

Maryland State Convention

1992 | Reading edition

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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 in good standing today. I've not had a drink of alcohol. I've had a face-to-face encounter with another alcoholic, preyed and meditated in custom of it. My home group is the Denver Thursday Night Group. We meet in Denver every Thursday night. And most of us still meet at that simple. This is a good group. I'm delighted to be with you all. I get to a lot of these things and you're all very warm and very healthy from what I can get it. And I want to personally thank Earl and Millie and Sonny and the others who have held this thing together long enough for me to get here. I promise you I'll take as good a care of it as you did. The same way you did. My home group is a very basic little AA group. We have a podium.

And you're asked to come up and you have five to seven minutes to talk about the only topic we have. What you were like, what happened, and what you were like now. And in seven and a half minutes you get to hook. And the next thing you say. And a wonderful thing happens at that meeting. I don't remember much over the years what's said there. It's pretty basic. But we gather about half-hour to 45 minutes early and they have to run us off.

And the spirit in that room draws people to it. Great spirit of healing there. We're a family, a true family. This little group also, for those who want to get serious and because we were overwhelmed with new people 10, 12 years ago, because we believe in personal sponsorship. To me the definition of sponsorship, by the way, is found in the big book in the second sentence of the first forward. To show others precisely how we recovered is the purpose of this book. So that's what we do.

If I sponsor you, you're required, if I'm a sponsor, you just show up at my house on a regular basis. I don't care whether it's once a day or once a week or once a month, but on a regular basis. And you and I will sit down together and I will read the big book to you. Word by word. And then you and I together will do everything it says together. And when we got overwhelmed we learned from Mark some of our family up in Winnipeg, Canada.

Matt Cheater came and talked to us one time in the early 70s. And we do what we call a big book workshop, which is exactly the same thing. We gather on a regular basis and read the big book out loud and do everything it says. There's a little group of 10 or 15 people. And the only result we get out of this kind of activity is that the bulk of the people who do that seem to stay sober and grow. Our little group, if you came to my home group, there will probably be at least one squalling baby and several pregnant women.

Because our group, for whatever the reason, tends to get married and start making families as they get sober. It's just what happens there. And I've seen those babies save the lives of some of our psychopaths because we do draw them. The angriest human being I know is my little friend Chuck. Oh, he was angry when he got here. Chuck and Laura's baby started crying one night and none of us could reach Chuck. And the baby started crying and Chuck walked over and picked it up and started walking with him.

And the baby got quiet and Chuck began to get quiet. Anyway, that's the commercial. I belong to Alcoholics Anonymous. You see, God gave me back my life a free, clear gift. December 26th of 1967. And then I was hand carried five months later to Alcoholics Anonymous. So that gift could take on some meaning and some purpose and some dimension. Because I had reached the bottom and I think the bottom for any human being, and I hit it, was the moment when I finally understood I was completely useless.

For me, the key to sobriety, to good sobriety, for me, is that I'm not useful. No better, no worse, but I'm useful. I have a reason to get up today. A lot of days I only didn't have a reason, I didn't want to. I drank alcoholically from the very beginning of my drinking. And yet my understanding of alcoholism comes from a very limited source. A book called Alcoholics Anonymous. And it defines it so simply that Albert, you never have to worry about whether you got or not.

If when you wish to stop drinking alcohol, you find you cannot stop entirely or wish to control the amount you drink once you start and find you can't do that, then you're probably alcoholic. And all the rest of it is interesting and academic. I've never had any control of the amount of alcohol I drank, nor did I ever try. That's the silliest thing I think of, is to try to control the amount I drank. I try to control my life and your life and circumstances.

But for my first drink, I love what this stuff did for me. It changed me. I came to alcohol desperately needing to be changed. I was little and I was stupid. And I was ugly. And if we were going to talk, you were going to be brilliant and I was going to belch. I was near the front hall or back hall in high school. I hung out with six other guys that ran up and down East Colfax and more battered forward looking for girls.

I'll never forget the night we found some. We didn't know what to do. We drank. As a rite of passage where I came from, around 15 or 16 years of age, we got a fellow from our Air Force base to buy us a bottle of whiskey. And we took it out East of Denver in order to get drunk like the big kids did. And I went out East of Denver stupid and little and frightened and angry. And I had me a couple drinks of bonded bourbon.

It changed me. I got powered and I got smarter. I can tell you a number of things that happened. What I remember most about that evening is that I had some plans for the first time in my life. The up till then I've been bouncing ricocheting really off of life. Whatever came by, I bounced. And this night I had some plans. It was a felony in my high school class who had not been treating me very well. And I knew he was going to be at Bill Bond City's driving later that night.

And I was going to go back and with him. And I could have done it. And it was a girl in my class who hadn't been treating me at all. She and I were going to have a visit. And I could have done it that way. And I must tell you in all honesty as I stand here today, if that's all that alcohol did for me, I would have to recommend it to anyone. It produced what I now know to be something very much like a spiritual experience.

It brought a sense of ease and comfort and sense of it's alright for me to be me and it's alright for you to be you. And if that's all it did, why not? That isn't unfortunately all it did for me. I didn't know it then, but it's in my nature that if one works, take ten. When I read the big book and saw the definition of insanity in there, it's very simple, lack of proportion in the ability to think straight, I don't have the slightest idea about proportion.

And I'm rubber-minded. I can't think straight. So before the evening was out, I was almost dead in a cute alcohol poisoning. I drank too much bonded bourbon and got sick. What the guy I was going to whip saw and what the girl I was going to visit with saw, despite my good plans, was my partner's hauling me around the driveway and Bill Johnson's driving. Well, they poured coffee down me and I poured it right back out.

And that's essentially how it was for me. And I have a keen alcoholic mind. I knew instantly what caused that debacle, bonded bourbon. I haven't had a bonded bourbon since. I really haven't. I'm not drinking that stuff. And I tell you, had that been all there was, I'd drink that again. But I very quickly found out what wouldn't make me have that reaction. And I began to drink for the effect produced by alcohol. What I love about alcoholics anonymous is from the very beginning, you've been very specific in what's wrong with me and I can identify with it.

If we were going to fight, I drank vodka. Because when I drink vodka, the effect is that I get me. And if you're going to fight, you'll be a little bit me. And there was a chance that we were going to meet some girls tonight. I drank dark Bacardi rum. It turns me into a lover. With red wine, particularly man of chef's. I am a poet. I can remember some terrible nights when I couldn't feel anything. So I drank Coors beer.

I listened to Ferlin Husky singing four walls. And I could just cry like a baby. I was in my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old. I was a direct result of drinking alcohol. And I didn't know that. You see, when I drank, one of the symptoms of my alcoholism is that I get lost and I can't find my way home. And there is a federal law against that when you're in the Navy. And it turns out it's a felony. My favorite word in our big book is the word baffled.

Because that was my lifestyle. And I was baffled by this series of events. See, I quit high school when I was 17 and joined the Navy to save America from the Communist menace. And to come home a hero. Because I desperately needed to be a hero to somebody at 17 years of age. And two years later I'm in the penitentiary. They would give me a 24-hour liberty. And I would go ashore expecting to be home in 24 hours. They expected it and I expected it.

And I'd have a drink. And it'd be 25 hours. You're 26 or 28. And one time it was 23 days late. And when I got home it wasn't there anymore. It was on its way to Korea. And at that time that was a shooting offense. Fortunately I ran with a real slick drunk. We're not idiots. We're not dummies. He got us on a Pan Am clipper. We flew over that ship and were in Japan three weeks before it ever got there. Now that sounds smart.

It turned out to be a bad mistake. I don't know how mad the skipper was when we weren't there. And he left. I suppose he was probably some relieved. But I can tell you from looking into his cold steel blue eyes how mad he was when he saw standing on a dock waiting for him. I ended up in a marine brig. And a federal penitentiary in Tokyo. And at 19 I was back on the streets of Denver with a bad conduct discharge. And a heart full of pain and my life was over.

And I don't believe to this day that my bottom on Christmas Day of 1967 was any lower than the bottom at that time. It's just that I'm tough. And I'm resilient and I'm balanced. I think the greatest pain that I caused the people who loved me the most was that I kept getting up. I'd stumble and they'd help me up and I'm a quick study. Up until I met you I was a sprinter in the game of life. Not a long distance rudder.

And sprinters are terrific off the line and I was. This need to be accepted again. And to have some hope for me means that I'm a quick study. I learned very quickly from you what you expect of me. And I do it well. For a while. And I went back and forth between trying to be super straight and super freak for a number of years. My dad got me a job of Mountain Bell. Three months later I drank my way out of it. Back that's very simple.

I've been shorting this whole talk up by telling you that I drank my way out of everything worthwhile in my life before I ever finished with any of it. Jobs and marriages and schools. I just never finished anything. I'm not a lead on you. And I didn't know what was wrong with me. I'm also one of the people. I used a lot of drugs. I am not however a drug addict. I'm an alcoholic. We just happen to use an awful lot of amphetamines in LSD.

Taking drugs doesn't make you a drug addict anymore and drinking alcohol makes you an alcoholic. It's always had a choice with that stuff. But I use it. We don't even talk anymore about that. I use it. Which expedited my weight loss program. The oldest boy was two and a half years of age. His little brother was a year old. And their mother in a family ship. And I became a single parent and homeless long before it was even fashionable.

And I raised those kids in the midst of active alcoholism. Trying from time to time to be super straight and finally giving up. And I became one of the freaks that came out of Berkeley in the 60s. Throwing LSD around screaming out where there's dope there's hope. Burned down city hall. And we tried. One of my parole officers suggested that I have an awful lot of cleaning up to do over that. I mean people like me. Christmas week of 1967 was a bitch.

I was at 133 pounds at this time. I was on federal parole for a little mistake I made in 1966. I want to tell you about this week. Because this was the week that I entered into the surrender process. For me surrender was a process. A series of events. I tend to experience life in segments. And it isn't. It's a flowing thing. Made up of a number of them. The surrender process for me was very simple. It was recognizing the lives of my life for what they were.

Lies. There weren't very many of them left. We were on ADC and welfare. One of my lives was no matter what else. The boys and I are still together and intact. And we have a warm, clean place to live in. And we have clothes and we're well fed. And so I looked around the house that week I could see the lie. We lived beneath an old lady that raised cats. There weren't cats everywhere. And as I looked around my house that week I was able to see that her place was cleaner than mine was.

And the food we got was when the check got there. And I couldn't get out of bed in the morning till this kid came by and gave me enough amphetamines to get me up so I could steal something. And we could get some clothes and I could function. I was not a good father. I come from a functional family. I know that's worthy of an apology these days. But I do. My people are still married to each other. In their early 80s, still talk to each other.

I just came from their house on the way to the airport to come out here because that's part of my new. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. I was writing music for Stan Kenton when he was 19 years old. A foremost synthesizer musician in the United States. When they have engineering shows they bring him in. My sister just retired from IBM as one of their top executives. She made wonderful money and great babies.

Some of her babies began to produce babies but had a hard time producing husbands. It's my family's attitude. That's all right. We raised babies. So we are raising a lot of little babies. And then it was done. See, we didn't have problems in my home. You can't be in a human condition and not have some problems. But my family always faced them and worked them out and dealt with. Except for me. I'm the only alcoholic in my family.

We've looked. I love him. We thought he was one for a long time. He drank kind of like I did. A lot and all the time. About 20 years ago, Walter's doctor said, Walter, if you don't stop drinking, you're going to die. So he quit. No stamina. Walter's a nice guy but you just didn't have what it takes. I can't lay my alcoholism off on anything except the fact that I drank alcohol. And I have a disease. On the 24th of December as I looked around my house, it didn't look like Christmas.

And I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. I come from a family where Christmas looks like Christmas. Our welfare check hadn't got there. We had no money. So we didn't have a tree. We didn't have any presents. And down on the public merchandise mark on East Colfax, and I still had just enough glib tongue that I was able to, this nice man, gave me a pair of cowboy boots and little shirts, so each of my boys would have one present on credit.

And I must tell you, I fully intended to pay for those as soon as the welfare check out there. And we found a dollar in the snow. And found out that they'll sell you the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar on Christmas Eve, and we bought the big one. The ceiling was about seven feet tall. The tree was about nine feet tall. And I didn't have the strength to cut it, so it tilted over. And it was dressed with what people like me dressed their trees with.

You cut out some cardboard stars, crinkled up a little bit of aluminum foil, and if you cut the bottom off of a milk carton and hang it looks like a bell. And this pitiful, too little presence underneath it. And then my little boys did something. They took some blue paper towel. Like the wash your car windshields with, and they wrapped up everything that would fit. I put it under the tree for me. I began to die. I began to recognize that this is wrong.

Christmas day we got down to my folks' place, so the kids could spend a little time with Grandma and Grandpa. And my dad met us at the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry. But your mother said I can't let you in here anymore. She can't stand watching you die. And I saw clearly, for the first time in my life, what I've been doing to my people. The lie was, leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And that day it was a lie and I knew it was a lie.

And then dad destroyed my last lie. He snuck us in. We got a big old house in East Denver. He snuck us in. And I had been saying nobody loves us. Nobody cares. And he did. And I couldn't duck it anymore. I was out of lies. Not a clue as to what was wrong with me. I just knew I'm useless. I knew what I've been doing to everybody on the planet. And there's some self-pity when I got home. But I walked past the self-pity and to the truth.

And the honest truth that day was, I'm useless. Everybody will be better off if I weren't here. The kids can go to the folks or foster home even to be better when I'm given. Everybody will be better off. And at that point, surrender isn't imperative. There's no choices left. Now I didn't know how to surrender to anything because at this point in my life I didn't believe in anything. So I just quit. I took a two-month supply of the garbage I was

using at that time and shot it up my arm, drank everything in the house and laid down and died.

And I believe I died. I've never been the same. I didn't feel good when I woke up the next morning. The police were at the door, so I know I'm dead. Without knowing it had happened, I had entered into something I understand today, a beautiful state. I was now in a body that wouldn't die, carrying around a mind that wouldn't work. A complete failure at living, and now a complete failure at dying. I had finally become willing to go anywhere anyone said.

And do anything anyone said if it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. That's all I brought to alcohol, it's enormous. I wasn't looking for you, by the way. I believe in trolling for the drunks. It distresses me every time I hear they know where we are. If they want what we have, they can come and get it. I didn't know what you had, I didn't know I needed you. It took an act of God for me to get to you, by the way. And I think it occurred simply because I'd surrendered.

The police had nine charges. I'd gotten careless. One of them called for three years to life in the penitentiary. The Denver District Attorney promised me he'd bring the rest of them one at a time, but I was through when I didn't care. And I still owe the federal government four years. For a parole violation, it seems it's a parole violation when you're arrested by the state for a felony. But I didn't care. In five months laying in the Denver County Jail, healing up a little bit, went to trial, and they offered me a deal.

They said, we don't want the expense of a trial. We've already talked to the federal people. They've agreed that if you'll plead guilty to a little reduced charge we've got here, we'll give you a one and a half to three-year sentence, suspend it, give you back to the federal people, and they'll take you to Fort Worth, Texas, to that lovely hospital down there, and fix what's wrong with you. I'm not an idiot, I'm a drunk.

Hospitals better penitentiary. Two of me made a decision that day. There's always at least two of me at work out there. At least. I work with a schizophrenic kid and he hasn't had a chance in day one. I know who we are. If you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'll be on the street in six months. I knew it. 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 would give me all of the symptoms I'd have to show them in order to convince them I was getting better, and that's been my best game since I was a baby.

But I was also willing to go anywhere. No hope. I've got to find something, and so I took their deal and they kept their bargain. They reduced my age to 17, by the way. I don't know what I'm going to do when it's time for Social Security. So I could qualify for this charge, give me one and a half to three, suspended it, turned me over to the federal people who'd already agreed to take me, and five days later I was in the Colorado State penitentiary saying, hold it.

I didn't sign up for this deal here. I was supposed to be over there, and I believe it was because God loves me and I had surrendered. I was brought to you and didn't know I needed you. I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type II. Another government man said I was a psychopath. One doctor thought I was manic-depressing. You played that too, did you? Oh yeah. You want to keep the crowd back so you can figure out who's home here today?

You have no mood swing or two. That's all manic-depressing is. I don't feel good. I'm the life of the party. Keep them off balance. That's the way you get through life. In my third week there, I can still hear it. The guard downstairs said you people will come down and you will listen. I didn't have a hell of a lot to do that day, so. I came down and began to participate in the first miracle of my life. I listened. That's a miraculous thing for alcoholics.

I listened. They had three guys there with numbers on their chest from alcoholics and all of us. The first fellow got up and he said my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic. That means that I'm powerless over alcohol, drugs and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life. My life has become unmanageable. 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.

I heard him. One of those three said you're very best thinking got you the penitentiary. You're not doing so good are you? Well there I was. What am I going to do? Are you? And then they gave us the message of alcoholics anonymous and this is it, Albert. If you're an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink alcohol again, ever. You don't ever have to feel like you've been feeling ever again in your life. We do not promise you a pain-free life.

But the pain of alcoholism would never be yours again. And they said it was such assurance that I heard them and I didn't even know that's what was wrong with me. But I heard the stuff about the pain. Then they invited us to their 12-step study school. I had no idea what that was. What it meant was that we had to give up our yard privileges in our movies every Saturday and every Sunday for the next five weekends and go to school.

My friend Jim and I talked it over and decided we'd go. For the wrong reasons, if you're kind of new here and you weren't about doing this thing right, let me assure you you can't. I wasn't afraid of that penitentiary. It's just another community. You learn the rules, you live, you don't, you die. It's not anywhere else. What had me frightened is that I knew that sometime in the next year and a half to five years they're going to put me back on the streets of Denver and I don't have the slightest idea how to live out there.

And I can't possibly live the way I've been living ever again. I don't have any clues. So we went. And I encountered sponsorship. These guys had obviously been to the main sponsor school. Here are all things in New Jersey. It's about our spring. Convicts in their natural habitat are a little intimidating. Smiling convicts are frightening. We walked into that school and these three guys were standing there smiling at us.

And one of them said, now for the next five weeks, you guys have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. We weren't allowed to speak anything in our first five weeks today in the meetings. The meetings had only one purpose. To hand carry us through the book called Alcoholics Anonymous using their experience in that book so that we could participate in the recovery process. Now new people have to talk a lot.

We all work in the district room and we babble to each other. And our sponsors would talk with us outside of that formal meeting. So I was carried, thank God, immediately into the recovery process as outlined in the book of Alcoholics Anonymous. The first thing they did was tell me precisely what's wrong with me. They told me in terms that I could understand why I went to the penitentiary when I was 19 years old. It's because I have an allergy.

If I had an allergy to tomatoes and I ate tomatoes, I'd break out with an itch. My allergy is alcohol. If I put alcohol in my body, the symptom is I'd break out with an itch. For other drink alcohol. I don't have any choice in the matter. None. Once I've taken a drink, I love working with new people because they teach me effective prayer. You see, when you come to me, you put your life in my hands and I'm fully aware of that and I do not take that lightly.

I'm also aware, I don't know, what the hell to say to you. So I do what I was taught to do. I get the big book out and we start to read it and see if you want to look at one of these kinds. Because alcoholics are prescribed very clearly in that book. And by the way, I'm going to bust another bubble. We all think we're so smart and slick. Everything we know about alcoholism of any value came to us from non-alcoholics.

Dr. Silkworth, some other... Everything that we know about progressing on a spiritual path came to us from non-alcoholics. The one thing you and I have that they don't have. They know all there is to know about us and things that we don't even want, though. But we don't believe that. And that's the thing that you and I have here in Alcoholics Anonymous. We can sit down across from each other and present that information in such a way.

And they did that for me that I came to believe that they knew what was going on in here. See, I was alone. I was the only one on the planet that thought like I did. I was the only one on the planet that laughed at funerals and cried at hockey games. I personally was responsible for World War II. I don't know how, but I was. Huh? They told me about my disease. I took a drink in Long Beach, California one day. I was 19 years old.

And 23 days later, I was in Persian school in Los Angeles. On the 22nd day, I was motoring drinks and quarters and could not go back to that ship. Period. No way. I couldn't even think of going back to that ship. On day 23, the madness wasn't there anymore. And I turned myself in and went back to face the consequences, like any rational human being. And there I was. Dr. Silkwood describes men he'd been working with, who had been working for months on a business deal that would be subtle favorably to them.

And they took a drink a day or two before and they missed their appointment. And I began to find me in the shared experience of alcoholics. And then my sponsors would share their experience with that. And I got comfortable in that life. Now I know what's wrong with me. And then they hit me with it as sponsors tend to do this. And now that's really important information. If I won't stay sober without going there, but that won't keep you sober.

That's academic. If you never take another drink of alcohol, you'll never have that happen again. So what's really wrong with me then? I've got a lifetime of experience of having that happen. Well, it's because there's a piece missing up here in my head. My neighbor has it. One of the things that will happen now, I've been living in the same house for so long I've lived an entire dog from puppyhood to the end. Fourteen years, fifteen, married to the same woman.

I didn't even do that much time. But there's a thing that happens there if you live in the same place long enough, pretty soon you have to start talking with your neighbors or they'll start talking about you. I'm still a very private person. I'm a private person, a wonderful sense of humor. So I have hedges. Life has convinced me that seven foot hedges are too much in our little neighborhood. And we can cut them off so you can see our heads above them.

And I was talking with my neighbors across the fence one day, or the hedge. Lovely man. Owns a bar. Nice guy. But I was discovered something since I started hanging out with some normal people. They small talk. I don't know the slightest idea how to do that. They can spend a half hour and never really even say anything. And you and I all know that life is important. It must be done in earnest. It's passionate. But I want to be a good neighbor.

I really do. So I've learned how small talk. But I'm up to almost four minutes now. I can tell you at least three kinds of grass we don't want growing in our neighborhood. My neighbor's kid growing one of them in my backyard too. He pushed me past my limit. We're going to end up, I either have to leave. We're going to end up talking about the only thing I know anything about. That's alcoholism. Alcoholics anonymous and God.

And he pushed me one day. So I had to start sharing with him. Now I don't share with my neighbor anywhere near the depth I'll share with you. It would really make him nervous to know who lives next door. But I shared enough and I know from how we looked at if my turn and then it's his turn. And he was interested because he shared with me a common experience that he and I have in both head. He told me about a night that he drank too much whiskey.

And he got drunk. And he fell down and he threw up. And he made a fool himself. And he hasn't done that since. Bizarre? I did the same thing. I drank too much, fell down, threw up, made a fool myself, got up. I drank too much, fell down, threw up. But he taught me early in sobriety why that happens. He can remember how badly he felt about what he had done. And it attaches to this thing in his mind that says then don't do that again.

I can remember vividly. Many, many times. Feeling bad about what I had done. But it doesn't attach to me. Oh, one night it was bad, chilly. That's where we threw up. Bonded bourbon. So I didn't drink that stuff again. I am convinced in my heart that I cannot learn enough information in my head about alcoholism, about alcoholics, anonymous, about the spiritual life or anything else to keep me sober. There have been and will be days in my life when I will reach for some reason.

There will be a blank spot. Everything I know won't show up. Or if it doesn't be warped when it does. And I had an experience in my sixth year sobriety that drove that home to me. God in his mercy keeps my life full circle. I don't have any loose hands. It's wonderful. If they're loose hands I know they're about to be tied up. And in my sixth year sobriety I was now working behind the walls of the penitentiary. Getting a chance to give it back where I got it.

Helping the guys get jobs and transportation, the ones we're getting ready to get out. They were the ones I worked with. And that meant, you know, they put prisons at least 100 miles away from anything. So once a week I had to drive over to Denver. My home group met on Monday night and I had a business to do. And on one of these meetings at the old Leo's restaurant in Denver, one of the fellows had discovered a new liqueur.

It was green and it came in a tall, skinny glass. There wasn't enough in it to do anybody any good, but they were passing it around so everyone could taste it. And everything I knew showed up. I felt no stress, no anxiety at all. I knew I was not going to drink that. I knew why. I mean it was all there. As it came by my nose I thought, I'll snip it, see what it smells like. And while it was there 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.

With everything going. When my hand is here it does that. And then I got out of my body quick and watched God move that thing on so I didn't drink it. I haven't sniffed anything green since either. It's green and doesn't belong near my mouth. It's that serious to me. I must have and they help me understand. I must have a power greater than myself to take care of me during most times. But I didn't believe in anything.

I came to believe in the power of God before I came to believe in God. And I find it interesting that the big book doesn't require us to believe in God. But it says it is essential to believe in the power of God. And I came to believe that by watching three men walk around. If you're new here, despite your doubt and cynicism, look around in this room. With the meetings I go to, I look at their eyes. I love the front row.

That's where I sit. The officer said, we will always sit in the front. I want you to see their eyes. I'm not just hearing their words. Bruce was a killer. He had killed some people one morning when he was 17 years old in a mad alcoholic rage. Roy Nichols was a stick up man. Another angry man. Phil Gateris threw people out of third storey windows when he was drunk, terribly violent human being. But the men telling me these stories could not do what they said they had done.

They were different human beings. And I didn't come here to stop drinking because I didn't know I needed to do that. I came here to be changed. And these three men had been changed. And I'm a bit of a skeptic to this day. I watched them as well as listening. I wanted to see how they walked. And they were different. Bruce had a couple of things I really wanted. First of all, he got in and out of his cell whatever he wanted to.

And the way I knew that is when I was locked up for the night and couldn't get out. He'd come by and visit with me. And I wondered what he had. And on one of those visits he said to me, Don, do you know that it's possible for me to think one thought at a time? And he had me forever. What do I have to do for that one? See, I'd become everybody I'd ever met. And they were all talking at once. One thought at a time. That's a piece of mind.

I've been changed. And when it didn't come, it scared me. It was a terrible experience that day. I expected this great boom. And my uniform would turn white, I guess. The doors spring open and they'd say, Okay, you can go home now. We don't need you anymore. Something goofy like that. Absolutely nothing happened. And I don't know an alcoholic alive that can stand. Nothing happening. And I did what I had begun to learn.

I went and bitched at my sponsor about that. I gave him the alcoholic war cry. Where's mine? You want to synthesize self-centeredness? That's all it is. Where's mine? He said, You dummy. You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flashlight to enter. It killed you all your life. And we talked about it because I've had some duties. Southern comfort on a roof in Phoenix, Arizona in September will give you flashlight. Along the way, I've had the privilege of participating in an Easter ceremony with the Peyote Indians in Nevada.

And I had a real vision. A real one. I saw a great bird flying high with no head. And I understood clearly that was me and my life. Flying high going nowhere. That kept me silver four months. If you're new here and you're contemplating visions, I've got to tell you the truth. They work. They're good for four months to survive. I'm in for the game. I don't have any choice. We discussed those. Then he put me through an exercise that I loved today.

I hated him that day. We examined my concepts of God. And they were garbage. The whole thing boiled now. Even Jesus loves me. Was getting in the way of me having a meaningful spiritual. And I remember screaming at him that day. You're asking me to turn my woman life over the care of nothing. And he said, why not? Nothing can run a better than you than doing it. Then he took some time and shared with me how to come for him.

He said, God knows none. You probably can't stand one more big shock anyway. I began to talk about this gentle loving God that he had found. And then he went for this. I asked him, how do I make it real? Who would reveal himself to you as you reveal yourself to you? What often did my inventory into ours later when I finished it? I brought him back to the fifth step and he looked at it and he said, as garbage you wrote that to impress me.

Well, I'd worked for two hard hours on that thing. I'd written down somebody bizarre stuff. So I found me a guy who would listen. One of these things I'd done and he'd say, well, that wasn't that bad. And I'd tell him to know and he'd say, well, that bad. And I began to have a series of spiritual awakenings. That spiritual awakening is simple, Robert. Anytime any alcoholic, anywhere understands any part of the truth.

I woke up and once again picked someone who would tell me what I wanted to hear, so I didn't have to do anything to change that. And if I didn't stop that, I was going to die a very ugly death. And I knew it. And I'm not afraid of death. I haven't been afraid of death for a long time. There's a lot of ways of dying I'm not interested in. But death itself is no big deal. But to die an ugly death means that for some period of time just before that, I'm going to have to live a very ugly life.

And that thought terrifies me. So I'm on the back to him. He and I made a discovery that day. I believe that truth without love is cruelty. And confrontation without some kind of real answer is brutality. So I won't participate in that. But he loved me and he had a real answer so he didn't pussy flip. We began to dig. And he found I had one final reservation. I really believed at that time, if I surrounded entirely to this God, that he would put me on the corner of Colfax and Broadway, handing out watchtower magazines and asking strangers, have you been saved, brother?

And I just couldn't see me doing that. And my sponsor said, well, let's talk about that. Which means, by the way, if you're new, why don't you be quiet for a few minutes? He said, Don, do you suppose that the fellow that's handing out watchtower is down there today? He had breakfast where he wanted to. And I said, probably. He said, well, you didn't. Do you suppose that that guy that's making a fool of himself asking strangers that they've been saved is wearing clothes that he picked out to do any.

And I said, probably. He said, you're not. Do you suppose when he's all through that he gets to go home? Well, I didn't. We're promised a new mind here. It's a promise. And he carried me to that new mind. And it's very simply this. Anything at all that God may have in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will ever have in mind. And I have been living that way for 24 years now. It's been perfectly, but that is how I live.

And it's been marvelous. And it's been painful. And it's been exciting. Though it has not been. When I ran my own life, the very best I could do was get me into an eight by ten toilet making deals with cockroaches. Oh, yeah. I made a deal with it. If you stay on that end of the cell, I'll stay on this end. My children got to live in foster homes. They were bad foster homes. And my people had to be put in a position where on Christmas day they had

to say to me, you and your kids can't come here. That's the best I can do.

Since I have given up, I have literally been all over the world for what that means. In 1988, you all sent me to the Soviet Union to talk about Alcoholics Anonymous with the Russians. I've gotten to go to Guatemala and Puerto Rico. Last weekend, I was in Calgary, Alberta. Tonight, I'm in where? Hagerstown. I can find my way home. And I have in my pocket a key. It lets me in and out. And when I get home, they're glad I'm home.

I must tell you all something, though, about sacrifice. My family is as long as it makes us sacrifice. While I was on your board of trustees, I was going almost every weekend for only five years. And people that used to say to me, oh, what a wonderful sacrifice you're making for us. No, I love this. You give me attention and applause and you let me talk to you and do all the things that feed me. You put me in motel rooms. I can't afford.

My life means something because of you. My life doesn't need you. She makes us sacrifice. She and my children. They stay home while I go. And it's important you know that. We tend to get caught up in this deal and forget. My sponsor told me one time, we'd have practiced the principles in all of our affairs, and that means you have to do that at home, too. And to do that, you have to be there once in a while. Anyway, I got earnest about this deal and went to my big book through my school and the big book to reveal myself to me so God could reveal himself to me.

And I made some interesting discoveries on the second one by reading the directions. I thought that the inventory process saw I could find out who I was. And it's very clearly in there. It's to help me find out who I'm not. One of the promises at the beginning of the fourth step is the reason I was able to face the things I had done to my children. Couldn't have faced some of that. It says it's an effort to face and be rid of the things myself that have been blocking me. Face and be rid of.

I can get rid of the stuff I've been doing over and over and over again that have been driving me crazy. In 1966, federal narcotics agents broke down my house and in that raid almost shot my son. My four-year-old let out a shriek and the cops swung around almost shot him. I found out who he was and where he lived. I had some wonderful schemes. But thank God I didn't get to. When I got after you and you said to well what we're going to do with that is put that on paper.

I put down him, I was mad at him and I put down 22 reasons I was mad at him. That's all I had to do. It's funny to me today, 220. It's only one arrest. Well he had made a criminal out of me. He had violated my civil liberties, talked ugly about me in front of my people. And he had almost killed my son. And that affected everything in my life. And I tried to take the attitude you suggest I take that he like myself was perhaps spiritually sick.

Damn right, I still hated him. I could not grant him the same sympathy and pity I would grant cheerfully to a sick friend because at that time sick people didn't get any sympathy out of me. I had to have a script for everything in my life. And there's only one script for visiting with sick folks. What can I do for you? So I just kept hating him. But I went ahead and did what it said next and I forgot to think. He said I was to look for my own mistakes.

Where was I selfish, self-centered, dishonest, fearful? Where was I at fault? And as I wrote that out it became

very clear. I headed mighty men to my house with a hand engraved invitation. I'd been smuggling marijuana out of Mexico and not paying the tax on it. And I was his job, had it not been for the promise that I could be rid of the kind of thinking that allowed that to happen. I couldn't have faced the fact that I almost got my fault.

But I have to think like that anymore. Does it work? Well, there hasn't been a federal narcotics agent in my house for 25 years. I don't even invite him to dinner. The IRS showed up about three years ago. I'm on a lot of non-profit boards and the tax deal I want of wasn't right. And he came to my house and he really confused. And you taught me when I'm confused, just be confused. You know, real sanity for the alcoholic is when I say, I don't know.

And I said this off and he finally got mad. He said, oh, just find this. I'll take care of it. And he laughed and I haven't heard another word. So if you're looking for a way to deal with the IRS, just get stupid. I thought fear riding inventory in a penitentiary. And I learned about release from fear. I thought fear lived here in my building because that's where I feel it. I have a high-grade manufacturing plant up here in my head.

You wasn't that friendly yesterday. I will work that thing. We're all into law, law, law, law, law, law, law, law. Familiarly spheres. I had a lot of them in my sponsor. Civilist put some names on them. And then I discovered mercy. This whole deal is about mercy. We live in a world that is filled with people with all kinds of problems, and all of the other therapy modes that I see insist that they have to learn how to cope with them.

And here I am promised I get to be rid of them. to this day, I don't know how to cope with fear. How do you walk through your fears? I'm afraid to do that. I'm afraid to be afraid, and a lot of other things, too. Well, in my book of common experience, it says, once I've admitted them and found out that the problem is that I simply am not trusting in my own God, I'm relying on my resources for years, there's a little prayer in there.

God, remove this fear from me and direct my attention to what you would have me be. And I find that interesting, it doesn't say. And I learn some things, I'm not what I do. I'm not my car, I'm not my job, I'm not my group. I'm not the money in my pocket, I'm none of the things that I do. Everyone of those, if I can't do them, then I'm not me anymore. What I am is a child of God. God's my dad. What am I ever gonna do to top that?

Self-esteem, problem solved. I may be a stupid kid, but God's my dad. The problem was that I thought I was a human being trying to have a spiritual experience. What I have discovered here is that I am a spiritual being, having a human experience. And that makes me very human, my approach to things. It's two and a half years before I could do a sex inventory. I couldn't remember anything. When I finally got it done, it fit on a little three-by-five car.

I was a legend in my own mind, I was like, how does something about dawn? Not as a family man, and once it that way. One woman at a time is enough to do statement, not a negative statement. I'm a dedicated family man. And you taught me how to live as a spiritual being in a family because this is a family here. We have a lot of different groups, because as with any family, there's also immediate family. And from time to time, I need to get with my immediate family, but I love y'all kissing cousins and all.

And that saved the life of one of our girls, you know, our group, just knowing that. When we were all gonna go to Seattle, she was very afraid to go. She was a year sober, had come from a very bad background. She was

just frankly frightened to go. But because the rest of us were going and the family was gonna be there, she went. And my wife and I had their privilege in 1989, of going to Japan to help them celebrate their 15th anniversary of A and Japan.

And I met some of my family there. They were Japanese, but they were immediate family. Two of them came up to me in the hotel lobby in Osaka, and reminded me that we had met on a wahoo four years before that. But we got to Seattle, and this girl told me the story of her, she lost us. There were over 40,000 that was walking around the street, but she had lost the immediate family. She said she was standing on the street, petrified, terrified, unable to even move.

Well, all these are eight people around her. And she said a little Japanese couple walking down the street, walked by her and saw her badge, and it said, Denver on her, and they stopped and said, oh, do you know Dansan? The family had showed up. Our family is all over this world. I can literally, and the contrast startles me sometimes, I came from a place where even my own family would not talk to me. And today I can go literally anywhere in the world, and I know somebody personally.

And if I don't, a phone call in five minutes, and I'm home, what a wonderful thing that is. I never worry about coming here. I can't tell you all the story. I flew into Baltimore, you all sent somebody down to pick me up, and we got to the outskirts of Hagerstown. I said, do you know where we're going? Because we don't. There's conventions being held. And we all three said at the same time. Well, it won't be hard to find them.

So we pulled it across the street, and they said, yeah, they're right across the street. And if I can't find you, I worked young Chuck and I worked together this winter in a very strange environment for both of us. I'm currently helping a friend who opened a casino, so I'm working in the vault and even a little blackjack. It's really a weird environment. And it made Chuck a little crazy. He was the cook up there. And he came to me one afternoon and he said, I just don't.

And I heard myself say to Chuck, Chuck, I don't either. But I fit here. Because I fit here, I can fit in anywhere. A few minutes left, and in that few minutes, I need to share a couple of events with you because they were so meaningful. You want to remember, when I came to my evangelistic stage, which occurs around the eighth and ninth step, if I sponsor you and you don't want to save the world about then, we start over, they wouldn't let me out.

And I wanted to go make these events and they wouldn't let me. And my sponsor was to never leave the penitentiary. But he was free and I could see it. And I wanted to know how he did that. And he helped me to understand that the key to real freedom here is in willingness. Was I willing any amends I had to make as soon as the opportunity was clear. And he gave me an exercise to do. He sent me back to my cell at night and he said, now, I want you to make a list of all the people you've ever harmed.

We started with my inventory list. It's clear, and I did harm every one of those people. Then he said, just to add anybody else you can think of, because if you met him, you messed with him. I don't have to make direct amends to the whole world, but the attitude was correct. Then he said, Don, I want you to picture each one separately in your mind. And see if you can feel a willingness to look each right in the eye and say to them, I've been wrong, I've harmed you.

Would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get these books to balance. And as I went over that list that night, I began to realize that caused anyone on this planet, any harm at all, I'm willing to set the matter straight. I had the experience I waited for my whole life. I was lifted, another eight months, but I was free. A couple of weeks after that, they began letting me out of my cell, and I found out what that was about.

It's 12-step for it. They let the guys who've been through the school out the top of the guys who couldn't be trusted yet. What happens after you ask that question, made it possible for me to make the really tough amends, and once to my folks, my mom? How do you make amends to the mother you've put in a position to say on Christmas Day, you and your kids can't come to my house? I'm sorry mom won't get it. But what you do have to ask the questions you shut up, I'm listening while I tell you what you have to do.

That's easy. God has made me a listener. And months after I got out, she loved me to come by. Very, very lucky. And I found a way to ask the question. I'm also told as I make these amends and to be very kind to the people. Hard on me and kind to them. And I found a way to ask the question when I shut up and listen. And she said, honey, all I've ever wondered for you was that you'd be happy. So for the last 22 years, I've been going by my mother's house on a regular basis.

Happy. It worked. The key is regular. When I'm sick, I'm undependable and unreliable. If I'm going to demonstrate that this thing works, I found something out about spiritual people. They tell you what they're going to do, and then they do that. I tell you what they're going to be, and where they're going to be, and if you go there, they'll be there on time. Amazing. And because of that growing development, she said it was six years before she believed I was going to mount to anything.

But I wasn't going to prove anything. Because of that development, I had been privileged to participate in an event that gave me a personal experience of anonymity and has become a healing tool for hundreds of people. And I couldn't have figured it out if I had tried it. I have been able to see God take the very worst thing I think I ever did, and turn it into a tool of healing for others. All the stuff I did, the worst thing of all, was one time in desperation.

I stole my mother's \$2 bill collection because I needed the money, and I was too tired to go steal anywhere else, and bought booze with it. And after I got out in and after a while, I was able to tell her about it. But if you remember back in the early 70s, they were out of circulation for a while. So I was never able to replace them. And because my life is none of my business, and I just go work God sends me, and He talks to me through you, about six years ago, I ended up over here in West Virginia in an area assembly.

I was trusty at large, and they didn't trust themselves, so I came down to an election assembly for them. And they took us up to Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, and he's on the \$2 bill. And they are back in circulation, they had boxes of them. And I'm cursed with a clearer memory. I bought 16 of them, because that's what I'd stolen, and took them home. And that night, of course, I was touched, and I loved to have a crowd cry a little bit.

And so I told the story, and balled a little, and we all had a good cry on her. And I took them home and gave them to mom, and she pretended it didn't matter, and I could see it really did. Two weeks later, I got an envelope from West Virginia with no return address on it, with some \$2 bills on it. I knew about anonymity. Up through me, helped someone else get free, who had not been able to get free. Through me, they could.

And since that time, it's been an amazing phenomena. Wherever I go, \$2 bill will show up. Yeah, last week, an envelope came from Calgary with a Canadian \$2 bill in it. I was in Texas, and this big biker in his leathers was standing there crying like a baby. With one in his hand, he's watching and he did the same thing. The kid told me one time he'd been trying to get free for years. The sponsor said, go give that to him.

But let me tell you what she's doing with him. She has two collections, the one I replaced, and then this growing envelope. She thinks we're really weird, but. My sister tells me that one real people come over to her house, takes this big envelope of \$2 bills out, and uses that in an effort to explain to them what alcohol it's anonymous. She tells people that each of these represents someone getting well from a very serious disease and getting healed, says, in my son's part of it.

You gave her a great gift one time. While I was on your board, I was going every weekend, practically, and her mother died, my grandmother. I was on Wednesday or Thursday, and, of course, I went over, and I said, I'll just cancel this weekend, Mom. She said, honey, the funeral's on Monday. I said, I know, but I'll cancel the weekend. She said, well, you'll be back Monday, and I said, yeah, but let me cancel it. She says, no, no.

You have an obligation to the living. I'm going to take care of that. I'll be all right. You gave her that. I did grave damage to my two little boys. They were on the road with me because I was restless, irritable, and discontent. They thought living in hell's angel's hideouts and crash pads was a normal oil light. What an I made piece. We've talked about all this because I believe what you taught me as long as we're talking to each other will come be old.

But my older boy, Cherry, and I, never made peace. We chapped. But every time I thought of me, there was pain in my heart, and I could see there was pain in his heart, and his brother would tell me about that pain. Something was desperately wrong. He was so mad at me. I stay involved in the recovery process to grow spiritually by working with others a lot. But every now and then, I put myself in someone else's hands, and I trust and let them just carry me through it.

It's only a two or three day process. It's no big deal. Because I believe this. I truly believe this. God talks to me directly, either through your mouths or in the quiet of my inner garden. Now, I don't get ideas like late everybody to Jerusalem and all that, but God never yells at me. Never. And my mind must be very still, or I won't hear you or him. I have to have a clear mind. So I try to keep it clear, that's all.

In November of 1988, I was 22 years sober, and I just cleaned house, and I was able to be still in my basement again and go into that quiet place, which by the way, one of these days, I'm not coming back from it. I can hardly think one thought at a time. Every now and then, I'm able to. And in that quiet time, I began to think of Terry. And I remember that the last time that I was arrested, so was he, and he was only eight years old.

And I went to prison, and they went to a very bad foster home. Bad things happened to my kids there. And we talked about that. But the worst thing that happened, I realized, was that at eight, my older boy had to grow up and become a man very quickly in order to protect his six and a half year old brother. And I had never thought, thanked him for that. And I believe there's only one time. That's right now, and there's only one place, and that's right here.

So we're in that here and now. I've got to hold of him immediately. I didn't want to die before I thanked him. And I said, Terry, I know that we've talked about this a lot. But I want you to know that what you did that time was a very brave thing. And I want to thank you for taking care of your little brother when I couldn't. And I heard his voice change on this spot. Now, I get Denver Bronco tickets. I don't know what they do, so I don't go home.

And they tell me they don't know what they do either. So I don't know. But the kids like it. Two weeks before our little talk, I'd given Terry some Bronco tickets, and he came by and got him and went to the game. Two weeks after our visit, I called him and said, I've got some Giants tickets. Would you like to go? And he said, Dad, are you going to go with us? About six weeks later, he called. And you parents in the audience know what I'm talking about.

When your kids call, you just visit and listen until they tell you what they call them or something. And we visited, and I waited, and we visited, and I waited. And we visited. In about 10 minutes, I realized my son and I have been visiting for about 10 minutes. And that's why he called. The most important event of all took place a year and six weeks ago. When Terry first got married, he planned it on a weekend when he knew I'd be gone.

He got remarried a year and six weeks ago, and he had me do the ceremony. That's just part of it. The most important thing of all was that a couple weeks later, he and his new bride were going to Indianapolis to visit with her folks. And Terry called me. He said, Dad, we're leaving tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. We're going to take I-70 through Kansas City all the way into Indianapolis. We're going to stay X number of days, and assess in such a time we're leaving Indianapolis, and we're going to take I-70 and come back home.

I should be in by 10 o'clock. I can pay him a heart anymore, and he's part of the family again. What families do is tell each other about the journeys they're taking, and keep each other posted. That's what we do here. I may know of a detour around Colby, Kansas, somewhere that I can tip him off about. I've got that over that road, and I do. I run away back. He can tell me what he found out there. So the one I take the same journey.

He didn't want me to worry about him. He loves me. I don't want you to worry about me. I love you, and you love me. I don't want you worried. So I told you tonight about my journey. And I'm on the same journey today that I was on the day I walked into Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm trying to find out how to be more effective. I can't get any closer to God than I am at this moment, because where I am God is. But I want to know it better.

And I want to know you better. You're my family. Let me give you my little gift, and it will all go dance. And this came to me out of one of those meditations for tonight. I try so hard to find a way to tell you how I see you. And this came to me. I had become everybody I ever met, or read about, or seen in a movie, and they were all talking. I was afraid I was going to have to spend the rest of my life finding out who I was.

And you told me, we don't worry about that. We'll help you find out who you're not. We'll get rid of that. And whoever you are is just going to show up. It's like what happened when the fellow saw Michelangelo's statue of David for the first time, and he went to Michelangelo. And he said, how in the world did you do that? Michelangelo said, well, I just took this block of stone. And I chipped away everything that didn't look like David.

And that's what I got. And that's how I see us. God is the sculptor. And our little meetings and all these funny little things we do together, that's the chisel. May I'm a very willing block of stone. And one day at a time, we're simply chipping away everything that doesn't look like not. And so far, this is what we've got. I've been thinking about thank you. And that's all the 12 step is. For me to thank the thank you to God is beyond me.

The whole concept to God is beyond me. And his mercy, he gave me you so I can say thank you to him through you. That's what our 12 step work is about. I'm left with two deep awarenesses from that experience, by the way. The depth of my alcoholic self-centeredness is clear to me. It took 22 years of doing this rigorously day after day and an act of God for me to even thank to say thank you to my God. I'm also fully aware that one day sooner would have been one day too soon for Terry.

It's in God's time. He left us with a little salutation that I think is appropriate today. It's an old Arabic salutation. And that's what it says. I salute you. And I thank you for your lives.