

North Platte, Nebraska

1972 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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and take me a minute or two. My name is Don and I'm an alcoholic and a drug addict, and I woke up with laryngitis this morning, so I don't know whether it's the cigarettes or my prayers, but if God's with us, we'll get a message out tonight. I think it's pretty neat to be invited back the second time to someplace I've been before. That's new. That never happened in my life. And I have a great fondness for the people that do. A great fondness. I'm here for only one reason. I want to try to give back to you a little part of what you gave me. When we pick this thing up, the first time I've seen one of these, and Jim says, if you're not good, that's what you get. You people saved my life. You introduced me to something so miraculous that I don't know how it was contained in one book or in the hearts of people. You gave me this and let me describe to you how I feel. There is no place in God's entire universe that I would rather be than right here, right now.

There are no people in God's entire universe that I'd rather be with than you people, right now. And there is no other human being on the face of God's earth that I'd rather be than me. And that's miraculous because I'm a person who never felt he belonged anywhere, a misfit, an alien. I've been doing a lot of digging into myself again lately, and this alienation is something. You know, that's really what causes our problems, separation. Somewhere along the line I got the idea that I was different. I was afraid of things. My buddies said they weren't, and I didn't think I could win all the time, and yet people kept saying, you can.

And somewhere down the line, I don't count my first drunk. When I was 11 we got into some homemade brew. My God, I got sick. And when I was 15, I got on my second drunk. And it's very easy to tell you my drunkalog, because I behaved the same way every time I drank. I tried to drink a fifth that night. That's all we had, and I tried to drink it all. And God, I got sick. And until I was 34 years old, that's how I behaved. I tried to do everything, and I got sick. And I got sicker. I'm a runner. You know, when I get scared, I don't stand pat very good. I run. Now, y'all know what I mean by scared. I get that little gnawing inside. It tells you beyond the shadow of a doubt. Whatever you say or do next, it's going to be wrong. No matter what happens, it's going to be wrong. And you know that. Doctors treat you for paranoia. But I wasn't paranoid. I knew the world was out to get me. And I kept proving it. I kept putting myself in the situations where people had to harm me. Bill talks about that in our book. And the harder I tried, the worse it got. And I just then discovered chemicals. You know what they did for me? I didn't feel afraid. I didn't feel that I was going to do something wrong. If I drank vodka, I was one rough tough son of a gun. Now, I've got some scars on my body that prove the fallacy of that. When I drank vodka, I fall down a lot. I don't duck very good. When I drank rum, I was the world's greatest lover. Oh, yeah? No, I didn't get along too well with the girls because I'm also very sloppy on the road. I don't like that. But I began to develop what was going to be a pattern for my life. I didn't care what reality was. This is how I felt about it. And that's what counted. For a while, it would make me fit. Now, I began around to run around with the kind of people that I was. I began to lose interest in things. And I began to be more frightened when I was done than when I started. And I was in high school and I belonged to a loose-knit group of six guys who didn't belong anywhere either. Six misfits. What a team we were. Our major activity in our junior year on was to get in the car, get all the beer in the car we could drink for that night and cruise up and down the Colfax looking for girls. One

night we found something. And I didn't know what to do. True, I'll never forget that. You see, as a phony, I tried to learn the rules of life. And if I was with you because I didn't have any resources, well, I don't want to learn your rules. And if I was with him, I learned his rules. And if I was him, I learned his rules, what he expected.

Well, hell broke loose. If all three of you got in the same room at the same time, I didn't know what to do. I began to avoid people who gathered in the same room at the same time. The rule book had never said what you do when you find it. All it said was you go up and down Colfax looking for it. That's been a pattern in my life, too. Learn the rules to a certain point. Beyond that, I couldn't think. I ran away from high school in my senior year and joined the Navy. I didn't do this for the reasons I said. You know, I had noble purposes.

Absolutely. I was going to be a hero, save America, or help save America, for Mom's apple pie and all this sort of stuff. I ran away from high school because I couldn't stand the pressure one more day. My people knew there was something wrong. I knew there was something wrong. I wasn't going to school on a regular basis. I was misbehaving and I was drunk most of the time. I joined the Navy. We all figured this would make a man out of me. It didn't.

You didn't. You know, I missed the age just as badly there as I did before. I tried very hard to please everybody. And in the service, you just can't do that. And I'd get up tight and I'd go on a binge and I'd get drunk and I'd get in trouble. And after two years, the Navy and I split the blanket. I was so angry, so upset that I took a bad conduct discharge and three months in the marine brig rather than put in one more day trying to live up to the standards that I couldn't live up to. And I drank a lot. And when I got out, I came home and I drank. I got out in August and in December my people had had all I could stand in my drinking because I really was, when they sent me to the therapist and this therapist gave me a little white tablet. They were using to make therapy a little easier.

Methamphetamine hydrochloride. They call it speed today. And I took it and I was home free. You see, part of the heavy drinking I'd been doing was because booze all by itself had stopped working. I wasn't comfortable anymore. Nineteen and it didn't work. But this little tablet did. Oh my god. I volunteered for every drug research program going on in the city of Denver immediately. And for two years I let research supply me with pills and drugs and hallucinogens, LSD and mescaline. And I learned the rules and I learned what symptoms they were looking for and they got their symptoms and I got comfortable. I got my trip. I learned how to be a phony and lived. For the effect of it, somehow I was trying to get comfortable.

Hell my only problem is I've never grown up. I'll quote a friend of mine in Denver. I'm going to do a lot of quoting tonight. I'll get away and get back to you. Every time I had a chance to grow up, every time life presented me with an opportunity to grow up, I got stoned and it became harder and harder for me to even pretend that I was a normal human being. I began to mix things. I needed wine to get me off the speed. I needed some whiskey to make this feeling go away. I needed to mix up this combination to make this feeling go away. And I married and I had two children. And as usual, I didn't think things right.

Now I'm terrified of people. You know what I became? An insurance salesman. That's insane. As long as I had my pocket full of pills to get the day going with and my bottle of wine in the evening to smooth it out with, I sold a hell of a lot of insurance until I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't manage the money and I was taking it

from the debit to pay the bills and waiting for the check to get it back to the debit. And I came to a day when I had one more check, they would bounce the books and then I'd get caught and they put you away and I quit. And I took a bigger and better job back east: sales manager for IBM training school. God, that took a lot of pills and a lot of booze to keep me going through that. And we bounced around for about two years, getting another job, living like tramps most of the time and terrified. My God, the responsibility of children and a wife when I was incapable of handling myself and I knew it. Drove me up the wall. Finally, my wife got sick of it and she left. I hope God's blessing wherever she is. She was as sick as I was and I sure hope she finds this program someday. I really do. But she left and she left me with the two babies and I got full of fear and I did the only thing I knew how to do. I just started getting stoned all the time to hide that fear inside. I began to become all the things I didn't ever want to be. I couldn't work and I discovered instant money. Banks give you a piece of paper to pay the order of and if you do it right they pay the order of and I began to write checks. Instant money. I began to get more and more into the drugs and into the drug scene and the natural consequences of that is that I became a drug dealer. It's automatic. I can buy 50 pounds or whatever it is over here and sell part of it. I've got some for me and I've got some money to live on and it just becomes a way of life.

I became a burglar. Now I'm not a good one. Please don't understand. I'm the world's worst gangster. I'm the kind of burglar that had to get all stoned and filled up and was good and drunk before I could break into a place and I'd spend two hours looking over the closets and the drawers and forget to take anything. Hell of a gangster. Never made the big time. I was a petty thief. I would definitely steal from you given an opportunity. I had become totally isolated from people from the human race. I'd even had fantasies that maybe I didn't come from this planet. Nobody could feel that different and still belong here. I kept using the damn chemicals to make that thing stop and eventually they just made it worse and there came a time when I couldn't stop even when I wanted to. I just lost heart. We ran, and the kids and I would jump to California and then we'd run back to Denver and then we'd jump to Cincinnati and then to Phoenix. I don't know about that, but I got tired. God, I got tired. I got into smuggling then. Real big time. Hell I was broke in Albuquerque and a friend of mine put me onto the smuggling deal and made me some money and I took it because I didn't know what else to do. Three months later the federal government sent two or three. I keep thinking of the one at the front door and the one in the back door. I forget the one who came through the window. They came out to my house and told me you can't do that. You don't smuggle marijuana into this country and they frightened me. They really did. These guys were big and they were mean and they had guns. But you know I'm an alcoholic. I developed an attitude. You people have just made me a criminal. My activities didn't. Getting caught. That made me a criminal and you caught me. So I decided to be a good one. They sent me to the federal penitentiary in Texas. For the first time in years I dried out and I began to learn all sorts of slick techniques about blowing safes and you know all the neat things. You know what I did the first night I got out. I went to Albuquerque and I got stoned. What else do you do? And I stayed that way for some time and then the police in Boulder picked me up after a blackout in a stream trying to wake up after a five day binge. And I had my kids with me and I don't know how we got off that mountain. And they took them away and they put me in jail for six days and couldn't find any charges to hold me on and released me. And I decided to go straight. Anybody here ever decide to go straight? Fantastic procedure. I got a job. A real honest and good job at a dollar and a half an hour cooking hamburgers at the Burger King in Aurora. And I moved in with a Boy Scout troop leader because if I'm going to learn the rules I might as well get it from the top. Let me tell you, it's impossible for an alcoholic of my type to live comfortably with a Boy Scout troop leader.

Absolutely impossible. I didn't understand this guy. And I'll guarantee you he didn't understand me and he tried. My sickness caught up with me in about four months. That's how long fear kept me straight. My sickness caught up with me. I had taken another job. The kids were back with me now and you know the pressure was on. I hadn't learned anything new. I know for a fact for the alcoholic, one of anything is absolute disaster. I am an alcoholic and one of the girls at work to help me stay awake through my second job gave me one Dexamyl tablet. And I took it and by morning I had broken into her house and stolen her bottle so that when the drugstore opened in the morning I had it refilled for my own use. I bought some YM haters and I ate them because they get me very stoned. Yeah, they will make you insane. I wrote three prescriptions of my own and went on a tear. Went on a tear. I went insane immediately. If anybody here is thinking that maybe they can safely take just one, please don't. If you're an alcoholic like I am, you will end up on a tear. The state of Colorado sent some people to my door. One day you see, by God's grace I got a Christmas present. It can't be beat. On December 25th of 1967 I tried to kill myself the same way I had been living. In that crummy little basement I took a two-month supply of amphetamines and ran it up my arm and they found a bunch of empty beer bottles in my place. I tried to die the same way. December 26th in the morning the police came to my house and took me away. By the grace of God and the help of Alcoholics Anonymous I haven't had a drink or a pill or a fix or a desire since that day. They took me to the Denver County Jail. God brought me to you people. He brought me here directly.

My own devices and trying to figure it out, the probation officer and the judge and the district attorney and my lawyer and me, all agreed that I belonged in a hospital and that was to be my sentence. They had nine different charges on me. I don't behave well. They wanted second on behavior. The deal was if I would plead guilty to one of them, they'd suspend that sentence in favor of sending me to a federal hospital where I could get some treatment.

I had a very wise probation officer. This is the guy who knew me better than anybody. He said, don't bother. The man's a psychopath. He's untreatable. It doesn't matter where you lock him up. Just get him off the street. He's dangerous. And they didn't have a hospital in the United States at that time that would accept my type of addiction. At that point we thought I was just a speed freak. I couldn't even be honest about that. So I went to the federal or the state penitentiary in Colorado, Canyon City. And I thank God for that. Because it was in Canyon City that I heard the words that have saved my life. Part of the indoctrination over there, they sent three guys from Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm going to try not to cry. Because 70% of the people that are locked up there are there as a direct result of alcohol. Direct result.

And these three guys came in and listened. If you're here, if you're new, listen, I was at a point of zero. I really didn't know anything. In Denver County Jail, I had said a prayer. It's as close as I could come to a prayer. Things began to change inside me. I didn't want to do this insane thing anymore. I didn't have any idea that there was anything else I could do. But part of the jail routine is I listened to your lives for 10 minutes and you listen to mine for 10 minutes and we both deliver ourselves and take a nap. And among this, the line and the talking, everybody had the same idea. When we get out of here, I heard it a few minutes ago. We deserved our good one. We'll go out and get ready. Now my mouth will say this and in my heart, I really didn't feel it. I remember that new feeling and I didn't know what it was. I just knew I didn't want to do that. So they call us down and down with zero. I was listening. I was at a point where I really didn't know anything and they said, you will come down here, all of you, and you will listen to this. So I did.

And this guy got up and he said, my name is Doc. And I am an alcoholic and a drug addict. And that means I am powerless over alcohol and drugs. And that my life had become unmanageable. And he pointed his finger at it. He said, if any of you smart bastards think your life is still manageable, look at the reward the state just gave you for the beautiful job you've been doing. I heard what that man said. I was put into one place where I would hear what I needed to hear. He was right. Someone had finally told Don what was wrong with him.

I had had years of people saying, what do you do that for? Well, I don't know. Why don't you quit? It's going to kill you. I know it, but I can't. I don't know. This man said I was powerless over alcohol and drugs. And my life had become unmanageable. And he went on to explain what that meant. And I heard him. God had given me something I could hear. And he said, there's a way out. Most important words I've ever heard in my life. He said, listen, you don't ever have to hurt like that again. You don't ever have to hurt like that again. I didn't know that. I'm an intellectual giant, but I didn't know that I didn't have to hurt like that. He said, you don't have to die in this penitentiary or one like it.

You don't have to die in a gutter or in a hospital drunk. I didn't know that. I had to listen to him because he was what I was and he wasn't drinking anymore. And he wasn't shooting dope anymore. And he said, we have what's known as the 12 step study school. I got to that. Before you become a member of the new life group in Cañon City at that time, you had to attend five consecutive weekends where all they did was study this book, worked these steps to carry their experience, strength and hope. Or you didn't get to become a member of the group. Saturday. You had to give up something though. And this is important. Saturday afternoon is the movie. You can go to the big yard and listen to the guy's lie about the Cadillac. If you go to the movie, or you can go to, hey, hey, hey, you don't get to see the movie. And unless you like lying about Cadillacs or playing with boys, hey, and the movie is it? That's the only entertainment you've got. They carried the message to us again. They had a little slip. A reminder slip on our bunks that there would be a first step meeting held in the school starting at one o'clock right at the lunch. And a couple of us decided let's go. I don't want to die in here. Let's go. And we talked about the first step. And Sunday I went back. And we discussed the second step. I say we discussed. My name had been Don. And now it was 38984. And I had a sponsor who renamed me Dummy. And Dummies don't get to talk. Listen, this man was in that penitentiary for a murder. He'd committed an act of violence in the midst of a stick up. Oh, he was drunk. I'd never done that. This man talked to me about how he heard and how he thought and what it was that got him so messed up that he had to take the drinks that got him so messed up. But he went out and did that. I had done every one of those things. I knew what he was talking about. I knew about rage and anger. They pointed out to me the insanity of the alcoholic I behaved insanely after I drank and shot the stuff. But my insanity began when I uncorked the bottle and took that first drink or took that fix. That's when it began. In all honesty, I must tell you I never did get high accidentally. I thought it all out. I took real pains to make sure the circumstances would be right so I could get stoned right. There's no game.

They made me give up all my excuses. That's a hell of a thing to do with a man who don't know how to live. They made me give up all my excuses. They made me try to become rigorously honest. And I couldn't even spell it. I had a sponsor who was doing a natural life sentence for a double murder committed in the midst of a holdup. Never to be pardoned in the natural life term. By the way, he's out. He's been paroled to another ex-convict. I know it doesn't make sense. But at this time he didn't think he'd ever get out of there. And he looked me in the eye and he said he was comfortable. And I had to believe him. He really was. Now listen, I'm going to pay

attention to anybody that can get comfortable in an 8x10 toilet that's filled with copper. Because I sure as hell wasn't. But he said he was. And he began to gently. Also gently. You have no idea how beautiful those guys are. Because I couldn't stand many more shocks. God gave me the right kind of people. They gently began to lead me down this fantastic path. My job was in the dishroom for that penitentiary. That's a hell of a place for a guy who's a physical coward, let me tell you. That's why they make all the booze and that's where all the riots start. And here I was working in the middle of all that and scared to death. But all the other new guys were down there too. And we spent our days, our time, talking about this new thing we were going to, this Alcoholics Anonymous. And the following Saturday I discussed the need to turn your will and your life over to the care of God as you understand Him. And it had brought me to a place where I could accept this fact: God loves me. I didn't know that, but I accepted that fact. And I made my decision and I sat back and I waited for the boom for my big flash of light. It's what's supposed to happen. Nothing ever significant ever happened in my life. It didn't go boom or bang or. And it didn't come and I was terribly disappointed and frightened. And I went to my sponsor and I told him that. And he said, Don, be grateful for that. Flashes of light have nearly killed you all your life. And we discussed that. Marijuana gives you a flash of light. A hypodermic syringe full of LSD. Guaranteed flash of light. They nearly killed me. I said, OK, what do I do? I know this is not enough to just say, OK, this book says, I'm willing, I'm ready. What do I do to implement this decision? He gave me a pencil and a piece of paper and sent me off to myself to write a searching and fearless moral inventory. And he didn't show me how to do it. He said the directions were in here. And I went up and I did a magnificent job. It took almost a half hour. I had a couple sheets of paper there and I ran back up to the school and I found a guy and we sat down and for two hours I justified my behavior. And something happened inside of me. I came to the awareness that there was something definitely wrong. It said that he was supposed to listen to me. And I came to understand that I had not been honest. I hadn't written a searching and fairness moral inventory. I was playing the old game, learning the rules, getting some quickies done. I had to go back to myself and get honest. Do I want to live or do I want to die? Do I want to be comfortable? What do I really want? And they had told me, when you write this inventory and ask God's help, I hadn't done that first time. Who needed it? This time I did. And I must tell you that it was no magnificent thing. But I wrote a searching and a fairness moral inventory and it took a while. And they told me when you're through with this, you must.

You must go to someone and talk about it. But you must find somebody that isn't going to be terribly affected by it. Somebody that isn't going to be hurt by it. Can I pick the guy with the same amount of sobriety I had? He was so screwed up, there's no way I could hurt him. And he listened. All I talked. And he would throw a few things in as we went. We spent a couple of three hours up in that school. And at the end, I found out something that I hadn't put on that paper, but I came to understand that my gravest defect in character was the fact that I relied far too much on my resources and on your resources as human beings and nowhere near enough on God. And I came away from that experience knowing that I had a whole lifetime of this examination to do, but that I had done it right for me. You know how I knew that? I felt better. I felt better. I can't describe what I felt except I felt better. And I went back to myself, again, under the direction of my sponsor, and I sat down. I looked this thing over and I had done a thorough job of throwing out the good. I knew it wasn't complete. And I asked God to remove my defects of character. And because of the knowledge that I had at that moment, I also tacked on and please don't let the ones I hadn't got to kill me before I get to them.

I must tell you that he did that. I'm here tonight. I don't do the things I used to do anymore. I don't think the

way I used to think anymore. I get frightened. I get scared. I get tempted to cheat a little bit here. It's still there. But you know what? Every time it happens, if I ask God's help, it stops and stops now. It's fantastic. So I did that. And I got to tell you, it's a good thing I was locked up. I made me a list of all the people I had harmed and I became willing to make amends to them all. And Don Fritz, number 38984, got free. The feeling of freedom came to me locked in my cell one night. On the fourth tier in cell house one in the Colorado state penitentiary, I got free. This book and my sponsor said the minute you are willing to face everybody that you've ever done. If you're willing to do it, that's the key. And you can become free. And the feeling was this. What a feeling. But it's a good thing I was locked up because I got excited and I want to run out and make amends to everybody instantly. God, they had to lock me up. I thought I'd done that. These beautiful people, you people, have constantly worked on me to slow me down. I had a man the same guy that was in there for life. See, look, there's people I can never reach. He said, they won't let him in the same. He had a funny attitude. He wasn't locked in. You were locked up.

Probably why he was comfortable. And he showed me how to write letters to some of them. He showed me how to be willing to wait until I got out. And he showed me the most important thing of all for me. He said, yeah, God help you write that inventory. God's in charge of your life now. Let him help you decide when and where you're going to make direct amends. Don't run him up out there. Don't create any more chaos in your life or the lives of people around you.

Don't ever run and duck. But don't make him any ask yourself. He said and go out there and try it and follow them. I did what he said. To the best of my ability. I continue to take personal inventory. When I'm wrong, as promptly as I can, I admit it. He taught me to learn to live one day at a time. A wild thing happened along the way. They let me out of that penitentiary. My time was up. Now, this was a strange day and a fantastic thing began to happen. I began to be aware of the miracles of God's love in my life and the active participation so long as I was willing to rely upon him. I still had some federal time in my old room and they paroled me to the federal authorities to finish that four-year stretch that I hadn't finished up before. And I was ready to go ahead and do that. This program worked just fine with penitentiary. Just fine. I could live this way for another four years. They sent me to Denver to await the trial that I had to go through. And it's a wild experience coming from the penitentiary to the jail. You know, when you go to the jail from the penitentiary, you're a bum. When you come out of the penitentiary to the jail, they treat you like a man. They let you have your own cigarettes. They're nice to you.

And this was a new experience for me. The policeman and sheriff's office was being nice to me. And it didn't matter. And they took me to trial after two weeks and they destroyed all my losers. The federal judge reinstated my probation and said I could go out. Well, this was a long weekend. I think it was Labor Day, one of those. It was a long weekend. I had \$17 in my pocket. No job. No place to live. Nobody out here that wanted to see me again.

My family was done. They'd been burned out. All I had was this program. And the word of a man from Alcoholics Anonymous, who the week before had been to the meeting, and I said, Reed, how am I going to be accepted out there? God bless him. He said, why don't you come and find out? If you'll come to a meeting the first night out, you'll probably stay out. That's all he said to me. Except that one of us will be there to meet you.

When they released me, as I took my blankets downstairs, a colored kid handed me a little slip of paper out of his cell. He said, go see this guy. Maybe he could help you get a job. Turned out to be a daily labor pool. You'll work one day. You get paid for that day. Fantastic. That's how I'm learning how to live anyway. Why not? You people taught me to be completely honest with everybody I meet. So after they took me downtown, we signed the paper to put me on the street. I went over to see this guy. And I walked in, and I had that morning, said to God, you lead me. I'll go where you want, and do what you want, because I don't know how to live. And I knew he loved me, and I knew he didn't want me to starve to death. I knew he'd take care of me, and I really knew that.

So I went to see this guy, and I walked in, and I said, look, I just got out of the penitentiary. I'm a recovering alcoholic and a drug addict. Do you have any work? And he got excited. I'm just exactly what he was looking for. I don't know why, but he sure got turned out. You bet he had work. And we ran down to this place, and they told us down there that they didn't hire ex-convicts, but they would work me in a box car one day at a time unloading. This is neat. I'm not an ex-convict anyway. Now I'm a man, and I've been to prison. I had a guy who wasn't a convict teach me that. He was a man who was in prison. He pointed out to me that ex-convicts go back, about 70 percent of them. I don't want to go back. It's a little attitude shift.

But yes, they would put me to work the next day. And the miraculous things began to happen. The miracle took place in my life, because Jack asked me, do you want to work today? And I said yes, and I found out something. God never, never tests me. But he continually allows me to find out consciously where I'm at, because they sent me out to Abbott Laboratories. Abbott Laboratories manufactures and distributes the stuff I like the best, but very best. And I spent the day working alongside a boy who had a bandage on his arm, because he'd missed the night before unloading box cars and the stuff. And I knew I didn't want it anymore. Do you know what it feels like to know that God's done that? Whew. He had taken away what I asked him to take away my insane compulsion to do these things. It wasn't there. I didn't want to do it. He gave me the sanity to say no when the man at Abbott Laboratories offered me a full-time job. I don't know how long I'd stand being around that stuff daily, after day, after day.

That's ridiculous. I said, no, and I went to work for a company that doesn't hire ex-convicts. And a few months later, they put me on payroll. I don't know what they do with ex-convicts, but they will hire a man who's been in prison. I became a truck driver. I didn't know that's what I was. A truck driver. And I loved it. I loved it. And I went to meetings every night, and I began to discover the real fellowship of this program. I discovered God through people. I look into your eyes, and I see the reflection of my father. You taught me that.

For six months, I couldn't have a car. So people from Alcoholics Anonymous saw to it I got to every meeting within a hundred miles. Nobody ever tried to ram anything down my throat. But they saw to it that I got everything I ever needed. I made a friend. I made a friend. A man that no matter whether I'm sick or well is glad to see me. Fantastic. I never had a friend. The most unlikely man in the world. I'll tell you, I wouldn't have picked him for anybody.

His mind's too fast for me. But we became friends, and we did things, and I worked, and I went to meetings. But I became, as Joyce said, the house father in a recovery house. I didn't want to do that. I already didn't. I was quite warm and supportive. But I didn't want to do that. I enjoyed being alone. God revealed things to me in

funny ways. I laid in my bed one night thinking how neat it was to be alone in my own apartment. And I might as well have been hit with a ball bat because the realization to me came to me. It is not nice to be alone. Never again am I to be alone. You people make it possible for me not to be alone. That's what was killing me being alone. Being alienated and being separated. So I moved in with this bunch of nuts. What an experience.

24 hours a day I had to work the program to stay sane. So I heard out of it. We had drunks and junkies falling in and out the front door and the back door. And we didn't get along with each other too good. Those of us who were trying to do this, we began to learn how to live with one another. And to learn by the traditions in this program. And to try very hard to stick close to our primary purpose. To achieve sobriety. And to pass it on. Twenty-four-hour-a-day Twelfth Step work is fantastic. I do that today. I learned something not too long ago. I learned that a man said something to me and I felt the truth. Every time you meet me you should 12 step me and I'll do that to you too. And you know what the message is? We carry. You don't have to die drunk. You don't have to hurt that way. You carry the message of hope. And we do this by hugging and kissing and shaking hands and saying how are you? Hell I know how you are if you're here you're fine. Fine. But I'll ask you anyway. Once in a while somebody says I'm really not feeling too good. And that's me. Somebody else got on. You've given me my life. You have taught me how to pray. You took away my excuse that I didn't know how to pray. Before every meeting it starts out God grant me serenity.

That's God's phone number. You taught me that. If I say that I hook up instantly and directly. I'm hooked in. We begin a meeting by saying God and we spend the next however long it takes listening to what he has to say. Each one of us talks and passes on what we learned today. You taught me I don't have to be brilliant. You've taught me all I have to do today is give you what I have today. Some days that isn't much. Some days that's so much I think I'm gonna bust right inside out. If I can't get ahold of somebody and say look isn't this neat. You've taught me that God loves me like nobody else ever existed. And he loves you the same way. And this is a very practical God. When we got married it became very apparent that I'm incapable of supplying adequate bread for that many people. So all I could do was take care of me and we decided if God wants us fed you'll have to do it. And he has. We've missed me. In fact it gets spooky. We should miss you. I should. You make it impossible for me to remain silent ever again in my life. It's in silence that I'm sick. There are times when silence comes to me in meditation and that's good.

But for me to remain silent in your presence I can't do that anymore. That's part of my sickness. If I can't do any more than say I love you or help me I must be willing to do either one of those things. They're both healthy. I didn't think it was healthy to be able to say help me. Big old strong me. I weighed 133 pounds. So can what? Big old strong me. I'm going to tell you my favorite story because I don't have anything else to say of any importance. This story sums up for me in the most beautiful words I've ever heard just exactly what you people are. My life was like a great huge lake. And I'd swum about halfway across this lake with my anvil in my hand.

And it finally got too heavy; I couldn't go any further. I was just barely treading water, holding on to my anvil out in the middle of the lake. I was going to drown. And I looked up and on this bank we're a group of people and they saw me and they said hang on young man we're going to have a quick prayer service and we'll get you out of there. And they did it. And beautiful things happened for them. My anvil just got heavier and heavier. And over here on this bank were a group of fine well-dressed citizens. One of them hollered out to me and said hey hang on there for a second we're going to pass a law that makes swimming illegal and you'll have to

come out. And they went off and did it and my anvil just kept getting heavier and heavier. And over on this bank we're a group of men with slide rules and sextants and all kinds of material. They said hang on young man we're going to build a bridge across this lake and when we get out in the middle we'll reach down and we'll haul you out. But hang on because first of all we have to make a feasibility study and see how many people are going to use it and we've got to get our material list together and get the money raised. My anvil just kept getting heavier and heavier. Off in a quiet little cove, a bunch of people were having a barbecue and having a good time. Oh they had a thing like this AA and take it easy and signs all around them and a few of their members were walking down along the beach. One of them saw me and he said hey out there you got my attention. He said hey drop your anvil. Well this was the only one I had you know this struck me it's kind of funny if I let go of that anvil I wouldn't have one anymore. And I told him so the narrow anvil he said listen if you don't want to drop drop your anvil. I was right about where you are just a few months ago with a GMC truck transmission in my hand. And I'll probably show this if you'll drop it it'll go right straight to the bottom. And if you ever ever need it again you can always swim right back out here and dive down. It'll be there and you can have my transmission too if you ever get desperate. But if you don't want to die drop your anvil. And I didn't want to die so I did.

And all those people stopped what they were doing and came out on the beach. One of them said to me reach out with your right hand and get a handful of water. Pull up behind you. And I did that and I moved a little bit toward the beach. And another one hollered now. Reach out with your left hand and get a little handful of water and pull up behind you. I moved a little further toward the beach. And once they saw I could do this number pretty well, One nice little lady stood out.

Kicked your right foot up and out of you. And I did and I moved a little faster. Another man said now kick that left leg up and down. Keep reaching. Keep kicking. And I made it to the beach. Your people covered me with blankets. Look, here I am tonight, so I didn't have to swim back out and drown. One, two, three, four, five, six. My family can remember the time when I wasn't. And everybody I came in contact with can remember the time that I wasn't. But tonight I am and maybe tomorrow I will be. And you look. Happy occasion for three of us tonight and maybe more of you. But especially for three of us it's our anniversary. And like Jim says he was the first sponsor. I was the second.

And Harry, of course, has sponsored people. But the three of us kind of have gotten through the years some way or other. We're real happy about it. I don't have much of a speech to make except to say I'm happy to be here. Well Bob's right. Harry's not going to get out of it. He's going to come up here too. And so next I'd like to give you Harry with the 15 years this month and I'm real happy for him. And just watch your language here. I'm very happy to be here. And today is my 15 years.

And that 35 cents that he mentioned wasn't 35 cents at all. I know those boys in that back room and they've been heavier than that. And I'm glad they all lost their money. I never have found out who bet on my side. But I hope he had a good win streak. Sure. Thank you very much. And I'm real happy to be here. And God willing I hope I can be here next year and the year after and the year after that. Thank you very much. They talk all time and I just get few times.

Oh yeah. That's not like a good idea. I'm glad you brought it up. Fine. No I would like to hear from from you girls. And Fern, why don't you come up here first. Okay. Thank you. Anyhow. Gwen how about you coming up

and just saying a few words out was. I'm sure happy to be here. And I'm sure this is the happiest 15 years that we've ever had. Harry's always said he was always a real clean cut kid. Well I know if he wants to say a few words I think this would be the time to say it.

Did you want to come up here. I'll take care of that. I don't know why a guy gets drunk. Ties in that stuff and stays with it. Something I've never figured out and I really quit trying. Maybe there's a lot of reasons. I was born on a farm just near a small town. Maybe that causes it. I don't know being born near small town. Give you an idea how small it was when they issued ZIP codes, they put a decimal point in front of them. The youngest child in the family maybe the family. Maybe being the baby. I don't know. I had things a little better than the other two kids did. Maybe that caused me to drink. Don't really know him. Don't really care. I'm glad I did.

And I'm glad that I found AA. I'm glad I found the North Platte group. I guess everybody thinks his own group is the best. There's wonderful groups all over the country. And I've been to a lot of them. And I think North Platte is real fortunate. We've had some AAs move in here lately. And I'm tickled with that CMLP. You'll be an active member of our group, Mike, like you've been in Grand Island. And I'd like Mike from recently from Grand Island, Grand Island, Mt. North Platte. Would you come up and say I am Mike and I'm an alcoholic. North Platte is not too new to me. I spend my Saturday nights in the KC Club or in the AA group for quite a few years up here. I spend half of my life up here I guess with the railroad. It was generally in the bar in front of a mirror admired my mind or some chasing somebody or something. There is a pretty good fella here though. He's told me my last final whiskey or got it for me. I woke up one morning Sunday shaking sick just about to go to work and didn't know whether I could make it to North Platte to Grand Island without a drink.

I called him up and he took care of that. And I think that was just about my last final whiskey. I don't know. It was neared anyway. Oh, really? I don't care. I guess I would be leaving this kind of a life. I might not be. The fella in Grand Island after it always claims that had we not been alcoholic turned to the boob that we might have wound up and then seen asylum anyway because of our makeup were kind of quite strong and had we not added had it not been for the boob. We might have not turned out to get in. So I think we're pretty fortunate to be able to wind up alcoholics and then be able to find a place such as this to straighten our lives out. It was under a hell of a lot of pressure from several different directions. I think I'd been threatened to be divorced. I don't know how many times. I've lost my job several times. It don't seem like there's any way to scare an alcoholic. The doctor had scared me. My liver was getting shot. I was getting physically in pretty bad shape, probably shaped spiritually. You put that all together. It's pretty hard to face without a drink or other my way down to the ante. I think there was about three pulling and one pushing to get me down there. And I hate it now. I hate it but I can see where I delayed my sobriety. I quite a bit my happy sobriety by getting down there sitting behind the post and letting the other people do the work. Just as soon as the meeting was over by others for a while I wouldn't even wait for a cup of coffee. And then it got so I'd maybe stay for one. But until I started enjoying the company, started pitching in and helping with some of the work, I didn't enjoy my sobriety too much. I just as well have been a drinker if it stayed on like that. But I think that was a turning point about six to eight months after I'd been in. I kept coming once a week. I think there was only one meeting. I'd pray to God I'd be out of town on meeting nights so I wouldn't have to go. That's how bad I wanted to be. I'd rather found some other way. And that was him. He had a lot to do with it.

That I stayed long enough to find out what it was all about. I've been happy in sobriety. I mean I suppose I

had some good times drinking. But in the last five years of my drinking it became work. I used to bid in a local so I'd be away from home. I could least get off the job, get my jug, go to my room. Nobody was nagging at me. And that helped some. But I still had to face up and go home on Saturday night. And then it was hell till Sunday night so I could leave to go back. And had it not been for her though. Maybe I wouldn't be here yet. She was one of the pressures. And I had about quite a few kids that were getting at the age where they were quite a bit disappointed in their father. And I don't know. The hurt that could see in their eyes when I'd come home all looped up. The hurt I could see in their eyes when I promised them I was going to do something and there wasn't no shade to do it when at some time began to hurt the inside me. And I think until that inside pressure, I mean physically or financially I don't know if a fellow would ever stop going. I think it comes from inside. That hurt something that most of us just can't stand. I couldn't and I think that follows along the line. So I lost respect for myself. It seems like that's why it finally says something's got to happen.

I had a fortune that I knew about. It's been the AA and I think it might have kept that in the back of my mind. When I get as bad as he is or he was, maybe I'll give it a try. But it took some while before it made any sense to me at all. Go down there to 6-8-10. That was about the size of it when I started. They seemed to be happy and when you got a block up there and really don't want to let anything in, it's pretty hard for them fellas to get to you.

But when I finally give up, she said, well, boy, this is it. I'll do a gas. You start enjoying their company. I started enjoying AA. I started enjoying sobriety. Missed with myself and everybody else. I would probably lead people to believe that I got sober for my family. My folks or some other got given me. If I was honest about it, I was sick and tired of myself. I just couldn't live that way anymore. You start doing it for yourself. The other people get to benefit of it. And I figured that it was a lot of friends over there going to AA. But Biggie Sharon was glad to see me. So I didn't give a damn where I went to get it easily. I didn't think I could be happier. Have any fun without the booze. I mean, it's in a lot of other ways. It's a pretty good feeling to be able to feed your family, clothe your family, get a decent house for them.

It's pretty rewarding in that way. Be able to take, go to the ball games with the kids. I have tipped it. I've worked hard now for about three months. The bills are pretty well caught up. I had a drink coming. I was sober several times. Nine months one time. We just kept getting a little shorter, four months, three months. There, it's the last about 30 days apart. But when I would give it up, I thought I was making it right. I really thought I was making the sacrifice for my family. But that wasn't it at all. I was making no sacrifice at all. I haven't made a sacrifice since I quit drinking. I'm not doing anything now that I shouldn't have done for the last 25 years or the last 15 years before I quit drinking. It got to be work for me.

When I would once start, I would have enough money. I, probably about a week to find the money, to find the whiskey, to have enough for the next day. If I didn't have, if I had to go to bed at night knowing that I didn't have a drink in case I woke up or enough to last me until the bars open in the morning, I couldn't sleep that night. Boy, when it becomes work to drink, it's pretty easy to see that there's, I mean it's bad anyway. Thanks. I'm glad to hear it.

Thank you a lot, Mike. A couple of years ago, I asked to get a man to speak for our state reunion. I enquired around. If anybody had any suggestions, somebody told me, says, why don't you call Denver? So they've

probably got a young, a lot of young people, and a whole guy in Denver. And he said, you bet you would get the man you want. Called Don. So I called Don, invited him out, and he came to speak to our state reunion.

And he brought along the prettiest little girl with him. And since that time, I'd really become acquainted with him, close to him, and fell in love with both of them, both Don and his wife. I've heard Don speak before, but I never had heard her. So I'm going to let her take the lead tonight, and maybe she'll tell us a few things about Don and how, what he does, to keep himself sober. Maybe he's got some tricks that he hasn't told us, and she might tell on him. So Joyce, if you would, please.

My name is Joyce Pritts, and I am an Al-Anon. I don't know where to start. You know, I call myself an Al-Anon because I feel that's what I am today. But I found this program through Alcoholics Anonymous, two and a half years ago, and it wasn't clear then why I found myself in the midst of AA. But I know today that my higher power put me there. It was a direct result of the third step of this program, and at the time, I didn't know anything about 12 steps or too much about AA. My mother is a recovered alcoholic on the AA program, and she had just sobered up about two and a half years ago, and she was starting to send all kinds of little tidbits about AA home to me in Denver.

And at this time, I had reached the end of a 10-year marriage. I was near suicidal. I was just about as screwed up as you could possibly guess. I had tried marriage counseling and psychiatrists and ministers, and nothing worked. And I found myself in rocking chair one day, rocking a set of very sick twins, and I knew that I was at the end of my road, and I knew I didn't have any where to go. The word powerless didn't come to my mind that this is exactly what I was. In fact, I said some kind of a prayer to my higher power then that I didn't know too much about, but I said, God, I screwed this marriage up so bad. I screwed my life up so bad, and I don't know which way to turn, but I got to do something, and I don't have the courage to do it. I'm a very, very insecure person, and I'm a leaner. I knew I was making my husband miserable, and that I was miserable, and the only place for me that was left was the mental hospital that was just up the street. So I told God that day, I can't do any more with my life, so I'm going to put it in your hands. It can't possibly get worse. My whole life I had spent preparing myself for bad. My whole life, and as a result of that prayer, it was a matter of weeks I found myself in the middle of an AA meeting, and I had gone there just out of curiosity because I had met Don, my present husband, and some other people that were on the program, and I was curious about the AA program. I lived with alcoholics the greatest part of my life, and I knew my mother was changing and I wanted to find out why. I sat in the meeting that night and I'll never forget what happened to me. There was about 50 people in that room. We were all crowded into one small living room of a recovery home that Don was the house father of.

And these people, that particular night, they didn't talk about alcohol, and they didn't talk about drugs. They talked about feelings. They talked about fears, resentments, and anxieties that caused them to drink and caused them to take pills and cause them to shoot drugs, and there I found myself identifying so strong and I didn't know what was happening to me, but every single one of them that said something talked about me. They talked about the fear I had all my life, the feeling of being alone, the feeling of trying to please everyone and failing, the resentments that they built up, every one of them talked about me.

And I suddenly had this feeling of being where I belong, being at home. Something else happened. I was aware of that night. There was no soul in that entire room that had a mask on and this came as quite a shock

because everywhere I'd gone in my life I'd seen masks. I'd never really been able to see inside of anyone or know how they were feeling and I'd always worn a mask because I was scared to death to let people know what was really going on inside of me and there wasn't a soul in the entire room that was wearing a mask.

It was just a bunch of people sharing their experience, strength, and hope and I needed it so desperately and I knew I was home. I started attending those meetings faithfully because I was going through a divorce and there was a very strong possibility of losing my five children, losing my home and various other things and I needed those people desperately and sanity was starting to creep in. Those 12 steps were teaching me how to prepare myself for the good. The people on the AA program told me constantly that my higher power was all good that he loved me and he wanted nothing but the best for me and this was hard to believe and it's taken two and a half years for even a little bit of it to sink in.

But in these two and a half years there's been just nothing but beautiful things happening to me and Don is one of them. I didn't want any part of Don as a husband or anything that serious. I was so grateful to be free and feeling good and having some joy in my life that I was scared to death to get married again. I didn't want to ruin that what we had going. It was more like a very good friend and a sponsorship type relationship.

But our AA friends in Denver had made up their minds. We were going to get married whether we thought so or not and I think they prayed us into it. All of a sudden I found myself on the way to New Mexico. I practically had been handcuffed and stepped in the car and was told I was going to get married that night. Literally you have to watch out with AA people. I was scared to death. Totally just terrified of what was going to happen.

I was just learning how to live myself. I couldn't cope with my own five kids at the time and Don had two that just fit right in with mine, same ages. And I had very very mixed emotions about his children. I knew they needed a mother and one whole part of me wanted to be a mother to them and the biggest part of me wanted no part of it whatsoever. In fact I resented him for even having two kids. I resented the kids because it was just another load on me and we set out to play house. The only way I was able to agree to marry Don was that we would get married for one day only. I was really into the programs one day at a time and I thought I could tolerate going to New Mexico. I could tolerate signing the papers and marrying him if that's all it had to be was for that one day. So I told him if you'll just marry me or if I marry you, let's just let it be one day and then we'll live together. Then you don't have to be a husband and I don't have to be a wife because I didn't know how to do that. And he agreed that was fine with him and that's the way it's been, one day at a time. I don't act like a wife and he doesn't act like a husband. We have the most beautiful time. If I start acting like a wife and he starts acting like a husband, it's hell. It's just as bad as it was before. He didn't ask me to say something about Don and that's so easy for me to do because I feel like coming into the AA program the way I did and being told later that I really ought to go to Al-Anon that that's where I belonged. It was very tough for me. I didn't want any part of Al-Anon. I didn't identify with a whole lot of the Al-Anon people. I identified with the Alcoholics and I spent months on the program beating myself to death over this identification thing. I didn't know what my title was and it drove me crazy and Don kept saying, quit worrying about your title and work the program.

It finally sunk in and this is what I started doing and today I can very joyfully say that I enjoyed my meal and I'm part of the good. Most of the good that has come my way as a direct result of Don which he got it as the direct result of the Alcoholics that gave it to him. I didn't know the first thing about loving or the first thing about

accepting love. I was married to an extremely possessive man and very domineering and I myself was extremely possessive. I was terrified of losing what I had and being alone and all of a sudden I found myself being loved like this and I found out that that is stronger than any chains. By being loved like this I was tied so strongly to him I couldn't say no and this is the way I've been loved for the last two and a half years and because of this I'm learning how to do this. I don't do nearly so well at it as Don does but I'm so much better than I was two and a half years ago. The hardest thing for me to do is to love my children enough to let them go with love. I told you I had a terrible resentment of Don's two sons. The worst is with our oldest son, our 12 year old. This boy has got as many hang-ups as I have had and if he throws up a wall just as strong and tall as I throw up and so our walls get in the way of each other 95% of the time. I've always been able to go to Don and say Don I can't take care of another minute. Sometimes I think I hate him. I don't like being his mother and I know I hurt Don but because of the program Alcoholics Anonymous has given him. He's able to put his arm around me and say honey don't worry about it just let it go.

It's going to be all right and it does and it has and it's getting better more and more and more that boy and I are able to smile at each other. Not very much but a little bit more each day and as I said there has been nothing but beautiful things happening to us. We've done more living in the last two and a half years than I had crammed into the whole rest of my life and it's a direct result of this program. These 12 steps are teaching me how to have a conscious contact and how to expect nothing but the best because until I'm able to totally open up and let my higher power pour all his love in and all his goodness I can just keep on wallering around in myself pity, my fear, and my agony but the more this program teaches me to open up and let it in the more it comes in and sometimes it comes in floods and that's hard to take. The people on the program of Al-Anon tell me that it gets better and better and better and that's hard to believe because when it's as good as it is today it's unimaginable that it can get better but it is the very fact that we were able to come back down here after the beautiful trip we had a year and a half ago and the fact that the beautiful North Platte people flew us both in was just a rare treat and we were able to fly back in today with two of the most beautiful people I've met in a long time. I can't hardly wait to see what tomorrow brings and I think my prayer is that I don't do anything to screw it up to get away from this program because as long as I've got the program and as long as I've got people like you I know I've got it made. Thank you.

Thank you so very much Joyce. It was great.