

Alabama-Northwest Florida Al-Anon Convention

1996 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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At this time, I'd like to introduce you to your speaker this morning, Don P. I'm the best host I've ever had. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. And I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in good standing this morning. My home group is the AA group in Denver. We call ourselves that because the long form of the tradition says that any two or more alcoholics gathered together for sobriety, we call themselves an AA group.

So we do. We're not very smart. And we know each other well enough to know that had we had any discussion whatsoever on a name, we'd have wasted at least three meetings on that. So I'm very pleased to be here this morning. I also need you to know that your speakers are fully aware of the awesome responsibility you have put in our hands because there's lives at stake in this room this morning, mine and yours. So I'm not here to entertain you. I think you will find some of it entertaining because I'm a damn fool about half the time. But also having said that need to tell you that we ought not take ourselves too seriously. This is only life or death. It's just no big deal.

You've heard some good speakers this weekend. We've had some fun. This area in the center that's been cleared. I was wondering what that was what was cleared. And Burns told me that's where he's going to hold the altar call about 10.30. I belong to Alcoholics Anonymous and I must tell you that Alcoholics Anonymous did not get me sober. But I belong to you. God got me sober and gave me back my life as a free clear gift December 26 of 1967.

And five and a half months later brought me to you. So you could teach me what to do with sobriety. I believe that sobriety is probably the most uncomfortable and impossible state of being for any alcoholic. That's why we drink. Can't stand being sober. So if you're new here, those of you who didn't stand up, I'm not going to tell you that I hope you get to stay sober. That would be wishing you great pain. I hope you get to stay sober with meaning like I have been able to.

I'm a recovered alcoholic. I have no problem with people who were in recovery. I was in recovery for a period of time myself. But the great promise of Alcoholics Anonymous is that you do not have to stay sick for the rest of your life. I gave you my sobriety date because I also wish to bring to your attention before I get to the important stuff that is possible to stay sober for the rest of your life. Relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. It will occur. There's not necessary. If you're an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again ever.

You don't ever have to feel the way you've been feeling ever again in your life. And we do not promise you a pain in free life. In fact, I will promise you more pain than you ever thought possible. Because once the medicine is gone, life shows up and there's days my feet hurt. And there are days my heart hurts. And there are days when nothing hurts and then I get worried. I used to think that life was about feeling good.

Well, it did. What I've come to conclude is that I no longer feel bad about not feeling good. And that's progress. I'm an alcoholic and one of the reasons I belong to you is that I did not know that when you found me. I didn't come looking for you. I didn't know I needed you. My alcoholism was so complete that nobody saw it. It

was a part of my life. Nobody saw it. When you found me, I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type two.

A federal man said I was a psychopath. And the doctor said I was a manic-depressive drug addict. And the truth was I was really tired. I'm one of the freaks that came out of Berkeley in the 60s throwing all these acid around, screaming out, where there's dope, there's hope, burned down, city hall. But you need to know that I am not a drug addict. I am an alcoholic and I had a lot of drug problems along the way, but I'm not a drug addict.

Some people are, some aren't. I think it's important that we take the time to help our new people find out. The spiritual life will work for anyone. This path will work for anyone, but it has to have a foundation of truth. And so where I come from and we were taught the 12 step is we'll help you find out if you're an alcoholic or not. I can't help you find out if you're a drug addict. I'm not one. I don't know what you're talking about.

But I can help you find out if you're an alcoholic or not. And if you are, we can go from there and all the rest of it will fall into place. And if you're not, God help me. Let me get you someplace where you can get you some help. And I'll stay your friend and you come to the potlucks with me, but don't let me kill you. God, every time Norm shows up I editorialize instead of talking. I have history in this room. For you new people, one of the great joys of my life in sobriety is that I have history with people.

I've known Clark 10 years, Norm 15 years. There's people in this room that I love dearly because we have history. I'm one of those who burn his bridges behind him in his sickness. You came into my life, I used you up and then I left. And I had no history. And I really need history. I was on the road one time out in Nebraska. Great job. I was raising seven kids. I had a woman that just adored me and life was good. And I was feeling the pitifuls driving down the highway 70 miles an hour in his fine car to work.

And got to thinking about the wheel shimmying a little bit and realized my boss hadn't checked it like he was supposed to. And pretty soon it was going to come off and I was going to go into the bar pit. I wouldn't die. I'd just be maimed and nobody would care. And it happened faster than I can tell it. So I pulled into the first rest stop and got my pad and paper out. You've given me a technique to use when I get to that.

I'm an action guy so you make me write this out. I did a little inventory as well. Did a little praying. Got to the next town and got my book out because part of my history is written and kept track of by the General Service Office in New York. They have a directory of people who are willing to be called at any time you want to go to. And I call this poor devil. We never met. On the other hand I can picture it. Some lunatic calls read this goofy inventory to him.

It's his thanks. Because when I'm through with it, I'm through with it. I got on down road and for the only time my entire A life I spent a night in a town that had no way. It was time for just being God. And I got out my pad that night because I'd been taught a thing called doing your gratitude by one of the old timers. And I wrote across the top of the pad, Dear God, thank you for it. I began to list the most important thing in my life with the people that I can count on.

It can count on me 24 hours a day. And I got one side of that legal pad covered and was halfway down here than the tears were coming. Because I was totally alone when I came to you and now I can't get past a page and a

half of writing your names. Without crying. Because you made my life count. Alcohol changed me and that's why I used it. I came to alcohol a lunatic. My people, obvious to me when I was 13 I was laying in bed crying because my people had come from some other planet left me and then I was waiting for them to come back.

I did not feel human. I listened to humans. And how they thought and how they felt and what they talked about and I didn't feel like that. But I didn't think like that. I'm weird. I was Mrs. Pritts the strange little boy. I've heard that term. Somehow I was a misfit. My best friend when I was young was the kid who had the same birthday I did. I mean that makes old brothers of you when you're five and six. And on my sixth birthday I went down to see him and they were having a birthday party and I hadn't been invited.

I just knew well that's okay. I don't belong there. And it's a feeling I had. It wasn't what happened. His mother just didn't like Mrs. Pritts the strange little boy. I'm not sure Mrs. Pritts had to make this along the way too. A lot of things were going on in my life when I was 15 or 16. Because I had brought all that stuff forward with me. I was a Golden Gloves boxer at one time. I got my ass kicked in the finals because I had it one in my head and I relaxed and the other kid had motivation and he didn't.

And I discovered I'm also a physical coward or I thought I was. My definition of a coward is somebody who doesn't like pain. That's a sane person. I was terrified of girls. I had once said a hormone saying there is nothing better on this planet and I don't know why yet but I can tell you it's true. And the rest of me would say I'll die. All I have to do is open my mouth and I'll die. I'll say something stupid. We got a guy as a rite of passage in Denver. You get somebody from Lauer Air Force Base to buy a bottle of whiskey and you take it out east of Denver and drink it and get drunk and have fun.

That was the plan. And we did that. Bounded bourbon and it changed me. I will tell you new people this is all about change. If you're the same person two years from now you are this morning you will probably drink again. It's all about change. And what happened to me that night is described in the book Alcoholics Anonymous by Carl Jung. Won't quote it directly but what happened to me was that ideas and emotions that used to govern the lives of these men are suddenly cast away.

And an entire new set of conceptions begins to dominate them. He's describing a spiritual experience. That's what alcohol did to me. It gave me what seems to be a spiritual experience. Couple drinks of that stuff and instead of the state of mind I was in which was ricocheting off of life and trying to say the right thing and do the right thing all the time so it wouldn't make any kind of mistake. I had plans. It was a guy in my class who hadn't been treating me very well and I was going to meet him at the drive-in later that evening and whip him.

And I could have done it. The hell with the pain. And it was a girl who hadn't been treating me at all. We were going to visit that evening and I could have done it. Sounds good doesn't it. I got to tell you the truth. If that's all the booze did I'd buy everybody in this room and drink. That's good stuff. To take a misfit and put them in the heart of life. There's nothing wrong with that. That's all it did. That isn't all it did to me.

It is in my very core every cell of my being that anything worth doing is worth overdoing. If one works take ten that's still part of my makeup. And I did. And what the guy was going to whip saw and the girl I was going to visit saw and all the bystanders I was going to impress saw instead of what I had. Was my partners carrying me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway. And that's how I drank. Never seemed to get around to

doing the things I wanted to do.

And always seemed to get around to doing things that I really didn't want to do and that characterizes it. I was in my first federal penitentiary when I was nineteen years old. And didn't know why. Until I got to you. I love you dearly. You told me precisely why that happened to me. It wasn't because I was a big time gangster. It's because I'm an alcoholic. Dr. Silkworth describes one aspect of my disease as an allergy to alcohol.

The symptom of which is a craving for more alcohol after I take one. And I began to find myself in that. Nineteen years old. I got a problem. When I drank I can't find my way home. And I'm in the Navy. And that's a felony. And I had a lot of captains' masks for getting back from 24-hour liberties in 25 and 26. But this particular time I was 23 days late. And my ship was on its way to Korea and that was a shooting offense.

The only thing that saved us is I ran with an alcoholic from how from Wisconsin was really sharp. He managed to get us on a Pan Am clipper. And we beat the ship to Japan by three weeks and forced all being shot. Did not stop us from going to the penitentiary. And I wondered forever why that happened because I loved the Navy. You know, I joined the Navy when I was 17 to become a hero and save America from the Communist menace single-handedly.

I wanted to be a hero so bad I can still hear it. I'd come home in my little blue suit and a little white hat. God knows how many colored ribbons. Probably the one that hangs on the blue. And they would say I could hear them. There he is. That's him. I know him. He lets me talk to him. And of course I would have the good grace to not even acknowledge that kind of stuff. I'm way too humble for that. He took me to dinner the other night.

And instead I was in a penitentiary two years later. Because when I drank I can't find my way home. I took a drink of alcohol in Long Beach, California, on a 24-hour liberty. And 22 days later I was in Pershing Square in Los Angeles, Moochin' Drinks, rolling drunks, whatever I had to do, I did it to continue drinking. On day 23 the madness was gone. It wasn't there anymore. I was in my right mind and I turned myself in and went back.

And lived for the next number of years wondering why did that happen to me? I must be insane. Which is also true, but you put your finger on it for me. I can identify. If I sponsor you I will encourage you to bring your own memories of that kind of thing to the process. There's no magic in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. It's a clear cut honest report of people who are lunatics telling you what it seems to be like when you think like a lunatic.

So that you can identify and say yes I am one of them too. Christmas week of 1967 to get on about the business at hand was a bitch. I was really really worn out. I tried from the very beginning. From the time I was 19 I got a bad conduct discharge, came back to Colorado and immediately began to pursue what's wrong with me. I got into Dianetics at the time. It seemed like a good idea. Because in three months after I got home I had drunk myself out of a really good job with Mountain Bell.

And we all knew something was wrong. Now think about that. 19 years old, obviously a deep trouble. So I turned my well in my life over to the care of a science fiction writer named L. Ron Hubbard. Had a great two years to do what I'm telling you. I learned stuff I still haven't been able to forget about my mind and how it works and it's all true. That's exactly how it works. So what? I learned about expressing anger.

They had me mock up my dad's face on a punching bag and punch it so I could get rid of the anger. And I felt strange. They all got rid of the anger and I enjoyed the hell out of it. I get involved in it. That won't work for me. I've always known my answer would be spiritual. But I've been a spiritual thief on the life. Taking it from out here and putting it in here so I could feel good. I thought being spiritual meant to feel good all the time.

No, no, no. I've been through psychiatry. I've had the privilege of sharing a peyote ceremony with a washer at an Easter ceremony and had a vision, a genuine vision. So a great bird flying high with no head and understood clearly that's me and my life. It kept me sober four months. I'm sorry. I got to tell the truth. If you're new, peyote is good for four months of sobriety. I'd had periods of sanity and I'd put on a suit and a tie and I'd go to work and I'm really good.

After my first son was born, I became an insurance salesman on a debit. That's where the premiums are so low you go run and collect them every month. Four or five, six bucks at a time. I sold \$800,000 with a new premium in seven months on a debit. Because nobody had told me it's not possible. And the next month I had to quit because I hadn't learned that the money that I was collecting wasn't mine until it went through their books.

So my last paycheck went to them and I left town for a better job in Kansas City. Or I went to work for an IBM training school and in three months I was sales manager. And in six months my family was gone. And I was drunk. And I ended up with the two little boys out of that for some reason. And we began that terrible journey to the bottom. The kids and I were on the road the last four and a half years of my sickness.

Never more than one month in any one place. I lived with the fact that my children grew up on the road. We lived in crash pads in Berkeley. All across the United States. In 1966 I was my second penitentiary. I want to share a little of this. It's painful but some of you I've talked to this weekend need to know this. Some things we get to live with. Some things we get free of. Some things we get to live with. And I don't know why but we do.

And I get to live with the fact that my self-centeredness when I'm focused on a project is such that I will jeopardize even my own children. I was hired to bring some marijuana out of Mexico on a very dangerous deal because everybody knew Pritz is crazy. You call him. They'd gotten it to war-es and the guy who was bringing it over got arrested on something else and it was laying in a closet in war-es and they needed it in the United States.

And nobody was crazy enough to go in and get it. Call Pritz. He'll do it. Because I would. I didn't have a conscience at that time. I needed to meet my own needs. And they were right. So I went in and got it. And I'll tell you how I got it. I get to live with this. This is the shabby stuff of the alcoholic. We look for a till of the hunt and find little boys that wet their pants. I put the stuff. It fit perfectly in an air mattress.

Put it inside, resealed it. That kind of takes care of the odor. Put dirty diapers on top of that. And then put the two little boys on top of that. And when I hit the border I yelled at them so they'd be screaming and crying. Because they won't stop you and mess with you then. That's pretty shitty. Left to my own devices. That's what I do. And I told you it was for the good of the kids. We ended up with some pretty good money out of that and all that.

No, no. Self-centeredness and it's extreme and that's how I will behave. And you know that set me free? It hurts a little bit but I'm free. Because knowing that's how I'll do it. I object to that so I turn my life over or

something else. I don't want to ever be left to my own again. Mercy. Anyway. This had brought us to Christmas week in 1967. The kids and I lived in a basement apartment between an old lady that raised cats.

And she had cats everywhere and her place was cleaner than mine. I weighed 133 pounds. I was on federal parole because we got caught for that job. The guy that hired me to do it turned us all in about three months later. And that was a fun day. He was on my inventory. As was the federal agent that arrested us because he almost shot my son on his screen. There were a lot of things went down. But we're on federal parole and aid to dependent children.

I couldn't work. At this particular time I was shooting speed like there was no need tomorrow. So I just so I could get up and function during the day. I didn't get high anymore. I just had to function. Which meant go steal something. Pull some kind of scam. Get enough food and booze to get back home. Feed the kids. Go to bed. Get up the next day. The same thing. Over and over. I didn't get sober because of the truth.

This process I'm telling you about brought me to the end of my lies. I come from a functional home. I really do. I apologize to those of you who don't but I do. My parents are still alive. They still love one another. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. I was writing music with Stan Kenton when he was 19 when I was in the penitentiary. He is probably the finest synthesizer musician in the world.

They just brought him back from Russia. They took him over there to Russia and the Scandinavian countries so he could show them what he does. Now he grew up right down the hall from me. It doesn't seem to be much of a tie between the environment and my alcoholism. My little sister was an IBM executive just recently retired. They had good money and great babies. And her babies are making great babies. Because you young guys are stone idiots, her babies can't find husbands to go with the babies.

But in my house what we do in my family when one of those babies shows up, the attitude isn't that nice. There's another little prince baby. Let's raise it. If you had asked me to make a list of the attributes of the family I wish that had been raised in, that's the one I was raised in. Did everything I've ever wanted and still do. And I didn't fit. Didn't have anything to do with anything except me. That doesn't mean we weren't problem free.

My dad at one time was the second in command of the Colorado Ku Klux Klan. He had some really funky attitudes at one time. He's changed. He's a very spiritual man. Do you know how tragic it would have been had I held on to the old image of him? I'd have missed who he really is. Had you not told me about change I wouldn't allow myself to see his change. He's a wonderful old man. And he is getting old. I have to live with the fact that my family gets old.

And Anna was 102 and the folks are in their late 80s and grandpa was 94. I'm afraid unless something comes long I'm stuck here for a while. Okay. And I'm just going to be able to enjoy it. Coming from a functional home I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. It's a real tree they brought in from the outside. Smelled good. Decorated with lights and tinsel. And we string popcorn on string and the house would smell of hot chocolate.

Hot chocolate and marshmallows and not them little bitty sissy things. Marshmallows. The kind you go get them off of their first. And cider with cinnamon and people. Christmas in our house where I grew up was filled with people. My folks are beloved in our town and people would come by and visit with them always. For

several weeks it would be a steady train of people coming and going. And that's part of what broke my heart.

In my house nobody came. Even my parole officer maybe go see him. He wouldn't come out to the house. And we didn't have a tree on 24th. We're on ADC and the check hadn't gotten there yet and I hadn't stolen anything yet. I couldn't get up. Couldn't get it going. So we took a walk. Part of my nature in that state is that I was restless, irritable and discontent. So we walked a lot. I think that's why my feet hurt today.

I'm paying the price. And in that walk we found a dollar in the snow and went to the Christmas tree place to see what we could get. And they sold us the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar. And I'm alcoholically bought the biggest tree on the lot. To this day I keep that pain fresh in my heart because I can still see it. We have all these dramatic bottoms. Mine was a Christmas tree in a 7 foot room with a 9 foot tree and a tilted at the top.

And I knew there's something wrong. It didn't occur to me to even cut it to fit the room. It's just there's something wrong. And we decorated it with garbage. That's what you do. Crumple up some tin foil and cut the bottom off on them little milk cartons. And each of the boys had one present that I'd gotten on credit from the public merchandise, Martin Denver. A pair of cowboy boots and a cowboy shirt. That very kind man.

Obviously could look at me and tell me what I was dying. And he gave them to me on credit. \$10.95 worth at that time. So each of the boys that had one present. And the kids had wrapped up everything that fit in blue paper towel and put it under the tree for me. And there's something wrong. I'm describing my first spiritual awakening and as you can tell they don't feel good. Christmas day we went to the folks. It never occurred to me.

Not to go home for Christmas with the kids. 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 lies and the last of my lies began to fall apart. I would have told you that day because I really believed it. Just leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And when he said that I could see what I was doing to everybody.

My folks, my kids, to everybody. I was hurting everybody I got in touch with. And that lie fell apart. Then dad tore another one up. He snuck us in the house anyway. Down into the basement. And I told you that day nobody loves us. Nobody cares about us. And he made a lie out of that. And I saw the lie. And I didn't have any lies left. And I went home with a lot of self-pity and then stepped past the self-pity into the truth.

And the truth that day was, I'm useless. There is no reason for me to be here. Everybody would be better off if I was gone. And there's no greater human pain than the moment that you're useless. That's it. You the surrender or die. And I had nothing left to surrender to. I tried Hubbard. I tried Church. I tried Peyote. I tried it all. There's nothing to surrender to. So I took the ultimate surrender. And I took it two months.

Supplied as oxen. And then we shot it up Marham. And drank everything in the house and laid down and died. And I have to tell you, I think I died. I've not had a drink or a pill or a fix or a thought of one from that moment on. I did not feel good when I woke up in the morning. God did I not feel good. The police were at the door. And I didn't care. I was now a failure at living and a failure at dying. Lings you teachable.

I couldn't put words on it then, but I can tell you the state I was in. I had become willing to go anywhere anybody said and do anything anybody said. If it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. That's all I brought to you. A willingness to do anything so I don't ever have to return to that state of being. No identification with

alcohol or drugs or anything else. I just couldn't stand being me anymore. They had nine charges this time.

First one called for three years to life. And the day he told me he'd bring the others one at a time, but I was through and I didn't care. And I'm telling you this because I want you to understand my first experience was the power of God. I can believe in God until I rot and it means nothing. I had to experience the power of God at work in order to even get close to being able to turn my life over to that. We went to trial five and a half months later after a detox from the Denver County Jail and just went through all that stuff.

It's just drama. And they took me in a room with my lawyer and the state attorney said, we've been talking with the federal people and we've all concluded you're pretty sick. So what else? I know that. We made an agreement with them. See, I still owe them five years for parole violation. They said, if you'll plead guilty to a reduced charge so we don't have to have a messy trial, then it would have been. He said, we'll give you a one and a half to three-year sentence, suspend it and give you back to the federal people.

And they've agreed to take you to Fort Worth, Texas to that hospital down here and fix what's wrong with you. I didn't even question them a sign. I'm not an idiot. The two forces that are always with me were fully awake. I really was wanting to go anywhere anybody said, but I also knew if you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'll be on the street in six months. My best game is, you tell me what you want and I'll show it to you.

They would tell me what was wrong with me, how long did it take to fix that and then give me all the symptoms of what it looked like to get better and I'd have been on the street in six months. I'd have gone back to Denver, cured of whatever the hell they thought was wrong. On some hot day I had a glass of coolers mirror and I'd be locked away somewhere in a raving maniac today. Big Buck offers us several options, sobriety, death and insanity.

I'm sorry, I've used up all of my options. Death didn't work. I enjoyed insanity. There's only one thing left for me, sobriety. I was supposed to go to that hospital in Fort Worth, Texas and if you know anything about power, you know when the state says you go from Denver to Fort Worth, Texas and the feds say you go Denver to Fort Worth, Texas, you go to Fort Worth, Texas. Five days later I was in the Colorado State Penitentiary.

The federal man changed his mind at the last minute and I believe that was because of the grace of God. See, I was sent to you. I'm an alcoholic. You did not look nice to me. My messengers, my angels usually are reprobates. You had prison clothes on, you all had numbers on. You were obviously bad guys, gangsters. Now inmates in their natural habitat in their own clothes are a little intimidating. Smiling inmates are downright frightening.

They called us down that day and they said you people will come down and you will listen. And I did the first and only thing you ever need to do here. I went down and listened. And they smiled. Their smile said we know something you don't know. And if you don't get it right now, you may not live through this. The guy named Doc got up and said my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic. And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life and my life has become unmanageable.

And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. I had encountered sponsorship. Thank God for that kind of sponsorship. They did not give a damn whether I liked it or not. They told me the cold hard truth. Now truth without love is cruelty. And confrontation without a real answer is outright brutality so we don't participate in that.

But they loved me and they had a real answer so they just said kind loving things like your very best thinking got you to the penitentiary. You're not doing too good are you? But they followed it up with a greater truth. If you're new here please hear this. We can show you a new way of thinking. We can show you how to live a way of life that will make sense to you. And that was a new idea for me. I've been living my life trying to have it make sense to you and my life never made sense to anybody.

Today my life makes imminent sense to me. It still doesn't make sense to everybody. But don't give a damn. You put bread on my paper table. I'm not worried about that. I will not deliberately try to hurt you. But learn something a long time ago. We talk about selfishness here. I do not believe that it's selfish for me to live my life in such a way that it makes sense to me. What's selfish is for me to expect you to live your life in such a way that it makes sense to me or makes me feel dead.

That's what's selfish. They taught me about my disease. I came into Alcoholics Anonymous where we weren't allowed to go to Alcoholics Anonymous for five weeks. You had to qualify for it. We had a main meeting on Friday night where real people from the outside came in. We had two hours of speakers and a nice meeting. We couldn't go. Until we completed their 12-step study school, which was every weekend on Saturday and Sunday afternoon, we went to school for five weeks.

Meaning we were carried through the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the steps the way they are put in the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the experience of our teachers who had done that. We got to that first meeting in the 12-step study school and the first thing I heard was you knew guys for the next five weeks. They had nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. True. And they shared with us and they read that book to us out loud.

One of them had the opinion that the way it was said there was better in any way he could say it so I changed it. If I sponsor you today, you come to my house and we sit down and I read the book to you out loud. I will share my experience with it, but we're going to do it just what they said there. Because I can't say it any better than that. We have pamphlets on sponsorship. The big book has one sentence that tells me about sponsorship to show others precisely how we're recovered.

That's all the rest of that. I will share with you how I use the big book and the experiences of it. I will share my old friends with you. I have a tape library because part of my recovery is based on people like old Wesley Parrish and Bob White and Chuck Chamberlain and some of the old-timers who are dead and gone now. I want you to know them. They're part of who I am. So you'll hear my tapes. I don't care whether you like it or not. I don't ask you.

I don't loan them to you either. You never give them back. You and I will drive to a meeting somewhere that's a half hour each way and will listen to a tape each way. You don't even know it, but you've been had. If you're really good, I'll double an offer. You're a hell of a James good. But you don't get mine. Not anymore. I want

you to come to my house for a very specific reason. If you're new, I want you to see how recovered alcoholic lives.

I want you to meet my family and my children and my dog, who by the way is gone. We have finally hit the peak of the good life. My wife and I are childless and dogless. The only beasts that have been in my house for six months are two bees and I killed both of them. Life is good. I have my own bathroom and my own closet again. And I want you to learn as I have from my children. My kids teach me so much. My wife is sane and I've learned everything I know about women from her.

I was an idiot growing up. I tried to learn about women from men. Men don't know anything about women. Finally got smart 43 years later and asked a woman to teach me about women. I liked them so much a narrator. But my daughter, we were very busy doing this important big book stuff because you don't get to go to my private place until we've been through a couple steps. I want you bringing your crap down to my place. And I want the family to see you too.

We were busy and my daughter came downstairs. She was about 14. She said, excuse me. So I interrupt us in this life-changing thing here. Excuse me. I said, you want to kill me? She says, I live here too, you know, and you haven't introduced me to this person. What a lesson. What a lesson. I want you to see that. I want you to see a home where the children are not afraid of the father. We speak the truth in my house. The unity of our house is more important than any individual in it.

And the buck stops with me because I'm bigger than anybody, but I don't get to make the decisions. They say, go do this, and I say, as you wish. I've been married to the same woman for 19 years, and we've yet to have a fight. There's no need to. You've taught me some things. If I raise my voice to make my point, I've already made my point. I'm an idiot. God never yells at me. Why should I yell at you? I agree with her too. She's saying. So I agree with her most of the time.

She thinks I'm the cutest thing she's ever seen. I agree. That's what I was shown. We touch in my house. We're a very affectionate family. I learned that in a penitentiary. Right? I felt her name Phil Gateris. Phil was doing a pretty long time because Phil was a very violent oriental chap. Came from Guam. Big muscles. Had one of those faces that if you were going to make a Chinese pirate movie, he'd be the captain. When he smiled, he was terrifying.

When Phil drank, he got a little violent. He was doing this time because he'd thrown some people out of a three-story window on his last drunk. But the Phil Gateris I knew was the kindest, gentlest, most loving human being I have yet met. Phil had the full power of God alive in him. And Phil knew something about us. We're all a bunch of puppies. And need to be touched on a regular basis so we don't get to think of him alone.

And he taught me to touch in a penitentiary. He knew the healing power of the human touch. Nobody ever questioned Phil's touching. Even the bad guys knew there's something different about this fellow. So I learned to touch in a penitentiary. Makes it easy out here. In fact, you want to be careful. Don't get too close to me. It's a reflex. We are not smart here, you know. You heard a well-trained physician last night.

Would you buy a car from me? I wouldn't. All kinds of really neat stuff here are 12-step work and are going

to meetings and are reading the book to each other and all that. But what we really do here is heal. We all suffer from a terminal illness. And the only job God's given us is to heal and then show others how they can be healed. And part of that, since I want to be that, since I've awakened to that, I've been watching healers.

To see what it is they do and see if I'm in tune with that. Her life is a healer. She's a head nurse in an infant research unit at Children's Hospital. She's presented with many of the same problems you and I are. Part of the healing process that's absolutely necessary is eventually the patient must participate in their own healing. They have to acknowledge it and then participate in the process. Well, she has these little baby babies that don't speak English.

So she can't tell them what's wrong with them. Sounds like the guys I get to. They can't read. They don't understand English. The only intelligible words most of them can say is, yeah, but they've only. But I watch my wife. She'll pick a baby up and start patting on it. She talks to it anyway knowing it doesn't understand the words. She says, you can be right. You're in the right place. Easy on it. Easy. She pats on them and talks to them.

And I think, why not? What do we do? Well, that sounds familiar. We bring them in. We start patting on them and saying, you're in the right place. You can be all right. I know it feels bad. I know you don't understand the word we're saying, but be still. Let us say it anyway. Let us wash you with the love that comes through our words. Let us touch you. I worried about that one time because I'm a hugger and it was a lady.

They used to come to our meetings and every time I hugged her, she just froze up. When I did some praying about this, should I be doing this? And I couldn't stop. I don't know why I was praying. I can't stop. I didn't have a choice. And a day came when she walked all the way across the big room in a convention to get her hug from me. And the next week she died. If they freeze up, just keep on anyway. If they hit you, keep on anyway.

If you're hugging them hard enough, there's nothing to hit with. The great heater used to walk along the roads and come upon somebody who was blind and crippled and sitting by the side of the road covered with sores. And no one would be around them. And he'd reach out and he'd touch them and say, hey. Anybody home? We do that a lot. The instant you touch someone, whether they like it or not, they cannot be alone. It breaks the lie.

Then he would say, you know, you don't have to do this anymore. See, he knew something and we know the same thing if we'll wake up to it. This person who's crippled and blind and covered with sores and can't move thinks that's why they're alone. If they've got sores and are crippled and they're blind, he knew and we knew that the reason they have the sores and are blind and are crippled is because they think they're alone.

So we break it. You're not alone anymore. You don't have to do that anymore. And if we do it the way we've been trained, we then ask them, do you want to get up? I think probably the rudest thing I could do would be to force somebody into sobriety. That's really cruel and stupid. They're not going to do anything with it anyway. God didn't force me and I'm sure he could have. Came to me and asked me, would you like to stop this deal?

If you would, I know some magic. The minute you say yes, he would say to them, oh, okay, get up. And the minute some drunk says to me, how do I stay sober? Do you really want to stay sober? Yeah, don't drink alcohol. Oh, magic. Then I will say, well, how do I not do that? And that's when sponsorship begins, while I show you precisely how I don't do that. Anyway, I don't know why I got off onto that one. I went through this whole

process in five and a half weeks and awakened spiritually.

Didn't get smarter, didn't get brighter, but I awakened spiritually. In the sixth week they gave me a big book in the new group and the sponsor and I took the new group through. I had had that experience. Why not? This whole business is not about me doing the work. I sponsor a lot of people who think working the steps is the work. It's not. It prepares you for the work. The real work of Alcoholics Anonymous and his members is to carry this life-changing message to the next person.

My sobriety is not for me. It's for you. My life is none of my business. The third step I gave it to God. Do with me as you will. Heavy way. I had a deep reservation that my sponsor had cleaned up for me at that third step. We destroyed all my concepts of God and I still had a reservation. I was truly afraid that if I gave my life entirely over the care of God, he'd put me on the corner of Colfax and Broadway, handing out watchtower magazines and asking strangers, have you been saved, brother?

And I was afraid of that because I'd seen the guy in the brown hat and brown suit that did that and he looked like a damn fool to me and I didn't want to be a damn fool. And I knew that's what he'd do with me. And I told my sponsor that and he said these magic sponsor words if you knew, listen. Oh, let's talk about that. That does not mean let us talk about anything. He'd shut up for a minute. And he went for it because he had an answer.

He didn't have to put his foot with me and he said, Dom, do you suppose that that guy that's handing out watchtowers down in this afternoon 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 if they've been saved is wearing clothes he picked out to do it in? And I said, probably. He said, you're not. Do you suppose when he's all through making a fool of himself down there today that he gets to go home?

And he had me because I didn't. We are promised a new mind here. And my sponsor escorted me into my new mind and laid its foundation for me. It's very simple. Anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will ever have in mind for me, period. And I've been living that way for 28 years now. And I very imperfectly don't mistake that, but I do live that way. That's why I'm here this morning.

I promise you, I would rather be home with my wife. 19 years and I'm more desperately in crazy in love with her than I ever was before. And she's painting the house. And I'm here. And I like to watch her climb ladders. When I run my life, the very best I can do is get me an eight by ten toilet full of cockroaches and my kids in a foster home and my parents unable to talk to me. Anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than that.

Since I took that attitude, see I love to travel. I box myself in. Since I took that new attitude and began to live that way, I've been all over the world. Literally. You've been kind enough to send me. To Guatemala, to Puerto Rico, to Latvia, not Latvia, Finland, Russia, Japan, Canada, all over the United States. There are people that spend \$10,000 to get to come to Panama City, Florida. You wouldn't even have been on my list if I'd have made it up.

Not because it's a bad place to come, but all the good stuff in my life is stuff I never thought of. Left to moan devices I'll think of something else. Whatever he has in mind for me is better than what I have in mind for me. I've gotten to witness people who are at the verge of death become vital living human beings again. What a joy

that is. First I saw it happen to me. And now I get to see it happen to others. Desperate people.

God sends me psychopaths. I love them. I know who they are. There's never a question that I can do anything for this one. I love sponsoring people because it has taught me effective prayer. You come to me and you give yourself over to me. You turn your life over to me. I've just spent an hour telling you I'm an idiot. And then you give your life over to me. And so I have to go deep within and say, oh God, see what you got us into now.

What do I say to this one? And it comes. And sometimes it says you don't say anything. You just be quiet and listen. Sometimes it gives me words to say things to do. And I get to watch them come from death and live again. What a neat thing. What a neat thing. Got a few minutes left and with that I would like to tell you the most important activity outside of directly working with drunks in my life. And that's cleaning up my past and keeping it clean.

I'm not one of those whose experience says you get free at the ninth step. I got free at the eighth step. They wouldn't let me out to make amends when I was ready. I had a bad attitude they did. When I was filled with evangelistic fury I was ready. They wouldn't let me out. My sponsor said, look, here's what I want you to do. You go back to yourself tonight. We know what you did to all these people. We have it in the inventory.

But you're so insensitive you have no idea what it did to them. So I want you to go back and take each one separately and close your eyes and picture them and see if you can feel within yourself a line is to say to each one, I've been wrong and I've harmed you. Would you please tell me what I have to do to get these books to balance? As I went over that list that night and became aware, woke up to the fact that I will look any human being on the planet right in the eye and if I have caused you any harm at all, you tell me what I have to do and we'll get it square.

I was literally lifted from my seat and set free. I've been free ever since. That made it possible for me to make the really tough immense. Because what you do at that point is nothing. You shut up and listen. Well, I'll tell you. How do you make immense to the mother that you put in a position on Christmas Day to say to you and your children, you can't come to my house anymore? There's no way I could ever think of anything I could do to make that up.

But she reluctantly let me come by several months after I was released and I found a kind way to say it. I don't see that quite that abruptly. I shut up and listen. She told me. She said, honey, all I've ever wondered for you is that you be happy. So for the last 26 years I have been going by my mother's house on a regular basis, happy. And that's all it took. It worked. We get along fine now. I had the privilege about six months ago of detoxing my mother off of morphine.

My brother and I. She'd gotten shingles and they gave her morphine for the pain and that upset her stomach. So they gave her stomach medicine and the combination sent her away. We'd be visiting with her and so would several other people that we couldn't see. And my brother who spent 22 years before he could really talk to me, he and I teamed up and helped get her off of that stuff. Working in a team to make sure she wouldn't get her in a way.

What a wondrous thing to be able to call me in because they figured I might know something about that. And

I do. You pat him and pat him. You can't be all right because they're not know what you can do. My dad's in a foster home now. They're not a foster. Well, it's a foster home. There's somebody else there. He's 86 and he's getting old and the rest of the family seems to think he has Alzheimer's. He doesn't. He's just tired.

He took a piece of his lower tract out and so they took all the food he likes away from him. I sneak it in and they take it away and I sneak it in. And what the hell is going to happen? Cheeto's going to kill him. He's 86 years old from crap. They're worried about. But they tell me he does funny things. Like putting mayonnaise in lemonade. I've never seen any of that kind of stuff. What the family says he does. At the conference we had where the decision was made that really it was too much for mom and my folks would be outraged if we gave up our lives just to babysit them.

And it's a good home. The decision was made. He asked the doctor. He said, doctor, can I have some chili? And he said, Mr. Pritts, you can have anything you want. See, she has told me he'll be gone within a year. She knows there's no reason to hold back. So he and I know he's leaving. And by God we're going to have fun all the way to the end. That's all. So we took him out for chili. The whole family were sitting at Denny's.

He's having chili and crackers and you know, old man, really old man eat. So I'd finished long before he was half through the chili. And I'm just kind of watching him. We're visiting and I saw him pick up on those great jelly deals. And I said, oh my God. He's getting ready to put the chili into the jelly into the chili. And I didn't want to embarrass him. So I thought it'd finesse him. And I took him up and put it over in front of him and said, pop, I think it probably tastes better on this.

So I took a scoop of chili and put it on enough. Then he looked me right in the eye with that old gotcha. There's nothing wrong with him. He's the one who had to carry the message. She's mother says I can't let you in here anymore. Must have broken his heart. But because of alcoholic's anonymous and the spirit, we've healed all of that. When my dad leaves, I will not have to stand at his grave and say, pop, I wish it had said this to you.

It said, I trapped him in his office three years ago. Because he's not a very demonstrative man. I said, I got to tell you something, pop. I have three heroes left on this planet, year one of them. And we hugged. And he froze up a little bit. Went along after that. I hugged my mom and I was going. He said, you suppose I could have one of those. That's what this is about. That's what this is about. Let me tell you about my little brother and then we'll all go home.

Because what we've done here this weekend is really fun and really important. But if we don't take this home shame on us, our real work just begins after here. I got to go back because I've got a lunatic waiting to do a fist step. And if I don't carry this back to him, he'll go find somebody to tell it to. It'll scare her. Because he's a scary one. I had to wait for my little brother to make amends. I was able to address the fact that I'd screwed it up.

But I was his hero and I betrayed that. I was his big brother and I betrayed that. My little brother is Mr. Straight Arrow. Absolute Straight Arrow. I used to smoke dope and sell it to his man. But not to him. I betrayed the family. Everything he thought was decent. I betrayed. I have no reason to ever expect that he would ever think of talking me to again. So I don't. I just got my life in order and periodically we'd cross trails and it was clear he just didn't want to be around me.

Twenty-two years he finally invited my wife, an eye over for dinner. After dinner he said, I'm not sure you and I'll ever be friends now. But tonight was pleasant. We can do this again. And it began. Well I had occasion to be in North Carolina for two years and I'd go home on a regular basis. Because if you're new here that's the deal. Regular. Whatever you're doing make it regular. And I was visiting with the folks and my brother walked in and I was sitting there with my leg up like that.

And he reached across and kicked me on the bottom of his shoe and he said, you know, I'm really glad to see you. And he really was. And he said, look, next time you're in town let's you and I go up to the cabin. He has a cabin up in the mountains and we'll just do a little fishing. Well I made a trip. And we went up and we scared a few trout. Didn't catch much. That didn't work there. Back to the cabin and started to visit and play cribbage.

And I have to tell you, I am scrupulously honest in all of my affairs except games. Don't play games with me. My brother had forgotten that cribbage is an institution game. And I reminded him it had been many many years since I played. And he would probably have to teach me how to count again and how to deal with the God. I got into play ball hands, you know. You can't lose when you cleaned his plow. It was terrible.

I was ashamed of myself. But in the midst of that discussion, my brother gave me the gift of all gifts. He gave me who he believes he is. He don't just do that to anybody. He gave me him. He said, Don, you know, I want you to know something. I can hear a big brother in the background. I want you to know something, Don. I'm 58 years old now. And I believe I've made a decent contribution to life. That's what this is about.

I'll never have to stand to his grave and wish we had done something. No, he, mine. He gave me himself. The greatest gift he gave me, though, is I have spent years trying to tell you all how I feel about you. I've had all kinds of stories. The Anvil and the Michelangelo. And I've just dug deep and couldn't quite find it and I've got it. See, this morning I'm just a little over 62 years old. And I believe that because of you, I have made a decent contribution.

Thank you.