

Reno Spring Festival

1986 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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Who I'd like to introduce Don P of Aurora, Colorado. My name is Don, I'm an alcoholic. And I want to thank you all for letting me be with you this morning. I've been out here so often I wonder why the hell anybody would ask me to come back again. I need to set a couple things straight before we get started. Friday night your chairman told you that he was a member of our group which meets on Tuesday night and was the best group in the United States. You need to know that I am from our group which meets on Tuesday night in Aurora, Colorado. And it's such a good group that they still aren't aiming format in time. I'm sure glad you reread that if God removed all of the defects of character this morning we'd all have to go home. I have been forever more changed by this weekend. So we may be in for crying time. This morning. The only reason I came to Alcoholics Anonymous was to be changed. And I have been forever more changed by some things I heard this weekend.

I had five tapes of these deals. I bought the entire package. I want everybody out over here this weekend. I never really know how to get cooking on this thing because since December 26th of 1967 I've been walking with you and with God. And that means each and every day of my life since then it has been filled with really interesting experiences. And how do you sort those out? And I'm so glad to have seen the new people with you.

I'm here because you are my direction. You're why I'm here. I'm here to talk to one person in this group today. I've got a message for you. If the rest of you enjoy it, that's neat. But I'm here for one person and one person only. Plus myself. Alcoholics Anonymous is my life. It operates in my home. It operates in my business. Alcoholics Anonymous is my life. I need to thank you. You for last night. See, I perceive a very definite difference between the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and the recovery program that God gave us within that fellowship. Fellowship won't keep me alive without it. I'm dead. But fellowship alone won't keep me alive. I mean, the reason I know that is I see a lot of people come here and then go die. Just going to meetings by itself will not keep me alive. I go to a lot of meetings.

But I've seen a lot of people come to meetings and then go out and drink again. So apparently that isn't the magic. Goodness X, new people. Go to every meeting you can get to. I don't even think reading the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous would keep me sober. And that's all I did. I sponsor people who have whiskey glass stains on their big books. They sat home, drank and read the damn thing. But all of those things put together lead me to the power that does keep me sober.

In my fifth year of sobriety, I found it necessary to break my dependency on Alcoholics Anonymous. And now I belong to you, all of me. I need you more today since I stopped being dependent on you than I ever did. And that makes sense to me and probably the most people in this room. Alcoholics Anonymous answered the question that lived with me from the time I was a little kid. What's wrong with me? I've always known there was something wrong with me. I didn't feel like the other guy said they felt. I didn't think like the other guys said they thought. I discovered later most everybody I ever met lied to me. But I really thought I was the only one that had the feelings that I had and thought the way that I thought.

I was raised on the streets of East Denver. You're not supposed to be afraid there. And I was afraid all the

time. I woke up every morning in my life with a certain unsure knowledge that something is about to happen. And when it does, you're going to blame me for it. And I began to live my life in such a way that I got blamed for whatever happened. I can remember in the afraid ground in San Diego when I joined the Navy.

We were all thousand of us standing on parade one day in our pretty white uniforms and a new event took place. My company commander was talking to the company commander next door and they'd never done that before. So I knew somebody was in trouble. And I know who it was. I hadn't done anything. Everybody's looking straight ahead. I look to see what they were doing. And when you're only one of a thousand people, it moves across attention to you. And I caught the heat.

Hell, I was two years sober before I understood I didn't personally start World War II. The best picture I can give you of me was that I felt like I was three feet tall with a big wart on the end of my nose. And I talked funny. And I thought funny. And I felt displaced. I knew deep within me that if I ever really succeeded in anything, it was a dumb accident. And I was terrified most of the time because if I ever did anything right, I knew you'd ask me to do it again the next day.

But I didn't know how I'd done it the first time. I played a little football when I was younger. And I still recall the quarterback sneak that worked. There was nothing between me and the goalpost but air. And that stunned me and I stopped and looked to see what the hell happened. That's what I brought into active alcoholism. The night came, I drank. And my wort went away. I didn't talk funny anymore. And there was a guy at Bill Bonses Drive-In I was going to go back and whip.

And it was a girl I had no intentions of whipping. But before I could get back there, because of my nature, which is, if one works, you take ten. I nearly died of alcohol poisoning. I drank too much. I drank completely out of control from day one. I am very fortunate. I don't have to debate my drinking. From the very first, if I take a drink, I will take more. And there is not enough on this planet to suit me. Now I nearly died that night. And a regular normal person like my next-door neighbor who had puked as much as I puked that night would quit.

What I did was find out what wouldn't make me puke. Alcohol made it possible for me to feel things that I couldn't feel any other way. It made it possible for me to stop feeling things I couldn't tolerate. It gave me the illusion that this marvelous head of mine was working well. I drank for the effect produced by alcohol. And when alcohol all by itself stopped working, meaning it stopped giving me the precise effect I needed, I added other things to it over the years.

In an effort to control how I felt and my thoughts and madness. Let's take a walk through my early recovery, because that's the only real message I've got. Christmas week of 1967 was the worst week of my entire life, and I've had some bad news. But this was the week that Don got to look at Don for exactly who he was, and the blinders were gone. My dreams were dead, and my people's dreams were dead. I was not going to be the lawyer we all thought he was going to be, or any of the other things we all thought I was going to be.

There was no chance now. I was on federal parole for a little indiscretion I committed in 1966. I weighed 133 pounds, and I didn't feel good. This is the week that I got to see some things, and I'll share a couple of them with you, because I am convinced that because of my ego, had I not been beaten absolutely to death, I would not be here. I had two little boys that had been in and out of foster homes and in and out of jails with me, and for some

ungodly reason they were still letting them live with me.

We lived in a \$40 a month basement apartment beneath an old lady who had cats, and I mean she had cats. Her place was cleaner than mine was, and I saw it that way. A little piece of my image of me died. I'm an alcoholic who happens to have used an awful lot of drugs along the way, but I'm an alcoholic. But I've never used heroin, because of my keen alcoholic mind. They showed us the movie about junkies when I was in junior high school, and it was such an ugly picture I vowed then, I'm never going to be there.

Now junkies are heroin addicts in this mind. I put everything else I could get in a needle in my arm, but I avoided heroin. But I woke up from where I'd been one morning during that week, and I nudged the guy next to me. I said, my God, we've got to get out of here. This is a junkie pad. This is my house. Another piece of my illusion broke. Now for you fellows who may not be through you, Edgar Gal, and share a couple of survival things with you.

There is money laying in the streets of America. There's not much, but if you walk around with your head down all the time, you'll find up on six cents last week. Christmas day we found a dollar in the snow. On Christmas day any Christmas tree in the country will sell you any tree they've got for a dollar. And we bought the big one. Now the room was this high and the tree was this high, so it had to tilt. And something about that cracked another piece on the inside.

That didn't seem quite right. And the kids had decorated it with all the junk in the house, because it's all we had with Johnny. And they broke a piece of me. There's a young kid that I was using as a runner who, for reasons none of us have ever understood, stole a whole case of those blue towels you wipe your windshields with and brought them back one morning. I hadn't thought it was still good yet. My children had wrapped up everything that would fit in paper towels and put it under the tree for me, so I'd have a good Christmas.

Another piece broke. I'd managed to talk to Public Merchandise Mart, in East Denver out of a little pair of cowboy boots and a shirt. On credit, I didn't have any money. Fully intending to pay for it, as soon as a welfare check got there. So they'd have a little Christmas. Another piece broke. But the killer came, thank God, when we went down to my folks' place, so the kids could spend part of Christmas day with Grandma and Grandpa.

My father 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. And I finally, for the first time in my life saw what I'd done to my mother, clearly and cleanly, in a piece of me died. And then Dad snuck us in anyway. And I had to face what I had been doing to him. I used to say I'm not hurting anybody but me. He risked his own happiness that day, because he loved us and I used to say nobody cared.

And I had to see what I'd been doing to my children. And clearly and cleanly I saw that. That's a hell of a way to treat him. Knocked them around the country. My kids thought that was normal. They thought everybody hitchhiked around the United States and slept in crash pads. Because everybody we knew did. Until I met a real rat one day, told my six-year-old about school. And we had to stop so he could go and the police got me.

The train hit me. I went home after the first clear, honest, clean inventory of my life. Where I looked at Don for who he was and can find no reason to stay on his planet. There were no more redeeming qualities.

Everybody, including my kids, would be better off if I was dead. And I did the one thing that every alcoholic must do before this thing would work. In my own sick way I surrendered, I quit. I said I can't do this anymore.

Now, in my sickness, I only knew one way to quit. I took a two-month supply of the drugs that were on hand and drank everything I could find in the house. And I lay down to die. I got to tell you, the next morning was a terrible disappointment to me. I really didn't feel good, and the police were at the door. During that last week, in some kind of desperation, I'd set myself up to be arrested. And they came. But they weren't there for the reason I set it up.

I just wanted six months in the county jail. And for somebody in my condition, that's summer camp. If you guys aren't through yet, let me tell you how to get by the county jail. The rules are real simple. I lied to you for ten minutes. You lied to me for ten minutes, and then we both go take a nap, and that's it. That'll get you through county jail. What they came at me with were nine charges. One of them calling for three years to life in the penitentiary.

And I had a promise from the district attorney that he'd bring the rest of them one at a time if I beat him on that one, but I was through. I was finished. And I really didn't care. I brought you only one thing. The willingness to go anywhere and do anything anybody said. If it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. That's what I brought you. I'll tell you why I didn't feel good. I was a complete failure at living, and a complete failure at dying.

And what are the options? Okay. I'd killed it, and it was still walking around. Bring me. So when you found me, you found me in a state of true surrender. I needed a lifetime answer, not a quick fix. Partial answers were not good enough anymore. Hell, I've had partial answers, including spiritual awakenings and visions. Oh, I had a vision once. I had the privilege, the real privilege of sharing the peyote ceremony with the Indians.

And I had a genuine vision. I saw a great bird flying with no head. And I understood that that was me and my life. Flying high, no direction going nowhere. And for four months, that kept me from drinking or doing anything else. So if you're considering visions, they will work for four months. But I need a lifetime answer. I'm stuck in this body. I can't get out. Now I have to talk a little about penitentiary because that's where it happened for me.

But please don't think that I'm a big-time gangster because I'm not. Big-time gangsters don't even get there once and I've been in three of them. However, God entered into my life during the court proceedings? I've laid in jail for five months awaiting a trial. And they really had me. But they didn't want the expense of the trial. So they had made a deal with the federal people. That if I would plead guilty to a reduced charge, then give me back to the feds and send me to Fort Worth to the federal hospital down here and fix me.

We did not know what was wrong with me when I got here. Nobody did. But I'm not a dummy. Six months in a federal hospital is better than life in the penitentiary. Because in the hospital, they'll give me books. And I love doctors, but God bless them. When they deal with us, they make a mistake. They would tell me what was wrong with me. And about how long it was going to take to fix that. And then they would tell me all the symptoms I would have to present along the way to convince them.

And I was getting better. And I've done that since I was a little-bitty kid. I'm good at that. So one side of me said yes to their offer based on pure self-interest. And the other side of me said yes because I was wanting to go

anywhere anybody said. So I didn't have to be me anymore. And the power of God went to work in my life. If you don't think about power, you know when the feds and the state get together and say you go from here to there, that's exactly what happens.

And they kept their end of the deal. They gave me a reduced charge and turned me back to federal people. And five days later, I was in the Colorado State Penitentiary saying things like, wait a minute. You can't do this to me. And I am so grateful for that. Had I gone to Fort Worth and been fixed. I would probably be dead or locked on the back wards somewhere today because we had fixed the wrong thing. I had surrendered, so God entered my life and went to work.

And that's all it took. I didn't know his name. I had surrendered to anything, to nothing. And he went to work. And in our third week in the fish tank, they sent these three guys over with numbers on their chest to talk to us from Alcoholics Anonymous because over 70% of the people in any penitentiary in this country are there as a direct result of alcohol. And I do remember that day. Doc got up and he said, my name is Doc, and I'm an alcoholic.

And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and people and all of the circumstances in 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. And the great miracle was that I heard him. I heard him. I don't remember much else about that day except for a little bitty thing.

And I hope we never forget this. I was now 38984 and I went where they told me. When they told me. These people invited us to come join them on Saturday. It's been a long time since I've been invited anywhere. They said, if you are an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again, ever. You don't ever have to hurt the way you've been hurting ever again. I didn't know that. Nobody had ever told me that before. A lot of people have said, can't you see what you're doing to your life?

Yeah. Can't you see what you're doing to your kids? Oh yeah. That's enough to make you drink. Nobody ever said I didn't have to do that. They told us that we could learn to live a way of life that would make sense to me. Now there was a novel idea. I have always tried to live my life so it made sense to you. And they're telling me I can learn to live so it makes sense to me. That's interesting. The requirement for membership in my initial home group, the new life group in the Colorado State Penitentiary, was a little more than just a desire to stop drinking.

They had a big meeting on Friday night where they let real people in from the outside. And you couldn't get to that meeting until you had completed five weekends of the 12-step study school. We gave up our movies and our yard privileges for five weekends. And after lunch, went up to the 12-step study school. Jim and I went. They left a little reminder on our bunks. And we went. And I met sponsorship. Loving kind, gentle sponsor.

The very first words they said was, you new guys for the next five weeks you have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. Your very best thinking put you in the penitentiary. You ain't doing so good. Now new people have to talk, but not in the 12-step study school. We all worked in the dishroom. So we had eight hours a day where we would just be all the time. They let the sick ones talk to the sick ones.

But the well ones talk to us. God bless them. They gave me information that I needed that I could relate to

my life that put me on the track of recovery. I'm powerless over alcohol. They told me exactly what that means. I suffer from a disease that is mental, physical, and spiritual in nature. And we will not treat the mental and we will not treat the physical. We will treat the spiritual malady and the other two will straighten out.

New concept. They told me well first of all, they answered why I was in my first penitentiary when I was 19 years old. I went to prison the first time because when I start drinking I get lost. I can't find my way home. And there's a federal law against getting lost if you're in the Navy. And I was baffled. I got I loved the Navy. I really did. The Navy had been my escape out of Denver when I was 17. Denver got too small for me.

I got to drink with the big guys. At 17 and 18 war was exciting. I got to tell you today, it looks really dumb. But then it was exciting. And I was on a destroyer in Korea and we shot cows and stuff. And yeah, we were destroying the communist food supply. I was in challenging work. I was a radar man and a radio man. I just loved the Navy. There is to this day no experience quite like standing on the bridge of a ship at night.

I'm watching the planet breathe as the Earth turns the water turns over. You can feel it breathing. But I couldn't get back to my ship on time. And I was baffled. They give me a 24 hour liberty and I'd get back in 25. Or 72. One time it was 23 days. They were really mad that day. But you told me exactly why that happened to me. And I'll share it with you. Because it's the foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous Recovery Program.

That happened to me because I have an allergy to alcohol. If I had an allergy to tomatoes and ate tomatoes I'd break out with a rash. The symptom of my allergy, according to a doctor who knew. A non-alcoholic by the way. If I take a drink of alcohol into my body, I break out with a craving for more alcohol. That's the symptom. It changes me physically. I start craving it physically. I start craving it mentally. And forget spiritually.

That doesn't exist for me anymore. And I must continue to drink until that madness is gone. I must. I don't have any choice in the matter. I've lost the power of choice. For all the hundreds of reasons that we all drink. The bottom line is, once I start, I can't quit. Now I can relate that to that 23-day excursion. Went on liberty, and 22 days later, I'm in Pershing Square in Los Angeles, mooching drinks and quarters.

And if you try to take me back to my ship, we'd have had a tussle, I can guarantee you. I could not go back. I wasn't through. Whatever madness was, it wasn't over. On day 23, the madness was gone. And I took myself to the police station, like any other responsible citizen faced the consequences of my own act. I was sane again. But I could relate that. That's what happens to me when I drink. I don't have the biggest idea how my neighbor operates.

Here I get along pretty good. He owns a bar. We were talking one day. This is a lovely man, but he's kind of bizarre. He told me he got drunk one time and threw up. He hadn't been drunk since. I never threw up in my life. I puked. And it certainly didn't stop me from anything. He didn't have my allergy. He didn't have what's wrong with me. So my sponsors helped me understand physically and mentally I'm different. What an interesting piece of information.

I've always thought I was different. And I come to you and you tell me that's right. They let me get comfortable with that, and then they told me a terrifying piece of information. What I just told you is completely academic. If you never take another drink, that'll never ever happen. The madness of my activities will never take

place again if I don't take another drink. So why, after 34 years of proving that, do I keep taking a drink?

It's because I've got a madness in my mind too. It's obsessed with the idea that all of those little things that alcohol did for me along the line, it'll keep doing for me. The madness in that is that a good feeling I got on rum yesterday didn't happen today so I had to switch to vodka and add something to it to get that feeling. It works for a while and it doesn't work anymore and I'm obsessed with the idea that's going to work.

But the horror of this alcoholic's life is that despite all the reasons I drank, the madness is that I drank for no good reason whatsoever. I drank because that's the nature of the disease. And because there's a piece missing up here, I'm in grave danger every minute of the rest of my life. I can't learn enough about alcoholism or alcohol or psychiatry or how to live or anything else to keep me from taking a drink because there will be a day.

There have been days and there will be a day in the future when my mind will simply not give me that information. It won't be there. Now that's powerless. I'm completely powerless if I put it in me and I'm powerless to keep from putting it in me. That's powerless. I have less power than I need to make this thing work. Hell of a deal. Good news, right? At the time you told me that, and we began to work toward the madness-Step Two, restoring me to sanity.

I was certified by the federal government as a sociopath, type two, and by the state as a psychopath. And then you come along and tell me I've got a third incurable disease. Big deal. The reason I was in the penitentiary is because what's wrong with me is not treatable. I'm not a clinician, but I can tell you this. They can't treat a psychopath because the psychopath doesn't know the difference between right or wrong.

They can't treat a sociopath because a sociopath knows and just doesn't give a damn. And I was both of them. But my sponsors were wiser than that. They said, that's not what's wrong with you. So you're a fine actor. I can give you psychopath: back me in the corner, guys. I'll show you a psychopath. Leave some pretty trinket laying around and I'll show you a sociopath. If you're not watching, it's mine. Totally absorbed in my own ego.

Totally absorbed in my own ego. You didn't ever really exist for me until I got here. You were whoever I needed you to be to tell me who I needed to be. That's all you were. No wonder I was alone. I was truly alone. You didn't exist. My sponsor was a marvelous man, and God bless him, he drank again. It took him 15 years to get back to this program. But he said, Don, the most important thing in the second step for you is the word restore.

God knows that you have not always been a raving maniac. There was a time when you were sane. And the definition of sanity that they gave me came out of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous in the story of the young salesman Jim, who was now working for a company he used to own. And he'd gone to a bar one afternoon to find a customer and have lunch. And after lunch, his mind said, Ooh, we can have a little drink. We just put it in milk, and he did.

All the warnings they didn't have, and he didn't go instantly crazy. It worked. It was fine. It worked. He put him in the milk and didn't feel bad, so they had another one. And that worked, too, so they had another one. And he ended up back in the sanitarium. My book says, whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call that plain insanity. Lack of proportion and the inability to think straight. That's what's wrong with me.

Anything worth doing is worth overdoing. I don't know anything about proportion. Fear is for kids. You pay a quarter to get fear on the roller coaster. I need stark terror. It makes me feel alive. What good's lying if it isn't big? I don't know much about anger, but I can tell you about rage. I can make a quantum leap from dead calm to killer and just that quick. All you have to do is tell me I'm wrong. Make me defend my rights.

He said restore. I began to learn about the power of God and how God operates. I can't describe it to you, but I can tell you some things about how God operates. It's not rude for one thing. I always hated rude people when I was one. Comes by invitation only. What an incredible thing there is to me. I am convinced that the God of this universe could straighten out instantly any time he wanted to, but for reasons known only to him.

He's made it one of the conditions of that happening that I have to ask Him. I have to invite him in. But he said God in his mercy will restore me to that time of sanity that I had. He said we will assume you went nuts about three seconds after you're born, so we don't have to track anything. And that was good news to me. I really thought when we were talking about insanity I was going to have to spend the rest of my life on the psychiatrist couch trying to unravel what I had already failed to unravel.

And he said no, no, I didn't have work here. You get to be restored to a point of sanity and start all over again. And my book even uses the word reborn. I get to start over again and recreate my life. My goodness, for somebody that was as tired as I was, that was sure good news. I came to believe in this power because I could see it in you and working through you. Bruce was in the penitentiary for the rest of his natural life.

for committing a double murder one morning when he was 17 on the streets of Denver, and he told me about that day. And I've never had what it takes to put a gun in my hand and go out and do that. So I didn't identify with that. He said he woke up that morning with the feeling that nobody on this planet cared whether he lived or died. That hurts a bit. He had to start drinking in order to kill the pain. Only that morning it didn't kill the pain. It got him involved in the pain.

It turned into rage, and he decided to go downtown and get his and kill some people. The man that was talking to me was incapable of committing that act. And I knew it. And I asked him about that. He said, yes, I have been changed. That's why I'm here. I came here to be changed. My Big Book, early in one of the promises, says I can have a complete psychic change. I will be a new and different person. Thank God. The old one was too tired to even work with.

I wanted what you had so badly. I'm a very practical person. Bruce had two things I really wanted. He got in and out of his cell anytime he wanted. That was my perception because when I was locked up he'd walk by and stop and talk with me. That's how I knew that. And I wanted to do that. And he told me one afternoon he said, do you know it's possible for me to think one thought at a time? And he had me hooked forever.

I had by then become everybody I'd ever met. Or read about or seen in the movies. And they were all talking at once. Peace of mind is one of the things we're after here. And that means one at a time. That was a great boatload. That kept you back. I really wanted what you had. I don't want to be what I was anymore. And he said the first thing that I had to actually do about that was to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him.

And we played with that for a while. Because I had been seeking God since I was tiny. I had a lot of misconceptions about that one. What we came down to was me screaming at him saying, because he erased all my images. He asked me to surrender to nothing. And he said, why not? And nothing can run your life better than you've been doing. I had a reservation. The good news that God had specific work for me to do was not good news to me, because I knew what it was.

If I really gave my life over to God, he'd have me on the corner of Colfax and Broadway and Denver handing out watchtower magazines and asking perfect strangers if they'd been saved. And you'd think by then I'd be wanting to do that, but I wasn't. The alcoholic ego needs about three and a half minutes to heal and mind it, it's almost six months. Didn't fit my image. So he played with us some more. If your sponsor won't play with your mind, get it now though.

Let's talk about that. That's interesting. Let's talk about that. Do you suppose that that guy down at Colfax and Broadway handing out Watchtower magazines got to choose the clothes he's wearing today? I said, probably he said, you're not. He said, do you suppose that he ate breakfast where he wanted to this morning? And I said, probably. He says, you didn't. He said, do you suppose that guy handing out watchtower magazines and asking perfect strangers if they've been saved, gets to go home tonight when he's all through and I knew what was coming.

Because I didn't. Very carefully and lovingly, he beat my ego up to where I came to the place that I stand today. And that's very simply this. Anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I may have in mind for me. So I went to take my third step and had the worst experience of my entire life. If it goes boom, I can deal with it. From God talking out of the clouds to the feds, breaking in the door.

I've lived through a lot. But I said that third step prayer and absolutely nothing happened. I didn't get a flash of light. I didn't get a rush. I didn't get a chill. Nothing. And I had learned by then, if your sponsor suggests you do something and you go and do it and don't get the results you think you ought to, go bitch at him. So I went back to him and his response was loving and kind. He says, you ought to be grateful, dummy.

He'd give me back my name, dummy. Be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. Flashes of light have nearly killed you all your life. I've had some beauts. And then he did what we do here better than anybody I know. We had a little limited time on this planet when you think about it. Each moment of my life was very precious and I know his was very precious. But he took a couple hours out of his life and gave them to me.

As he shared with me the experience that he had with God, with this power. He said, God knows you probably can't stand one more big shock anyway in this shape. He said, I couldn't. Came to me over a period of time, gently, slowly, awakening me. And that that would probably be my experience from what he could tell. So I had to get serious. I asked him, how in the world do you make this real? It has to be real. This is not an intellectual exercise.

This has to be real to me. And he said, Don, God will reveal Himself to you as you reveal yourself to Him. He said, I have to do an inventory of my grosser handicaps. Two hours later when I finished it. And I went back to Fifth-Step with him. I hadn't read the book. I just went off and did it. I made a list of all the bizarre things I've done. I thought that's what it was about. This same man who just spent time so gently with me looked at me and

said, that's garbage.

You wrote that to impress me, get away from me. And I was baffled again. And I'm also a little willful. I found a guy who would listen to it. My God. And had a spiritual awakening. We spent a couple of hours and I'd tell him some dumb thing I'd done. And he would say, oh, that wouldn't have been. And it was. And I knew it was. I knew there was something wrong here. And I awakened to the fact 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. I didn't stop that. I was going to die a very ugly death. Now understand, I'm not the least bit afraid of death. I've already done that a couple times. But a very ugly death to me means that for some period of time, just before that, I have to live a very ugly life. I can't do that. So I got serious now. How do you get serious about doing this program? I got that blue book out and read the directions.

That's how you get serious about this deal. It said I was supposed to make a list of all the people I was mad at. God, that's easy. I can get somebody that still smells bad and get them to do that. And after I made that list of all these people I was mad at, I was supposed to put down why I was mad at them. God, that was easy. No difficulty in that. And then I was supposed to put down what that was doing to me. What that affected in my life.

Let me share a little piece of that with you, so you'll understand my experience. Federal agents broke into my house in 1966. One came through the front door and one came through the back door. One came through the window. They knocked me to the ground, handcuffed me, and did what they do. My four-year-old son let out a shriek. And this big cop swung around and put a gun to his head and almost killed him. And I really hated that guy.

I had figured a marvelous plan to get him. I'm going to kill him. And I won't tell you what it is because one of you may need it. It's risky. But I wasted a lot of time hating him. Well, he was, by God, on my list. And there were 22 reasons I was mad at him, which is a little bizarre anyway. One lousy arrest and 22 reasons. He violated my civil rights, for one thing. My sex life was affected. My personal relations were affected.

My security was affected. My ambitions were gone. I wanted to be super freak and he'd stopped me. But somehow in this process I learned that one of the things that happens to me at the third step is that I no longer have any ambitions. I'm here to be whatever God wants me to be. That's my only ambition. So I don't have to worry too much about that. I ran that guy down and I tried very hard to take the attitude you suggest I take that this man like myself was perhaps spiritually sick.

Now I can go on with that. I didn't feel any better about him. I asked God to help show me to be able to take a kindly and tolerant view toward him. I didn't like him any better. So I just did what was next without thinking. It says that I'm to set aside the wrongs he may have done and resolutely look for my own mistakes. Where might I have been in fault? God it burst on me. I had sent him a hand-engraved invitation to come to my house.

I've been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico and not paying the tax on it. That makes you fair game for the feds. I'd ask him in. I awakened for the first time in my life to the fact that my problems are of my own making with no exceptions. I bring to me all the problems I have. What a marvelous thing that was to learn. And thank God I had already had a sense that God loved me as I was, where I was, or I couldn't have lived with that.

And I'm very careful in sponsoring people. We don't do an inventory if I sponsor you until you have had some sense of the presence of God in your life. And the easiest sense of the presence of God in my life is this. I don't ever have to do that again. Because of this power I don't ever have to do that again. So I can face it now. Because I don't have to repeat it. The power of God I don't have to do it again. Well the rest of it went on.

I learned about fear in that inventory. I thought fear lived here because that's where I felt it. And I discovered in that inventory that I have a manufacturing plant here. I make real high-grade fear. Basically anything you can bring to me. It doesn't even have to be scary. My mind is the thing I had most to be afraid of. I told Bruce that one day I said, I'm scared to death of my mind. He said, you have good reason to be.

I was two and a half years before I could do a sex inventory the way the book talked about it. In addition to the alcohol I had eaten an awful lot of wine mining haters and done a lot of speed and I just was a mess. I was sick. It wasn't anything I had to worry about because I don't like boys and that's all around. I was healed. Over that two and a half years at the end of the time I finally was able to put down what it says in the book.

It fit on a three by five card. I was never a super stud. It was all in my head. I went to a young fellow named Jim. He and I were in the program the same length of time. I took this fifth step when I finished it. That was a shabby effort. Please don't think it was a big one. I couldn't remember that much. I had done the best I could and I took it to Jim because you had told me to take my fifth step with somebody who would not be overly affected by what I had to say and he was so crazy nothing could have bothered him.

Jim and I were friends and a funny thing was happening to me at that time. A feeling I had for Jim. I knew while I was in that penitentiary I had done what they said I had done. Jim was in there for vehicular homicide. In a blackout while drinking he had killed someone. He didn't know why he was there. His mind had no recall. They told him why, but he didn't know why. And I really wanted it to be okay for Jim. I didn't know then but that's called compassion.

I wanted to do something for him so he would be okay. And I've been listening to you long enough but I did something bizarre. I took the garbage of my life and gave it to Jim so he could feel better. Isn't that weird? The only decent gift I had for a suffering alcoholic is the garbage of my life. That's my tool. Well, we had a time of it. Jim sat in that school with me all afternoon. And the only time he talked was when I ran a little dry and he'd just start me up again.

And we covered what was on that list and a few things that weren't there. And I had another one of those awakenings. It had been me and whoever I needed you to be. That afternoon we ended up with two people in the room. Me and a fellow named Jim and his existence was separate from mine. And yet we were bound together forever. But there were two of us. You know I haven't been alone since. I have never felt loneliness since that moment.

As long as there's two people on this planet, I'm not alone. And the spiritual tie we made that day has lasted till this. And I've only seen him once since then. They let me out before they let Jim out. He's from Florida. And I got a little job driving a little truck making deliveries. And I didn't like one part of my job because in the afternoon everybody else got to go home and I had to take the packages to the bus station.

I never knew for sure when I'd get off. It kind of irritated me a little bit. One afternoon I'm sitting in the bus station and two prison guards walking with Jim. The odds are outrageous. Our paths crossed just long enough because they were sending him back to Florida. But I know he's okay now because we talked and he knows I'm okay. And that's how God works in my life. There are no missing pieces anymore. It all gets wrapped up and tied up.

And then I came away from that with another interesting experience. Up until that moment I had been a sprinter in the game of life. Never a long-distance runner. I'd never finished anything. Because I get distracted. One of the worst things I did to the people who loved me was that I kept getting up. You know I'm a sprinter. Once I get up and we start over again everybody gets the hope this time he's going to make it because I look good off the line.

I'll learn quickly. Man we're cooking. He's going to make it this time. And then you look away or take a drink of water and I'm gone. And that was very damaging to the people who loved me. Better I'd stayed down. I went back to my cell and I did what it said in the big book and examined that thing for about an hour. And recognized that this was a very shabby effort and I had a lot of work to do. Finished something to the very best of my ability at that time.

I'd done everything I could possibly do. I was a long distance runner now. But because I had some amends to do I asked God in his mercy please don't let the things I hadn't found yet kill me before I find them. As you remove the defects of character you see my defects of character are my defenses against what I perceive to be a hostile world inside and out. And I'm asking for those to be removed so I become incredibly vulnerable.

I don't trust God because it's neat I don't have any choice. My defenses are gone. If he isn't watching out for me I'm a dead cookie. He's watching. I found some more stuff last week. And he must be on the job because I'm still here. Had to do with prestige and ego. Damn that thing. Just keeps cropping up. But the tools work. My inventory today seldom takes more than half a page. If I get more than 10 or 15 words out on something I'm both of them.

Ernest Lee won. I've got to tell you this because I know there's more than one of you in this room with the feeling that I grew up with that I wanted desperately. All I have ever really wanted to do was be one of God's kids and act like a human being. And I was never able to say that because of the shame that seemed to go around that. If you want to be one of God's kids you can. What I want to do today if you don't like it tough.

I embarked on my evangelistic stage about then. If I sponsored you and we get to the Eighth and Ninth Steps and you don't want to save the world we start over. We'd missed something. But I was in an interesting position and thank God I had a sponsor who could never get out. All we did. They wouldn't let me out to make any amends. They wouldn't let you in. So he said that doesn't matter because the key to freedom is in the willingness to make amends.

And he gave me an exercise to do in my cell. He had me make a list of all the people at home and all the government agencies I had harmed. And he said you get those from the list of people that messed over you. And he said by the way just to add anybody you can think of, because if you got close to them, you hurt them. The rest true or not he didn't play. And he gave me this exercise. He said Don one at a time picture each of those

people right in front of you.

And see if you can feel the willingness to look them right in the eye. And say to them I have caused you harm. I've done you wrong. Would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get the books balanced. He said you know what you did to them but you're too insensitive to have any clues to what it did to them. So I have to ask you what do I have to do. That's pretty risky stuff. Sitting locked up in my cell for the night in the Colorado State Penitentiary doing that.

I was set free. I was lifted. The weights were taken from me. I was lifted. I'm set free. Because I am willing if I have done you wrong or harmed you in any way. You tell me what I have to do and we'll get it straight. Well you can imagine the emotional state I was in the end for goodness sakes. I had to go start making some amends. They wouldn't let me out. He said you can deal with some of these by mail. Some you have to live with until you get to them and some you just have to live with.

He let me play with it for a while and make up a list of people I was going to write to and then check my list and he said I think you can probably do those when you get out. And the people I was wanting to go see said hell you can do that with a letter. All one of them was crushing. Christmas week before I got arrested. In addition to their boys stuff for Christmas we bought a string of Christmas tree lights for a buck and a half on credit.

And of course I hadn't paid for them. And I had to write this guy. Now I made 10 cents a day and had to buy all my toilet articles out of that. So we did me a budget. And I had to write this guy and say I bought these and I didn't pay for them and I want to pay for them. But I only make a dime a day would you take a quarter a month until your dollar and a half paid off. But that's hard on a big time gangster's ego. The most important amends that I had to make and I had the experience of making amends and seeing other people's lives change because I did that.

The book says setting my own house in order is only one of the purposes of doing this. The main purpose is to fit me to be of maximum service to God and my fellow man. I must be fit to do this work. There must be no one left on this planet that I can't go see because they may need something that I've got like the message that you don't have to drink anymore. I cannot afford to have to duck and hide from anybody. That doesn't mean you have to like me.

But I must not be afraid of you. The only way I can get unafraid of you is to face you with my garbage again and say, you tell me what I have to do. I've had some fun with that. We've spent hours on that. There's a couple I'd like to share with you. They have to do with my family. How do you go back to the mother that you put in a position that she has to say on Christmas day you and those children can't come in? You don't go back and say, Mom, sorry.

That's crap. My sponsors refused to ever let me use the word sorry again. They said, you've been sorry forever. When you go to talk to somebody, you tell them that you apologize and you wish you hadn't done what you've done and what do you have to do to get it straight. Don't you ever use the word sorry again? Well, what you do after you ask people, what do I have to do is you shut up so they can tell you. After I've been out for a while, my mother allowed me to come by the house and I didn't use those exact words but I found a way to ask her, what do I have to do?

And then I listened. She said, Don, all I've ever wanted for you is that you'll be happy. So on a regular basis for 16 some years, I go by my mother's house happy. We have a marvelous relationship with my mom and I. She told me once that it was six years before she thought I was going to really stay sober. But I wasn't going to convince her of anything anyway. I was just going by happy. We have an interesting thing going on out with my mother.

Because of you and by the grace of God and because of your trust in me, you've allowed me to serve this fellowship in some interesting ways. I've served as on-area committee. I've been a delegate at the present time I'm serving you as a trustee at large on your general service board. And my mother has a grossly exaggerated opinion of my importance to Alcoholics Anonymous. I know that because I heard her talking to one of her friends one day and I thought, my God, I've got to straighten her out.

But I don't do anything without prayer, so I wasn't afraid about that. And the answer came back, no. After all the years of pain and agony, she wants to say, come on, Fort Bokeh. My dad and I know better. So I'm going to say, he never lets me forget that I'd just stumble into that one. Making amends to my father had to do with releasing him. My father is an unmeasured genius. They don't have a test yet, they'll test him.

He lives in a 48 room house full of stuff. And it's just a reflection of his mind. And I tried to compete with that and be that. Oh, God, we out of time. When I went to my dad to make amends, I started by saying, you know, I lied to you and I cheated you. And he said, wait, please stop. I know all that stuff. All you can do by telling me the details was hurt me all over again. You and I are just going to have to start from here today.

So we did. Now, I got free of my dad one afternoon when I recognized him. He baffled me because this was a very loving, lovely man. But every now and then he did something awful. And sometimes he did it to me. I could understand how he could do that. In this process, I woke up one day and realized that somebody must have done something really bad to him or he wouldn't have done that to me. That maybe he was doing the very best he could based on his own life.

And if that's the truth, then I had to set him free. Well, it set me free because if that's true for him, that's true for me. I've been doing the very best I could and it wasn't worth a damn. It was the best I could do. So he and I started communicating. Now, I've become a listener in Alcoholics Anonymous. Servants have to listen to find out what you need. And he was talking one afternoon. He said, he pointed to the place.

And he said, I spent over 60 years accumulating all this stuff. And I'm going to spend the rest of my life getting rid of it. Well, I heard what he really said. He wasn't talking about the stuff. He's talking about the stuff. So I go by and visit with my father on a regular basis. And he's a marvel. A marvel is he talks about the things that he has come to learn about life. And he gave me one the other day that I'll give you because it wraps it up.

He's only going to be with us about 12 more years, he says. He knows when he's going. And I believe him because Grandpa did too. Grappa picked the day and the time left. And dad's getting tired of his feet hurting. 74 years old now he said to me the other day he said, I finally figured it out. There's only two things a person needs to live a good life. Honor and wisdom. You have to have enough honor to keep any promise you make regardless of the personal consequences.

And enough wisdom not to make too many promises like that. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have missed that. Nothing much I can do about what I did to my kids except give them an arena where they can get well. We call that home. Been the same place for nine years. Absolute world record. My kids taught me an important lesson. Through a series of circumstances, I ended up working behind the walls of Colorado City, Penitentiary.

And once a week I had to drive 120 miles into town. And it struck me one time with my past record of going and maybe not being back for a number of days. And it might bother the kids, and I asked them, does it bother you? But I have to go and they said no, we don't mind if you go, but please tell us when you're coming back. Pretty important. My children don't need any more major surprises like federal narcotics agents.

They can function quite well as long as they know when I'm going to show up. So from that day on my family, all of my family knows where I am. And they know approximately when I'm going to get back because they can deal with that. Keep your eye out for my youngest. He's six foot two and blond and hadn't got a lick of sense. He's getting ready to do five days for driving under suspension. And he's done a number of those things.

He's a beaut. My older boy and I made contact because of alcohol one night. He's not an alcoholic. He's only been drunk twice than I know of. And both times have been a joy to my life. This kid was in bad shape. He really was. He had blackouts and bizarre behavior and real trouble. It was an eye problem partly. But living with me created some real problems for this kid. And we worried about him. He joined the Air Force and married his little-well, he rescued this little girl and married her.

I love my daughter-in-law, but she is a little bit short and fully loaded. Anyway, they went down to Wichita Falls, Texas in the Air Force. And I came over to my mom's one night and my sister and my son's wife and all the ladies in the house were going crazy and my dad was sitting there grinning. And I pulled him inside and said, what's going on? Well, Terry's in jail now. It's tough all. And I said, how come? He said, well, he went out.

Went to a house to go repute, got drunk and got in a fight and they've arrested him. And Dad and I are both gone. I'm good. He made me okay then. First normal thing he had done in years. Six months ago the Aurora police called me and said, well, you come and get your son. It seems that he'd gotten drunk that night and gotten angry and said some things and his little wife got afraid he was going to hurt himself so she had him arrested.

And he was sitting in that jail on the other side of being drunk. And the jail psychiatrist said, please come and get him. There's nothing wrong with this boy. So I went and got him and we talked at my house for a long time. And I can't be mad at alcohol because it brought my boy back to me. He was able that night because of what normal people can do with alcohol to tell me that he'd always felt that he was personally responsible for our home breaking up and his mother leaving.

And we started getting straight and communicating. We communicate pretty well today. He's still tied up a little but he can talk with me now. I have two little stepdaughters. I get so frustrated it's time for me to quit. And I must ask you in indulgence for just about five more minutes because the really important stuff is on tap now. It means we have to go have coffee or something to make a lot of meetings because I got a lot to tell you.

And I want to hear from you too but these two little girls are a joy. I didn't want to be a father anymore. I'd already raised seven kids. And I met this sane lady and we got married and she had two daughters. And I just

really didn't want to do that again. Two of my own and five of the stepchildren, that was enough. And these two were not in great shape. Their daddy's a Denver juvenile detective. And he has this insane need to tell them what he does for a living.

So my little girls from time to time were a little distressed because there's rapists and all this out there. They don't know what that is but you know that's awful. And I get a little nervous when I leave home. Now we operate our home by the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous including the traditions. A great way to run a group-a home's just a group. We have one ultimate authority. Loving God has expressed himself in our group conscience.

I'm a trusted servant. I'm the leader of the home. But I'm a trusted servant. I don't govern. They trust me to make the tough decisions. And I trust my partner, so we get along fine. We are self-supporting my home. I work for a living. My wife works for a living. If the kids want extra money, they got to go work for it. We're self-supporting for our own contributions. There's only one requirement to be a member of my family.

That's a desire to be a member of my family. And the unity in our home is more important than any individual in that home. And that caused me to have to put my seventeen-year-old on the street one night at twenty below. It was destroying the family and I was killing them and I had to let them go. So we operate that way. We know that God is an active part of our home. But my twelve-year-old sends you her deepest love today.

When I leave the house, she will ask me, where are you going? Particularly at night or one of these weekend deals. And when I say, honey, I'm going to Alcoholics Anonymous. I watch her relax. She knows because I have told her so. Then if I'm with you, they're safe and so am I. And I will be home. You should have been in our house today. We came home and found out we'd been burglarized. First of all, I'm an ex-burglar and it really made me mad.

But my older girl says, oh my goodness, what am I going to tell the kids at school? I told them God watches over us. And I was able to say to her, honey, he does. We weren't here. Nothing happened to us. All they got was some of our stuff. We didn't have any stuff when we started. We didn't always get more stuff. But we weren't here to watch this. She sends her love. Oh, she loves me. Our house is full of AA people all the time.

See, when I sponsor, I only know one way to sponsor. You come to my house and we go through the big book. So there's lots of people in my house all the time. And most of them are strange. God sends me the psychopaths. You know what I do tell them? I turn them over to my 12 year old. She loves them. I can tell them I love them and they suspect me. But there's no way in the world that you can doubt that my daughter loves you.

A few weeks ago, as part of a school project, she had to write a biography of her dad. Well, she's got two dads and she picked me. And that was nice. Did seven pages on me. Some pages are really nifty stuff, you know. But the last paragraph, if nothing else worthwhile, ever happens to me. I can leave tomorrow morning or right now and go singing, "Thank you, God". I didn't want to be a father anymore. In her last paragraph, she said, if I'd have had any choice, in the matter I'd have picked Don for my dad.

But I didn't have any choice. So God picked him and brought him to me. You want what we have? Because that's the kind of stuff we have. That's the kind of stuff life is made out of. That's real. We got a new black lab puppy a while back. You can have him, too. Terriers teethe on little rubber bones. Black Lab puppies teethe on

furniture. And my patio deck. But I love him. He's quite a dog. He really is. I want to thank you.

You see, God gave me back my life as a free clear gift. And then he gave me you. So that gift would be able to take on some dimension and some meaning and some purpose. The greatest pain of my life was that I never felt useful to anybody. Today, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt, my life means something. It's no better, no worse than anybody else's, but it means something. And so does yours. We have a lot of fun here.

But the bottom line is this. You and I properly armed with facts about ourselves, the garbage of our lives, are sent out into places where people are dying and going mad. And if we will let God use that, they don't have to die. And they don't have to go mad. It's heavy duty stuff. That's you and I. On any given day, I wake up in the morning and I don't have to wonder, why am I here anymore? I don't know exactly why I'm here.

I know precisely what God's will for me is. I am to go out each and every day and find an alcoholic that doesn't know that if you're an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. And bring them back into the family where we can love them well. That's all I have to do on any given day. And as a result of that, I get to live like a regular real person. Then I give you my final gift and then I'll sit down and hope we can go chat.

I've become everybody I've ever met. And I was afraid like all the other programs I've encountered that I'd have to sort all that out to find out who I was. I found out who I was once and killed him. If you tell me we won't do it that way, I'm not here to find out who I am. I'm here to find out who I am not so I can get rid of it. It's like the fellow who saw Michelangelo's statue of David for the very first time and was just awestruck.

I don't know if you've seen it, but even the pictures breathe. And he went to Michelangelo and he said, how in the world did you do that? And Michelangelo said, well I took a block of stone 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 our steps and our program and our meetings and all the little things we do, as the chisel.

And with me as a very willing block of stone. One day at a time we are chipping away the things that don't look like Don. And so far this is what we've got. Thank you.