

Columbus Spring Roundup

1997 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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One thing he didn't learn about introducing is that I get the last word. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. Excuse me, I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. My home group is an AA group. Meats in Denver at six o'clock every Friday morning. We call ourselves that because the third tradition says any two or more alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group. So we do. We are somewhat fundamentalists.

Students are too sick to get to think. In fact, we tore that card up and had a bonfire with it. We want to say think, think, think. We don't allow that. I'm glad to be back here in Columbus. I have history with some people here, my friend Pat and Larry and some of the others. And it was so nice to see Sharon and we go back. You know, one of the products of sobriety is history. I used to burn people up and throw them away. And now I have history. That's a real benefit.

I was a little nervous about being in Columbus. The last few times I was here, the first time was at the great riot at the 714 club. And the last time was in this room where somebody gave you Douglas a little bear that when you pushed on his tummy said, I love you. And I thought, I thought he was going to have a heart attack. I don't know what you're going to do to me this time. I just talked with my wife and she sent you her love. I'm going to take this off. You don't mind. I'm going to talk a little about that.

Just a little. My wife is not an alcoholic. She doesn't need all this stuff you and I need. And she would rather have me home and it's a great sacrifice to her because I am her love. That's what she sent you. And our families make big sacrifices for us so that we get to stay sober and carry on God's work and how seldom do we thank him for that. Just need to mention that. Because she loves you more than I do. I have to come.

Okay. She doesn't. She thinks you're weird. She thinks I'm weird. I only made her one promise. I promised her life with me would never be dull. And I have kept that promise. She reminds me of that frequently. Because this is not dull. Sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous is not dull. It's filled with passion and fun and madness. If sobriety were just sobriety, it's probably the most intolerable condition for any alcoholic that there is. It's just sobriety.

It's one of the reasons we drink. We can't stand being sober. But sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. My goodness. I love being with you. I don't know if you can tell that or not. You are my family. I belong to a good family. But it's not the same as here. Just not the same. I walk into this room and there are people I've never seen before and I know them and they know me and we recognize that. I'm willing to do a lot of things for my little brother. But I'll do anything for you. See you own me. Alcoholics Anonymous did not get me sober. I've got to tell you the truth.

God got me sober. December 26, 1967. And then five months later, while I was already physically sober, I was brought to you. And you taught me how to live sober. And that's the challenge of the alcoholism, isn't it? Having to live sober. Because we are passionate people. I love passion. It used to be called high drama. But since I've been sober a while now, I can call it passion. It sounds better. We deal with life and death here.

People walk into our doors and they are literally dying. We deal with life and death here. But we got to be careful not to get too serious about it because it's only life or death. I did not know I was alcoholic when you found me. And I didn't come to you. I was brought to you. By the power of God and because there is grace. My alcoholism was hidden behind a number of things. When I got to you, I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type two.

I don't know what it is, but I promise you it's not good. Federal parole officer said that I was a psychopath. And the psychiatrist said I was a manic depressive drug addict. And I could have given you all of those symptoms and convinced you. In fact, that's what I was doing was giving everybody symptoms. I drank alcoholically from my very first drink. Which means as I understand alcoholism from the time I took my first drink, I have never had any control whatsoever over the amount of alcohol I would drink, period.

I was my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old. Not because I'm a bad big-time gangster. I'm not. I've been in three penitentiaries and big-time gangsters don't even get to one. I went to the penitentiary because when I drink alcohol, I get lost and can't find my way home. That was my car. When you're in the Navy, that's a felony. I was in the Navy. Denver had gotten too small for me by the time I was 17.

So I joined the Navy to become a hero and save America from the communist menace. I've always been noble in my heart. In fact, as Denver was too small for me, I'd already used it up. We moved fast. And I so desperately wanted to be a hero because I was nobody. Every time I left it down, there wasn't anybody home. I'd begun to put on all the different people that I was meeting and reading about. Because when I looked for me, there was nobody home.

And I can picture it. Hero. I would come back after a couple years in Korea with my little blue suit, my white hat, and a chest full of colored ribbons. And I would walk, well, not walk. If there's a saunter down east Colfax, and I'd hear them. That's him, you know. I know him. He lets me talk to him. He's my friend. And the girls would say, you're this out of bed. Takes your first 17-year-old kid. And two years later, I was in the federal penitentiary.

Because I took a drink of alcohol in Long Beach, California one day out of 24-hour liberty. And 23 days later, when I got back to my ship, it was gone. And it was headed for Korea, which was a war zone. And I was in bad, bad trouble. Not what I had in mind for my life. I hit absolute rock bottom at 19. Because for me, bottom is simply defined. Any time I wake up some morning and realize that whatever I have in mind for my life is not going to happen.

That's bottom. And at 19, I could pick myself up and start over. And I did. And at 21, I picked myself up and started over. And at 23 and at 26. Finally, Christmas Day of 1967, I was too tired to get up. I did not get sober because of truth. I got sober because I ran out of lies. That's all. They just weren't any left. Let me tell you about Christmas Week in 1967 because then we can get about the business here. I was on federal parole for a little mistake I'd made in 1966.

I weighed 133 pounds because in addition to lots of alcohol, I was now injecting amphetamines. I'm not a drug addict, by the way. We can talk about that later. I'm an alcoholic who had some drug problems. I loved speed. Absolutely loved it. But I always was able to decide when and where and how much I made the wrong decision. But I could start or stop. I was raising two little boys and had been for four and a half years.

Their mother had abandoned the ship and the kids and I tried so desperately to be a good father. I really did. I desperately wanted to be a good father. But I was restless, irritable and discontent and crazy and drinking. And so about every month we'd moved somewhere and I finally gave up trying to be Superman and decided to try to be super freak instead and I almost made it. I am one of the freaks that came out of Berkeley in the 60s throwing houses acid around screaming there's dope there's hope burned down city hall.

My parole officer told me I have a lifetime of clean up to do over that deal. But I was getting tired. The boys and I would have told you that we were okay. The family was intact. The kids and I were together. We were eating regularly. We were clothed and clean. And I believe that. We lived in a hobble down in the basement of an old lady that raised cats. Her place was cleaner than mine and this is the week I saw that.

Things began to disintegrate. I come from a functional home. I really do. I apologize for that but I do. It does not mean that we didn't have problems in my home. The human condition just breeds problems in her personal relationships. God I love that. It doesn't mean anything but it sounds good. I always met them. My little brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. Last Thursday he got on an airplane and went to Moscow because they want him to teach for a month at the University of Moscow and then he will go to Sweden where he'll spend three weeks teaching with them.

And then over to Helsinki where he'll spend a couple weeks teaching with them. His writing music was Stan Kenton when he was 19. He grew up right down the hall from me next room over. My little sister is retired from IBM. She became a top executive with IBM. She made good money and great babies. Her babies have been busy making babies because most of you young guys are idiots. We can't find husbands to go with them. But in my home, when one of those babies comes by the whole attitude is, isn't that nice?

There's another little prince baby. Let's raise it. That's where I come from. And then it was me. If you ask me to make a list of the qualities in the family that I wish I'd have grown up in, that's the one I grew up in. And I didn't fit. I brought that to alcoholism. I brought that to alcohol. I had alcoholism. And next day I didn't fit in the freak world either. But coming from a functional home, I know what Christmas is supposed to look like.

Because it looked like it where I grew up. We brought a real tree in from the outside. It smelled good. Colorado Spruce is just wonderful. We decorated with lights and tents and we'd sew popcorn. I don't know whether you'd do that anymore or not. Long strings of popcorn. And a house would smell so good. There'd be cider with cinnamon sticks in it. And hot chocolate with marshmallows. I'm not talking about these sissy marshmallows.

The kind that you got to go and get off of there first. But what I remember most is that people would come by and visit with my folks. My folks are beloved in the town I come from. And all week people would come by and visit. Well Christmas week in 1967 in my home there were no visitors. Even my parole officer wouldn't come by. I had to go see him. And it was an empty house and it was a lonely house. And how to said we were a family and we were intact.

The truth is there were two little boys in the madmen. We were not a family. And I began to see that. We didn't have a Christmas tree. On the 24th we took a walk because I was restless. And we found a dollar in the snow. I went to the Christmas tree lot and it sure as hell. Found out that on the 24th per dollar they sold as the

biggest tree on the lot. And that's of course the one I got. I'm alcoholic. And God has left a piece of pain for me.

And that's the vision of that nine foot tree in the seven foot room. Not enough sense to cut it off. Decorated with garbage. Cut the bottom off a little half-pump milk carton. It looks like a bell. Crinkle up some newspaper and some aluminum foil. And it had two little presents under it. The Denver merchandise. Martin Denver gave me a pair of cowboy boots and a shirt. On credit. I didn't have any money. Well for a check had it gotten there yet.

So the boys that each have a present and my little boys wrapped up everything in the house that would fit in blue paper towel. Put it on the tree for me and some more of me bro. And then we got down to my folks house Christmas day. Because that's what you do. My dad met us at the door. Said don't I'm sorry I can't let you in here anymore. Your mother says she can't stand watching you die. And one of my lives fell apart.

I believe that morning. Leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And dad made a lie out of that. I could see somehow what I'd done to everybody I'd ever met. Particularly the kids in the family. And then he broke my last lie cause he snuck us into the basement anyhow. And I told you that day nobody cares about us. Nobody loves us. And he did. So I got sent home that day with no lies left. Just a heart full of self pity.

And I went past the self pity into the truth and the truth that day. And it was the truth is that I was useless. And there was no reason for me to be on this planet. And everybody I knew would be better off including my kids if I weren't here. And that was the truth. And I think that's the bottom of all human pain. When you finally know you're absolutely useless. You must either surrender or die. The greatest promise we have here.

The thing. Not the cars. Not the houses. Not the stuff. Isn't I get to be useful. And as long as I'm useful I'm going to stay on this planet. I have a reason to be here. And if you're new here you are useful. You may not understand that but you are by God useful. I need you. You are useful to me. I have been touched by the hand of God and I have to tell somebody about that. And you're it. Because the folks who have been around me long enough have already heard it.

They're out doing the same thing. I became useless. And I had nothing left to surrender to. I've been surrendering to stuff for a long time. I surrendered to Dianetics when I was 19. If I have any thought ever about my lack of sanity all I have to remember is back when I was so sick. But I've been to prison and got kicked out of the Navy. I turned my wound life over the care of a science fiction writer. If you're ready to stuff it's good.

I turned my wound life over to the peyote people one time. Good stuff. I had a genuine vision and an Easter meeting one time. Saw a great bird flying high with no head and understood clearly that's me and my life. Flying high going nowhere. It kept me sober four months. So if you're new here and you're considering visions I have to tell you the truth. From my own experience they're good for four months of sobriety. I've turned my wound my life over to books and to people and to money and to sex and to power and to jobs.

And every one of them had power because I'm a power seeker. We are all power seekers here lack of power that's our dilemma. But none of them had any sustained power because I get distracted and bored real easy. I'm one of those people that will work 24 hours a day to accomplish a goal and once I've accomplished it I don't want it anymore. In fact right near the end the last week before I got it I was bored at that point so we never even

finished it.

So I just surrendered the only way I knew how I took a massive overdose in the garbage I was using. Pushed it up my arm drank everything in the house and laid down and died. And I believe I really died. I've not had a drink or a pill or a fix or a thought of one from that time to this and that's been a little over 29 years. When I woke up the next morning I was a new person. So I have to talk about the transforming experience.

That's my experience. I was changed. I also have to tell you if you're new and if you're paying close attention that could not have felt very good. Spiritual awakenings don't feel good. We're all happy and joyous afterwards. But when they happen they don't feel good. And one of the key things of any spiritual awakening I've had matches with Billhead. I awaken spiritually suddenly and there's a great panic hits me because it feels like I've just lost my mind.

Well I have. That's the joy of it. I just lost the old mind. And now I got a new one and I don't know how to use it yet. And that's where you come in. You teach me how to use it. I woke up the next morning in the place where at the door. I had set myself up with a little thing that would get me at the best 60 days in the Denver County Jail because that's rest camp. And I needed to rest. I was tired. And I knew the kids would be alright. They'd go to my folks and I'd go do 60 days.

That isn't why they were there. They had nine charges and I first been called for three years to life in the penitentiary. I owed the feds five years at this point because of that arrest. And the day I told me he'd bring the other eight one at a time if I beat that one. But I was through and I really didn't care. I was in a wonderful spot. I was a complete failure at living and I was a complete failure at dying. That makes you teachable.

I am trapped in a body that won't quit. And it's carrying a mind that won't work. So I was willing to go anywhere anyone said and do anything. Anyone said, if a man I didn't have to be me anymore. I have no agenda. Came here without an agenda and today I have no agenda. I pick them up from time to time. They're like thorns on my side and I get rid of them very quickly. I have no idea what I want to be when I grow up.

I'm not sure I do want to grow up. I've met three adults in my life and I wasn't impressed by any of them. They're serious people. I believe that the power of God went to work in my life before I ever heard the name. I laid in the Denver County jail in detox. I don't want to ever forget that ever. I do not believe for one second that remembering my last drunk and my last detox will keep me sober. I've been through that and worse before. It didn't work.

But the clear cut memory of that detox has made me a pretty good sponsor. I laid in jail for the first six weeks pounding on my legs and on my arms and on my head and with cramps and just, oh it was awful. Six weeks of it. For six years every now and then I'd have a cramp I'd have to beat on. So if you come to me five weeks over saying I'm going to die, I can look you right in the eye and I said no, not yet. If I'm on experience you have at least one week to go.

God's been kind to me. Nobody's coming at seven because I'd have to say well. I have a memory of walking the tears in the jail and the schizophrenic split going on. You know what you're doing? Jail sunny knows. You walk the tears. Nobody's got \$100 for bondsmen so they can get out. Talking into millions and we're in for a

chicken shit deal. What we're going to do when we get out of here is always the same. We're going to get a keg of beer and an ounce of grass and we're going to go up in the mountains and get loaded. We've earned it.

I can remember my mouth saying that and my heart not wanting that. Something had changed. And I think I said a prayer. I wouldn't have known it was a prayer. I know from within myself there was a sense of help. That's all. Whatever it takes. Put me where you want me. Not in words but just that sense of anywhere. So we came to the day of my trial and they took my lawyer and I in a little room and said Denver District Attorney said we've been talking with the federal people.

We all think you're really sick. And I'm waiting for him to tell me something I don't know. I agreed. I said look if you'll plead guilty to this reduced charge we have ready so we don't have to have this messy trial and it would have been a messy one. I said we'll give you a one and a half to three year sentence and suspend it. And the feds have agreed to take you back and take you to Fort Worth, Texas and fix what's wrong with you. They got this big hospital down there.

I didn't even breathe hard. I signed. Two things are always at work in me. To this day. I am willing to go anywhere and do anything. I also knew that if you put me in a hospital with doctors and books I'll be on the street in six months. They would tell me what was wrong with me. They would tell me about how long it was going to take to fix that. And they would give me all the symptoms I'd have to show them to convince them I was getting better.

That's been my best game since I was a child. I'd have died coming out of there. We treated the wrong thing. What I have is untreatable. I'd have come out treated, had a cold bear on the hot day in Denver, and I'd be locked away permanently somewhere. Because death's no longer an option for me. It's going to happen someday, but it's not an out for me. And the power of God went to work and I think it's just because I met the only requirement we have here to get on any spiritual path, particularly this one I surrendered.

I'm supposed to go to the federal hospital. If you know about power, you know that one of the feds in the state on goes from Denver to Fort Worth. The on goes from Denver to Fort Worth. The year before that they sent me to La Tuna, Texas. The back seat of a car with two marshals, handcuffed and chained like an animal. That's what should have happened this time. Five days later I woke up in the fish tank at the Colorado State Penitentiary.

The son I actually heard myself say you can't do this to me. This isn't what I signed up for. Stupid. And that's where you found me. Part of what I know about Alcoholics Anonymous is that one of my obligations is to go trolling for drugs. And I found out where they're hiding out. They're showing up at A meetings. So all I got to do is go to A meetings and speak to truth as I understand it. And every now and then I get a bite.

I have somebody come to me and say, where did you hear that? And I say, would you like me to show you? And off we go. Anyway. In the third week over there, and I can hear it. The guard said, you people will come down and you will listen. I didn't have a busy schedule. I went on down. And without even knowing it, I began to participate in my own recovery. You can hang out for here for a while. And the power of our groups and the power of our love will hold you together for a while.

But eventually you must begin to participate in your own recovery or you don't get it. And that morning I participated. I went down and I listened. That's all you got to do here. Just listen. There were three guys in prison garb with numbers on their chest. Smiling. Now, inmates in their natural habitat and in their own clothes are a little bit intimidating. Smiling inmates are downright frightening. Okay. These guys had that smile that said, we know something you don't know.

And if you don't get it the first time, you may not live through this. And they were smiling about it. And a guy got up and he said, my name's Doc. I'm an alcoholic. And that means that I am powerless over alcohol and guards and drugs and all of the 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.

That's genuine love. Cold, unvarnished truth. I'm one that believes the truth without love is cruelty. And confrontation without a real answer is brutality, so I don't do that. But they loved us, just because we were there, no other reason. And they had a real answer. They said things like, you're very best thinking got you to the penitentiary. You're not doing too good, are you? But we can show you a new way of thinking.

See, that's the Alcoholics Anonymous method. I'll give you the truth, then I'll tell you the real truth. If you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. You don't have to behave this way anymore. It's not treatable. Forget it. But there is a way to stop it. They said, we can show you how to learn to live a way of life that makes sense to you. And there was a brand new idea. I've been trying to live my life so it made sense to you.

My life never made sense to anybody. Today my life makes sense to me. And there are still a lot of people that my life doesn't make any sense to you. Ta-ta. Old convict pulled me aside one day and he said, Prince, what's wrong with you? See, you spent all this time trying to please all these people. There isn't one I'm going to put a scrap of bread on your table. What's wrong with you? Okay. He cleared away myself a steam problem too.

Very simply. He looked me right in the eye and he said, As good as you are, as bad as I am, I'm as good as you are as bad as I am. Well, there's a goodie. We had to go to a 12-step study school before we were allowed to go to the regular A meeting. We had one meeting a week. They met on Friday night. They let real people in from the outside. And I needed that. I really needed that. I particularly needed you people who had never been to the penitentiary.

See, I was finishing my time as a convict. I'm not an ex-con. I'm a man and I've been to prison. My attitude has changed. And I needed people who had never been there to teach me how to live on the outside. My peers didn't know how to live free. What am I going to learn from them? I needed to hear from you how you do this on the street. I'm committed to this. You gave me heavy duty wisdom. Need money? Get a job. Want to keep it?

Show up. While you're there, you may even want to consider doing a little work. At the end of the week, a miraculous thing will happen. Somebody will give you money. Then you taught me what to do with that money. At the 12-step study school, every Saturday afternoon, every Sunday afternoon, we gave up our yard and our movie and went to school. And all that was was simply a walk through the book Alcoholics Anonymous, the recovery process that we have here.

The life-changing thing that puts me in touch with the fact that where I am God is. And once I have that, I can exist anywhere. They taught me about alcoholism. I didn't know I was alcoholic. It was hidden behind all this other crap. And the doctor's opinion, there's a story that Dr. Silkworth relates about a man. He said he'd been working with people who'd been working on a deal. He'd be subtle favorable to them on a certain date.

And they took a drink a day or two before and they missed their appointment. And it went boom. When I was 19 years old, I had a 24-hour liberty. And I took a drink of alcohol. And 23 days later, I woke up in Pershing Square in Los Angeles, still having to drink. And whatever that was these guys had, that's what happened to me too. And they began to help me bring my memories to it. And understand eventually, and it took a while, I'm alcoholic.

And if you're alcoholic, I got some good news for you. You are doomed. There's no treatment for it. I still got what I had then. If I took a drink of alcohol today, it would be as if I had never stopped. I'm watching a terrible thing happen. I'm watching people with 25, 30, 35 years of sobriety drink again. You young ones go out and slip and get back. They're not making it back. They're dying within weeks. I'm watching others to whom drinking is no longer an option.

So they're shooting themselves in the head because they can't stand the pain. The pain of just plain sobriety is unbearable. It's got to have more to it than that. So they carried us through that. The doctor said I was a sociopath and a psychopath and I was terrified. Because I was afraid I was going to have to spend my whole life on a psychiatrist's couch trying to unravel what I had just failed to unravel in the 34 years of effort I put in.

My sponsor, God bless him, said, we don't take your psychopath or a sociopath. We don't think you're crazy. We think you're a good actor. You suffer from alcoholic insanity. And the definition of alcoholic insanity for me is found in the story of the car salesman named Jim. Real simple. I'm a big book fucker. But I'm also clear that if it's just information, it means nothing. I mean, here's this car salesman. He'd been to A six times already.

Working with the guys who put this together. Prank each time. Missed something. He tells me precisely what he missed. He failed to enlarge his spiritual life. That's all. Nothing else. And so here's this day and he describes his days. Now working for the place that he used to own. And he had a few words with his boss. A little old grade resentment. Nothing serious. Failed to enlarge his spiritual life feeling of where's mine.

Goes out to sell some cars. That's his job. Stops in the place he's been before. Many times, says. To have lunch. They also serve booze. Had a sandwich. Glass of milk. And sung lunatic inside his head and said, Oh. You could have one. Well, now that's insane to start with. You know what whiskey does to milk? They don't get buttermilk. It's just a little bleep. So I had a drink and it was so successful that he had another.

Successful meaning he didn't go completely crazy and destroyed the place. So he had another. Now that's really insane. After drinking one glass of milk with whiskey in it, curdled. I believe I switched to just straight whiskey. My gin. Goes through the whole business, ends up in a sanitarium. And the book says, whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such lack of proportion and the ability to think straight and be called to anything else?

And there it is. That's what's wrong with me. I suffer from lack of proportion and the ability to think straight.

I can't think straight. I'm rubber minded. And if one works, take ten. Pete Pat's interest. Six years sober, I became a fundamentalist Mormon Pat. Had two wives when to quit. Looking for a third. And I was sober and sane and doing God's will. If you're new here and you're worried about going a little goofy, don't worry about it.

I just went, you will. I went to my sponsor tool in the store and he said, that's insane. And we got back on track again. Up to my own devices, I am totally self-centered. There are no gray areas. At my very best, today, there's a piece of self-interested work. I don't care what I do, I can't get away from it. One of my favorite people of all time is Brother Lawrence, because his dilemma is my dilemma. At my very best, doing what I think God wants me to do, I would like very much to be able to do it with no reward, and know nothing just to do it, and it doesn't happen, because God always gives me more than I can give.

And that's a dilemma. So I love reading old Brother Lawrence. I was his dilemma too, and I'm not even close to his stature, but I don't think God's rule is any stature anyway. First time I took the third step, I had the worst experience in my whole life. Went back to myself, set it with my whole heart. Waited from my flash of light. And when it didn't come, it pissed me off. It frightened me. And I went back and complained to my sponsor, which you ought to do.

If you do what they say you do, don't get what you think you ought to get, go bitch in. I went back to him with where's mine. He said, you dummy, you ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash of life. They've already killed you all your life. Now we discussed them. The peyote trip, southern comfort on a roof in Arizona in September will give you a flash of light. He said, Don God knows that in your present stage you probably can't stand one more big shock anyway.

And I'm inclined to think he said he'll come to you as he did to me slowly and gently. And he began describing how God had come to him and how it was for him today. And that's been my experience. It's been very gentle. My entire experience of God has been very gentle. God never yells at me. Never. My work in keeping my head clear is simply because it's a we small quiet voice. And if my head's going too busy, I won't hear it.

And he speaks mostly through you. God knows if I hear any more voices from outer space. And that's what took me to the Mormons. I saw some flying saucers and heard some voices and she thought I went. Nice people by the way. I'm not putting them down. I must have my head clear as much as possible as self-interest or I won't hear you. I'll be thinking what I'm going to respond when it's my turn to talk. And I'll miss it.

I will miss those precious moments that I have when I am by myself still in the inner garden carrying the voice of God. And he never says, no, I want you to take these people from here or there. He's generally saying, here's when you missed. I'll help you with it. They had me clean my house. This is about getting myself spiritually fit to be a maximum service to God and the people above me. Doesn't that sound noble? Every one of us has that in our hearts.

That's what I want to be. That's a real hero. Maximum service to God knows about me. You heard it last night. They wouldn't let me make amends. My first inventory was live. We got through that. I finally did a real inventory. It was live because I wrote it to impress my sponsor. I want to get on. We've had an event take place recently. I want to talk to you about, because this is about learning to live. Meetings are important. What I'm

about to say does not put that down at all.

I make a lot of meetings. My fellow shipping, all the work I do in AA is very important. But for me, this has been learning to live with people who are not alcoholics. My family. My neighbors. I've got a neighbor that's a hero to me. We live in snow country as you do. In Colorado, this time of year, we'll get a really heavy snow and then the sun comes out and it'll be 70 in the next day and we'll start to melt it and then it'll freeze up overnight so our gutters get packed with ice.

I wonder if it causes the dam and we've got problems. When I was in the house one morning complaining about when's the city going to get by and clean those gutters and I hear this noise outside. Cachunk, cachunk, cachunk. I looked out and here's my neighbor with an icebreaker. That's a hero. He taught me what to do. I went out and got me a shovel joined with him, breaking up the ice. I like private hedges. I'm a private person. My grandpa taught me good fences make good neighbors.

That's true. I like the look of the hedges and we put hedges in. My wife reminded me, as you put these in, you might ask him how high he wants it on his side. You might ask this guy over here how high he wants it on his side. We might want to leave a little area here where we can get back and forth. So I did. I learned to talk to my neighbors to find out how I can live in this neighborhood. They taught me how to keep them aggressive, cut.

And not to put the trash on the street automatically, wait till the day the truck's going to come get it. Basic stuff. My sponsor gave me freedom in the eight step. I don't believe we get free making amends. I believe we get free making getting willing to make amends. When I hit that place, I wasn't allowed to go out and make amends. And if you get to there, you're going to feel that angelic. I really wanted to go clean up the past.

It wouldn't let me out. Wouldn't let you in. He sent me back to myself. I said, Don, I want you to do this little exercise. He says, we now have a list of all the people you had harmed. We got it in the inventory. We got the federal agents that almost killed my son. I harmed him. I put the man in a position by my actions to almost kill a four year old. Again, to see what the truth of this deal was. I still don't like his mind of business and the way he conducts it.

But then I don't have to worry about it because I quit inviting him into my house. He sent me back to my family and said, I want you to take each one of these and make them close your eyes and picture them in your mind and see if you can feel a willingness in your heart to look each one right in the eye and say to them, I've 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?

He said, we know what you did to them. But Don, you are so insensitive. You have no idea what it did to them. And as I went over that list that night, I had to experience it. The whole life that I look for in acid and peyote and booze and sex and all those things. As I became aware that I am willing to look, any human being on this planet right in the eye, and if I've caused you any harm, you just tell me what I have to do.

We'll do the square. I was lifted from my seat and set free. And I've been free ever since. And it gave me the way to get back and make amends to my mother. What do you do when you put your mother in a position to say on Christmas day, you and your children can't come to my house? There's nothing I could conceive that would

fix that. So what happens after you ask the question is you shut up and listen? They will tell you.

So I've become a listener. I let God make me a listener. Months after I got out, Mom finally reluctantly allowed me to come by the house. And she had a good reason to be reluctant. Chuck taught me one time how to get past that. See, I single-handedly destroyed everything worthwhile in my life. And I have no right to ever expect anyone to ever talk nice to me again, ever, particularly the people I harm. So I don't expect anything out of it.

I don't do things to impress them. I was able to talk to my mom that day and ask her that without being blunt, we're supposed to be very kind to them. And then I shut up and listened and she told me what I had to do. She said, honey, all I've ever wondered for you is that you'd be happy. So I've been going by my mother's house for about 25 years now, ever regularly happy. Made amounts of my dad. Had a great list. Approached him gently.

Said, you know, Papa, told him what I was trying to do. I applied to you. I cheated you. I stolen from you. He said, please stop. I know all that. If you go into detail, all you're going to do is hurt me all over again. So you and I are going to just have to start from here. And we did. I was about 25, 26 years ago and I started from scratch. It was 22 years before my little brother and I made peace. 22 years before my son and I could make peace.

But in God's own time it worked. Five years slower, my dad came to me. He said, I need to talk to you for a minute. He said, you made amends to me a while back and now I need to make something to you. He said, I've just discovered that almost everything I taught you growing up was pure bullshit. And I sincerely hope I haven't hurt you too badly with that again. And I was given the grace to be able to keep my mouth shut and not say I've known that for years.

A while back I trapped him in his office. He had a little long office and I trapped him in his office. I said, Papa, I got to say something. I have three heroes left on this planet. You're one of them. And he was. Here's a man that came out of the depression and raised three kids the best he could. And whatever else went on he was there. And he wasn't always right. And I didn't always like him. But he was there. And whatever he believed, and this is a man who at one time was the second command of the Colorado Ku Klux Klan.

And became a bishop in a church. All this change took place. Can you imagine if I'd have kept that image of the Klansman? I'd have missed my dad. It's about letting go of all that. He'd have missed me if he'd have kept the image of that damn drug dealer who kept bringing their cops to my house. I'm telling you this because last week Dad died. But it's about living. He had a good life. And a good death. There were 20 of us in that room.

Five generations in that. Because of what you got taught me, I got to be there. Remember when I came to you, I was told you can't come here anymore. This is the change. We had some good years. I'm there for my mom. My brother and I got to detox my mother off of opium. Not opium, morphine. And that was important. She got shingles and gave her morphine for the pain. And had upset her stomach so they gave her some stabbing medicine.

And all of a sudden she's got visitors and we don't. She took a trip to Pennsylvania without ever leaving her chair. And because in God's time I truly believe it's all in God's time. And I keep myself available. My little brother could not talk to me for many years. I was 22 years sober when he had my wife on the over for dinner.

And after it was over he said, you know Don, I'm not sure we'll ever be friends. But this was nice and we can't do this again.

And I understood that. You know, I really heard him. I was his hero. And I grew up. I was his big brother. And I betrayed him and I betrayed the family and I betrayed the trust. I should never expect any more from him than contempt. Quite correctly. It's not occasion to go to North Carolina for two years. But I believe that this whole business is about being regular. I go by the folks house regularly. I show up for work regularly at the little regular meeting.

I'm regular in every way. So I made trips home periodically. The family had to stay in Colorado for two years while I was down there. And I was visiting the folks and my brother came in one afternoon. And I had my leg crossed. All of a sudden he reached across and kicked me on the bottom of the shoe. And he said, you know, I'm glad to see you. He was surprised because he really was. I said, look, next time you're in town, let's you and I go fishing up into the cabin.

We have a little cabin in the high country. I thought I made a trip back so we could go fishing. And we scared if you tried. I didn't catch any. That is why we're there. We went back to the cabin and played cribbage and tops. And I'm scooped to be honest in all my affairs except games. And my brother had forgotten that cribbage is an institution game. And I reminded him it had been years since I played. And he would probably have to teach me how to count.

I got him involved playing both hands and you can't lose when you do that. And we talked. And my brother gave me a precious, precious gift. Probably the most precious gift one human being can give another. He gave me who he saw himself as. He said, Don, I'm 58 years old. And I think I've been able to make a decent contribution to life. And my heart soared. Because of that healing, we got mom off the morphine. We worked in shifts.

They called me in because they seem to think I know something about detoxing. And I do. I came back and dad had to go to a nursing home. They thought he had Alzheimer's. I never saw any sign of that. I saw a tired old man. And I had to take out a piece of colon because my dad's one of those little guys that used to drink Worcestershire sauce right out of the bottle and eat chili. After the conference where it became clear we really did have to have him in a nursing home.

Because mom's 87 and he was 86 or 85. She couldn't handle him. He asked the doctor, can I please ask some chili? And the doctor said, Mr. Prince, you can have anything you want. Because she knew he was leaving us. And I'd been sneaking stuff into him. Well, you know, the family loves him. And with that piece of colon gone, they took away his cheetos and all the stuff he likes because they were afraid of hurting. And I'm thinking, what's he going to do, killing?

You know, Dr. Roy told me he didn't have that much time to go. So I sneaked in. I'm not for children. And at Denny's and the whole family's there at Denny's. And they said he's been doing weird stuff like putting mannays in the lemonade and stuff. And I'd never seen that, but they said it was going on. So we're visiting anyway and he's eating his chili. And I saw him pick up one of those great jelly things they have.

And I start to open and I said, oh my God. I put the jelly in the chili. And I don't embarrass him. I'll finesse him. I become really kind in my sobriety. So I took him up and put him over and said, pop, you know, I think this would taste better if you put it on this. So I took a doll of a chili and put it on the muffin. Then he looked me right in the eye with that look that says, gotcha. You have to be a listener or you miss those little gotchas.

Real communication isn't from the words. It's just the bridge. Well, I get frustrated because the fact is I've been living in the presence of God for 29 years and that means every day of my life has been a miraculous thing. A miraculous thing has happened. But it's a simple stuff. This death was a wonderful thing in my family. We got the call on Monday that he was leaving. He and Mom had been married 66 years. He was a operator on the Saturday.

And Monday he decided it was time to go. He only stuck around to get dead done. He had gangrene in one foot. His kidneys were failing. He was tired. And I lost my family, my wonderful family. That's kind of what you do, too. As we all just said goodbye to him, told him it's okay. He can go. He was in a coma. But he knew we were there. Five generations in that room. 15 grandchildren, three children, 17 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

Wonderful time. We spent two days saying goodbye. Family got together. We've eaten. I put on six pounds. People coming and people going, just like the old days. It was a good death. So you've given me a view of death that makes that possible. I'm not afraid of death. I've died three times that I can remember. But I just assumed it was a good death. Just to let him go. Whatever's next. I'll give you the last thing my dad gave me, and then I'll sit down.

He taught me to always stop and see the two-headed calf. Out where I come from, there's miles and miles of miles and miles. And out across those deserts, we traveled a lot. My family's travelers. And you'd be headed down a highway in New Mexico in particular, I remember one time. And here's this great ungodly, hand-painted sign. Ten miles. See the two-headed calf. Desert museum. Then at nine miles is another big, old, ugly sign.

Crippled monkey. Maybe wrappers. Nine miles. And every mile is a sign. Then he finally gets to the little dirt road off to the right. And here's a big red arrow. Two-headed calf, this way. And we'd go down that road to half mile. And some old desert rat had set up a museum. And sure enough, there was a stuffed two-headed calf in there. The baby wrappers were baby rattles in a box. It's an old con man. It was a crippled monkey and some real rattlesnakes out back.

Wonderful place. Wonderful place. Always stop and see the two-headed calf. Always take the child with you. Otherwise, you think you're on your way to Los Angeles. You don't stop. You need a child to go down the road. But I always have an adult with you too, because when I got there, I thought, man, this would be a cool place to live. OK. You've got to have somebody to get you back on the road. If you're a good sponsor, you'll go down with your new people and see the two-headed calf.

And if you pay attention, you're a sponsor. You want to see if it's time to go back down. Go back with them. Carry the whole thing. The gift my brother gave me is most precious to me, because I've tried for years to tell you how I feel about you. I've told you about Michelangelo and a statue of David and the anvil and all that stuff. But he gave it to me. Like everything else I've gotten here, most of it comes from non-alcoholics, because they're

in better touch than we are.

I'm now 63 years old. And because of you, I've made a decent contribution. My name is Don, and I am an alcoholic. And I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in good standing tonight. I haven't had a drink or a thought of a drink since December 26th of 1967. And I say that to impress Danny. Not with me, but with the fact that Danny, if you're an alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again, ever. If you hear that you have to stay sick forever, just turn out, walk away, because you don't.

Welcome, Diana. I'm touched. We're going to have a three-hand committing tonight and bring your boxes of tissues tomorrow. My home group is known as an A group. That's our name. The long form of the third tradition says that any two or more alcoholics gathered for sobriety may call themselves in an A group. So we do. We meet at six o'clock every Friday morning in the basement of a community correction center. We gave up a lovely living room where we were meeting.

This is a bunch of big book fanatics who just tend to keep going through the steps. When we get new people, they just have to go through the steps because they don't know any better. And we were meeting in Marty's living room, and it was really nice. They live in a loft in downtown Denver, great circumstances. But our conscience began to bother us because we can't carry our message if you have to be invited. So we gave up our comfortable home, went into this crummy basement of this crummy place, and the group has grown.

We generally have 10 or 15 inmates every week, and they don't have to come. They do have to get up real early. There's no dead weight in my home group. That means we're all models of mental health, but we are there because we believe in what we're doing. This is going to be an interesting weekend for me. I hope it will be interesting for you. I'm used to doing intensive weekend retreats, and I'm used to giving talks to combine them as a brand new experience.

I've never done this before. So you're going to have to help me. Fifteen or so of you have already told me what I'm supposed to do this weekend. I reported in about 20 minutes ago, and we'll try. I'm a living demonstration of the power of God. It's just very simple. There is no human power that could possibly have done anything that made it possible for me to be here tonight. And I know because I tried most of them. I'm an alcoholic who did not know I was alcoholic.

We're going to cover steps, and I'm going to read the big book, and I'm going to give you my view and my experience, and I hope to get some of yours, too. We're going to cover traditions and the principles we live by along the way. If you don't hear what you came for tonight, come back tomorrow. I want you to think about the fact that I have what is it? Six talks to give? I've already told you everything I know of any importance.

Okay, so I'm going to share an awful lot with you. I appreciate that opportunity. It's been now four and a half years ago or so. I came to the end of the road again, physically. I'd contracted a viral infection that brought me to my knees, and they put me on stuff called Interferon, which makes you really sick, which I really needed. I was already there. And in the midst of that, one of my messengers came by. Danny, a lot of what I'm going to say tonight is for you, listen for the messengers.

We each have messengers, and I have to learn to listen to them, because I've listened to everybody. I want to

be heading in too many directions. And I know how to recognize my messengers because from day one, they're the ones that showed up. Anyway, one of my messengers came by and we'll talk about that. And said, would you like to come with me? See, my messengers are always moving through. I'm always moving through. You need to understand I'm essentially on my way to Australia.

I'm just here for a while. They're busy people. They have been touched by the hand of God and they're about his business. But they're always wanting to stop and have a cup of coffee or meal, or even spend a couple days fishing. But they're on the way and they're doing things that are important. And I'm an alcoholic. Just going to work every day is not possible for me. I'm a person that needs a cause at all times. To get out of bed and go put in eight hours and get a paycheck is silly. I'd rather steal.

And I've done that. It didn't work too well either. I need a cause. Anyway, Tom came by and said, I'd like to have you come with me. So four and a half years ago, in the midst of being told if this doesn't work, you're dead. I was called to leave my home, my family, my group, everything that I knew and had and had worked for and believed in. And go to North Carolina where they don't even speak English. They speak Southern.

It saved my life. When you're sick, unto death, the only thing that will save your life and my experience is to get off your ass and go help somebody. That's what this is all about. I'm here tonight not for me. I've been giving a gift to life and sobriety. And it's not for me. The only way I get to keep it is to give it away. And that's why I'm here tonight. Well, I went and in the midst of all of that, I had about a two-year sabbatical in addition to everything else.

And you're going to hear about that two years this weekend. Maybe not day by day, but the journey that I made when I first got here, the journey down is making the journey we're all making. We go from one surrender to another, and this was a major surrender. There were days down there in North Carolina where I said to God, take me home. If I'm going to die, I want to do it at home. Not here. Anyway, so we'll hear a little bit about that.

Messengers. I'm a messenger tonight. I have a message for everybody in this room. If you are alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. If you're not an alcoholic and you love one, they don't ever have to drink again. I am a recovered alcoholic. I'm no longer in recovery. I was. Everybody has to be in recovery for a while. But you can only stay in recovery just so long, and you've got to get about to business living.

Recovery is a terrible time. No kidding. I mean, there's something going on all the time to remind you how sick you are. One of my dearest friends just had a hernia operation, and his experience is key to recovery from alcoholism. You know, they caught him open and sewed the muscles all back together and inside, and now it's healing and it itches, and he can't scratch it. I mean, it's inside, and he can't scratch it.

That's what recovery is about. It itches, and I can't scratch it. It's a wonderful time because you never, ever forget it, and when a new one comes along, it's your turn. I detoxed the last time in the Denver County Jail. It's a six weeks detox. In addition to alcohol, I'm also one of the freaks that came out of Berkeley in the sixties screaming out where there's dope, there's hope burned down City Hall. And I had been injecting amphetamines for about four and a half years in addition to my drinking.

I am not a drug addict. Just taking drugs doesn't make you a drug addict anymore than just drinking alcohol

makes you an alcoholic. And I say that only because the steps to God will work for anybody, but the foundation has to be truth. So my job early on with new people is to help them find out the truth. That's what you did for me. You sat me down helping me find out what the hell's wrong with me. Once we know that, we can deal with it.

But I didn't feel good. Six weeks of leg cramps and head cramps and headaches and pounding on my legs. That went on for six years. But that's six weeks with me. And I don't want to ever forget it ever. I don't believe for one second that remembering that detox will keep me sober. I've been through worse than that. But what has done has made me a pretty good sponsor. So you can come to me at five weeks going, I'm going to die.

And I can look you right in the eye and say, not yet. You still have a week to go. I drank alcoholically from my very first drink. Some people catch alcoholism on a bar stool. Some of us were born with it and all it took was alcohol to set fire to it. And I say that based on my understanding of what alcoholism is, it's real simple. If when you're drinking, you find you're unable to control the amount you drink. Or if when you wish to stop, you find out you cannot stop entirely, you're probably alcoholic.

That's one of the simple ways it got to me. We're going to go over the doctors' opinion and a lot of other stuff. But I sometimes have to find words other than the big books' words to communicate what it is. The sponsor was a psychiatrist one time. He was a beaut. He knew too much. And we're reading the doctors' opinion because that's the first thing I do if I sponsor you. You come to my house, we sit down, I read to you because I know the basic problem of most alcoholics is they can't read.

So I will never say to somebody, go read the big book. That's a dangerous thing to put that in the hands of a newcomer without some guidance and attention. Anyway, we're reading the doctors' opinion. And I'm watching that information go in his head and disappear and get lost and everything he knows. He didn't get it. So I started praying because that's what I do. The reason I like new people is they cause me to pray effectively.

God, what am I going to do with this one? That's serious business. People who are on the edge of death or insanity put themselves their lives into my hands. And I don't take that lightly. That's scary. If you work with very many of us, you know that each one of us is a challenge. So anyway, I'm praying. How do I say this? So he gets it. And I heard it come out of my mouth. I said, Don, what happens to you after the first drink?

He said, well, around the fourth or fifth or sixth drink, I start losing track of what I'm supposed to be next and what I'm supposed to do and I end up getting drunk. And I said, well, Don, what happens to you after the first drink? Oh, around the fourth or fifth drink, I start losing control of figuring out what I'm supposed to be and I end up getting drunk. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink.

And that's all I need to know to define alcoholism in order to move forward. The doctor's opinion is very clear. It gives us a broader picture of it. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. Alcoholism is not defined by my behavior. It is not defined by DUIs or jails or prisons or broken promises or broken dreams or broken windows or broken arms. Alcoholism is defined by me not being able to control the amount I drink once I start and not being able to control an absolutely obsessive idea that somehow this time it's going to be different and I take another drink.

Now I've done all the dramatic stuff and we'll talk a lot about that this weekend because I love high drama.

And the fact is I almost hate to talk about penitentiaries, but that's where I've been. But I would remind everybody in this room we have all been in our own prison. I just happen to make mine real. So I was in prison long before I got behind bars. I got free in a single cell penitentiary. I'll tell you about that later.

It was kind of a fun night. Alcohol changed me. It was a transforming experience. It wasn't some little change of attitude. It changed me. In the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, one of the foremost psychiatrists that ever lived, describes a spiritual experience. In essence he's saying that ideas and conceptions that used to rule the minds of these men are suddenly cast to one side and an entire new set of conceptions begins to dominate them.

It's a transforming experience, an entire new mine. Well I can go back and remember my first drink. That's exactly what happened to me. I had what appeared to be a spiritual experience. I went into the evening fifteen, sixteen years old frightened and angry. We've been frightened for fifteen years, you're pissed. I can tell you the very moment that I got that kind of rage. I can't give you the day and the day, but I can tell you the exact moment when I got cool.

Somebody said no to me and made it stick. Angry from that moment on. I was short and I was stupid that night. I knew that if we got in a conversation you'd be brilliant and I'd belch. I was not tightly wrapped. I was restless, irritable, discontented. And we got a bottle of whiskey and went out east of Denver to drink it and get drunk and have fun in that order. That's what they said I'd do for us. And I had a couple drinks of bonded bourbon.

Oh my goodness. And I was taller. And my voice was deeper. And I was no longer afraid. And I wasn't even all that pissed. And I wasn't stupid anymore. It was clear what my purpose in life would be. Suddenly I had, instead of reactions, I had plans. Hey, that's a big deal when you've never really had one. There was a guy in my high school class that hadn't been treating me well at all. And I was going to meet him back at Bon City's drive-in and whip him.

And I could have done it. This is the one that I used to. When I'd see him coming, I'd go down another hallway. Because I didn't want him to see me. He might hurt me or embarrass me, but probably. And there was a little girl in my high school class who hadn't been treating me at all. And I was going to meet her and we were going to have a visit. And I could have done it. I was a visiting fool that night. What I think about this, if that's all that alcohol did, I would buy everyone in this room a drink.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with something that will take a misfit like that and make it okay for me to be me and you to be you. That's a good deal. But it is in my nature, down where I live. If one works, take ten. Anything worth doing is worth overdoing. Period. That's just my nature. So I did. I drank until I was almost dead that night. I have a cute alcohol poisoning. The end result of that evening is instead of me whipping the bully and carrying the girl off into the sunset and being a hero for everybody, is that the people that drive in and saw my partners hauling me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway.

That's how I drank. To excess every time. But that few moments of it being okay for me to be me was worth any price I would have to pay for that. I sold out. I believe today that what I sold out to is that I have always known that my answer would be spiritual in nature because that's who I am. I'm not a human being trying to have a spiritual experience. I am a spiritual being having a human experience. And since I've come to know that, it's

been interesting.

I've been really, really human because I'm not afraid of the human experience anymore, right? Bring it on. Okay. Some days life is fun. Some days life isn't fun at all. Many, many, many days and the one I think is toughest for me is when alcoholics deal with other days when it's just flat. Don't do flat well. I was three years sober and I hadn't had any real difficulties for three years. Struggles yes, but no real difficulties.

And I'm hanging around the club and the meetings everybody's talking about how tough it is and all the trouble they're having. And I started feeling left out and made up some difficulties. No. That's who I am. After a night like that, all my dreams were just shattered and I puked in the driveway and made a fool of myself. I understand that there are people who, having done that, quit. I don't know, but I've heard that.

Hardly anybody I know would quit after that. I found out, though, what caused that? So it wouldn't happen to me again. I didn't want that to happen, that being the consequence. And it was clear to me why I got sick and fell down through a bonded burden. So I quit drinking bonded burden. And quickly found other things I could drink that didn't do that to me. When we got to the part in the book about drinking for effect, I could identify with that.

And one of the things I hope you'll do this weekend is bring your own memories to this. The greatest gift my early sponsors gave me was that they forced me to bring my memories to what the big book said. I drank for effect. And early on, the effects were very specific. If we were going to fight, I drank vodka. Because when I drink vodka, I get mean. And if you're going to fight, you might as well be mean. If we were going to go out and there might be girls on the horizon, I drank dark Bacardi wrong.

Makes me sensitive. Great love. During the absolute dead times, and I think one of the greatest horrors of all for any human being, and particularly alcoholics, are times when I don't feel anything. I could drink Coors beer, and listen to Jim Rays and Ferlin Husky. Four walls to hold me. Oh, God. Cry like a baby. And then the time came when vodka made me drunk, and rum made me drunk. Beer made me drunk. I used to like to drink tequila, and dance better.

Got sober and found out the reason I didn't dance well is I don't like dancing. I just don't dance well. But give me some tequila, and it looks like I do. I'm all over the place. I drank to feel taller, and stronger, and more certain of myself. I drank to stop pain. I drank to get involved in pain. Sometimes pain's all you got. The main reason I drank as an alcoholic was no reason at all. How serious this disease is.

I believe today, and on the 26th I'll celebrate 30 years of continuous sobriety, and I believe I'm in more danger today than I was then. What I'm in danger of is the truth, not lies. I had an experience on an airplane that brought that home to me. See, you're going to have to work real hard on any given day to come up with enough lies to convince me it's hard for me to take a drink. I'm going to have to stop doing a lot of things that I do over a period of weeks before I'll even listen to that crap.

But I was flying home from somewhere down here. It was an evening flight, and maybe even been that thing in Mississippi. No, it wasn't because I was blind from the smoke that time. But I'm flying home, and United Airlines is very nice to me because I fly so much if there's an empty first-class seat and nobody's using it, they give it to me for \$25 or something like that. So I'd upgrade it. Now, I'm fine. I've been to an AA conference.

I'm spiritually fit. I'm emotionally fit. I'm having a good time. I'm on my way home, which is where I want to be going. I'm in first class. I wouldn't pay for it, but it's better than coach. Evening flights and lights are right. I'm reading a book that I've been wanting to read. I don't have time to read much except on the airplanes. Everything's fine. And out of the corner of my eye, because they were serving dinner, I saw the flight attendant pour this dark burgundy stuff into my seatmate's glass.

And I looked over because it really looked good. And that's what my mind said. That really looks good. And it did. That's the truth. It was not wine in here. It was just this burgundy stuff that looked good. Then my mind said, I bet that'll taste good. Of course it would. That's why she's giving it to him. No thought about call. That'll taste good. Then my mind said, I bet that'll make that whole dinner taste better.

That's precisely why she's giving it to him. It will. It cleans the palate. Everything will taste better after wine. I'm still not thinking of drinking. And suddenly a prayer began in me. I did not begin praying. A prayer began in me. I've learned over the years to pay very close attention to that. You see, the disease of alcoholism is so severe that there will be times when all of the information I have available, all the reasons that are available to me from not drinking will mean nothing because they won't be there.

So I have to rely upon a power greater than myself to cover me during those times. You'll cover me during the meeting. What happens on the way home? So the prayer began in me and I pulled in because what I do when that happens is pull in and start listening. And I realized my very next thought would have been, I probably ought to have one of those. I still no thought about call. That's a serious disease and I've got it.

But I'm standing here telling you, I didn't drink that night. Whatever that power is, it took care of me that night. And it's taken care of me many times. I wish I had more of those kinds of stories for you. I'm sure those have more than once. But the scary thing is, I didn't know it because the information didn't show up. None of the things I do in Alcoholics Anonymous keep me sober. You need to know that. None of the things I do keep me sober.

I do the things I do in Alcoholics Anonymous because I am sober. There was a time when in order to be sober, I had to do all the things I do in Alcoholics Anonymous. It's a really weird thing. Danny, you're falling in with a bunch of real loonies here. Okay. You want to know how to stay sober? Don't drink. What causes alcoholism? I don't know. Do you know? I don't have any idea. There's THIQs running around somewhere.

I admit any, but I understand I've got some. So what? I come from a functional home. I really do. If I am offending anybody, I apologize. But I do. It doesn't mean we were problem-free, but I come from a functional home. My family functioned. We lived in the same place. When Dad died in March, they had just celebrated 66 years of continuous marriage. That's a long, bloody time to live with another human being in peace.

Of course, it wasn't always a peace. My mother sometimes has an attitude. My little brother, I call him my little brother. He's 67 years old now. My little brother is one of the foremost synthesizer musicians in the world. When I say that, knowing what I'm talking about, he just came back from Russia. He took into Moscow this summer for a month to teach in Moscow. So they can find out what the hell it is he does. And then he went to Sweden for two weeks after that.

He was writing music with Stan Kenton when he was 19 years old. It does one symphony every year just for the hell of it. He is a musician. Judy Collins calling one night when she was just getting started. Her guitar player had gotten sick and she asked my brother a company or that night at a show. He said, sure. When I bought a cheap still a guitar and a guitar book because he never touched a guitar in his life. And that night he accompanied Judy Collins on stage.

He grew up right down the hall from me. Next spring, maybe. Yeah. My little sister, bless her heart, retired a while back from IBM. Big executive. Made good money and great babies. Babies have been making babies. We're having trouble finding husbands. The young people today are a little bit nuts. But in my family, one of those babies comes along. Our attitude is good. There's another little French baby. Let's raise it.

And that's where I come from. And apparently the environment does not cause alcoholism because neither of them has it. My dad didn't have it. My mother didn't have it. The closest we can come in my family to another alcoholic is my uncle. But after drinking himself into serious condition, his doctor said, Walter, if you don't stop, you're going to die. So he quit for over 20 years. No heart for this business. They think we're weak.

You've got to be tough to be an alcoholic. It takes a certain kind of toughness to sleep and gutters. And direct cars and then go get another one and wreck it too. You've got to be tough to face down the people that you promised and they believed you, which are going to do certain things. And then you crapped out on them because you were drunk. It's hard to go home to that. You've got to be tough. You've got to be tough to wake up wrapped around the throne.

And everything in you said, I'm never going to do this again. And get up from the throne and go have a drink because you have to. You've got to be tough. No, I'm tough. I'm ranging a bit because I'm trying to establish some things here. I keep realizing we have a whole weekend. Am I going to have some fun? Christmas week of 1967 was the week that I hope everybody has because it's what it took for me. It's the only reason I'm here is because I finally ran out of lies.

The truth did not get me sober. I just ran out of lies. And all my toughness just went away. I've got two damn tired. I don't know what you listen for on a 12 step call, but I listen hard for two magic words. If I can hear that, I'll work with you. I don't care how convoluted the circumstance is. If you're tired of going to answer for you. If you're not tired yet, I still got an answer for you, but you probably won't hear it.

But I got tired. I was just plum out of steam away. 133 pounds. I was on federal parole for whom a steak I made in 1966. In addition to drinking all the time, I was now shooting speed at an unholy rate just to be able to get up in the morning. It wasn't fun anymore. I needed something to get up in the morning. We were on welfare. I had these two little kids whose mother had abandoned a ship years before. I'd had them out on the road for four and a half years.

We'll talk a bit about that this weekend because some of you had kids too. I was a single homeless parent before we even were professional. Eyes. Now coming from a functional home, I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. Looks like at my home this week, I've got a son-in-law living in my house who's just manic about Christmas trees. It's gorgeous. But I just got out of the way and let him put it up. Where I grew up, we had a real tree came in from the outside.

Big house. Eight, ten foot trees. Covered with lights and tinsel. We'd sew popcorn. Do you ever sew popcorn? Wonderful. Make long strings of popcorn. Hang it on the tree. And there'd be presents underneath. And I do remember clearly one of the things that I loved so much about my house, it made me feel I didn't belong there, but I loved it. For Christmas week, generally people came by. My folks were really loved in our town.

And people would just drop in and visit for a while. And the house would smell wonderful. Cider with cinnamon sticks. Hot chocolate. Marshmallows on them. I'm not talking about these sissy fingernail size marshmallows. Big ones. Covered a whole top of them. They'd go fuck. Suck them off of there just to get the chocolate. Christmas week in 1967, nobody visited our house. Even my parole officer wouldn't come out. I had to go see him.

We had no tree because we had no money. The welfare check hadn't gotten her yet. And for whatever the reason, I think it's probably just the grace of God, my mind began to clear, so I could see these things. One of my lives was just leave us alone. The boys and I are doing fine. Families intact were odd. My family was not intact. There was a crazy man and two frightened little boys living in this basement apartment. That was the truth.

Respect somebody that big. So that lie began to become real to me. We spent a lot of time walking. I have sore feet, and I sometimes think it must be a chronic condition because we walk so much. And on the 24th we took a walk. I had gotten enough speed in me, enough booze in me to get up and go out and try to find something for Christmas Day for these kids. And on that walk we found a dollar in the snow and took it to the Christmas tree place and found out that all ambassadors out there weren't all that way.

They gave us the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar that day. And it was a big one. It was pitiful. I keep the memory fresh. We had a 7-foot ceiling and we brought home a 9-foot tree. So get over, right? We decorated it with garbage. So people I may have to do. Cut the bottom off one of those little pint milk bottles and it looks like a bell. And crumple up some aluminum foil and stuff anyway. I had managed, there's a place on the East Colfax called the Denver Merchandise Mart, Public Merchandise Mart.

And this guy gave me a pair of cowboy boots and a little shirt on credit. \$10.95. So each of my boys had had one present. Because I didn't have any money. The welfare check wasn't there yet. If only I intended to pay for them as soon as the welfare check came. My little boy, some neighborhood kid that I had been using was honored and stolen a whole case of paper towels from the server station. My little boy has wrapped up everything in the house so it would fit in blue paper towel.

And the tree for me. And some more of me broke. That's not right. It's not the way it's supposed to be. Christmas day we went down to my folks' place because it would never occur to me not to go home for Christmas. And we got there and my dad met us at the dawn and said, Don, I'm sorry, but I can't let you in here anymore. Your mother says she can't stand watching you die. And one of my lies blew up. The lie was simple.

Leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. You know it's a lie. I can see who I've been hurting. Everybody. My parents, my kids. Everybody who ever believed in me. An undead tore up my last lie because he snuck us into the house anyway. It's a great big house. They snuck us into the basement. And I really believe that day that nobody loved us and nobody cared. And he made a lie out of that. I didn't have your lies left.

When I got home I had a lot of self-pity. I encouraged self-pity. I really do. There's nothing like a good case of self-pity and a good sponsor to get you across the line into life. You don't feel good. Oh. You guys do that down here? Yeah. Yeah. It saves lives. I love you dearly. But don't give me that crap. At that point of realizing there were no more lies, I stepped in the self-pity into the truth. And the truth was I had become completely useless.

And let's talk about that for a minute. The only thing that I can promise you, Danny, is if you'll say sober and work on this path, you will become useful. And I firmly believe that that's the difference between life and death, particularly for alcoholics. We must be useful. And the promise of the big book is that I will become useful. In fact, my wretched past is so useful that I'm not to forget it nor shut the door on it.

I'm to share it freely so that you don't have to die. So that you don't have to thank you. You're the only one on the planet that ever did something this stupid or thanks to this weird. I remember sitting in a meeting in York Street at one time with my tickets to the grave piece. I had one left. And some jerk started talking about it out loud in a meeting. Just as if it wasn't important at all. And set me free from that one.

But I was useless. The fact was there was no reason for me to be here. Everybody would be better off if I wasn't here. My children would definitely be better off if I wasn't here. My people would be better off. I couldn't thank anybody that could benefit from my being here. That's a terribly wonderful, painful place. You either surrender or you die. We're facing a thing in Alcoholics Anonymous today. This frightening.

I'm watching our old-timers. People of 30, 35, 40 years of sobriety blow their brains out because they can't stand the pain anymore. And I'm convinced that the pain is that they feel they have stopped being useful. And that's my fault. There comes a time in sobriety when I don't do things unless I'm asked. I don't want to get rid of enough ego that I'll wait until I'm asked. I don't want the exception to live 12 step forward.

And if you don't ask me, pretty soon I'm going to dry up. And I think that's what's happening to them. They feel useless. Now, that's partly their fault too. I'm not making excuses. I'm just saying I truly believe that's what causes me. It caused me to die that night. I had nothing left to surrender to you. You have to surrender at that point. It's wonderful. We talk all about surrender. We don't know what the hell we're talking about most of the time.

Surrender is something that happens when you can't stand the current conditioners and you have no choice in that. It's quit. That's all I did was quit. Nothing left to surrender to. I have tried everything imaginable along the line to find out what's wrong with me and fix it. I was my first federal penitentiary when I was 19 years old and came out with a clear understanding that I want to do that again. And whatever it is that caused that, I want to fix that.

So I joined Dianetics. And part of the treatment at that time was that they gave us amphetamines so we could become uninhibited and talk freely. It worked fine. Exactly what it did. So when I think back about insanity, I don't have to have any fancy definitions. At 19 years of age, a complete failure in my life, having just come out of a federal prison and the brain breaks and the bad conduct discharge and my dreams are dead and gone, I turn my life and will over the care of a science fiction writer.

So much for my good thinking. I have been dunked in dip and prayed over and prayed at and yelled at and cursed at. I've been to psychiatrist. The last psychiatrist I went to was smoking marijuana three weeks later. I'm also a good salesman. And he was ready. And I hate to pass up anybody who's ready. On my own, I will not make the right decision. It's clear to me. Every decision I make based on me is based on me. And at my very best, I got it.

No move. I just saw a group. At my very, very best nine out of ten people might get help. Somebody's going to get screwed. And if I can get half of them taken care of, okay. I have found that living by God's way, this path, everybody benefits. Even people just looking in from the outside. Benefits by the activities and actions. And we're going to talk a lot about actions this week. And I am a big book Nazi. But I believe that if that's all you do, you're going to get sick.

And I believe that because I've watched it. I have to take the experience that the big book gives me. And part of the experience it gives me is saying, get involved with life. Put your family back together. Get a job. Profound spiritual message here for anybody who doesn't know this one yet. This one that gave me early on. If you want money, get a job. And while you're there, and if you'll do that at the end of a period of time that you mutually agreed upon, they'll give you money.

And if you like it, go back next Monday and go to work again. And I'll give you some more money. It's a spiritual principle that I should be self-supporting by my own contributions. Not only financially, but emotionally, contribution. What goes around comes around, you know. While I was in North Carolina, I understand I have lived with a sense of the presence of God at that time for 26 years. Every waking moment, I've had a sense of the presence of God since I woke up.

And I woke up at six o'clock one morning, and it wasn't there. And I don't know why it didn't fright me. It didn't. But I began to pray right away, because I had built in a habit. Before I opened my eyes in the morning, I began to pray. It's just to have it. I'm not taking any chances on even going to the bathroom until I'm on solid ground. And my prayer that morning was, oh dear God, I need to know you're here. I need to know you better.

I need to be closer to you. And my phone rang. It was Billy Peat. Then I said I got a problem on seven years sober last week on a drink. And Alan's 12 years sober. And he drank. We got another fellow in our group who's just getting ready to drink. And we understand, because Steve told us that every now and then you'll get together with some people over the weekend and go through the big book and show them what it is you did, because you don't drink.

Would you come do that for us? I've got another to have it. I said sure, Billy. I went back to praying. Where are you, God? Another request. Will you sponsor me? Sure. Where are you, God? Pretty soon. I got it. So God talks to me directly through you. He was saying if you want to get closer to me, get closer to my children. You want to know me better? Get to know my kids better. You want to hear my voice? Quit whining.

Listen. When I've been all right since, the sense is back. It has nothing to do with feeling. Quite often I do not feel good. I've got a body that I beat up pretty good. It's been used up some. It's hard to believe I'm 72 years old and I'm not. It's just hard to believe. When I first said the third step prayer, I wanted magic. I had the worst experience in my entire life. The first time I said the third step prayer, got off of myself to lead, to build with me

and do as I will.

Because I waited for my flash of light and it didn't happen. Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing happened. I might as well not have said it. I'm alcoholic. Start a fire. Give me an earthquake. Flashlight. Longer to draw me with it, I'm cool. Nothing happened. It frightened me. I had come to believe that there was a power grader myself, and I also believed that he was so interested in me, that he gave me my own way, whenever I wanted it.

I wanted it out. I was in a penitentiary and I wanted it out. And I just knew if I said this prayer just right, I'd raim at it. Bars would swing open and they'd call my name and say, okay, Pritts, you can go home now. We don't need you anymore. And nothing happened. I know just enough at that time about sponsorship, because I've been paying attention to give you a tip. Daddy, if you do something your sponsor tells you to do here, and you don't get the results you think you ought to get, go bet you had it.

I did. I went to Bruce with the alcoholic war cry ringing from my lips. Where's mine? Where's mine? He said, and I told him, I said to them, Pritts, nothing happened. I didn't go flash, no nothing. He said, you done me. You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. They really killed you all your life. And we talked about flashes of light that I've had, and he was right. He said, God knows, Don, that you probably can't stand one more big shock in the shape you're in anyway.

And he will probably come to you gently as he did for me. And he did what the people of Alcoholics Anonymous do better than anybody. He shared that experience with me. He shared himself with me, and he shared his time with me. So, I was willing to listen to him for one major reason. He had been changed. He did not come to Alcoholics Anonymous to get sober. I had no idea I needed to be sober. At the time you found me, and I didn't come to you, you found me.

I was certified. The box is already weird, he started yet. I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type two. I don't know what it is, but it is not good. Federal man said I was a psychopath. Dr. said I was a manic depressive drug addict. I was supposed to go to a federal hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Christmas, the 26th of December, 1967, the police arrested me again. With nine charges, the first one called for three years to life.

The DA promised to bring the others one at a time if I beat that, but I was done. But I was down the night before, it didn't matter. I'd already surrendered. I was wanting to go anywhere anybody said and do anything anybody said. If it meant I didn't have to be me anymore. That's why I died. I took a two month supply of amphetamines that night and shot them up my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died because I couldn't stand being me anymore.

That was my surrender. So Alcoholics Anonymous did not get me sober. I didn't meet you for really five months. God got me sober, clean and simple. Then brought me to you, and that's why I belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. He hadn't carried me to you. Oh, I'm my blast. If you look at it from the outside, this poor child who was supposed to go to a federal hospital and because of the love of God that whole court order got changed and I was sent to a penitentiary.

So I pled guilty to a reduced charge in order to go to the hospital. It didn't work. The power of God went to

work instead of me going to the hospital. I went to the penitentiary and was just hand carried to you guys. I belonged to you. I did not depend on you. You don't want any more about this than I do. I think I don't have many to know that. How does it work? Please tell me, what is alcoholism? The people from Alcoholics Anonymous that showed up in my life on the day that I met you could be termed angels.

They were definitely God's messengers. They were on a crusade. They were inmates. They had numbers on their chest. They did not look angelic to me. They called us down that day and said, you people will come down and you will listen. I didn't have anything else to do. So I went down and I listened. The most important thing I have ever done in Alcoholics Anonymous, then and now, is to listen. I hope you are listening.

I am. My early sponsors made it clear to me. I want you to remember what said at meetings. More importantly, remember what you say at meetings. Because that's what's going to save your life. The joy of getting up and giving a talk is that I get to hear when I'm in. Get to put the pieces together. So we're there and I'm listening. And these three guys got up with numbers on their chest. And some folks here know that inmates in their own environment, in their own clothes, are a little intimidating.

Smiling inmates are frightening. Have you ever seen them? There's that shitting grin that says, I know something, you know. And if you don't get it tonight, you may die in the morning. That's what that says. I really do know something you don't know. And if you don't get it tonight, you may die in the morning. You don't have to. I got up and said, my name is Doc and I'm an Alcoholic. And that means that I am 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. I heard him. That's a spiritual deal. I've never heard anybody. You're very best thinking got you here. You're not doing too good, are you? That could be considered cruel. That's just the truth. But we can show you a new way of thinking. You know the greatest promise in the book of Alcoholics and Arms?

And of course it came to us from a non-alcoholic. Make no mistake about it. We didn't invent it. Dr. Silkworth says without an entire psychic changes very little hope of recovery. In plain street terms that means until I get a new mind, I'm not going to recover. And I'm promised I can have a new mind. A whole new way of looking at things. I still have an alcoholic mind in here. I never use it for myself. It's useless.

I wouldn't trust it with anything except your life. I use it when I'm talking to you so that you can understand that I understand. I understand something. When people say to me, why did you do that? That's when I began to bail my base of lies because the truth is, I don't know. And I learned early on if I say I don't know, you will say, you should know you did it. Why in the world did you drink after you drank, wrecked the car, went to jail, threw up on grandmother's lap.

Why are you drinking again? I don't understand that. I don't know why you are either. Except you probably have alcoholism and don't have any choice in the matter. And the best news I can give you if you're in that state is this, you are doomed. Isn't that good news? I think it's wonderful news. You're doomed. There's no treatment for it. No treatment at all for what's wrong. What's wrong with me, this untreatable, is that I have a body that has a different reaction to alcohol than my mother.

Let me tell you how my mother drinks. It's wonderful. She loves peppermint schnapps, which is not to make you sick anyway. I like gal toys, but not schnapps. My mother really, really loves schnapps. You can tell on the day when she's getting ready to get that bottle down and she got a little tall skinny glass and she pours it in there and she's with it. She didn't waste any of the drop. And then a disgusting sound for her.

She just loves every bit of it. And then she'll look at it for a while and then she may do that twice and then I've never say to my disgust, that's enough. I'm beginning to feel it. That is not me. The sound of a non-alcoholic having a drink of alcohol is a sound of an alcoholic having a drink right in here. She'll put it away. She won't have any more. She'll be beginning to feel it. I drink because I'm beginning to feel it.

Everything changes. Well, I don't want to keep you all up all night. We've been up here for about an hour. We've got a lot to talk. With your permission, what I'm going to do this weekend, I'm going to read to you some. I've been asked to give you precisely how I go through this and how I see it and I'm going to do that. There'll be some experience of that. Tonight I just wanted to let you kind of get to know me a little bit and to know that I believe that this is a transforming piece of business we're here.

I, like Ebby, do not, I'm just not inwardly reorganized. My roots are in a different soil. I'm a different human being than the one that died Christmas night in 1967. Don't even look like him. Don't think like him. I remember him well. Didn't have a chance from day one. Today my life is useful. One of the neatest things in the world happened to me the other day. When they arrested me, they took my children away from me.

And the only thing in my life that had any meaning at all was my two little boys. I wanted more than anything in the world to be a good dad. Sicker well. Those kids came first. I used them, but they came first. I really wanted it to be right for them. And they took them from, of course, because I went to the penitentiary. And for all I knew, I was going back to the federal penitentiary. I still owe them five years. My children went to a foster home.

It was not a good one. I was told you will never see your children again. Well, for a man, set me free. He said, don't ever try to get them back. You're a lousy father. I don't think you'll ever be a good father. Don't ever try to do anything to prove to me that you'll be a good father because you won't. It's done. Just get your own life in order. If I ever think you're going to amount to anything, I'll bring them to you.

Set me free. But that's where it was when I started here. My baby four months ago, I had a baby. Thank you, Sal. Now, as a result of all this stuff, the morning this occurred, I was in my best clothes. I had a suede jacket and I'm tired that I may wear this weekend just because I want you to see how classy you have become. And I'm on the way to visit a judge and straighten him out. I work in corrections and he was causing doing some things that weren't quite right.

And I got an appointment with him. And on the way out the door, my daughter handed me the baby. And the baby puked all over me. Oh, that's what ties your four. How would you feel if somebody who loved very much stood up and puked on you? What went through my mind because of my new mind isn't this wonderful. They trust me with their babies today. Knowing if they puke on me, I will not throw them against the wall. So that's sort of both ends of this deal.

I don't know what you want on a sobriety, but that did it for me. They trust me with their babies. So when are we going to get going? 10 o'clock in the morning? Another thing I would like you all to do, please to help me, because I get really frustrated with this. I've been walking hand in hand with the spirit of God for nearly 30 years. And that means every single day, unusual, miraculous events have occurred, and I don't know what you need to hear about.

And if you won't tell me what you'd like to hear about this weekend, I'm just going to keep right on badly. We're going to have a question and answer thing, I'm sure. We're going to read through this big book. I want to show you some views because I have some from my own experience about the easier way to make this work. This is not rigorous. It's sometimes hard. I love this particular group. You've fed one of the descriptions of the fellowship of alcoholics and hotities.

We laugh a lot. If newcomers could see no laughter here, they wouldn't want to stay. We laugh a lot, and we laugh mostly at us, because we're really funny. One of my favorite people was Old Tony de Melo, because he spoke truth one time to a group of clerics. It's the same truth I got. You come here to listen to me for a weekend. You need to know something. I'm an ass. You shouldn't expect anything better out of me than that.

And I know that. This isn't over. I do not like standing behind this podium. I'm hoping in the morning, particularly if there's no more of us than this, maybe we can rearrange this room a little bit and get together. Some circles or something. This is not my natural habitat. Anything at all you want for tonight, because you've got a meeting coming up at 10. And I'm going to go to bed. I'll have to share with you. I'll close out with a random thought.

Clint said I got to drop a bomb or two. So I will. It's just something to think about. Someone asked me a couple months ago, do you believe that God is love? I must tell you, I don't know for sure. I expect so, but if I make a flat statement that God is love, it's going to be limited because it will have to be based on my definition of love, which is woefully inadequate. I do believe this, however. If I will open myself up to that possibility, God will demonstrate through me what love really is.

And then I can learn about it. So this weekend, I'm going to try to avoid making definitions like that. If you need to believe that, that's cool. It's probably true, but I don't know for sure. We all done for the night? Don't y'all wish you had one? I don't like this room, though. The way it's set up. I'm out here all by myself and that is not what I'm here for. I'll get used to this thing. Right now, it's a distraction.

What I'd like to do, there's no way to do a circle here, which I suppose we could rearrange this in some way so that we're more of a group rather than an audience. I'm sure appreciate it. Oh Lord, you must have been planning this move. As with real life, we do things and then we break up and go do other things and then get back together and do things together. The spiritual experience is a unifying experience. So throughout this deal, if we're doing this right, when we take a break, y'all are going to break up and go talk to each other.

When you come back in, half of you are going to keep talking to each other. We have a common purpose in this room. I need to refocus on each time. I'm going to give you just a childish image that has helped me. Please don't ritualize what I'm about to say. This image has just helped me get centered. And it's a simplistic view of pottery. Any of you potters or no potters, it's a very simple thing they do. It's very spiritual.

To cast a good pot, all you need to do is get to clay centered on the wheel. If the clay is properly centered, when the potter begins to spin the wheel, the natural forces of centrifugal force and gravity tend to throw it right straight up. And all the potter has to do is kind of form it and encourage it a little bit. If it's the slightest little bit off, and the more off center it is, the more it tends to throw it out this way.

You've got to drag it back in. There's a lot of hard work. Yes? This is called chairs. Every time you move in that chair, we'll be like standing. We'll be like standing. Sorry. No. No. We'll take a vote. Who gets the chair? No. I don't know. There are several places in my experience that I can center. Right dead center in my head is a centering place. There's another one right here in my diaphragm. The one in the Chinese called the Tang Tian, which is a power center, is right down in here.

My spiritual center when I close my eyes and think about going with it and centering is just right here I don't know where yours is But I'm going to suggest each time we get together. We just get quiet for a minute Get centered Empty our minds and then we'll know what we're going to do next Not soon everybody. However, it is you do that I retreat instead of Barbara the monastery It's a really good place to do a retreat by the way with a group out of Los Angeles and It was really hard to get them quieted down again after each break We had some singers with us It was in her profession So one of them just went and her partner caught it and did a harmonic counterpoint to it. It was pretty it just Hit the room and got it quiet So after the next break She did the same thing. He did it and pretty soon the group started doing it and I got this horrible image What's going to happen?

They were going to go back to a a la basin Say don taught us to start meetings by going I see a lot of you brought your guidebooks Would you turn to page one please and read along with me on page one? We have alcoholics anonymous believe that the reader will be interested in the medical estimate of the planet I'll set you at page one This is the book alcoholics anonymous. I'm on page one Mine's the first edition now there's a couple reasons that did this a lot of people don't know of the massive change It took place in 1955 in our book Doctors opinions page one in all editions in the first edition It's a part of the body of the recovery process more than I Was hoping here was that chair that was for Danny so I Have to consider when I tell someone go read the big book Which one are we on the same page?

Are we carrying the same message? The message is got carried to me and the reason I'm here is because someone Carried me through the doctor's opinion and it was so important because otherwise I could not have identified as an alcoholic Then there's a thing runs through way that I hear drives me crazy The recovery process is in the first hundred and sixty four pages that leaves out the doctor's opinion and the forwards and the preface particularly the doctor's opinion Now I don't care why it happened I'm a member of alcoholics anonymous and part of my job is a member of alcoholics anonymous by concept and by tradition and by the force of spirit is to pass on the entire a message and Raising I'm making a point of it is we've started working with a lot of people Who had come to us and they drink again and then come back and they drink Y'all call them slippers I just don't think they ever quit drinking and the common thread was that they started on page one like we had told them to do And read the first hundred and sixty four pages and missed this piece. We don't miss it I know y'all don't when you read with somebody you read it, but I've been guilty at one time of saying the first hundred and sixty four pages Till I thought about what I was saying There's all kinds of stuff. I don't want to make it an editorial of this but currently At the next general service conference at the last one. They asked the literature committee to bring back The possibility for a fourth edition big book Just some changes and stories and all cuz nobody's gonna

change the body of the text And I don't have any problem with that. I don't say need for it, but I don't have any problem with it either but What a grand time it would be To restore the big book to its original condition We now have a reason for a fourth edition. I think at least wanted to consider Just put it back the way it was Now that'll really cause some confusion you need to understand that it means that I will have to at every time I do Big book work Explaining the difference. I'll have to start it's right place. I will have to become a better 12 step and a better sponsor Because if they get a third edition or in my case the second edition We're not gonna start on the same page unless we agree to We don't confuse daddy We already having baffled Okay It's that important a Couple of other wonderful changes in this thing, too I work out of a second edition simply because when I when I came for the first five weeks We weren't allowed to talk we went through a 12-step study school And at the first meeting they informed us that for five weeks We had nothing to say if we knew anything at all we wouldn't be where we were we should just shut up and Listen and they then they read the big book to us and shared their experience of the big book with us I'm doing what I was showing how to do 29 years ago. This is how it was brought to me And I just keep doing it and if there's one person in the room for 50 it doesn't make the slightest bit of difference Just what I do If this is all I do I'm causing you a grave disservice We got to take what happens here to the street Well, that's what this week is about us talking about how that one thing he didn't learn about introducing is that I get the last word My name's one thing he didn't