

Joe Hawk's home group

1988 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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Colorado and a man named Max Peter from Canada talked at that international and he talked about being in Canada with a lot of men that couldn't stay sober and they all wanted Max to be their sponsor and he didn't think he could sponsor everybody but he thought that maybe they could meet at a time when no one else would come and they could go through the steps together as a group. And that idea caught on in Denver. A lot of people were in workshops and a lot of people did workshops and my sponsor was one of those men that did workshops in Denver and they found people that couldn't stay sober staying sober because they were having an experience. And about two years ago I moved here to Santa Monica in a friend of mine that's here tonight, Al, asked me about this workshop idea.

Two years ago I think last month and we went through the steps together as a group and I believe we started with about 24 and we ended with about 18 and as a result of that when that finished they decided they wanted to do a regular meeting and they kind of were interested in 10, 11, and 12 because they had just gone through the first nine steps and this little group started down in the basement here with about 15 or 20 people.

That group has doubled in size in a year and it's become a very effective group. Several of the people that were in that workshop two years ago are here tonight. Since then several workshops have sprung up from that. To my knowledge there's about 20 workshops now in the Los Angeles area including Orange County. There's people here tonight from Orange County. There's people here tonight from all over Los Angeles that are involved in the workshop.

I know that six years ago when I was in one and going through the process with the man that's going to speak tonight it saved my life. To even feel a part of what's going on to think that that small workshop from two years ago has somehow in the AA way touched everyone in this room either directly or indirectly. As I guess what alcoholics is anonymous is all about. It's kind of overwhelming to me to be in a room in Southern California for only being here two years and knowing this many people, knowing most of you.

That's just overwhelming to me. Six years ago nobody wanted me in their life. And several of you care about me today and you care about each other and we're here joining in a common solution that I don't find all the time in alcoholics anonymous. So with no further ado I'd like to introduce our speaker from Denver Colorado down P. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. This is going to be interesting. My heart is so full I don't know if I can even talk to you.

The last month and a half I've had some things just to fill me beyond belief. And six days from now I celebrate an AA birthday and I am among friends and I know that. And you get to be the recipient of all this stuff and I have had a chance to talk about where I've been and what's been happening and all this stuff gathering up. I just returned from a week meeting with people from 32 different countries in alcoholics anonymous spending an entire week talking about how we can better carry the message.

Then I got together with my sponsor and some old friends from the Denver young people's group down from

Tucky for the weekend. And then we spent 17 days in the Soviet Union talking about alcoholics anonymous to them. So it was like being an AA in 1935. I am an alcoholic and I belong here. It's the first place that I ever belong on this planet. When I got here I felt different and strange. And my sponsor says well that's because you're different and you're strange.

But I've been feeling that way for a long time and somewhere along the way I discovered that alcohol changed it for a little bit. A period of time each day was okay to be me and it was okay for you to be you. But it is in my nature that if one works you take ten. If it's worth doing it's worth abusing. And I don't know why that's just me. I drank alcoholically from my very first drink. I don't have the biggest idea what controlled drinking is. I never really tried it.

I tried to get control of my feelings and my mind and my life. But I don't understand controlled drinking. Who cares? I didn't like throwing up but that's the price you pay for having fun. I've been doing a lot of thinking this week as happens as you come up on your birthday week. You look back and you remember what it was like. Christmas week of 1967 was a bitch. I weighed 133 pounds. I lived in a real dingy basement apartment with my two little boys.

We paid \$45 a month rent and the old lady who owned the place had cats. Her place was cleaner than mine was. I was on federal parole for a little indiscretion I'd committed in 1966. And I was in trouble. This time I was in the kind of trouble that ends with either death or sobriety. I was finally in the kind of trouble I couldn't explain away. I was beginning that week to finally become aware of the fact that all my dreams were dead. They were never ever going to happen.

The stuff I had in mind for me as I grew up wasn't going to happen. Stuff my people had in mind for me was never going to happen. I was finally willing, not willing, I was finally forced into whatever frame of mind it is that tells you you're cooked. How unable to do anything about the circumstances of my life and unable to quit. Unable to be honest enough to quit. I was also at that time putting an awful lot of amphetamines up hard.

I don't belong to any debating society. I'm an alcoholic and I used a lot of dope. If anyone's talked about that later we'll talk about it. But I'm an alcoholic and finally hit the bottom. Now I've been living on the bottom for about three and a half years. I had reached a place where I couldn't know I could never be sane. You know I had this obsession with being the best. Can't be the best I don't want to play. My brother was playing music with Stan Caton when he was 19.

I picked up the trumpet and couldn't do that so I quit. And it was that way with anything in my life. Christmas week in 1967 I got to look it down for exactly who Don was. That hurt. I don't want to be labor to the point. But I got to tell you a couple things that happened today. That week because that's why I'm here today. I met the first requirement of recovery. The first requirement of stepping onto any spiritual path is a recognition of the fact that in and of myself I can't do.

Not anymore. I looked at the things that were going on. I looked at our apartment. I looked at my parole. I looked at what we were eating. I couldn't get out of bed that week until my connection got there to give me a fix so I could get up and go out and do and steal whatever we needed to get out of the rest of the day. And I had always prided myself that I'd never turned on young people. I'm one of the people that came out of Berkeley in

the 60s.

Screaming out where there's dope, there's hope burned out city hall. I was always asked in all over the place and doing my best to destroy this planet myself. I didn't have the strength to do that anymore. But I had never turned on young people. I was proud of that. My connection was 16 years old. I had turned them on and I was using them for a runner. And I saw that finally. Our Christmas tree was an alcoholic marble.

We got it for a dollar Christmas Eve. We found the dollar in the snow. And the tree was the biggest one they had on the lot. And it didn't fit the room. It tilted at the top. Didn't that get you? Well, that got me. I had an image of me and it began to crumble. That didn't how it's supposed to be. You're not supposed to get your Christmas tree with the dollar you find in the snow. The only true Christmas presents my children had were some stuff I'd gotten on credit.

Because we were on welfare and we'd check any gotten there yet. So we had a pair of cowboy boots and a cowboy shirt wrapped up from our little boys. And the kids had taken everything in the house and wrapped it up in blue paper towel. So I'd have a decent Christmas. Some more of me broke. Come in. Is that real? You heard it too? It hadn't always been that way. A lot of things had happened that week but the killer came.

Thank God. On Christmas Day when the boys and I went down to my folks place so they could spend Christmas Day with them on Grandma. My dad met us at the door and he said I'm sorry. But your mother says I can't let you in anymore. Because she can't stand watching you die. And for the first time in my life I saw what I'd been doing to my people. Finally saw it. And then dad made a lie out of my last great big ration now.

I used to scream out nobody cares whether we lived or die. We're not hurting anybody else because nobody else cared. And he snuck us in the house anyway because he loved us. And I saw that. And I saw what I'd been doing to my children. I don't know why. They kept giving them back to me. But they did. Now we lived in crash pads. Now little boys were brought up thinking that hiding out in an attic with the Hell's Angels downstairs to protect you as a normal way of life.

And for them it was until some damn fool told my kids about school they wanted to go. And the train hit me. I saw what I'd been doing to them. And I went home. And did that thing that you. I believe all alcoholics must do eventually. I reached a place where I couldn't stand being made one more minute. It's over. I became wanting to do anything anybody said and go anywhere anybody said. If a man I didn't have to be me anymore.

And there was nobody left to tell me where to go and what to do. So I met the first requirement of recovery. I quit. I took a two month supply of this oxen and put it up my arm. I drank everything in the house and laid down on my diet. And I know about disappointment. When I woke up in the morning the police worked the door. And I knew I wasn't there. Now that sounds painful and it was. But it's a grand place to be if you happen to be alcoholic.

Wonderful place. A complete failure at living. And a complete failure at dying. You just automatically do what's next. And what's next was go jail. Now I had set myself up that week because I really was tired and I really needed to rest. And six months in the county jail for people in my conditions is a rest. Some people in this room aren't through yet. I know that. So let me tell you how to get through county jail so you can get back to

that.

I lie to you for ten minutes. You lie to me for ten minutes and we both go take a nap. That isn't why they were there. This time they had nine charges and the first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. The Denver D.A. promised me that if I beat him on that one he'd bring the rest of them one at a time. But I was through and I didn't care. I really didn't care. I talk about this because it's important for me to talk to you about the power of God as I understand it.

I want to talk about prisons. I don't want anybody here to think I'm a big time gangster. I'm not. The big time gangsters never get there. I've been in three of them. Well, they took me away. Five months later when a trial date came, they called me and I just don't remember. They said you are really sick. No big news there. We have made an arrangement with your parole officer, they said, and with the federal judge and with the state judge.

If you'll plead guilty to a reduced charge, we'll send you down to Texas to Fort Worth. Or you can get fixed. And two things helped me make that decision. I was wanting to go anywhere anybody said. I had been clean for five months. The alcoholic ego needs about three and a half hours to go to death for a collaboration. And I knew if you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'll be on the street in six months.

They do something. Doctors and books would tell me what was wrong with me. I thought how long it was going to take to fix that. And all the symptoms I would have to present to them on a certain time table to convince them that I was getting better. I've played that game since I was a little bitty kid. I know that one. Well, I took their deal. And they kept their bark. I pled guilty to a reduced charge. They gave me a year and a half of the penitentiary, suspended it, turned me over to the feds who'd already agreed to accept me.

Five days later I was in a car or a state penitentiary. Because the federal man at the last minute said there's no hope for this one anyway. Just get him off the street. And I think that was direct intervention of God in my life. Because I'd have gone to the federal hospital and I'd have been cured of what was wrong with me. I'd have been on the street in six months and some hot day I had a cold cure. And to this day I believe I'd be locked away in some nut ward somewhere.

I don't think death is an option for me. I tried it. It was left for me as madness. But I had surrendered. I'd said I can't do this. Very crudely, but I've said that. With my heart. I was sent to the place where I could hear the message that I needed to hear. I'm one of those people that believes if you're alcoholic and this is your first meeting. This is where you are supposed to be. You hear what you need to hear to get you back to another meeting tomorrow.

Or you can hear what we have to say until you can finally hear what we have to say. My third week in the fish tank in the Colorado State Penitentiary, the man who said one afternoon, you guys will come down and you will listen. I didn't have a whole lot else to do. So I came down with the rest of the guys and I said down I listened. They had three guys in there with green shirts and numbers on their chest. One of them got up and he said, my name's Doc.

And I'm an alcoholic. That means that I'm powerful silver alcohol and drugs 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

could still manage your lives, look at the reward to stay. Just gave you the nifty job you could do. And I heard what Doc said. That's a miracle. They also said some other nifty stuff like your very best thinking.

Got you with men attention. You're not doing something out of you. Then they told us the most important thing I have ever heard. And if you're new here tonight, this is it. If you are alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink alcohol. You don't ever have to hurt like you've been hurting ever again. We don't promise you a pain free life, but you don't ever have to drink alcohol. You know, I didn't know that. My experience was, yes I do.

Well, they offered us this little deal. On Saturday afternoon and Sunday, you get a movie and yard privilege. And that's about it for entertainment. If we would give up our yard and movie privileges and come to their 12-step study school every Saturday and every Sunday afternoon for five weeks, we could then become a member of the Alcoholics Anonymous Group and then on Friday night. Well, my friend Jim and I decided we wanted to go.

So I was in a bind. I was at least bit afraid of being in that prison. I don't know how to live in prison. It's even easier in County Jail. But I knew that in about a year and a half to three years, somewhere in there, they were going to put me back on the streets. Well, I didn't have the slightest idea I would have out there. And I didn't want to do what I'd been doing ever again. So Jim and I went to their little school.

I got introduced to sponsorship. Kind, gentle, understanding. We sat down and one of the three guys that was in that room said, you knew guys for the next five weeks, you have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. I didn't argue with that. And they began to do the thing that Alcoholics Anonymous does if you're really in Alcoholics Anonymous. They very specifically told us what was wrong with us.

They very specifically told us what to do about that. They answered the big question for me. All of my life I've been running around asking anybody who listened to tell me what's wrong with me. And I got confused because everybody I ask had an answer to them. In this book are some descriptions of Alcoholics. And I love this book, by the way, for a couple of reasons. One of them is that almost everything of any value in this book came to us from non-alcoholics.

The only thing we do well is carry the message. We don't know nothing. One of these non-alcoholics was a medical doctor who described in detail why I went to the penitentiary when I was 19 years old. In terms I could understand. One of the symptoms of my alcoholism is when I start drinking I get lost and I can't find my way home. And there's a federal law against that when you're in the Navy. I was stationed down here at Long Beach.

And they kept giving me these 24 hour deliveries expecting me to get back. And I wanted to get back. I really did. I loved the Navy, but I couldn't see me get back. 15, 20 minutes late, an hour late. Captain's Mask was just part of being there, I figured. One time it was 23 days. And when I got home it wasn't there anymore. It was the last way to Korea. And at that time that was a shooting event. I was in real trouble.

The only thing I think that kept me out of prison forever was the guy I ran with was smarter than any of us. We got us a Pan Am clipper to Japan and we met the ship. That's what saved us. Some of the trouble. Dr. Silkworth and my sponsors described my condition that may or that period of time in a way I could understand. I went to prison for alcoholism. I went on leave and I started drinking. And 22 days later I was in Persian Square,

bouche and drinks and quarters and food and doing whatever I had to do to stay out there until I found it.

I hadn't found it yet. It was there. On day 23 that madness was gone. And I turned myself in. Like any other rational human being and went back to face the consequences of my act. And he describes that in here he talks about men who had been working on a business deal for a period of time that would be settled favorably. They took a drink and aired two before their appointment and they missed their appointment. And there I am.

I went to prison because I had an allergy. If I had an allergy to tomatoes and I ate tomatoes I'd break out of an inch. My allergy is alcohol. If I put alcohol in my body I'd break out with an itch. One more alcohol. I have lost the power of choice and it has nothing to do with whether I love my family. It has nothing to do with whether I love my work or even myself. It has to do with the fact that once I put alcohol in my body for whatever the reason I must have more alcohol.

Until I don't have to have more alcohol. I don't know if that's going to be two hours, two weeks, two months, two years or a lifetime. I just don't know. I can't predict it anymore. Thing out of control means you can't predict your behavior. You can't predict what's going to come along. God that was good because they only told me I was sick. They told me why I was sick specifically. That is my reaction to alcohol and you know what? That's not curable.

There is nothing to this day that can change that. And I promise you something from today's viewpoint. If they come up with something that would allow me to drink. You can have my share. Well that was good. That told me what was wrong with me until they said now. If you never take another drink that will never happen again. That only happens after the first drink. So if you don't take the first drink you won't develop the craving and do the things you do after the first drink.

So we're back to the question what's wrong with me then. I've got a lifetime of that kind of experience. Why do I keep taking a drink? Well I had an answer to that too. I could say. We knew that one of the reasons I was in that penitentiary is because I was certified by one government agency as a psychopath. And another is associate path type two. And the reason I didn't go to the hospital they told me is because both of those are untreatable.

One doesn't know the difference between right and wrong so you can't help it. The other knows the difference and just doesn't give a damn. And I lose both. And then I get mixed up with you guys and you tell me I have this third terminal untreatable disease. You drive me mad or kill me. Thanks. Real good news for a sick person. The problem, my real problem centers in my mind. I can describe it to you in a couple ways and will.

I suffer from alcoholic insanity. And that's characterized by a couple things. It'll be different next time it's the chili. I've earned this. The main reason I drank alcohol. Well, of the several hundred I drank to feel bigger. I drank to feel smaller. I drank to be noticed. I drank to be invisible. I drank to feel good. I drank to stop feeling bad. The horror of alcoholism was the fact that quite often I drank for no damn good reason at all.

There's a peace missing. It's not there. My neighbor has it. I talk with my neighbors now. One of the benefits of sobriety is that I get to talk with my neighbors. They're not talking about me. They're talking with me. My neighbor owns a bar. The East Side Story in Aurora, Ohio. We were talking a few years ago. And this lovely man describing night that he had a terrible mind. It seems he got drunk. And he threw up and made a fool.

So he quit doing that. Makes me nervous. Our experience was identical. It was the night I drank too much alcohol. I puked. There's a difference. And I made a fool of myself. What I did with that was learn what didn't make me do. And I got to enjoy being a damsel. My neighbor remembers what happened to him and how it made him feel. So this day strongly enough that he doesn't want to do that again. And that's what's missing in me.

There are times I can't remember. The information that I can show up. We inherited a black left puppy while back. Beautiful little puppy. Came into my house and went on the floor. So I popped him to the paper and I threw him. The next day he came in and he went on the floor and popped him and threw him out. After about five days of that, the puppy quit wetting on the floor. And I was sitting in my chair rocking and the thought occurred to me.

That dog is smarter than I am. I can't be asked what on the floor he'd hit me with something I'd go. Next dog. He's able to learn from his negative experience. When it came to alcohol and eventually a number of other things. I couldn't. And I believe to this day there have been and will be blank spots. When all of the information that I have concerning alcoholism, alcohol, alcoholics, anonymous, steps, traditions, blah, blah, blah, won't show up.

Or if they do, they won't show up with a kind of intensity only to stay sober. I believe that. So I don't count on that. In my six years sobriety I had an experience that brought this home to me. I was now working in the reformatory. I'm not the only. It put me to work behind the walls. And once a week I'd come into town to meet with the chief of police. And my bosses. And God, that was heady stuff. Denver chief one time gave me a.

Told me something that just tickled me to death. He said, Don, you know, I couldn't pick you out of the lineup today. I thought that was nice. I had enough sense not to mention to him that that's academic too because I don't show up in line. But during this lunch, one of the guys had found a new liqueur even pronounced it funny. It came in a tall, skinny glass and it was green. And there wasn't enough in to do anybody any good.

But he was passing it around so everyone could taste it. Everything I know showed up. It was there. My defenses were there. I wasn't going to drink that. I knew I wasn't going to drink it. I knew why I wasn't going to drink it. But as it came by me, I thought, I'm going to what it smells like. I got it here and was sniffing it when it burst into my mind with the difference between life and death. That moment would be the twitch of a muscle.

That's how serious this is. And then God did his thing and I knew that because I stepped out of my body and watched my hand. You know I haven't sniffed anything green since. If it's green, it doesn't get near my mouth. But I believe that this disease is that serious. Left them on devices out of twitches. So what am I going to do? I'm really in a spot now. I know I can't run my life and I don't believe in anything else.

Well, I'm here today because I use my eyes and my ears instead of my mouth. There's only one thing I wanted when I got involved in AA and whoever had offered it to me, that's where I'd be. You just have an offer to me. I want it to be changed. That's the promise that shows up in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous first thing. In that non-alcoholic doctor's description of us, he also describes our recovery. And he says without an entire psychic change, there's very little hope.

That's a promise to me. And my sponsors put it in simpler terms. Don, you get a new mind. They said to me,

because I was really worried in that second step about this business of sanity and sanity, I really thought I'd have to spend the rest of my life on a psychiatrist's couch trying to sort out what I had already failed at 34 years to sort out. He said, that isn't what we do here. Don't worry about it. What's wrong with me is Alcoholics.

He said, the most important word for you to remember is a word restore. He said, God knows now that you weren't always a reigning man yet. And he will restore you to when you were saying that you get to start all over. He also said we will assume that you went mad about three seconds after birth. He gave me a key. We suggest that you forget everything you think you know about anything. Particularly about spiritual. One of my sponsors said to me, Don, I don't think the truth is going to work for you.

He described my mind. I take the truth there and my ego catches it. It says, aha, I can use that later. I can catch the edge with that. I've always needed to catch the edge. And the best way to catch the edge around straight people is with truth. Or some moderate version of it. Forget everything you think you know about anything. If I believed it, it was warped. I really didn't have any trouble with that. I know it was warped.

I found out something. Even if you had told me the truth, by the time I got around to using it, it wasn't the truth. So I am totally powerless. I've got a body that goes mad with alcohol. A mind that's mad enough to give it to them. I don't know why. I don't care. Now, I came here to be changed. So I looked around. I'm looking for change. And here's Bruce. He was in that penitentiary for the rest of his natural life because one morning he woke up feeling that nobody cared whether he lived or died.

And the pain of that was so great he started to drink to kill the pain, which he'd always had before. And this morning, 17 years of age, it didn't kill the pain, it got him involved in it. The pain got so bad he got into a rage and he was downtown and he killed some people. But the man that was talking to me was not capable of killing anybody. And I knew that. And I asked him about that. He said, that's right. I've been changed. God changed me.

I didn't care who changed me. He was a walking demonstration that he had been changed. Roy Nichols was a stick-up man who was no longer capable of putting a gun in people's faces and taking their stuff on him. And I asked him about that. He had been changed. He said, God changed me. I was getting interested. They had some things I wanted. In addition to that, I'm very practical. Bruce got in and out of his cell. I didn't tell him he wanted to.

Now I knew that because when I didn't, he'd come by and visit with me. I wonder what he is. And he came at me one day with a hook. For evermore, I'm hooked. He said to me, Don, do you know that it's possible for me to think one thought at a time? Whatever else is here, whatever the price is, I'll pay it. That's what I want. The ability to think one thought at a time. I'd become everybody I'd ever met, and they were all talking once. It was noisy here.

Well, they said God did that for them, and that I would turn my wound on my life over the curb. So I did. I went back to myself. And I took the third step prayer and said, I had the worst experience in my entire life. If it goes boom and rocks this room, I can deal with it. God talks out of the clouds, I can handle it. I said that prayer absolutely nothing happened. I can't handle it. Somehow what I thought was going to happen was that the room would fill with light.

My clothes would go from green to white. The cell door would spring open. And the captain would come down and say, we don't need you here anymore, you know. Nothing happened. I didn't feel anything. The door didn't spring. It closed a green, and I got terrified. I've learned by then, if your sponsor tells you to do something, and you do it, and you don't get the results, you think you ought to go bitch at it. I did. Because I was scared to death.

And I told him that. Why didn't I have this experience? He said, dummy. That's a step up. In the morning I was 38, 984. Now I'm dummy. I got a name. I said, dummy, you ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash in life. They really killed you all your life. We talked. I've had some beauts. Southern comfort on a hot bay in Arizona. That'll give you a spiritual way. I've had visions. I had the privilege of eating peyote with the Indians in the battle, an Easter ceremony time.

I had a genuine vision. I saw a great bird flying with no head on it. I understood that was me in my life. I had no head on it. That experience kept me all right for four months. So if some of you are considering other means, there's one that's good for four months. Four months of sobriety. But I need something that's going to last a lifetime. I can't stand the other way. Well, we talked a little that day. He said to me the most loving thing, and you've heard it in AA.

If you're new, it should scare you. It goes like this. Let's talk about that. Let me translate in case you don't understand English. That means don't be quiet for a benefit. I'll explain something to you. This guy with surgical precision, in what would have been a very, very cruel thing, cut to the heart of the man. He said, let's talk about that. Don, we found out I had a reservation. God had just worked for me to do.

It was good news, only I didn't think it was good news because I knew what it was going to be. If I truly surrendered my life to the care of God, I didn't end up in the Colfax and Broadway and Denver, ending on watch time magazines, asking strangers on the street if they'd been saved. I just couldn't see me doing that. He said to me, Don, do you suppose that the guy at Colfax and Broadway today had breakfast where he wanted to?

I said, yeah, I said, well, you didn't. He said, do you suppose that that man that's making a fool himself down there today is wearing clothes he picked up? I said, yeah, and he said, well, you're not. Don, do you suppose when he's all through? That he gets to go home. With the greatest love I've ever been shown, this man brought me to a state of mind that hasn't changed. And it's simply this, this is my life. Anything at all that God may have in mind for me is better than anything at all that I may have.

That's all there is to it. My life became none of my business. I gotta stand here and tell you, that's not a bad way to live. Let me tell you a couple of little things around that. When I ran my life, we went to president. When I ran my life, we entered in gutters, in a crash pad. We were told by our loved ones that we couldn't come to their home. I quit running my life several years ago. And I have been places I'll guarantee you I wouldn't affect.

Last year in January, if I'd have been running in my life, I'd have probably been in Phoenix. But I was in Winnipeg, Canada, doing some of God's work. I wouldn't have picked that. It was 18 below zero, in the lobby of the hotel. And our host thought that the nicest thing they could do for us was to take us out on the street where it was 40 below. And let us hang around with the people in Winnipeg. They were running the Olympic torch across Canada.

We waited and we waited and we waited because they were late. Someone in Winnipeg had taken a bunch of candles and these things painted red in front of the candles and made a little torches for people to hang on to. And somewhere down the line we were told, it was laid in a wheelchair with one of the torchbearers stopped and lit her candle. And it turned him on so much that he was lighting candles up and down the street.

And I used to say people don't care, they're no damn. I'd have to see that, I wouldn't have picked it. Another place I don't think I would have picked was Moscow in November. The day before Thanksgiving and Moscow just grew over three weeks ago. I was sitting at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous where they spoke only Russian. The group was not one year old. And Sasha began to talk. Sasha was five months sober. It was a second step meeting that Sasha was talking about his alcoholism when I could hear him.

And then Sasha said this. He said, I have no history of God in my life. He wasn't an atheist or agnostic. He never heard of it. I have no history of God in my life. But I want it to be sober. It's not what they said to do here. And I have found a spiritual power within myself. And I think maybe that's God. I'd have missed that. When I ran my wife, they took my children from me and put them in foster homes. Because I was an unfit father.

Saturday night, my children, my stepchildren and all of my grandchildren. And everything wrong in this program is very beginning. Two hours later, when I finished my inventory. I brought him back to him to take the fifth step. And that's fellow who had spent all that time being kind and loving and gentle. And understanding with me looked at that and said, that's garbage. You go back to impress me and you get away. Well, that hurts.

And I did what any self-respecting alcoholic would do. I found a guy that would listen to him. And I began to have a series of spiritual awakenings. Now, that's easy for me to define for you. A spiritual awakening is any time any alcoholic anywhere understands any part of the truth. Ooh, that's a spiritual awakening. What I had done was made a list of some of the really bizarre things I'd done. I didn't bother with the direction of this book.

And I would tell this guy who wanted these things I'd done and he would say, Hey, didn't that bad? I began to awaken. Because some of it was that bad. What I eventually awakened to in that little session with him is that I had once again picked somebody who would tell me what I wanted to hear. So I wouldn't have to do anything about it. And I knew at that moment that if I didn't stop that immediately, that I would die a very ugly death.

I'm not afraid of death. I haven't been afraid of death for a long time. I'm not too keen about some of the ways there are dying. But death was no big deal. I've died at least three times that I can remember. But to die an ugly death means that for some undetermined period of time, just before then, I will have to live a very ugly life. And I'm not willing or able to even think about death. So I got real. I started praying to God that I had no conception of whatsoever.

God of whatever changed these guys helped me with this thing. And then I got this book out and hooked up the directions. And Aaron made an interesting discovery or two. I thought I had to find out who I was. They didn't want it says here. It says the purpose of this inventory is to help me find and be rid of the things in myself that are blocking me from God. The only thing that's going to say in my butt is contact with the power of God in myself.

And this helps me clear the stuff that's blocking me, it says. I was one of the originals in Dianetics when I

was 19. Oh, I loved it. It had trip for hours. They had a thing they had me do for my father because I was enraged about my father. They had me picture his face on a punching bag and a punching so I could get rid of the anger. You understand that? I found out in this book that resentment is not the mental or emotional problem.

It's spiritual disease. That's what it says in here. From its dem all forms of spiritual disease. It kills more alcoholics than anything else because it does the one thing we can't afford to have done. It separates us. If I resent you, I am separated from you. I'm separated from you. I'm separated from God. I just know that to be true. Well, this is an easy process. It said what I should do is make a list of all the people and the institutions and the principle that I was mad at.

That was so easy. That's all I ever thought about. It said I was supposed to put down why I was mad at. That was simple. That's all I ever thought about. I was supposed to put down what was being affected in my life. That was easy. My sex life was shot. My self-esteem was gone. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They tell you about one of them very briefly. Because it changed my life. In 1966, federal narcotics agents broke down my house.

That's how they cut them. Front door, back door, side window, locked me to the ground, handcuffed me, put their feet on my neck, talked ugly about me. My four-year-old son lied out of Beller and his big cop swung around with his pistol and almost shot my boy. He was on the list. There were 22 reasons I was mad at him. He had made a criminal out of me, you know, a criminal to the cause. He violated my civil liberties.

He humiliated me in front of my children and almost killed my son. And I got all that down there. And then I tried to take this attitude that you all talked about then. But he, like myself, was perhaps virtually sick. We damn right he was. And I hated him. And I was supposed to take an attitude like I would for any sick friend and grant him some sympathy and pity. At that time in my life, sick people did not get sympathy and pity.

They frightened me. I needed a script. For every event in life, and there's only one script for sick people. What can I do for you? And I could not do that. So I just can't do anything. Then without any thought, which by the way is the best way to do this if you do. I just did what it said next. It said I was to set aside your wrongs, others had done a resolutely looked at my own mistakes. What was I at fault? Or had I been selfish and self-seeking and dishonest.

What was I to blame? And I had another one of those white turning on and the head things. I had personally invited that man into my house. I'd been smuggling dope out of Mexico and not paying tax on him. That made me his job. I'd been hired by a guy I knew if he got in trouble he would wrap me up. Based on self, I needed money. I took the job anyway. What happened that day was that I awakened to the fact that my troubles are truly in my own making.

I did that. Now I'm very careful when I take people through this process that they understand, truly understand ahead of time. It says, find and be rid of. If I can't stop doing the things that I've been doing, then I can't get rid of this god awful guilt that eats me alive. I couldn't live with the fact that I nearly killed my son. If it weren't that I already knew that somehow or another, I would be free of whatever it was that caused me to do that.

My kids don't have to face federal narcotics agents anymore. There hasn't been one in my house for over 20

years. I don't even invite them for dinner. I'm tired of being arrested, quit going where there's cops. A number of other things came out of that. I got over the ridge from my dad in that inventory with a real simple thing. I began going over that, but confused me with it. He was this truly nice man who every once in a while went nuts and did things to me that were just not good.

You know what? It occurred to me one day that maybe, just maybe, somebody had done some terrible things to him somewhere along the way. He was just passing them off. Maybe he was doing the best he could with what he had, and it wasn't enough. It was the best he could with what he had. He had never done anything that put me in a foster home while he went to prison. I got off of his back, and it just then occurred to me that maybe if he was doing the best he could with what he had, maybe I'd been doing the best I could with what I had to, and it wasn't enough.

And it would never be enough. Thank God. I learned about fear. I thought that it lived here in my stomach because that's what better. I discovered in the inventory by putting a name on all these unnamed fears that I have a high-grade manufacturing plant right up here in my head. I can take good stuff and make fear of it. Oh, yeah. Good morning, Don. How are you? I don't know what he wants. He wasn't that friendly yesterday.

This is payday. A fair inventory actually turned into kind of a laugh. I don't know why it is, but every time I make a spiritual discovery, I began to make a list of fear, like it said. I'm afraid of being alone. I'm afraid of being with people. Afraid of dogs, cats, snakes, beetles, spiders. I'm afraid of talking to people. Afraid you won't give me my turn to talk. Afraid of losing? Much more afraid of winning. Met a real discovery about that.

If I did something right, I just knew it was done lock, and I also knew you'd expect me to repeat it tomorrow. And I've learned real early. But when you fail, people are lovely. They will help you up. The greatest harm I did to my loved ones is that I kept giving them new hope. I discovered by writing down all these goofy fears, that I was afraid of everything. I was particularly afraid of my mind. I told my sponsor that one day. I said, I'm terrified of my mind.

He said, you have good reason to be here. And I began at that point to really discover God's mercy and God's love. We live on a planet that's filled with people who are terrified. And they have to learn the cope with fear. The word cope means to fight the good fight. He told me I could quit fighting. Once I understand that I ain't got it. There is a prayer in the big book of Alcoholics and News, specifically designed to handle this problem.

God please remove this fear from me and direct my attention to what you would have me be. That's an interesting prayer because it doesn't say what you would have me do. It says what you would have me be. I am not what I do. I am not the car I drive. I am not the people I hang around with. I'm not the job or the house or the money in my pocket. All of those things can be taken from me and when they are, I'm gone. That's not who I am. I'm not what I do.

I'm one of God's kids. That's all. I want to be little children. And I got to tell you, that sure solves a self-esteem problem. What are you going to give me or what am I going to accomplish to beat staff anyway? I'm one of God's children and he loves me good, better and different. He loves me when I don't know who he is and when I do. He loves me when I'm up and he loves me when I'm down. How do I know that? I've been living in that belief for a while now and it just keeps being demonstrated over and over and over and over.

I was a person whose father came to a jail with his shoes and a note that said don't ever call us again. Look at this room full of people who love me and some of you don't even know me. But you love me enough that you sit there quietly and listen to me battle. I needed desperately at the end of that fifth, sixth, and seventh step because I asked God please. Remove this stuff and don't let the stuff I haven't found yet get to me before I find it.

I'm still finding it. I found some more last week. I entered my evangelistic stage. It's a good thing I was locked up. I just wanted to come time to make a mess. My sponsor gave me the key to freedom at the eighth step. I sat in a prison cell following his directions. Locked up for the night. He said I want you to take, make a list of all the people you have harmed. You started with the list of people who hurt me the worst.

He said, add anybody you can think of because you met him, you messed with him. He said, Don, you are fairly clear. You know what you did to these people but you're so insensitive. You have no idea what it did to him. What he had me do was close my eyes and one of the time picture everyone. And see if I could get a feeling inside of me of willingness to look each one in the eye and say I've been wrong. I've harmed you but you can tell me what I have to do so we can get the most.

That's the night I had to experience and wait for all my life. I was lifted. If in any way I have harmed you. You just tell me what I'm done and we'll do, we'll get the most of my life. I don't push peanuts and I'm Pico Boulevard. I make direct restitution. Now that cleared up some things. I had some problems. How do you go back to the mother who has said on Christmas day you and your children can't come in here? You don't just say well I'm sorry I wish I hadn't done that.

After I was out for a while she allowed me to come by. And because of this attitude of mine I found a way to ask her that question. Not directly, but I found a way to ask her. What do I have to do? She said honey, all I've ever wanted for you is that you be happy. So from that day until yesterday I go by my mother's house regularly happy. And it has worked. She told me once it was six years before she believed I was going to be okay.

But I wasn't going to buy to prove anything. I just show up and give her what she wants. Now you guys have created some genuine problems with my mother. Because if you trust you that that may do some really important things and alcohol it's not. I'm not important. I'm going to the Soviet Union is carrying the message where I've been asked to carry it. I heard my mother talking to one of her friends one day. She thinks I'm the president of the day.

She thinks I'm single-handedly running around the world dealing with the alcohol. I felt my God I've got to straighten her out. But I don't do things anymore without praying about it if it will affect other people. And I prayed about that. The answer I got was very simple. After all the years of pain and agony that I've given that lady. If she wants to think I'm an emperor they should think so. As long as you and I understand I'm just another drunk we're all safe.

So I haven't straightened her out yet. My father knows better. You love my dad. He's an unmeasured genius. They don't have a testimony yet. He got bored with medicine. He lives in a 48 room house that's full of stuff. And I was talking with him one day and you've made me a listener. When I went to here to make a man he said don't do that. All you can do by telling me all that stuff is hurt me all over here. We start from here.

He was telling me one afternoon as he looked around all these outbuildings. He said I've spent my whole life accumulating all this stuff. And I had to spend the rest of my life giving it away. And I heard what my dad really said. He was talking about his mind. So I go by there all night. Listen, he and I chat. I even understand he was the one. Because of alcoholics anonymous and just following these directions. I've had about 18 years to repair the damage I did with my parents.

A little over two months ago I was able to take them to the Epcot Center in Florida. Probably for the last time we can go anywhere. My dad's planning on returning when he's 80. We gave him one of those little motorized carts the first day. We took it away from him the second day. We kept running over him. My father gave me one I'll give you. Free and clear. He said the other not too long ago he said Donna, lived a lot of years. I finally learned there's really only two things the person needs to live a good life.

Honor and wisdom. You must have enough honor to keep any promise you make no matter what the person consequences. Enough wisdom not to make too many promises like that. These deals frustrate me because I run out of time just about the time I'm ready to really say something important. If you'll indulge me about five minutes or a few more things I'd like to share with you because I love you. When I was at the World Service meeting in October where delegates from 27 countries came to talk about how can we better carry the message.

As we began to talk about that the Irish delegate got up and he said before we do that I think we need to get clear on one thing. What is the message we're carrying? Am I carrying the AA message? Because I think I have a responsibility not just to the people in this room tonight but to the people that will come through that door in 50 years when I'm dead and gone. That responsibility is very simple. They deserve the same chance I got.

And the message I got, I'm not to change that. We left that World Service meeting we're in 114 countries now. The lady in Russia told us it's 122. That's at least 114 different cultures, different places, thinking, different life experiences. You think we'd have to modify this deal, wouldn't you? Sasha said I have no history of God but I found within myself a power, a spiritual power. That's exactly what happened to me.

It appears to me maybe we don't have to modify or change this at all. At least that's my opinion. And that's how I live this. I believe in sponsorship and I've served long enough in every dimension of Alcoholics Anonymous to truly believe that every problem we have in A, whether it be my personal life or the fellowship itself, can, will be and should be solved by personal sponsorship. One on one, face to face, one alcoholic carrying his message or her message to the next one.

And since I'm such an idiot, I have a tendency to use this. The only place I know for sure that the Alcoholic Anonymous message appears is in this book. There are a lot of people talking about Alcoholics Anonymous and writing books about Alcoholics Anonymous that aren't even in Alcoholics. I don't care how you do it. I mean, it's not a... I don't know, I just know I'm doing it this way. I celebrate 21 years of sobriety Monday.

Doing it any other way that I've ever heard of I've been struck with every man somewhere. I love sponsoring people. The great joy of my life is to watch the psychopath as he walks in my front door. Caring me to help me. That's who God sends me. No one way to sponsor. We started the beginning of this blue book. We do every single thing that says, as it says it together. And many of them stay sober. They have to know. I do whatever Alcoholics Anonymous asks of me.

Partly because it scares me to death. When you ask me to do something, I know it will be obvious. So I have to go to my father and say, okay, see what you got us into? But if you'll stay with me, I'll try it. I'll get to go all over the place. Do all kinds of things. But it's Bobby that I love. Bobby just got out of treatment again. I've been in terms of Bobby for almost three years. Bobby cannot stay sober. Bobby's going to die.

But I know. As soon as I get home, Bobby and I are going to sit down on the couch. We're going to do everything it says in this book. One more time. Bobby gets halfway through inventory and falls in love. I'm going to start putting salt feeders across me. I have service sponsors. I have learned some things from people along the way that keep me going. I've learned to ask myself some very important questions along the way.

My lessons for this year are real simple. There are three questions that are not part of my life. Particularly in any kind of activity with people. First of all, what do I want out of this? What's my private agenda? I've got one. Always. All I need to do is find it and I can get it in harmony with yours, perhaps. But I better find it. Is it possible that I could be wrong? Oh, I hate that one. Yeah. Always. Modifies my behavior a little bit.

And how many lives will be saved this week by this activity? Is this even worth doing? Prayer and meditation are a vital, vital part of my life. I believe that the steps of alcoholics anonymous help me get sober. But it's in the 12th step that I stay sober. And I stay fit. I'm busy about doing God's work. You don't just walk out on the street and do that. You've got to get fit for that like you do any other job. And I stay fit through prayer and meditation.

I had to learn the difference. Prayers when I talk to God. And I've had to learn not to talk so damn much. Okay? God, please fill me with your love. I'm going to flow through me and into the lives of others. God, give me the strength to do the right thing. Guide my thinking today. Show me what I'm supposed to do in this situation. Those are simple prayers. Take this fear away from me, please. And direct my attention to what you would have me be.

But meditation was tough. I've done meditation in every way you can think of. So when it came time for meditation, I had to find something real real simple. And I found it in the last place I would ever love. I come to the garden alone. What I do is still on the road. He walks with me and he tells me all his own. Joy, we share as we carry there none other has ever known. So I've learned to go to the garden. And the garden is within me.

I used to carry my baggage in the garden. And I'd say, look at what they've done to me today. What am I going to do with this? Somewhere along the way, I learned to leave the baggage outside. I just go in and visit. And somehow when I left, I either had the strength to pick it up or the wisdom to just leave it there. And a while back on an airplane to Texas. And somehow I rarely ever have anybody sitting next to me at an airplane and I fly about 80,000 miles a year.

And so I'd come to use that time. And I was going to the garden and it was as if a voice said to me quietly, Don, become the garden. And it interested me because I already know I am. But I pursued that. And I'm having a good time moving the trees around and doing a little weeding here and there. Keeping the garden tidy. And that's how I see our service. I'm a steward of my life. I used to be a performer of my life. And I'm a participant in it.

And a steward of it. And I'm a steward of the fellowship. And all I got to do is keep it tidy so the message is

straight and clear. I had become everyone that I had ever met. And they were all talking at once and I thought I was going to have, who I told you to sort this out. To find out who I was, you said to me that isn't what we do here. We'll help you find out who you're not. And as you dispose of who you're not, whoever you are, we show up.

We show up. It's like the story of the man who had seen Michelangelo's statue of David for the first time that he was awestruck with his name. And he said to Michelangelo, how in a world did you do that? Michelangelo said, well I took this block of stone and I chipped away everything and didn't look like David. That's what I got. And that's how I see alcohol and sin on us. With God as a sculptor and these little meetings and our big book and our step workshops and all these little things that we do is a chisel.

And with me is a very willing block of stone. One day at a time we're just chipping away whatever doesn't look like Don. And so far this is what we've got. I love you all very much. Thank you so much for having me come share with you.