

DON P ARCHIVE

Founders' Day

1988 | Reading edition

FORMAT	DURATION	RECORDING ID
Transcript PDF	01:14:17	DP-1988-AKRON_01

Automated draft. Timestamps have been removed for readability. Names, specialized terms, and unclear passages require human review.

[Listen to the original audio source](#)

Transcript

Timestamp-free reading edition | Automated draft; human review required

I met this gentleman in general service? I heard part of his story and bought a tape. He's been very instrumental in my sobriety for the past year and a half. Very instrumental in my general service also. I'm going to introduce Don P, my friend. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. Oh, what an overwhelming experience this is. I was just sitting there taking a little head count like Bill and Dr. Bob used to do, and it struck me that these two tables are about the size of the membership of Alcoholics Anonymous and I decided we'd better write a book about this. I think they'd be mighty pleased this morning. These signers remind me of probably one of the most incredible experiences I ever had. We were privileged to be doing this at a little conference in Utah, and as I was talking I noticed at this table some of the boys from the fifth chapter in Salt Lake and in California had attended. One of them was signing to a very young man across the table from him, and it touched me. So I went down afterwards to talk with him. It seems that the young man that couldn't hear was three days sober and he had come to that meeting on his own, fully worried he wouldn't hear a thing, but he knew sobriety was here.

And the fellow in the leathers told me he hadn't signed for over 20 years, and somehow he just picked up. It all came back to him, and he said he'd done his very best not to make that meeting. It was raining and he didn't want to take the bike out and get it dirty, but he came. So thank you. I am an alcoholic, and I did not know I was an alcoholic when I first was found by you. Nobody knew what was wrong with me. We just knew there was something.

There had been something wrong with me since I was that little. Talked funny. I looked funny. I had a big wart on the end of my nose. That's how it felt about me inside. If we were in algebra, I was thinking about English. If we were to dance, I was thinking about something else. I thought an awful lot about girls, and that's all I could do is think about it. Someone in a sales class once told me that you are what you think about.

I thought that can't be right, because if that were true by the time that I was 15, I'd have either been a hamburger or a girl. I drank out of control from the first drink, because the first drink did for me what nothing else had done. It took away the ward. It made me taller and broader. In essence, it made it alright for me to be me for a little while that day. And it made it alright for me to let you be you for a little while that day.

And I'd have paid any price I had to pay to have that going on. I was not comfortable inside my own skin. I wasn't comfortable. I just, I can remember I was 13 years old laying in bed crying, thinking I must come from Mars. They must have just come and left me here. I'd have been adopted by these people. Because I didn't feel like what human beings said they felt like. I discovered later most of the people I talked to were lying to me anyway. But I was inappropriate most of my life.

And alcohol made me appropriate. It also very nearly killed me the first time I drank it. Because it is in my nature, if one works, you take ten. Anything worth doing is worth abusing. And that's just what I did. So we had an Air Force man buy us a quart of whiskey one night and went out in the country to drink it. I nearly died that night. Because I drank too much and I got terribly sick. But I had some fun for a little while.

I got big enough I was going to go back into town and whip this guy that missed treating me. And there was a girl I wanted to talk to and she was going to talk to me this night. That is my lifestyle before I got where I was supposed to be. I was too drunk to do what I was supposed to do. That didn't matter anymore. God gave me back my life as a free, clear gift. December 26th of 1967. And then by his grace he gave me alcoholics anonymous.

So that gift could take on some dimension and some purpose and some meaning. I think the greatest of all human pain is that sense of knowing of no use. Useless. I might as well not be here. And the greatest of all human joy I have found for me is to know that my life counts for something today. See I know why I'm here now standing here this morning. There's one person here today that I have a message for. I hope the rest of you enjoy it.

Because you're going to sit here for a while the doors are locked. But each day of my life I'm to find one person who doesn't know what I know. And that's this. If you are an alcoholic you don't ever have to drink alcohol again. That's the message. You don't ever have to be in the kind of pain you've been in ever again. We don't promise a pain free life but that kind of pain is gone. Now that week of 1967 Christmas week was a bitch.

Pardon me. I was on federal parole for an indiscretion I'd committed in 1966. I weighed 133 pounds. My kids and I lived in a \$40 a month basement apartment. Beneath a lady who had cats. Plural cats. But this was the week that Don got to see Don for exactly who he was with. No more of the blinders in front of me. I recognized that her place was cleaner than mine was. And some of the illusion dropped away. Some of that image that kept me.

I also, by the way, used a lot of drugs. But I am not a drug addict. If anybody would like to talk about that later I'll be glad to talk about that. I'm an alcoholic. But as part of that thing I had prided myself on never turning on young people. Well this was the week I recognized that I couldn't get out of bed till my connection got there in the morning. And he was 16 years old and I was using him. I managed to get two little Christmas presents for my kids on credit.

Of course I couldn't make any money. I was on welfare and a check hadn't gotten there yet. The Public Merchandise Mart in Denver, was kind enough to give me a little pair of cowboy boots and a little cowboy shirt. So each of my boys would have a present. My kids had wrapped up everything in the house in blue paper towel so I'd have a good Christmas. And a piece of me broke. Our tree was an alcoholic joy. We bought it with a dollar we'd found in the snow.

And on Christmas Eve they'll give you any tree you want for a dollar so we bought the big one. Now the room was this high and the tree was this high. And the drama of that still touches me. The thing bent at the top. But another piece of me broke. Christmas Day, it all came apart finally. The boys and I walked down to my folks house so they could spend time with Grandma and Grandpa on Christmas. My dad met us at the door and he said I'm sorry.

Your mother says I can't let you in anymore. She can't stand watching you die. And I finally saw clearly what my life had done to my mother. And it all broke. And then Dad made a liar out of my biggest scream. I used to scream out nobody cares. Nobody loves us. He snuck us in anyway. And that made a liar out of that. So that broke. And I saw clearly what I'd been doing to my children. I don't know why the government kept giving them back to me.

But I'm one of the nuts that came flying out of Berkeley in the 60s. Screaming where there's dope there's hope burned down city hall. And my children were with me through all that. We hitchhiked around the country and landed in crash pads and wherever we could be. And they thought that was a normal way of life. Until the federal government arrested me and someone told the kids about school. And my boy wanted to go so we stopped.

And when you stop living the kind of lifestyle I live they get you. What a marvelous day. I know it hurts. It still hurts me. But what a marvelous day. I finally had to face the fact. After all the self pity that there was no good reason for me to be here. It was a fact. My kids would be better off without me. My people would be better off without me. Everybody would be better off without me. And I did the thing that's required for recovery.

Or to step onto any spiritual path. I quit. Deep within myself. I said I can't be this anymore. I can't do this anymore. I'm through. I didn't know there was any hope. So I quit in the crudest way there is. I took a two-month supply of Desoxyn and pushed it up my arm and drank everything in the house and lay down to die. I can't tell you how disappointed I was in the morning. The police were at the door. I'd set myself up to be arrested because I needed a rest.

I was tired. And what I'd set myself up for was about a six month county jail thing. And that's so easy. It saddens me that there's a fact that some of the people in this room aren't through drinking yet. It's just a fact. For those of you who aren't, you'll probably make county jail. So let me give you the survival technique so that you can get back to us. Alright? I lied to you for ten minutes. You lied to me for ten minutes.

And we both go take a nap. That's it. If you can do that, you can get through any county jail in this country. They weren't there for county jail. They came this time with nine charges and one of them called for three years to life in the penitentiary. And I had a promise from the Denver district attorney that if I beat him on that, he was going to bring the others one at a time, but I was off the street. And I really didn't care.

I really, truly didn't care. I was in a blessed place. A complete total failure at living. And a complete total failure at dying. There I was in a body that just wouldn't give up on a mind that had quit years ago. And I had become willing to go anywhere anybody said. And do anything anybody said. If it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. That's all I wanted. That I didn't have to be me anymore. And I didn't know there was any hope.

We had tried everything. My last psychiatrist was smoking grass six weeks later. Hey, I can paint you a pretty good picture. I've been baptized a time or two. I was one of the first in Dianetics. God, I was good at that. That's a head game. We had tried everything. And nothing worked. Now they offered me a deal. And I'm going to tell you about this because I'm here this morning to tell you about the power of God. As I understand it.

They offered me a deal. They said, you're sick. And we know you're sick. And the federal people know you're sick. And if you want, we will send you to a federal hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. If you plead guilty to this reduced charge. The deal's already made. You go. Hell, I'd have gone anywhere. But two of me made the decision. There's always at least two of me at work. I've had occasion to work with some schizophrenics and they're amateurs.

I was wanting to go anywhere, but I also knew by now. And I was five months sober, you have to

understand, lying around the jail, physically detoxed five months. And I knew if they put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'd be on the street in six months. You see, they would have told me what's wrong with me. About how long it would take to fix that. And all of the symptoms that I would have to present to them to convince them that I was getting better.

And I've played that game since I got out of the crib. I learned a long time ago how to convince you that I'm what you want me to be. And I'd be dead today. And I think by the grace of God, he entered into my life before I knew his name. Because I made the deal. And they changed my age, by the way, to 17 in court. I'm much younger than I look. So that I could qualify. And the feds and the state agreed to this deal. And if you know anything about them, you know that's a lot of power.

When they say, Don, go from here to there, that's exactly what happens. Five days later, I was in the Colorado State Penitentiary. Saying, wait a minute. This isn't what I signed up for. Because I think God knows I'd be dead today. Coming out of the hospital. And I had surrendered. So I was taken to the place where I could hear what I needed to hear so I could be here today. I'm one of those who believes that if you are at your first day meeting, it's the right one.

You will hear something today that will get you through the night. So you can get back to us again tomorrow and do that over and over again until you finally figure out what we're trying to tell you. In the third week, excuse me, in that fish tank, the guard hollered out. You will come down and you will listen. So I did. I didn't have anything else to do. And I had three guys there with numbers on their chest. And one of them stood up and he said, my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic.

And that means that I am powerless over alcohol and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life and my life has become unmanageable. And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. And the miracle of the day is that I heard the man and heard what he said. And he told us we didn't have to drink anymore. We were alcoholics.

He said, things like your very best thinking got you in the penitentiary. You're not doing so good, are you? There I was. I couldn't deny that. And I had given it my best, I promise you. Made a couple of simple little promises to us. He said, I could learn to live a way of life that would make sense to me. That was a brand new thought. I had always tried to live a way of life that made sense to you. And my life never made sense to anybody.

And today one of the joys of my life is that my life doesn't make sense to a lot of people, but it makes sense to me. And an old gangster said, what are you worried about them for? They weren't going to put a scrap of bread on your table. It's a new thought. And they invited us to come to their 12 step study school. I hadn't been invited anywhere in so long. And they took great care when we transferred to our cells that following Saturday, there was a little note on our cells to remind us that after lunch, if we wanted to, we could come to this 12 step study school.

Now there was some sacrifice involved in that. It meant for five weeks we gave up yard privileges and movies. And that may not sound like a big deal, but that's all we had. And you gave that up. And in the penitentiary I came from, membership in Alcoholics Anonymous was not part of the parole record. It was an

anonymous thing these guys felt, and they didn't want anybody in there playing the game. So when you went up for parole, they didn't tell anybody that you were in AA.

Well, we got there. My friend Jim and I decided to go. And we sat down and I encountered sponsorship of the finest kind. They said-and remember, the three of them-for the next five weeks, you new guys have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. Oh, yeah. I couldn't argue with that. And then they did for us the thing that Alcoholics Anonymous does better than anyone, and for which I will be forever grateful.

They told me precisely what's wrong with me. In terms I could understand, and then they told me precisely what to do to deal with that condition. No pussyfooting. I was in my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old. And I'm talking about penitentiaries because that's where I've been. But please don't think I was a big-time gangster because I wasn't. My favorite burglary was the one I committed while I was a police officer.

Well, you know, we were working 80 hours a week, and I was eating Methedrine to stay awake and drinking wine to go to sleep. It gets confusing. And I lived in a chicken coop I had converted because it was cool. And I got messed up that night, and I was drunk. And I wasn't feeling good. And I got angry because I was living in a chicken coop. I put on my black peacoat and my black watch cap. I got on my bicycle for crying out loud and rode off to do this burglary.

And I knew which house was empty. I've been watching it all week. I got in the house and ran around and looked at things for two hours and left and forgot to take anything. That's the kind of burglary it was. I gave it up. I truly believe today that I wasn't looking for things in that house. I think somehow unconsciously, you know, I was looking for how come they have a house and I have a chicken coop. Maybe there's some magic here because I always look for magic.

Well, my sponsors talked to me very clearly about a disease called alcoholism, and they gave me some things to read by a medical doctor named Silkworth, who described the condition in its symptoms in very clear cut terms that I could identify with. He talked about men who had been working on a business deal for several weeks that would be settled favorably to them. And they took a drink a day or two ahead of time and they missed their appointment.

And I understood why I was in the penitentiary when I was 19 years old. There's a federal law against getting lost if you're in the Navy. And I was. And one of the symptoms of alcoholism for me is that when I start drinking, I get lost and I can't find my way home. And they'd give me liberty and I'd expect me to be back on time. And I could never seem to get back on time. Five minutes, ten minutes, an hour, and one time it was 23 days.

And when I got home, home wasn't there anymore. It was on its way to Korea and he was really upset with me. Fortunately, my drinking partner was smarter than a whip. And he got us to Japan before the ship so we weren't facing a shooting offense anyway. But as they talked to me about this disease, this craving for alcohol that overcomes me when I take a drink, and that story about the business, man, it clicked in my mind that that's what had happened to me.

See, I loved the Navy. I really did. Everything about it was fun. I joined when I was 17 to become a hero and

come back to Denver, a hero with medals. I want to save the world from the communist menace. I've always done noble things. But I took a drink on this liberty. And 22 days later, I was in Pershing Square in Los Angeles, mooching drinks and quarters and food and whatever. I could not go back. They had to drag me back in chains.

There's no way I could go back because I hadn't found it yet. I knew it was out there, but I hadn't found it yet. And this thing was on me. On day 23, the madness wasn't there. And I don't know why, but it wasn't there. And like any sane, rational human being, I went back to my ship to face the consequences of my act. I identified with that. That happens to me when I drink alcohol. They made it very plain. That only happens to alcoholics.

And it happens to every alcoholic. I must be one of you. It happens to me. And I have no control over it. My choices are gone. It has nothing to do with whether I love my family or not. It has nothing to do with whether I love my work or me or anything. It has to do with the fact that if I drink alcohol, I can't tell you what I'm going to quit. I can't tell you where I'm going to quit. Or when I'm going to quit. Or what I'm going to do between now and when I quit.

All I know for sure is that none of us are going to like it. So I am physically powerless over alcohol. I have no power over the stuff. And I got just comfortable with that when they indicated to me that that wasn't the real problem. Because if you don't drink alcohol, that won't happen. So what's wrong with me? Why do I keep doing this? With a track record like I have. Why do I keep it up? Well, part of my insanity is that I think it'll be different next time.

My real problem is up here in my head. There's a piece missing. Get in there. My neighbor has it. Yeah, he owns a bar. My neighbor. You'd love it. A little strange. But he told me about a time five or six years ago that he got drunk and he threw up and he made a fool of himself. So he didn't drink anymore. Those two things don't relate. I had reached the stage in my life where getting drunk and throwing up and making a fool out of myself was fun.

Several years ago we inherited a little black lab puppy. And he came into my house and he went on the floor. So I popped him with a paper and threw him out. And he came into my house the next day and he went on the floor again. So I popped him and threw him out. And after four or five days of that, the puppy quit wetting on the floor. And I was sitting in my chair and I thought, you know, that dog smarter than I am. He can learn from his negative experience and I never could.

There's a piece missing up here. I can stand here for the next hour and tell you why I drank. Hundreds and hundreds of reasons. I drank to feel good. I drank to stop feeling bad. I drank to be taller. I drank to be noticed. I drank to be invisible. I drank for all kinds of reasons. The horror of alcoholism is the fact that more often than not, I drank for no good reason at all. I'm powerless over alcohol. I can't learn enough about alcoholism up here in my head.

I can't learn enough of the big book or anything else to keep me sober. Because in that book, this was also brought to my attention that today will come when that information won't show up with enough force to keep me from taking a drink. And I bought that from the beginning. I don't trust my mind, but I understand it. There's a lunatic loose. In my sixth year of sobriety, I had one of those wonderful experiences that we get along the way if we pay attention that brought this home to me again.

As I say, I bought this from the beginning. In my sixth year, we were having lunch with the Chief of Police of Denver and some other notables. At that time, I was now working behind the walls, getting jobs and counseling guys, getting ready to get out, so they didn't have to go back. And I wore a coat and a tie. We were having lunch at Leo's in Denver, a very fine place. And one of these men had discovered a new liqueur.

I don't understand them. It came in a tall, skinny glass and it was green. It looked like something I used to throw up. But he was passing it around so everyone could taste it. Everything I know was there. All of my defenses were up. There was no problem. I was not going to drink that and I knew I was not going to drink it. I was not going to drink it. As it came by, I thought I'd sniff it just to see what it smelled like.

And I had it here and it burst on my mind clearly that the difference between life and death for me would be the twitch of a muscle. With no thought, when my arm gets here, it does this. And that's how serious alcoholism is to me. And then I remembered that there is a God because I watched my hand move that thing on. I don't sniff green stuff anymore. The freedom and finally understanding that I couldn't trust myself is really something.

I told one of my early sponsors and said, my God, I'm terrified of my mind. He said, you have good reason to be here. But one of the early promises in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous, and in the old timers, who by the way I thank for holding this together so I could get here, they said, I get a new mind. Dr. Silkworth reminds us that without an entire psychic change, there's little hope of recovery. That's a promise of a new mind.

An entire psychic change. I don't have to fight this thing anymore. Well, I was a little frightened, quite honestly, because at that time I was certified by one government agency as a psychopath. And by another government agency as a sociopath type two, whatever that is. The reason I was in the penitentiary is that both of those conditions are untreatable in the hospital, couldn't do anything about it. See, one doesn't know the difference between right and wrong.

You can't help them. The other one knows the difference and just doesn't give a damn. And I was both. And then you come along and tell me I've got a third incurable terminal disease. Thanks. I was afraid I was going to have to spend the rest of my life sorting out what I had already failed to sort out. And he said, no, no, no, no. My sponsors told me that they didn't think that I was a psychopath and a sociopath. They thought I was a pretty good actor.

I had learned when I was real little. But if you want to hold the world back, be a little nuts. Not too much or they'll lock you away. Be unpredictable and people will leave you alone. So I learned all kinds of symptoms from dropping to my knees and crying to going stark-raving mad, depending on the circumstances. There was a defense. But they said, that's not what's wrong with you. You suffer from alcoholic insanity.

Now what the heck is that? They gave me that book and they talked about their experience. The chapter about, in one of the chapters is a story about a car salesman named Jim, who had been in and out of AA several times, failed to enlarge his spiritual life, but knew all there was to know about AA. Went out one morning, had a little tiff with his boss. He was now working for a company he used to own. A little pissed about that.

Stopped in a bar for lunch, which he had done many times before. And after lunch, the lunatic in his head said, Jim, you can have an ounce of whiskey if you put it in your milk, you got a full stomach. So he did. And

nothing terrible happened. It was a wonderful experiment, so he had another. And then another, and pretty soon he's back in the insane asylum again. And with my mind, I needed a simple definition and it followed that story.

Whatever the precise definition of the word 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 don't understand proportion. And I can't think straight. I'm rubber minded. Bruce told me, Don, we don't think the truth's going to work for you. He says, you take it in and your ego catches it and says, I can use that later.

I can catch the edge with that. And by the time I run it through and start using it, it isn't the truth anymore. So what am I going to do? They brought me to a new surrender. I had quit and now we came to surrender. They said, Don, we suggest that you forget everything you think you know about anything. Particularly about spiritual matters. If any of it would have worked, you wouldn't be here. If you did learn anything over the years when we're all through with what we're going to do, it'll still be there.

But let it go. Forget it. And by some kind of grace, I was able to do that and begin learning. Oh, I wanted what they had. They had been changed. And that's what I wanted. Bruce had killed a couple of people, when he was 17 years old in a shootout in Denver on the street. I'd never done that. I couldn't identify with that. But he told me about the morning it happened. He woke up thinking nobody cared whether he lived or died.

And the pain of that was so bad he started to drink to kill the pain. Only that morning it didn't work. It got him involved in the pain. He went out to get his and he killed these people. I understood that. But what I understood more was that the man who was telling me this story was not capable of killing anybody. He said, That's right. I've been changed and God changed me. I didn't care who changed. I wanted some of that.

I'm also very practical. He had something else I wanted. He got in and out of his cell any time he wanted to. And I knew that because when I couldn't get out he'd come by and visit with me. I wanted that. I have never gotten to where I like being caged up. Roy Nichols was a stick-up man who was no longer capable of putting a gun in people's faces and taking their things from them. He had been changed and he said, God did that.

I didn't care who did it. I wanted it. My favorite was Phil Gutierrez. God love him. He's dead now. Died sober on Guam. Phil came from Guam. Phil looked bad. If you're going to make a movie about Chinese pirates you'd cast Phil as the captain. Phil was in this penitentiary because they wouldn't have him on Guam and they couldn't have him in Colorado anymore because when he got drunk he liked to throw things out of windows.

And the last time he'd done that it was people. And it was three stories up. Phil said to me one time, I've been here sober seven years now and you're the first person I've ever sponsored. You will stay sober. I lived up on the fourth tier. Phil Gutierrez was the gentlest and most loving human being I have ever met until this day. Phil Gutierrez taught me to touch physically in a penitentiary where it's risky because he knows, he knew as I now know, we never outgrow the need of being petted on.

And touched by our fellow human being. He touched me with his mind and his heart too. I've never met a man yet including myself that loves his family anymore than Phil did. But Phil would say, I don't do this for them. When I did this for them it didn't work. I do this for me because if I fail at this they have nothing. And he taught me to do this for me. They walked this thing. It wasn't words to them. They walked it.

And I wanted to walk like that. I wanted to be like that. The implication was that if I would get rid of all the things I wasn't, whoever I really was would show up. And they said, God did that and I was to give my life to God. And while I was willing, so I went back to my cell and I said the third step prayer, waited for my flash of light and had the worst experience of my whole life. I'm an alcoholic. If it goes boom and shakes the room I love it.

I can deal with it. But I said that prayer and absolutely nothing happened and I can't deal with that. I'd learn by then if your sponsor tells you to do something and you do it. And you don't get the results you think you should. Go bitch at him. So I did. I told him about that. I was frightened. I had done what they said and I fully expected instant sainthood. And the following day they'd let me go home. He said, you dummy.

Gave me back a name. I'd gone from 38, 94 to dummy. He says, you dummy. You should be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. Flashes of light have nearly killed you all your life. I've had some beauties. Southern comfort on a hot day. I'll give you a flash of light. I've had visions. I had the privilege of eating peyote with Indians at a peyote ceremony in Nevada one time. And I had a genuine vision of a great bird flying high with no head.

And I understood that was me in my life flying high going nowhere. For four months living in the north woods of California. No alcohol or nothing else. So if you're considering visions, they'll work for four months. But I'm here for the long haul. I've got to have more than that. He shared with me because he didn't have a flash of light either. He shared with me how it came with him. He spent a couple hours with me. And in that time we made a discovery.

Don had one last reservation. See, there was good news available. If I'd surrendered to God, He had work for me to do. And I knew what it was and I didn't like it. I knew that if I really totally surrendered to God, I'd end up at the corner of Colfax and Broadway handing out watchtower magazines. Asking strangers if they'd been saved. I just couldn't see me do that. And he just smiled. And said two words that if you hear from your sponsor, quiver.

He said let's talk about that. Which in English means be still for a minute while I straighten you out. With great love and great understanding, he carried me into my right mind. He said don do you suppose that the fellow at Colfax and Broadway handing out watchtowers today had breakfast where he wanted to? And I said yeah and he said well you didn't. He said do you suppose that that man down there humiliating himself is wearing clothes that he picked out?

And I said yeah and he said well you're not. Do you suppose when he's all through making a fool of himself that he gets to go home? I didn't. Well that kind of love and truth. He carried me to an awakening and it's 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 period. The results of that have been fun. Oh my I just started saying yes. I've been places I sure wouldn't have picked.

One of the most touching was last year. I just go I get up in the morning and I say well here I am what do you want to do with me? Whatever. I'm ready. Give me some strength. Let's go. And the phone starts to ring. Things happen. Well last January I was up in Winnipeg Canada. It was 18 below zero. I can promise you that I've been thinking. I wouldn't have picked it. I would not have been there. Our hosts thought that the nicest thing they could do for us was take us out on the street where the wind chill made it 40 below.

I didn't have anything else to do so I went. It seems that they were running the Olympic torch across Canada. There is no way that by thinking I would have taken myself to that place to see that. No way. We're standing on the streets at 40 below and here are all these huddled little bundles of clothing. As I look closer at carrying out there were children inside of them just peeking out. They closed the schools and everybody in Winnipeg was lining the streets.

And I began to feel the power of that. But they were late. About an hour late because it seems that one of the runners they handed out candles with a little red plastic top to simulate the torch. And one of the runners saw a lady in a wheelchair and he stopped and lit her torch and it became a habit. And I used to think people didn't care. I wouldn't have taken myself there. I can't really think I would be in Akron, Ohio this morning had I chosen this.

Before I get up here I ask God to please fill me with his love. And let it flow through me and into the lives of others. Here I look at you and I am filled with God's love. I wouldn't have picked it. This lady that's with me I wouldn't have picked that. She's sane. I didn't pick sane people. Well I want to get on with it. Anything he has in mind for me is better than anything I had in mind for me. And I've been down some wonderful paths.

I've had five career changes since I was 35. And I'm up for whatever is next. You know, life has become interesting. But to get to that, how do I then I ask Bruce how do I make this real? God must be real. He said, Don, God will reveal Himself to you as you reveal yourself to Him. And sent me off to do an inventory. And two hours later when I'd finished it and come back to Fifth-Step it, the same loving man looked at that and he said that's garbage.

You wrote that to impress me. Get away. See I'd written down about two hours worth of some of the grosser things I'd done in my life. That's what the inventory was. And he knew it was garbage. I did what any alcoholic would do. I found somebody who would listen to it. I'm not wasting that effort. And I came away from there with another spiritual awakening. A spiritual awakening is simple by the way. Anytime any alcoholic anywhere understands any part of the truth, that's a spiritual awakening.

I'd tell this guy something and he'd tell me things like, it wasn't that bad. And as this went on I awakened to the fact that some of it was that bad. And I had once again in my life picked somebody who would tell me what I wanted to hear, so I didn't have to change anything. And I knew on the spot, if I didn't stop that immediately, I was going to die a very ugly death. And you must understand I'm not afraid of death and haven't been for a long time.

There's some of the ways of dying I'm not too keen on. But I have died three times that I can remember. But the fact of living or dying an ugly death means that for some period of time just before that I have to live an ugly life and I can't stand the thought of that. Not again. So I did the thing that we all hate to do. I submitted. That's another way of spelling surrender. I got the big book out. And I looked in there for instructions on how to write an inventory in Alcoholics Anonymous.

And made an incredible discovery. It has nothing to do with finding out about who I am. It says that the purpose of inventory is for me to find and be rid of the things in myself that are blocking me from God. And there's the promise that makes it possible for me to be here to find and be rid of. I don't have to repeat the stupid

mistakes of the past over and over and over again. I can be rid of them. And without that I couldn't have made it through this deal.

Well the instructions were simple. Even an idiot like me could understand. It says, make a list of everybody you're mad at. That was easy. All I had to do was think about you. You went on the list. He said, I'm supposed to put down the reasons that I'm mad at you. What have you done to me? It's so terrible. That's easy. That's all I ever thought about. I'm supposed to put down what that affects in my life. That isn't that hard.

I can tell you right now all kinds of reasons that are messing me up. What you've done to me. Our founders were brilliant. In 1966 federal narcotics agents came through my house. That's how they do it. One came through the front door. One came through the back door. One came through the side window. They knocked me to the ground and put his foot on my head. That kind of stuff. My four-year-old son let out a shriek and this big cop swung around with his pistol and almost killed my boy.

Just a reflex. And I hated him. He was on my list. There were 23 reasons I was mad at him. He had made me a criminal. He had talked ugly about me. He had frightened my parents. He nearly killed my son. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I tried to take the attitude we're supposed to take that he like myself was perhaps spiritually sick. You betcha. And I still hated him. I was to grant him the same pity and sympathy. I had granted a sick friend.

At that time sick people did not get pity and sympathy from me. They scared me to death. See, I had to have a script for everything in my life. And there's only one script for sick people. What can I do for you? And I couldn't do that one. So they scared me. Well, I still hated it. This thing wasn't working. I went on. I read and I did what it said next without thinking. It said setting aside the wrongs others have done.

We resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where have I been at fault? Where have I been selfish and self-seeking and dishonest and fearful? And getting to that, it burst on me again. My troubles really are of my own making. I brought that guy into my house. I gave him an engraved invitation. I'd been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico and not paying the tax on it. I was his job. There's a lesson in that. If you're tired of being arrested, quit going where there's cops.

I brought him there. Everything that had happened that day was my fault. And I'm very careful before I take people into the inventory process, because there's no way I could have lived with the fact that I almost killed my son. If it hadn't been that I already knew now that God had forgiven me, but I think of more importance for me, that by doing this, I would never again have to repeat that and put my kids in that kind of jeopardy again.

That's the promise to find and be rid of the stuff that's doing this. And you know what? I haven't had a federal agent in my house in 20 years. And I don't intend inviting any. But if one of them needs a Twelfth-Step call, he can sleep in the basement for three days. That's it. And I finally got my hands on one of them. At the Shick Institute in California, I finally got to a 12-step federal narcotics agent and I turned him over to one of the guys I sponsored because he's tougher than I am.

I learned about fear. I always thought it lived here in my stomach when I felt it and I discovered I have a high-grade manufacturing plant here in my head. I can make good quality terror out of good morning, Don. He

wasn't this nice yesterday. I wonder what he wants. The nameless fears. I put names on them. I was afraid of being with people. I was afraid of being alone. I was afraid of having to talk and I was afraid I wouldn't get my turn.

I was afraid I'd never get done what I wanted to do. I thought I was afraid of failure and discovered that I was afraid of success. Failure is easy. People will treat you nicely and help you when you fail. But if I did something right, I knew it was dumb luck. And I also knew you'd want me to repeat it tomorrow and I didn't know how I'd done it today. And I learned about God's mercy. After this list is made, consider this.

There's a lot of sick people on this planet and they all have to find ways of coping with their fear. Cope means to fight the good fight and I'm too tired to fight. And it tells me in my big book how to deal with fear, I'm going to go to God with this. And say please remove this from me and direct my attention to what you would have me be. And in that simple little sentence is freedom. I am not what I do. It doesn't say remove my fear and direct my attention to what you want me to do.

It says what you want me to be. I'm not what I wear and I'm not the job I have and I'm not the family I live with. I'm just me. An old and dear friend once said, Don, there's only one thing you can do better than 50 million other people. And that's be you. And I have a contribution to make to life and if I don't make it, it will never be made. And you have a contribution to make to life. And if you don't make yours, it'll just never be made.

It wouldn't have to be said. Two and a half years before I could write the sex inventory. I was very confused up here. I couldn't remember anybody. But I finally got done. It fit on a three by five card. I was not a super stud. Genuinely surprised that I had children. But I took what I did have and went back to my friend Jim one afternoon. And he spent the whole afternoon with me as I revealed all this stuff. And two wonderful things happened that afternoon.

I stopped being alone for one thing. As I took this material to my friend Jim and shared it with him, we ended up with two people in that room. And up till that time it had been me and whoever I needed you to be. I'd never granted anyone their own life. That afternoon in that process of sharing, we ended up with two. And as long as there's two of us guys, you can't be alone. I took this thing with Jim because I wanted things to be better for Jim.

Jim was living the most horrible dream any alcoholic can have. In a blackout, in a car, Jim had killed someone. And in his mind was no recollection of that. He was in the penitentiary for a crime he couldn't remember. And I wanted it to be better for him. That's compassion. I didn't know that then. And I had known, I did know by then, because you had taught me the best way for me to help any alcoholic. I share the garbage of my own life with him.

That's our weapon. So I did. I walked away from that experience with a certain and full knowledge that for the first time in my life I'd completed something. I'd finished it. I'd given it everything I had and it was done. And I went back to my cell and did my review of it. And it was done. But I also knew I had a lifetime of work to do. Because it was shabby. There wasn't much in my head at that time. So I asked God in his mercy in that seven step to please don't let the stuff that 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, I wanted to tell you about it. Why do I?

Oh, never mind. We had to learn some things about the house cleaning process because it isn't finished until you have done the Eighth and Ninth Steps until you have discovered and become willing to make amends to everybody and done so. They wouldn't let us out. They wouldn't let you in. So we learned some very important spiritual things about that.

The key to this whole process is my willingness to do something about it whenever possible. And he sent me to my cell and he said I want you to make a list of all the people you've ever harmed and you start with a list of people that hurt you the most because now we understood what I had done to them. And then he said just to add anybody you can think of if you met him you messed with him. He helped me understand that I was clear in what I had done to people.

But he said you're so insensitive you have no idea what it did to them. So I was to take them individually and picture them in my mind, close my eyes and see if I can look each one right in the eye and feel a willingness to say I've been wrong. I've harmed you would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get the books to balance. And I had the experience I've wanted all my life. As I went over that list that night I was lifted and set free.

If I have harmed you in any way you tell me what I have to do and we'll get it straight. It makes me one with the people of the world. We are peers. We're truly all God's kids. You're my brothers and sisters. I heard it again last night. And that's real to me. But they wouldn't let me out. So I had to write some letters. We owed a buck and a half to this place we'd gotten Christmas tree lights from. And I had to write them a letter and say I'm in penitentiary and I haven't paid you for those yet.

I'm an alcoholic and had to get my life straight. I make 10 cents a day and out of that I have to take out all my toilet articles and stuff. Will you accept a quarter a month until we get paid? That's tough on a big time gangster. I had to go to one guy and say I owe you this money and I don't have much. I screwed up my life and he said you sure did. Why do I get my money? Most spiritual one I ever ran into. When do I get my money?

And I gave him the \$5 I had and he gave me a receipt. And I started telling him when I'd come back and he said don't tell me any of that crap. He says you've never told me the truth in your life. Just show up again someday with some money and I'll take it. That's real stuff. But the thing, the most important thing, and I'm coming close to out of time and this is too important to miss, was to make amends to my family.

I think that the most important spiritual thing most of us will ever have to deal with is living at peace in a family. It doesn't get much better than that nor is there anything much tougher than that. I learned it here. This is my family. You are my family. And you taught me some things about family. To be consciously deliberately concerned with your welfare is a family attribute. It makes a difference to me whether you live or die.

You can jump off a cliff if you want to and I won't stop you. Unless you have asked me to sponsor you and stop you from jumping off a cliff, then you're mine. I have the right to interfere in anything I want to. Until you jump, I still won't stop you. I will run up and say you know, say hello before. I'm probably going to hurt down at the bottom and I'm not cleaning up the mess. But if you don't jump, I'll sit here for a couple hours when you talk.

And most of you don't want to jump anyway. One of my favorite guys I met on a cruise ship was watching

him as a sober sailor's cruise. When I told my wife he's getting ready to go over the side. And I walked over and we started to talk. And I eased him back up to the ping pong table. And he said, yeah, I was. The only reason I didn't jump was I didn't want the sharks to get me. Well, what you do after you say, what do I have to do to get things straight?

As you shut up and listen while I tell you. That made it possible for me to go back to my mother with no big promises. She eventually allowed me to come to her house one day and I didn't say the words outright. I found a way to ask her what do I have to do. And I listened and she said, honey, all I've ever wanted from you was that you'd be happy. So I've been going by my mother's house for years, happy. And it's worked.

She told me it was six years before she thought I was really going to make it. But I wasn't going to prove anything. I was going by to give her things. Me. That's all I have to give anyway. You guys have created a hell of a problem for me with my mother. As a result of your trust, you've asked me to do some important work in Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm not important, but the work you've asked me to do has been. I've been a chairman.

I've been a delegate. I'm currently a trustee. That isn't who I am. That's just the work I'm doing. But that means I travel a lot. And I go here and there. And you give me these funny little things. New Orleans gave me the key to the city. I can't keep those things. I give them to my mother. But I heard her talking to one of her friends one time. She thinks I'm the president of AA. I thought I've got to straighten her out on this deal.

But I don't do things that affect people anymore without praying about them. And I took that into prayer carefully. An answer I got was very simple. After all the years of pain that I caused that lady, if she wants to think I'm the emperor of AA, she can. As long as you and I understand, I've worked my way to the bottom. We're all okay. My making amends to my dad has been fun. As I started to go over the list with him, he said, don't tell me those things.

I know all that. Well, you can just hurt me all over again. What you and I are going to have to do is start from here. So we did. Now my dad is a genius, literally. He lives in a 48 room house full of stuff. And it's a reflection of his mind. And part of the problem I had with him was that I couldn't keep up with him. I'm not a genius. And he did some strange things to me along the way. This really lovely man did strange things along the way.

And I didn't understand it. I got free of that. It occurred to me in the inventory saying that somebody must have done some terrible things to him or he couldn't have done that to me. Maybe he was doing the best he could with what he had. It wasn't enough. But it was the best he had. At least he was never in a penitentiary when his kids weren't a foster home. So I let it go. And letting him go, I got free. Maybe I was doing the best I could too.

And it wasn't enough. And it never will be but on my own. So we have a good thing going on. But I learned to listen. He said to me one day as he pointed to all these outbuildings. He said, Don, I spent 60 some years accumulating all this stuff. And I have to spend the rest of my life giving it away. And I heard what he was really saying. He wasn't talking about this stuff. He was talking about this stuff in his head.

So I go by and visit with my dad. We chat. Which means I listen a lot. And I even understand him once in a while. It's a wonderful man. He said to me not too long ago, Don. There's only two things a human being needs to live a good life. Honor and wisdom. You must have enough honor to keep every promise you ever make. No

matter what the personal consequences. And enough wisdom not to make too many promises like that.

I can't do anything about what I did to my children. And I damaged my children severely. There's only one thing I can do. I can create an arena where they can get well. We call it a home. When I was working at the penitentiary I had to come into Denver once a week. And I asked my boys, does that bother you? And they said no. But please be sure you tell us when you're coming home. My kids don't need any more big surprises.

So in my home everybody knows where everybody is and when they're coming in. It's important. Several years ago I got the privilege of marrying a sane lady. Jackie. You know how I know she's sane? She never tries to fix me. And she won't let me fix her. And she had two little girls and I almost missed this deal. I'd already raised seven children. I lived with my two boys up in the mountains and we fished when we wanted and we didn't fish when we didn't want.

And our life was good. And she had two little girls I'd have to raise. I wasn't sure I wanted to do that. So I prayed and thought for three days and decided why not. I got nothing better to do. Besides I loved her. And I don't have time to tell you the adventure. This poor lady had never seen an alcoholic. First thing my teenage boys did when I moved into our new home was get the babysitter pregnant. Well that disturbed her a little bit.

I don't know why it disturbed her. That's routine isn't it? Her little girls have been a joy to me. I've had to learn some new things. Girls fight. Dirty. I remember one morning I had never been in such fine spiritual condition. My patience was good and I was just... And Kelly said something to Lisa. Lisa said... And I said, don't do that. Dumbest thing I ever did in my life. It put me in the game. The volume went up.

I said knock it off. Which meant, "We got him". The volume went up. And I said get to your rooms. And as they got to their rooms they slammed the door. Well that's important in our house. It was vital. Spiritual life required solitude. I was up those stairs in a single bound and had those doors off the hinges and on the way to the basement. If we're going to slam them we're not going to have them, right? They went on in school.

Well I got down into the basement. Clear down there. The doors by now had become heavy. And I had a spiritual awakening. I said to me... You got to carry these things all the way back up. Rehang them. And then when those little girls get home from school you've got to apologize for being a jerk. So I got out my pad and my pencil. I inventoried and found out what button they had found, and dismantled it. And you know what?

They can yell now and I don't hardly even care. I'm not getting in that game. I can't win. But one of the most important events in my life came as a result of my 15 year old daughter, Kelly. My girls love you. She has two dads. One's a Denver policeman. And me. And she had an occasion to write a paper on her dad. And she picked me. And she wrote six or seven pages of some of the neatest stuff I've ever read. What a guy.

Cutting door. I was really glad I knew me that day. At the end of this paper her last paragraph rocked me to my soul. She said if I had a choice I would have picked Don for my dad. But I didn't have a choice. God picked him and brought him to me. Well I wondered why did that hit me so hard. That's good stuff. But why did that rock me? Well that's how I feel about you. That's why. If I had a choice, I'd have picked you.

But I didn't have a choice. So God picked you and brought you to me. Which means I belong to you. I will give my life. Not my death. I will give my life to preserve what we have here. It's a gift from God. And I'm

personally responsible to keep it shiny and clean and intact. And unchanged. So that the guy who comes in there 50 years now. And that's easy. I just read the big book and when I sponsor you we read it together and we do what it says.

And I expect you to show up at service meetings. Well you like it or not. I've come to the most frustrating part of my talk because I'm out of time and I finally come to a place where I have something important to say. So we will just have to get together over coffee tables and at meetings. But I want to give you two little gifts as I go. I had difficulty with the idea of meditation because I had been into every kind of meditation there was.

I've been to the day before the first day of creation in my life. And I knew that wasn't what it was about. It was a quiet thing. And I think in images. So I found an image that fits. Just from an old hymn called "In the Garden". I come to the garden alone. When the dew is still on the roses. And he walks with me and he talks with me and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

And I found that you with that image I have a garden within me and I can go there and I visit with my father. And it's just a visit. I used to carry all my garbage in and say, look what they've done today, Dad. What I do about this. And along the way I learned to leave the baggage outside and just go into the garden. And as I left I would either have the strength to pick it up or the wisdom to leave it there. Some time back on an airplane and I used airplanes for solitude.

I was going to the garden and it was as if a voice said to me, Don, become the gardener. We're pruning and moving trees around and looking for the gophers. There's still a few of me in there. But I spent a lot of time there. One of the promises I was given at the beginning was that I would learn to think one thought at a time. And that has happened for me. But I've also learned the precious gifts of going and being still and not thinking at all.

And someday I'm not coming back. I don't know what you're going to do with a shell, but I'm not. I'll wait. I came here willing to die rather than be me anymore. And today I'm willing to live for as long as He has use for me. And if I go this afternoon when this is all over, I go knowing I've had 20 of the damndest years any human being could ever have. And I've left my mark and I've been marked by you. I had become everyone I'd ever met or read about or seen in a movie.

And they were all talking at once. And I thought I was going to have to sort them all out to find out who I was. And you said, No, that isn't how we do it here. What we do here is kind of like the story of the fellow who had seen Michelangelo's statue of David for the first time and he was awestruck. And he went to Michelangelo and he said, How in the world did you do that? Michelangelo said to him, Well, I took this block of stone and I chipped away everything that didn't look like David.

And that's what I got. And I think that's what we do here. With God as the sculptor and our meetings and our books and our slogans and our stuff as the chisel. 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. I love you very much. Thank you.