

Iowa Fall Conference

1986 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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Whoo! My name is Don, I'm an Alcoholic. After Fifi's visit I've forgotten what the hell I'm doing here. Don't tell my wife about that. I've been privileged to be at a number of these kind of functions and I must tell you I have never ever been treated as warmly or as well as I have this weekend. You're just a fantastic group of people so we're probably going to have a crying talk tonight. I'm all wound up. On December 26th of 1967, God gave me back my life as a free, clear gift and then He gave me Alcoholics Anonymous so that that gift might have some purpose and some dimension and some meaning and some joy. Because I didn't come to you all to get sober. I didn't know that's what I needed. In fact, I didn't come to you at all. You dug me out of a rat hole. I could sum up the difference in my life today very simply. There is no other place I'd rather be to not know.

There's no nights and nights here. And there are no other people that I'd rather be with than you. And there has never been born or ever will be born anyone I'd rather be than me and it just wasn't always like that. It's been a good part of my life trying to be anywhere but where I was, and I'm still not too fond of the people I ran around with. Although some of them are in this room. Every time I look to see who died, I'm just a good man. But I down was, I found a creep. Just couldn't find anybody home worth visiting with. And that's for I ever took a drink. Now alcohol solved that for me. I was three feet tall with a big wart on the end of my nose and I talked funny. And I walked funny. And I thought funny. And I took a drink of alcohol and I was six feet tall. And it was alright for me to be you or me to be me and you to be you for a while. And I became willing immediately to pay whatever price I had to pay to get that feeling out of each day. And alcohol is the thing that did that for me. I made an interesting discovery of the day. One of the reasons I drank in high school was because it made it possible for me to dance. I was not a good dancer. And I discovered not too long ago at an AA dance that the truth is, I'm not a good dancer. In fact, I don't even like to dance. I don't know where the boss is going to take us tonight. I'm killing time till he clicks in. I do know this. I'm here to talk to one person in this group.

That's why God sent me here. I hope the rest of you have an enjoyable time. I'm also acutely aware of the fact that I'm dealing with life and death here in this room tonight. Not that I'm going to save any lives, but I'm not here to talk about some Scout jamboree. It's life and death in this room. What we do here means the difference between life and death for people. It did for me. You found me in my third penitentiary. We'll get that out of the way early. I have to talk about penitentiaries not as a status, but because that's where I ended up. I was not a big time gangster. Don't get that idea. I remember one of my better burglaries. Mainly because it's the only one I can remember. I was off duty that night.

At the time, I was also a special police officer for the city of Denver. I was off duty that night and drunk. I took the easier, softer way. I went to a place I knew was empty. Three o'clock in the morning. I put on my black watch cap and my black pea coat and got on my bicycle and went off to burglarize this house. And wandered around for a couple hours in that house and left and forgot to take anything. So I wasn't a big-time gangster. At the time I was living in a chicken coop I had converted because it was cool to do that. And I believe today that what I was looking for in that house was whatever magic it was that made it possible for those people to live in a house and necessary for me to live in a chicken coop. And I didn't find it of course. Let me tell you about my last

week. And then we'll talk about what I came here to share with you. The last week of my life, Christmas week of 1967, that was the week that Don got a chance to see Don for exactly who he was. The images were gone. The excuses were gone. All the scripts were written and trashed. I was on federal parole for an indiscretion I'd committed in 1966. And my two little boys whose mother had left years before I raised two little boys in the midst of my sickness. For some ungodly reason they were back in my care again. And we lived in a \$40 a month basement apartment beneath a lady who had cats. It was my first understanding of obsession. She had cats. And that's the week that as I looked around I could see that her place was cleaner than mine was. And another piece of that false image that I carried around broke. The Christmas tree that we had was only an alcoholic would pick it out. Our ceiling was this high and the tree was this high. So it kind of drooped over at the top. And we had gotten that tree for a dollar that I'd found in the snow. And that struck me as not quite right. And under that tree I had managed to literally con this little place out of a pair of cowboy boots and a shirt so my boys would have at least one present. Fully intending to pay for them as soon as the welfare check came. If you ever turned down or patronize the merchandise smart out there on these Colfax very kind of people.

But my kids had wrapped up everything that was in the house that would wrap up in blue paper towels so I would have a good Christmas. And that broke another piece of me. But the killer came thank God Christmas day when the kids and I went down to my folks house so that they could spend the day with grandma and grandpa. And my dad met us at the door and he said I'm sorry. But your mother says I can't let you in anymore. She can't stand watching you die. For the first time in my life I saw what I'd been doing to my mom. And a great big hunk of me broke. And then dad snuck us in anyway. And I got to see clearly what I was doing to him. I'd been screaming out in my madness that nobody cares. Well he cared. He cared enough to jeopardize his own home that day.

And snuck us in anyway. And another piece broke. And I could see clearly what my lifestyle was doing to my kids. You know every time I got arrested, so did they, and they hadn't done anything. My boys were on the road with me for a long time. I'm one of those nutso's that came out of Berkeley in the 60s. Screaming where there's dope there's hope burned down city hall. And when you do that you have to be on the move a great deal. My kids thought that hitchhiking around the United States was a normal way of life. Until some damn fool told my older boy about a thing called school and he wanted to go. So we stopped. And the train hit me. I ended up in a federal penitentiary. And I saw what that had done to my kids. My dreams were dead. We all have fine dreams when we start and mine were dead. They were never going to happen. And the dreams that my people had for me were dead.

They were never going to happen. And the dreams of my little boys had were dead. And once I got past the self pity I made the discovery that there was no good reason for me to stay. Everybody that I could think of would be better off if I weren't here. And that was the truth. So I took a massive overdose of drugs and drank everything and finally lay down to die. And was really distressed the next morning when I woke up. The police were at the door. I had in that last week set myself up to be arrested. I was really tired and I needed to rest. And I had learned from experience that county jail is a magnificent place for drunks to rest. Now there are some people in this room unfortunately tonight who aren't through drinking. So let me tell you how you survive county jail because you'll get there. It's real easy. I lied to you for 10 minutes. You lied to me for 10 minutes and we both go take a nap. And that's it. Just remember you've got to listen to the other guys' lies and believe them. Well they

didn't come to me for that little six months in the county jail. They had nine charges. The first of which called for three years to life in the penitentiary.

And a promise from the Denver district attorney that if I beat him on that one that he was going to bring the rest of them one at a time. But I was through and I still had the question in my mind, hey, what's wrong with me? Nobody knew. Well I laid in the Denver county jail for five months waiting for a trial and doing what you're doing in the county jail which is kind of just hanging around lying to each other. And I can still remember that change had taken place. Because what we talked about what we were going to do when we got out. That's what you talk about. And it's always the same thing. We're going to get a keg of beer and a little grass and go into the mountains and we've earned this one. And I was still saying that but I can still remember that isn't what I wanted anymore. I didn't want to do that anymore and I did not know that it was possible for me to not do that. And I've got to tell you about the power of God as I understand him because God entered into my life before I knew his name. I met the basic requirement for recovery and alcoholics anonymous in my own sick way. I had surrendered. I had said within myself I would rather die than live one more day this way. And that's the beginnings. I can't do it anymore.

I don't even want to try. I thought I was tired. Well the Denver District Attorney and the Federal Authorities who owned a piece of me got together and decided that I was really sick. That's what they told me. And that if I would plead guilty to a reduced charge they'd give me back to the federal people and they could take me to Fort Worth Texas to a federal hospital down there and fix me. Now I'd been healing for five months and an alcoholic ego can go from death to reasonably good health in about a half hour. And my answer to them was based on two factors and there's always at least two of me at work in here. At least two. I had occasion a while back to work with a genuine schizophrenic and the poor guy was an amateur. These two guys got together and one side of me was wanting to go anywhere anybody said and do anything anybody said as long as they didn't ever have to be me ever again. And the other side of me knew that if you put me in a hospital with doctors and books I'll be on the street in six months. Because God bless them their job is to tell me what's wrong with me and about how long it's going to take to fix that.

And then they would tell me all of the symptoms I needed to present to convince everybody I was getting well. And I've done that since I was a little bitty kid. I'm awfully good at that game. I'd have been out. Well I said yes. My mother raised a drunk and not a dummy. Six months in a federal hospital beats the hell out of life in the penitentiary. And they kept their bargain. They reduced my charge, gave me back to the feds and five days later I was in the Colorado state penitentiary saying things like wait a minute you can't do this to me. I didn't sign up for this summer camp. And it's just by the grace of a very loving God that that happened to me.

I'd be dead today if I'd have gone to that federal hospital because we'd have treated the wrong problem. In our third week in the fish tank I'm laying there waiting for somebody to tell me what the hell to do. You know when you think about surrender that's what it's about. It's real simple. I look at it in terms of an army. When an army surrenders it means you've met a force over which you have no more power so you lay down all your fighting tools and sit by the side of the road until somebody comes along and tells you where to go. And I'd lay down all my fighting tools and I was laying around here waiting for somebody to tell me what to do.

And a guard hollered out all you new guys come downstairs and listen. And I didn't know any better so I

listened. They had three guys with numbers on their chests. And the first guy said my name's Doc and I'm an alcoholic and that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life and my life's become unmanageable. And if any 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. And I think the great miracle of my life is that I heard Doc. I don't remember a whole lot else about what they said that day except they did a remarkable thing. They invited all of us the day that we got out of the fish tank and into the main population to come to their 12 step study school. They said you guys aren't doing too good.

Your best thinking brought you to the penitentiary. That's not doing too good. And they told us that if we were alcoholic we didn't ever have to drink again ever. And we didn't have to hurt like we'd been hurting ever again that they had a way that they could show us that would change our lives. I came here to be changed. So and I hadn't been invited anywhere in a long time anyway. So I went to their silly school. Now that meant we had to give up our yard privileges and our movie. And that's all we had. They held those at the same time as a 12 step study school and a little sacrifice involved here. So my friend Jim and I we went to their school and I discovered sponsorship. They sat us down and said now you new guys for the next five weeks you have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all you wouldn't be here. The hell is that kind of say and I will be forever grateful because they did the thing for me that needed to be done.

Since I was little I've been asking what's wrong with me because I don't fit. I think funny. I feel funny. I make mistakes. I can't get where I'm supposed to be on time. What's wrong with me? Why when I have all these high ideals do I keep ending up in a gutter? And you told me exactly why and they told it in a way that I could understand it. I was in my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 because when I drank I can't find my way home.

And there's a federal law against getting lost when you're in the Navy. I had joined the Navy to save America from the communist menace and come home a hero. Oh I needed to be a hero when I was 17 awfully bad. And they kept giving me a 24 hour liberty expecting me to come back. And I went ashore fully expecting to come back because I loved the Navy. I really did. I got in at 17. War is exciting. Looks pretty dumb from where I'm at today but it was exciting then.

And I was drinking with the big guys. And I was on a ship when I was a radarman and it was exciting. And there are very few experiences in my life today that match standing on the bridge of a ship at night and watching the sea turn over and listening to the planet breathe. And I loved it. But I'd go ashore and I couldn't get back on time. I start to drink. That's what you did. And I'd be three minutes or ten minutes or an hour and a half or a day or two.

One time was 23 days and they were really mad. See when I went home to Long Beach they moved home to Korea. And I was in trouble. You told me why that happened to me. That happened to me because I have an allergy. I'm allergic to alcohol. And the symptom of my allergy if I were allergic to tomatoes and I ate tomatoes I'd break out with a rash and itch. The demonstration of my allergy is that when I put alcohol in my body I'd break out with a screaming-mimi itch for more alcohol.

And I do not have any choice in the matter. Once I take the first drink I've lost the power of choice. My body

changes and my mind changes and I become consumed with a need for another drink. And that must go on until whatever causes that doesn't cause it anymore. And I will always love you. Everybody was always able to tell me why does that happen. I come to you and you say it happens and we don't have the slightest idea why. We just know it happens.

On day 22 I was in Pershing Square in Los Angeles. Mooching drinks and quarters and meals and whatever I had to do. I could not go home. On day 23 the madness was not there. And I turned myself into the place like any other rational human being and went back to face the consequences of my act. And that's why that happened. And I came to understand that it only happens to alcoholics. It doesn't happen to anybody else.

And it happens to alcoholics every single time they take a drink. And they let me get just comfortable enough with that to be a little comfortable and then they hit me with a zinger. They said it's academic. If you never take a drink it'll never happen again. The main problem with me centers in my mind. I've got a mind that for whatever reason and you don't know that either can't seem to remember that that's what's going to happen next time.

There's a piece missing. My neighbor has that peace. My neighbor owns a bar and doesn't drink. And I was curious about that and got talking with him one day. Seems he did once. He drank and puked and quit. He didn't like what happened to him so he didn't do it anymore. He's able to learn from his experience. When it comes to alcohol I'm not. I could give you a two hour list of the reasons I drank and every one of them would be true.

I drank to feel good. I drank to stop feeling bad. I drank to be taller, shorter. I drank to be noticed. I drank to be invisible. But the horror of my life as an alcoholic is that most of the time I drank for no damn good reason at all. I'm obsessed with alcohol. I learned later I'm obsessed with me. Somewhere along the way I got the silly idea that I'm supposed to feel good all the time. I spent my whole life trying to do that. Well I'll tell you something. I'm 52 years old now. We're not really the state made me 17 when they locked me up so I'm younger than that.

But on my best day when I'm feeling my best my feet still hurt. So I'm never going to feel good all the time. Alcohol helped me to feel good to stop from feeling bad. It changed me and that's why I used it. It changed me. I've got a piece missing. I am convinced in my heart to this day. Almost 19 years sober that there will still come a day when all of the information stored in my head won't show up and keep me from taking a drink. So I'm powerless. I've got a body that will go mad if I give it alcohol and a mind that says let's have a drink. That's as powerless as I'm going to get. I've been afraid of my mind for a long time. In fact I went to my sponsor one time and said Bruce I'm terrified of this mind of mine. He says you have good reason to be. We don't trust a Don by himself anymore. I had an occasion several years ago that brought that home to me. I've believed it since you told me. But God gives me experiences that make sure that it's nailed down tight. I was working in an agency that got jobs for ex-cons and I was wearing a coat and tie. We were having lunch at Leos in Denver with some businessman. Really impressive stuff for a guy like me.

One of the fellows had discovered a new liqueur. Now I never heard of liqueur. It's green stuff and they put it into this funny looking little glass and there isn't enough in there to do anybody any good. But he was letting everybody taste it because it was new and all of my defenses came up. I'm not going to taste that and I know that. Everything that I learned here was there. When it came my turn I thought in courtesy I'd at least sniff it and as I was sniffing it it burst into my head that the difference between life and death for me would be the twitch of a

muscle. And it was that easy and then I watched God move my hand right on off and I don't sniff anymore. I'm fully aware that my life is in that delicate balance and I can't learn enough about Alcoholics Anonymous. I can't learn enough about alcoholism or life to keep that from happening.

I'm powerless over that. So I don't trust me to do it. I didn't turn my life over to the care of God because it was a neat thing to do. There wasn't anything else to do. Then we had to deal with insanity. And this was a problem for me because at the time I was certified by the state of Colorado as a sociopath type two. And the federal government had me certified as a psychopath. And the reason I was in that penitentiary was because they are both untreatable in the hospital, and they didn't want me. They're untreatable because one of those kinds of people doesn't know the difference between right and wrong. The other one knows and just doesn't give a damn. And I was both. And then you come along and with the good news that I now have a third terminal untreatable disease.

I was terrified because in 18 months they were going to let me out. I wasn't the least bit afraid of being in there. I knew how to live in there. They were going to let me out. And I knew from past experience there was nothing in that penitentiary that was going to change me. Working in the dishroom certainly wouldn't do that. Well, you took my concerns away from me. My sponsor said, Don, we don't think you're a sociopath or a psychopath. We think you're a good actor.

I used that. I learned when I was very young, a thing that some of my Indian ancestors knew. If you want to keep people away, just be a little bit nuts. Put me in a crisis and I go, and all but the stoutest of hearts disappeared. They told me what's wrong with me is that I suffer from alcoholic insanity, which is defined a couple of ways in our big book. The idea that somehow, someday, I'm going to beat the game. It's going to be different next time.

But the working definition for me came in the story of the young car salesman named Jim, who woke up a little angry one morning because he was now working for the company he used to own. He'd been drunk a number of times and had been Twelfth-Stepped and was now in the program, but he'd failed to enlarge his spiritual life. He just kind of showed up at meetings. And he had a few words with his boss and went off down the road and he stopped at a bar to have lunch and to find a customer for a car. He'd done this many times over. And after lunch, somebody inside there said, Jim, on a full stomach, we can have a drink of whiskey if we pour it in our milk. And that sounded like a good idea to him, so he did it. And it was so successful.

And he didn't go instantly crazy and tear the restaurant up that he had another. And that didn't do anything bad, so he had another. And he ended up back in a sanitarium. And the book says that whatever the precise definition may be, we call that plain insanity. How can such lack of proportion and the inability to think straight be anything else? That's what's wrong with me. I lack proportion and I lack the ability to think straight.

I love everything about Alcoholics Anonymous, but one thing. If I could, I would go to every place I've ever seen it and tear down the sign on the wall that says, think, think, think. Because I'm rubber-minded. My sponsor told me, Don, the truth, isn't even going to work for you. Because I put the truth in here and my ego catches it and said, oh, we can use that later. And by the time I get around to using it, it's warped.

So they gave me the key to freedom. They said, Don, we suggest that you forget everything you think you

know about anything, particularly spiritual matters. Because if anything that you thought you knew had worked, you wouldn't be here. And they said, if you ever have learned anything in your life, it'll still be the truth when we're all through with you. But for now, forget it. And by some form of God's grace, I was able to do that for a time.

In fact, this day, if I'm willing to argue with you and fight with you, it's my opinion. And I know it and it's warped. I never have to fight for the truth. The truth just kind of stands there and is the truth. But I do love a good battle. My sponsors had some things I wanted. I'm a very practical person. And there were a number of things they had. First of all, Bruce was in that penitentiary for the rest of his natural life for a double murder he'd committed one morning on the streets of Denver, when he was 17 years old. He described that day. He'd awakened that morning knowing that nobody cared whether he lived or died. That's how I felt. And that's very painful. And so he took his medicine, started drinking to kill the pain and that day it didn't work. It aggravated the pain. And he ended up going downtown in a rage and killing some people. Now, to the best of my knowledge, I've never done that. But I have wakened knowing nobody cared whether I lived or died. And the medicine didn't work. And I did my own bizarre stuff.

But Bruce was incapable of doing that act. And I knew that. I'm not blind. He couldn't kill people anymore. And I asked him about it. And he said, yes, I've been changed. That's why I'm here. I can be changed. My sponsor, Phil, was the most gentle human being I've ever met to this day. Now, Phil was in that penitentiary because when he was 17 years old and lived on Guam, he did what Phil did. And they said, either leave or we're going to lock you up. And several years later in Colorado, the state of Colorado said, you either go back to Guam or we're going to lock you up and Guam wouldn't have him. He had been there seven years sober. And I was his first person he'd ever sponsored. Now, what Phil did when Phil got drunk was throw things out of windows. And quite often it was people. And this last time it was three stories up.

Now, Phil and his quiet way looked at me and he said, Don, you will stay sober. And I lived on the fourth tier up. He said, I'm not losing my first one. Phil taught me to touch in an environment where physically touching is very deadly. But he taught me to touch. Now, I've never met a human being that loved his family anymore than Phil Gutierrez did. But he would tell me, I don't do this for them. I do this for me. Because if I don't, they don't have anything. And I learned how the most selfless activity in the world is to be done for me.

Now, that's just contradictory enough that my sick mind can grasp that. Well, Bruce had something else I wanted too. They let Bruce in and out of his cell anytime he wanted. And the reason I knew that is because when I was locked up, he used to wander by and stop and talk to me. And I've been locked up enough to know that that's the job you want to get, the one who lets you in and out whenever you want. It wasn't until later I found out he did that.

Bruce was Twelfth-Stepping the guys who couldn't get out. In our prison, they knew that over 75% of the people in there were there as a direct result of alcohol. And they believed in alcoholics anonymous. Because people from the outside for many years had been coming in and were respectable and got results. And they trusted alcoholics anonymous. Now, I decided I wanted what they had. So they told me God had done it and I figured, all right, what the hell?

If that's who you say it is, I really didn't care. I knew that I could have an entire psychic change, you said. And I'd read enough to know that this sounded exciting. So I went back to my cell and took my Third Step and had the worst experience of my entire life. I'm alcoholic. And if it goes boom and shakes the room, I can handle it. All the way from federal agents breaking down a house to God talking in visions. And I've had visions. What I can't handle is what happened that day. I said the prayer waited for my flash of light and absolutely nothing happened.

And I can't deal with that. I might as well not have said it. Well, I'd learn by then that if your sponsor suggests that you do something and you do it and you don't get the results you think you ought to be getting, go bitch at him. I did. His response to me was dummy. They gave me back my name. I'd been a number and they gave me a name, dummy. You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. Flashes of light have nearly killed you all your life. And he was right.

I've had some beauties. In case anybody's thinking about visions, they will work. I had the privilege of eating peyote with the Indians one time in a peyote ceremony. Very real thing. Had a real vision. Saw a great huge bird flying with no head on it and understood that that was me in my life, flying high going nowhere. And for four months living in the north woods of California, I stayed sober and clean. And then I got back to San Francisco and lost it. So if you're considering visions, they will work. They're good for four months of sobriety. But I'm here for the long haul.

I didn't come here for any more short term fixes. Whatever it is that we're doing here must last me the rest of my life. It must. So we talked. Bruce took a couple hours out of his life. Very precious time and gave them to me as he shared with me how God had come to him in a gentle slow way. And the gentleness of him convinced me that that's what God was about. Here were three examples in front of me of killers and stick up men and throwers out of windows who were gentle men. And they said God did that for them. So I figured it must be a gentle God then.

And I asked him in all earnestness, Bruce, how do I make this deal real? He said, well, Don, God will reveal Himself to you as you reveal yourself to Him. And I was sent off to take an inventory of myself. I didn't bother with the book. Two hours later when I'd finished it and came back to Fifth-Step it. This same patient man looked at my inventory and he said, that's garbage. You wrote that to impress me. Get away. Just blew my head away. I mean, I had written down some of the most bizarre things I'd ever done and he's telling me that's garbage. Well, I did what any good alcoholic does. I went and found a guy that would listen to it. And I had one of those spiritual awakenings. I'd tell him one of these things I had done and he would say it wasn't that bad.

And it was that bad. I was not a nice person. And after a while I awakened to the fact. That once again I had found somebody who would tell me what I wanted to hear so I could just keep on doing what I wanted to do. And if I didn't stop that immediately I was going to die a very ugly death. Now then as now death really doesn't bother me that much. I'm not afraid of it. I'm not eager for the process of dying. But I've died three times that I can recall. But an ugly death has meaning to me. It means that for some period of time before I die I must live a very ugly life and I can't stand the thought of that. So I went back and reviewed where I was at.

And we talked some more about this God business. And I had one last reservation. You'd think I'd have been

ready. But I had me a reservation that was a humdinger. You told me there was good news. God had work for me to do and I knew that wasn't good news at all because I knew what it was. If I really gave my life over to the care of God I'd end up on a corner of Colfax and Broadway in Denver handing out watchtower magazines and asking strangers if they'd been saved. And at that time I just couldn't see me doing that. So my sponsor took some more time with me. And he said the magic words. If you're new and your sponsor uses these words you're in trouble. He said let's talk about that. Which meant Don listens. Bruce talks. He said Don do you suppose that that fellow that's doing that, Don on Colfax and Broadway today had breakfast where he wanted to? And I said yeah I said well you didn't. He said do you suppose that guy that's handing out watchtower magazines picked out the clothes he's wearing to do that in? And I said probably he says you didn't.

Do you suppose when he's all through asking these perfect strangers if they've been saved that he gets to go home? And I knew who it was next because I didn't. And through this gentle process of beating my ego out again he brought me to the place where I stand before you tonight. And that's very simple. My program is based on the simple fact that anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I may have in mind for me. Period. And with that I went back to work. And I got a big book out and started doing what it said. Damn this process I've ever seen. I found out that the purpose of the inventory was not for me to find out who I was.

I knew who I was and killed him. It was to help me find out whose I was and that I was going to find out all the things that stood between me and God and between me and you. And all I had to do to start that process was make a list of the people I was mad at and God that was easy. If I knew you I didn't like you. And that I was to put down the reasons that I was mad at you. And that was easy too. That's what I thought about 24 hours a day. That was to put down what that was doing to my life.

And it was a mess. Let me tell you about one of them because it changed my life. In 1966 federal agents broke down my house. That's how they come. Unannounced and violently. One through the front door one through the back door and one through the side window. Knocked me to the ground, handcuffed me and were just mildly abusing me. They're not so tough. My little four-year-old let out a shriek and this big cop swung his gun around to his head and almost shot him just as a reflex action and I hated him. And I nursed that hate all through that federal penitentiary and after I got out. Well he was on my list. I guarantee you I was mad at him. I had 22 reasons I was mad at him. One lousy arrest. 22 reasons. He'd made a criminal out of me to start with.

You're not a criminal to your cop. Et cetera, et cetera. My self-esteem was shot. My sex life was gone. My personal relations, et cetera, et cetera. And I tried very hard to take the attitude our big book suggests to get rid of this. That this person like myself was perhaps spiritually sick and I agreed with that and I still hated him. Then I made a big mistake. I read the directions out of the big book and didn't think. I just did what it said.

It said I was to set aside whatever wrongs he may have done and resolutely look for my own mistakes and it burst on me again. I'd invited this clown into my house. I'd been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico in rather large amounts and not paying the tax on it and that made me fair game for him and anybody like him. I was his business and I recognized that everything that happened that day was my fault including my son almost getting killed. Now I'm very careful before I take new people through inventory. There's no way I could have lived with that knowledge had it not already been that I had a sense of the presence of God and that I had grasped the great promise of Alcoholics Anonymous and that was that whatever caused me to do that would be removed and I

didn't ever have to do that again. I couldn't have lived with it if I didn't know I don't have to do that again and I came to that belief because of you. I believed God could do that because he had done it for you but more importantly you said you would accept me as I was where I was at the very beginning and I knew you were flawed and if you could do that then this God could certainly do that so I had that sense of it and I just kind of went on from there. I learned about fear.

I thought fear lived down here in my tummy because that's where I felt it and I liked it. You know, talking about lack of proportion, fears for children give me a good dose of stark terror anytime really makes you feel alive and useful and quick. But I learned about the kind of fear that will kill me. I've just gotten up again and I think that's the worst damage I ever did to the people who loved me every time I got knocked down I got up again better off staying down but I've just gotten up again and I got a new job and everything's gonna be okay except that I forgot to set the alarm and I wake up 10 minutes late and it starts.

I'm gonna get caught in traffic and I'm gonna be 20 minutes late and I'm gonna walk in and my new boss is gonna say where have you been and I'm not gonna like the way he says it and I'm gonna say what do you care and he's gonna say well I care plenty I pay your salary and I'm gonna say no you don't I quit so I don't even get out of bed. I'm paralyzed and I start to drink at that son of a bitch and the way he treated me. The kind of fear that has caused me to walk six blocks around a little dog in the dark he went yep yep and within two steps it went it's a bullmastiff in the next bush and God put it on the planet to eat me so I walked six blocks around it kind of fear that kept me from ever engaging in anything real with people because I knew when you said hello I'd say something dumb and are we ever blessed here we live in a world filled with a variety of sick people and they all have to learn to cope with fear all the other techniques I've ever seen teach us how to cope with fear oh, my copier broke a long time ago the word cope in my dictionary which my sponsors made a second bible means to fight the good fight hell I'm all out of fight all I have to do in the fear situation this kind of fear is admit I've got it and ask myself why and admit the fact that the fear is there because I know beyond a shadow of a doubt I don't have the personal resources to deal with it I've known since I was little I don't have what it takes all by myself I just don't and it leaves me frightened because I know every now and then I'm going to accidentally do something right you're going to want me to repeat it the next day and I don't even know I did it the first time and what is our solution it's one filled with mercy it says all I need to do is ask God to remove the fear from me and direct my attention to what He would have me be what an incredible discovery it was to find out that I am not what I do I'm not the job I have and I'm not the car I drive and I'm not the clothes I wear I'm not what I do and so I can set all those phony images aside and when God's helped direct my attention to what He would have me be and that's scary you know what it says in the big book he wants us to be spearheads of his ever advancing creation damn that's heavy duty stuff for a drunk spearheads of his ever-advancing creation-right out in front which is where I like to be anyway he wants me to be a demonstration of his great love and his power and his way of life he wants me to be an example of what he can do man that's good stuff I came out of Berkeley that way because I never had been one who can quietly get up in the morning go to work I've got to have a cause well we've got one it's life and death I've been testing that fear prayer for a long time and it's never failed me please remove from me this fear and direct my attention to what you would have me be see in the third step I gave up my ambition whatever he wants me to be that's what I'll be whatever he's got in mind is better than what I had in mind so when I get to having ambitions personal ambitions I know automatically I'm off track here and the terror of that is that if I get off track on a spiritual path and start getting selfish I get what I want and I usually find myself in

deep trouble because I don't know how to handle it I've learned some tough lessons praying for the things I want and getting them I just didn't pray for what He wants for me that's good enough well I was two and a half years before I could take a sex inventory I couldn't remember in addition to a lot of booze I did a lot of acid and wine mining haters and amphetamines and uh man I don't mess you up when I finally took it it fit on the back of a three- by-five card I was not super stud my whole sex life except for those two kids was up here but a marvelous thing happened in that two year two and a half years I had been healed then I could look at it honestly well I took that thing and I wasn't going back to that sponsor and risking him telling me that's garbage too so I went with my friend Jim who was in the program the same length of time I had been and he spent a whole afternoon with me sharing with me and I picked Jim for a couple reasons you said find somebody who won't be overly affected and Jim was that crazy; nothing I could have said would have bothered him but I had a new sense of something with Jim I was a loner but I wanted things to be okay for Jim see I was in that penitentiary for a crime I could remember I'd committed it Jim was the first one in Colorado convicted under our new drunk driving law he'd killed somebody driving his automobile drunk in a blackout they told him why he was there but Jim had no memory of it he didn't know why he was there he was a little baffled and I wanted things to be better for Jim and somewhere I picked up what you taught me the best way for me to make life better for another drunk is to share the garbage of my life with him not the neat stuff garbage so I shared my garbage with Jim that day and he listened. He didn't talk back to me or tell me it wasn't that bad because we weren't dealing with what was good and bad we were dealing with what's wrong with me and he only talked enough to keep me moving and two marvelous things that happened that day I can tell you about them today I experienced things that day and understood them six or eight weeks later but something changed that day I stopped being a sprinter in the game of life I had finally finished something to the best of my ability and I stopped being alone because I went into the room with the fella I needed and somewhere that afternoon we ended up with two people me and a fellow named Jim you see up till that point I'd been alone because it was me and whoever I needed you to be none of you were ever real and that day Jim was there with me and I've never been alone since I wish I had time to tell you the rest of the story about Jim it's magnificent maybe over the coffee tables we can share that then I entered my evangelistic stage I went back to my cell and reviewed it and realized I had a lifetime of work to do but I was done and asked God to remove this stuff but don't let the stuff I haven't found yet kill me before I find it and I'm still here and I found some more last week shabby stuff now rape and murder that status I yelled at a kid a couple weeks ago and I asked myself why did I do that first of all it's dumb and everybody who has kids knows it's a minute you yelled at them you've lost and it's not necessary for me to yell at children but I do when they threaten me and I found that drives my little girls nuts because the minute I make that mistake I go do some inventory and praying and talking to my sponsor and they can't push that button anymore the Eighth and Ninth Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are the most blessed thing I've ever encountered I know God forgave me from the beginning of time but I am so constituted that I must pay for my ticket I must do that and we're told that that's also a must if I don't do that I'll probably die they wouldn't let me out to make amends and they wouldn't let you in so I had to learn to write letters to some people I'd owed one place a dollar and fifty cents for Christmas tree lights we got on credit that same day I made ten cents a day I had to buy all my personal things out of that and I had to write this guy a letter telling who I was where I was and what I'd done to him and would he take a quarter a month until I could pay it off and for a big-time hoodlum that's demeaning it he said yes the most important amends in my life were to my family I get frustrated standing here because I've been walking hand in hand with God for 18 some years and that means each day has been filled with marvelous experiences and miracles and I

want to tell you about them all we're gonna have to just get together but I do need to share with you the things that I found about my family my sponsor sent me to my cell and said the key to freedom is willingness and he said here's what I want you to do make a list of all the people you've harmed start with a list of people that hurt you the most and then he said, for you, Don, just add anybody can think of because if you met him you messed with him he said you know you will find what you did to some of these people you know what you did to some of them but he said you're so insensitive that you have no idea what it did to them so here's what he had me do he said I want you to make the list and then picture each one of them separately and see if you can feel wanting to look them right in the eye and say to each one of them I've been wrong I harmed you would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get the books to balance and I started going over my list that night and I was lifted and set free locked away for the night I was literally lifted and set free because I'll look anybody in the eye and say that if I hurt you you tell me what I have to do and that was so important in making amends to my family you see I couldn't go back to my mother and just say geez mom I wish I hadn't done that what you do after you ask what do I have to do is shut up while I tell you and after I'd been out for a while my mother allowed me to come by the house and I didn't say it in exactly those words but I found a way to ask her and I have become in Alcoholics Anonymous, a listener she said honey all I've ever wanted for you is for you to be happy so on a regular basis I go by my mother's house happy that's it she told me it was six years before she thought I was really gonna make it I wasn't going by to convince her of anything my father's an incredible human being he used to make me crazy they haven't been able to measure his IQ yet he's brilliant lives in a 48 room house full of stuff then it's a reflection of his mind he's an electronics engineer and a consultant and a genius and I don't know what all he can do he told me one day in the driveway he said Don I spent 60 years accumulating all this stuff and I'm gonna spend the rest of my life giving it away and I heard what he really said he wasn't talking about the stuff in the garage he's talking about this so I go by and visit with my dad quite often which means I listen well he talks about all the things that he's discovering his life and every now and then I even understand it he gave me one the other day I'll give you because it's a gem he said I'm 75 now and I finally learned there's really only two things a person needs to live a good life honor and wisdom you say you got to have enough honor to keep every promise you ever make no matter what the personal consequences enough wisdom not to make too many promises like that I'm just about out of time and it just frustrates me beyond belief because it finally reached the place where I may have something important to say but if you'll indulge me another five minutes or so I'll be brief because there's some really important things I need to share with you Then nine years ago I met a sane lady I'd never met one I'd never even looked for one I didn't even know they were out there I had enough smarts to say yes to move in with her and her two little girls and as much as I love this lady I've already raised seven kids I've been after Dan Byrne for a long time and I thought I'd done my fair share and I really wasn't sure I wanted to do that I worked in the penitentiary now I lived at the base of Mount Princeton at 14,000 foot peak in the high country of Colorado worked six hours a day had those two long-haired kids of mine who are now teenagers I worked six hours a day and went fishing I felt like it we loved it I went into Denver once a week for my home group and I loved it and I didn't want to give it up but I did and I'm so glad I did that you taught me about being in a family you taught me how to recover through the 12 steps of alcoholics anonymous and how to live as a family through the 12 traditions and we apply that in my home that's how we live and these little girls are something one's 15, one's 13 now and they send their love to you particularly the little one she loves you dearly you see when I go out of the house she's a little nervous her daddy's a Denver detective and he has some bizarre need to tell them what he does for a living so when I leave at night they're a little frightened and when I'm gone over the weekends

they're a little frightened and I'm gone a lot because you asked me to work for you and she'll ask me where are you going dad and I say honey I'm going to alcoholics anonymous and I watch her relax because she knows if I'm here with you doing God's work he's watching my house for me I've told her that she believes that she'd have been with us today we came home found out we'd been burglarized we asked burglars don't like that my older girl says my god what am I gonna tell the kids in school I've been telling them god watches our house and because of what I know here I was able to say to her honey he did we weren't here all they got was our stuff; we didn't get hurt we're gonna have a garage sale anyway you have given me some of the greatest joy in my life I was absolutely useless and that was a fact and you've trusted me with some jobs that are incredibly important to alcoholics anonymous you let me have the key to the meeting room one time probably the most important job in AA the guy with the key doesn't show up how are we gonna have a meeting you allowed me to make coffee and I make awful coffee I've only held that job once I caught a bad case of GSR a while back my sponsor had something I wanted and I found out he was in service and it filled the last piece of me the piece that was missing I not only owe my life to the next person that walks in the door I owe my life and dedicate my life to the person who comes through the door when I'm dead and gone 50 years from now this thing must still be here if God so chooses it must be here so I have a stewardship I'm a caretaker I'm currently serving you as trustee at large on your general service board which just absolutely blows me away I finally worked my way to the bottom in our structure that's where it is I can't do a damn thing unless you ask me to That's marvelous, but as a result of that I'm gone a lot and I worry about my kids well my daughter my young daughter a few months ago had occasion to write a theme about her dad and she picked me. She wrote eight pages of some of the neatest stuff I've ever written I mean I was glad to know me that day but her final paragraph rocked me where I lived she said if I'd had any choice I'd have picked Don for my dad but I didn't have any choice so God picked him and brought him to me and I wondered at the emotion that I felt why I felt so deeply about that until I understood that's how I feel about you but if I had any choice at all I'd have picked you but I didn't have any choice so God picked you and brought you to me and you have made my life worth something it no longer is any question in my mind that I don't belong here I belong here I came to you willing eager to die and because of what I have learned and experienced here I'm willing to live just as long as he wants whether my feet hurt or not I'm also willing if it should be his will when I leave this room tonight that this is it I go with a full heart there's nothing more I could do and yet on the airplane up here I had made a list of 22 things I want to do in the next couple months next Friday on your behalf I'm going to Guatemala alcoholics anonymous is alive and well in 114 countries and 27 of them are sending delegates to Guatemala next week so we can all share experience on how better to carry this message anywhere it seems that we translate real good this message is understood by people of all cultures and all mindsets and they're getting well all over the world and I get to go sit in the middle of that I couldn't earn it I couldn't have planned it I'll guarantee you from reading the newspapers the last place I'd pick to go next week is Guatemala but on your behalf I'm going and I sincerely hope when I come back that somebody will ask me to tell you about it because I know it's gonna happen to me I'm gonna come back just as I am now unable to keep my big mouth shut I must tell you about it let's spend some time at the tables because I'm not through yet I want to hear you and I have a number of things I'd like to share with you in love but I'm all done for tonight I want to give you a gift it's my personal gift came to me as I came out of meditation one time my meditations are simple they have to be I go to a garden with my father I just kind of sit there and he walks with me he talks with me he tells me on his own and I used to take my burdens into the garden with me and I've learned not to do that I leave them outside the garden I just go in and generally when I come back out I've either got enough sense to just let

them lay or I have the strength to pick them up I'm going to do something about them and as I came out one day I didn't have anything left to carry and this thing burst on me I had become everybody I had ever met or ever read about or seen in a movie and I was gonna have to spend the rest of my life sorting that out I'd already failed to do that and you told me no, that isn't how we do it here what we do is kind of like the fellow who had seen the statue of David by Michelangelo for the first time I don't know if you've seen it but it breathes and he was awestruck when he went to Michelangelo and he said how in the world did you do that Michelangelo said well I took a block of marble and I chipped away everything that didn't look like David and that's what I got and that's how I see Alcoholics Anonymous with God as the sculptor and all the funny little things we do here as the chisel and with me as 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 very much