

DON P ARCHIVE

Big Book Weekend, location undetermined

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Transcript

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You got about 15 minutes left. I want to finish up what I started. I told you I came from a functional home and that's describable. My dad died four years ago in March. He was 86. As a result of making direct amends with him, and understand I went to him. I had my list with me. And I've been taught to be gentle with him and hard on me so there's some opening remarks. I've done some things wrong dad. I've lied to you, cheated you. He said stop. All you can do by going over the details has hurt me all over again because I know all that, which you and I will have to do is start from here. And I followed directions. And we started from there and had a 27-year relationship.

More than four years ago. Whenever he died, he was 86. And I know because we were very close, he was finally in a nursing home because mom couldn't care for him. And he had a fit if any of us had stopped our lives just to care for him when this other thing was available. But we still went to see him a lot. And I know for a fact that he wanted out about six months before he died because we talked about it. We're not afraid of death in my family.

It's just a natural part of life. It begins the minute you're born and continues on until some time later. He had dry gangrene in one leg. His memory was beginning to go. And from my dad that was a crucial thing. My dad was an unmeasured genius. They had tried all the tests that they have and couldn't come up with a marker. So his memory is very important to people like that. But it was beginning to go. But he never lost his sense of humor. I remember he told me one time near the end. He said, you know Don, there's a real benefit to this memory loss business. I only have to rent one movie for the rest of my life.

My folks had their 66 wedding anniversary on a Saturday. And on Tuesday, dad went into a coma. And on Thursday, we pulled the plug and let him go. That's functional. He knew how important the party would be for my mother. So he stayed. When he really didn't want to stay, he was ready to go a long time before that. That's functional. My little brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado, one of the foremost synthesizer musicians in the world. In fact, I just saw his resume on the internet and it scared me. I knew what he's done, but I had no idea what he's done.

He's the head of the Sound Engineers organization, travels the world setting up conferences when he's not teaching in Colorado. Last year they took him, well, the last five years. They've taken him over to Russia and the Scandinavian countries to teach during the summer. Just came back with his second doctorate. Was writing music with Stan Canton when he was 19 years old. When I was 19, I was my first federal penitentiary in Tokyo, Japan. And the contrast does not escape me. See, we grew up in the same house. He lived in the next room over just right down the hall. Petted the same dog and everything.

What do you even look like? Jerry's talking about feeling different. I've always felt that. I can remember lying in bed at 13 years old crying. Wondering when my people were going to come back from out there and pick me up. I'd been dropped on the wrong planet here. Because I'd been listening to these human beings talk, and I didn't think like they did. I didn't feel like they did. I since discovered many of them didn't feel that way

either, but they... I was that weird little Prince Boy Donnie.

My best friend when I was six, it's because we had the same birthday, and I went to his house that day because they hadn't seen him. And the lady opened the door and called him. There was a party going on in there, and she called somebody back. It's that strange little Prince Boy Donnie. And I hadn't been invited because I was that strange little Prince Boy Donnie. And I carried that with me. And what's so interesting to me is that if you have met one of us, you know you've met one of us. Because we all look alike.

I was my mother's 91st birthday party a while back. She's still here. She'll be 94 in February. And showing no signs of leaving yet. She's got a new cane and you've got to be really careful. She didn't know how to use it yet. She's got attitude too. She doesn't like what's going on. She just turns her hearing aids off. Doesn't even pretend. She just shuts them off. But there's a lot of little Prince babies running around, and I know I didn't do it.

But they sure all look a lot like me. I wanted badly to be part of the family that I was born into, but I didn't think I was born into them. There's a mistake been made. And that gets carried on. I don't want to belabor it. It went away one night. We got a guy from our Air Force base sometime around 15, 16 years of age to buy us a bottle of bonded bourbon. We took it out east of Denver to get drunk and have some fun. I did not know what that was, either of them.

And what happened to me that night is described in the book Alcoholics Anonymous by Carl Jung as a spiritual experience. I haven't memorized this thing yet. What he says is a phenomenon. It really happens. Ideas and conceptions that used to rule the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side. An entire new set of motives and emotions begins to dominate. Hell, that's what happened to me. I went into the evening scared and stupid and short and foolish and angry.

And set apart from everybody. It was me and who I needed you to be. It was a mess up here. And a couple of drinks, suddenly I had plans. So that was a reactor in two life until I had a couple drinks. And now I had some real plans and they were good ones. It was a boy in our class that had been treating me well. I was going to go back and meet him at the drive-in restaurant and in front of the whole crowd whipping. And I could have done it without any hesitation or even breathing hard. He'd have been a snap.

Before those two drinks, I was a coward. It's how I felt. It sounded like pain. And somehow my keen mind said, if you don't like pain, you're a coward. Today I'm truly sane and I must tell you, avoid pain at all costs. Okay. There's enough of it going around you. Don't need to make any more. But do your best to avoid it. When it comes, we're supposed to take it cheerfully. I don't, I want. But I have people around me and say, don't just go to my deepest depression and sobriety.

I was six years sober, living in Kansas. That'll depress you. I wanted to go to the Colorado State Convention and I had seven children and a crazy wife, and I couldn't go. And it just brought me down. Deep, deep depression. And I literally went to bed and pulled the covers over my head, and I was fine the next morning. I was too depressed to work steps on it. I knew how to do that. All that was there was to just pull the covers over my head. Then when I got up, okay, then I went back and wrote some inventory to find out.

Why would such a silly thing devastate me like that? See, I do believe I need to find out what it is so I can get

rid of it. Anyway, I was in my first federal penitentiary in Japan at 19 years of age because of alcoholism, not criminal activity. When I drink, I get lost and I can't find my way home. And when you're in the Navy, that's a felony. I had joined the Navy, left Denver, quit in high school in my senior year, which tells you I can save hours of my talk by telling you that's characteristic.

Right near the end of everything, I quit. Just don't finish things. And a few things I do finish by the time I've acquired them, I don't want them anyway anymore. So I abandon them. I quit. Join the Navy, save America, no ego problem at all. Come home a hero with, oh, Jesus. It's destroying itself. Two years later, I'm in a federal penitentiary because of alcoholism and I didn't know that. I knew there was something wrong, but I didn't know what it was. They give me, I love the Navy. I just love the Navy.

It was a challenge to me. I've got a mind, it's not as high-powered as my dad's. They can still measure mine, but it's in that top 1%. And the things going all the time, I've had to learn to give it things to think about because it won't quit. A peace of mind to me is still the Stanford Library reading every book in there in the next 10 minutes. So, I was a radioman and a radioman. Boy, you want to have some fun. Put a young alcoholic, put earphones on him that go, for an eight-hour shift and then let him sleep next to the soda in our room where it's going, loved every minute of it. I understood. I didn't understand you.

Oh, I got salooned. They made a radioman out of me. Now, there's another fun thing for a guy like me. He's sitting in a dark room looking at a green screen with a line on it that goes around. And every now and then, something shows up on it and you say something to someone else and they take care of it. So, man, we'd go on Liberty. They'd give us 24 hours to go ashore. And I only ever did one thing with Liberty. I drank. I drank.

We got a chance to go to Japan several years ago and celebrate AIDS, 15th birthday over there. And the great joy for me is that I finally got to see Japan. I'd been there often. But all I did was drink until about the 28th hour. Then I'd go back to the ship and get in trouble. The last time I did that, we were getting ready to go back to Korea again. And I was ready. I got it. 19 wars even exciting. Today I think it's really stupid.

People try to kill you. They shoot at you and they mean it. That's dumb to stand there and let them do that. For ground that you're going to give them next week anyway. Never mind. I was not suitable to the armed forces. They gave me a 24-hour liberty and I really meant to get back on time because we're going to see and I love the ocean. I learned how to navigate. I learned how to actually steer the ship. The planet's alive and it breathes.

And there's still nothing in my life experience. Quite as beautiful as the high seas at night on the ocean when the waves are just turning and they fluoresce in the moonlight. And there's a tranquility and a breathing. I know where I'm at. I loved it. 23 days later when I got back to the ship. It was gone. They moved my house. And since that was going to a war zone, I was in pretty deep trouble. Not a criminal act, but an act that puts you in a penitentiary, which it did.

Two marine brigs in a penitentiary later, I was given a bad kind of discharge and sent back to Denver at absolute rock bottom. Bottom is an easy thing for me to describe. Any time I wake up knowing that whatever I have in mind for my life is not going to happen, that's bottom. And I drink myself there. That doesn't occur any other way in my experience. I drink myself. But at 19 and 20 and sometimes as far as 30 or more, I can bounce.

New town, new girl, new job, new dreams, and we start all over again. And the worst thing I did to the people that loved me the most was that I kept getting up. Because off the line I'm a real whiz. When I'm really sick, I have this obsessive need to be accepted and defined by you. So I'll do everything you tell me and I'll do it precisely. That's still in me, not for the same motive, but that same... I sponsor a guy who, the only way I get him quiet was in a golf cart. And I don't play golf.

Yeah, we could talk for a couple hours. He's a fine golfer and a better instructor. So good that even though I'm the kind of golfer that at the end of 10 wonders why we didn't stop at 9, I beat him on his own course, following his directions. Called me a son of a bitch and threw all his clubs into the lake and his wife said he didn't play golf for months. He took up tennis. I follow directions. And so the pain that I caused the people to love me is that I would do what was there to do.

And everybody would think, oh he's going to make it this time. Look, look how well he's doing. And then they'd get distracted and I'd get distracted because there is within me a need to be bad once in a while. For no reason at all. Just got to screw something up. Got to shake the tree a little bit. Or a lot, depending on where I'm at. And off we'd go again. Those were some of the events. Had absolutely no idea what was wrong with me.

I came out of my first federal penitentiary and turned my own life over the care of a science fiction writer. I joined Dianetics. He's a very fine science fiction writer and there's nothing wrong with Dianetics either. It just doesn't go far enough. It talks about me learning to control my mind. So in two years I was a mess because they also at that time, Denver was doing a lot of drug research trying to find out about LSD and peyote and amphetamines.

And for therapeutic purposes and I volunteered. I had discovered with a little speed in me I can drink successfully again. Now when I fall down it's a controlled fall. Two or three days of drinking, that's nice. I tried all those things. I have known since I was little that my answer would be spiritual because I am in truth. Not a human being trying to have a spiritual experience. I am a spiritual being having a human experience.

And I've always known that. But couldn't pull it off. I thought I had to pull it off. So we have Dianetics. We have psychiatry. I was with the Peyote people for a while and had a vision. A real one. We were with the Washaw at the Easter meeting in Nevada. I haven't enough red blood in me that I'm allowed to go. I had a great vision. So I have a great bird flying high with no head and understood clearly. That's me and my life flying high going nowhere. No direction. It kept me sober for four months.

My kids and I and my partner Frank moved into a tree in the north woods in the Mendocino area and lived in the Redwood Forest for four months. Great time. Staged sober. Just had a great time. Then some guys came by because in that world, when I couldn't try to be a regular person that got into that shadowy world. So I'm trying alongside of ours. And it's a community too. Anyway, the guys that come by. One of them came by and told us that Lightning Hopkins was playing a gig down to Coffee House in San Francisco.

There's no way you can't go to that. We didn't have any money. We did have a deer we had just killed. So we caught a hunch of deer and put it in a backpack and hitchhiked into San Francisco and used that deer hunch to get into the Lightning Hopkins deal. Which means we got in the back room. And if you're in the back room with the people who run coffee houses and bring Lightning Hopkins in, you're going to drink. And I did. And it was over.

One thing after another.

I ended up in the padded cell in the Boulder County jail one day after a five day run. And I don't remember how I got there to this day. I remember when they picked me up out of the creek the day before with my kids. I tried above all things to keep the family intact. Sick or well. So my children are the product of a sick person trying to keep a family intact. And they show it. I remember coming down or being up at the top of sunlight. A four mile canyon out of Boulder.

But I don't remember driving down. What I remember is waking up with the police taking me out of a stream. I guess they're on cold water on me. I don't know. And I do remember saying because there were people in a motel watching this scene saying, somebody please tell them who I am. And they thought I was being arrogant. I didn't know who the hell I was. And they took me over to their jail cell. And while I'm not a drug addict, I did like amphetamines.

I had a whole bottle of 10 milligrams of oxins that I just got in theory of. And I know I was in trouble because I was on federal parole for another mistake I'd made in 1966. So I just ate them all. So they couldn't find them. Well, what are you going to do? Walk up in a padded cell. Through the kindness I was turned loose again. But I had to go through a psychiatric evaluation. My parole officer kind of thought I might need some help.

Now, you got to understand it's really, really important at that time to pass this test. I want to have some help. But I don't want to be so crazy that they locked me up to give it to me. Just crazy enough that I get out patient. I vote for out patient. So I went to the Denver Public Library and studied for the Rorschach test because I knew I was going to get one. That's the ink blots. And they had books to tell you how they interpret those. And so I passed.

I was just sick enough to need outpatient. And they gave me my own psychiatrist. God love him. Three weeks later, he and I were smoking marijuana together. If you can't beat them, get them to join you. I'm not saying I turned him on, but he was ripe. He ended up leaving Denver and joining a commune up in Oregon somewhere. I didn't do that to him. But even my attempts to get well were attempts to control something I had no control over.

Finally, Christmas week in 1967, I made a final total complete surrender. We'll talk more about that tomorrow when we have some time. I came to a place where I understood clearly that I cannot live as me one more second. I had looked at my whole life through the best inventory I've ever done. Clearly, and everything was clear. And I can't live like this anymore. And I knew the kids would be alright when they found the body because they'd taken to my folks.

But I had heard everyone that I ever knew and there was no way I could live with what I've done. So I took a two month supply of that garbage and shouted up my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died. And I really think I died. I've not had a thought of a drink or a pill or a fix from that date of this. Just not enter my mind. It's over. I didn't feel good when I woke up. I really didn't feel good when I woke up because I was still alive.

But I had entered into the state that I hope you have and if not, maybe some of you will have it happen. I am

now a complete failure at living and a complete failure at dying. I'm in a body that won't quit and a mind that won't work. Just I'm there. I'm ready to go. I'm wanting to go anywhere anyone says and do anything anyone says. That means they don't have to be me again. And I'll continue that in the morning. You're all tired and I'm all tired.

And besides, the drama coach says leave him one or something. Tomorrow, the rest of the story. Breakfast is about eight. Tom, eight o'clock. When do you all want to gather here? Eight thirty-nine. Rest of the story. That's all I know how to do. But we want to take you on a journey with us this weekend. That's what we think it's about. And someone was kind of sad and some of the little tragic and I understand I talked too quietly.

Is that better? Who was bitching at me? Okay. It's going to go away anyway. Of course, got married, had two little boys. Their mother, who was also alcoholic, abandoned ship, and I ended up with the boys. There's a whole day's story in that. We won't go into it. That happened right near the end of my real down-hair swing into total alcoholism. I had along the way tried all the different things like Jerry talked about.

Tried to be a straight citizen, particularly when the kids came along. I became an insurance salesman with the security benefit life of Topeka, Kansas, a little debit company. The policy holders had \$2, \$2, \$3, and you'd go around and pick up the money. Every month they wouldn't stay on the books. I didn't know you couldn't do it, so I sold about \$800,000 in new premium on that little debit. And just not over seven months.

It would have been in a millionaire's club my first year. But I had to quit that job because I hadn't learned that the money I was collecting wasn't mine until it went through their books. Well, life was tough and I just borrowed. I always put it back. So I had to put my last check into the pot and then quit the job and leave for Kansas City for a better job. Always for a better job. Went to work from an IBM training school.

In three months I was sales manager. In six months my life was over. My wife was gone and I had these two little boys. And anyway, instead of bouncing in and out between the two worlds I just got into the subculture to hell with it. I started my journey to become super freak instead of super citizen. Damn, you're made that one. But it brought us to the place where I want to pick this up, which was Christmas week in 1967.

I was on federal parole at the time for a mistake I made in 1966. My first experience at Penitentiary when I was 19 was so profound that I just did not go back. I got really careful. I don't have fall partners because they learned early on in that world somebody talks. That's how you get caught. So I worked alone. It was very successful at it. For a while. Anyway, I'm on federal parole. We're also on ADC because I'm now pretty close to the bottom.

I was down in my weight ran around 130 to 140 pounds. In addition to the drinking I was using a lot of speed because I couldn't get up. My day started out with the kid that I had was training to be a good burglar. Coming over and giving me a shot of speed so I could get up and go out, run a little scam, get enough money to get me some booze and the kids some food and back to home again. And this was kind of the routine.

This whole business is about complete and total surrender. If you are the same person two years from now that you are today, you will probably drink again. Just know that. Life is about change and things just weren't changing in life. It was the same thing over and over and over again. I think I came to Alcoholics anonymous

spiritually awake. When I say that because the experience is prior to my getting here, awakened to me. I did not know what to do with it.

One of the things that we want to hope to do this weekend, and if I sponsor you, is a gift that Ann Smith gave us. We must walk day by day with a new person. We walk them up. They don't know how to walk the spiritual life yet. We need to be walking with them. I am a great believer that the steps in the big book are critical because it is our way of waking up. But now what? I believe I continue to work the steps because I want to stay spiritually fit.

But now what? And our book tells us what to do there and the examples of people around us. How do you... Well, Bruce said it one time. My sponsor says, I'm tired of getting busted. I said, yeah. He said, well, then quit going to one of those cops. Heavy duty stuff like that. You want some money? Yeah. Good job. And then he expanded on it. He said, once you get it, you might want to show up for it regularly and on time.

And while you're there, you might even consider doing a little work. And if you'll do that, at the end of a certain period of time, they'll give you money. It'll never be enough, but it will always be enough. That's profound stuff. Anyway, when I say I was awake before I got here, because Christmas week in 1967, I actually saw me for who I was. I'd never been able to see that before. And I want to tell you a couple of things that brought me to my knees, because I had to die to get here.

I could no longer live as I was. I told you I'd come from a functional home, so I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. In my home, we had a tree, and it was a real tree. We brought in from the outside, and it smelled like a tree. And it was decorated with tinsel and lights and ornaments. Family ornaments, we passed them on generation to generation to hang them on that tree. I have ties to my past, but I didn't even know about.

And the house was filled with odors. Apple cider was cinnamon sticks in it. Hot chocolate with marshmallows. Real marshmallows, not this sissy stuff. Okay, cover the top and you have to go get them off of there so you can drink the chocolate. And people would combine and visit. My parents were greatly loved in our town, and people would combine and visit. So I'm looking at my own life in relation to that. We didn't have a tree on the 24th, because the welfare check hadn't gotten her yet.

I'm on age of dependent children because it can't work. Nobody comes by our house except this kid in the morning to get me up and get his marching orders, and then he's off stealing, so well, you know. My parole officer wouldn't even come by. He made me report into him. And I noticed that. Today what I know is that he did that out of kindness, because he and I have talked since then. He knew what he'd find in my house, and he knew he'd have to arrest me.

I didn't want that to happen. Not a Christmas. I truly believe that the spiritual life is life of kindness. Kindness brought me to my knees. One of my ways of dealing with life was to leave, take a walk. My feet hurt to this day. The kids and I would walk. We walked the United States for four and a half years. So we didn't have a Christmas tree, so we took a walk. I don't know how to deal with that. Didn't have any money.

And I couldn't think of a good scam to steal anything. I had one cooking that I'm glad I didn't go, because I'd still be locked up if I'd tried it. And we found a dollar in the snow. And so I took that to the Christmas tree place

up on East Colfax to see what we could get for a dollar. And this very kind man gave us the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar. About a nine-foot tree. And I'm thinking, I've still got it.

When I look back, it's clear that what he saw was an Auschwitz survivor, 133 pounds of walking death, and two little boys. And he was kind enough to take my dollar so I wouldn't lose face. That's what I know today. What I know then is that it broke me a little bit. I still remember, and I keep it fresh, and it still hurts. The tree was about nine-foot tall, and the ceiling was about seven-foot tall, so I... But I still got it.

We didn't have any to decorate it with. So we cut off some little milk cartons. They look like bells, and crumpled up some aluminum foil, you know, garbage. And no presents. Went down to a drug store where I was friendly with a pharmacist. You know, I had a working arrangement. As long as I had a note, he had what the note called for. He didn't care who wrote the note either. So I was a doctor along the way. I can write as good as any doctor.

We got our little Christmas tree bulbs from him. About a buck and a quarter, a buck and a half. So we at least had some lights on the tree. No presents, so I went to the... Public merchandise, more in Denver, up on these Colfax, and went in and chatted with a guy and walked out. He gave us a pair of cowboy boots and a little cowboy shirt, so each of my boys would have a present. And I'm thinking, still got it. Another act of extreme kindness.

Same thing. He saw these kids that had nothing because they were with me. And me and with me met you had nothing. This kid I had been training, the basic training for being a thief is that as a salesman each day must make a sale, a thief each day must steal something. That's how you break him in. And he had stolen a case of blue paper towels from a Texaco station because he couldn't find anything else to steal, I guess.

My little boys wrapped up everything that would fit in a blue paper towel and put it under the tree for me. All of these little things started breaking me. They hadn't broken me. We've been over that ground before. I'm thick skinned and filled with denial. But I'm awake somehow. The power of God's already working my life because I'm seeing this and it's breaking me. I want to tell you why I was on parole. They had me certified as a sociopath type 2 parole officer set as a psychopath and a doctor set as a manic depressive drug addict.

And I wanted, why do they think I'm a sociopath? Misguided. Well, I know why because if you looked at my life from the outside that's what you saw. As with most of us, I made several genuine efforts to straighten my life out. Never thinking alcohol was a problem, believe me. Never did I think alcohol was a problem. It was part of my life and had been for all these years. And we all have an ace in the hole. A father, a brother, a mother, an uncle, a sister, a friend.

The ace in the hole, the one I'm at the end of the road. I've got one more place I can go. And it's warm and I'll get a bath and I'll get fed and get to rest for a week or so so I can start over again. And my dad was my ace in the hole. He had a carriage house and we could always, because of the kids. I never hurt my children physically. But I used them. If you've got children, you'll eat. You'll have a place to stay.

There are things you can use them for. So I lived with a constant guilt of wanting to do the best I could for my kids and using them at the same time. They'll tear you up. Anyway, one of the things that brought me to my

nays was one of the things that did happen. We had come back in 1966, early 66, to Denver and to the carriage house where we could rest up again. I used my father one more time. And I'm really trying to get my life in order.

Generally, that's what I want to do. And I got a call from Albert down in Albuquerque. Albert was one of the snakes I ran with. That's what lives in the underworld of snakes. Albert says, we've got a problem. We've got 30 kilos of good marijuana up out of Mexico and got as far as war is and our driver got arrested on a traffic charge. And the stuff's laying in a hotel. And we needed to get it across the border. We, meaning this little syndicate of people, said, do you want the job?

Now, I'm doing my best to get my life back in order. So I made a response to Albert with sure, Albert. LAUGHTER And I didn't do it for money. My cut was two kilos. And at that time, it was \$200 a key. That's \$400. That's chunk change. OK? I did it for prestige. See, I was the only one in the United States that they could think of to call, to go into old Mexico and rescue the goods. OK? Yeah. Of course, Albert. I quit drinking.

I quit everything. I got super straight. Got a sports coat. We looked regular. Let my mind clear. Did the math. Did the planning. I don't want any ties to this operation. So I'll let them rent a VW bus and somebody else's name. I'll let them take care of the arrangements. And whereas, I'm not picking it up out of the hotel. I'm not stupid. If anybody's watching, that's what they're watching. I did the math on the volume.

The way it was packaged and that amount of marijuana on the volume was such as it would fit perfectly in a single air mattress. Which was convenient because I wanted to cut the smell, too. So when we got down there, I let them get it out of the hotel. They booked us into a motel and whereas it was actually a warehouse. Well, that's how they thought that would be a good cover. And I thought so, too. So the boys and I went there until the transfer got made and then we immediately moved uptown.

I didn't tell them any of this. We moved up where a tourist with these two little boys would stay. If you want to become invisible, get visible. Now, I have always used what's at hand and I believe that's what God does, too. And we'll talk a little about that. Got the stuff inside the air mattress and resealed it and put dirty diapers on top of it. Got to cut this odor somehow. On the way to the border crossing, we saw an Indian lady sitting on the street crying holding a dead baby.

And that became part of my plan also. Just before we got to the border crossing, I put the boys on top of the diapers. And as we pulled up, I turned around right out of nowhere and screamed at them to frighten them so they'd be crying. Because they don't fool with you much if you've got crying kids and dirty diapers. And that sounds like a smart plan, but it broke my heart and has broken their hearts. And remembering that I did that brought me to the place where I must have a change so profound that I could never ever do that again or I don't want to live anymore.

I don't need behavior modification. I need a profound change in being. I must become a person who could not do that again or I'd rather die. And at that point I had no options. I tried psychiatry. I tried peyote. I tried church. I've been baptized so often that I can become a Baptist now too. Do you notice the difference? In my part of the country they're Baptists. He's from the south. They're Baptists. I tried everything.

There were no more options. And I knew I was totally powerless. This is an intolerable state of being for the human being. No one can tolerate the feeling of being utterly powerless. It brings you to the point of death. Something has to happen. And I had no other option so I took the only thing I could do. I took a two month supply of the disoxone I was using and shouted up my arm and drank everything in a house and laid down and died.

I believe that the power of God went to work in my life before I ever heard the word. I believe that if you're in this room today you're already spiritually awake. You just may not know it. You wouldn't come here. With everything New York has to offer on Saturday. What the hell are you doing here? This is not a choice. This is an inner prompting of the spirit. When I woke up the next morning I really didn't feel good.

My body said, I don't like you at all. If I could kill you I would. And the police were at the door. My four year old had to let the police in. And I knew I wasn't dead because you don't need cops in heaven or hell. And I just don't know what to do. But I'm in a perfect state of being. I'm a living and a failure at dying. I'm not wanting to go anywhere. Anyone says what means I don't have to be me anymore. I couldn't have articulated that but that was the state of being I was in.

Shut this thing off when you're early. If you think too much it'll think you right out of here. After you have awakened and know you're awake, you better start thinking. But it's guided thinking. It's a little different. Anyway, they took me away. They had nine charges. The first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. The Denver District Attorney told me he'd bring the rest of them one at a time if I beat that but I was through and I really didn't care.

And I still owe the federal government five years when all that was done. Because being arrested by the state is a parole violation. I was through. Fine with me. Detoxed out in the Denver County Jail for five and a half months. I'll tell you what kind of a big time criminal I was. My bond was set at ten thousand dollars and couldn't come up with a hundred bucks when needed for the bondsmen. Big time gangster. Somehow, all the guys that were my friends forgot where I was.

I was caught in the catch-22 that exemplified it. It just identified my life. They couldn't find my shoes when they arrested me. They took me anyway. But the rule of the Denver County Jail is that you must go to Chow. And the second rule is that you must have shoes on when you go to Chow. Now, I'm caught on the tears without any shoes and I've got to go one place and I can't go because I can't don't have shoes. And it made them crazy.

You don't want to make jail guards crazy. So, we call my dad to have my last days in the hole to bring me some shoes to the jail. And thank God he finally ended it. He brought the shoes to the note. Please don't ever call me again. Now I'm free. There are no more resources for me. None. I detox, spent five and a half months detoxing. And the big book talks about hospitalization is favored if you're very jittery or befog.

The mind needs to be cleared before we make the approach. My hospital was a county jail, that's all. And I have a memory, a firm memory of how the change had already taken place. When you're in the jail, county jail, you walk the tears and talk about what you're going to do as soon as your buddy gets there with the bail bond. And it's always the same. We're going to get a lit of grass in the case of good, cold, coolers, beer and go up to Bergen Park and tie one on, celebrate.

Same time. And I was making the same noises out of my mouth and I remember clearly that I didn't want to felt like it here. I didn't want to do that anymore. But I hadn't, I didn't relate to life any other way. I just know I can't do that anymore. The power of God went to work at my trial because they took me in. I was five and a half months sober, which meant my mind was very clear. And I was once again looking at options because the alcoholic mind goes from death to pretty good operation in three days.

And the mind had been cooking for, you know, I'm looking for the deal. And they made me a deal. They took me into the room with my attorney and the Denver District Attorney. And he said, we've been talking to the federal people. And we've all concluded you're really sick. And I knew that. That was not a surprise. He said, we've made a deal with them. If you'll plead guilty to a reduced charge so we don't have to have this big mess of trial, we'll give you a one and a half to three.

And then we'll suspend it. And the feds have agreed to take you back and they'll take you to Fort Worth to that hospital down there and fix what's wrong with you. I didn't have to think about that. I signed the paper. Hospital beats the hell out of penitentiary. And two things went off in me and there's always at least two of me. If some of you feel like you're a little schizophrenic you are, that's the psychiatric term for it.

I'm not making fun of schizophrenic people. I know so. But we are more than one at work all the time. My spirit was now and my being was now I wanted to go anywhere anyone says. I can do anything anyone says. The other part of me said, hospital. I'll be out in six months. They'll tell me what's wrong with me. They'll tell me about how long it's going to take to fix that. They'll give me all the symptoms I need to show them to convince them I'm getting better.

We're talking about my best game. I've been playing that one since I was two. I'm really good at that. So are you. I'm going to have you walk in a room and before you go anywhere you take one step either left or right and stop for a minute in case the room. I do to this day. I want to see who I'm supposed to be next. That's when I'm sick. I'll get with you in a couple seconds. You'll tell me who I'm supposed to be and that's who I'll be.

And then I'll get with you and you'll tell me. I got to avoid crowds because it gets pretty confusing. I'm great at parties though. So they agreed and I agreed. Now we're talking about real power here. The power of the federal government in the United States and the power of the state of Colorado both agreed. If I would sign this paper they would take me to a hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Now I know about that kind of power because in 1966 they said we're taking you to Latuna, Texas.

To that penitentiary they put me in chains and took me. I know what kind of power they have. So I'm ready to go. And by all the powers that I can think of I should have gone to that hospital. Five days later I'm in a Colorado state penitentiary fish tank. Because the federal agents that made the deal with me have been in touch with Fort Worth and they looked at my record and said there's nothing we can do to help this one anyway.

Just block him up so he doesn't hurt anybody else. And I think that was an act of mercy by God I've come to understand. I had surrendered already. I do not believe for a second that God will mess with your life to make mine better. That's stupid. But I do believe that God uses whatever is at hand. And what he had at hand was the new life group of Alcoholics Anonymous in the one place left where they could take me. They didn't have any choices.

The feds had rejected me. I'd pled guilty they'd given me a sentence. Now they got carried out. They hand carried me right into your lap. Because I wouldn't have known where to go. I would not have come to Alcoholics Anonymous. I was a sociopath and a manning depressive drug addict. Why would I come to you? I had gone to NA in the federal penitentiary and didn't hear a thing that I identified with. Because I'm not a drug addict.

I'm an alcoholic that used a lot of drugs. But I could stop or start those whenever I needed to. I loved marijuana. I loved it so much as seldom ever used it. If the circumstances weren't exactly right. Or I could have my experience to help with it. I'm not interested. What I could never take care of was alcohol. That was there no matter what. Up down in between. Straight. Voted. It didn't matter. Alcohol was always there.

Anyway, I'm in the fish tank in this penitentiary. Now for those of you who haven't been there. That's just an isolation unit. Or for 30 days or so. They thump you and bump you and test you and teach you how to survive when you leave this building. Because if you don't learn you're a dead meat. At a cellmate that was kind of interesting. I was beginning to have some new feelings that I didn't know what they were. But my cellmate was a kid named Jim.

And he was doing three to five for vehicular homicide. First one in Colorado, convicted of that. In a blackout driving a car he had killed some people. Now I knew why I was there. I had done what they said I had done. Jim didn't know why he was there. No matter what they told him. He didn't know why he was there. He was not a criminal in the same sense. I had kind of a funny feeling for Jim. In addition to friendship I wanted his life to be better.

I had no idea what that feeling was. It's compassion. I would not have hit me. I was beginning to get some concern for the welfare of someone else. But I'm also saying stupid things like, wait a minute, you can't do this to me. I didn't sign up for this party. I'm supposed to be in a hospital. In the third week in that fish tank I can hear the voice and smell the smells. The guard said, you people will come down and you will listen.

My social calendar wasn't full that day so Jim and I went down and we did the first and most important thing that any of us can ever do. I listened. They had three guys from alcoholics and automobiles over there. The administration of this penitentiary knew that somewhere between 70 and 80% of the people in there were there as a result directly of alcohol. The crimes were committed while using alcohol. Not all of them were alcoholic but alcohol was involved so AA was thriving at that time.

They sent these three guys over to talk to us to make the initial contact ugly people. Two of them were. Bruce was really kind of cute. He was fine looking young man. Big number on his chest. But the ugly one, Doc, was the first one to talk and he just stood up and he said, my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic. That means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and drugs and all the other circumstances in my life and my life has become unmanageable.

And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. He said, your very best thinking got you the penitentiary. You're not doing too good are you? What am I going to do, argue with him? There I am. And I've been doing my very best. See that's part of my understanding of this first hypothesis. I've been doing my very best.

With all the pure motivation and loving father can have I've been doing my very best. And my very best puts me in a cage and my children in a foster home. I got a lesson on what this man said. And then he did what I ate people do best. He made a promise. He said, we can show you a new way of thinking. We can show you how to learn to live away a life that will make sense to you. And that was my first new idea. I've been trying to live my life so it made sense to you.

And it never made sense to anybody. Now my life makes sense to me today and it still doesn't make sense to a lot of people. And I just don't give a damn. Had no convict. Most of my truth came in strange packages. This little guy says, Prince what are you so worried about what other people think? Not one of them is going to put a scrap of bread on your table. True. A little negative but true. Another one gave me one of the greatest releases I've ever heard.

I was beginning at one point in my early AA life. I know you've never done it but I was beginning to be holy. Better than thou. tolerant but better than thou. He said, listen kid. As good as you are and as bad as I am. I'm as good as you are as bad as I am. He said, whoa. More truth. So as we go through this it's important when I work with people that if you want what I have don't look at my surroundings please. Okay.

You may not want to live the way I live. The way I live makes sense to me. I have a two story house with a basement. And everybody in the house has their own room with doors on it. That they control. Yeah if you're in my house in your room even if the house is on fire we're not going to knock on the doors. Up to you to smell and smoke. Okay. You want privacy you got it. I've been married to the same woman for 27 years now.

We don't fight. In my house I love children around. You may not want children around. I love to have them around. Not all the time. I'm getting old now. A little cranky around the edges but I love having children around. I like cutting the lawn. You may not like that. Don't look at all that. What would I have that you might want? Well, I am genuinely at peace most of the time. And I'm even at peace with being rattled from time to time.

And if you don't get rattled from time to time on this planet or pissed a little bit there's something wrong with you. There's things happening on this planet that are just bound to piss any person off. But I've learned that I can't hang on to that. I have to get past it because I have work to do. My life makes sense to me. I travel a lot. In fact, that's one of the contrasts that I see. When I ran my life I end up in a cage, an 8 by 10 toilet.

Actually, it was 7 by 9. The mine does funny things. I took my grandson down to the penitentiary the other day to the museum and they have some of the cells on display. He doesn't know I've been there. His folks do it when it's appropriate they may or may not tell. Anyway, we took him down. And the cell was 9 by 7. I always thought it was 8 by 10. My mind added an inch so I could fit there. But his comment was really interesting because he got to go inside one.

He says, Grandpa, I don't understand how they can put people in these things. They're too small. And when I run my life, that's where I go. So I came to you, a cage animal with no name. I was 38984. And that's exactly where and who I was supposed to be. Nobody. What a great place to start from. I know it sounds difficult but what a great place to start from. From nowhere there's only one place to go. Anywhere. It's like standing right on the North Pole.

No matter where you go, you're going south. What they did then, and then I want to turn some of this over. We got so much ground to cover. I got to get me into A somewhere a long way. We had a friend who I was in. He gives a long talk. I was sitting next to some guy who knew him. If he had a sober by 8.30, we're in for a long talk. They did something that, these are the ways I learned how to work with others. They had a 12 step study school, they said.

For five weekends, if we would come to that, and this was an invitation, not an order. These were not rude people. These were God's people. They invited us to their 12 step study school, which meant every Saturday and Sunday. Afternoon, we gave up all of our yard privileges or movies, whatever privileges we had, and we went to this school, where we could learn a different way of life that would make sense to us. They said, if you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again.

And made the invitation clearer. They had an AA meeting on Friday night where they let real people in from the outside. We were not allowed to go to that for five weeks. You had to get through the steps first. You had to become a member of Alcoholics Anonymous to go to that meeting. That's all. They didn't want us screwing up their meeting. You know, the word sponsor comes from that, the description of it. Not the definition, but the description describes any social organization, moves, elks, whatever.

They have certain rituals and characteristics and goals, and they don't want you messing it up. So if you want to join, I will offer to sponsor you, which means I will tell you how we operate. I'll share with you our goals and aspirations and our principles, and I'll teach you our lingo. Because when you finally get to the regular meeting, we don't want you messing it up. That's with sponsorship. Once you become a member, you don't need me anymore.

We're now members together. I've got new guys to sponsor. So my form of sponsorship in AA is the same. I'm hard-nosed as hell through the steps. And somewhere along the way, you're on your own as you and God from here on. You want to call me back or continue this relationship, we'll do that. But I've done what I came here to do. I just come here and wake you up, and then walk with you for a while, so you don't go back to sleep, and then throw you out.

It's your turn now. In our sixth week, I was given the next group from the fish tank. It was my job now. Because during that five weeks, what they did was just sit us down. They said the same three guys were up there. Bruce said now, for the next five weeks, you know guys have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. Okay. We talked a lot outside of those sessions. Because new people have to talk.

You've heard, man, I don't know what I'm talking about. They didn't want to hear that. They hand carried us through the big book. They read it out loud to us and shared their experience with it and of it, and gave us exercises from this book to do. And if we would do those, the changes would take place. I would never again be the person I was before. That was a promise. And I'm a cynic, or was, today I'm a healthy spiritual skeptic.

Whatever you believe is absolute gospel truth in whatever universe you're living in. But I'm just passing by. So along the way, because we want to be some specific on the steps, I'll walk with you along the way today through each one of the experiences I had with those steps. But the first one was the invitation. It didn't have to go. From the very beginning, this has been up to me. So whether I'd show up, whether I'd do anything or not.

If I want the results, I have to do what they did. If I want something else, I'm free to do something else. But I watched Bruce particularly. He kind of took me on it. I had three sponsors at the beginning, Bruce and Phil and Roy, and I watched them. Because they said they could show me how to learn to live a new way of life. Not tell me about it. Show me. Bruce had pressed the clothes. Now you either got to be a big, bad gangster and have a bunch of punks working for you, or you got to be really something different to have pressed clothes.

His clothes were clean and pressed, and his hair was cut. He looked like a geek. He was doing a naturalized sentence for a double murder he'd committed one morning in an alcoholic raging a stick up. This fine looking young man. And one of the things I recognized that has convinced me I was already spiritually awake is that the man telling me the story I recognized was not capable of committing that act again. I could see that.

And I asked him about it. If you knew, challenge your sponsor asked those questions. He said, that's right. I have been changed. And God changed me. I didn't care who changed him. He'd been changed. He demonstrated the kind of courage that I wish I'd have had along the way. Prison is about power. Everybody's looking for power. Just like out here. Only it's a compressed view. The administration thinks they have it all and they don't want the inmates to have any.

The inmates know they already have all the power and they don't want anybody else to have any. Everybody's fighting with everybody all the time about power. And at that time we had 23 self-help groups in that penitentiary. Which tells you he was running that penitentiary. We were. And we were up in the school one day because this was my lifeblood. They gave me all the groups. I was now the reader from the big book. That was my job was to help the new ones.

So we were up there a lot. And anyway, one of the fellows came in and said we're in trouble. One of the other groups decided they want our time in space. And it's convinced Warden that what we're doing doesn't mean much and what they are doing does. And I watched Bruce, who I'd never seen disturbed by anything, go into a new posture. I'll take care of this. And he stomped out of that school and down the stairs and headed around the corner for Warden Wilson's office.

And I'm thinking yeah, you'll take care of this. You're headed for the whole. You don't stomp into the Warden's office with your attitude. And about 20 minutes later he came back and he says we're fine. So I'll take care of it. And I didn't know what had happened so I asked him. Between there and the Warden's office, he paused, stood still and paused and asked for the right thought or action because he knew he was not going to get it done this way.

So when he got there, he was a reasonable man and the power was with him and we were fine. But what I saw wasn't that I want that kind of power. What I saw was courage. He did that for us. Had he let him close the school way to head weekends off, he could have done whatever he wanted. He didn't do this. He risked himself for us, not himself. And that's real courage. It was a demonstration of what we do. He went on the line for somebody else.

That takes courage. Of a kind that I now have and sometimes wish I didn't. I think I'm direct. Other people have other words for it. So to sum it all up, I came here to be changed. I looked at the people who had been changed. We had a lot of good AA members who hadn't been changed. I didn't pay much attention to them. Roy

Nichols was another one. He was a stick up man. His favorite thing was to stick up supermarkets.

He liked the adrenaline is what he liked. He didn't do it for money either. You know, this was chump change he was getting. He liked to look on your face when he put a gun to your head and took your stuff. And he liked the adrenaline of going from register to register to register. The longer you're in the store, the more danger you're in. And he liked that. He was not very good at it, obviously. But Roy was one of those that helped me understand that while I'm a spiritual being, I am having a human experience, which means from time to time I get riled.

And Roy would get riled, particularly at the AA group. Roy loved AA and he changed his life and made it meaningful. But he'd get pissed and we wouldn't see him for two or three weeks. And I watched this because I'm a watcher. And when he came back, I asked him about it. He said, yeah, the petty stuff got to me. So I've been backing myself for the last three weeks writing inventory and getting clear of it and finding out why I'm so threatened by you idiots.

And I need to come back. And he did this numerous times. And I came to understand, okay, this is real stuff then. This is not a book. Phil Guterres gave me the emotional piece that I needed. Phil was from Guam. When he was 17, he was so violent that they sent him to the family in the United States because they couldn't handle him on the honestly war. Phil was in this penitentiary because on his last drop, he threw some people out of a three-story window.

And they wanted to send him back to Guam and they wouldn't take him so they just put him in this penitentiary. And he was going to do some time. Phil was the kindest, sweetest, most loving human being I have met to this day. Everything about Phil. Phil taught me how to touch physically in a penitentiary where it's risky. But there was something about Phil that nobody ever misunderstood, Phil's touching. Phil was a family man, which is what I am.

And he told me about family. He said, I used to try to get sober for the kids. He had 13 of them. He wasn't drunk all the time. He said, it never worked. I do this for me because if I don't stay sober, they have nothing. And I do this for me. Then they benefit. And I began to get the understanding of enlightened self-interest, the beginnings of it. I still want mine, but the best way for me to get mine is to make sure you get yours.

So I do this for me. God uses whatever is at hand. Alcoholics are the most selfish, self-centered people on the planet. So he uses that. Isn't that nice? If you don't do this, you will die. Oh, well then I will do it. For a while. I was talking to a guy the other day. We're dealing with a lot of my friends are dying. I've finally reached that age where they're either living peacefully or with cancer or with various other things.

This one has cancer. He said, I do exactly what they said. Whatever the treatments and some of them are difficult. They're painful and the hair goes and headaches come. He says, but if I don't do that, I'll die. So I've never questioned it. I just do it. And then he left. And we both left because with the alcohols and it's the same thing, but I don't do certain things I'm going to die. Well, let me think about that a while.

God, is there one? How arrogant. How do I know? There better be. But let me think about it for a while. Consider this well. So I'm in A now. And I've used up enough of this early morning session getting there. Kind of gives you a rough idea of the way I lived. With all the information and emotional support that a good solid

family can give you, didn't mean a thing because I'm alcoholic. I wanted what I had already. It was always there.

One of the things Chuck used to say to us that baffled me for years and I understand, so I'll give it to you to play with. What you're looking for, you're looking with. Thanks. I'm always ready, but I can always relax too. I think the achievement has been made for. We're going to talk.