

Bayouland Jamboree

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Transcript

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Goodness. I just tell them in the back there I'm used to looking at your pretty faces before I get up here so I can get tuned into you. I ain't tuned in yet. My name is Don and I'm an alcoholic. And I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in good standing tonight. My home group is the Tuesday night Southern Pines Big Book group in Southern Pines, North Carolina. And this code is terribly hot. My mother and my sponsor and my wife say I have to wear it to show that I respect you. Do you understand that I respect you? Okay. I really did that so you can see these fine suspenders. Before I ever make a talk in Alcoholics Anonymous, I ask God to fill me with His Holy Spirit and let it flow through me and into the lives of others. I've got to tell you just looking at you. I am truly filled with the Spirit of God. So we're going to have a three-hanky talk. I belong to Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn't come looking for you. I didn't know I needed you. And I would never have found you. If you hadn't had some of your emissaries out trolling for people like me. At the time you found me, I was certified by one government agency as Associate Path Type II. And another government agency was he said I was a psychopath. And the psychiatrist said that I was a manic depressive drug addict. And the only I knew for sure is I really didn't feel good. I think that as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, one of the most important duties that I have, if God puts you in my life, is to help you find out what the hell's wrong with you. Are you an alcoholic? I can deal with that one. You can be an alcoholic and anything else that I can deal with your alcoholism. I am not an alcoholic and a drug addict, although for 14 years I did speed. And acid. That my drug of choice was methadrin. But I always had a choice as to whether I used that or not. And with Alcohol I have never had a choice and that's what makes me alcoholic. And today in Alcoholics Anonymous we have a lot of people coming to us, God bless them. And if we don't help them find out what's wrong with them, they stay fragmented. And fragmented people die. And we don't care what you are. If you're alcoholic, you belong here. And if you're alcoholic I have some really important information for you tonight. The most important thing I've ever heard in my life. If you're alcoholic you don't ever have to drink alcohol again, ever. You don't ever have to hurt like you've been hurting ever again. I could sit down now.

I'm not going to. I'm meant to thank the committee too for the pool. I have always wanted to have a water walking after one of my talks. Rebstock said he'd go first. I have some concerns about Alcoholics Anonymous today. I've been here long enough to have some opinions and some concerns. One of my concerns has to do with the way we are tending to ritualize some of the important information in Alcoholics Anonymous. I love the promises. But I work in a prison system in North Carolina and quite often I hear them just read as if you showed up here tonight this is what's going to happen to you and that's just not true. For me the promises of Alcoholics Anonymous began in the first two sentences of the first forward to the first edition of our first book. If you're new please hear this. This isn't me. We are more than a hundred Alcoholics men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. That's a promise. I am not cured of alcoholism but I stand before you tonight to recover to Alcoholic. I'm one of we. I no longer suffer from alcoholism.

I still have it. But I don't suffer from it. And you don't have to either. If you're new here please understand you don't have to stay sick forever. Please. And then they give me my life work to show others precisely how

we've recovered. That's our purpose. God that's easy. I don't even have to be smart. All I have to do is be able to remember what I was like. What happened to me and what I'm like today and share that with you in love and that's all I'm going to do tonight is just share that with you in love. Before I met Alcohol I desperately needed to be changed. I can remember laying in bed 13 years old crying wondering when my people were going to get back from Mars and pick me up. Because I certainly didn't feel like a human being. And I didn't think like one and I didn't feel like one. I didn't act like one. And I hurt. And when you hurt like that there's only one thing you can do. I got really pissed. I know about outrage. When you don't fit you become outraged. And I spend a good part of my life outraged. I learned to lie very young because I tended to do bizarre things. If you ever get bizarre just for the sake of getting bizarre. And people would ask me why did you do that? And I learned early on don't tell them the truth. I would tell them the truth. I'd say I don't know. And they would say well you must know you did it. And I began to understand that people needed some kind of an answer. And I have a whole trick bag full of answers if you're not through drinking and I'll let you have them for nothing. Things are guaranteed to get everybody off your back for a while. I learned early on while I was trying to figure out who was home because it was getting crowded here before I ever met alcohol. I was beginning to become everyone I'd ever met or read about. And I learned real early on while I'm trying to figure out who's here and you start bothering me and distracting me how to keep you back. Throw a mood swing. Give them a little manic depressive. Be unpredictable. You have to be careful and very good at it. If you're not good enough they just lock you away somewhere. And if you're too good they invite you to parties. And I was frightened. I've known from the time I was a tiniest child that in and of myself I don't have what it takes. Let there be light.

I knew from the time I was the smallest child that if I did something right today it was dumb luck. And I also knew that tomorrow morning first thing you're going to ask me to do it all over again. And I don't know how I did it the first time. And I began to discover that failure is a hell of a lot easier to live with in the United States than success is. People really are kind. Every time I failed they would help me up. In fact the greatest damage I did to the people that I love the most was that I kept getting up. And off the line I'm really good. Before I came to Alcoholics Anonymous I was a sprinter in the game of life. Not a long distance writer but a sprinter. If you put me in a new situation, new job, new wife, new whatever. I learned very quickly what's expected of me and I produce it because I really need your acceptance. And we both think oh look isn't that nice. He's going to do fine this time. And then you get distracted and then I get distracted or lose interest and I drink and I go away. I come from a family of musicians. In fact my brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. I'm so proud of him I could bust. He was riding with Stan Kent when he was 19 years old. He writes a symphony every year just for the heck of it. He just came back from Holland where they took him because he's a synthesizer musician the foremost in the United States. Highly successful man. You know he lived right down the hall for me when we were growing up. Kind of got a clue that maybe more I grew up had nothing to do with why I'm an alcoholic. I came to Alcoholic Mess and I started drinking because where I come from in East Colfax in Denver. One of the rights of passage is that you get a guy from an already field to buy a bottle of whiskey. And we take it out east of Denver and get drunk and have fun. The big guy said get drunk and have fun like it was one word. Always gave him a little fun. And we did that. We got some bonded bourbon and one out east of Denver. I don't know whether that was 15 or 16. Whatever it was.

I was little and I was stupid and I was ugly and I was angry and I was frightened. Big ward on the end of my nose. I knew that if anything happened tonight I was going to get blamed for it. And I had a couple of drinks and

bonded bourbon. Wonderful thing happened. I can tell you all the stuff you know like getting taller and broader and all that. What I really remember about that night is that for the first time in my memory I had some plans. I had what Dr. Carl Jung describes in our book Alcoholics Anonymous as a spiritual awakening. Ideas and concepts and emotions that used to govern the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side and a whole new set of conceptions begins to dominate them. That's how he describes a spiritual awakening and that's what I had. He promises us a new mind. The first time I drank bonded bourbon I got a brand new mind. I had plans. Good plans for a 17 year old kid real good plan. There was a guy in my class who hadn't been treating us very well and I was going to meet him back at the drive in later that evening and whip him. And I could have done it too. And there was an old girl in my class who hadn't been treating us at all and she and I were going to have a visit and I could have visited with her. And God willing will visit about visiting tonight because I think one of the most important things in recovery one of the greatest gifts I've been given is the ability to visit with folks.

Well what happened to me was so good that if that's all that had happened to me I'd buy everybody here drink tonight. It's not a bad deal what happened to me put me in the heart of life. Gave me some clarity of thought. In fact it was so good I had several more ideas it's in my nature that if one works you take ten. Anything worth doing is worth abusing. So by the time I got back to the drive in with the people I was going to impress saw instead of me whipping the bully and visiting with a girl they all got to see my partners hauling me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway. I nearly died from acute alcohol poisoning that night. I tried too much whiskey. And my keen alcoholic mind immediately zeroed in on what caused that. Bonded bourbon. And I have not to this day had any more bonded bourbon. I still haven't made you sick. I'm convinced if that's all there was I'd have had it but I had plenty of everything. I quickly learned what wouldn't do that to me. When I began to go through the book Alcoholics Anonymous and they described us as people who drank for effect. I could identify with that. If we were going to fight I drank vodka.

Because when I drank vodka I get mean. And if you're going to fight she might as well be mean. If we were cruising for girls that night and it was a half way decent chance of meeting some I drank dark Bacardi rum. It makes me sensitive and warm. I can remember early in my drinking time the horror of not being able to feel anything. When there weren't any emotions at all. And I found that if I drank Coors beer and listened to Jim Reeves and Ferlin Husky singing things like four walls I could just cry like a baby. It was those good tears. With Red Morgan David wine I'm a poet and I paint. I'm an artist. It had a little speed to that and I can play the trumpet. I'm inclined to think that I was becoming somewhat obsessed with alcohol real early. I went to my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old. Not because I'm a big time gangster. I've been in three penitentiaries and I'm not a big time gangster. They don't even get to one. No. But in 19 hours of my first one in Japan. Because of alcohol. And I wondered at the time that happened. Why did I do this? What's wrong with me? This is what I had mine. I would join the Navy and I was going to be a career sailor. Save the world from a communist menace and become a hero and come back to Denver a hero. God I want it to be somebody's hero so badly. And here I'm in a penitentiary. And I didn't know until you found me why that happened to me.

It's in the book Alcoholics Anonymous in a section written by our lovely Dr. Silkworth. He describes men he'd been working with who'd been working on a business deal that would be subtle favorably to them and dare to before their appointment they had a drink and they missed their appointment and there I was. That's me. I had a drink in Long Beach, California on a 24 hour liberty. And 23 days later when I got back to my ship it wasn't

there anymore.

See 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. So at 19 years of age I'd been through my first prison experience and failed utterly and completely and hit absolute rock bottom. I do not believe that the bottom I hit December 25th in 1967 was any deeper than the one I hit when I was 19. Bottom for me are those moments when I wake up and know clearly what I have in mind for my life is not going to happen now. The dreams are dead. The plans are dead. We got to start over. I'm so god awful tired of starting over. My dad says one of the worst things I did to him is that I learned how to abandon things real early and he helped me set up another new place to live and a few months later the landlord had called him and say can you come by and get this boy's things. He's gone. Let me get on about the business of hand. See I'm already frustrated. I have been walking hand in hand with the power of God since December 26th of 1967 and that means every day I have had monumental experiences and I want to tell you about every one of them and you give me an hour. I'm going to take 70 minutes probably.

I got sober because I ran out of lives not because I ran into the truth and I must tell you the truth. Alcoholics Anonymous did not get me sober. God gave me back my life as a free clear gift. December 26th 1967 and five months later brought me to you so that gift could take on some meaning and some dimension and some purpose because what happened to me that day is I hit the absolute bottom of all human pain. I had become completely useless and I knew it. I looked at the remaining lives of my life and there weren't many. I was on federal parole at the time for a little mistake I'd made in 1966. I weighed 133 pounds because I hadn't been able to get out of bed for some time until this young kid 16 years old that I'd recruited came in and gave me a shot of speed so I could get up and go steal something and buy some booze and go back bed. I had two little boys with me because their mother had abandoned ships several years before and for the last four years those kids and I had been running the street. We were a single parent homeless family before it even became fashionable. I would have told you and believed it truly that we were okay. We had a place to live and it was clean and we had clothes and we had food and we were intact as a family and somehow that day I began to see the lie in that we weren't a family. We just lived together because I was alone and so were those two little boys living in the same house and it was a pig pin and the food we got we got from aid to dependent children and the check hadn't gotten her yet. Food we were eating that day is what I'd been able to steal the day before and I began to see the lie. Now I must tell you all that I come from a functional home. I'm sorry but I do. It doesn't mean we didn't have problems in my family but my family always faced them. My folks are still alive. They still live in the same house. They still talk to each other. They still have spirit. My mother is 85 now. Went into the hospital last week for a hip replacement. She figured she's got 10 or 15 more years and she's tired of hobbling around. So she's got a new hip. She's up feisty and they didn't want her to lay down. She wants to go home. My family faced every problem that came along.

I told you about my brother. My sister just graduated or just a while back retired from IBM. She was one of their top executives. She made good money and great babies and her babies have been making great babies. They have not been able to find good husbands to go with them. We just got another one about three weeks ago. But in my family the attitude when the one of those babies shows up is, oh look there's another new little prince baby. Let's raise it. That's where I come from. So I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. Where I grew up Christmas was a marvelous thing. They brought a real tree in from out there in a cold and it smelled good and they decorated with lights and tinsel and little packages begin appearing under it. But the most important, oh God

the house smell good, cider with cinnamon in it, hot chocolate with marshmallows and they weren't them sissy things. These were the kind you had to go suck them off the top where you could get to the chocolate. But where I grew up the most important thing that happened Christmas was that people came by and visited with my parents, streams of people. I was there last Christmas. It hadn't stopped. We sat there for a couple hours and people came in and out and visited. Christmas of 1967 nobody came to my house.

Even my parole officer made me come see him. He couldn't stand it. And we didn't have a tree. The welfare check hadn't gotten there and so we didn't have any money so we didn't have a tree. But it's in my nature to be restless, irritable, and discontent. So we took a walk on the 24th, found a dollar in a snow, went to the tree shop and found out they'll see you the biggest tree on the lot for a buck on the 24th. That's what we bought, the biggest tree on the lot.

Our little ceiling was about seven feet tall and our tree was about nine feet tall so it killed it and I still pictured that. And we dressed it with stuff and cut up some cardboard and crinklesome aluminum foil and I started dying because I knew this isn't right. One of the things I've had to face in my sobriety is while I lost the ability to differentiate the truth from the false I've never lost the knowledge of right and wrong. We alcoholics don't have no conscience. We have too much conscience and it just eats us alive. And I knew this was wrong.

And the little presents that were under there, I managed with my glib tongue to talk the fellow in the public merchandise marred on East Colfax and Denver. Talked them out of a pair of cowboy boots and little cowboy shirts so each of my boys would have one gift each. This was on credit. My kids wrapped up everything in the house that would fit in blue paper towel so that I'd have a good Christmas and it just fell apart. On Christmas day, I think, God, the last of the lives went.

We went down to my folks' place to spend the day with grandma and grandpa. Never occurred to me. When we got there, my dad met us at the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry. Your mother said, I can't let you in here anymore. She can't stand watching you die. I weighed 133 pounds in my eyes hung out and my cheeks were sunken in and she knew I was dying. I want them to lie as when. I would have told you that day and met it. Just leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me.

Clearly, I could see that day who I was hurting. Everybody I ever touched got hurt, particularly my people, my children, my folks. It was clear. And then, dad, God bless him, he destroyed my last lie because he snuck us in into the basement. And I'd have told you that day nobody cares. Nobody loves us. And he did. And I didn't have any lies left. I went home with some self-pity. A lot of self-pity. And then I was able to step into the lie of truth. And the truth was that day there was no reason for me to be here. Absolutely useless. Everybody I could think of would be better off if I was gone. And nobody can live with that. And I couldn't live with that. And I had nothing left to surrender to. That's the point of departing. You have to surrender. There's nothing to surrender to. I tried everything. I've got, I've been in and out of a lot of different churches. I was in Dianetics in 1953 when L. Ron Hubbard was still at the helm.

He was my kind of people. A science fiction writer who believed his own stuff. They introduced us to methamphetamine hydrochloride so we could become uninhibited and talk freely. I laughed at it. It worked. My last psychiatrist was smoking marijuana three weeks after we started meeting. That was one of my trades. That

was a marijuana salesman. There was nothing left to surrender to. So I did the only thing I could do. I quit. I knew that the kids would be better off without me and everybody would be better off without me. And I took a two-month supply of the speed I was using and put it up my arm and drank everything in a house and laid down and died.

And I truly believe I died. I've never been the same. I've never had a drink nor desire for one. I've never had a pill and a desire for one. I woke up with a brand new mind and I hurt like hell. The police were at the door. It woke me up and I knew I wasn't dead. But I was in a wonderful position. I couldn't have described it to you then but I can tell you about it now. I was a complete failure at living and I had just become a complete failure at dying.

I'm walking around in a body that won't die carrying with it a mind that won't work and I got to have an answer. I was truly willing that day as I am today to go anywhere anyone said and do anything anyone said if it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. I came to alcohol meeting to be changed and I came to you needing to be changed. And they drug me away. They had nine charges and the first one called for three years to life plus the five that I owned the feds and the other eight the D said I'll bring them one at a time if you beat this one but you're through.

I don't care. Laid in that Denver County jail for a little over five months detoxing. I don't want to ever forget that. Six weeks of leg cramps and pains and headaches and twitches and discomfort of various kinds and I don't want to remember that to keep sober. I don't believe they'll keep me sober. I've got those kind of memories that come before that and they didn't keep me sober. What it does is make me a pretty good sponsor. You can come to me in your fifth week of leg cramps, twitching, throwing up itchy scalp eyes falling out and I can look you right in the eye and tell you from my own experience you're really not going to die yet. I know you want to but hang on you ain't going to die yet and if you want those smart asses I'm not that kind. I'll just say don't wind up me not till you've been at this six weeks. I love you enough to tell you the truth. You will not die from this. You will die from the medicine that will relieve this.

Well the power of God went to work in my life before I ever heard the name. I find it interesting that our book doesn't say you have to believe in God but it says if you want to recover you will be required to believe in the power of God. However you can see this. I came to trial and the Denver district attorney said we've been talking with the federal judge and the federal parole officer and we've all kind of concluded you're really sick. No argument from me. I said we think you need help and the federal people have agreed that if you'll plead guilty to a little charge we have here to skip and we'll skip the trial we'll give you a one and a half to three-year sentence suspended and give you back to the federal people and they'll take you to Fort Worth, Texas and fix what's wrong with you. See I was an associate past, psychopath, a manic depressive drug addict. That's what they fixed down here. I said sure what do I sign?

I'm not an idiot. I'm a drunk. I signed it. They kept their word, gave me one and a half to three, suspended it, gave me back to the federal people and five days later I was in the Colorado State Penitentiary by the grace of a loving God. Had I gotten to that hospital, had I been able to manage to get locked up in the place I want it to be, I'd have been on the street in six months. If you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'm home free. They would tell me what's wrong with me. They would tell me about how long it's going to take to fix that up and they

would give me a long list of symptoms I'd have to show them to convince them I was getting better. That's my best game but I had met the one and only requirement for stepping on to any spiritual path and that includes this one. I had truly surrendered and so I was taken to the face tank of the Colorado State Penitentiary and I actually heard myself say Joe you can't do this to me. My last stupid statement and that's where you found me and you came looking for me in the form of three convicts with numbers on their chest. Convicts in their own environment, in their own clothes, are a little bit intimidating.

Smiling convicts are frightening. These three monkeys were standing there smiling like they knew something we didn't know and if we didn't find it out quick we were probably going to die and the first one got up and he said my name's Doc and I'm an alcoholic and that means that I am powerless over alcohol and guards and drugs and all of the other circumstances in my life. And my life has become unmanageable and if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing and the great miracle of my life took place. I heard him. I believe if you're here that we all get a little grace period when you walk in the doors you don't have to do anything you got a little grace period it lasts just about as long as how sick you are and when it's over you better have something going and all I had to do all I had to do was listen and I think God has a marvelous sense of humor. He has made me a listener and you ask me to talk all the time and I think that's funny but I was listening that day they gave us the truth these people didn't care whether our feelings got hurt or not because they knew our lives were on the line one of them said you know your very best thinking got you to the penitentiary you're not doing too good are you well there's where I was and I promise you I've been doing my best and that's where I was but then he did what happens here in Alcoholics Anonymous he said but we can show you a new way of thinking the people they have taught me something very important truth without love is cruelty and confrontation without a real answer is brutality but if you love me and you have a real answer have at me and they did we had to go through a 12 step study school before we could become part of the main A group it met on Friday night and they let real people in from the outside to our meeting I really wanted to go to that because see I wasn't afraid of the penitentiary you learned to live there like anywhere else what had me frightened at that time was that I knew then sometime between the next year and a half in six or seven years they're gonna put me back on the streets of Denver and I don't have a clue as to how to live out there I've already proven that I need to learn something else and I knew that the convicts that I was hanging out with whatever else they said they didn't know how to live for either they'd already proven that too so I really needed who had never been to a penitentiary they would command and tell us how to live and we couldn't go for five weeks every Saturday afternoon every Sunday afternoon we gave up our yard privileges our visitors and our movies and went up for three three and a half hours to the school where they hand carried us through the book Alcoholics Anonymous first thing they said when we showed up was you know guys for the next five weeks have nothing to say if you knew anything at all you wouldn't be here and new people have to talk to you know we got to do that in the dishroom we all work in the dishroom and we babble at each other and they talk with us outside the meeting but during the meeting time we listen they told me what was wrong with me I have a disease it has recognizable describable symptoms I'm allergic to alcohol now if I were allergic to tomatoes night tomatoes I'd break out with an itch my allergies alcohol if I drank alcohol I'd break out with an itch for other drink alcohol it's clear what's wrong that's why I went to the penitentiary I had a drink in Long Beach and 23 days later I stopped drinking and because the madness was gone on that first during that 22 days I could not stop I could not go back to that ship I had a different mind day 23 I turned myself in it was over there's no

treatment for that my favorite word today in the big book came out the other night in the workshop Bobby he's doomed I'm an alcoholic I'm doomed there's nothing you can do for the physical disease that I've got it's going on in me right now if I take a drink of alcohol tonight I'm convinced I might never have quit and I'm watching people with 15 20 25 years of sobriety die these days because they're taking a drink and they don't get back it's like they had never quit I don't want to be one of them but as long as I don't drink alcohol that never happens to me I don't go crazy I don't do crazy stuff that I do on alcohol I still do crazy stuff because why not I like going to parties now so what's really wrong with me well the main problem of the alcoholic centers in the mind and my sponsors made it very clear you can't use the problem to solve the problem I'm warped up here I can't use my mind to solve my mental problem there's too many pieces missing my neighbor has one of them I know that well you know I until I moved to North Carolina we've lived in the same house for 17 years and when that happens you either start talking with your neighbors or they start talking about you and I want to be a good citizen I really do so I've learned to visit the first thing required about visiting is that you learn to small talk I'm an alcoholic I don't have a clue as to how to small talk life is earnest and real and filled with passion we have to get down to the nitty gritty now but I've learned I'm hell I'm up to five six minutes now then we're going to talk about alcoholism and God may because I don't know about anything else one day he and I were visiting and he ran me out of small talk and I started sharing with him not like I would you I'd scare him to death if I told him what I'd tell you but I shared a little about alcoholism with him and he was interested he owns a bar turns out he and I have a common experience I shared how I drank and then he said you know I did that one night I drank too much whiskey and I got drunk and I fell down and I threw up I haven't done that since strange man well he's got his little piece in his mind so he can remember how badly he felt and it attaches to a piece in his mind that says well then don't do that again I can remember how badly I felt and how badly I felt and how badly I felt because it doesn't attach to anything in my mind oh early on I did it was bonded bourbon we got sick because it was bad chili you know I'm absolutely convinced that there have been times in the past and will be times in the future when everything I know about alcoholism about alcoholics anonymous and about God in my head won't be there I need protective from those strange mental blank spots you can either come warped or won't come at all so I can't learn enough about a if you came to study it good luck I am convinced by the way that those of us who have been sober for a while are in far greater danger from the truth than we are from the lies had an experience a while back that brought that home to me it would be really hard for you to come up with enough lies to convince me today that it's all right for me to take a drink but one night about three years or so ago I was on an airplane headed back from one of these deals and because I fly so much united airlines every now and then gives me a little certificate that if it's available I can move into first class I wouldn't pay for it but it's better than coach and it was a night flight it was nice the lights were on I had the reading light on my book and first class is kind of nice you know they they laid real tablecloths out there on the train you get real silverware no plastic it's real food no plastic and I'm reading and they're serving the belt fella next to me and this lady poured into his glass the prettiest deepest maroon stuff I've ever seen and the light hit it just right and I caught it with my eye and I looked and my mind said that really looks good and that was the truth it did I don't think about cracking that really looked good and then my mind said I bet that would really taste good too that was the truth it really would that's why she gave it to him then my mind said I bet that'll make his whole dinner taste better of course it would and suddenly a prayer began within me I did not start to pray a prayer began within me and I've learned when that happens to pay close attention I'm in far deeper trouble than I thought I was and I paid attention to the prayer and I realized that my next thought would have been maybe I ought to have one of those I am four thoughts away from a drink in fit

spiritual condition but by the grace of God and because I trust in that I'm safe and protected if I will pay attention and listen that's why I become a listener you see God never yells at me it's always a very very quiet voice and I must have a quiet mind or all messes well you know what happened I went back to my book then I looked over one more time at that good looking red stuff and then I joined in the prayer and the deal was over and I was convinced in the beginning that's what I must have I am totally absolutely utterly powerless over alcohol and there's nothing I can learn that will ever ever change that thank God the battle's over I have to fight anymore goodness but I came to be changed not sobered up took me while to understand I needed a sobriety but my sponsors had been changed all three of them and I knew they had I pay attention I'm a spiritual skeptic I was a cynic back then but a spiritual skeptic what I mean new people is I'll believe absolutely anything you tell me and then I'll go check it in the big book and if I can't figure that it fits there I'm not going to do it good luck and I watched these three guys one of my sponsors had killed a couple people in a shootout one morning in a drunken rage and as he told me the story it was clear to me this man could not do that he couldn't he's talking about somebody else and I asked him about it he said that's right I've been changed and God changed me and the other one was a stick-up man who couldn't do that I'd listen to the story and I knew he couldn't do that either same story how changed and God changed me an old Phil Gutierrez God I love Phil Phil came to us from Guam bad looking Ruby knows there's a certain Oriental face that you just look at you know that's a pirate and Phil was one of them and when he smiled he was really menacing when Phil drank well last time he drank he'd thrown some people out of a three-story window he was a very violent individual Phil's the one that taught me to touch in a penitentiary where that's kind of risky but Phil knew something about us no one ever questioned Phil's touching if you get close to me you're going to get touched because I've learned something here that we're all puppies we're healers that's who we are we're not doctors we're not smart we're not therapists we're healers and since I've come to know that I want to be a good one because people come into our lives and their lives are on the line and we have said to them you come to us you'll be all right we better not be lying and so wanting to be a good healer I've looked around my world at the healers my wife is a healer she's a nurse on an infant research unit one of the important things about helping someone heal is that you'd be able to tell them what's wrong with them that it's going to be all right she works with babies and they don't understand English so I watch what she does with her she picks them up and starts patting on them and then understanding English or not she says you're going to be all right you're in the right place you're gonna be fine and she walks around with them and I get to thinking well let's see how what do we do when people come to us I don't know about you but I find very few alcoholics that can understand English and they come to us and we just get all over them we shake their hands and put our hands on them and we say things like oh you're gonna be all right you're in the right place you're gonna be fine so that's what I start doing I got thinking one time about the great healer he'd walk along the roads of his country and he'd come on someone who was sitting there blind and crippled and covered with sores and alone and he knew something that you and I know that person thought that they were alone because they were blind and crippled and had sores he knew that they had sores and were crippled and blind because they thought they were alone and he just reached out and touched him you know what happens when you touch someone whether they like it or not they can't be alone there's somebody else in the room and he'd say to them hey is anybody home he said huh but they didn't know anybody was there and if they'd acknowledge that he'd qualify him a little bit he'd say something like this you don't have to do this anymore you don't have to stay sick not anymore let me see if they'd say was that right you see that's right would you like to get up he'd say and if they'd say yes he'd give them the magic words oh okay get up kind of get up what do we do they come to us and we say you don't have to do this

anymore now they could believe him because he spoke with such conviction that you could hear it in their voices I am an alcoholic and if you're new here I want you to know something if you're an alcoholic you don't ever have to drink again ever and I believe that because I don't need to do these people and then we say to them do you want to quit the book I read says I'm supposed to ask that question pretty specifically and if they say no I'm supposed to say well good luck and go find another one but if they say yes I'm gonna say to them oh okay don't drink oh magic words Carl asked me on the way down what is the secret of sobriety don't drink alcohol that's who we are we're the heaters isn't it wonderful to be a healer my god I get to spend I spent my early two years my first two years cataloging all the growth and changes in me they were so exciting I was coming back to life any new child will begin to become self-centered about oh see me in these past few years my great joy is to watch the moon of ticks that god sends me as they begin to heal well they showed me how to do inventory after they showed me how to get my mind straight I've had a series of spiritual awakenings here and if you're new that's an easy thing to grasp a spiritual awakening from alcoholic is anytime any alcoholic anywhere understands any part of the truth that's a spiritual awakening I came to believe in this power by watching it walk around and I wanted what they had and I was told about that third step prayer offer myself to God and I went back to myself and had the worst experience of my entire life because I said the prayer waited for the flash of light waited for the cell door to spring open for them to call me and send me home and absolutely nothing happened and I'm alcoholic if that ceiling caves into the pool I'll keep talking and you'll keep listening that ain't gonna bother us that's a lightweight crisis I can handle that but nothing happened and I can't handle that so I did what I'd been taught I went back and bitched at my sponsor I went back to Bruce with the alcoholic war cry ringing from my lips I'm gonna give it to you so that anytime you hear yourself say this you'll know it's time to call your sponsor where's mine where's mine now I've told you that if your alcoholic your mind is already figured away around that so let me give you the backup that's not enough want more that can't be mine it's not big enough that can't be mine it's the wrong color I'm gonna recognize it the hell of it is that half the time when I'm screaming out where's mine I'm sitting in the middle of it so I went and complained and my sponsor destroyed all of my concepts of God he did not give me new ones he destroyed my old ones they all had to do with Santa Claus what's he going to do for me I'm here today because I learned to say what can I do for you I still want mine but I have learned by watching you that the best way to get mine is to help you get yours first mine just seems to come along with it I didn't know that then though we found one last reservation in my sick mind I was truly convinced at that time if I gave my life over the care of God entirely but he'd put me on the corner of Colfax in Broadway in Denver handing out watchtower magazines and asking strangers have you been saved brother from my plush apartment in the car our state penitentiary I just couldn't see me doing that and my sponsor said sponsor words if you're new here listen for these you're in trouble he said let's talk about that now that does not mean let us talk about that he said down to you suppose that the guy that's handing out watchtower is today at Colfax in Broadway had breakfast where he wanted to and I said probably and he said you didn't do you suppose that that guy that's making a fool himself down there today he's wearing clothes that he picked out to do it in I said probably and he said you're not do you suppose when he's all through humiliating himself that he gets to go home I didn't we are promised a new mind and by loving sponsorship I was hand carried into mine and the foundation was set for me anything at all that God may have in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will ever have in mind for me period and then my last bit of noble ego showed up when I told him okay I'm wanting to go down and hand out watchtower he smiled he said oh well God there I got a guy downer doing that he's need you somewhere else and the hand carried me through the inventory the house cleaning process I know this is just an observation of

mine but let me suggest as you approach this part of the of our recovery process people get frightened in spiritual terms the word amen is a closure it means we have finished with this part there is no amen at the end of the third step prayer do you ever notice that but there is one at the end of the seventh step prayer which looks to me like the third step prayer with teeth in it and I have concluded and practiced with the people I sponsor that everything from the word God at the beginning of the third step prayer to the amen at the end of the seventh step is all part of the same prayer prayer becomes activity in action at this point and all through there I'm given a whole series of other prayers to use so that I can get the metal change I need to become willing to go straighten up my past I got free locked up for the night in the Colorado State Penitentiary my sponsors had told me that what he wanted me to do was to make a list of all the people I had ever harmed and we started with the people on my inventory including the federal agents that nearly killed my son in a narcotics raid so I harmed that man I put him in a position where he almost killed a four-year-old kid that's great harm to his spirit I still don't like what he did but I brought him there what the hell he said Don we know what you did to these people but you are so insensitive you have no idea what it did to them so make a list of all these people then take them one of the time and close your eyes and see if you can feel a willingness in your heart to look each one right in the eye and say to them I have been wrong and 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 had the experience I've looked for my whole life I was lifted from my chair and set free but I've been free ever since and I stay free because if I have caused anyone here any harm whatsoever you come see me we'll get the books to balance now what you have to do after you say that is shut up and listen while I tell you what you have to do and that made it possible for me to go to my mother that was a problem to me how can you apologize to the mother that you put in a position on Christmas day to say you and your kids can't come to my house there's no way but I can ask what you'll have to do and I found a way to ask her months after I got out she let me come by very reluctantly and I'm very careful with people and I asked her and I shut up and listened and she said honey all I've ever wondered for you is that you will be happy for the past 24 some years I've been going by my mom's house on a regular basis happy and it worked oh we have a wonderful time wonderful time she said it was six years before she believed anything I said well I have no right to think she would ever believe me again ever I just go by don't have time to tell you about the two dollar bills I've stopped telling it and they're still coming catch me afterwards you want to know about the two dollar bills because I got a couple other things that have happened when I'm running out of time the business of my father when I went to my dad to make a man's I had the list and I started out like I've been taught who I am what I am my life's at stake here's what I did I lied to you stolen from you cheated you and he saw the list and he said stop please I know all that all you can do by going into the details is hurt me all over again you know I'm gonna have to start from here and so we did and I had one of those serendipitous about a month and a half ago see there are a lot of things I didn't get from my dad but I needed when I was five and six it's not uncommon the hell did they know they're just people and the things I didn't get from my dad I'm never gonna get because I can't get them from him and God has spilled all those holes and I don't need that anymore it's wonderful it means he and I have a good relationship because I don't need that anymore and my wife had come down to visit me I'm down in North Carolina because one of God's messengers came by and asked me to come and when they show up I go one of the things I've learned to do in Alcoholics Anonymous is listen for my messengers and when they come I pay attention but my family is still in Colorado and I miss them but it right now this is the way it's to be but any moment why should come down to visit me she gets horny without me she can't help it don't you tell her I said dad and I had called my dad and we were visiting because I do that regular they're in their 80s and you know

each day's a gamble see you call him and he and I were visiting and he gave me this wonderful gift he said Jack he just came by yesterday and she was telling us how proud she is of you down there and then he said you know Don I'm proud of you too it's extra good because you don't need it and I think you did it to get back at me because I got him about five months ago I have three heroes left on this planet I'm working for one of them my dad's a second and I won't tell you who the third one is my dad's never been a demonstrative man he came out of a generation where you had to plant close to the chest but he has this long office that he works in it's just wide enough for one person got some benches in his law and I kind of backed him into that one day where he couldn't get out he can't move that fast anymore and I put my arms around him and I said pop I'm gonna tell you something I have three heroes left and you're one of them that's so he'll double cried the damage I did to my brother took a long time to heal see I damaged our name my brother and I ran the same circles he played in the bands and I sold the band players in marijuana I did dirt to our name and I hurt our parents and he hated me for that and over the years he's been very very reticent very standoffish I was 21 years sober when he invited me to his birthday party and it was guarded 22 years sober he had my wife an hour for dinner and after dinner he said I don't know if you and I'll ever be friends but this was nice tonight we can do this again and I've done nothing over the years except just stay busy making my life my life not trying to do anything but when I was home I got just about three months ago I was in visiting with the folks that's what I do you know I visit and my brother came in I was sitting with my foot crossed over my leg and he sat down across with me giving me this funny look and he kicked me on the bottom of the shoe and he said I'm really glad to see you the next time you're in town why don't you and I go up to the cabin and go fishing just the two others we got a little cabin up in our country well you can believe next time I was in town we did we stomped through beaver ponds never caught a fish got all muddy and cold went back to the cabin visited played cribbage that poor baby she cribbage is an institution game I walked in three out of four games and then he gave me a precious precious gift he gave me his inner core my brother said to me don I'm 58 years old now and I believe I have made a decent contribution to life that's what this is about all I do is get busy with God's kids and I get these things back since I have been sober for 26 years I have walked with a sense of the presence of God and I don't always get to feel it because I abused my feelings and I don't always get that but I've had this constant sense of his presence about a month and a half ago I've been I've been doing some extensive step work if you go house cleaning to continue growing and I woke up one morning and it wasn't there it was six o'clock in the morning it wasn't there I can't say I was frightened it was just awful so I began to pray immediately which of course made a lie I would not be in there and my prayer was simple I said please let me know that you're present I need to be closer to you and I need to know you better and my phone rang six o'clock in the morning there's old Billy he said I was seven years sober down and I drank again and I have a friend up here 12 years sober that drank again and I do these little big book workshops where we sit down and over a period of time we just read everything in the big book and do what it says together and I'd done that for some kids in his group and they are on fire and they're just 12 step in the hill out of North Carolina and he wanted to know if I would gather with him and his friend at his beach house over the weekend and show them what they were missing and I of course and I hung up and started addressing the phone rang and if somebody else asking for help when I started to get dressed in the phone rang and the phone kept ringing all the way till I got out the door and when I got to work it was ringing and about 10 o'clock the message was clear to me God was saying to me directly if you would know me better get to know my children better do you want to be closer to me be closer to my kids that's why I'm here with you I want to visit oh I have so much I want to share with you almost two years ago I once again had to face my own mortality it came real close this time it was

a bit she's still uncomfortable but I'm all right but I got to take a look at the fact I'm not going to be here that much longer so I want everything to be current and I've gone back and checked my life and except for the I still haven't paid my rent this month you know those kind of things I can stand before you tonight with the greatest news of all the greatest promise that I could offer you I will never have to stand at a gravesite ever and say I wish I'd have told this person this I'll never have to do that as far as I know I'm current with y'all I'm current with everybody if nothing else ever happens that's good that's good and I wish in my heart of hearts that I can truly thank God for that but the whole idea of God is just too big for me and it's getting bigger so you know what he's done in his mercy he's giving me you because I can look you right in the eye and I can say to you thank you for your lives in mind