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Transcript

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My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. And I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. My home group is the Denver Thursday Night Group. We meet every Thursday night in Denver. It's been fun. I've got some old friends here and met some new ones. It was good to see Helen and Dick again. Of course, Reese's and Mary's. I'm glad you asked me down. Thank you. Whoever will be responsible for that. And I have to agree with you, Tom. She writes a great letter. I had planned to be here on Friday afternoon. I read one of her letters and I was here at Thursday.

I'm not messing with you. I would like to tell you about my home group. One of the extra benefits of getting to talk from here is that I get to share a few of my opinions as well from my experience. And I think the home group is absolutely vital. I think I have a concern today because we tell people go to meetings but we don't explain it. Probably I get a home group and go to meetings. Because just going to meetings, we seem to believe.

We're losing a lot of folks. My home group is a wonder. It's a genuine AA group. We meet every Thursday night in Denver at 8 o'clock. And they begin to arrive around 7, 15, 7, 20. And we meet for an hour and somewhere around 9 and have to run us off. We like to spend time with each other. Our meetings are very simple format. We only have one topic. What you are like, what happened, and what you are like now. And that's our only topic. We have a little podium.

You are asked to come up and share for 5-7 minutes. And I guarantee you at 7 minutes you are asked to sit down. That's enough. We put this group together because of a big book workshop we had all attended. And we wanted to stay together and have a place where if you have a new person, you can bring them to our group but you will be assured they will hear about alcoholics and animals. We don't save anybody. We don't walk on water. We talk about alcoholics and animals. We are very strong on sponsorship.

And we do a lot of things together. We have a monthly potluck. We just all get together and have fun in a meeting. We have a monthly group conscience where the basic business of our group is taken care of. And that's held before the meeting. We found we can get them to come before and they won't stay after. And every 3-4 months we have a full group inventory. We pick a separate night, neutral ground, somebody's house. We feed them. We learn it from the Salvation Army. Feed them first and they are easier to deal with.

And then we spend whatever time we need, conducting our group's business. Is this going to be an open or a closed meeting? It's group business. One of the most important things we did, I think, in our group was to decide what happens if a non-alcoholic shows up at our meeting. Because we, by group conscience, are a closed meeting. What happens? And not only for the person who shows up who is not an alcoholic, but mainly for our chair people.

We put them in a terrible spot when we don't give them some kind of direction. And we spent 4 months hammering this out, trying to come up with a loving way to deal with this situation. And our solution is this, at this time, if someone arrives and we introduce ourselves so we can find out if everyone's an alcoholic and

someone isn't, our chairperson is directed to ask them if they have a problem with alcohol if they'd like to do something about it.

And if they still say no, we have to suggest to them that because this is a closed meeting of alcoholics anonymous for alcoholics or people who are drinking problems, they won't be able to stay in for the main meeting, but several of our members will break off and go into a separate room and you'll have a meeting. You came from meeting, you'll get one. Of course, that's a 12-step call for our members. So that's our solution at this point. I like belonging to a group that's wanting to discuss those kinds of things, and that's why I bring it up.

I've been sober for a while, and the odds of me just going out and getting drunk are slimmer than they used to be, although I think I'm closer to my first drink than I was years ago. But circumstances sometimes keep me from showing up like I was here Thursday night. If I miss more than a couple meetings, somebody calls me just to make sure that I'm okay. That's the kind of group I belong to. They send you their very best and hope if you come to Denver, you'll stop by and see us.

We'll try to be as kind to you as you have been to me. I can't guarantee it. My group also draws psychopaths. That's why I belong to it. This group also sponsors what we call a big book workshop. If you hear about A and decide you really want to get serious, really serious, it's 6.30 in the morning, every Tuesday morning, and it'll probably be 6.15 starting next week. We sit down with those who wish and we read every word in the big book.

It takes us about 30 to 36 weeks. We go through it. And we do every single thing it says to do as we go through it as a group. And then at the end of that period, it's over. We take a break and then we start again. And I really like that. There's nothing like getting up in the morning with a group of really serious AAs. It's 6.30 in the morning going through the big book. You know people stay sober doing that. So, that's the commercial for the Denver Thursday night group.

I did not know I was alcoholic when you found me. Not a quiz. I have been drinking for a number of years and I drank alcoholically for my very first drink. As I understand alcoholism, that's a simple definition. I never had any control whatsoever over the amount I drank once I started. And I'm not sure I could have quit if I wanted to because I never really tried. But I'm inclined to think that I wanted to stop. I probably couldn't.

But I had no control. See alcohol did a wonderful thing for me. The very first time I drank it. Wonderful thing. I was little and stupid ugly. Every morning when I got out of bed. And when I got out among you, you verified that I was stupid and little and ugly. And I had a tendency to be a coward. A physical coward. So I fought a lot. A coward would stand to fight a lot. I was in cross-purposes with the world around me.

I can remember laying in bed 13 years old crying one night. Wondering when my people were going to get back from Mars to pick me up. Because I didn't feel human. I'd been listening to humans talk about how they felt and how they thought. It certainly wasn't me. Just in franchise. There's a hundred words for it. I didn't fit. And when you don't fit, when you don't belong, there's only one real reaction to that I found.

And that's mellow rage. It's outrageous to not belong among your own people. And so I kind of walked around fist off all the time. Stupid ugly. And there's a rite of passage in Denver of what we did. Those of us who grew up on East Colfax, we got a guy from our field to buy us a quart of whiskey. We went out east of Denver

15-16 somewhere to get drunk like the big kids did. Because they said this was fun. And I had a couple of drinks and I changed forever.

I can tell you all the different changes. You know, taller and braver and all that. What I remember most about that evening is that after a few drinks of bonded bourbon, I had plans. Now up to that point in my life, I had been ricocheting off of life. I had no plans. But that night I had plans. I was centered. It was alright for me to be me and it was alright for you to be you. And that was a kid in my high school class who had not been treating me very well.

And I was going to meet him back at Bill Bond since driving and whipping. And I could have done it. And that was a little girl in my class who hadn't been treating me much at all. And we were going to visit. And I could have visited that night. And I must tell you standing here today, if that's all that alcohol did, I would have to recommend it to anyone. It produced what I now know to be something very like a spiritual experience.

It relieved that sense of restless irritable discontent. It relieved that sense of being an outsider. It gave me, if I don't think it's a mistake, they call it spirits. It creates something very like a spiritual experience. And it worked. And that's not a bad deal. But I didn't know it. Nobody knew it. It's in my nature that if one works, you take ten. That's just automatic. We were discussing this new chemical they found that supposedly nullifies the effects of alcohol.

Well, of course, I drank for the effect. But I'll tell you in all truth. If they could give me something, it would nullify the effect. I'd still drink the stuff. I drank to be taller and shorter to stop pain, to feel pain, to feel. I drank for all those reasons. My experience caught off when I drank for no reason at all. It was just there when I drank it. So if you kill the effects, all I'm going to do is drink it and get in the matter because I'm not getting the effect.

You can have mine, thank you. But I got back to Bill Bonset's drive and in the pattern of my life starting. I had good plans and I got back there. By the time I got back there, I had had so much alcohol that I was nearly dead. It's just from alcohol, boys and girls. Because I went after it. And the guy I was going to whip and the girl I was going to visit, instead of that happening, what they saw was my partners hauling me along by the armpits while I puked in the drive.

My plans didn't work out. And you know, I understand there are some people who have had very similar experiences and they stop doing that. But I have a keen, alcoholic mind. What I associated that event to was bonded bourbon. And I've been very careful. I've never had any bonded bourbon since that event. I also must tell you, had that been the only thing that was to drink, I'd had it. But I understood right away what caused me problems.

I also understood right away what had happened to me. And I have quickly found things that wouldn't make me pukes too quickly. When I got into your big book, you mentioned that people drank essentially because they, for the effect produced by alcohol, I identified easily with that. I drank different things on different nights according to what we were going to do. My mother doesn't do that. She likes snacks and she'll drink a couple and that's it.

I planned what I was going to drink depending on what we were going to do. If we're going to fight, I'd drink

vodka. Because with vodka I mean. If there were a lot of little girls at the party, I'd drink dark McCarty rum. You didn't have that. I'm a lover with dark McCarty rum in me. Not all of them sweet and sensitive for 10-15 minutes. I remember nights when I couldn't feel much of anything. So I drank Coor's beer.

I listened to the pearl and husky singing in four walls. And then he had a time I could cry. That's wonderful. With red wine, I'm a poet. With white wine, I'm a painter. I was in my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old. I was a director of all of alcohol. And I will have to talk to you about penitentiaries because my life took me there. It doesn't give me any status. It'll make me special. It means I was really stupid along the way too.

I was not a big-time gangster. I've been in three penitentiaries and the big-time gangsters don't even get into one. But when I was 17 years old, Denver had gotten too small for me. I'd been skipping school and everybody was on my back. It seems I wasn't living up to my full potential. I hate that word today. What's wrong with you, they would say? We know you can do better, why don't you? And I learned a lie fairly early in my life because of questions like that.

At the beginning, when they would ask me what's wrong with you and why did you do that, I would tell them the truth. I don't know. And people would say, you must know. And so I began to find out what they'd like to hear. And when I'd get one of those questions, I'd tell them something they'd satisfy. So I became very good at that game. This week of 1967 was the most painful week of my entire life. Now I think I hit bottom at 19 and I don't believe my bottom was ever any deeper than that.

Because I went to the penitentiary and took a bad conduct discharge and came home. All my dreams smashed. I was disgraced in a failure. But at 19 I was resilient and I bounced. I think today the worst thing I ever did to the people that loved me the most is that I kept getting up. I'm giving them new hope and I'm dashing it again. For Christmas week in 1967, I was really tired. I weighed 133 pounds. I was on federal parole for a little indiscretion I'd committed in 1966.

I had two little boys that I'd been raising for years because their mother had abandoned the ship one over a year and a half and a year and two and a half. And I've been hauling them around the country with me. Trying hard to be a good father and absolutely incapable of it. What happened this week is that I entered into the surrender process. For me it was a process. Surrender for me is a matter of recognizing the lives of my life for what they were.

Lies. I had long ago quit living in the truth. I couldn't tell the difference between the truth and the false. Either in who I was, what I was or how I felt. But this week the lies were just about to run out. I want to tell you about that because I want to get on about why I'm here. That's to share with you precisely how I recover. I come from a functional home, by the way. I know you have to apologize for that today, but I did.

My people are still married to each other. They still live together and talk to each other, love one another. I come from a family that didn't, it wasn't that we didn't have problems, but we always met them. We faced them. My dad, for instance, at one time was the second command of the Colorado Ku Klux Klan. He's now a very spiritual man. But some of his attitudes as I grew up, but we always faced that. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado.

One of the finest synthesizer musicians in the world, writes a symphony every year for the Colorado Symphony. My sister just retired a short while back from IBM as one of their top executives. Somehow our environment didn't seem to affect that much. It was me. Coming from the functional home, I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. We had Christmas in my house. Tree and decorations and good smells and music and fun.

Christmas week in 1967 did not look like Christmas in my house because we were on ADC. Federal parole and we had no money. And dad was a mess. I also got into using a lot of amphetamines. I'm not a drug addict, by the way. I'm an alcoholic who's happened to use a lot of amphetamines. There is a difference. And at that time, I couldn't get out of bed until this kid I was using as a runner, got by to give me a fix, give me a drink, give me up so I could go steal something.

But I was still saying, I'm a pretty good father. At least the boys and I have a warm, dry, clean place to live, and we're intact. And as I looked around my house that week and realized what a pig-pan it was, I began to understand that's a lie. We were staying together, but we were not intact. And I was not a good father. We didn't have any food, because the welfare check hadn't gotten there yet. And we didn't have a Christmas tree, because there was no money.

And things began to fall apart for me. On the 24th, we found a dollar in the snow. And I got to tell you, they'll say you're the biggest tree on the lot, for a dollar on the 24th. And that's the one we bought. I'm an alcoholic. Our little room was about seven feet tall, and our tree was about nine feet tall. And it tilted over at the top. And it was dressed with the kind of things that people like me dressed the tree with.

Cut out some cardboard stars, and you know, if you cut the bottom off of the half-pint milk carton, it looks like a bell. And there were two little presents that I had gotten for the boys on credit, a little pair of cowboy boots and a shirt, and the Denver merchandise mark. These kids had wrapped up everything in the house that had fit into blue paper towel, the kind you wash windshields with, so I'd have a good Christmas.

And some more of me broke. I could see the lie in all this. The event that I love today, the most painful event I've ever been through. On Christmas Day, the kids and I went down to my folks' place and said we could spend time on Grandma and Grandpa on Christmas Day. And you can understand, I've come from a family that really is intact. My sister makes great babies, for instance. And her kids make great babies. Her kids aren't always able to find great husbands to go along with them, however.

And the attitude in my family is, oh, how nice. We have another Prince Baby, let's raise it. That's just how we operate. And on Christmas Day of 1967, we got to my folks' house and my dad met us with the door. And he said, Don, I'm sorry, but your mom says, I can't let you in here anymore. I can't stand watching you die anymore. And for the first time in my life, I saw the truth of what was going on. My lie had been, leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me.

And that day it was a clear cut lie. I was hurting ma'am and my children and everybody that knew me, and I knew I was doing that. And then my dad smashed my last lie. Because he snuck us in anyway. They live in a big old house in East Denver, and he snuck us in. And I have been saying for years, nobody cares about us. Nobody loves us. And he made a lie on that that day. And I knew it was a lie. And I'd run out of lies.

As you can understand, when I got home, there was some self-pity to walk through. But I went through the self-pity and I walked into the truth. And the truth I'm sad to tell you was when I realized fully there's no reason for me to be here. Everybody on this planet would be better off if I was gone. The kids would be taken better care of and stop hurting people. It was the truth. And at that point of no hope, all you can do is surrender.

And I had nothing left to surrender to. I had tried everything. I've been on forever. I was something wrong with me. I was in Dianetics when it started. I knew Elrond Hubbard. Trying to fix my sick mind. I've been baptized a number of times. I've had peyote visions with the Indians that their meetings in Nevada. Real visions? I gotta tell you. I had a vision of a great bird flying high with no head. And I understood clearly that was me and my life.

My and I go nowhere. It kept me so over four months. So some of you knew people were inclined to want to try visions. I've got to tell you the truth. They're good for four months of sobriety. But I had run out of all hope, all methods. The last psychiatrist that I went to was smoking marijuana in three weeks. I'm a reasonably good salesman. I had to die. I took a two month supply of the junk I was using and pushed it into my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died because I knew it all the way.

I quit. I met the first requirement for stepping on any spiritual path. I'm out of the game. And for whatever the reason I woke up the next morning and I really didn't feel good. My first spiritual experience was not fun. The police were at the door. I'd sent for them. I was tired. And I set myself up to get a little stretch in the county jail so I could arrest. The county jail's arrest camp for people like me. I lied to you ten minutes. You lied to me ten minutes and we both go take a nap.

That's the deal. That isn't why they were there. They had nine charges. The first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. And the DA told me that he'd bring the rest of them one at a time if I beat that. But I was through and I still owe the federal government four years or five years. It was over. And I must tell you, I didn't care. You see, I was now at a wonderful place. I hope some of you hit this place.

I look for those of you who hit this place. I was now a complete failure at living and also a complete failure at dying. I didn't have any options. I have lost the power of choice, not over alcohol, but my life. I was walking around in a body that wouldn't die carrying within a mind that wouldn't work. That makes you teachable. I was willing to go anywhere anyone said and do anything anyone said. But man, I didn't have to be me anymore.

That's what I had in. I could not stand being me one more second. I loved your talk yesterday. My experience was different. She reached a place where she wanted to live more than she wanted to die. I reached a place where I wanted to die. The same place. I surrendered. And you sent help. Life sent help. They laid me out in the county jail for five months and I detoxed. I don't want to ever forget that. It won't keep me sober.

But I don't want to ever forget that. Because until you spent six weeks detoxing with cramps and all that, don't whimper at me. I'm good with new people. When they say, I really hurt. I say, I know. Now, what do you want to do about it? Compassion I have, sympathy, I don't. Anyway, the power of God entered into my life before I ever heard the word. And I find it interesting that our book of experience doesn't talk about having to believe in God, but it says one of the requirements of recovery is belief in the power of God.

And the power of God began to be demonstrated in my life before I ever got to you. They came to me just the day of my trial and said, we've been talking with the federal authorities, whom you owe five years to. And we all agree here pretty sick. And I agree with that. No question about that. And what we've decided is that if you plead guilty to a reduced charge, so we don't have to go to a trial, we'll give you a one and a half or three year sentence, suspended, give you back to the federal people.

If they have agreed to take you to Fort Worth, Texas, to that lovely hospital down there, and fix what's wrong with you. And I'm not an idiot. The federal hospital beats the hell out of federal penitentiary. Plus, I was ready to go anywhere. So I took their deal, and they kept their bargain. And my first experience as a power of God occurred. If you know anything about power, you know that when the feds in the state say Don goes from Denver to Fort Worth, Don goes from Denver to Fort Worth, I plead guilty.

They gave me one and a half year sentence, suspended it, gave me to the federal people who agreed to take me. And five days later, I was in a Colorado State penitentiary saying, wait a minute. I did not sign up for this one before you found me. I'm the kind of A member that trolls for drunks. If you'd have been among those AAs who say, if they want what we have, they know where we meet. I wouldn't be here today. I didn't even know you existed.

I had tried NAM, my second penitentiary, and I didn't fit there. Didn't have a clue that I was alcoholic. I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type two. But whatever that is, it ain't good. Another government agency said I was a psychopath and untreatable. One doctor thought I was manic-depressive. He'd caught me playing my best game. When it's really noisy in here, and you're trying to figure out who's home, you gotta hold the crowd back a little bit.

And the best way to hold the crowd back is to give them some really good mood swings every now and then. And they'll stay the hell away from me. And I found out they call that manic-depressive. I sponsor psychiatrists who says any competent psychiatrist working with an alcoholic in that first six to eight weeks would have to diagnose him and manic-depressive. To this day, if I'm not careful, I can go from sweetness to light to maniac in less than the speed of light.

Makes people nervous. Anyway, you found me. You came looking for me. So I belong to you forevermore. I was not looking for you. In our third week, I can still hear the guard saying it. You people will come down and you will listen. And I didn't have a really busy social calendar that day, so I went down. And I participated in the first miracle of my life. And I truly believe that anyone coming here has a little grace period.

God is very merciful. But eventually I must participate in my own recovery, or I don't get it. And that day without even meaning to, I accidentally participated because I listened. Well, I did. I sat there and had three guys with numbers on their chest. They said they were from Alcoholics Anonymous, who'll be. I thought I 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 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. They said kind things to us like, your very best thinking got you to the penitentiary. You're not doing too good, are you? They understood us. They invited us to their 12 step study

school. In order to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in that penitentiary, meaning the main group, the new life group, which met on Friday night, they let real people in from the outside to participate in the meeting.

You didn't get to go to that meeting until you'd gone through the 12 step study school. Which met every weekend for five weeks. We gave up our movies and our yard privileges. Every Saturday afternoon, every Sunday afternoon, we were to go to school. Now we didn't know what that was about. My friend Jim and I decided to go. And I went for the wrong reason. I went because I was afraid. Not of the penitentiary. I don't know how to live there.

What had me really frightened is that I knew somewhere in the next year and a half to five years or so, you're going to put me back on the street. And I don't have a clue to how to live out there. And I can't do what I used to do. Can't. It isn't me anymore. So we went and we encountered sponsorship of the finest kind. Conviction and their natural habitat in their little uniforms are a little intimidating. Smiling convicts are frightening.

Walked into their room and they were smiling. And we sat down and one of them got up and said, all right, now for the next five weeks, you knew guys have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. Can't argue with that. So for five weeks in our AA meetings, we weren't allowed to talk. We had nothing to contribute. We had no experience. We were there to learn how to recover from alcoholism. To learn about it and how to recover from it.

Now, after the meetings, they talked with us plenty and they let us talk plenty. New people have to talk. We all worked down the dishroom, so we just babbled for six, eight hours a day at each other. But I began to see something in my sponsor that I wanted. He got in and out of his cell anytime he wanted to. And the way I knew that is when I was locked up at night and couldn't get out, he'd come by and visit with me.

And I wanted what he had. First of all, I was a very practical wife, you know. I'm one of those visits he nailed me forever. He said, Don, do you know that it's possible for me to think? One thought at a time, and he had me. I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for that. One thought at a time. What an incredible idea that is. See, I'd become everybody I'd ever met and they were always all talking at once. It's noisy up there.

They told me what was wrong with me in very specific terms. I was in the penitentiary when I was 19 years old because of alcohol, because I have an allergy to alcohol, or something like an allergy. I have an abnormal reaction to alcohol. If I had an allergy to tomatoes, and I ate tomatoes, I'd break out with an itch. My allergy's alcohol. If I had drank alcohol, I'd break out with an itch. For more alcohol. They described it.

I found me in the doctor's opinion. He had been working with men who had been working on a business deal that would be settled favorably to them, and they took a drink a day or two before and they missed their appointment. What happened to me? When I drank, I get lost and can't find my way home. And that's a felony when you're in the Navy. And, yeah, it is. Felony, they put you in prison for that. I loved it. I absolutely adored the Navy.

It was everything a 17-year-old kid who's goofy, stupid, and angry, could ever want. I had a war to fight. I got to drink with the big kids. I learned about sex. I just loved it. The activity was wonderful. I was in radio and I felt useful. But I'd go ashore. It was supposed to be back at midnight, or 24 hours. I had to get back at 1, or 26

hours, or 28 hours. And the punishments were ridiculous. Ten days' restriction to the ship, and then we'd go to sea.

Big deal. One time, I was 23 days late getting back to my ship. And when I got there, it wasn't her anymore. They were moving it to Korea. Which was a shooting offense. It was a war zone. The kid I was running with got us on a Pan Am Clipper. We beat the ship to Japan by three weeks. Which proved to be a mistake. We thought we were pretty slick. I don't know how mad our skipper was when he realized we weren't with him.

Probably was rather grateful. But I don't know if I'm looking in his cold, beady eyes how angry he was that we were standing on the dock waiting for him. That explains why that happened to me. I've always wondered why that happened to me. I took a drink in Long Beach, California, drink of alcohol. And what's wrong with me went into action. And for 22 days, I could not go back to that ship. I roamed the Los Angeles area, motion drinks, ended up in Pershing Square, willing to do absolutely anything I had to do except go back to that ship.

On day 23, the madness was gone and I turned myself in and went back. I found me in the book called Alcoholics and Monkeys. That was one of the feathers. There were a number of them I don't have time to talk about. I discovered what's wrong with me. Now, when I sponsor people, it's very important to me that we spend as much time as we need to identify whether they're alcoholic or not. I believe the steps will work for anybody.

But I don't believe the fellowships do. And I have worked with enough people over the years to know that if you're still fragmented and don't know for sure, you don't get the full result. So whatever your problem is, let's find out what it is. Now I sponsor a psychiatrist who's the founder of one of the finest treatment centers in the world. The University of Colorado. The problem is, he can't seem to stay sober himself.

He came to me and we're running through it and we're reading the doctor's opinion and I'm trying to find a way to get through to him. Because everything I'm saying and everything Dr. Silk we're saying is getting caught in all the stuff he knows. And the thing I love most about new people is that you teach me effective prayer. Effective prayer. You come to me and you put your life in my hands. And I do not take that lightly.

Lives are a stake here. And I don't know what to say to you. Go fear and hell. What am I going to say is going to make any sense? I understand today that just my being wanted to say anything at all helps. But I want to be effective. So anyway, I'm saying this go into Don's head and he isn't getting it. And I started praying. What can I say to this man? And it came to me. I said, Don, what happens to you after the first drink?

And he said, we're on the fourth or fifth drink. I forget where I am and where I'm supposed to be and I get lost and I get drunk. I said, Don, what happens to you after the first drink? I'm on the fourth or fifth drink. I forget where I am and where I'm supposed to be and I get lost. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. That's all you need to know to start getting well. That happens to alcoholics and it always happens to me.

If I have one drink, I will have another. And it has nothing to do with whether I love my family or my job or myself or anything. It has to do that I've had a drink. And now until the cycle runs out, I will drink. What I do along the way, it's terrible. But that won't happen either if I don't drink. Have a safe trip, Tom. Say goodbye to Tom. He's a one really. Great hope from understanding the physical disease that I have and then my sponsors

threw me a curve.

He said, You know, that's completely academic. If you don't take another drink, that will never happen again. So what's really wrong with me then? Because I've been doing that for years. What's wrong with me in the simplest terms is there's a peace missing up here. And my neighbor has it, by the way. I know that because we talk. One of the benefits of sobriety is that I've been living in the same house and right in the same woman coming up on 16 years.

We've lived together so long without living an entire dog. And that's really a long time. But when you live in a neighborhood, and I really want to be a good neighbor, you eventually have to talk to your neighbors. And real people do a thing they call small talk. And I don't have a clue as to what that's about. Life is important and full of meat. They can talk for half hour forty-five minutes and never say a thing. But I want to be a good neighbor.

So I've learned four or five minutes of small talk. I know at least three kinds of grass we don't want to grow in our neighborhood. And I caught my neighbor's kid growing one of them in my backyard. Surprised him, he didn't think anybody knew what that was. Anyway, my neighbor and I were visiting one day. And when I run out of small talk, I either have to leave, or we're going to talk about the only thing I know anything about.

And that's alcoholism. And God. And sure enough, he ran me out of small talk. So I began to share a little with him, and I'm very careful by the way of my neighbors. I do not share with him at the same level I share with you. I think it really made him nervous if he knew who really lived next door to. And he shared with me a common experience that he and I have had. It is so clear the difference between us. He said one night, he too got drunk by drinking too much whiskey.

And he fell down and he threw up and he made a fool of himself. And he hasn't done that since. His reactions are very different than why. And I know today why he didn't do it again. You see, he remembers how badly he felt about what he had done, and it attaches to something in his mind and says, well, I don't do that again. I can remember vividly how badly I felt time after time. It doesn't attach to anything. In the big book, they tell us that the memory of the humiliation, even a week ago, may not show up.

My sponsors are very careful to help me understand. I will never ever be able to get sober and stay sober based on self-knowledge. Because all the information that I need to do that, there will be a day when it won't show up. Or if it does show up, it will be warped. Six years sober, I had an experience that drove that home. God is very kind to me, leaves no loose. My life always comes full circle. And in my six years sobriety, I was working behind the walls, counseling and getting jobs for the guys as they came out.

He let me give it back where I got it. And part of my job, man, I had to come into town once a week to catch my home group and to visit with our contacts. And we were having lunch in a place called Leo's in Denver. Very fine place. Everybody was in coaching ties. One of the fellows had discovered a new liqueur. Green stuff and a tall, skinny glass. It wasn't enough in it to do anybody any good, but they were all tasting it. It went around the table.

Everything I knew showed up. I knew I was not going to drink that. I knew why. All the information was available. There was no danger here. And as it came by me, I thought, oh, sniff it and see what it smells like. And

while it was under my nose, it burst into my mind clearly. The difference between life and death for me at that moment would be the twitch of a muscle. It's all it would take. With everything going, that's all it would take.

Fortunately, I understood death from the beginning. I don't want to disagree with anyone, but to this point, I've never asked God in the morning to keep me sober. It's none of my business. Give me the guide and direct my life and the filming with his spirit. I believe I've lost the power of choice and direct it. Every time, 100% of the time, when I had a choice, I made the wrong one. And I'll guarantee you, if I had the choice today, I'd make the wrong one.

The better I just give it up. I'd say I've dreamed of it. I believe it's that serious for me. I must have something working for me for those blank times. And less than a year ago, I had another experience that brought that home to me. I believe those of us with some sobriety behind us a few years of sobriety are in far more danger from the truth than we are from the lies. It would be really hard for anyone here to convince me it would be alright for me to take a drink alcohol.

I know that's a lot. But I travel a lot. And as a result of that, I'm in a flight class with United for 25 hours if there's that first class seat available, I get it. And I was coming back to somewhere on an evening flight and I upgraded myself. And they were serving dinner. And of course, the cabin lights were damp and my reading light was almost reading my book and the table was making very nice ambiance in the room.

And they were serving the guy sitting next to me and the girl poured him a glass of deep, burgundy red wine. And I caught her out of the side of my eye and my mind said, that really looks good. And that was the truth. No mind that. That really looked good. And then I looked at it. And my mind said, I bet that would really taste good. And that's the truth. I'm still not thinking about drinking it. The truth is that looked good and it really will taste good.

And then my mind said, I bet that's going to make his dinner taste even better. And that was the truth. It would definitely make his dinner taste even better. That's why they served it to him. I'm one thought away from the drink. One thought. My next thought would have been, maybe I'd better have one. But before that thought entered my mind, the spirit began to pray with his name. I didn't start to pray. I didn't know I needed to.

There was no sense of danger. But a prayer began to me. And when that happens, I pay attention. I know then I'm in danger. And I began to join in with this prayer and realize what had happened. And went back to my book. And looked over one last time. And it really looked good. And then I started to pray and it was over. That's how deep this thing is for me. And it's also how this works for me. When I can't, I'm safe and protected.

So long as I'm doing certain other things. So I understand I'm really powerless. Really, truly a death I'm powerless. That's why I don't pay any attention to powerless anyway. It's going to take the power of God. And you know, you can't do it. I love you dearly. But you can't keep me from drinking. Without you, I will surely drink. But you can't stop me. And I know that too. So I can love you without reservation or expectation.

I don't expect you to keep me sober. I expect God to keep me sober. And what he gave me was you. So I stayed real close to you. My sponsors had been changed. I did not understand sobriety yet. But I didn't know I needed to be changed. And I was watching God walk around on two feet. And people who had been changed.

One of my sponsors was during a naturalized sentence for a double murder he committed in an alcoholic rage.

I had never done that. But when he described how he felt that morning, I felt the same way. But the guy telling me the story could not commit the act. And I knew that. And he said, that's right. God changed me. And I didn't care who changed me. Something had changed me. And Ron Nicholas was a stick-up man. And he told me about what his life had been like. It wasn't the same man telling me the story. He had been changed.

He said, God changed me. Phil guitarist was probably my hero. Phil didn't go on now. Phil wasn't gone. Phil looked bad. And Phil was bad. If you're going to make movies about Chinese pirates, you'd cast Phil as a captain. Because he was scary looking. He was a Guamanian who had that special look. And Phil was doing time because when he drank, he liked to throw things out of windows. And the last time he'd done it, it was people.

And it was three stories up. Phil was a vicious man. But the man I knew was the kindest, most loving, gentle human being I've met to this day. Phil guitarist taught me how to touch physically in a penitentiary with lots of risky business. But Phil's touching was of a nature that no one ever questioned. And I certainly didn't. Phil'd reach over and go, I feel good all over. These are the people that demonstrated for me.

And they all said God had done this. Well, I wanted what they had. And I went back to myself one time. I said the third step prayer. I sat back loose and easy and waited for my flashlight. And when it didn't come, it really aggravated me. I had tried your deal and didn't work. I still believed in magic. I thought it was going to go boom. My green clothes would turn white and the cell door would pop open. And they'd say, all right, Don, we don't need you anymore.

You go. Absolutely nothing happened. I'm alcoholic. If it goes boom and this room shakes, I can handle that. But nothing happened. But I can't handle that. So I did what I would suggest you do. If your sponsor tells you to do something and you do it, you don't get the results. You think you ought to get. Go fetch at them. I did. I went back to British. And I said, what's going on here? I could explain. I said nothing had happened.

He said, you dummy. In the morning I was 38, 9, 84. But afternoon I was a dummy. I'm coming up in the world. Are you dummy? You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash in life. You're going to kill all your life. We talked about my flashes of light. I've had some. Southern comfort on a roof in Phoenix, Arizona, mid-summer will give you a flash of light. I've been looking for those all my life. And then he took time to explain to me, he said, Don, God knows that you probably can't stand one more big shock in the shape you're in anyway.

And he will probably come to you gently as he did with me. And he described how to come for him. This killer. And then he took the time to wipe out my conceptions of God. He was always Santa Claus. What's he going to do for me? And we wiped him out. I'd tell him some idea I had about God. And he wiped it out. I had enough screaming at him that afternoon. You're asking me to turn my life over to kill him nothing. He said, Why not?

Nothing can run up better than you've been done. My first inventory was a lie. I wrote it to impress my sponsor. And he caught me out of one lesson to it. Took it to another guy who would. All I did was make a list of some of the more bizarre things I had done. Filming that was it. I took it to this other guy, though, because I'd

worked two hours on that thing. Somebody's going to listen. And I had a series of spiritual awakenings.

I would tell him something and he would say, Oh, that isn't that bad. And I knew some of them were that bad. And I realized I've once again picked somebody who will tell me what I want to hear. So I don't have to do anything about it. I realized that it was garbage that went back to the sponsor. I believe the truth without love is cruelty. And I think the confrontation without some kind of real answer is just brutality.

So I'm going to do it that way. But if you have the truth and you have a real answer, like Bruce did, he went for my throat. He helped me discover I had one final reservation about this God business. I really believed at that time that if I gave my life entirely over to the care of God, I would end up in the corner of Colfax and Broadway handing out Watchtower magazines. And asking strangers, have you been saved, brother?

I just couldn't see me doing that. My sponsor said, Oh, well, let's talk about that. Which means, be quiet. All I explain is thanks to you. He said down to you, suppose if the fellow that's handing out Watchtower magazines down there today had breakfast where he wanted to. And I said, probably. He said, well, you didn't. Do you suppose that that guy is making a pool of self-asking strangers that they've been saved is wearing clothes he picked out to do in here?

And I said, yeah, probably. And he said, you're not. Do you suppose when he's all through humiliating himself that he gets to go home? And he had me because I didn't. We are promised in Alcoholics Anonymous a new mind. That's what we're promised here. And my sponsor led me into my hand, carried me into it. And the foundation of my new mind is very simple. Anything at all that God may have in mind for me is better than anything I will ever have in mind.

And I've been living that way for almost 25 years. I don't have time to tell you the joy of living that way. I act well for anything. Whatever he has in mind for me is better than anything I'll ever have. And to make sure that I can maintain that new mind and that attitude, he said I would need to clear away the garbage that kept me from thanking that way to start with. The old mind had to be looked at. It's of absolutely no use to me anymore.

But it's the only tool I have in working with new people. So I need to understand it. I need to be properly on the facts about myself. And I said to him, how do I make this thing real Bruce? He said, well, God will reveal himself to you as you reveal yourself to you. And I finally got this shabby little inventory done. I've got to tell you a shabby. I didn't have much mind left. I couldn't remember much. But I learned about the promises of Alcoholics.

The things we read are wonderful. We're either a checklist or not promises. This book is a book of great mercy. The first thing that happens every time I have a spiritual change is I think, oops, what's wrong here? Something's going wrong. I'm not thinking like I did yesterday. So all through our little book of experience, the people who had the experience before us say, here's what we'd suggest you do. Here's precisely how we suggest you do it.

Here's what's going to happen if you do. And here's what it'll feel like and think like and taste like. There are a checklist all through the book of Alcoholics. There's one just before the third step. On page 75, there's a checklist after you finish your first step. You're probably having this going on. Around the ninth and tenth step,

there's another checklist that describes the spiritual awakening. And they carried me into all of that.

I understood from the very beginning my problems were of my own making. But in order to look at that, honestly, I had to look at the promise in the fourth step. See, the fourth step I've discovered is not so I can find out who I am. It's so I can find out who I'm not. And we can get rid of that. And who I am will just show up. It says to face and to be rid of the things in myself that have been blocking me from this.

And to be rid of is why I was able to look honestly at my own life. In 1966, when federal narcotics agents broke down my house, my four-year-old son was almost shot. And I learned to hate the officer who pulled the gun on him. There's no way I could have understood that I was responsible for that if it weren't for that promise that I get to be rid of this. The kind of thinking that brings federal narcotics agents to my house has got to go.

And does it work? There hasn't been a federal narcotics agent in my house for 26 years. There was an IRS agent showed up a while back. Well, I'm on a lot of non-profit boards. I don't know why, but they keep putting me on. And somebody hadn't done the paperwork, right? And since my name was here, he came and asked me about it. And he really confused me. And you have taught me when I'm confused, I don't pretend I'm smart.

I'm confused. And about a half hour, this guy was restful, charitable, and discontent. But I don't know what the hell he was talking about. And he said, oh, just sign this. I'll fill it out. And I haven't seen any sense, I guess, being dumb-faced. I learned that resentment is not a mental or emotional problem. Resentment is a spiritual disease from its stem all forms of spiritual disease. Because resentment separates me from you, and anything that separates me from the children of God separates me from it.

On the very human side of resentment, the fact is, if I resent you, you own me. You don't even have to be in the room, and you own me. You can die, and you still own me. And I don't want to be owned by the kind of people that piss me off. So I've learned what to do with resentment. Here we are, all these action people. And what do we get to do with the most serious disease of all? Put it on paper. Put a namby-pamby solution that is.

I'd rather attack it somewhere. We put it on paper. I learned how to put my fears on paper, and I learned about God's mercy. We live in a world where people are screwed up, filled with fear. This is a very frightening planet right now. Most of them have to learn how to cope with it. I was told I don't have to cope with fear. I understand why I have it. It's a lack of trust, generally. And then there's a prayer in that four step that I've used for years that works.

It says I can ask God to remove this from me, and drop my attention to what He would have me be. And that prayer changed my life. It doesn't say what He would have me do. It says what He would have me be. And I came to understand that I am not what I do. I am not my car. I am not my job. I'm not the people I hang out with. I'm not the money in my pocket. I am none of those things. Those things are in my life because of who I am.

I'm a child of God. I think that will solve the self-esteem problem. What am I ever going to do that's going to top that? God's my dad. That puts me in a pretty good spot right there. I took my fist up with Jim because I wanted things to be better for him. What little time I have left, I want to tell you a couple stories about the most important things that have occurred in my life, and that has to do with the eighth and ninth step.

I was left with a series of spiritual awakenings. I awakened to this fact. Part of the problem in my life is that I

thought I was a human being trying to have a spiritual experience. What I discovered is that I'm a spiritual being having a human experience. That, by the way, has made me very human. It also means if I'm going to be in my right mind and live correctly for me, I must learn to live by spiritual principles.

That's not easy. This book teaches me how to do that. You teach me how to do that. But I have to approach life that way. And the essence of the spiritual experience is unity, being part of. So my life has to be dedicated to trying to find some way to heal the wrongs, to set them straight, to keep us unified, not to separate us. One of the prayers I've had to make for myself is God please make it unnecessary for me to be right today.

Because when I'm right, it's terrible for everybody around, because I get righteous in any way. My sponsor was free during a life sentence, and I knew he was free. And I wanted to know how he had done that, and he told me precisely. He sent me back to myself. He said, Don, I want you to make a list of all the people you've ever harmed. And we started with my inventory, including that federal agent. I knew clearly what I had done to these people.

He said, you know what you've done, but you're so insensitive, you have no idea what it did to them. So what I want you to do is make a list of all of them and take them one at a time and picture them in your mind and see if you can feel a willingness to say to each one, looking them right in the eye, I have been wrong and I've harmed you. Would you please tell me what I have to do, so I can get these books to them. And as I went over the list that night, and did that little exercise, I awakened.

And the fact that if there's a human being on this planet and I cause you any harm, if there's an institution on this planet to whom I have caused any harm, I am willing, as soon as I know how, to set that matter straight to the best of everybody. And I was lifted from my seat. And I've been free ever since. What this did was made it possible for me to make the tough of men's. The one that had me most concerned was the amount of my mother.

How do you make a man's to a mother that you put on a position on Christmas day to say you and your kids can't come to my house? That's a toughie. Well, what you do after you ask the question is you shut up and listen. And months after I got out, she allowed me to come by very reluctantly. And I don't blame her. I have no reason to ever expect she'd ever trust me again. But we visited, and I found a kind way to ask that question when I shut up.

My mom said to me, honey, all I've ever wanted for you was that you'd be happy. So I've been going by her house on a regular basis for over 20 years, and it works. I've done nothing special. I show up on a regular basis. We have a wonderful time. And I make peace with my dad. And I must tell you, my folks are getting pretty old. They're not going to be here forever. And I can't tell you the peace I have in my heart knowing that we are up to date.

When they go, of course, I'm going to cry. But there's nothing left undone. And that's freedom. So if things happen around that, they're marvelous. I can tell you something that my mother awakened to because of you. You've been very kind to me. And in your trust, you allowed me to serve this fellowship because I've needed to. God knows I need to give it back. But more I give back. Faster it comes. I don't have time to do anything except give it back.

If you had me serving as your trust, eat large one time. And I was truly large. I was somewhere all the time. That's where I met Bud. You have very nose. I was sometimes two places at the same time. Anyway, my grandmother died. My mother's mother. This was on a Wednesday or Thursday. I went down to the house. And she knew I had some place to go and I knew I had some place to go. And I said, Mom, I'll just cancel this.

She said, would you be back my money? And I said, of course. But I'll cancel it. She said, no honey, don't cancel that. You have an obligation to the living. You'll take care of that. I'll be okay. As long as you're back for the funeral, I'll not do that. That's what you gave my mother. My damage that I did to my children cannot be measured. I raised them as best I could. I was a single parent and homeless one before it was fashionable.

But we've placed around this country for three or four years. And I'm one of the people that came out of Berkeley in the 60s, throwing houses and acid around and screaming out. Or there's dope there's hope burned down city hall. That wasn't the federal penitentiary for smuggling drugs. And I used my children to do it. My kids lived a tough life. And it damaged them. And we tried to heal that up over the years. And with the young one, it worked fairly well.

But my older boy, Terry, was never again part of the family. Something had him at odds with me, no matter what I did. And I've learned to just wait. And we've talked and we've done things. Every time I thought of Terry, it was pain in my heart. And I knew there was pain in his heart. I stay active in the steps because I want to grow spiritually. And growing spiritually to me is getting rid of old ideas and letting God present me with new ones.

And after I rotated from the board, that was a full time career. I needed to re-center my life so I did the inventory and got settled. Partly because I know this. God talks to me directly. He either comes through your mouths, or in those very precious times in my basement, or wherever it may be, when I'm not thinking at all, this tiny voice will stimulate me. And God never yells at me. It's always a quiet voice and I must have a quiet mind or I don't hear it.

And I had gotten quiet again. And I was sitting quietly in my place. The spiritual life requires solitude, and the world will not give it to you. You must create it. And I've created a place where if the house is on fire, they don't tell me about it. They expect me to come out of more. That's the deal. Don't bother it. Anyway, I was being still. And I began to think of my son Terry. And I realized that the last time I got arrested, so did he and his little brother.

And he was eight and his brother was six and a half. And they got arrested with me. And I went to prison and they went to a terrible foster home. We talked about it. Bad things happened to my kids. And it occurred to me that the worst thing that had happened is that my boy at eight had to grow up very quickly and become a man in order to protect his little brother. And I had never thought to thank him for doing that.

So because I live in an immediate life, this is it. I got a hold of him right away. And I said, Terry, I want you to know something. Well, we talked about this many times. And I want you to know that I think what you did that day was a very, that time was a very brave thing. And I want to thank you for taking care of your little brother and what I couldn't. And I heard his kids voice change on the spot. I get Denver Bronco tickets.

And I don't have the slightest idea what they do. They tell me that they don't know either, but I don't.

Anyway, I give the kids the tickets. And two weeks before I'd, he'd come by and done some tickets and went to the game. Two weeks after I visited, I had giant tickets. And I called him and asked him if he'd like to go and he said, Dad, are you going to go with us? A few weeks later, he called. And if you have kids, you know when they call, you just wait, well, I tell you what they want.

They want something. It's how we visited and I waited. And we visited and I waited. And about ten minutes, I realized I've been visiting with my son for ten minutes. That's why he called. It never happened. When he got married the first time, he planned it on a weekend when I was out. And he knew I was going to be out. So I couldn't be there. You're in half or so ago, he remarried and he had me do the ceremony. So what time after that, I got a call from him.

The most important. My kid called and said, Dad, Angie spoke to you in Indianapolis and we're going to be a visitor. We're leaving Denver at four o'clock Friday afternoon. We're going to take I-72 Kansas City to Indianapolis. Monday at eight o'clock, we're leaving Indianapolis. We'll come back I-70 through Kansas City and be hung about such and such a time on Tuesday night. That's what we're about. My boy loves me again.

He didn't want me worrying about the journey he's going to take me. He wanted to let me know what was going on. That's what we do with each other, you know. All this babble is about me letting you know this is the path I'm on. So you don't worry about me. He also knows I take that trip frequently. I don't want to stop for food. I've got A.A. friends at every town between Denver and Indianapolis and my sponsor was at Indianapolis.

We got family along and out. He wants me to know he's safe because he knows who they are. And if he doesn't, he can call me and I can tip him off. That's what we do for one another. The immensity of the spiritual experience is saying thank you. This struck me. And I wondered what did I do to bring this about. It was a great healing. Three weeks ago, my son and his wife and all four of my grandchildren, I got to take them to Epcot.

We had a week. I robbed my boy of his childhood. And I could never give that back. Three weeks ago he and I got to play together. All I did was say thank you. And that's what the 12 step is about. I would love to be able to say thank you to God. But the whole idea of God is too big for me to grasp. And in his mercy, what he has done is given me you. So I can say thank you to him through you and to you. And I get to thinking about what did I learn from this.

I learned about the depth of alcoholic self-centeredness is what I learned. I've been rigorously trying to live a spiritual life for nearly 25 years. And it took me 22 years and an act of God to thank to say thank you to my kid. That's how deep this runs. It didn't even occur to me. But I'm also aware that one day sooner would have been too soon for Terry. He wouldn't have been able to hear. So I live with some things until the time is right.

I'm learning to say thank you in every language I can find. It's an acknowledgement of another human being. We had dinner at a Chinese restaurant the other night. And I said, shush, you should have seen the waitress come to life. Nobody had ever talked to her in Chinese before.