal
To begin the morning, a screw was bawling
Get up you bowsie, and clean up your cell
And the auld triangle, went jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal
The lags were sleeping, humpy Gussy was creeping
As I lay there weeping for my girl Sal
And the auld triangle, went jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal
Up in the female prison, there are seventy women
'Tis among them I wish it did dwell
Then the auld triangle, could go jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal
All along the banks of the Royal Canal.

Attributed to Brendan.Behan

https://youtu.be/aa7birRBmNM?si=RTZP_YGcuExtzPc6

Prison Postal Service

Another vital aspect of prison service is postal sponsorship. The Prison Postal Service enables inmates to correspond with prison sponsors - via our service address -so that we may share our experience, strength and hope. For further details contact Steve: PPS Request, GSO, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ. 01904644026 aainformation@gsogb.org.uk

Editor's Note: We would welcome any stories or articles from AA members willing to share their experience of life behind bars and how they found recovery.

Also, the experiences of RPLOs within the prison system. Please email material to Bruce @ prisons5.sc@aamail.org