

38th Texas State Convention

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Transcript

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Hi, my name is Don, I'm an alcoholic. By God's grace, and because of your loving, caring attention, it has not been necessary for me to have a drink of alcohol, or any of that other weird stuff, since December 26th of 1967. And for that, I'm astonished. I've given this talk several times in English, and now I understand I'm supposed to give it in Texan. We'll try. My friend Bob says that I'm just elegant, but there's a price that's too high for me to pay. My mother and my wife, who is here, make me wear this thing to prove that I respect you. Do you all understand that I respect you? Someone take it off then. This wristwatch is easy. I sometimes don't know exactly the direction to go from here, because I'm dead serious about this program.

I try not to be too serious about me, but from the first day that I met you, I realized we're dealing with life and death here. So one of my prayers before I talk is that I hope I don't get cute tonight. You found me in the Colorado State Penitentiary. It was my third penitentiary. I didn't like it any better than I did the first one. And I want you to please understand, I have to talk about prison because that's where I was, but also understand I was never a big-time gangster. The big-time gangsters don't go to the penitentiary, only the dummies.

In fact, one of my big capers, one night I was a little drunk, and I was living in a chicken coop at the time that I had. That was cool where I came from, right? At about three o'clock in the morning I didn't have anything better to do. So I put on my black peacoat and my black watch cap and got on my bicycle and went off to rob a house. That made sense to me at that time, in fact that still makes sense. I went through that house for over two hours and left and forgot to take anything. Now you know what kind of a criminal I was. Everything that I know, I've experienced since I met you, and as a result of you carrying me from my first day into the book called Alcoholics Anonymous, I had marvelous sponsorship. I had the kind of sponsors who didn't ever say to me, Don, as soon as you're comfortable, we'll work these steps.

They said to me, if you ever hope to get comfortable, we're going to start right now working these steps. I, one of my favorite words in our book is the word baffle, because that described my whole life, baffle. Since I've come to you, I've gotten unbaffled. One of the things that baffled me was that I really never did want to end up in the places I ended up, and I really never did want to do the things that I kept doing, and I could never understand why I could never get around to doing the things that I really did want to do.

Another thing that baffled me was why I went to my first penitentiary, and you explained that to me. You see, I went to prison the first time, because I couldn't find my way home. I got lost. That's right, there's a federal law against getting lost, if you're in the Navy. And I was. I loved the Navy. I really did. I loved the ship. I loved the work I did. I loved everything about it. And it used to baffle me, because they'd give me these little 24-hour liberties, and I'd be weeks getting back sometimes. And I couldn't understand that, and they couldn't understand that. And this last one, they gave me a 24-hour liberty, and I was 23 days getting home, and by the time I got there, they had moved home all the way to Korea, and you know, they really were mad at me. There's the sailor. So they put me in prison and gave me a bad conduct discharge and sent me home at 19-baffled. I'm wondering what the hell's this all about? You explained that to me.

I know today why that happened. It happened because I'm allergic to alcohol, because if I put alcohol in my system, I'd develop a craving for more alcohol that will not stop until it decides to stop. And until the craving is gone, I no longer have any choices about what I want to do with my life. I have to drink, and it was that simple. It tied that loose end up. Once I start, I can't quit, and my early sponsors made sure that I understood that.

And just as soon as I understood that, they said, you know, that's completely academic if you never take a drink. There's something else wrong with you too. I have a mind that can't remember sometimes that I get lost. I'll kid myself into thinking that I really do need this. It'll make me feel better. I thought one time I drank because I was nervous and found out I got nervous because I drank. There's a piece of the puzzle missing up here. My neighbor has it. He owns a bar, but I've never seen him drunk. But I don't have whatever it is that allows me to stop when it's time to stop. I lost the power of choice somewhere. And by God's grace, I've never gained it back.

And I hope to God I never do because you give me a choice about alcohol, and I wouldn't be here. I'd be in Huntsville probably. I didn't take the easy ones either. Is there anybody here tonight that's in our first 30 days of sobriety? Oh, God bless you. I'll stand to be you. I mean life's good for me today. But getting good is where all the fun is. When I was in my first 30 days of sobriety, I was laying in the Denver County jail wondering what was next. I'm afraid I might get the answer. I'd like to share with you very briefly my last week before I died because I need to always remember it. And it's the beginnings of the journey that I want to share with you tonight. Christmas week of 1967 was that blessed week that we all get somewhere along the line that allowed me to see me for exactly who I was.

And what I had become with no more excuses, no more cons, and no more blinders. And what I saw was kind of wretched. At the time we were living in a \$40 a month basement apartment. I say we, I had two little boys that I'd been dragging around this country with me because I couldn't sit still near the end. And we were living in a \$40 a month basement apartment and the lady above us that rented us the room had cats. She didn't have some, a few tabbies running around. This lady had a thing for cats. Hundreds of them. It seemed to me. And her place was cleaner than mine was. And that's the week that I saw that. I have never used heroin.

Because of my keen alcoholic mind. When I was 14 years old, they showed us a movie about junkies. Those were heroin addicts. And that was such an ugly creature. I determined that I would never be a junkie. And if I never took heroin, that couldn't happen. Now I have unfortunately put everything else I could get into a needle in me. But never heroin. That's the week that I woke up somehow and turned to the guy next to me and started tearing and said, my God, we're in a junkie pad. And it was my house. And that's the week I saw that.

I was beginning to reach the point where my dreams were dead. And my parents' dreams were dead. And my kids' dreams were dead. We had good dreams, how I didn't start to be a bum. That was the week that Christmas day I took the boys down to Grandma and Grandpa's. So they could see Grandma and Grandpa for Christmas. And on the way, if you've been on a road like I have, you know that there's money in the streets of America. That is true. Not much. But if you walk around, we head down all the time and eventually you'll bump into some money. And we found a dollar in the snow that day. And then we got to Grandma and Grandpa's. And my dad met us at the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry. Your mother says I can't let you in anymore. She can't stand watching you die. Now, I remembered last year that that wasn't the first time that that had happened.

But that was the first time I had seen what I'd done to my mother. And then dad, God bless him. He snuck us in anyway. And I got to see what I'd done to him. And I had to look at what I'd done to my kids. That's a hell of a thing to put the kids through on Christmas day. And on the way back home, we found a Christmas tree lot. Now, if you're planning to go off and do what I did in the strong Christmas, any Christmas tree lot in the country, about 430 Christmas afternoon will sell you any tree they got for dollar. And we bought one. And naturally, it didn't fit the room.

I'm an alcoholic. I got to have the drama. The damn thing was too big. We bought the big one. And on the way home, we stopped at the public merchandise mark. And I used the last of my glibness to get the man to give us a little old pair of cowboy boots and shirts. And my kids would have a Christmas present. On credit, of course, I didn't have any money. And I can still remember. I really meant to pay for that as soon as the welfare check got there. And that's how we went in the Christmas night. And all of that gathered together and reduced me to a place where my very first inventory, honest inventory, brought me to a state of mind where I was no longer willing to live that way anymore. I could find nothing of value in me. So I took a massive overdose of amphetamines. It took a two month supply and shoved them up my arm and drank everything in the house I could find lay down to die. And I think I made it. Although, when I woke up the next morning with the police at the door, I was in this terrible state. God, if you ever have to do that, I hope you make it. That's the most crushing thing in the world to lay down and die and have the cops come get you the next morning. After the initial shock, of course, I relaxed. For people like me, going to jail is a rest. Now, if any of you folks haven't finished drinking, and jail is in the future for you, so that you'll survive it, let me give you the rules of county jail. I lie to you for 10 minutes. You lie to me for 10 minutes. Then we both go take a nap.

That's it. If you go on the county jail, that's all you need to know. Isn't that a hell of a way for grownups to live? And they took me away this time and they were really upset. During that week, I had realized that something was desperately wrong and I wanted help, but I didn't have even the honesty to go ask for help. I had set myself up to be arrested on a little video fraud in the seat charge of getting me six months in the county jail and fattened me up. That isn't why they were there. They didn't find that until the next day. They came loaded for bear this time. Three years to life is what we were talking about on the first charge. And the DA promised me that if I beat him on that one, he'd bring the other eight one at a time. He'd tie me up in that jail till I was an old man, he said, because I was through. And it was during this time that God entered my life and I didn't even know it. I have to share with you the power of God as I understand it. And it's all based on mercy. They ended up offering me a hell of a deal. Everybody thought I was a drug addict, including me. So the Denver district attorney and the federal government, because I was on federal parole at the time, they both had custody problems going on. It made a little deal. If I'd plead guilty to one particular charge, they'd send me down to Fort Worth to that federal drug hospital and cure me.

Now I had reached the place in my life where I was willing to do anything and go anywhere that anybody suggested. Because you got to remember, I just killed myself and then woke up. And here I am trapped in a life and in a person that is incapable of functioning at all. I don't know how to live and I don't know how to die. And here I am stuck in it. I got to find something. I'd have done anything. But there's also a part of me and probably always will be that's in a hole. See, I had healed up for a couple months. The alcoholic ego heals in about 33 seconds, I think.

If you put me in a place where there's doctors and books, I'm in heaven. I can read. I spent my whole life presenting symptoms. I love doctors, particularly head doctors. God bless them. I knew how they operated. I'd been getting dope from them for a long time. They would tell me what was wrong with me. They would tell me about how long it would take to get that much right. They would tell me all the different steps I would go through and I'd present them right on time to them. And in six months I'd have been out of there, cured of drug addiction.

And today I'd be locked away somewhere mad or I'd be dead and I know that. But because in my own sick way I'd surrendered, I truly believe that God entered into my life. If you've ever made a deal with the feds in the state, you know that when they say you go from here to there, that's what happens. They've got a lot of power and we made the deal. And they gave me this little old sentence and suspended it and turned me over to the federal people to take me away.

And five days later I'm in the Colorado State Penitentiary saying, wait a minute, this isn't the summer camp I signed up for. And I'm so grateful for that today. In His wisdom, God put me in the one place where I could hear what I had to hear to continue living. I believe if you're new here tonight at this convention this weekend, you're in exactly the right place, somebody here will say something. It'll get you through today and get you back here tomorrow for you to hear something that'll keep you coming back until you can finally hear what we're trying to say. And so there I am in the penitentiary not having the slightest idea that alcoholism is my problem. Laying in a cell one day and the guards called everybody downstairs: "We've got some guys here you will listen to.". They bring us down here's these three convicts, but they had told me I would listen to them and I did. And oh boy, what a day that was.

This guy got up and he said my name's Doc. And I'm an alcoholic and that means that I'm powerless over alcohol. And all of the other circumstances of my life and my life has become unmanageable. And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. Doc did what you do so well. He put the mirror of truth up in front of me. I couldn't deck it. And now you just three have random random fields. And then they mentioned to us that next Saturday you get out of the fish tank.

We would like you to come to Alcoholics Anonymous. We meet in the school they said. And Saturday came and I got to myself and I had taken enough care to put a little note in every one of our new cells reminding us that we'd come to school that day. Now to do that we had to give up the only important things that were going on in that place. Yard privileges and a movie. And that may not sound like much to you but when that's all you got and that's what we gave up to go to school. You couldn't go to the Friday-night AA meeting down there until you'd completed a five week 12 step study school. And it was important to go to that meeting because they let real people into that meeting from the outside. We weren't real.

And so I began my journey. Oh God. I didn't even know who I was or what I was. And we got in there and these nice gentle speaking sponsors said to us for the next five weeks you have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all you wouldn't be here. The mirror of truth went up again. All they loved us. They loved us. They gave up their movies too and their yard privileges and they gave up prison dignity. They gave up status in that prison to show up at that school every Saturday and Sunday and share with us their experience with this program.

I needed to identify first of all what the hell's wrong with me. Things don't start getting well until you know what's wrong.

I'd admitted something was and I listened to Bruce that first day. You see the first day was the first step and the second day was the second step. Then all the new fish worked in the dishroom. We had all week to talk to each other about what had gone on that weekend. But Bruce described a day and I understand Bruce was in the penitentiary for the rest of his natural life because one day in downtown Denver in a shootout he killed some people. I hadn't done that.

But he described that day. He woke up that morning knowing that nobody on this planet cared whether he lived or died. Well that hurts. And it upset him so much that he started to drink in order to kill the pain. Only that day it didn't kill the pain. It got him involved in the pain and the more he drank the angrier he got and then he went downtown and killed some people. I had awakened in the morning and knew that no one cared whether I lived or died.

And I did the same thing and did my own bizarre endings to that. I stood in the driveway of my dad's house one day with my two little children and knew nobody on this planet cared whether we lived or died. That hurts. So I identified with him. I had another sponsor, Dell remembers and we'll fill the terrace. If you were casting movies about Chinese pirates Phil would be the captain of the ship. He'd look mean. Phil was in the penitentiary because when Phil got drunk he liked to throw things out of windows. It was usually people.

And it didn't matter to Phil whether it was the first floor or the third floor. And Phil you, if you knew Phil you'd know I've never met anyone that loves his family any more than Phil the terrace did. And he'd stand there and he'd tell us I don't work this for my wife and my kids. I worked this for me. Without this program I have nothing for them. I throw them out of windows too. And Phil taught me to touch physically touch in a penitentiary which is a very risky business. But they shared about what they had experienced about being powerless.

And they helped me to understand that I am without power. That's my problem. I have always known that. That's one of the things that kept me scared all the time. I've known since I was little that if I ever succeeded at anything it was just pure dumb luck. I also knew that everybody around me would expect me to repeat that the next day and I didn't know how I'd done it the first time. I used to play a little football and I can remember a quarterback sneak that worked one time and it was nothing but air between me and the goal and it stunned me to the point where I had to stop and turn around to see what had happened. And they got me. And that's the story of my life. I had stopped to look and see if the train was coming and it was already there. And I began to think about this business of being powerless. In and of myself I am nothing. And I know that. I don't have what it takes to finish anything. I'm a sprinter not a long distance runner. And I know that. I have always known that. And there was a little piece of the puzzle. And then Bruce, God bless him. I talk a lot about Bruce because he he was my guide.

He's three weeks sober now and I'm sponsoring him because he didn't believe what he told me. But that doesn't matter. I did. That's all that counts. The Bruce and I talked one one day after the second step class about this business. I was really afraid because we're talking about sanity and insanity. And at that time I was classified

by the state prison board as a sociopath, type two, and a psychopath. And one of the reasons I was in the penitentiary instead of the hospital is because of that classification. You can't treat either one of those.

So they don't try. They don't bother. You have to have a conscience to treat one. One supposedly doesn't know the difference between right and wrong; the other knows the difference between right and wrong and just doesn't care. I knew the difference between right and wrong. I just didn't give a damn. And you can't treat that. And I had visions of having to spend the rest of my life on a psychiatrist's couch trying to unravel the madness that I had just spent 34 years trying to do and fail. And you all said, no, no. That is what we do here. Bruce told me the most important word in the second step for me was the word restore. He says, Don, you haven't always been a raving maniac. There was a time you were sane and God in his mercy will restore you to that point. And you get to start over. And that was confirmed by my bullshit sifter.

They used the word reborn. That means start over. He also gently said, we're not going to worry about when you went crazy. We will assume that happened about three seconds after you were born. Then we won't worry about tracking that down. And he said, you're not a psychopath. And you're not a sociopath. Although I can present the symptoms of either one of those with the drop of a drink. You get my back against the wall and see if I don't look like a psychopath. Get in my way and I'll kill you. At least that's what my eyes say. I didn't, I never did want to do that. They said there's nothing wrong with you except you suffer from alcoholic insanity, which in this book is defined so simply that even my sick mind can deal with it. You know, a story about a young fellow car salesman who was now working for the company that he used to own stopped into a bar for lunch one day. I figured well, hell, I've eaten and I've been in a little while. I can safely have a drink if I put it in my milk and did and promptly ended up back in another sanitarium somewhere.

And it says whatever the precise definition of the word, we call this plain insanity. Lack of proportion and the inability to think straight. God, that's me. If one works, take 10. I either had two or three jobs or none. I didn't drive a car. I drove a 49 mercury convertible maroon with leopard-skin seat covers. I walked and people had been telling me for years that I couldn't think straight. You see, I'm rubber minded. The piece that's missing in my head means that when the truth goes in, it gets bent by the gap. By the time it comes out, it's not the truth.

Bruce told me even the truth wouldn't work for me. And because it wouldn't, that he suggested, since my best thinking put me into penitentiary, that I better forget everything I think I know about anything, particularly about God. Because I had been on a spiritual search since I was born. Somehow I've known, deep within me, that my answer would be spiritual. But I'm a thief at heart. I've been trying to steal that for years. I was one of those early on that thought Timothy Leary had a genuine answer. And I had me some spiritual awakening, I can promise and I've been in and out of the river. And I've, well, we didn't get it all the way.

I've had some spiritual awakenings, no substance to them, but I've tried. If you're new here and you're concerned as you probably are as to whether or not you can work these steps correctly, let me set your mind at ease. You can't. It takes rigorous honesty and I've never met a new drunk that has even a little bit of that. I didn't. I did this whole thing for the wrong reason from the get-go and the joy of it is it worked anyway. I came here genuinely frightened because I didn't know the difference between right and wrong. I didn't know I was incapable of differentiating the truth from the false, which gave me another thing to identify with. It said neither did you.

And it talked about this honesty and I went to my sponsor and said I'm scared. I may be constitutionally incapable of being honest. And Phil says, well, I think you'll be all right. That's probably the first honest statement you've ever made. To take my Third Step-to give my life and will over to the care of God. But I had one last real hang-up, you know, dead at the core and still when it came to that final surrender, I had a hang-up. You gave me the good news that my life would not be worthless, that God had something important for me to do. That was not good news.

I knew that what He wanted me to do, if I gave my life to Him, was go to the corner of Colfax and Broadway and hand out watchtower magazines and ask perfect strangers have you been saved, brother. And I didn't want to do that. But I didn't want to live as I'd been living either. And came to a place where if that's what God has in mind for me, that's exactly what I'll do. And then I went to take my life to God and I said my prayer and I'm an alcoholic. I can handle anything that comes along as long as it goes boom shakes to it. I said that prayer and absolutely nothing happened. Nothing scary. And I had been there long enough to know that if your sponsor tells you you go do something and you go do it and you don't get the results you think you ought to be getting, go back to Adam. And I did. You know what his response to me was that I should be grateful that I didn't have a flash of light but they nearly killed me all my life. And then he did what the people of Alcoholics Anonymous do better than anybody else on this planet. Each one of us in this room has got a certain allotted amount of time and maybe that's it for this trip. And he took some of his precious time and gave it to me so that I could feel okay. He shared with me his spiritual experience. This is the man that had killed some people and I could listen to him because I could look in his eyes and know this man is not capable of killing anybody and he told me that's right. I have been changed and I want you all to know particularly you new folks. I did not stay with Alcoholics Anonymous to learn how to cope with life.

My coper broke years ago and the spare parts are out of out of style now. I came here to be changed and the promise of this program in this book and in my life experience is that we get to have an entire psychic change if that's what we want. And he had been changed and he talked to me about the God he had found that was gentle. He says, Don God knows you probably can't have one more big shock anyway. Not in the shape you're in. That God would reveal Himself to me as I revealed myself to Him and he sent me off to do an inventory and two and a half hours later when I was finished with it. I came back to him to do that Fifth Step and he looked me right in the eye and he said that's garbage. You wrote that to impress me. Get away from me. Now I was baffled again. Here's the guy who's just giving me all the love that there is and two and a half hours later he's treating me mean. I had risked being honest to be part of you and he told me it was garbage and so I ran off and found a fellow who would listen to my Fifth Step and he spent the next couple hours justifying my behavior to me telling me it wasn't all that bad because all I'd done was put down some of the bizarre things I had done and I had a genuine spiritual awakening as that took place because I became aware that once again I had picked somebody who would tell me what I wanted to hear so I could keep doing what I wanted to do and if I didn't stop doing that I was a dead cookie. Please understand that my definition of spiritual awakening is very simple. Anytime any alcoholic has any glimmering of truth that's a spiritual awakening and with that is the beginning.

I went back and searched myself to find out do I want this more than life itself and these were the simple promises that I was given early: Don if you will do this you can find a way to live that makes sense to you. That's a rather novel concept don't you think. I spent my whole life trying to make it make sense to you. I've never

considered that my life had to make sense to me and I can tell you today with great joy that there are vast numbers of people that my life doesn't make any sense to at all but it does make sense to me. Did I want to stop feeling useless?

Yeah, if I'm trapped in this damn thing I don't want to feel useless on top of that so I went back into this thing as perfectly as I knew how and I did what it said in this book if you're new here tonight let me caution you. If you don't want what we had then don't do these steps because if you do what this says we did you'll get what we got. In 1966 federal narcotics agents came to my house but they came through my house. They came through the front door and the back door and the side window knocked me to the floor and were being rude and my four-year-old son let out a shriek in this big cop put a gun to his head and almost shot him and I went past resentment at light speed and the hate and nursed that for a long time I nursed it all the way through the federal penitentiary and out you know how we alcoholics are got I had a marvelous scheme I wasted six months of my thought life scheming how I was going to get that one I won't tell you how because there's some new people here and they may still have those ideas it was marvelous when it came time to do that inventory all this book said I had to do is put down a list of all the people that I was mad at and he was there and that said I was supposed to put down why there were 22 reasons I was mad at him that's pretty egotistical one little bust and I got 22 things I'm mad at and then it said I was supposed to put down what that was affecting in my life will tell everything and it suggested that I take a new attitude toward this person and really genuinely see that he, like myself, was perhaps spiritually sick and I can agree with that sick people do that kind of thing, and I still hated him and then this magnificent thing got to me before I had the slightest idea we didn't get me and got me the next suggestion was that I set aside whatever wrongs he may have done and resolutely look for my mistakes and it burst upon me I've invited him to the house I gave him an engraved invitation I'd been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico and not paying the tax on it, and that made me his business that made me fair game for him and anybody like you and I began the path toward freedom my troubles truly are of my own making I cannot ever again say to anybody you did that to me I got me here I did it and I am convinced that before I could look at that I needed some grace and a sense that God was with me because the terrible guilt it would have come from knowing that I was responsible for almost killing my kid I'm gonna live with that but there's an interesting thing about this program there is no amen at the end of the Third Step prayer it comes at the end of the Seventh Step prayer which kind of indicates to me that from the time I make that first prayer until I'm through with all this the whole thing is one great big prayer and I'm in a state of grace and I believe that because that's how it happened for me I could look at that and say my God if that's how I'm behaving somebody else better run my life I went through a whole thing there I learned about fear I'd been living with fear all my life I was baffled about that too the guys I grew up with said you're not supposed to be afraid of anything and I was just plain afraid and I didn't know what I was afraid of so the suggestion was well let's make a list of things that you're afraid of we'll put some names on them and it got bizarre yeah I'm afraid of being alone then I'm afraid of being with people I'm afraid to talk I'm afraid you won't ask me to talk I'm afraid to feel anything because it's always been inappropriate I cry at hockey games and laugh at funerals things come over me and I don't know what to do with them desperately afraid of this there's a loony that lives in there a maniac scared to death of them because you can't think straight the main problem of the alcoholic centers in the mind I have a mind that's incapable at certain times of thinking straight enough to keep me out of trouble I have a set of emotions that we're on the way to do something we both want to do and you say to me we have to do this like hell we do I have the kind of a mind the kind of fear I'm talking about is the time

that comes over me at 8 10 in the morning when the alarm was set for 8 so I could get to work at 8 30 and I start thinking oh god I get up at 8 so I can miss the traffic and I'm gonna be caught in traffic by the time I get there I'm gonna be 20 minutes late and my supervisor is going to say, "Pritts, where the hell have you been?"

in such a tone that I will have to say, "It's none of your business." he will say it is my business I say you're sorry and I will say no you don't I quit and knowing that's what's going to happen I don't even get out of bed I go get done kind of fear that paralyzes me because I don't even know what I'm afraid of how can I deal with it it paralyzes me and the only relief I ever got was putting that booze or something else on it and then of course the day came when it didn't work it got me involved in the fear I learned about God's grace and mercy at this point do you know our poor neurotic brothers and sisters have to learn how to deal with fear God bless them they have to go through some horrible things and learn all kinds of techniques when they come up on fear all we have to do is to ask God to remove that fear and to direct our thinking and our attention to what He would have us be and it goes away I'd make that up first time I thought it was in the bullshit sifter and I tried it and it worked I tried it and it worked I no longer have any nameless fears every now and then I get scared I can tell you just exactly what I'm scared of and I immediately say whoops take this away and direct my thinking to what you want me to be and then I get on about my business as if he were going to do that and he does I was about two and a half years before I could do the sex inventory I in addition to the booze did an awful lot of speed in wire mine inhalers and LSD and it was a very confusing thing and when I got it done it fit on the back of that you are up here and I learned some more about mercy during that I generally couldn't face any of that and I just asked that it be dealt with and over that period of time I was healed of whatever was wrong there then I was able to do the work the way the book says and clear up those few indiscretions not a nice word this sounds like it was a big deal but that first inventory was a shabby little effort God for you new folks don't worry about it you see there wasn't a whole lot left here my memory didn't work too well man I came upon something that I'd finally done and I went off to take that Fifth Step what a day that was I picked the fella who had the same amount of sobriety I had because you had told me to find someone to share this with it wouldn't be overly effective and Jim was as crazy as I was nothing I could say Jim was in that penitentiary for a crime that he will never remember he was the first one in Colorado to be convicted of vehicular homicide he killed somebody in a blackout when he was drunk and I've always felt a deep sadness for Jim because he'll never know what he did all he knows is what the price was and I came to love him dearly Jim sat there one afternoon, as people are apt to do and he listened to me as I shared with him the failures of my life fears and the wretchedness and all of the stuff that I didn't want to be anymore so the joy of it is once we do that we don't have to be that anymore he goes away and somewhere in that afternoon a thing happened to me that I didn't understand at the time I just felt I stopped being alone I found you know why I was so alone my god on this planet there was me and whoever I needed you to be and that's who lived on this planet and that's the only thing that afternoon there became me and a fellow named Jim there were two people on the planet now and I haven't been alone since I would like to share with you if I can do without bond you can imagine how close Jim and I became and I got out before he did and one of the jobs I got when I got out was driving an old delivery truck and the only thing wrong with that job was that every afternoon after everybody else got to go home I had to take the packages that were going out on the bus up to the bus station and wait in line and I never knew when I'd get off work and that kind of rankled me a little bit but one afternoon when I was sitting in that line through the door walks a prison guard with Jim they're sending him back to Florida where he lived and for a brief moment with incredible odds against it he and I got a couple minutes together I know he's

okay and he knows I'm okay which was very important that we know and that's mercy well I finished with that fifth step and I went back to my cell and did what it said to do next which was to review that and see if I'd done a thorough job and I had another one of special things happened to me I was no longer a sprinter for the first time that I could remember I'd finished something to the very best of my ability that never happened before and once it came a certain inner assurance that that was a shabby effort and I had a lot of work to do but for the time being that was it I was done and I asked God to go ahead and run my life whatever he has in mind for me is better than anything I have in mind for me and that please don't let the things I haven't found yet kill me before I get to them. I found some yesterday afternoon I'm still here so he's still working apparently it was at this point that I began to be filled with evangelical fury it's no way I can describe it I got free, locked up for the night in the Colorado State Penitentiary and I've been free ever since my sponsor had sent me off to start working on the eighth and ninth step now his thought was this first of all the list started out with all the people that had hurt me and then I was to add anybody else I can thank you I wasn't on any of these other lists because he said you know if you met them, you harmed them somehow just take care of that but the key to this was this I knew what I had done to these people by now but he said you don't know what that did to them so what I want you to do is make that list out and then close your eyes at each name and picture that person in front of you and see if you can feel a willingness within you as you look them right in the eye to say to them I have caused you harm will you please tell me what I have to do to get the books to balance very risky and I got free this great lead weight had been taken from me but that night I was lifted as I realized that there is no one on this planet that I'm afraid to look in the eye and say, "I've harmed you. Tell me what I have to do" and we'll get straight one of my big problems that I was always either better than you were or worse than you were we never had a chance never had a chance well they wouldn't let me off to see you and I wouldn't let you in to see me and that's a good thing because man I was filled with the fury how to screw it up Bruce was never gonna get out of there and he had gotten through this so I asked him about that and he says well some of them we can write letters to them clear up and the rest of them with God's grace you're just gonna have to live with until you can get to see them that the key was in the willingness to do so not in the doing and so I made a list of people to write to and a list of people to go see and had him check it he said no no no no I think this person that you want to write a letter to you better wait and go see them and this guy you're so anxious to go see you can probably handle that with a letter disappointing to see my judgment so it is at the Eighth and Ninth Steps that I wish I had three hours to share with you because it was at this point that I have experienced what it means to be alive and to be a service to God most of those amends are simple but there's three of them that I talked about that weren't simple how do you make amends to mom that worries me just going to mom and saying I'm sorry mom I didn't mean to do that he's not gonna get it and it was a while after I got out before my mother would see me and the day came she would see me and I found a way not in those exact words to say what do I have to do the secret to using that method to make amends is that as soon as you say what do I have to do you shut up listen well they tell you she said honey all I've ever wanted was for you to be happy so on a regular basis to this day I go by my mother's house happy now or she believed this would not take but you know I had no reason to ever believe that she would ever ever be able to count on me again so that didn't matter I wasn't doing it for that reason we have a good time today my my mother graduated from college when she was 63 and she's a pistol she's a go-getter I quit trying to steal from my father quit trying to steal his ideas and his personality and his money and his time I robbed him a lot of time my dad and I just have fun today my father is an unmeasured genius lives in a 48 room house full of stuff and that's what his mind is made up of and I'm loving and his statement to me last week this is the man who said I could not come again was Don, you're as welcome

as the flowers in May. Back to the kids I damaged my kids I drove my kids in and out of crash pads and in and out of jails and in and out of foster homes I damaged my children and there is no way to fix that a dear friend of mine reminded me there's nothing I can ever do to change what I did to them all I can do is give them an arena or a place where they can get well to and give them the very best of what I am today we almost had to lock my older son up for some very serious problems and the day came when I could no longer help him and I had to tell him there's nothing more I can do we tried EKGs and EEGs and all that because he was getting bizarre and he was hurting people and I said Terry you're going to have to find your answer the same place I found mine inside and I asked him do you still believe in God and he said no dad I don't think so but because you do I will keep praying it's what you did hey that's what you gave me that I could take home to my kid because I couldn't help him a week later he came out of his dungeon and said let's check my eyes and that's what it was he had a weird eye condition that made it impossible for him-he saw the world in a distorted way hell I know about that we undistorted him and he joined the Air Force and went to Alaska and had two babies he's coming home in September to go to work with me and he hated me you gave me by giving me contact with God in the wisdom to know that I was powerless the strength to put my son out in the snow when it was 20 below and it may sound a little bizarre but if you're alcoholic you understand that I think he's one of us if he isn't he'll do till one shows up but he was destroying our home and as much as I loved him I discovered one day that for a year and a half I'd been saving him when I was killing him and that if I kept trying to fix that kid he was guaranteed to die by my efforts and I did the hardest thing I've ever had to do I said you have to go now not tomorrow now you have to go and he hated me and he went out in the snow when he slept in the snow that winter underneath some stairs at a condominium and God gave me the grace and the strength not to go see where he was sleeping you see with me he had one chance in the thousand of living with God he had unlimited odds and he's one of God's babies too now he's all right today he works with me he's running my business right now I hope but someday this tall blonde good looking kid who hadn't got very much smarts can walk through that door he'd just be kind to him and gave him the same message he gave me because he's no longer in my hands I have two little stepdaughters today God bless both of them they drive me crazy I love them dearly and I don't understand them at all but we communicate pretty good in my house because of you not well I was I can still remember the day was a honey six months ago they were yelling and screaming because that's what they do best and sometimes I knew that day I couldn't live with and I sent them to their rooms and I wasn't in good spiritual condition. Well, I slammed the door so I went out and took both doors off of hinges and took them to the basement I was faced with the fact that I had to go down to the basement and carry them damn doors back up I said one again a short while back I met a sane lady and was given whatever it takes to say yes I'll live with you and we're engaged upon the greatest adventure I've ever been part of I found out with her early but that wasn't enough this time it took more than that you see they came when I chose to die rather than live one more day as I was and somehow in this process I reached a place where I was willing to grow old and I found that I'm willing to grow old with her and man is that something we never try to fix each other she works pretty good anyhow and she puts up with things from me that I wouldn't put up with from me and it's a joy just a joy there came a time when I'd worked the Steps, so I was on a spiritual path my life made sense I had a job and a place to live was active in AA and it was a gap something was missing and I didn't have any idea what it was I work the Twelfth Step because I'm left the word obligation isn't right I don't have any choice I'm left with a sense of gratitude that will strangle me if I don't do something with it and so I go give it away as fast as I can and it was still something missing and you taught me early on when you find somebody who has had something that you want you hook on to them and you latch on you don't let go until you

find out what that is and how they got that and I met a fellow named Gary Brown who by the way is talking about her serenity I guess on the 4th of July don't miss him he's marvelous very unlikely fellow tall good-looking college educated you want to sell clothes you put them on Gary Brown let him walk around and people buy them and he had something I wanted and he was headed for an area assembly over in Montrose with his wife and daughter and I said I'm going with you he didn't have any choice he really didn't he hadn't planned on me but I wonder what he had he said he had GSR now I didn't know whether that was a condition or property that's what he had and so I went and I said I thought at that time everybody in AA had been sober forever and were saints and I sat in my first AA business meeting God was that something I went back to Bethel real quick they were fighting like they meant business over things that had no sense but that night at the restaurant these same people were sitting at a long table and I walked in and stood for a minute and I heard laughter laughter the kind of laughter I'd never heard before these people who that afternoon were ready to kill each other over meaningless stuff were laughing just because it was fun to laugh and because they were together and the jokes stunk and they laughed anyway and I can remember the urgency of the feeling wondering will I ever be part of that and one of the trusted servants got up from the table and came to me and invited me to sit with them and it was that easy I caught GSR on the spot and the gap the thing that was missing has been filled I owe this fellowship more than my life I have an obligation to the alcoholic that walks in that door 50 years from now when I'm dead and gone and the obligation is very simple but that person gets the exact same message that I got that made my life make sense and I'm responsible for that I'm responsible to make sure that I don't find anything fancy to fix this thing up with got to take a couple more minutes to give you what's excited me the last two years this thing is incredible it was put together by drunks you heard David talked about the struggle but once they got it right it was put into the hands of the rest of us now you put that anything that's written down in the hands of several million alcoholics and every one of them has got to say something like that would be just a little bit better if only and you know we haven't been able to change the word of it there must be some power there I'm thrilled to think of this thing here these two guys these two drunks who couldn't even get themselves walked up in the right place start doing something and they count noses on a regular basis and one night they're sitting in the kitchen and it turns out there's about 40 that news was so momentous that they decided we better write a book about that 400 million people on the planet 40 of them are doing something that works and we're going to write a book about them and we inherited that book and everybody that uses it the simple way it's meant to be used gets something done we belong to the first generation in recorded history where alcoholics do not have to die on alcoholic death that gives me the chills my research has taken me back as far as Noah oh that was a beauty God gave him kind of an important job to do and he argued about how much snake bite medicine he got to take and the first thing he did when he hit dry land was plant grapes as soon as they were ripe, stomped them into wine, got roaring drunk, and threw his whole family out of their home that is not social drinking from that day to this except for brief individual recoveries or brief movements alcoholics have died horrible deaths and their families have lived in horrible circumstances and I get to belong to the place where God sent the message that if you're alcoholic you do not ever have to drink again where we were given a way by which we could put our own lives back together and our families could get well and the dreams that were dead could come up again I owe something to that I belong to you I will do anything that you ask me to do because I know that everything you asked me to do is going to be vastly beyond my ability to do it and the minute I know I can't do it I call on my partner and I say all right you got me into this now you come with me and we'll go try it and I can't begin to describe the adventure I've had I just had the privilege of serving two years as Colorado's area delegate and I didn't want to do that I'm

not delegate material and I was afraid I'd screw this thing up I went to Mike Rainbow said Mike I'm afraid I'll screw this thing up he said, "Kid, there's nothing you could do" in two years to screw this thing up anyway just go have some fun and I did but the richness of this year can be summed up in my 10 year old daughter in making amends I've learned to listen to my children I used to live 120 miles away from Denver and once a week I had to go into town and I got thinking about what this was doing to my boys did it bother them and you know I lived the kind of life when I left there was no guarantee I was coming back or that if I did come back that there wouldn't be a whole bunch of freaks right behind me and I asked my boys that one day they were bothered and they said no we don't mind if you go but please tell us when you're coming back you see my children don't need any more surprises my young stepdaughters live in a city and their real father's a Denver detective and I hear things and they're not safe when I'm gone they don't feel good my 10 year old when I go out at night says where are you going dad and I can hear it in her voice and if I say I'm going to an AA meeting she just relaxes and walks away because I belong to AA my children know I'll be home tonight that's good enough reason for me to stay here until I'm old and gray there's times I get in their way and yell at them but they won't be around I'm going to close with a gift for you I can tell you that I love you and there's no way to ever convey that with the depth that I feel it but I can tell you how I see you I spent my whole life trying to find out who I was and I became like old Legion I was everybody I'd ever met read about, heard about, or seen oh god it was noisy and I tried to sort all that out and couldn't and I came to you and you told me that what we're going to do was like what had happened when the fellow first saw the statue of Michelangelo's David I don't know if you've seen it or not but it breathes and he was so awestruck that he went to Michelangelo and said how'd you do that said well I took this block of stone and I chipped away everything that didn't look like David that's what I got that's Alcoholics Anonymous for me, with God as the sculptor and you and these steps and what we do here is the chisel and me is a very willing block of stone one day at a time we're chipping away everything that doesn't look like Don and so far this is what we've got thank you