

DON P ARCHIVE

Sunday talks

1990 | Sunday evening | Reading edition

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Transcript

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I'll let him talk rather than me. I can't remember where he's from Don so you can do it. I don't feel bad about half the time I can't either. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and my home group is the Denver Thursday Night group, which meets in Denver on Thursday night at eight o'clock. We hope that if you're ever down there you'll come join with us. We will try to make you at least as welcome as you have made me this weekend. It may get a little emotional tonight because that's what you've done for me to me and with me. When I got here I couldn't feel anything. Absolutely nothing. I am an alcoholic who did not know he was alcoholic when Alcoholics Anonymous found me.

I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type 2 and by another government agency as a psychopath. That's a lot of weight to carry around for a kid in my size. One group of folks thought I was a drug addict. See I use drugs long and way 2 and that does not necessarily make you a drug addict. I'm an alcoholic not a drug addict and if anybody would ever like to talk about that after the meeting we can do this.

But not now. I drank alcoholically as far as I understand alcohol as in from my very first drink. When we were 11 we got into some German homemade brew and I drank until I puked. Didn't go to jail right off the bat but it didn't fall down and didn't feel too good and I really hardly count that one because it didn't set off a wild craving. I didn't do that again until I was 15 or 16. When we got a guy from an hour field to buy us some whiskey because that's what you did in East Denver.

Around 15 or 16 you got a guy from an hour field to buy you some whiskey and you went out east of town you drank it and we did that one night. And that night I remember. Now I don't suppose there's a whole lot of guys that I grew up with that remember that first time they went out and started drinking but I do because it changed me. I came to alcoholism with a desperate need to be changed to be anybody but who I was because I didn't know who I was and I was confused and I was beginning to become a number of people.

See yeah I'm not alone. And I started out that evening just kind of hanging out going with the guys. Three feet tall with a big wart on the end of my nose and I talked funny and I acted funny and I was strange. And then we had a few drinks of whiskey. I don't strange anymore and the wart was gone. A number of transformations took place but the one I remember is it somewhere between that first drink and nearly dying that night from drinking too much alcohol.

I had plans. I wasn't just bouncing off a life then. I had me some plans. It changed me. It brought me to the heart of life. There was a fellow back at East High School that hadn't been treating me very well. And I knew he was going to be a Bill Bong sibs driving later that evening and it was my intention to go back and whip him. And I could have done it too. And there was a girl in my school that hadn't been treating me at all.

We were going to have a talk. That's not a bad deal. To go from a frightened strange weird little kid to somebody who has plans and can feel up to life. But it is in my nature that if one works you take ten. That anything worth doing is worth overdoing. And it's just the nature of the thing. And so before we went through I

was nearly dead from a cute alcohol poison. I drank way too much whiskey that night. The guys I was with just kept me on my feet and poured coffee down me and walked me around because I think they knew instinctively.

If I laid down I would probably die. And it was four years before I could even smell bonded whiskey without retching. But that was one of my clues is to alcoholism. I found something that wouldn't make me feel that way. Whenever the price I had to pay from that day on I was wanting to pay it for some part of each day so I could be okay to be me. And so it was alright for you to be you. But it's weird stuff. This book describes us as restless, irritable, and discontent.

And no one can live in that state for a prolonged period. No one. And we're extra sensitive. My pain threshold is about 20 minutes. Other people I know came off of work restless and irritable and discontented and they didn't want to go home that way and visit their families with that. And we would stop and we'd have a few beers. And they would go home. Because it soothed them. It caused them to relax and to not be discontent and irritable anymore.

And it did for me too. For a few minutes. And then the thing would start all over again and I'd have to have more and somehow I'd never get home. I was my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old because of that. Not because I'm a big time gangster. I've been in three penitentiaries. And that does not make me a gangster. The big time ones don't even get into one. When I was 19 years old, Denver was too small for me.

I had already outgrown it. So I joined the Navy to become a hero and save America from the Communist menace. This is back in the 50s. I've never done anything for shabby reasons. It's always been noble. Hell, I've been kicked out of school. And things were tight. And I desperately needed to be a hero. Desperately needed to be a hero. So I ran off and joined the Navy to be a hero. And two years later I was in the federal penitentiary in Japan.

And then I was sent back here through Treasure Island and the Marine Briggs and giving a bad conduct discharge and put back on the streets of Denver. Absolutely baffled. That isn't what I had in mind. It isn't what I wanted. It didn't fit. I neither did I. In my little home group, our format is real simple. You have five to seven minutes to share what you were like, what happened, and what you're like now. And that's been good training for me because what I have to share with you tonight is recovery and I need to get you, we need to get me sober.

In the first ten minutes here, it's going to be a long meeting. And I can share how I drank with you very simply. I drank my way out of high school before I was finished with it. And got into the Navy and drank my way out of the Navy before I was finished with it. And I came home and went to work for Mountain Bell and drank my way out of that job before I was finished with it. And got married and had some children and become a very fine insurance salesman.

In seven months, I had sold \$800,000 with a new premium on a debit on a way to becoming a member of the Millionaires Club. And I drank my way out of that job and that family before I was finished with it. And that's the story of my drinking. I think the gravest damage that I did to the people that loved me the most was that every time I fell down, I got up and started over. Because I'm real good off the line. I was a sprinter. And sprinters are real good off the line.

Give me a new challenge, a new job, a new family, and I learn it real quick. But don't look the other direction for one minute. Because I get distracted and I'm gone. And I didn't understand what did that. The upshot of this whole thing was that in 1966, I was in my second federal penitentiary. And I really hadn't planned that one either. In 1967, this road came to an end. I drank my way out of life before I was finished with it.

And for that, I'm deeply grateful. Christmas week of 1967 was a terrible week. And probably the best thing that ever happened to me. Because Christmas week of 1967, I finally, through a process of events, saw all of the lies in my life for what they were, lies. And that's what surrender is about. Recognizing the lies for lies. It didn't feel good at the time. I weighed 133 pounds in. But promises we won't be stored mentally and physically.

That's a promise you won't find in the book, will it? The last little pieces of the image I had of me died. They just fell apart and broke. Because it was coming to the end. We'd been living on the bottom. I had two little boys, and we'd been living on the bottom for about three and a half years. When I realized I am never going to be super straight, I did my very best to become super freak. And I really came close to making that one.

We got kicked out of 13 crash pads in 13 days in the Boulder area one time. And you had to work at it to have that happen. And I didn't understand that. I'm one of the guys that came out of Berkeley in the 60s, throwing Owsley's acid around, screaming where there's dope, there's hope, burned down city hall. My parole officer told me I've got a lot of amends to make for that. I'm trying. But I had always prided myself that I'd never turned on young people. Never.

But this was the week that as I looked at my life, I hadn't been able to get out of bed all week until this 16 year old kid that I had turned on came over and got me up. Gave me a fix and got me on the feet. And I had turned him on and I saw that lie. And a piece of me broke. Our Christmas was going to be miserable. We were on welfare in ADC and the check hadn't gotten there yet. So there weren't any presence for the kids. And that isn't right.

I come from, I'm sorry, a functional home. My parents are still married to each other. My brother and sister are respected members of our community. We have a very tight family. The only thing that didn't function in my family was me. So I know what Christmas is supposed to look like and feel like and sound like. And that isn't what it sounded like in my own. My little boys and I lived in a little old \$40 a month basement apartment with the ceiling that I could touch.

And as I looked around that place that week, we lived beneath an old lady who raised cats. There were cats everywhere. And her place was cleaner than mine was and I finally saw that. So another piece of me broke. The lie that I'd been carrying around that was no matter what else is going on, I'm a good father. I thought it wasn't. We found a dollar in the snow on the 24th for a walk. We have nothing to do, you walk a lot.

And there is money laying in the streets of America. It didn't enough to make a living on, but it's there and we found a dollar. And with that dollar on Christmas the day before Christmas, they'll sell you any tree on the lot. Well, we bought the big one. You don't buy the little ones. And it still tubs at me a little bit to remember that tree. Because the ceiling was this high and the tree was this high and it bent at the top.

You know, marvelously pitiful. And the boys and I had just made trinkets out of what we could and hung

them on the tree. And some more of me cracked and broke because that is not how it's supposed to be. And the guests were something else. The public merchandise marred on East Colfax in Denver. A very kind man in there on that day gave me a little pair of cowboy boots and a cowboy shirt on credit. So my kids at each have a present.

Wonderfully kind man. And I really meant to pay for it as soon as the welfare check got there. My little boys had taken Blue Paper towel. This 16 year old kid had stolen a case of those blue paper towels from a service station. I don't know why, I taught him better now. My little boys had wrapped up everything and put it under the tree so I'd have a good Christmas. But some more of me broke. But one must left. Christmas Day we went down to my folks place to spend time on grandma and grandpa.

And my dad met us at the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry, but your mother says I can't let you in here anymore. She can't stand watching you die. And I saw for the first time in my life what I'd been doing to my people. See the lie was simple. I used to say leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody but myself. And that was the lie. And I saw it. And so I broke. And then dad snuck us in anyway. And tore up another lie.

I used to scream out nobody cares. Nobody loves us. Well he did. And I saw it. And I saw who my kids were going through. Now this is painful but it's wonderful. Because I've got the kind of ego that had to be smashed entirely in order to get here. And I did it. I went home and walked past the self pity. There was little. And just on the other side of this mountain of self pity was the truth. Everyone on this planet would be better off if I weren't here.

Everyone. I could think of no reason at all or no person for me to stay here. The kids would be better off, the people I knew would be better off if I weren't here. Now that's a real delicate place. And I did the only thing I knew how to do. I quit. I can't stand being me one more second. That's where I came to. And because I didn't have any hope because I didn't know there was any answer for what was wrong with me. Because first of all I didn't know what was wrong with me.

I took a two month supply of desoxing graduates and shot them at my arm. And drank everything in the house and my dad died. And when I woke up in the morning I really didn't feel good. And I promise you that's enough to kill you. What I did. And I died. Because I'm convinced that when I woke up the next morning, even though I didn't feel good, I was different. I had met the first requirement for sobriety. The first requirement for stepping onto any spiritual path.

I had fully and totally surrendered. I can't do this deal anymore. 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. Because I was in a really neat place. I was in a body that wouldn't die carrying around a mind that wouldn't work. And you've got to have an answer when you're there. I woke up with the police at the door. I had set myself up to be arrested that week.

Because I was tired. And I needed to rest. And for people like me, County Jail is Rest Camp. I lied to you for ten minutes. You lied to me for ten minutes and we both could take a nap. You know big deal. They didn't bring that one up until two days later. What they came with were nine charges in the first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. And the Denver District Attorney told me that he'd bring the other eight one at a time if I beat that one.

But I was through. I didn't care. I really didn't care. I just knew something's got to happen. I can't go on this way. Well, I'm telling you about this because my first experience with the power of God happened before I even knew the name or had a clue because I'd met the requirement I had surrendered. They didn't even know it. See, they offered me a deal. I still owed the federal government four years. I was on parole and being convicted of a state felony is a parole violation.

They're touchy about that. And the day of the trial came and the Denver District Attorney said he'd talk with my federal parole officer and the federal judge. And they'd all come to a conclusion that I was really sick. And they wanted to help me. And that if I would plead guilty to a reduced charge so they didn't have to have the expense of the trial. It had already been agreed among all of them that they would suspend my sentence and give me back to the federal people and take me to Fort Worth, Texas.

To the federal hospital so they could fix me. Now, my mother raised a drunk, not a dummy. The federal hospital beats state penitentiary. Two of me made that decision that day as I look back. At least two of me always at work. I knew that if you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'd be on the street in six months. Doctors and books are something I'm familiar with. They would tell me what was wrong with me. They would tell me about how long it would take to fix that.

And then they'd tell me all the symptoms I'd have to present to them to convince them I was getting better. Hell, I've played that game since I was little. I know that game. The other side of me was wanting to go anywhere anybody said. Surrender means you stop fighting and you sit and you wait until somebody tells you where to go next. And that was what they said to do. And I took their deal and they kept their bargain.

They gave me one and a half to three-year sentence. Suspended that and turned me over to the federal people who had already agreed to take me. And at the last minute the federal man changed his mind. He said, there's nothing we can do for this one anyway. Let's just get him off the street so he doesn't hurt anyone. See, I was classified as a sociopath and a psychopath and you can't help either one of those people. One doesn't know the difference between right and wrong.

The other one doesn't just doesn't give it to him. But I was both. I believe this was by the grace of God because I'd met the first requirement. I was taken five days later to the Colorado State Penitentiary. Or I could hear what I needed to hear so I could be here tonight. In our third week in that fish tank, they hollered out you. People will come down and you will listen. And I really didn't have anything else to do.

So I came down and listened. And they had three guys with numbers on their chest and their green clothes. And this guy got up and he said, my name's Doc and I'm an alcoholic. And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and 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 can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing.

That was my introduction to Alcoholics Brothers. I think the miracle of the day was that I heard him. I heard him. They said a couple other things that morning. The most important information I've ever been given. And the most important thing I will say here this evening. If you are alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink alcohol again. You don't ever have to hurt the way you've been hurting ever again. We do not promise you a pain in free life,

but the pain of alcoholism.

Here you go. I really didn't know that. I had a whole lifetime of experience with alcohol that says the hell you say. Yes, I do. No one had ever told me I didn't have to do this. A lot of people had said, Don, can't you see what you're doing to your life? You betcha. How do I not do that? Can't you see what you're doing to your children? Oh, yeah. I had to get drunk over that. That hurt. But you came to me and you said, I don't have to do this anymore.

Then I got back under high horses. I've been sponsored by folks that ride big horses. One of them said, you know, you're very best thinking got you to the penitentiary. You're not doing so good, are you? They couldn't argue with him. They suggested to us that if we wanted to do something about this deal, that after we got out of the fish tank for the first five weekends, we could join with them in their 12-step study school.

We gave up our yard privileges and our movies for five weekends to go to school. We didn't know what that was. We being my friend Jim and I, we talked about this. Should we go do this? There was no other door open to me. I was in a state where I really wasn't afraid of the penitentiary I've been there. There's rules like any other community. You live by them, you live, and if you don't, you die, that's all. But I knew that sometime within a year and a half to five years from now, they're going to put me back on the streets of Denver.

I don't have a clue as to how to live out there. I've got to be changed. I can't do what I did ever again. I just can't. Well, we decided to go to their little school. The alcoholics anonymous that I've known through my years of sobriety has been very careful alcoholics anonymous. When we got to our new cells, there was a little slip of paper on our bunks reminding us that if we wished, we could join with them that afternoon right after lunch.

So Jim and I went and there were three of them smiling. I don't know about you new guys, but when I was new, I learned real early when they're smiling, you're in real trouble. Oh, Lordy. One of them said, now you new fellows. For the next five weeks, you have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. Couldn't argue with them. Then they took us through this precious recovery process. The sponsors we had believed that this is the book.

There's other good books in our library, but this is the one, this is the book of common experience that says, one drunk talking to another. If you want what we have, here's precisely what we did. This is a wonderful book. I hear a lot of meetings about the promises of alcoholics anonymous. There are so many, I can't even count them. The first two are on the first two sentences of the first forward to the first edition.

Major promises. We are more than a hundred alcoholics, men and women, who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body, to show others precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. I have no quarrel whatsoever with people who are recovering. I was too for a while, but I've recovered from alcoholism. You can only recover just so much. Then you got to get busy living. If it had not been that promise, I'm not sure I'd stay.

If I was just going to be given another way to cope with life to hell with you, my cope are broke. I can't stand coping anymore. I looked that word up. My sponsors made me get three other books. It's a three-volume set of dictionaries, because I make whole worlds out of words, and they said, you better earn what they mean. To cope

means to fight the good fight, and I don't have any fight left. It's all gone. So I have to learn how to cope.

What are they going to do here? Well, according to this deal, I get a new mind. I don't have to fix the old one. Thank God. Even fixed, it wouldn't work. In the chapter that's written by our beloved doctor, he tells us that without an entire psychic change, there's very little hope of recovery. I count that as a promise, an entire psychic change. I get a new mind. I get to start over, and all I have to do is let go of the old one.

Goodness sakes. They told me precisely what's been wrong with me all of my life. They told me why I was in that penitentiary when I was 19 years old in terms I could understand. When I started drinking, I get lost. I can't find my way home. That's all. And there's a federal law against that when you're in the Navy. And I was. They'd give me a 24-hour liberty and expect me to be back in 24 hours. And I left the ship fully intending to return on time because I loved the Navy.

I just, to this day, there's no experience in my life that matches standing on the bridge of a ship at night and watching the water fluoresce and listening to our planet breathe. They'd give me a liberty and I'd be back in 25 hours, or 30. And one day I was 23 days late. And when I got home it wasn't there. The ship was on its way to Japan, and then Korea, and I was in a world of trouble. And the only thing that saved me that time is that the guy I ran with, oh, he was slick.

He got us on a Pan Am Clipper, and we were in Japan three weeks before that ship was. And I got to tell you, as slick as he was, I'm not sure how mad the captain was when we left, but I can tell you how mad we was when he saw us on the dock. He was livid. And I went to the penitentiary and got kicked out of the Navy because of that. And didn't understand why. Well, this book explains why. Dr. Silkworth talks about man.

He says that he'd worked with it. We're working on a business deal that would be settled favorably to them. And a day or two before the deal was to close, they would take a drink, and they would miss their appointment. And there I was. This happens to me because I have an allergy to alcohol. If I had an allergy to tomatoes and I ate tomatoes, I'd break out with an itch. My allergy just happens to be alcohol. If I put that in my body, I'd break out with an itch for more alcohol.

The simplest way I can describe alcoholism to you is I understand it is this. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. And that's all there is to it. That's all I need to understand to get well. That's permanent, by the way. There is no treatment known. There'll deal with that. I got it. There's several other symptoms described too. We have a describable illness. But that one I've got. That's the common symptom among us.

If you got that, you're alcoholic. If you don't, we better find out what's wrong with you. I'm serious about that. If you don't have that and you hang around here too long, we'll mess you up. Because we don't understand you anymore and you understand us. And we don't want to hurt you. We take you lovely. But if you got this deal, you got it forever more. And there is nothing in the world that can be done about it. One drink will set that off in me.

And it's over. And I've come to believe that that's a progressive thing. I heard that at the beginning. But I've lived long enough to watch some of our members with 15, 20, 25 years of sobriety drink again. They don't get back. You retreads that are young. Oh, I pray hard you don't get any long term sobriety and then try it. I haven't

seen one yet to get back over 20 years. There may be some, but I've not seen them. They die within weeks.

This deal's still going on in me. So that's what's wrong with me. If I take a drink of alcohol, I lose track of things. Like life and home and job and self-respect. And then they said that's academic. If I never take another drink of alcohol, that cycle will never begin again. And all the bizarre things I do after the cycle starts. So what's really wrong with me then? Why do I keep drinking alcohol? Well, it's not because I'm stupid.

It's not because I'm weak. I have to laugh at people who think we're weak and don't have any stamina. Stay, keep up with me for a week. Let's talk about stamina. No, the problem is there's a peace missing in my mind. Get in there. I'm obsessed with alcohol for one thing. My real insanity is that I'm obsessed with the idea that somehow I'm supposed to feel good all the time. That's insane. But that's my obsession. But there's a peace missing.

Now my neighbor has it. He's not an alcoholic and he's got this peace. And he and I got talking one day. One of the benefits of sobriety is that I get to live in the same house for long enough to get to talk with my neighbors. And I have worked really hard for years to develop a little small talk. Regular people are interested in what the Broncos do and stuff like, I don't know who they are. And I've up to three and a half, almost four minutes of small talk now.

And if we go past that, we're going to end up talking about the only thing I know anything about. Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous. And he pushed me over the line one afternoon. And we got chatting about this man owns a bar. And as we talked and I shared a little and then he shared a little. It seems we share a common experience. He got drunk one night, he said, drank too much alcohol. Got drunk and fell down and threw up and made a fool of himself.

And he hasn't done that since. No weird. I had exactly the same experience. I drank too much alcohol one night and I got drunk. And I fell down and threw up. And I made a fool of myself. And I got up and found out who wouldn't make me fall down. And what I could drink that wouldn't make me puke. My neighbor has something in his mind. When he remembers that incident, he remembers how foolish he felt, how badly he felt.

And it attaches to a little deal in his head that says, don't do that again. I can still remember how foolish I felt and how badly I felt. Don't attach to anything. There were a couple times it did. One night it attached to, it was bad chili. My first real drunk, it attached to, it was bonded bourbon. We'll drink vodka instead. The horror of alcoholism as I understand it is that there are times when I won't recall anything at all that will keep me sober.

It's missing. It's described in this book that information just won't show up Sunday. No matter how much I learn in my head about alcoholism or the big book or the fellowship or anything, the time will come when it won't show up at a critical time. I'm really powerless. I must have something to protect me during those strange mental blank spots. And I had an event take place in my six-year sobriety. It just drove that home to me.

I've bought it from the beginning. But in my six-year sobriety, I was now working behind the walls because God has a wonderful sense of humor. One of my dearest friends in AA is an ex-convict who's the warden of a prison down in North Carolina. When the boss goes to work, the walls come down. Anyway, I was working behind the walls and I came over to Denver once a week because we were having to deal with some important

people, like chiefs of police and businessmen and all that.

We were at Leo's restaurant one afternoon having lunch with some of these people. One of them had discovered a new liqueur. It was green and it came in a tall, skinny glass and it wasn't much there. But everybody was passing it around so they could all taste this new thing. And I knew I was not going to drink it. All my defenses were there. Everything I know showed up. I knew why I wasn't going to drink it. There was no danger.

But as it came by me, I thought I'd sniff it and see what it smelled like. And while it was under my nose, it burst into my mind that the difference between life and death for me at that moment would be the twitch of a muscle. You see, when my hand gets here, it does this. And then I knew God was present because I stepped on my body and I watched that hand move that drink on. And I've not sniffed anything in green since.

That's pretty serious stuff. Now, how do I get this? I came to believe this power could be mine by watching the three people that had it. I'm not blind and I'm not an idiot. This one man was a killer who was no longer capable of killing anyone. But I could see he wasn't capable. He wasn't just saying, I don't want to do this anymore. He couldn't. He didn't think that way anymore. Ron Nichols was a stick-up man who could not do that anymore.

One of my favorite and dearest people on this planet for me is old Phil Gutierrez. Phil came to us from Guam. He came because they couldn't stand him over there anymore. And several years later in Denver, the city said they'd see the back of Guam or the penitentiary with you Phil. And they wouldn't take him, so Phil was locked away. When Phil drank, 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. And he'd hurt some folks. And Phil came to me one day smiling. And he said, you know, I've been sobering this penitentiary for seven years. And you're the first person I've ever sponsored. You will stay sober. I lived up on the fourth tier, so I listened. What attracted me to Phil Gutierrez was here was this terribly violent man when he was drinking. But the man I knew was the softest, gentlest, kindest, most loving human being I have ever met to this day.

Phil Gutierrez taught me how to touch physically in a penitentiary, where that's risky. But no one ever questioned Phil. There was a quality in what Phil did. See, Phil knew something about us. We're all much puppies. I've never outgrown my need to be padded and petted and reassured. Phil was a healer, a great healer, in the tradition of spiritual healers. He knew the first thing you'd do is touch them to remind them they're not alone.

That's what the carpenter did. He'd walk along and see somebody sitting in a corner full of sores and wine and crippled up, because they were alone. They didn't think he was anybody else there. He'd reach over and he'd touch them. Hey, you don't have to do that anymore. Look at us. Think about that. We're the healers. You walk in that door so sick you can't stand yourself. And the first thing we'll do is touch you. We'll shake your hand.

And tell you, you don't have to do that anymore. I watch healers, because I am one, and I want to get really good at it. My wife's a healer. She's a nurse on an infant research unit. Her baby's frequently dying. And I watch how she does with him. She can't tell those babies what's wrong with them. They don't understand. And I promise you the ones that show up at my door. I can't tell them anything. They don't understand.

But what does she do? She holds them and she rocks them, and she pets them. And I've heard her say, he's going to be all right. And that's all we have to do. We don't have to be smart. This comes later. They healed me first. They patted me and patted me and told me it was going to be all right. And they told me it was going to be all right from being all right. I can see it. So I came to believe in it. They walked it.

They were real. So I wanted what they had and I tried it. They said God had changed them. Big deal. I didn't care who changed them. They'd been changed. That's all I knew. That's why I stayed. Now they said God had changed them. So I took a chance. I went back to myself and said the third step prayer. I had the worst experience of my entire life. I'm alcoholic. If it goes boom and shakes this room, I'm fine. I can deal with that.

We were talking about that when the San Francisco earthquake happened. Hey, I'll wait all the heroes out there. Ain't no big deal. I said this prayer, this momentous prayer, the most important thing I've ever said in my life, and absolutely nothing happened. Nothing happened. I can't stand that. I think today as I look at this little flash, and my green clothes turn white. And my cell door would spring open. And I got into the hall and say, okay, Dine, go home now.

We don't need you anymore. And I would come back and get into some white clothes and go sit on the mountaintop and you'd come by and visit with me. And nothing happened. And it scared me to death because I'm in business. So I went and complained to my sponsor. If you do what you're told to do here and you don't get the results, you think you ought to go be a chair. But I did. He said to me, you dummy. You should be grateful you didn't have a flashlight.

It really killed you all your life. That's right. We went over some of my flashes of light. Southern comfort on a hot day, that'll do it. I've even had visions in my quest. I had the privilege of eating peyote with the Indians over in Nevada. I had an Easter meeting. And I had a vision of a great bird flying high with no head and understood that that was me and my life. Flying high going nowhere. And for four months I was completely clean.

I lived in the north woods of California with my kids and my partner. Prayed everyday with eagle feathers. Little drama. So peyote visions are good for four months if you want to try them. But I don't know how long I'm stuck in his body. That's not good enough. Whatever it is, whatever time I have left, must be permanently sober. It must be. There's no choice. I've lost the power of choice. It's all over. So what do I have to do?

Well, this man shared with me for a couple of hours how it had come for him. Slowly. Over a period of time doing certain things. He said, Don God knows that you can't stand one more big shock anyway to shape your end. This is a very loving, gentle God. Then we began to examine my concepts of God. And they were really fun. No. God is not Santa Claus. Although he behaves like that from time to time. And that was one of the images I had.

This gimme, gimme, gimme thing. We chased a lot of things. I learned just enough about concepts of God along the way to confuse myself. The only one that even came close was the one I got as a small child in, I think it was the Methodist Church. Jesus loves me this I know. That's the only one that seemed somehow to be okay. But they suggested that I forget everything I think I know about anything, particularly spiritual matters.

And said all these things aside. He said, Don, you're going to have to have your own spiritual awakening. And then you're going to have to learn to live by spiritual principles. And as we dug that afternoon, we discovered I had one more final reservation. I thought I was done, I wasn't. See, there's good news here. If you'll surrender entirely to your life really over the care of God, he's got really good work for you to do.

And I didn't think that was too cool because I knew who it was. As we poked in product, we discovered that my great fear was that if I really, truly surrendered my life to God, he'd put me on the corner of Colfax and Broadway handing out Watchtower magazines. And asking strangers, have you been saved brother? Man, I couldn't see me doing that. And he did a sponsor thing on me. He said, smiling, let's talk about that.

Now if you're new, let's talk about that means be still for a minute while I straighten you out on something. The truth without love is cruelty. The truth without an answer is a terrible cruelty. Now what he did next, if it weren't that he had an answer, it would have been a terribly cruel thing to do to me. But he had an answer, so he took his spiritual scalpel and went for my jugular. He said, Don, do you suppose that the fellow that's handing out Watchtower's at Colfax and Broadway today had breakfast where he wanted to and I said, probably and he said, well you didn't.

You suppose this guy that's making a fool out of himself by asking strangers if they've been saved is wearing clothes that he picked out to do it in. And I said, yeah, and he said, well you're not. He used to pose when he's all through humiliating himself, but he gets to go home. He helped me into a state of mind, and I'm still in it. And it's really simple. Anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all I will ever have in mind.

And I've been living that way for 22 years now. And I intend to live out the rest of it exactly that way. When I ran my life, we ended up in Salvation Armies and gutters and jails and prisons and foster homes and on the streets. Since I quit running my life, I've been living in the same house for 13 years, married to the same woman today as our anniversary. You think I love you? She loves you more than I do. She didn't say a word when she knew I had to live this weekend.

This has to come first. If this doesn't come first, it won't be there when I get home. And she knows that. And I know that. Phil taught me that. When I'm home, I promise you I am all the way home. And that's why she won't mind if I come out here. She made me promise not to say the next thing I was going to say. Oh my. Pardon me. It just hit me. But you know what she gets to do next week with me? We're going to Japan.

See, when I ran my life, we couldn't do that. I don't run my life anymore. So I get to go places like Bozeman, Montana. And Osaka, Japan. And a year ago in November, I was in the Soviet Union for 17 days. For aye. And I've been to Hawaii. And Guatemala. And Winnipeg, Canada. In January. If I'd have been running my life, we wouldn't have done that. And I would have missed one of the most important spiritual events. I've ever had.

If I'd have been running my life, we'd have been on Maui. But I don't. And so we were in Winnipeg. 18 below zero in the lobby of the hotel. And our host took us out on the street where it was 40 below. They thought that'd be neat. They're drunk. And it really was. The entire city of Winnipeg was gathered on the streets that day. That was the year they were running the Olympic torch to Calgary. And that weekend it was in Winnipeg.

No big deal. Except here's all these people. Waiting for that event. And this is a very tightly timed event. They can tell you which street corner he's going to be on. Exactly when. And we waited and he didn't show up. It's an hour and a half late. It seems that someone had taken candles and put these little cup things on top to look like torches. And handed them out. And as the torch bearer came into Winnipeg. He saw a lady in a wheelchair and a snow with a candle.

And he stopped and lit it. And it changed his life. A spiritual event took place inside this man. And he had a very important job. It was to be at the next corner one minute later. And he just tossed to the side. It was more than began lighting candles as he ran. And it was a no and a half late. I'd have missed that. Not only would I have missed that event. I'd have missed the reinforcement of the old lie that used to be.

Nobody cares. Oh, that's a lie. The whole city of Winnipeg cared. He cared. It touched me deeply. And that's what this is about. I love to be touched deeply. My pain and my active alcoholism is that I couldn't feel anything. If I did, it was wrong. So I did their inventory. The way you said. The purpose of the inventory is to help me find and be rid of the things in myself that are blocking me from God. That's the only reason it's there.

It isn't so I can find out who I am. Hell, I knew who I was. Christmas Day in 1967 and I killed it. It's to help me find out who I'm not so I can get rid of it. And there's the promise. Federal narcotics agents broke down my house one time and almost shot my son in that raid. And I hated them. And this guy went on my inventory. Twenty-two reasons that I was mad at him. He'd made a gangster, a criminal out of me. Almost killed my son and blah, blah, blah.

And I went over what this thing is because resentment is the spiritual disease that I must overcome. I have a physical disease that gives me an allergy to alcohol. My other problem is anything that separates me from you separates me from God. And resentment separates me from you. I cannot be separated from you. We're all his kids. One of us is separated. We're all separated. I can't do that. I must perform that healing.

And the way to do it is put it on paper. Well I discovered in listing from the big book what this narcotics agent had done. But I had eventually invited him into my house. I brought him there. I invited him in with a gold plated invitation. I'd been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico and not paying the tax on it. That made me his job. If a guy that hired me to do the job was a weak wing and I knew if he got caught he'd turn us all in.

He got caught and he'd turn us all in. Everything had happened that day was my fault. I brought it on myself and on my kids. And you can't live with that. I couldn't have. If it hadn't been for the promise find and be rid of the things in ourselves. I get to get rid of that kind of thinking. Now does that work? Well there hadn't been a federal narcotics agent in my house for 22 years. I don't even invite him for dinner.

I learned about fear on paper. I learned about God's mercy. We live in a world filled with people who are frightened and have to learn how to cope with fear. I don't have to learn how to cope with fear here since I can be rid of it. Once I honestly look at why I have it and the only reason I ever have fear is because I recognize I can't deal with this deal. I don't trust in God to do so. There's a prayer we're given.

And all I have to do is say God please remove this fear from me and direct my attention to what you would have me be. And there was the key. It doesn't say what you would have me do. What you would have me be. I

am not what I do. I'm not my house. I'm not my job. I am not my family. I'm not the car I drive. I'm not the money in my pocket. I'm not what I do. I do what I do because of who I am. And who I am as a child of God.

That's all. You want to deal with self-esteem problems? There it is. God's my dad. What am I ever going to do to top that? Okay. And if he's my dad and he's your dad then we in a very real sense are part of the same family. And that's what we learned here in Alcoholics Anonymous is how to function in a family. God comes by invitation only I discovered. But once invited you're cooked. And that's how I sponsor. If you do whatever the hell you want to do, I'll never bring it to your attention unless you ask me to sponsor you.

Then you're mine. I don't have any choice. You've asked me to show you the truth. And here it is. That's what's intended for me. They just kept throwing a mirror up in front of me. Here's the truth. Well anyway. I'm about to run out of time but I need to share with you the most important piece of business that we have here. And that's the process of making amends. That's a spiritual activity. When I finished my inventory I took it to my friend Jim and had some awakenings.

I'd finished something. I wasn't alone anymore. I began to sense this powerful presence of God in my life. Couldn't tell you much about it but there was a presence. It was real. My sponsor and I were not allowed to go out and make our amends. And you know when you hit this spot if you've done this right you begin to be filled with evangelical fury. Gotta do it all now. We weren't allowed out and he was to never be allowed out.

But he was free. And I wanted to know Bruce how come you're free. The key to this whole business is my willingness. That's what he told me. He'd killed some people and there's no way he could go back to their families and make amends to that. Not possible even if they'd let him out. You can't do that. He was willing if circumstances ever presented themselves to do exactly that or whatever else was called for. He was wanting to do the rest of his life and the penitentiary to pay for that debt.

He sent me back to my cell with an exercise. He said, Don I want you to make a list of all the people you ever harmed. The first bunch comes off the inventory, the people that hurt you the most. Because by then we discovered what I'd done to them. Then he said just put down anybody else you can thank you because you met him, you messed with him. We discovered later I didn't owe direct amounts to all of those people but most of them.

Here's the key he said. I want you to picture in your mind, close your eyes and picture each one of them separately. And look him right in the eye and see if you can feel willing to say to them while you're looking you're in the eye. I've been wrong, I've caused you harm. Would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get these books to balance? He said you know what you did to them because we got clear on what I'd done.

They said you're so insensitive you have no idea what it did to them. And as I went over the list that night, picturing each one and asking that question, I had the experience I've waited for all my life. I was lifted and set free. Because if I've caused you any harm you just tell me what I have to do and we'll get it square. Now a lot of the direct amends are easy to make. The money I owe on those little deals but how do you make amends to the mother that you put in a position to say on Christmas day, you and your kids can't come in my house.

You don't go say mom sorry, it was you hadn't done that, that's a monk. It was months later after I got out she

finally allowed me to come by. And I didn't use those exact words but I found a way to ask the question. The spiritual life has made me a listener not a talker. And what you do after you ask what do I have to do is you shut up and you listen. Well I tell you. And my mother said to me honey, all I've ever wanted for you is that you'll be happy.

So from that time until just before I came up here I go by my mother's house and the regular bass is happy. And that's all it took. That's all she wants from me. That's all it took. All but the things that are happening as a result of the year. See this business takes time. I want to spend the rest of time sharing with you some really important things that have happened just recently. About 25 years ago I stole my mother's \$2 bill collection because I needed it.

And eventually we got around to where she was. Except that when I confessed to her that I had done that. And it was during a time if you remember the \$2 bills were taken out of circulation. I couldn't find any to replace the collection. All I could do was cop out to the truth. And then she kind of forgot it and I forgot it over a period of years. It just kind of went out of my mind. A couple years ago because I don't run my life.

One of God's messengers said, well you come down to Virginia. And I was down in Virginia and our host down there took us up to Monticello, which is Thomas Jefferson's incredible house. And he's on the \$2 bill. And they're back in circulation. They had boxes of the damn things that they give out for change. So I bought enough \$2 bills to replace my mother's collection. I don't know whether it's a blessing or a curse, but God has let me remember every tiny little detail of what I have to straighten up.

And I was deeply touched by this and in my talk that night I shared that with the people. And I went home and I gave it to her. She'd forgotten and she was thrilled that she was kind of bored with it. And a week later an envelope came in the mail from Virginia with \$2 bills in it. I'm beginning to experience what anonymity really means. My life, the very worst things of my life in God's hands can become tools of healing.

Someone else did that too. And they can't make direct amends. I don't know whether they're mother's dad or what, it came anonymously. They couldn't do that. But through me they got free. And for two years \$2 bills been showing up. My mother thinks you guys are really something else. And I'm convinced if I tell this story just right she's going to be a rich woman. But that dimension thrills me. I had nothing to do with it.

Through each of us, in God's hands our lives become the healers for others. That's what it's about. That's what I want to participate in. That thrills and excites me. Some other things take time. I damaged our name in our city. My brother's a musician, a very fine musician. And has been for years. And I hung out in the same places he did. And our name got dirty and he got tainted with my brush. And it was a long time before my brother really wanted a whole lot to do with me.

21 years it was. We would talk. We even bought a cabin together. But we never did anything together. Last year he invited me to his birthday dinner for the first time. He just took time. And then he had me over to his house for dinner. My wife and I. And I remember at the dinner we were laughing and having fun. And he said, you know I'm not even sure we're going to like each other. But tonight was fun. And I can live with that.

Because I've learned I don't try to impress anybody. Or ever. I've lost everything that was ever precious to

me. And have no right to ever expect any of it back. And I know that. So when one comes back it's a thrill. Making amounts to my sons was something. Because I ran them through crash pads and jails and foster homes. And we've talked about that. And I've done all I can do to heal that. And my older boy for a number of years now we've been able to talk.

And I can say Terry I love you. And he's been able to say I love you too, Dad. But there's nothing there. There's been a wall. And on a regular basis I pick another guide. And I go through these steps for me. I stay in them because the way I sponsor is to carry you through the steps. But back just prior to the Super Bowl. I picked a friend who I knew would do the same thing I do but would different eyes and we went through it.

And I found one right major resentment and two fears. And cleared them out. They were goofy. As all these things are. But my motive is that I want to hear that we small voice now. More and more. I like what happens when I listen to that voice and go with it. And I wanted to clear anything that was blocking me. That's all. My wife was on the inventory. I just finished four years as your general service office trustee.

And my business had gone to hell. I was broke. And I was afraid she was going to leave me. And then I was afraid she was going to stay and earn all the money and tell me what I had to do. You know, goofy stuff. Anyway, we, with my wife, he's just, she's incredible. When this was all over, I was able to sit still again and be still. And when I'm in the stillness, I'm constantly trying to get direction on how can I make this life better around me?

How can I live? The spiritual life is one of living in reasonable harmony with the world around me. How can I better do that? Well, we had a telephone answering machine for my business. And it said, this is Don Prince. I can't come to the phone right now. Your message is important to me. So, or your call is, so please leave a message. And I just changed to the new ATT mailbox. So I listened to that message to see what I wanted to retain and it hit me.

I can't come to the phone right now. Your message is important to me. Hell, she lives in my house too. So I changed the message. Neither Jackie and I can come to the phone right now. But your call is important to us. I didn't tell her about it. She called home one afternoon and heard it. And she never said anything about that. But that pleased her so much. And I got to look at how deep my self-centeredness is. I'm in reasonably fit spiritual condition.

And it took me all these years to remember she lives in this house too. My older boy and I, I was sitting and thinking, when I got arrested last time, he was eight years old. And they took them away to a foster home. He and his younger brother. And it was not a good one. Some bad things happened to these kids. And we've talked about that over the years. And got all that straight. But the wall was still up. And every time I thought about my older boy, it was a mixed feeling.

I loved him deeply and there was this sharp pain. Every time I thought of him. Something undone. I wish that hadn't happened. Well, after I'd finished this deal and cleared my head a little bit, I was thinking about him one day. And it occurred to me that at eight years old, this little boy had to go into a bad circumstance and protect his little brother from danger. That's a tough thing for an eight year old kid. But I had never thanked him.

So I got a hold of him. And I said, Terry, I know we've talked about this before. But I want you to know that I know that that that was a very brave thing you did. And I want to thank you for taking care of your little brother when I couldn't. And I heard the change in his voice then. Something got set for you. Just before this, I had Super Bowl tickets. I sponsor a guy who has Super Bowl tickets. And I don't even know what the Broncos do.

Well, we had some tickets for one of the earlier games. And I called my son and asked him if he wanted to go. And he said, of course, Dad, thanks. So he came by and got the tickets and went. After I had cleared my head a little bit and had this and thanked him, I had tickets to the Giants game. And I called him and said, Terry, would you like to go to the Giants game? And he said, are you going with us? Three weeks ago, he called me.

He does once in a while because he needs things. And I kept listening and waiting for him to tell me what he needed. And he just kept chatting. For ten minutes, my son chatted with me. It's all he wanted that day. He had never done that before. He's free. And when I thank of him now, there's no pain. This is a healing deal we got here. And it takes time. I, yeah, I've run out of time. I get so frustrated because I got some really important stuff to share with.

My life is no longer useless. I have no better or no worse than anyone else on this planet. But I am useful. And each of us is useful. I can't just get out of bed and go to work in the morning. I need a cause and I've got one. There are millions of us who don't know that if you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. And our job is very simple. We're going to go find them every day. I'm telling them that. And if I even come close to bleeding us, we're supposed to say, well, good.

Come and meet some of my buddies. We'll show you precisely how to do this thing. And you can become part of us. I fit. I don't fit in the world. I get to living just as if I did, but I don't fit out there. To this day, I can't cope with what's going on around me. I don't even try. I had reached that place in my life where I had become everyone I had ever met, or ever read about or ever seen in the movie. I was crazy.

Like old legions in the Bible. There were just too many of me. And I couldn't deal with it. And there were any pigs left to cast the demons into. And I, you came and you found me. And you told me I need not worry about that. I thought I was going to have to sort all those people out to find out who I was. And you said, no, no. We'll show you who you're not. We'll help you find out who you're not and you get rid of that.

And whoever you are will just show up. And that's how I see us here. The way I see Alcoholics Anonymous is like what happened on the day that that young fellow saw Michelangelo statue of David for the first time. And it was just awestruck. And so he went to Michelangelo and he said, how in the world did you do that? Michelangelo said, well, I took this block of stone and I just chipped away everything it didn't look like David and that's what I got.

And that's how I see us. What we've got is a sculpture. And our little meetings and our book and our steps and all these things we do is a chisel. One day at a time we're just chipping away everything that doesn't look like dawn. And so far this is what we've got. I love you all. Thank you very much.