

First Things First

Newsletter of the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

Intergroup carries A.A. message to inmates Former Californian's visit to San Quentin Prison took heart – and guts

By Lora B.

Helping people is important to me, especially helping people who didn't have many opportunities. In recovery, I learn something valuable whenever I'm of service: sponsoring, attending meetings, volunteering at institutions, or just being kind to civilians and drunks alike. Service work at institutions is essential to my recovery.

I chose institutions because it's dumb luck that I didn't get arrested. I drove drunk and in blackouts all the time. Once, I got pulled over by the police, I got out of the car, tripped over the curb, and fell into the policeman's arms. I lied and said I was going right home. Instead, I drove to the beach, hours away. I don't remember anything after leaving the policeman on the side of the road. That was the 80s. Today, I would have gone to jail.

To give you an idea of what type of service is available, I have volunteered at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center at the PTSD ward, Margaret J. Kemp Camp, a detention center for girls under 18 years of age, and the Allegany County Detention Center.

I learned something different from each commitment, but the mission is always the same — to carry AA's message. The message that you never have to drink again, which will change your life and make you happy to be alive.



A friend asked me to speak at San Quentin Prison. I happily said, "Yes, of course." At the time, I didn't realize it was an all-male prison. Yes, I do live under a rock. Speaking at San Quentin

Prison changed my relationship with fear. I went to the prison on a Saturday. The AA person in charge met me at the gate. The number of rules to prevent gang violence was concerning: Don't wear red or blue. No belts. No writing or designs on your T-shirts. I can't remember all the rules. I dressed like I was going on a job interview — black pants, no open-toed shoes, and no colors. I was wanded and asked several questions. I couldn't bring anything

inside except myself and my car key.

After I went through security, we walked to the meeting house. We passed a large building
[See 'Prison' on next page.](#)

"During my pitch, I shook violently from head to toe. I've never been so terrified."

‘Prison’ continued from page 1.

on the left, and then the road curved so you couldn’t see what was coming. The view opened after we rounded the turn. I saw at least 80 men (maybe more) milling about in the yard. We walked right through the middle of them. I felt like a candy bar at a Weight Watchers’ meeting.

I waited awkwardly in the meeting house. As the men entered the building, a woman checked their credentials. About ten minutes into the meeting, she left. I was the only woman in a room with 100 inmates.

The AA guy was edgy. He did not help my nerves. He said not to talk about anything triggering. With a story riddled with abuse and violence, I tried only to allude to it. Foul language was out, too. The edgy AA guy said, “We made a guy who said the f-word every other word stop sharing. He didn’t get to finish his story.” This policy was a real sticking point. At the time, I used the f-word in almost every paragraph, but I could turn it off for work. I may have said sh* or he*, but are those really swear words?

During my pitch, I shook violently from head to toe. I’ve never been so terrified. When I started my share, I kept forgetting what I was saying, and the inmates would repeat the last thing I said back to me. I calmed down some because I realized they were listening. This kindness had a calming effect. I got sober when I was young and heard repeatedly, “I spilled more beer on my tie than you ever drank.” I’ve always struggled with “I’m not a real drunk.” I realized at some point, “Who’s going to kick me out?” We don’t kick people out of AA. Still, it was gratifying to find out that hardened criminals in San Quentin Prison were listening to me. I had something worth sharing — sobriety and a meaningful life.

Somewhere in the middle of speaking, my body stopped shaking as much. I carried on and finished my share without as much assistance. Afterward, the men lined up to shake my hand and talk to me. It was like a receiving line for a wedding. It didn’t occur to me that, of course, they’d want to talk to me. They had few opportunities to meet outsiders, plus the whole candy bar thing.

See ‘Prison’ on next page.

Get into Service

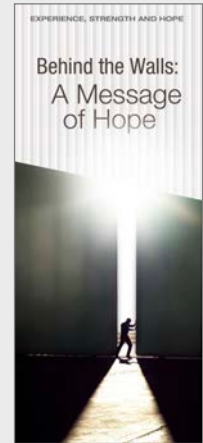
Most A.A. home groups offer members an opportunity to become involved through various service positions, such as secretary, treasurer, literature rep, and General Service rep, to name a few. *First Things First* highlights a different service position each month.

Service Position: **Intergroup Corrections Committee**

In Western Maryland, Intergroup carries the A.A. message into two corrections facilities — the Allegany County Detention Center, and the Garrett County Detention Center.

Lora B. takes a meeting to women at the Allegany County Detention Center every other Wednesday at 6 p.m. Around six to 12 women typically attend. If you’d like to share your story via Zoom, or if you would like to fill out paperwork to go into the jail, contact Lora at westernmarylandaa@gmail.com.

Cody B. takes a meeting into the Garrett County Detention Center every other Thursday at 8 p.m. Around 10 men usually attend. If you’d like to volunteer to help carry the message into the jail, email westernmarylandaa@gmail.com.

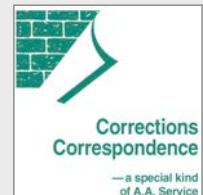


Order pamphlet at <https://onlineliterature.aa.org/Memo-To-An-Inmate>



Sharing from Behind the Walls is a quarterly newsletter published by the A.A. General Service Office that includes inmate letters. Current and back issues can be printed from the Corrections section of the G.S.O. website at www.aa.org.

A.A.’s General Service Office is always looking for volunteer A.A.s to correspond with inmates who want to learn about recovery. Sign up for the **Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS)** <https://www.aa.org/corrections-correspondent-sign-form>.



Guidelines for corresponding with inmates can be found at https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/f-26_en_0223.pdf.

AA slogans: “It’s the first drink that gets you drunk.”

What does it mean to you?

It's taken years for me to understand it wasn't the last drink from the bottle I poured out, but the first drink I poured into me that got me drunk. That first swallow that went down so smooth, so warming, releasing me from pain. If one felt that good, two would be better. The third, I wasn't going anywhere (unless I needed another bottle).

That first drink unlocked the phenomena of craving. The obsession for another drink drove me crazy. Another drink I was willing to do and say anything to get it. It had taken me over.

The next day the remorse, hangover, and vow I'm not going to drink today. This was the cycle I called my life. My insanity.

Today I understand it's the first drink that takes me to the bottom of the bottle and away from all the things I am grateful to have in my life today.

—*Nikxan K.*



‘Prison’ continued from page 2

I was schooled before I went; don’t ask anyone what they were in for. I almost blew it when one guy said, “I went to prison the year you got sober.” And I almost, almost, said, “What the hell did you do? Kill someone?” But luckily, I caught myself.

I rode in the AIDS Ride in 1997. It was 360 miles over four days. There were lots of hills, big ones. Towards the end, I was fatigued. That’s when the magic happened. People from whatever town we were passing through lined up at the top of the hill and clapped and cheered for us. “You can do it!” “Don’t give up.” After the ride, when I was frustrated or afraid, I would hear those people cheering for me. It made it easier to face things for a while. Of course, that was long ago; the cheers have faded. San Quentin was the same. I

realized I could carry on, even when terrified, and people would help me — cheer for me even.

I learned a lot about prisons from that visit. Granted, I didn’t know anything when I agreed to do it. The only prison I’d been in was one from the 1700s in Europe as a tourist. After reflecting and thinking about how good I felt about myself that I didn’t let fear stop me, I realized the best part of going to San Quentin Prison was that I told the truth about my recovery, and some of them received it and maybe got something from it. I delivered the AA message. I was an example of how the program works. You can never really tell if your message was received. When I share, I ask God to help someone get something out of it, even if it’s only me. He always delivers.

“I realized the best part of going to San Quentin Prison was that I told the truth about my recovery, and some of them received it and maybe got something from it. I delivered the AA message. I was an example of how the program works.”

—*Lora B.*

New Hope group offers fellowship, support

By Carol C.

The *New Hope Group* meeting is held Wednesday evening beginning at 8 PM and again Saturday at noon.

Accessibility to the meeting, held at St. Patrick Catholic Church, 201 N. Centre Street, Cumberland, MD is pretty easy, as the church has created an entire lower-level parking area for worship access. To access the annex, where the meetings are held, you will have to walk around the church. If you can manage four to five steps, parking in the main lot is easiest. The meeting itself is completely handicap accessible with an elevator to the basement. There is no parking on the street.

Upon exiting the elevator, you will see coffee and cookies in the kitchen to the far left. The unisex lavatory is to the far right. It is common for there to be at least a dozen AAs at either meeting time and the format is a speaker-led discussion. In other words, a “volunteer” will take about 10-15 minutes to talk about their experience, strength and hope, then pick a recovery-related topic for open participation. I have yet to attend either meeting without hearing wisdom to take and apply to my own recovery.

The overall atmosphere is one of fellowship, support and love. This is a very active home group with some long-term, stable sobriety. Come on down if you're in need of a little “new” hope!

Editor's Note: The New Hope Group is meeting at Fort Recovery, 418 N. Centre St., until further notice.



Photo by Wendell F.

Roving Recovery

Tell us about a meeting you attend either regularly, or as an out-of-town guest for our “Roving Recovery” feature. Send it to westernmarylandaa.org.

First Things First is published monthly by the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous.

P.O. Box 403, Cumberland, MD 21501-0403

Website: <https://westernmarylandaa.org>

Email: westernmarylandaa@gmail.com

24-hour Hotline: 844-568-3422, or 844-LOVE4AA

Submissions are welcome! If you have an idea or a story, send us an e-mail.

The views expressed in *First Things First* represent those of individuals and do not imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous.



What We Do...

at Western Maryland Intergroup

- Maintain a website: www.westernmarylandaa.org and a hotline: 844-568-3422
- Create and distribute Where & When's
- Host workshops and activities, including the annual Gratitude Breakfast in April
- Provide literature to local treatment and detention centers
- Publish a monthly newsletter
- Cooperate with the professional community to increase awareness and understanding of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Provide a P.O. Box for correspondence (P.O. Box 403, Cumberland, Md., 21501-0403).



We need you!

Every A.A. group in the area can elect a representative to Intergroup. Intergroup representatives attend monthly meetings, contributing ideas and skills, and help to form the collective group conscience for A.A. in the area.

Meetings are at **6 p.m.** the third Friday of each month at various locations in Allegany and Garrett counties. **The next meeting is Friday, Dec. 15**, at First Presbyterian Church, 33 S. Broadway St., Frostburg, MD.

Area 57
State Sponsored Workshop
Hosted by: District 40

There seems to be no reason why several AAs cannot join, if they wish, with a group of straight addicts to solve the alcohol and the drug problem together. But, obviously, such a dual-purpose group should not insist that it be called an A.A. group, nor should it use the A.A. name in its title. — Bill W., 1958

So what CAN we do? Let's cooperate with other 12 Step Programs!

◆ **Cooperation without Affiliation:**
Other 12-Step Programs


SATURDAY
DECEMBER 9, 2023
9 AM TO 1 PM

In Person:
Where Good Things Happen
5561 S Lewis Ave,
Tulsa, OK 74105

Online/Zoom:
ID: 884 2416 0557
PW: 12steps

Problems other than alcohol

by BILL W.,
co-founder of
Alcoholics Anonymous



Speakers will be present for each of the following topics:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Al-Anon Family Groups
- Narcotics Anonymous
- Cocaine Anonymous
- Heroin Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous

New Hope meeting at Fort

The New Hope group, typically at St. Patrick's Church on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at noon, will be meeting at Fort Recovery until further notice. Fort Recovery is located at 418 N. Centre St., in Cumberland. Watch for updates at www.westernmarylandaa.org.

Box 459 publishes edition

The fall issue of Box 459, A.A. General Service Office's quarterly newsletter, is available at www.aa.org. Included are profiles of four new Class 'B' (or alcoholic) trustees, and an "Inside A.A. Finances" article about the Reserve Fund.

Berkeley Springs potluck

A potluck and meeting is set for Saturday, Dec. 9, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Berkeley Springs to celebrate the 37th anniversary of the group's formation.

The dinner starts at 6:30 p.m., and the speaker meeting starts at 7:30. Email nineball@bsdinc.com for more information.

What happened at the meeting?

Western Maryland Intergroup, Nov. 17, 2023 meeting minutes

Attendance

Erin, Kenny, Dan, Lora, Kristin, Farren, Wendell

Call to Order at 6:09 pm

Adjourned at pm

Serenity Prayer

Traditions - Farren

October 20, 2023 minutes approved.

Treasurer-Farren

Starting balance: +\$3810.60

Dan for Hotline: -110.34

Erin for workshop: -365.22

St. Patrick's for Workshop: -50.00

This church: -\$11.00

Paper statement fee (October): -\$1.00

Ending balance: +\$3225.54

Savings Acct: \$23.02

Reserve fund: \$2190.08

Institutions: Chair - Les (Cody)

No representatives attended.

Activities: Chair: Kenny

- Trying to find past NYE supplies.
- Found other people to help with the party: Kristin T., Cody
- Need volunteers to bring food.
- Music use a phone with a speaker.
- Location: Presbyterian church.
- People usually attend a meeting and then walk over.
- Start the party at 9:00 pm.
- After 12 am go outside to watch the fireworks.
- People from the house will help decorate.
- Volunteers
- Have a meeting at 8 pm.
- Set up before the meeting.

Newsletter: chair- Kristin B.

- Passed out some copies of November newsletter.
- Said Lora will have a piece on corrections
- Nikxan submitted something on a service position.

Website: Chairs - Erin and Wendell

- Last time Wendell reported that Thursday meetings do not appear on the Meeting Guide app.
- Last year, monthly average of 417 page views, 112 unique visitors a month, and spending two

minutes daily. Seven people are looking at 10 pages today.

- Erin turned off two-factor authentication.
- Friendship meeting was removed from the events page.
- Erin to do the Thanksgiving flier.
- Farren is looking into an EIN number to set up a PayPal account for donations. Says we may already have one. Need to see what happens if you have two.
- Need to get the credit card information out of the Wix profile.

CPC: Chair - Woody

- Passed out where and when handouts to Brady center, Osbourne newman center thus at 7pm
- Three people OD and went to the hospital.
- Opportunity Shoppe - a place for people to be exposed to Where and When handouts.

Where & When handouts: Chair - open position

- Need to change the current Where and When handouts to a larger size to accommodate eyesight issues of members and the ability to add more meetings.
- Wendell will move the current where and when handout to a legal size paper.
- Updating the current template to use the current date and current format.

Literature: Chair - Les

Les did not attend.

Hotline: Chair- Dan

- It's going well.
- Tech support can't fix the caller ID to anonymous. He's going to call.
- Greetings are already there voice mail.

Old Business

- Revisited Gratitude Breakfast printing bill.

New business

- Letter from GSO about financial issues. Caused by low contributions from individual groups and declining literature sales.
- Kenny will reach out to Shane, the previous treasurer, and ask how much money NY/GSO gave us during Covid that helped us stay afloat.
- AA.org is doing a membership survey.

Our next meeting will be December 15, 2023 in Frostburg.

Help us ring in 2024 — SOBER



Western Maryland Intergroup hosts:

A New Year's Eve Celebration

Where: Trinity Lutheran Church, 326 N. Centre St., Cumberland

When: Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023

8 p.m.: STEP meeting

9 -11:30 p.m.: Food, games, music

11:30 p.m.-12:30 a.m.: Watch city fireworks from parking lot. Bring your own chair.

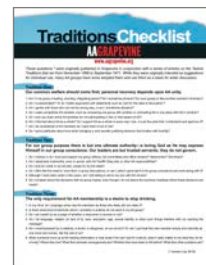
Watch for a flyer at www.westernmarylandaa.org.

Tradition Twelve: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

Traditions Checklist No. 7: What does anonymity mean to me?

At first, anonymity meant to me that I could come into recovery without declaring it to the world. I could come into A.A. as just another alcoholic with a problem I couldn't solve by myself, another blank face among blank faces who was seeking a way to live without drinking. It meant that no one outside of A.A. had to know I was in A.A. and that inside A.A. I was protected by others who understood that I'm a sick alcoholic with a fragile ego and an intense fear of everything.

As I began to grow in recovery, working the Steps and having a spiritual awakening, I began to understand that my initial ideas about anonymity barely scratched the surface of the spiritual significance of the principle. Anonymity protects A.A. from me and all my shortcomings. It keeps the Fellowship separate from individual personalities, who all have foibles and frailties. It reminds me that I'm not as important as the message of recovery that I can pass along to another who is suffering. In anonymity, I have the freedom of choice. I get to decide how anonymous I want to be inside the group and at any level that doesn't involve press, radio, film, or social media. It also teaches me to honor the decisions of others on how anonymous they want to be.



-Kristin B.

(Question from Traditions Checklist at <https://www.aagrapevine.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/GV-Traditions-Checklist-2018.pdf>)

December anniversaries



- Rick E., New Hope, 12/3/1995
- Tom A., Mustard Seed, Oakland, 12/7/2002
- John K., Sunday Night Step, Dec. 7, 2022
- A.A. Co-founder Bill W., 12/11/1934
- Kenny L., Sunday Night Step, 12/13/2019
- Mike S., Into Action Grantsville, 12/19/2017

Starting in January...

Western Maryland Intergroup plans to scrap our list of anniversaries and start afresh, with the idea of creating a new list once a year.

We believe that observing A.A. members' sober anniversaries shows that the program works and offers encouragement and inspiration for suffering alcoholics, outside and inside the rooms of A.A.

Watch this space for more information about how to share your anniversary date via *First Things First*.

Corny joke corner



Man on phone: My name is Matt and I'm an alcoholic.

Operator: I'm sorry Sir. This is AAA, not AA.

Man on phone: I know. I'm just explaining why my car is in a lake.

A drunk walks into a bar and asks for a shot of whiskey. The bartender pours it, and the drunk pushes it aside and asks for another shot of whiskey.

The bartender pours it, and the drunk drinks it.

The bartender says, " I don't understand why you pushed the first one away and drank the second one."

The drunk says: "I've been going to these AA meetings, and they said whatever you do, DON'T TAKE THAT FIRST DRINK!"

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that, I am responsible.

**A.A. Responsibility Statement
(written for the 1965 A.A.
International Convention in
Toronto)**