

A Spiritual Journey, Strange Camels Group

1997 | Part 1 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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Tonight and this weekend we are very, very fortunate. And with no further ado, I will introduce you to Don and I will sit down. Don't make James mad, but I've got to move this. I'm fine. I am messing with you. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic. And I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm 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 around and walk away because you don't. Welcome Diana. I'm touched. We're going to have a three-hanky meeting tonight and bring you boxes of tissues tomorrow. My home group is known as an AA 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 an AA 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, I just have to go through the steps because they don't know any better. And we were meeting in Marty's living room. 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 intensity 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. 15 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's 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 he 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'm going 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 going 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. And 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, I'm to 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 given 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 Danny's 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 the business of 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 cut him open and sewed the muscles all back together 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 was 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 got me down to help me find out what the hell is 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 six weeks was mean 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.

And drank. But what it's done is 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 doctor's opinion and a lot of other stuff. But I sometimes have to find words other than the big book's words to communicate what it is. I sponsored a psychiatrist one time.

He was a beaut. He knew too much. And we're reading the doctor's 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 doctor's 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, the 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, 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 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 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.

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 15, 16 years old frightened and angry. You know, you've been frightened for 15 years, you're pissed. I can tell you the very moment that I got that kind of rage.

Can't give you the day and the date, but I can tell you the exact moment when I got really pissed. Somebody said no to me and made it stick. But I was angry from that moment on. I was short and I was stupid that night. I knew that 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 to 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 more 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 visit and fool that night. When 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 them 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. You 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 who drive in saw my partners hauling me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway. Now that's how I drank. To excess every time. But that few moments of it being okay for me to be me, it 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. Bring it on. Okay. Some days life is fun.

Some days life input at all. Many, many, many days and the one I think is toughest for me is an alcoholic to deal with are the 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. I'm hanging around the club and the meetings everybody's talking about how tough it is and all the trouble they're having. When 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 and threw up bonded bourbon.

So I quit drinking bonded bourbon 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 me. If we were going to go out and there might be girls on the horizon, I drank dark Bacardi rum. Makes me sensitive. A great lover. 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. I cry like a baby. And then the time came when vodka made me drunk and rum made me drunk and the beer made me drunk. I used to like to drink tequila and then dance better. I got sober and found out the reason I didn't dance well is that I don't like dancing. I just don't dance well. But to 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 is all you got. The main reason I drank as an alcoholic was no reason at all. That's 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 and 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 all 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. It may have 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 upgraded. 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. An evening flight, the lights are right. I'm reading a book that I've been waiting 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 seat mate'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 of alcohol. 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 thanking and 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. I 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 show up. It 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. And still no thought of alcohol. 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 kind of stories for you. I'm sure that it's happened 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. You want to know how to stay sober? Don't drink. What causes alcohol? I don't 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.

And I say that knowing what I talk about. He just came back from Russia. They took him to 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 called him one night when she was just getting started.

Her guitar player had gotten sick and she asked my brother if he'd accompanied her that night at a show. He said sure. When I bought a cheap Stella 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 to him over there. Yeah. My little sister blessed her heart retired a while back from IBM. Big executive made good money and great babies. Babies have been making babies.

Yeah. Lord. We're having trouble finding husbands. The young people today are a little bit nuts. But in my family when one of those babies comes along our attitude is good. There's not a little prince 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 got to be tough to be an alcoholic. It takes a certain kind of toughness to sleep and gutters. Into wrecked cars and then go get another one and wreck it too. You got to be tough to face down the people that you promised and they believed you were 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 got to be tough. You 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 got to be tough. Well 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. I'm not going to have some fun.

Christmas week of 1967 was the week that I hope everybody has. It's what it took for me. It's the week when and the only reason I'm here is because I finally ran out of lies. 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. I'm tired. If I can hear that I'll work with you. I don't care how convoluted the circumstance is.

If you're tired I've got an 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. I weighed 133 pounds. I was on federal parole for a real mistake 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 the ship years before. I'd had them out on a road for four and a half years. We'll talk a bit about that this weekend because some of you have had kids too. I was a single homeless parent before we even forced fashionable. But I ran out of lies. 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.

God, 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. And we'd sew popcorn. Do you ever sew popcorn? Wonderful. Make long strings of popcorn. Hang 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 who 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 with marshmallows on them. And I'm not talking about these sissy fingernail size marshmallows. Big ones covered a whole top of the thing. You had to go 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 were doing fine. Families intact were on. Well, a family was not intact.

It was a crazy man and two frightened little boys living in this basement apartment. That was the truth. I always 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 karmic condition because we walk so much. And on the 24th we took a walk. I had gotten enough speed in me and 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 seven foot ceiling and we brought home a nine foot tree and showed it over, right? We decorated it with garbage so people like me 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. And I had managed there's a place on East cold fast called the Denver merchandise mark, public merchandise mark. And this guy gave me a pair of cowboy boots and a little shirt on credit. \$10.95. So each of my boys would have one present because I didn't have any money. The welfare check wasn't there yet.

I fully intended to pay for him as soon as the welfare check came. You know, a little boy with some neighborhood kid that I'd been using as a hunter had stolen a whole case of paper towels from a server station.

My little boys wrapped up everything in the house that would fit in blue paper towel and put it under 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 door and he 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. I leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And that was a lie. I could see who I'd been hurting. Everybody, my parents, my kids, everybody who ever believed in me. And then dad 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, do you guys do that down here? Yeah, say his 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. 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 think 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 at York Street at one time with my take it 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. Okay. 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 think 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 that's frightening. I'm watching our old-timers. People with 30, 35, 40 years of sobriety blow their brains out because they can't stand the pain anymore. And I'm convinced that the pains 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 want to get rid of enough ego that I wait until I'm asked. I don't want to impose it on anybody.

With the exception of 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 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 conditions and you have no choice in that. You just 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 if they gave us amphetamines so we could become uninhibited and talk freely. Works fine. It's 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 marine breaks and a bad conduct discharge and my dreams are dead and gone.

I turned my set of 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. Don't move. I just saw it droop. At my very, very best nine out of ten people might get help. Somebody's going to get screwed. Just the way it is. 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 weekend. 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, work. 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 pretty soon 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. My 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. I woke up at 6 o'clock in the morning and it wasn't there. I don't know why it didn't frighten 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 a habit.

I'm not taking any chances on even going to the bathroom until I'm on a 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. My phone rang. It was Billy Pate. You know I said I got a problem. I was seven years sober last week and I drank. And Allen'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 buck and show them what it is you did because you don't drink. When you come do that for us and I've got another habit. I said sure Billy. I went back to praying. Where are you God? The phone rang. Another request. We use sponsor and 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 on it since, the sense is back. It has nothing to do with feeling. Quite often I do not feel good. I've got a body, but I beat up pretty good. And it's been used up some. It's hard to believe I'm 72 years old in it.

I'm not. It's just hard to believe. Thank you, buddy. When I first said the third step prayer, I wanted magic. I had the worst experience in my entire life. First time I said the third step prayer, God offered myself to me to build with me and do with me 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. As long as you're drama with it, I'm cool. Nothing happened. And it frightened me. I had come to believe that there wasn't power grading myself and I also believed that he was so interested in me. That he'd give me my own way whenever I wanted it. And I wanted out. I was in a penitentiary and I wanted out. And I just knew if I said this prayer just right, I really meant it.

That the bars would swing open and they'd call my name and say, okay, bitch, 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... I'll give you a tip, Danny. 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, Hattie. 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 that damn prayer. Nothing happened. I didn't... I'm gonna flash. No nothing. He said, you dummy. You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. They really killed you all your life. And we talked about flash 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, now I was willing to listen to him for one major reason. He had been changed. I 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 waiting. It 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. The doctor said I was a manic depressive drug addict. I was tired. I was supposed to go to a federal hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. 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 another five months. God got me sober, clean and simple. Then brought me to you, and that's why I belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. Hand carried me to you. Well, I'm I blessed. 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've been to enough many to know that. How's 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 at dance and said, you people will come down and you will listen. I didn't have anything else to do.