

A Spiritual Journey, Strange Camels Group

1997 | Part 4 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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A general human being I've ever met in my life. This is the guy that was throwing people out of the windows. A funny story. He came to me one day. He says, you know, I just realized I've been in this penitentiary seven years. You're the first guy I've ever really sponsored. You will stay sober. I lived up on the fourth tier and I knew his story. I felt dead what he said. I particularly like Roy Nichols because Roy got pissed today every night and quit.

Very spiritual guy. But our little group had about 100 members in it and there were maybe 10 or 15 on the men's business and the rest of them were using it for political things. And it just threatened me and really pissed me off and frightened me. And I was told not to be at least a bit concerned about that. As to who Matt doesn't see who didn't. Ruth said, do you? Said it doesn't matter what anybody else does. What do you do?

It doesn't matter what anybody else says. He said, in fact, I'd suggest to you these guys that are up there to put him lying. They're at least reading the big book, which is what you need to hear anyway. So shut up and listen. Okay. But Roy was real. He'd get irritated. I mean, quit for a couple of three weeks. I was standing still instead of going to the meeting pout. I thought he was potting. I finally caught on what he was doing.

He was pausing. He was writing inventory. He was trying to clear out of his mind the things that would keep him from going just because he didn't like it. But he was also honest. He didn't like it. He didn't go. Then he'd come back. Now, we weren't allowed to chair for a year. I had to do the 12 step study school, but at the real meeting where they let real people in from the outside, we couldn't go for five weeks. And when we did, we couldn't chair for a year. You had to earn that. It's a big deal. We were self-supporting.

The outsiders want to put money in our kitty. We made 10 cents a day, and by God, we were self-supporting. I learned some things from them. I want to say I learned them. I watched them because I was cynical. And I saw they did it. I stuck around and saw they actually did what they said they would do. A funny shift came because before I left, I can remember, I used to go by and visit Bruce when he was locked in his cell. They let me out.

And I'd go visit him when he was locked in. And it always struck me as kind of strange that we'd have that going on. I stood in the district room in the penitentiary. I worked in the district room the whole time. Just musing one day in the midst of this process. And the mess hall of the penitentiary is the most dangerous place on earth. That's where it happens. That's where everybody's congregated. That's where the tensions, if there are any, are going to erupt.

It's a dangerous place to be. So they have catwalks, and in Kenya City they had catwalks and guys that there were submachine guns. And on the doors was the goon squad. A goon squad is simply made up of the kind of people who really enjoy hurting other people. That's who they put there. That's why they put them there. Because not everybody in the penitentiary is innocent. There's some bad guys there. Anyway, I'm musing on this. And the executioner is on the door. The line's coming in and he's on the door.

And this was a strange creature. He was round and bald and had big ears. And when you leapt into his eyes there was nobody home. He really enjoyed his work. And I'm thinking, isn't this awful? Here's this guy over here.

And every now and then they say to him, you take this guy over to that green room and kill him. And he does it. And he comes back and he has lunch. It doesn't phase him at all. And he's in charge of my life.

And the thought hit me. Yeah. But who brought you here? And I got some real freedom from that. And my mind changed. And I got to where every time I saw him on the door, my thought was, isn't that nice. They've got him locked up for at least eight to ten hours a day. The community is safe right ten hours a day. My job is to be invisible when he's around. It's just a little thing. But the changes that take place are real in thinking.

What do you want to do? You want the questions asked. Yes. What about going to the same group for years? Can we become stagnant? Do we just join another group? Why are you asking me that? Of course we become stagnant. Working with new people is what keeps me from being stagnant. My personal experience, let's just go with that. There's no answer to this. No pet answer. My personal experience has been a strange one because from the very beginning, my home group was a prison group and I had to leave it.

To become a true living member of my home group, I had to leave it. It's the only way I could be a success. For whatever the reason is I've never been able to stay in a home group for more than four or five years. And in circumstances such like moving to another state or whatever have shifted me. Somewhere along the way, I stopped being a member of this particular group and became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. About my fifth year of sobriety somewhere. And as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I had a home group.

Don't misunderstand. I told you about them. This is my base group. But I'm not dependent on them. I belong to Alcoholics Anonymous. This weekend I'm a member of the Strange Camel Group. And I'll go home and tell my home group all about you guys. I'm not sure what you want to answer because there's no answer. I sometimes have yearned to be a member of a group like some of the old timers I know that have been there 20, 30 years in the same group.

It's just not been my experience. If you're doing a group big book study and a new person comes in and you just continue where you are or what, we keep right on going. There's different views on that. Some of the folks I sponsored when they started a big book workshop group, after the third week, they closed it. I don't. I've never seen anybody damaged by any piece of information this book has to put on at any time. I'm not in charge of who sends them at when. I'm just supposed to be there when I get there.

And we continue on. One of the things I noticed early on in Street A was that we'll be in a group where they'll be doing the steps. And some new person to come in and they'd break it off and go back to the beginning and start over. And they never got past the third step. And so that's my experience. What you all do with it. I don't know. It's success in both ways. I don't care who shows up to when. I never do an alcoholic's only big book workshop either. Whoever shows up.

I don't care. Why in the world should I care? The one I'm doing right now on Thursday morning was set up by Illinois. So we have A's. We have Al-Anons. We have CAs. We sponsor C.A. in Denver. That's why it's strong. We don't have much of a drug problem in our meetings. We took them through the steps and sponsored them so they got strong and now they don't have to come to us anymore. We got their own thing going. The same person has written three notes here. Now this.

Are you doing that? I'm an old forger and I recognize writing. Did you do that buddy? Where is that rascal anyway? What do you do when you're working with someone who whines all the time? Won't take any suggestion. Goes and asks their therapist about what's been suggested and comes back and tells me their therapist says not to do it. Well, I suggest that they might want to work with somebody else. If you want what I have, you do what I do.

And if you don't go work with your therapist, I have no luck on the truth. But I don't waste any time with that stuff either. I'm not into debating society. How involved should a sponsor get in the sponsor's personal life? Relationships, job, family life and so on? That's a serious question. Give me a minute. I've got 15 answers. How involved do I get in my sponsor's personal life? Is the only way I can answer that. Very damn little.

I get deeply involved in the step work and I get deeply involved in sharing my personal life. My involvement is usually if you're having trouble at home, whose fault is it? If you're having trouble at work, what aren't you doing at work is causing you to have trouble at work. That's the kind of involvement I get. I really don't like to get involved in all the drama. I think that's what they're asking here. I try to avoid the drama. You can't always avoid the drama.

On the other side of that, there are times when we've held each other's hands and cried. And I've spent the night with people and not been spending the night with me. But I'm just not smart enough to know what's right for you. I'm just not. I got fired last month. I love it when I do that too. We were doing fine. We got to the fourth step. And then his wife started treating me wrong. And I started saying, well, that's good stuff to write about.

Pretty soon he was bogging down, and all I wanted to do was talk about how badly she was treating him. And I kept saying right about it. And then he called me from the restaurant about 9.30 at night and said, the way she's treating me tonight at this restaurant, I feel like drinking. And all I could think of to say was, well, that's what you ought to do then. And he called me the next day and fired me. He needed a little different kind of sponsorship than I offered.

I will not be held as hostage by years rather drinking. That's not what I'm going to get involved in. Had one call me one night years ago. I get the psychotics. I really do. 2.30 in the morning. I'm getting ready to go over to Bitch's house and I'm going to burn it down. Thank God, 2.30 in the morning. I couldn't think. I just quickly prayed, oh, what do I tell this one? I heard it come out of my mouth. I said, you son of a bitch.

You woke me and my whole family up to tell me something I could have read about in the morning paper. I hung up on him. It surprised me. At 7.30 he came crumpling up to the front porch, all contrite to apologize to everybody for getting them out of bed. Which leads me to my real answer to that. It's all about prayer. Each circumstance is different. I got so involved in Chuck's life for a year and a half, I made his decisions.

It's completely contrary to the way I sponsor. But he had nobody else. Friend of mine now, I think for the last two years I have had to bite my tongue to keep him telling him to get out of that leave home pack, whatever he had to get out. I won't tell him that. If he ever asked me and he did last week, do you think I'll leave? I can say, yeah. Okay, so there's no answer to that. Is that answer? No answer, okay? My troubles are mild-necking.

Here's must be too. Let's find out what it is you're doing. Thomas Sullivan had a say. I stole from him

because it's beautiful. He said, we don't have any answers here today. We don't. If you want answers, go stop any stranger on the street. Tell them what your problem is. They'll give you an answer. What we have here is a solution. If you'll get yourself involved deeply in our solution, you'll find your own answers.

So that's the answer to this question. I will help you into this process in the prayer and meditation so you can find your own answer. I don't know what you need. What about antidepressants? What about antidepressants? Where's the line of alcohol? Oh, this we covered that. Do antidepressants erase our need for God? I don't know. I can tell you this from what I have seen. This is purely my observation, both as an AA member and a professional.

One of the most dangerous drugs in the market for alcoholics is Prozac. I can just tell you that people that I have had contact with using Prozac cannot work the program. I do speculate why I won't hear today. It cuts them off from something. I don't know what it is. It just doesn't work. I will never tell anybody to get off of the Prozac. I'm not a doctor. I'm just telling you that I have seen you can't serve two masters.

I also know people who do have to take certain other kinds of medication. The genuine bipolar better have his lithium. That's a body cell. I don't have the problem with that. I learn that the hard way. Things that keep me from feeling bad I'm suspicious of. Because then I get relief instead of what I really need. Does it cut me off from my need for God? I don't know. I do know that those I have talked with are cut off from God.

Well, that's because of the drug that I have no idea. I just know when we reach this point of surrender at the third step, they can't do it. That's all I know. So I don't work very much with him. I sponsor a guy who's a professional who gives it to him all the time. He and I disagree huddly. He believes that sometimes by taking the antidepressants they can get through the steps. That's just not my experience. But I'm not a doctor.

I also have a very dear friend. She's 12 years sober now. She's had an awful time. She's spiritually fit. She's had an awful time being disassociated. Did you ever have a day or a moment in your life for whatever the reason from the inside out? You couldn't hold on to something. It just kept slipping. Then you drop it and then there's a baby rage that hits. She was like that most of the time. It spiritually fit. A few months ago, after two years in therapy, she and her doctor worked out a specific medication that seemed indicated.

I talked to her the other day and she says for the first time in her entire life, she's feeling what she thinks must be normal people feel. She's fine. It has not disrupted her spiritually. There's a chemical missing somewhere in her and now it's not missing. Who am I to judge? But the antidepressants, there's nothing like a good case of depression to get an alcoholic off his ass. OK, particularly if he's well-sponsored.

If I love you, I will let you find your own path. If you want what I have, do what I do, I do not take antidepressants. And I suffer from some physical maladies that cause deep depression. I don't have to suffer from them. On those days, I pray for the strength to get up and go to work cause I don't want to go. And I pray that I not be nasty to anybody cause that's how I feel. I just want to be nasty to everybody. And I love you but leave me the hell alone.

Yeah. And for God's sakes, don't try to cheer me up. I will eat your face off. You'll never see that, but that's how it feels someday. And I could get relief from that. I know several medications I could take that would stop

that. No, I don't do it. There are days when I'm sure she wished I did. Not often, but ever now and then. I am absolutely the most pitiful person you've ever seen when I'm depressed. I'm willing to share it with everybody.

I don't do this. I do this. Can I get you any hurry? Anyway, I'm going to suggest that this evening this group will probably be ready to take the third step as a group. Don't know for sure that it appears to me we're headed that way. The suggestion in the big book is you think well before taking this step. There's a reason for that. Once you take it and meet it, you can't get off. I think well, I love doing it. I also have had experiences where it's so funny because everybody says, oh yeah, we're ready until just before we're ready.

And then we have two hours of discussion before we can get it done. So think well, because then we can really move on through. I'm getting to where I'm wandering and I think it's time to shut down now for a bit. But let's think about that. We'll take the third step tonight and then we can really move through some of the work stuff. I'll give you some views that I have and some methods that come right out of the big book if you'd like.

Okay, anybody else have a question? This is question time. Yes, so I work with them. As I mentioned earlier, this morning you said that they were bringing up at this question. I'm over correctional. You know, as you said, there's a lot of people that are there just for politics to get their past and get whatever it is. And there's some people that are really trying to do something. And they're afraid to come up and ask myself where the other guy goes over there and go over there together about the last year and a half.

And they're afraid to come up and say, you know, hey, help me with this fourth step. Or I'd like to do a fifth step with you. And I can see that in the rise. You know, because I was told that after you've been around a program, we'll be looking to someone's eyes and you can see if there's anybody holding on. How do you go about doing that since you're over all the time, you know, around those types of folks? How do you get over with this?

How do you do something with them to get them over this peer pressure of this peer? You know, I'm not looking for magic words, I'm looking for a method, I suppose. How do you get around them? There came a time in my life when I had to take a stand that either got his everything or nothing and take that to the street. If there were no risk involved, there would be no gain involved. And the only real risk in not doing it is that I may die.

A very ugly death. And if the concern of being liked by people who aren't worth worrying about is more important than my life, then it's open. Take a stand. I'll help you with your fourth step. That's what I do. I'll help you with this step. I came from a background where they gave us cat calls every time there was a meeting. Drunks and junkies downstairs. There go the dogs. There go the sissies. We take a stand where you die and ugly death.

And there's no simple answer. It's cold blooded as hell. Either do it or don't. I just have to go to one particular guy there. I mean, this is just third time in the prison in the last 18 years. And his son is 17. And he's seen him for one year in Alaska. A total of one year in Alaska in 17 years of his life. He's seen his son. And he wants to do something about it. And a lot of this is here. My experience has taught me that when the guy takes a stand, everybody backs off.

They really do. The most mean-spirited people of all will back off when you really take a stand for something. I don't care what anybody thinks about what I do. My life's mistaken. I'm going to do it. Period. You

can't stop me. I'm going to do it. I got free in a penitentiary. You can't take away my freedom, ever. Okay. It's an inside job. You can't beat me hard enough to make me give it up. You can't lock me up. You can't do anything.

Where I am, God is. And I've got to trust that before that experience. If they want to do a fourth and fist up, we've even gone so far as to go to the warden and get a special time and a special place set out so that we can do that. And the administration will go along with it. I don't know. I just push it. I just take a stand. What did you mean when you said that you sponsored CA as a way of trying to deal with the drug problem in?

Well, the folks from CA, the drug addicts and the old breeders and a number of other non-alcoholics were inundating our meetings for a while. That's a problem. I am convinced that the steps, the program, the path of the God will work for anybody as long as the foundation is truth. So what we did was take some of the guys from the cocaine addicts and sat down with them, first found out whether they were or were not alcoholics. If they weren't, then we can work the steps based on the cocaine addiction.

We didn't even have moves behind. You can leave the cocaine behind too. Once we got the problem clear, then they went through the steps and awakened and had the same experience I did. And began then. They will come into our meetings because the CA meetings weren't strong. They didn't have any substance. Well, now they've got some substance. And they sponsor the same way. We did a whole series of tradition meetings with them, as they began to build their fellowships.

They said, we don't want to make the same mistakes you guys did. So we helped with that. And now CA and Denver is very strong. They don't have to come to AA meetings. They have a place to go with their substance. Now the alcoholic members of CA still come to AA meetings. That's fine. Their alcoholics come there. They're not clear about that, too. But it was our perception that that was the way we did it with over readers, too.

A couple of us took some over readers and anonymous members and took them through the steps. Because they were coming to AA meetings. And once they were two, then they could go back to their own meetings with the steps. And they had some substance to pass along. So they quit coming to our meetings. Worked pretty good. Bill suggested that. As a matter of fact, if you don't have any in your town, he said, help get it started.

And even go to their meetings for a while. Until they're strong. John, in line with them, I had a fortune. I was fortunate to listen to a guy that had 55 years. And he was talking about how other societies before alcoholics anonymous had came and left because of the inside destruction. And I was very concerned, and I feel that it's our responsibility to have a clear message. And he just talked about other things that's coming in. And I've been able to go around the meetings around the countries, too.

And I've been able to meet meetings and say, what kind of meeting was that? And just to speak on our personal responsibility is what I would like to, if you had a thought on that. In terms of keeping the message, the message, and not try to solve every problem under the sun. Even though the guy thing works all of it. And we have a path to find that. But when we go to AA or to AA meeting, what is it? Is it going to be AA or not?

Let me give you this image because it may help with that. Recovery did not come from meetings. Meetings were started because people who had recovered had a need to get together. And the fellowship grew from recovery, not the other way around. The recovery process and the big bulk alcoholics anonymous is different

than the fellowship. They're interdependent on each other, but they're different. The steps that work for anybody, I believe, it's a fellowship home.

Our fellowship's responsibility, a good part of it, is to make alcoholics comfortable in an environment where there are other alcoholics so that they know, here's the hopeful place. We killed drug addicts in our fellowship, and we're liable to kill alcoholics in our fellowship if we don't keep it alcoholic. They've got to be able to hear somebody identify so they can identify in the fellowship. So I work very hard to keep the fellowship straight, but I'll work the steps with anybody.

Makes no difference whatsoever. I just don't take into my meeting with me. Now my home group right now happens to be an open meeting because of the facility we meet in. We know there's drug addicts coming. That's okay. They're not members of the group. They don't get to talk. They want to hear something. They can hear something. We're clear about that, and they're clear about that. They're more than welcome, but they can't talk.

Does that help any? That's been kind of the approach I've taken with it. I have a question on that, son. Don't blast me on this one. No, I don't say that this is one of us can alarms, but I've often wondered this and I've been told to different things. I travel along, so when you go to a different meeting out of town and I don't know how you are, and you go in and there's just crap going all over the place. Is it our responsibility that's not our home group as a member of VA?

Because, you know, I'm like the big red, wait a minute, that's not right. I mean, is it our responsibility to say that's not what the big book says? Or do we say that's not my home group, that this is their group, and, you know, my home group is my responsibility. Or do we speak up? My responsibility is to share my experience, my strength, and my hope. That's all, my truth. Because you're calm, so you and everything. That's crap.

Not in your group, I won't say that. I will say that by talking about my experience. There's not yours, you'll hear that's crap, but that isn't my approach to it. I got down in North Carolina to my hero's group, and they weren't doing it right. Damn. They had some strange customs. That was the first one. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. You have an altar call at the beginning of the meeting. Here's how you join A, come forward and get your chipping.

I'm going, ugh. There were three different meetings. We had the main meeting, and then we'd break, and it was a big book study, and then it was steps one through 12 meeting, and then it was a beginner's meeting. Well, I went to the big book meeting, and somebody read one piece out of the family afterwards, and we began and spent the whole meeting talking about dysfunctional family. The next week, I went to the, I just heard a four-step meeting, and then in the one through 12, and it was a 12 and 12 meeting.

I think that's a nice book. I don't have any experience with it. And I went to the beginner's meeting, and it was the only A meeting in town that I'd found. That's what I understood. Somebody read from the beginner's back in the big book and told these people what it was about. And I made a pure ass in myself. He also had a book raffle afterwards. So, a little chairman one night came to me and asked me if I would do the chipmunk.

It'd be pretty cool. Up till then, and then I said, let me tell you so. There's two things I will not do in this group. I will not hand out those damn chips, and I will not participate in the book raffle, and if you ever want to

know why, I'll tell you. And some other kids said, I don't know why, so I told them. And I went home that night feeling bad. I had made an ass of myself. Did what I had to do and went back to them both and took them aside, apologized to them, explained why I had been such a jerk.

Asked for the privilege of handing out the chips next week. Had one of those terrible experiences. I didn't say this is how you join A. I just mentioned it's a... Anyway, nobody came up for chips that night. It's not a lie. Dead deal. And I woke up to something I've known for years. This long story was to tell you this. Whether I feel like I belong in a group has absolutely nothing to do with whether you accept me or not.

It has only to do with whether I accept you or not. And once I accepted them, I became a member of the group. And in the 12 and 12 meeting, I couldn't share from the 12 and 12, so I just shared my experience. And people would come and say, what did you get that? And I'd say, would you like me to show you? And if they said, yes, I'd drive this thing out. And the next thing you know, I've got a big book workshop going.

And I've got five people who come over six o'clock in the morning to look with me. God showed me how to create the fellowship. I crave it. It's all based on whether I accept you or not. Not what you accept me. So when I go somewhere else and I hear crap, okay, what else am I going to hear? Maybe that's what they really believe. I just become part of what's there. And if I get a turn, I speak. Never ask me a long-winded question.

I was based on the information that was presented to us on page 25 of the book. What was your reaction to the comment? Is my voice not the current statement? Well, that's not my experience. If somebody tells me that I suppose they... Maybe it's true for them. It's not true for me. I've lost the power of choice. And I'm inclined to say that in response to that. But I don't know. Maybe they do have a choice. If they do, they probably are a certain kind of hard-ranking, not an alcoholic, but I try not to make that.

I do make that judgment, but I try not to vote. Oh, I sit down. Yeah. That's not my experience. I have lost the power of choice. Yeah. John, I've heard one of the women that you've sponsored give a talk. It was made reference to not taking the people you've sponsored to staff more than once. You've been talking to Janus, haven't you? Did I miss understand? That's true, but it's not true. If I have sponsored you through the steps and you come to me three years later and want to go through the steps again, I'm going to suggest to you that you go find a new person and take them through the steps.

That's how you do that. You're not going to learn anything new from me. On the other side of that, there are occasions. If you're willing to give up a full weekend, I'll sit down with you and we'll do it over a weekend. If you've been through this once and awakened, Clint Hodges and I went through the entire process in 13 hours. You don't want to ever do that with a new person. They should take at least 15 hours. But there are too many new people coming for us to use up that time for the reasons that we would be using it up.

So she's telling you the truth. I won't take them through a second time except under a special circumstance. The best way to do it is to take somebody new through it. That's what I do. She and I are going to do a workshop up in Worcester, Massachusetts in February. If you like Janice, you ought to come. She thinks we're going to do it together. I'm going to set them up and throw it in the line. Keith, you have something?

Yeah, Don. One of the questions I was about, if you go in a group and you don't like it, I shouldn't you leave

or whatever, my experience did about a year ago. I'm from our Bloose's home group. I quit my group up four months because the group wasn't right. And what happened was I came back after four months and the group's great. The best group I ever grown to. And the only person in the group who changed, they got changed.

I went back to that attitude. And I do believe in this reading. I start a group or whatever. But my experience is I went back. I worked this up again. I took a kid out of the property and I would group it better. I did it. Ever been. So I went. There simply are no Pat answers. There are principles and there are experiences. Every time I think I know the right answer, it's not the right answer anymore. One of the groups I helped start years ago.

And was a dedicated member to for years. I've stopped going. There is a principle that has taken place in that group. I cannot support. I love the people. I still associate with the people. I simply can't go to that meeting and be a member of that group. Because you're doing something as contrary to principles as I understand it. I'm not going to fight them. I did that for eight years. And I lost. I'm going to wait until some of them die or move away and then go back.

Okay, I'm going to wear you all out. We'll keep this up. Go have dinner. We'll do whatever you wish later. What are we getting together at? Eight. Eight o'clock. Eight o'clock. And then you get to tell me what we're going to do. We're already going to do the third step. At eight o'clock. Well, maybe not at eight, but during that eight o'clock time. I do? With what I consider real sponsorship. And led by example, I told me the absolute cold blood of truth whether I liked it or not.

My feelings didn't count for nothing. My life did. I was loved as it was where I was. I was one sick cookie and that was perfectly all right. After I was, but we're going over here. It feels to me like we've been two days at this. We'll get three and a half hours and we'll over. But that's what it feels like. Getting to hold this piece of the truth. I got this over a weekend. And all week to kind of let it process and watch.

Visit on the tears and with the other new guys. We'll talk to all the stuff. We had to talk to each other to get it all to process in our heads. All the different ways you can be powerless and unmanageable. My response is very clear. I'm powerless over alcohol. Whether it's in my body or not in my body. The fullness of my alcoholism did not come for several months. For some time I was an alcoholic and a drug addict. Simply because that's what I've been told.

And eventually I made peace with the fact that no I'm not. I'm an alcoholic. And everybody needs to make that peace. It didn't matter. I was an alcoholic. First I was very clear as to what was unmanageable. My outer life was not unmanageable. It was being managed 24 hours a day by very competent people. Every minute we knew exactly what we were down. It was going to be what he was going to do. What kind of clothes he was going to wear.

What he was going to eat. How much? It wasn't a minute. It wasn't accounted for. What's unmanageable about my life is this life. I cannot manage to order my thoughts in such a way. I can make anything come out right. Two and two equals five. I don't care how you approach it. When I do the math. Unfortunately I've seen math ways prove that it really does. But that's neither here nor there. On one of his visits by myself, Bruce said to me one night, Don, do you know that it's possible for me to think one thought at a time?

And I've been hooked since. That's what brought me all the way home. It's all I've ever wanted. I've become everybody. We were all talking at once. One thought at a time. That's true peace of mind. When we were talking about serenity, I had been serene. And I knew that that is not what we were talking about. I've been so serene that had you gone and got a pull motor or something to get my heart going again. Because it's very serene.

In my mind I have been to the first day before the first day of creation. It doesn't do much good when it's time to go to work. But it was a hell of a trip. I've had visions, genuine visions. I've been privileged to share an Easter ceremony with the washer endings in Nevada. It appealed to me. I had a genuine vision. About two o'clock in the morning as the firebird went out I saw a great bird flying high with no head and understood clearly that was me in my life flying high going nowhere.

For four months I was completely clean. I was spiritually fit for four months. If you're new and you're thinking about visions, they weren't good for four months. But I had been a spiritual thief. I stole that experience. You can't take it from out here and put it in here and get to keep it. You're going to have it but you don't get to keep it. Bruce said, I cannot give you my God. You're going to have to have your own experience.

Oh my goodness, I don't want to do that. So we spent an afternoon talking about God. Now, he told me the truth. He did not give me a new concept of God. He destroyed all of my old ones. He'd have me tell him something about God but then he'd whack it. Until it was clear that all my life I had been creating God in my own image. No wonder I don't trust him. I'm laying on attributes of meanness that I have within me. And so I was given a key that day.

He said, Don, we don't even think that the truth's going to work for you. And he explained why. This guy had an answer for everything. He says, you take the truth in and your ego catches it. And says something like, I can use that later. And I tuck it away in my little hidey hole until I can catch the advantage of it. And so by the time I use it, there's not the truth anymore. Or I only hear that part of the truth which suits me.

God forbid I ever tell anybody to take what you want and leave the rest. If you don't take it all, may you rest in peace. So I ended up screaming at him. You're asking me to turn my life over to the care of nothing. And he said, well, why not? Nothing can run it better than you've been doing. More truths. By the way, another little misconception, and I know it's nitpicky. Bill will understand the words are really important.

We make entire lifestyles and approaches to life out of single words. The big book does not suggest, every did not suggest to Bill, that he use his own concept of God. He suggested his own conception. And there is a difference in my mind. A conception has room to grow and change. A concept is a rigid, boxed-in piece of stuff and that's it. So anyway, he left me hanging out there. We're willing to go anywhere and do anything.

It does not mean that I always liked it. You can be willing and still be pissed. I do a lot of things that I don't really want to do, but I'm a little agitated about them, but I do them because I still do them. Remember, in our conversation I said to Bruce, okay, how do I make this real then? Because I know it isn't any of that law law stuff I've been through. And since I don't know how do I make it real, he said, God will reveal himself to you as you reveal yourself to you.

Which is a little paraphrase on what the big book says. When we drew near to him, he disclosed himself to us

in pages 57. Help me understand that I am a power seeker. I always had been. From the time someone said no to me and made it stick, I've been looking for the power to unstick it. I've known at a level that goes beyond thought that I do not have enough power, enough of whatever it's going to take to make it come out right.

Meaning, come out the way I want it to. Don't have it, I'm a power seeker. So I started looking for power very young. There's power in numbers for death. So I tried becoming part of the gang. For a private person, that's stupid. Any gang, even a street gang has rules and I just don't do rules with a dam. I am of the nature that I can be headed out this door over here having made a conscious decision to go. And Charlie will say to me, you got to go out that door.

No, I don't. I'm not going now. I don't care what you do to me. I'm not going. I want to go, but I'm not going. You got to hit me in the head with the two before and I'm still not going. You're going to drag me out that door. That's just my nature. But I'm Charlie standing at that door and I'm headed that way. And he happens to say, have you seen what's out here? Be right with you, Charlie. I'm willing to go. And therein lies the difference between my ego life and my spiritual life.

When I'm in my ego state, I feel driven. I must be driven either by my own ego or the pressures of those around me to do anything I'm driven like an old mule. For the spiritual mind, I feel led all the time. And I don't mind being led. I'm quite willing to admit, I don't know where the hell I'm going anyway. And since this is an amusement park planet, if you know something, I don't know, show it to me. God will reveal himself to you as you reveal yourself to you.

Not a bad image. Very scary. The last, the most complete inventory I ever took in my life. And I've taken a number of them before I got here. It simply means I had examined my life and looked at it with the truth. The last one I did caused me to kill it. What I found inside of me, I had to kill it. And now I'm being told, that's where we're going to look. Deep within each one of us is the fundamental idea of God. And it's only there.

They may be found. That's a scary proposition when you just finished doing that a few months ago. And what I found, I wouldn't really want to go after again. But there is a promise at the beginning of our inventory process. We're going to bounce a little bit. It makes it possible to go back in and look. What a wondrous thing this thing is. Inventory is an effort, strenuous effort, to face and to be rid of the things in ourselves which have been blocking us from God.

To face and to be rid of. I can be rid of the kind of thinking that causes me to do the kinds of things that cause me to have to kill myself. I can be rid of it. There's no other way for me to face the things I did to my children. And to the people I loved and to my dreams. Except the promise that I get to be rid of it. You don't have to do it anymore. I'm a power seeker. Lack of power, that's my dilemma. I found power in the game.

And it belonged. Oh, that was the first I tried the regular way. I joined the Boy Scouts. Three times. I made tenderfoot three times. And then got kicked out for a quit. Four number of reasons. And another one. Yeah. Great guys but I don't understand them. The street game quit letting me go with them on their little four A's because I was stupid. It was all stupid. I'm the one that hears the siren and hangs on to see what's going on.

I found power in sex. Discovered girls and thought it was even better. It's a power source. It gives me the

sense of accomplishment, ease, comfort. Stress is gone. It does what I'm looking for. It gives me the sense of ease and comfort. Which comes at once by taking a couple drinks. But early on there's other sources. I found power in money. There's great power in money. If you know how to do it. I got a problem. There's only one reason to have money.

Spend it. There's very little power in spending it. You've got to manipulate it. I found power in Vincec. When I was six years old I had scarlet fever. Temperatures that actually put me in commas. Off and on for several days. I still have a clear memory of waking up several times. And having heard my folks talking. There was another guy in our house. When the doctor diagnosed me and quarantined the house. So he couldn't leave.

They had to burn everything I touched. I was being cared for and looked after like you couldn't believe. When I was there I was really getting taken care of. But the whole idea that they had to burn my plates. And the stuff I touched in this man couldn't leave. Because I was sick. I found power being sick. So along over the years periodically I did sick pretty well. When things got tough. There's power in it. Did you ever do that?

Yeah. Because I'm a word mechanic. One day just for the hell of it I broke the word in. It's two component parts. Powerless. And had one of those fun little games that you had to play with you. I have less power than I need. Bingo. The lights went on. If I have less power than I'm going to need to accomplish any task I might as well have none at all. So I suggest that people don't be afraid to let your mind go play a little bit as long as you have the foundation solid.

It'll fit every possible thing you can bring to it if it's the truth. I'm still a power seeker. This is all about seeking power. There's no other reason for this. It tells us in this book. It's main object is to help you find a power greater than yourself that will solve your problem. This is about power seeking. I don't pretend for a minute it's not. If you don't find a power you're dead. Because I can't keep you sober.

And this group can't keep you sober. And AA can't keep you sober. If it could we would ask so many people to drink after coming here. Reading a big book won't keep me sober. I don't know people who would drink and read a big book. I don't know people who read a big book and drink. By itself. It's on power seeker. And I have found the power today that I needed to find. I suggest to you on page 45 where it says it's main object is to enable you to find a power greater than yourself which will solve your problem.

It does not say problems. It does not have an S on the end of it. I only have one problem. It causes me a lot of problems. There's some guides here for not only working the program but for the future. And because I have a mind that will not quit. It won't shut down ever. I can put it to sleep and it'll still dream. It just it works all the time. There are very precious moments when I can get it quiet. But boy they're hard to come by.

I can't think one thought at a time now as a result of cleaning out all things I'm angry with and afraid of and guilty about. When those things are out in my mind it settles down pretty good. But it is suggested it says, I do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. So through the process if you're working with me and I just offer it to you, ask yourself what does that mean to me?

What does that mean to me? I throw the word God around here and I don't have any idea what I'm talking

about. I can't give you a description. Better my relationship and the more my sense of God's presence has become the less I can describe to you. But what does that mean to me? What does powerless mean to you? You get to ask yourself that. It's a wonderful, true long way to engage that idiot that lives in there and has something to do.

Now this is going to sound schizophrenic but I love the little monster. There is within my mind a piece of something, a quality ego or whatever you will, that has never forgotten anything. It's like a computer, it has access to every little thing that's ever happened that caught my attention and some things are just under periphery. Unlike a computer it does not collate those things, or put them together correctly, it just stores information and presents them at odd times.

Usually in some garbled fashion it depends who's operating the stick, right? When I get frazzled, I mean this thing's got something to do so I let it do all that kind of information storage and sorting and retrieval and all that. It's a busy little thing in there. And I'm rich the age where every now and then I don't remember things, particularly names. The function that produces the labels for people and other things has been damaged and I don't always get it.

I found out that I can make a request. We need this information, would you go get it and bring it back? Sounds goofy but it works. Then I can get on about my business because I trust the little monster. You go get it and bring it back, a name or a location or whatever I need. I just have to be patient and wait for it. If I push you, I get the finger. It's like a deep pool underneath the surface of the water. It's every piece of information I will ever need about anything.

And all I have to do is put the request in and it'll float out. It's another way it occurs sometimes. But I have to have a quiet mind to do that. If there's a brainstorm going on, the waves are high, it doesn't work. Just some images that a long way have helped me. Serenity is not that floating like a zephyr on the soft summer air. I've done that. Good as you'll do that. A quarter of a sudden comfort will take you there.

So I used another book. I used the big through volume Webster's dictionary just to kind of locate things. I found a definition of serenity and there that works for me. Clarity of thought. Clarity of thought is serenity. That's what it produces. When I'm thinking clearly, there's peace in my mind. I'm three. It's almost like floating like a zephyr on the soft summer air. What does the term serenity mean to you? What is the power greater than myself?

We went over powers greater than myself one day. As I sit here right now, I'm almost brought to tears by what Bruce really did for me. He gave me his time. I don't know how much time I've got or how much time anybody's got. It's pretty precious stuff. He gave it to me on a regular basis and helped me wade through the muck of my own mind. That's pretty precious stuff. We talked about powers greater than myself and they were all negative at that time.

He brought out of me guards, courts, systems. We talked about all kinds of things that were clearly a power greater than I was. Alcohol, all kinds of stuff and it was all negative until I understood that I believed in all kinds of powers greater than myself. It was no great leap for me to say I believe in a power greater than myself. My whole list of them. All I had to do was make a shift that will restore me to sanity.

And then the bastard got me again. I had in mind what I'd been doing for 34 years minutely tracking down moment by moment, year by year to find out when I went insane. That's it. He said no, no, no. We will just assume that you went insane about two seconds after birth. So just forget everything you think you know about anything, particularly about spiritual matters. Well, I rebelled at that. Surely I know some truth.

He said it's really doubtful. But it is possible. I'll tell you something. If you know any truth at all, when we're all through, it'll still be the truth. And all the rest of it's garbage anyway. So just throw it all out together. Except the fact that without God I am nothing. I know nothing. I laugh hard at old Schultz. I'm not hugging his heroes because he says that I see nothing. I hear nothing. I say nothing. I know nothing.

Without God I am nothing. I am lost. So that's where we come to. We're about to place it on page 47 where it says simply all we need to do is ask ourselves one question. Do I not believe or am I even willing to believe that there is a power greater than myself? Isn't that a silly question? What an ego I've got that I even have to ask that question. A quick look around says of course there is. Anybody close to that switch that I am going to turn the lights out.

But I have to ask myself that question. I saw in Bruce and I saw in Phil and I saw in Roy something I wanted. A changed man who were able to not just function but actually be alive in the presence of death. They lived in cells but they were free. They were not contained. They had something I wanted. They told me it was God. I had no idea what that was about but I was willing. And in my eagerness instead of pursuing the path that was laid out I went my old way.

I went running back to myself after I made a decision I want this. And said the third step prayer with all the fervor I could muster. I met every word of it. I had a terrible experience because nothing happened. I had put demands on how God was going to come to me. I'm going to say the prayer and then I'm going to wait and I'll get a flash of light. The cell door will open. They'll send me home. I will then acquire a jacket with patches on the elbows.

A place on the side of the hill with French doors where the peasants can come behind. I can generously dispense wisdom for the rest of my life. And nothing happened. Nothing. Terrified me. I've got to get rid of all my fixed ideas. I have no idea how God's going to come. I have no idea for sure if he's going to come. One of my favorite stories I picked up during the doubting, oh not me. I'm different period. Old farmer out in Nebraska during the drought time came out six o'clock in the morning.

It was already 102. And then the milk bottle in the kitchen table was a note from his wife. Said I can't stand it anymore. I'm running off with the milk man. Because out on the porch and the poor old dog had crawled into the porch that night to get out of the heat and suffocated. And the dog's body was there. He looked across over here and his young teenage daughter was running into the barn with the idiot from next door.

He goes out and gets on his tractor and heads into this dust bowl he's got to plow. The right rear tire goes... The front end falls into a gopher hole. The radiator goes... And he looks at the sky and he says, God oh God, why me? And the voice comes moving back out of nowhere saying, oh I don't know where else there's just something about you pisses me off. Well that's kind of how I felt. It was made clear to me I do not need to understand God to know about God.

I simply needed to become aware that where I was God was. The presence of God, that's all I need. It's a scary place. If the concept of God says he sees everything you do and everything you think. Because I've been thinking some really weird stuff for a long time. And doing some pretty weird stuff for a long time. And that's pretty scary. So I'm brought to a jumping off place. Whether I like it or not has nothing to do with anything.

Faced with a self-imposed crisis. I can either postpone or evade. I'm faced now with the proposition that either God is everything or God is nothing. God either is or isn't. What's my choice to be? There's a choice I have to make. It won't matter which one. Isn't that wonderful? If I choose God as everything there's nothing to worry about. If I choose God as nothing, there's nothing to worry about. But I've got to make a choice.

I've got to quit being wishy-washy about this deal. It's all or nothing. I'm faced with either dying an ugly death. Which really means living an ugly life. Or surrendering to whatever. Whatever it was that made these guys attractive to me. Well, as made clear I'm not looking out here anymore. I've got to look in here very frightening. But the promise that I can face and be rid of this stuff is what brought it around.

Let me tell you what I had to face and be rid of. It's high drama stuff, but every one of us has this kind of high drama. I went to the federal penitentiary in 1966 for a failure to pay \$96,000 in taxes on a little marijuana I brought into the United States. That's what the tax was. We didn't pay it. Now that's the surface stuff. I was hired to do a job because I was insane. These guys had gotten this little marijuana to Juarez.

And their courier had been busted for something else. So it was stashed in a hotel. And they were all afraid to go get it. They didn't know who might be watching it. But they knew they wanted to get it. Somebody said we'll call Prince. He's crazy. At this time I've got two little boys. My oldest boy was two and a half and his dad was a year old. Their mother left. She's also an alcoholic. And we've been on the road for a while.

And they were with me. Now one of the reasons they thought I was a psychopath is because I demonstrated that I had no conscience. It was clear. They offered me the job and I took it. Of course. I didn't take it for money. I took it for the prestige. It's really prestigious in that particular community. To take the kind of risk. It took to run in there and get that stuff out of there and get it back to Albuquerque and this first.

It was a big time ego satisfaction in that. And I took the job and I'm not an idiot. I made them get it out of the hotel. And take the transfer somewhere else. But I got that across the border because I knew some things about human nature and I had no conscience at that time. I packed the stuff in an air mattress and then recently I put dirty diapers on top of that. And then I put my two little boys on top of that. When we hit the border station I yelled at them so they'd be crying.

Because they don't stop being give you much shit. When the place smells like dirty diapers and the kids are crying they just want you moving through. And I also had two courts of vodka. I did not declare so he had something to do. He found that. I get to live with that. You don't change that ever. But to be able to look at that the promise that I could get rid of whatever it was that allowed me to do something like that was taken away and the guilt that goes with it left to.

Today I am incapable of even considering something like that. But I lived with the fact that I did that. If you've done something to hurt your kids let me tell you. I know about that and you can be done with it and get on

with life. To face and be rid of the things that have been blocky us. God didn't hate me for that. If anything I've ever done should have brought down the wrath of God on me that should have been it.

When I got even worse than that I was accepted by fallible human beings. They accepted me as it was where I was and I came to believe partly because I could see these guys are really imperfect. These weren't boy scouts. They weren't even all that cool spiritually fit. They took me as it was where I was and I thought one day you know if they can do that as imperfect as they are. Maybe this God you're talking about can do that too.

Just little steps forward in making that happen. There's some lovely stuff in here heading toward the third step. But there's a big piece that I want to share with you because it touched my life deeply. Self-selfishness and self-centeredness that we think is the root of our troubles. They also tell us that we believe that our troubles are of our own making. And I was at a retreat in Rhode Island and will Kim for a time of a matter she was buttoned down.

Young girl she had on combat clothes and combat boots. The camouflage stuff, hat down to here, buttoned down to here, buttoned up to here. This child had been abused by her grandfather when she was five. And she was buttoned down. You didn't touch her. You didn't get too close to her. She was alcoholic so she was coming. And she asked me a serious question. She said, what could I possibly have done at five to make him do that?

What do you mean my troubles are of my own making? So Kim and I talked about it. And this is what she gave to me that I'm going to give to you because we worked through that. She did nothing in five. Shame on that old man. What a terrible thing to do. That's real. That happened somebody on a horse whipping. The very first time she remembered that it wasn't what really happened after all. It was already changed. Fifteen years later what was keeping her buttoned down was memory after memory after memory after memory of something that never ever happened.

Her troubles were her own making. The way she felt about the event today was the build up. Because every time she remembered it, it was different than the time before because she talked to somebody else or added to it or taken away from it. And I remember doing that as one of the processes I had. So her troubles, the feelings she had today, the victim and all that were of her own making. When we let that go, we could look clearly at the fact that that also I'm a bitch out of a horse whipped.

But we're told in here one of the ways we look at this thing is to understand that the people who wronged us are perhaps spiritually sick. I don't want to be owned by the kind of people that do that kind of thing. And if I resent you, you owe me. You ought to seek him today. Long flowing black here. She'll hug you. She'll tell you she loves you. She still thinks as I do the total Sunday, she'll hug your horse whipped.

But he's dead now. Okay. Things happen to me in my life. I got beaten with a rubber hose when I was 11 for having sex. I should have been given an ice cream call for our cookie. I carried that for years. Warped. And then my other thing happens too. Warped for me. Poor old me. And I hung on to, for dear life, what kept it hooked in place was, how could an 11 year old possibly have known that was so wrong to have that happen?

What a bunch of crap. When I got into the inventory process and looked at it with clear eyes, I may not have known why it was wrong, but we were hiding. I knew it was wrong. That's all it takes to get free. It's honestly the

fact that, yeah, I knew it was wrong. There's no victim in that. Those are some of the things that we're going to face in here. Our troubles we think are basically our own making. Do you really believe that?

I do. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must be able to kill us. We could not reduce our saw center as much by wishing or trying on our own par. We had to have God's help. And then they go on and give us some images. There's some wonderful stuff happens here. I think in images. I don't know, we're a mechanic, but I think in images. There's a piece of me that needs a whole picture. And it's got to be part of what's going on.

So I'm giving some images. Let's take a look at these images and see if any of them fit us. First of all, we're going to quit playing God. Why? Because it didn't work. Not because I want to. Because I think it'd be a better thing to do. It just doesn't work. Next, we decided to hear after this drama of life, God's going to be the director. What does that mean to me? What does that mean? Well, let's think of a stage play.

There are a few actors and good directors, but very few. Most actors are good actors because they have the ability to become character centered. They become the character. And I know a lot of actors. I've done a little. I don't care what character it is, I know it's going to play better, center stage. In every case. Do you ever listen to actors? They don't look at parts. They look at how many lines do I have? How often am I going to be out there where they can see me?

They get character centered, so they don't see the whole play very well. Need somebody who can stand back and look at the whole business and put it all together. So when it is your turn, you really do shine. And sometimes you only have one line, but it's the pivot line of the whole play. A good director is this. I'm not very good director. I've proven that in my life. Bill gives us that wonderful business about the actor.

Read my mail with that one. Okay, if God then is the director, okay, that's an image I can accept. He's not the score keeper. Gonna be the director. He's the principal on where his age is. That was an easy one for me. I've been a salesman most of my life. The principal decides what the goods are, how much they're going to sell, and what territory they're going to sell them in. The agent goes out and does the job. Okay.

I can kind of go along with that. Can you go along with that? Yeah. I'm not going to decide anymore what the goods are. When I decide what the goods are, I get in trouble. I bring the wrong goods into the country and don't pay the right taxes on it. You know, even after they sent me to prison, they still wanted that \$96,000 in taxes. Yeah. The federal guy came to me and asked for that and I said, wait a minute. He says, I'm doing my time, do I still have to pay the taxes?

What do you think this is all about? Boy. And they did that to five of us. \$96,000 each. I pay my taxes today. I'm not messing with them guys again. He's the father and we're his children. And at the time I first encountered that, I was really pissed at my dad. And through good sponsorship, I was taken to Hawaii. We just read it in the earlier sessions. Deep down in each human being is the fundamental idea of God. I know what father is supposed to be and my dad didn't match up.

And it made me angry with him. Nobody's dad could. It means available 24 hours a day all the time, full protection, no mistakes. My God, what I put on my dad. Shame on me. Because he didn't match up. But I knew

what it was. I can live with that image. It's an easy one for me to deal with. If he's the father and we're his children, that makes us all the relationships are clear. I've got a chance of getting along with you a little bit better for Ken.

It's just an image that today I can work with. Maybe you can't. It doesn't matter. He gives us several of them here. Now he describes another spiritual awakening. Shall we see if we've had it? We're being asked in a few minutes to turn our one of our lives over and surrender to consciously and deliberately to the power greater in ourselves. And I want to have a little experience first and did have. Let's see if we've had this experience.

When we sincerely took us such a position, remarkable things followed. We had a new employer. Being all powerful, he provided what we needed. If we kept close to him and performed his work well. There's one I can work with. What do I have to do with my life? Well, each morning I have to show up and say, okay, here I am. You need a boss. What do you want me to do? That's all I have to do. I'm going to provide everything I need.

I watched him provide for Bruce and through Bruce. He provided for the group and for me and for all of us. I can get on. Have you had that happen? Do you have a sense? There's a new employer. And he's going to provide everything we need. Look at this. We got us a room. We got.