

DON P ARCHIVE

Pacific AA Group

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Transcript

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Yes, our main speaker tonight is Don P. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic and I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in Good Standing Tonight. My home group is a Denver Thursday night group. We meet in Denver, Colorado every Thursday night at 8 o'clock. If you ever get there, please come visit with us. It's a very basic little AA group. I'm also very active in a Big Book workshop that meets on Tuesday. Tuesday morning at 6 o'clock in the morning, we don't have much dead weight in that group. But the joy of my life are the people who come by my house on a regular basis. And we sit down, read a big book, and share ourselves with each other. And I get to watch people who are stark raving mad, get stark raving sober, and change their lives. And that's the joy of my life. My kids love having you.

They're out by their dad. They're real dad. My stepdaughter's real dad is a Denver vice detective. And I got sober in my third penitentiary. So there are some contrast between us. And my kids have learned over the years that the folks that come sit on our couch are the very folks that their dads looking for. And they love you. I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you for allowing me to be here. But I particularly want to thank you for being here. I have been walking hand in hand with the spirit of God for 25 years now. And that means every day of my life since then, the extra ordinary has occurred. And if I don't get to tell somebody about that regularly, I'll probably get me in an ugly again. I know I feel good. One of the stories I'd like to share with you has to do with this young lady right down here.

I was in Kanab, Utah a few years ago, just giving one of these little pitches. And down front at one of the tables, there was one of the bikers from the Salt Lake City Fifth Chapter group in his leathers. And there was a young man across the table from very young. Couldn't have been 17 or 18. And the biker was signing to the other young man. And I was touched. After the talk, I went down and visited with him. They didn't know each other. The young deaf fella was three days sober, had come to that meeting knowing full well he wouldn't hear anything. But he knew the sobriety was here. And so he came.

The biker said he hadn't signed for 20 years. But somehow he picked up on that. And it all came back to it. So I would like to acknowledge her. She's really carrying the message. I drank alcoholically from my first drink. And I didn't know I was alcoholic when you found me. I've never had any control of the amount of alcohol I drank. I still think that's a silly idea. What do you want to do there? Alcohol changed me.

See, I believe this whole deal is about change. I went to alcohol desperately needing a change. I was stupid and I was short and I was ugly and weird. I'm still weird. But now I'm pretty. We got a guy from our Air Force base to buy us a bottle of bonded bourbon. And went out east to Denver to drink it. Because that's what you did where I grew up. Around 15 or 16 that ride a passage was get a bottle of whiskey from an airman and go get drunk because they said that was fun. And I was into fun. I didn't have much but I was ready.

And that night I had what is described in the big book is something very nearly a spiritual experience. Ideas and conceptions who once ruled the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side in a whole new set of ideas. And that's what happened to me that night. A few drinks of bonded bourbon and the normal things happened. I

got taller and smarter and all that stuff. What I truly remember about that night is for the first time in my entire life I had some plans. Up until that night I was a reactor to life. It happened and I bounced off of it.

And I had to learn by then that whoever I was was whoever you said I was. I avoided crowds because I get really confused when you tell me one thing and you tell me another. But that night I was me. It was alright for me to be me and alright for you to be you. And I had some plans. It was a kid in my class that hadn't been treating me well at all. And I was going to meet him back at the drive interwipping. And I could have done it.

And there was a little girl in my class that hadn't been treating me at all. And we were going to have a visit. And I really believe I could have visited with her that night. I didn't know at the end but it's in my nature that if one works you take ten. And by the time I go back to the drive in of course what these people saw instead of what I had in mind was my partner scaring me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway.

I have just described my drinking to you. But I have a keen alcoholic mind and I quickly determined what caused that kind of embarrassing situation. It was bond of bourbon. To this day I don't recall ever drinking bond of bourbon again. I think if it's the only thing I had I would have. But I quickly learned what wouldn't make me do that quite so soon. When I began to read the book Alcoholics Anonymous I found me in there. I drank for the effect produced by alcohol. If we were going to fight what you do when you're 16 on East cool facts and Denver. I drank vodka.

Because of the vodka I get me. If we were going to go to a party and there was a chance there would be some girls there. I drank dark McCarty room. Because that turns me into a lover. Oh yeah. I get sensitive and warm and smooth and drunk. Early on I ran into that terrible thing that happens to alcoholics and there would be times I couldn't feel anything. But I could drink Coors beer and listen to Jim Reeves singing four walls. And I could just cry like a baby. It was wonderful.

And I was my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old because of alcohol. Not because I'm a big time gangster. I'm not. I'm a drunk. And when I drink alcohol I get lost and I can't find my way home. And when you're in the Navy that's a felony. I missed a ship movement by 23 days one time. And I was baffled by that for years. Baffled is my favorite word. That's where you've just done everything you thought you heard them say you're supposed to do so it'll work. And it didn't work.

And I was baffled because I loved the Navy and I loved everything about it. But I just couldn't get back to that ship on time. I took a drink in Long Beach, California and 22 days later I was in Persian Square. mooching drinks. And couldn't even consider going back to that ship. On day 23 my madness was over for whatever the reason and I turned myself in went back like a regular person and faced the consequences. And I didn't know until you told me specifically that that was alcoholism.

I love Alcoholics Anonymous so much because I didn't come looking for you. You found me. And then when you found me you told me precisely what was wrong with me. And precisely what I couldn't couldn't do about that. We ritualized things these days to my chagrin. There's some. We tend to ritualize the promises. Well the promises are all through the book Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm here to talk to Joe tonight. Have you met Joe? God, fresh and new. I love it. I said it. So I don't want to embarrass you yet.

But I look for Joe. He sat there and he'd be going like that with low feet. And he's sucking on a sucker. Four days sober. I love it. I'm glad you're here. Take good care of you. But I didn't come to you. You came to me. By the grace of God. Christmas night of 1967. As a result of finally running out of lies. I took a two month supply of speed and shouted up my arm and drank everything in the house and died because I couldn't stand being me one more second.

Just couldn't. I was living in a hovel with my two little boys. There's only one or two people left on the planet that had talked to me. And I ran out of lies. And that was the process of surrender for me. Not the truth. The truth didn't get me here. Running out of lies did. I only had a few left. I would have told you at that time that everything was okay and my family was intact so we were okay. And I was a good father. The truth was the boys and I lived together in the same house. My family was not intact. I weighed 133 pounds. I was on federal parole for a mistake I made in 1966.

And we were on ADC because I couldn't work. And we lived beneath an old lady who raised cats and her place was cleaner than mine. I come from a functional home. If there's anybody I need to apologize for that floor, I will. But my parents are still alive. They still live in the same house. They still talk to each other. They still even like each other. They draw all these years. In my home we had problems, but my family always faced up to their problems. They're what nothing they do about me.

My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado and probably the foremost synthesizer musician in the United States. He was writing music for Stan Kenton when he was 19. My sister retired from IBM a while back, one of their top executives. She made great babies and great money. Her babies make great babies. They have been unable to find decent husbands to go with them. But my family, the attitude is when one of those comes along, isn't that nice? Another little prince baby. Let's raise it. And that's where I come from.

And I know I broke those people's hearts time and time again. I think the greatest harm I did to my family was that I kept getting up. They'd get new hope and then I dashed those hopes again. Then I'd get up. Because I'm a spreader in the game of life. After I've been knocked to my knees, I get up and I'm really good off the line. I find out what you want me to be and I beat it. And I find out what you want me to do when I do that. And I'm really a quick study. But don't turn your head. I get distracted real easy.

All I did that week was surrender. I realized we lived in a hovel. My family wasn't right. We didn't have a Christmas tree. None of the things that make life okay were happening in my house. I will be forever grateful for the thing that killed me. On Christmas day we went down to my folks house to spend the day 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 my lie had been for a long time. Just leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And that day I could see the lie. I could see what I'd done to my kids and my folks and my friends and everybody. And then dad dashed my last lie because he snuck us in anyway. He had a big house in East Denver and he snuck us in. And I had been saying nobody cares. Nobody loves us. He made a lie out of that.

And I went home and couldn't stand at anymore and killed myself. And when I woke up the next morning, I

really didn't feel good. The police were at the door. I'd set myself up to be arrested. The charges that I set myself up for, they didn't find for two days. They came to take me away on nine charges. The first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. And I promised him a DA that he'd bring the rest of them one at a time if I'd beat that one.

Now that's really high drum. And it just happens to be the path I went. I believe everyone here created their own prison in their mind. I just lived long enough to make mine real, that's all. When I came to trial five months later, the district attorney said we've been talking to the federal people. And they say that you're sick and I agreed. He said we've talked it over. If you'll plead guilty to this little reduced charge, we'll suspend your sentence.

And give you to the federal people and they said they'll take you down to Fort Worth, Texas, to that hospital where they can fix you. Because at that time I was finally certified as an associate path type two, a psychopath and a manic-depressive drug addict. What I knew was that I was really tired. I plead guilty. Federal hospital beats the hell out of penitentiary. Come on. For a number of reasons. They kept their bargain. They gave me a one and a half to three years sentence, suspended it and turned me back to the federal people who'd already agreed to take me.

And five days later I was in the Colorado State penitentiary. Because the federal parole officer changed his mind at the last minute. He said there's nothing we can do for this one anyway, just lock him up so we don't hurt anybody else. And I believe that was an act of God. Had I gone to the hospital, I'd have been on the street in six months. They'd have told me what was wrong with me. They would have told me how long it would take to fix that.

They would have told me the symptoms I'd have to show them to convince them I was getting better. That's my best game. I was taken to you. Because in our third week in the fish tank, you showed up. In the form of three guys in green clothes with numbers on third chest. I gotta tell you, convicts in their natural habitat in their own clothes are a little intimidating. Smiling convicts are outright frightening. And they were smiling.

And we came down and listened to him and this guy got up and he said, my name's Doc, and I'm an alcoholic. And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life. And my life has become unmanageable. And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you could do. And the miracle happened. I heard him.

I don't think that alcoholics necessarily don't think well. Alcoholics can't hear and they don't know how to read. That's their biggest problem. But I heard him. They gave me the message of alcoholics anonymous. It's this simple, Joe. If you are an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink alcohol again, ever. That's it. The rest of it's fun and games and a lot of hard work. If you believe what I just told you, I've screwed up your drinking forever.

Because if you ever drink again, you remember that. It's really uncomfortable. I was hand carried through the step process out of the big book, the recovery process, and five weekends. In order to go to the main group, we had to go through this 12-step study school. And it was there that they first introduced me to sponsorship. I'm a believer in sponsorship. And I met kind, gentle sponsorship right off the bat. This smiling monkey with a number

on his chest said, you knew guys for the next five weeks have nothing to say.

If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. And they began to hand carry us using the book in their own experience to have that same experience. The first thing they did for me is the first thing I will do for anyone that asked me to sponsor them. They helped me understand precisely what was wrong with me. They described the symptoms of alcoholism in a way that I could put my own life experience to it. I went to the penitentiary at 19 because I'm alcoholic. I had a drink in Long Beach and ended up in Persian Square drinking.

And I was able to put a lot of other things to that. I got comfortable with the idea that I have a physical allergy to alcohol. And they told me it was completely academic because if I never took another drink of alcohol, that had never happened to me again. I never developed this craving for more alcohol. What was really wrong with me was up here in my mind and that scared me. I had just examined my mind for 33 years and I had to kill it.

And that's what's wrong with me. Good. I'm afraid I had to spend my whole life on a psychiatrist's couch trying to unravel what I'd already failed to unravel. My sponsor said, don't worry about it. We suggest that you forget everything you think you know about anything. Particularly about spiritual matters because if anything had worked, you wouldn't be here. Let's start over, he said. We can't fix what's wrong with your mind.

It's just too badly damaged. There's too many pieces missing. And the key piece that's missing for me is that all the information I've gathered in 25 years, I know that today will come because it has come when it either won't show up or it'll be warped. So I haven't learned a hell of a lot of alcoholics in all of this. I've learned a lot from you. What I've learned mostly is that you can't keep me sober. Without you, I am a dead cookie. Please don't misunderstand me.

God brought me to you because you are his people. And it is through you that he speaks to me directly. But he never, never, never, never, never yells at me. You knew, but he doesn't. So what you have taught me mostly is to have a quiet mind so I can hear him. And that's all the steps are for me, a way for me to quiet my mind. To be able to pray effectively. I love sponsoring people because they teach me effective prayer.

You come to me and you put your life in my hands. Literally. And that's just scares me to death. I haven't really gotten a good grasp of mine yet. So I pray, oh God. Now what do I do? And you know, I've been shown over the years exactly what to do and say. It's just wonderful. The less I know, the better chance you have a living if you come to me. But I know a couple things. I know that where I am, God is. And I learned that in a penitentiary through more of that gentle, gentle stuff.

I wondered what these guys had. I came to believe in God because I watched it walking around. Three men whose lives had been changed. One was a killer who couldn't kill anymore. And I knew that. One was a stick up man who couldn't do that anymore. I think the man that I have loved most of my life, he's dead and gone now. Let's feel good to her. Because he was what I wanted to be. And he didn't talk about it much. He walked around in it.

Now Phil was a badass. He came to us from Guam and was doing time because when he got drunk he liked to throw things out of windows. And the last time he'd done that it was people and it was three stories up. This

was the kindest, most gentle human being I've ever met in my life. He taught me to touch physically in a penitentiary where it's risky. He taught me about family. And he taught me a basic principle of Alcoholics Anonymous.

He said he really loved his family. He said I don't do this for my family. I do this for me. Because if I drink again they have nothing. He taught me how to be a member of a family. And Alcoholics Anonymous is my family. I was as comfortable here tonight as I am in the Denver Thursday Night Group because I know you're my family. I also know that there's kissing cousins and immediate family. We just came from a conference in Breckenridge, Colorado where the minor differences in style that we all experience.

You know that's why we have so many groups. Just differences in style. There's put better than anything I've ever heard. One of our young men said that the fellowship of the spirit born of the steps. That gives us a common experience. And I liked that because it took all the differences away. Whatever the differences in style from what I've heard here tonight we all believe the same thing. It's one alcoholic talking to another.

Sharing hope and love. And technique and style. Let me share with you how important that was. I watched this family idea save a girl's life. Literally. In my little home group we're pretty close as you are. And we were all going to Seattle to the international. And this girl came from a very bad home. She was really scared to even be out on the street. She's really nervous. But because we were going to Seattle she went.

And we lost her somewhere on Saturday. Or she lost us. Now my wife and I have been privileged in March to go to Japan to share with them at their 15th anniversary. And we met some of our immediate family there. You spot them. You walk in room and there they are. And it was fun. Anyway this girl told me later she was standing on the streets of Seattle with 30-40 thousand of us walking by regularly. Absolutely petrified.

Because she was alone. Couldn't move. Couldn't talk to anybody. And she said this little Japanese couple walking down the street saw her badge. And on it it said Denver Colorado. And they walked over to her and said oh do you know Dansan? And she was okay. And I've had that experience traveling around this country and other countries. I have yet to be anywhere. If I find alcoholics anonymous. But I don't meet somebody from before.

I'm completely at home. And I came to you completely lost. Part of my awakening at the third step was my fear. I was absolutely terrified. If I really gave my life over the care of God he put me at the corner of Colfax and Broadway handing out watch tower magazines. And asking strangers have you been saved brother. Not me boy. That's too humiliating. And I had one of those sponsors who said a sponsor thing. He said oh let's talk about that.

And Joe if your sponsor says that to you it does not mean let us talk about that. It means if you'll be quiet for a minute maybe we can wade through this thing straight your mind up. I believe the truth without love is cruelty. And I believe that confrontation without some kind of real answer is brutality. So don't do that. But he loved me and he had a real answer ready for me. And so he went from my spiritual jugular.

He said Don do you suppose that the guy that's handing out watch towers down there at Colfax and Broadway today had breakfast where he wanted to. And I said probably and he said you didn't. Do you suppose that guy that's making a fool of himself by asking strangers if they've been saved. It's wearing clothes that he

picked out to do. And I said probably and he said you're not. Do you suppose when he's all through making a fool himself that he gets to go home.

And of course I didn't. I was promised when I got here that I could have a new mind. That's the promise. And my sponsor hand carried me into my new mind. And he helped me to have an experience that changed my life. Anything at all that God has in mind for me. He's just going to be better than anything at all that I will ever have in mind for me. Period. And I've been living that way for 25 years. Imperfectly to be sure.

But I can tell you the contrast that convinces me that's probably what's happened. When I ran my life and gave it my very best. I ended up in a penitentiary cell talking to cockroaches. My two beloved little boys ended up in a foster home where they were badly treated. My parents wouldn't let me into their home on Christmas Day. My fall partners, the gangsters I ran with, wouldn't come up with \$100 to bail me out. That's the best I could do.

And I promise you I had done my best. And I quit. I've been letting God kind of direct me. And just on the outside I have been all over the world. Instead of an 8 by 10 toilet, the world is mine. The United States, Canada, Guatemala, Puerto Rico. Because of your love and trust I was sent to Russia for 17 days to talk to their doctors about alcoholics anonymous. I've got to go to Japan. Hey, look where I am tonight. In the synagogue in Los Angeles.

If you'd had me making on a list of places I'd go, I'd have missed almost every one of the places I've loved the most, including here. I don't make lists anymore. Every time I do, I come up short of what I couldn't really have. I had a series of spiritual awakenings. And please understand when I talk about a spiritual awakening for alcoholics, anytime any alcoholic anywhere has anything like it, perception of truth, that's a spiritual awakening.

Having had that spiritual awakening, my sponsors gave me a big book in the next group of people out of the fish tank and said, now it's your turn. Give it back. And then they taught me how to live this way. The practices, principles and all of my affairs means I have to have some. I don't want more affairs than I have principles, but I've got to have some affairs. One of the affairs that I have learned to have in my life is a job.

I'm a contributing member of my community. I have a monstrous love affair with my wife. She is the cutest little thing. I've been married to her for 16 years, and I just fall in love with her all over again every day. And I almost missed her. I was living at the base in the 14,000 foot mountain, with two teenage boys, a black dog and a white cat, and working behind the walls of the penitentiary six hours a day and the rest of the time my life was mine.

And along comes this sane lady. Gary reminded me after I met her, I called him and said, I think I finally found one that doesn't need fixed. And she has taught me, you taught me about love. She has taught me how to love. Because she never tries to fix me. Oh, I love her dearly. She had two little girls that I didn't want to get involved with. I just finished raising seven kids and watched most of that. And I didn't want to get married, but I didn't miss some of the greatest things in my life, and I missed those girls.

They were a little rowdy, and I remember early on in our marriage. They got too much for me. So I went upstairs to wait it out, and I just knew that she was going to straighten them out in about 20 minutes and then

come get me. And it was about two hours later when I realized you're going to starve to death here, bud. She didn't about to fix anything for me. She's a wonder. I think what I want to really share with you is the business of living this out.

Making a man's has become the most important thing in my life, and that doesn't mean apologizing to people for the wrongs done. That's only a small part of it. I spent the last 25 years trying to set right the wrongs that I did. And thank God for old Chuck, because he saved my life one time. He told me there's absolutely nothing I can do to ever change what I did to my children, and that was the one that hurt the most.

What I can do is create an arena where they can have an opportunity to get well to. And we call that home. I've been living in the same house so long we've outlived an entire dog. I trust my God. It took 22 years to really make a man's to my son, my older boy. But it got done. Just recently I had occasions to look at the fact that I'm mortal. We don't know how long any of us are going to be here. And one of the benefits of that is that I ask myself, is there any unfinished business here on this planet?

And I found something that wasn't the negative stuff. I haven't harmed anybody in a long time serious enough that I couldn't clean it up right away. But there was unfinished business. I have three heroes. My dad, the man I'm getting ready to go to work for down in North Carolina, and my next door neighbor. And I pinned my dad down about three weeks, four weeks ago, in his little office where he can't move and get by me.

And I said, pop, I want you to know you're one of my heroes and I gave him a hug and he cried. So that's finished now. I've been making a man's to my mother for years by showing up on a regular basis. Because when I asked her what I have to do to straighten this up she said, honey all I ever wanted for you was to be happy. So I go by regularly happy. That's all it took. If you asked me today to make a list of what I would like in my life and what I would like my life to be like, except for never having enough money, I have everything I could ever dream of.

I am useful. I have enough people that love me to keep me from feeling lonely and enough people who are pissed at me to keep me from getting careless. I was sitting on my back porch the other day looking at the trees in the house. And realizing I have everything I could ever want. My home group is the finest group of people I know. My marriage is good. My relationship with my kids is even working. I told my 20-year-old up years the other day and she said, up years too.

And that's love. I haven't decided whether to apologize without or not. I kind of meant it. On August 16th I'm going to get in my van and drive away from all of them. Because I have been asked by one of God's messengers to come do something with him in the prison systems in North Carolina. And it's a strange feeling to know that I'm going to walk away from it and won't lose a thing. I won't lose a thing. And my wife's excited about it.

I don't know whether she's excited because I'm not going to be around under foot for a while or because she's got a new place to go now. I won't lose a thing. Where I am God is. I love Alcoholics Anonymous and I love you personally and individually. I wish I could thank God for everything that's been given to me. But that whole idea is beyond me. I don't comprehend God. I'm just feeling. But He gave me you. And I can thank you.

So from me through you to this loving God I have found. Thank you very much.