

Blackstone, Virginia

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Transcript

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and now it is my pleasure and privilege and honor to introduce Don P. from Aurora, Colorado. Just give me a minute. My name is Don, and I am an alcoholic. I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. My home group is simply known as an AA group. We were trying to name it. We were going through the traditions in the long form of the traditions that any two of them are alcoholics gathered for sobriety. They call themselves an AA group, so our central office told us we couldn't register under that name, and we reminded them they worked for us, not the other way around.

We meet at the example of St. Joseph Hospital in the Alpine Room or the Aspen Room at six o'clock every Friday morning. We don't have a lot of dead-weighted our meeting. We don't want a lot of dead-weighted our meeting. Our format is very simple. We talk about a step of tradition or a concept back-to-back, and it may take one meeting or it may take weeks. We really don't care. Following that little gathering, oh, by the way, our second meeting of the month belongs to our GSR and our central office rep. We are part of Alcoholics Anonymous, and our business meeting is one of our regular meetings.

You can bring new people there. If we're talking about the tense concept, we won't hurt them. They don't hear anything anyway. Following that gathering, we all go into the cafeteria and have breakfast together where the real meeting takes place. I hate to admit it to you, but at any formal meeting, I'm only partly listening. Part of my mind is working out what I'm going to say when it's my turn, and I wish it weren't so, but it is so.

But over breakfast, we just chit-chat. We have a favorite. We've been 12-stepping for about a year and a half now. A little Mexican fellow that has been in an accident has some brain damage and some other things, and he has to show up at the hospital regularly for therapy. Well, we know who he is. While I got to just look at his eyes, you know how he had that accident. So we started quietly 12-stepping him. Sure enough, he was drunk.

He still, after a year and a half, has not come over and sat with us at the table, but he likes to have us come and visit with him two or three at a time, and he'll stop and say goodbye. But of more importance, people watch us, you know. People don't hear much what we say, but they watch us. Whether you like it or not, anytime you are identified as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, you are Alcoholics Anonymous to whoever's watching.

About six months ago, our little fellow had a grand mal seizure right there in the cafeteria. Right over on his head. Blood everywhere. You know, head wounds aren't really bad, but they sure look ugly. And I've never seen such response from a hospital staff. Everybody from the administrator to the blue cart people were just there. We are reasonably sane in our group, and though we love this guy, we knew, don't try to help. We're in a hospital for God's sake.

Okay, just stand back and wait and let the experts do it. And after he'd been cared for, three of the nurses came over to make sure we were okay. They watch us, you know. The neighbors watch us. My next door neighbor, we have, I'm from the old time I ate. In addition to meetings out here, we have a meeting in our home every Wednesday night, a little potluck in a meeting, because we used to meet at homes. We still do. We're

having a meeting one summer. Good one, every 40 or 50 people showed up.

The next day my neighbor's kid came over. He said, Mr. Pritts, you seem to know something about alcohol. I have some friends who are in trouble. So, this is the same kid that I went out in my backyard one day to pull some weeds, and some of them were weeds. And I quit growing our stuff years ago. So, so I just pulled them up. We had a big black lab at the time. I just pulled them up. You know, it just weeds. A few days later he approached me and said, Mr. Pritts, if I came into your yard, would your dog bite me?

See, I know he's thinking, I got to replant that stuff and I don't want it in my backyard. So, I said, no, Chris, he wouldn't bite you. I think what he'd probably do is eat you and bury your bones under the apple tree. They watch us, you know. Everybody's been double thanks, but we missed one guy. I need to thank Reed. I come to these things to learn. He very kindly taught me how to identify the solid fork from the regular fork.

I've been years waiting for someone to understand that I don't know the difference. In fact, I don't really care, but it was nice of you anyway. I've been profoundly moved by this weekend. If this is your first one, you have been privileged by the program. Not just the speakers, the workshops and the speakers and the spirit of this gathering. I have been continuously sober since December 26th of 1967, and I'm profoundly grateful for that.

It's due to the power of God and because everything I was asked to do here in AA was the truth and it worked. I talk about my sobriety date because it's time we dispel a rumor that crept in and became kind of a myth in Alcoholics Anonymous. For you new folks, relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. It does occur and it will continue to occur. One of the facts of life is that Alcoholics drink alcohol. That it need not happen. If you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again.

If it weren't for that kind of promises, I would not be here. I must also tell you AA did not get me sober and AA does not keep me sober. God got me sober. God keeps me sober. AA keeps reminding me of that. I did not know I was alcoholic when I got here. I was certified by one government agency as Associate Path Type II. My federal parole officer said I was a psychopath. The doctor said I was a manic depressive drug addict.

I was hiding my alcoholism behind some real high drama. You can get past one or two of them, but not all of them. Managed Depressing was one of my better games. Please understand, I'm not demeaning that. My son is a truly diagnosed treatable manic depressive. But for me, it was defense. When people start getting too close, the easiest way to hold them back is just throw a few mood swings. They tend to leave you alone. You have to get really good at it than I was.

If you do it too much, they put you away somewhere. And if you don't do it, but just a little bit, you become the entertainment at the party and I'm trying to avoid crowds anyway. So in my alcoholism, I became a surprise. Now, surprises are supposed to come in packages with ribbons on them. I became a surprise. You never knew for sure when I showed up, who the hell was that mask man? And that caused grave, grave damage to my family and the people who loved me most.

I come from a functional home. I'm sorry, but I do. If I were to be asked today to write down the qualities of the home I wish I had been raised in, that is the home I was raised in. My parents were married 66 years when Dad left. And I can describe functional by my father's death. Having made amends to him, we had a 27-year

relationship. Father and Son, man to man, nothing undone, nothing unsaid. So I know that about six months before he died, he wanted to leave this planet. He was tired.

He had dry gangrene in one leg and he was losing his memory. And for my dad, that was bad news. My dad was an unmeasured genius. Truly, at the time of his death, they didn't have a test that marked where he was. But he never lost his sense of humor. He told me right near the end, he said, you know, down, there's a great benefit to this memory loss deal. I only have to rent one movie for the rest of my life. They celebrated their 66 wedding anniversary on a Saturday.

On Tuesday, Dad went into a coma and a few days later left the planet. Now, the opportunity to have rebuilt a relationship with him was brought to my attention. My function for the rest of my life from the day I got sober is to fit myself to be a maximum service to God and those about me. There was no grieving for my dad. It was a good death. It was done. He was ready to go and we were all current, if you will. What it did was make me available to the nieces and the nephews and the grandchildren who didn't know what was going on.

I could walk them over to him and say, talk to him. He can't talk back to you. But if you have anything to say, get it said, do it. He stayed around for that party. That's why he stayed because he knew how important that was to my mother. That's functional. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. Pardon me. I'm going through some physical things that just make me whine like a baby. Life touches me right at the morning.

Now, he and I grew up in the same house. He lived in the next room over right down the hall. We petted the same dog and everything. When he was 19, he was writing music with Stan Kenton. When I was 19, I was my first veteran pet in the tensory in Tokyo, Japan. Somehow the contrast does not escape me. My brother is a marvel. They take him to Russia and the Scandinavian countries every summer to teach. He's probably the world's foremost synthesizer musician.

Quite a guy. Let me tell you what he and I have together. We made amends. It took 22 years to do it, by the way. He couldn't trust me. For 22 years, he could not trust me. So when you get around to trying to clean it up, remember the damage we do to people sometimes last a long, long time. And they watch us. My words mean nothing. It's my actions. When we finally got it done, one of the things my brother gave me is a gift.

He said, I've discovered you and I are doing the same thing with my music. I'm trying to reach people deep, deep in their souls so they can change, if they need to, and have a new experience with life. He said, I watch you. You do the same thing. He said, I use the trombone. He used your mouth. You don't want to miss that. That's what sobriety is about. Sobriety is so far beyond not drinking. It just irritates the hell out of me.

In today's day, we think not drinking is more important than recovery from alcoholism. Tell you new people something. If you recover from alcoholism, you won't drink. Now it's a pretty good idea to stop drinking for a few days before you get recovered. But don't settle for sobriety. That is the worst possible state an alcoholic can be in is sober. The main reason I drink is because I can't stand being sober. But meaningful sobriety, now that's worth having.

Part of my emotional difficulties in life is that I am a passionate man, and I think life means something. It just

doesn't pass by. I want to get in the heart of it, and it means it's important, my goodness. But I was a sprinter in the game of life and not a long distance runner. When we played football, I was a fairly good athlete. I was quarterback at one time, and I'll never forget the day I made a quarterback sneak and it works.

And there's nothing between me and the gold post, but air. My emotional state was, what the hell just happened? And so I slowed down, turned around and see what just happened. They creamed me. I was a Golden Bluffs boxer when I was younger. I trained with Tommy Golden and Denver. Made it all the way to the finals. There was little three round finals. In two rounds, I had the thing. It was mine. The problem was I knew it, so I relaxed.

He had a motivation I didn't know about. He had two brothers up in the stands who had told him, if you lose this one, you got two more coming as soon as you get home. He beat the hell out of me in that third round, because I was a sprinter, not a long distance runner. I played trumpet, trombone, harmonica's. Right now all I'm playing is the lap dulcimer, and you're not going to hear that. It's too pretty for you. It's one of the examples of the lessons I've learned about love for my wife.

We were in Silver City, Arkansas. And young Tom Coburn was playing Scotland the Brave on the 120-string, hammered dulcimer. And I knew before I die, I must be able to play just once, Scotland the Brave on a dulcimer. My wife, who is saying, knows that I will probably not get around to learning how to hit 120-string, so she bought me a little four-string lap dulcimer, because she loves me. And I play Scotland the Brave.

Tom Ivester told me if I ever played a kid in his presence, he'll break it. I think it's pretty. This is a sponsorship conference, and I hate definitions because they lock things in, but descriptions are good. I want to do something for you new people. This is not about me. Please understand this. One person sponsors another, and they sponsor another, and the circle goes out. And as a result of that, I have a family.

A is a big family. But as in all families, there are immediate family, and there's kissing cousins. And I love my kissing cousins for a little while. But I need to be around my immediate family. They are all over the world, for you new people. With those of you who are in my immediate family, you don't want to miss that. Several of these people are insane. Two of them are stark, raving man. When there's nothing good on television, I just think of the last time I was with Brendan.

When I got here, I didn't have a name. I was 38 and a hundred and four. No one would talk to me. Rightly so. My alcoholism has taken me some strange places and I almost hate to talk about some of them because somehow the sicker you are, the higher your status is here. The worse places you've been, the better you are. But Christmas week in 1967 was a bitch for me. I was on federal parole for all mistake I'd made in 1966.

I got in with Bad Company. And well, we were... My job was to smuggle marijuana from Juarez to Albuquerque. Not a bad job. A little tense at times, paid well. But the fellow who hired me to do one of those jobs turned around and turned us all in, so he wouldn't have to go to prison. He made my inventory, by the way. So I was on federal parole. I had two little boys whose mother had abandoned the ship years before. She also was alcoholic.

So I was a single parent, homeless for about four and a half years, and it was before it became fashionable to

be that. We finally had to land, and the boys and I lived in a basement apartment between an old lady who raised cats. I was down to about 133 pounds. I am not a drug addict, but I'd come from the generation where I used law speed. It made it possible to drink longer and better, and it made it possible to get the hell out of town faster.

And it quieted the imperious urge. So I'm going to talk a little about that, but I'm not a drug addict. If you think you are, please find that out. Just because you use drugs doesn't make you a drug addict and just because your drink doesn't make you an alcoholic. You need to find out what the problem really is so you can take care of it. Anyway, I'm going to tell you about that week so I can get to what I came here for.

I think Sean was about five, five and a half and turned around eight. I couldn't work. I was on federal parole. We were on ADC and was running near the end of the road. I have come to bottom many, many times. Bottom for me is easily describable. Bottom is any morning I wake up and understand clearly whatever I have in mind for my life isn't going to happen. And so I pick up a new set of dreams. New girl, new car, new town, new job.

We start all over again. And because I'm a sprinter that falls apart and I hit bottom again, this was near the end of the last bottom for me. We didn't have a Christmas tree because the ADC check hadn't gotten there yet and I was too tired to go on stealing anything. I just, man was a tired. But when I get into stress, I walk. I'm a traveler. So the boys and I took a walk and we found a dollar in the snow. And with that dollar, we went to the Christmas tree lot a couple blocks away and got the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar.

And I'm thinking, I've still got it. When I look back over there, what I realized is I had encountered genuine kindness. This guy saw this 133 pound Auschwitz survivor with these two little boys who had nothing. He'd have given me the tree. But he let me save face by paying him the dollar. So he took it home and I keep the memory clear because we had a nine foot tree and a seven foot ceiling. And I didn't have the wit to cut the top off.

And we dressed it with garbage and junk and stuff. And we didn't have any presents either. So we took another walk. And we got to the public merchandise, Martin Denver. And that very kind man gave me a pair of cowboy boots and a little cowboy shirt. Uh oh, here he comes. I'm having some minor medical problems and it sometimes drives me out. That's one of yours. He saved my life more than once. So were the boys each out of present?

They wrapped up everything in the house for me that would fit into blue paper towel and put under the tree. I started dying. I'm not here today because of the truth. I'm here today because I finally ran out of lies. My lie was, we're okay. The boys and I are intact. A little family. We have a place to stay in food. And that was a lie. We were not an intact family. There were two little boys living with a madman. And we had nothing.

We went down to my folk's house on Christmas Day. And I told you, my family is the kind of family that no matter what you're doing, you can always go home. It may smack you alongside the head, but you got a bed. My dad might have said the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry, but your mother said I can't let you in here anymore. She can't stay in Washington to die. And my lie was, leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me.

And by some kind of grace, I got to see who I was really hurting. Everybody. Particularly the people I love the most. Then dad snuck us into the basement. And my last lie died. Nobody loves us. Nobody cares. He did. He jeopardized the peace of his own home that day by sneaking us in. So I went home that day, Christmas Day in

1967, with no lies left, a heart full of self-pity, and moved from the lies into the truth. And I've got to tell you, it's sad as hell, but I finally understood I had become completely useless.

There was no reason for me to be on the planet. I couldn't find one. Kids would be better off. Folks would be better off when it was the truth. Everybody would be better off. I think uselessness is the absolute rock bottom of all human pain. At the point of uselessness you either surrender or die. And I had nothing to surrender to. So I took a two-month supply of amphetamines, and shot them up Marham, and laid down and died.

I drank everything in the house and died. And I really think I died. I haven't had a drink since. Well, up in the morning didn't feel too good. Well, hell, the police were at the door, and I knew I wasn't dead. I hope if you try it, you make it. There's nothing more disappointing than waking up after you've killed yourself. But I was in a wondrous state. I was now ready for you. I'm a complete failure at living, and a complete failure at dying.

I don't have any options left. Without knowing it, I had become willing to go anywhere anyone said and do anything anyone said. But men, I didn't have to be that creature anymore. That's all I came here with. It was a willingness to change totally. And I didn't care what I changed into, just whatever. Anyway, I laid in jail for five and a half months and healed up. What they have is nine charges. A person called for three years to life in the penitentiary, and the day he promised me he'd bring the others one at a time if I beat that, but I was through.

I really didn't care. I know I was through. We came to trial, and they took me in a room with my attorney and said, we've been talking to the federal people because they really are the ones who still own me. I owed them five more years. We've all concluded you're really sick. I knew that. I said, here's the deal. If you'll plead guilty to a reduced charge we have ready, we can give you one and a half to three and we won't have to have this big trial.

We'll give you one and a half to three and suspend it and give you back to the feds, and they've already agreed to take you to Fort Worth, Texas, to the mental hospital and fix what's wrong with you. I'm an alcoholic, not an idiot. I signed right there. I signed up for federal mental hospital. And five days later, it was in the fish tank of the Colorado State Penitentiary. I can't even get locked up in the right place.

And I believe that's by the grace of God and because I had done the one thing that's required here, surrendered totally. No reservations. Didn't even know I'd done it. I believe I came to you spiritually awake. I didn't know that. I came to you pretty fragile, but spiritually awakened people are pretty fragile. So when you're working with people and they awaken, be kind, be gentle. They're really fragile. They're just been reborn.

They don't know what the hell's going on. And since you don't either, be kind. I don't believe for a second that God will mess your life up just to make mine better. I believe God uses whatever is at hand. And in that knowing of what I really needed, which was alcoholics anonymous because I'm an alcoholic, if you had to put me in that hospital, I'd have been out in six months. That's one of the reasons I signed the paper.

I know how to play hospital game, mental health game. I woke up in the padded cell of the Boulder County jail one morning and couldn't remember how the hell I'd gotten there, and if you could anybody else, scared me a little bit. The parole officer was put in a position where he had three choices. Send me back to prison. Send me to some sort of mental hospital or get me out patient treatment. Well, I voted for out patient, of course.

And I knew I was going to have to take a battery of tests. I know how to play that game. I went down,

honestly, went to the librarian and studied the row shop because I knew that was going to be one of the big ones, the ink bot test. They evaluate, you got to be sick enough to need help, but not the sick that they need to lock you up. I passed it. I got my own psychiatrist. Lovely man. Three weeks after we started meeting, he started smoking marijuana with me.

Now, I'm not saying I turned him on. He was ready. But the game is, if you can't beat him, get him to join you. Anyway, I was brought to you. In the third week in the fish tank, for those of you having been there, there's a one-month orientation where you learn how to live in your new community. They test you in thumpion, bumpion, find out where you're going to go to work, and kind of teach you who the players are and who not to play with and what not to do.

In the third week, I can still hear it. The guard called out to us, you people will come down and you will listen. Hell, I didn't have anything else to do. So I went down and I did the first thing that I had ever done right. I listened. Just listen. They had three guys, ugly. Convex with numbers on it. Well, two of them were ugly. Bruce was really kind of cute, but... Well, he was. One of the ugly ones got up. It was short, but people like Chuck Shorten.

My name's Doc. I'm an alcoholic, and that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and guards and drugs and all the other circumstances in my life. 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. Because I was listening, I heard him. He says, you're very best thinking got you the penitentiary.

You're not doing too good, are you? That's where I am. Then you did what A does if it's working right. He went one step past that. It isn't what happened, what I was like. He said, but we can show you a new way of thinking. We can show you how to learn to live a way of life that will make sense to you. And that was a new idea to me. I've been trying to live my life so it made sense to you. And my life didn't make sense to anybody.

My life makes a lot of sense to me today. It still doesn't make a lot of sense to other people, but I don't care. When you start buying my groceries, you can tell me how to live. It makes sense to my wife. We've been married 27 and a half years now. We haven't had a fight yet. That's true. We don't always agree. But why would I want to fight with a person I love the most? And besides, she's right most of the time anyway.

Let me give you guys, I'm terrible sponsor when it comes to personal relationships because I've never figured out how to have a successful, sick relationship, so I'm no good to you. But I can tell you how to have a successful marriage. How many of you have seen the Princess Bride? That's my relationship with God. And all my others are based on that. Remember, the little farm boy is completely dotty over the little girl.

And she takes advantage of that. Oh, a farm boy affects me in that bucket as you wish. Farm boy, do this as you wish. As you wish is the relationship with God. So be careful what you pray for. If I ask, that's what God says, as you wish, I must also reciprocate. Whatever he asks, as you wish. So you want a successful marriage? Just say, as you wish. Now, my wife tells me that there are inflection differences. She's been picked up over rather than fight.

If I think there's something not quite right that she said, as you wish. But that works just as well. Our 12-step

work is based on that, you know? We ought to find out, first of all, if the people want to recover. You want a quick drink? Are you wanting to go to any lengths to do so? Would you like to work with me as you wish? If you don't want to get sober, have a good time. If you do, whatever we need to do, as you wish.

If you want to stop right in the middle, as you wish, you'll be back. The best friend we've alcoholics and Anonymous have is alcohol. It brings more people to us than anything else. Good friend. Don't hate it. Somebody wants to drink? Buy them one. One. Then I got to go. Yeah. Before we were along, one of the things that I want to share with you, again, is in developing my relationship with God, because that whole idea is beyond my capacity.

I have to look at the people involved. Now, the three people that helped me most, we had to go through a 12-step study school before we were allowed to go to the AA meeting. The regular meeting happened on Friday night and they let real people in from the outside. It was a 2.5 hour meeting where we did half of it, had coffee and cake and cookies, and then they did half of it. We weren't allowed to go to that for five weeks.

Every Saturday and every Sunday afternoon we gave up our yard privileges, our movies, everything. I went to what they called the school. Three or four hours. And all it was was they took the big book of alcoholics and Anonymous and read it out loud to us, shared their experience with it and of it, and gave us the assignments that come out of there, asked us those questions. First thing they said when I got in there, by the way, because Jim and I decided, let's go.

Those same three guys were there, and Bruce said, now you knew guys for the next five weeks, they have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. So during that time we were not allowed to talk even, unless we had a question. Outside of that particular gathering, we talked all the time to them and to us. Most of us worked in the dishroom, so we'd... And then at night, Bruce or Roy or Phil would come by and visit with us.

Now my experience is a little different from the beginning. I couldn't call my sponsor when I needed him. He didn't have a phone, neither did I. He lived on the other tier. I couldn't get to a meeting when I needed one. We had one. So my experience has been, it had to go in here first. He was visiting me on one of those times. I'm locked down and he's on the tier visiting with me when it hit me. He's getting out of his cell any time he was.

I want what he has. This is a man doing a natural life sentence for a double murder he committed one day in an alcoholic outrage in a stick-up, and he was free. That's what I wanted to be free. And one of our first prayers is, relieve me of bondage yourself. Set me free from the bondage yourself. Why don't you have a good trip, talk to the boy everything you know. He knows that way until I got out of the room before I said that.

And they showed us precisely what they had. They could describe it and they could tell us precisely how they got it. And all I had to do was what they did. I learned about alcoholism. I was in my first federal penitentiary at 19 because of alcoholism, not because of gangsterism. When I drink alcohol I get lost and I can't find my way home. That happened to you. And when you're in the Navy that's a felony. And I was. I'd get a 24 hour liberty and be back in 26 or 28.

Get a captain's mask and we'd go to sea and that's all there was to that. And last time I did that I had a 24 hour

liberty in Long Beach, California. And 23 days later when I got back to the ship it was gone. I was going to a war zone and I was in deep, deep trouble. And in the doctor's opinion the book Alcoholics Anonymous he talks about working with men who had a business deal or a personal deal would be settled favorably to them on a certain date.

But they took a drink of air soap before and they missed their appointment. And I began to see, oh yeah, I took a drink in Long Beach. It's the first time I'd ever linked these consequences with a drink. See these consequences do not define alcoholism. That drink does. I got to sponsor a psychiatrist once. I love that. He was smarter than anybody. He was the founding psychiatrist, one of the finest alcohol and drug treatment programs in the world.

He just couldn't stay sober. And I like working with new people because you teach me effective prayer. Oh God. Oh God. What am I going to say to this one? I'm reading the doctor's opinion to him because I understand as smart as he is, the main problem most alcoholics has is they can't read. They either read above the line or below the line. I just can't seem to get the line. Or they interpret what they read. I know, I do that.

I don't know how many hours I spent in AA meetings deciding what did it really mean by that. Words like immediately. Well it means immediately. That's what it means. But we'll discuss it. York Street, midnight meeting, over and over and over again. We talked about any lengths. What does any lengths mean? We talk about that. It means any lengths. And I'm reading the doctor's opinion to him and I'm watching it go in his head and get lost among everything he knows about alcoholics.

And I'm praying, what can I say? It's even simpler than this. I heard this come out of my mouth. I said, Don, what happens to you after the first drink? Well, he says around the 4th of 5th of 6th drink. I tend to forget what I'm supposed to be next and what I'm doing and I end up getting drunk. I said, well what happens to you after the first drink? Or on the 4th of 5th of 6th drink? What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink.

And if you're new, that's all you need to know about alcoholism. If that happens to you, don't go anywhere. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. And it may not be this afternoon, but it will be there. And that leads then to the spree. And the consequences and I can hide behind all the drama. It's that first drink that starts it all. I have a condition of my body, which for some reason compels me to have another drink after I take one.

I don't have any choice in the matter. I can't stop it from then on. It has to run its cycle. And I've got an even worse problem. I've got a mind that just can't seem to remember that. It'll be different this time. We didn't get sick as we drank too much. It was bad chili. And on and on and on. So I've got a body that condemns me to die if I drank and a mind that condemns me to drink. Against my own will. I can give you a hundred reasons why I drank and every one of them is valid, but the main reason I drank was no reason at all.

And that problem rests in my mind and I can't solve the problem with the problem. Thank God mine was destroyed when I got here. After I learned about alcoholism, Bruce said now, we're going to assume that you went insane about two seconds after birth. So that we don't have to track anything. Find me. He said, we don't even think the truth is going to work for you. You take the truth into your head and your ego catches it.

And it says something like, uh-huh. I can use that later. So by the time I do use it, it's not the truth anymore. It's my warped version of it. He said, we suggest you forget everything you think you know about anything. Particularly about God. And I rebelled. I said, come on. He sure learned some truth. He says, it's doubtful, but it is possible. And granting that it is possible, here's the deal. And I think it's really true.

We'll still be true when we're all through. And the rest of us garbage. Just drop it. And by some form of grace I was able to do that. To this day, if I'm doing battle with you, please understand it's my opinion. Which means it's automatically warped. Even if it's the truth, it's warped. If I have to convince you of something, I'm in trouble. Because I will not listen to you. And if I don't listen to you, I won't know what you need.

And as a sponsor, I need to know what you need. Not what I think you need. So when we both get lost, neither one of us know, we just hop in the big book and read it out loud. And said when we find out what we need. I came to believe in the power of God. And I came to believe that this could work for me by watching three absolute total failures. Who had been changed. Bruce was a killer who couldn't kill anymore. Couldn't.

It's a different person. The guy telling me the story could not have committed the act he was telling me about. And I asked him about it and said that's right. I had been changed. God changed me. Roy Nichols, God love him. He was a stick up man. Not a very good one, obviously, but a stick up man. And he didn't do it for the money. Roy liked going to supermarkets and going from station to station to station. He liked the adrenaline rush he got knowing every second you're there, you're closer to getting busted.

What he really liked was look on your face when you put a gun to your head and took your stuff. I heard that. I smoked with a load of marijuana across the border one time. I'm trying to get my life back together at my dad's house when Albert called me from Albuquerque and said we got a problem. I got these two little kids trying to get my life back together. Albert says we got a load as far as we're as in our driver got arrested and we need a driver.

You want the job? Well, I drive. I'm trying to get my life back in order. So I said of course. Did the deal. And I didn't do it for money. I did it for prestige. I was the only one in the United States they could think of to call. To go into old Mexico. And save the day. You think your ego will get you in trouble? Man. That put me in federal penitentiary because Albert's a snake. Did me. This has to be real and I needed sanity and insanity to be real for me.

I've been studying it for years and playing it for years. And in the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the story of Jim the Car of salesman I found a working description of my kind of insanity. Read the story. I don't have time to tell it. I love to tell it. The upshot of Jim was here in A.A. six times. Kept drinking. The last time he drank nearly killed him. Bill says that what he did was insane. See how can anything be less than insane.

And sanity is described there as lack of proportion and of the ability to think straight. And that's the kind of insanity I have. I have no proportion in my life. If one works take ten. Fear is for sissies. Pay fifty cents and get on a roller coaster and get scared. I like raw terror man. That's good stuff. That'll get you out of bed. Make you feel useful. I don't know much about anger. I know about calm and I know about killer rage.

And I go from one to the other just like that. Over really important stuff. About getting cut off on the

freeway. Yeah. Dinner wasn't hot. Break something. Yeah. No proportion. And I can't think straight. I do not see what this action will cause later. I'm warped. I'm rubber minded. I'm self-centered. It's all about me. How can I think straight? It goes out and comes right back. It's a loop. I've got to get over that.

To restore me to sanity was important. Now these three guys please understand. The reason I was listening to them is they took me as I was where I was. No name. Living in a cage which was appropriate. And they accepted me as it was where I was. I didn't have to clean up for them. And they kept talking about this God. And I got thinking one day my experience was if they can take me as I am as flawed as they are. Maybe this God that they're talking about can too.

They don't open that door. We got to the third step and I had a real dilemma. I have never been afraid of the unknown. I love the unknown. That's where all the action is. I get bored with the regular stuff. What I'm afraid of is always what I think is going to happen. I created up in here. I've got a manufacturing plant for high-grade fear. Well, we came to the third step and I had one left. I admit I will forget everything but I had one left.

I was afraid if I really turned my life and went over to the care of God completely, that he put me on the corner of Colfax and Broadway, handing out watch to our magazines and asking strangers, have you been saved, brother? I've got this palatial suite in cell B49 right in the Colorado State Penitentiary. I just couldn't see me lowering myself to that. Macro proportion in the ability to take straight. See, I had a model for that.

When I was in high school in Denver on the corner of Colfax and Broadway a fellow we call the brown man. Lovely men. Brown suit, brown shoes, brown tie, brown shirt, brown hat, brown attitude. As people walk by, hand them a watchtower and ask them, have you been saved, brother? And we used to drive by and make fun of him. And that's what I was afraid of. And if I turned my life over to God and did God's work, you'd make fun of me and I'd rather die and feel like a fool.

And I had a very wise sponsor. He said, oh, well, let's talk about that. Now, for you new folks, please understand, let's talk about that does not mean let us talk about anything. It means if you'll be quiet for a minute, we'll see if we can drill through that hard head of yours. Truth without love is cruelty. And confrontation without a real answer is brutality. But he loved me and he had a real answer so he said, Don, do you suppose that the guy that's handing out watchtowers down here today had breakfast where he wanted to?

And I said, well, yeah. He said, well, you didn't. Do you suppose that that fellow who's making a fool to himself, asking strangers if they've been saved, is wearing the clothes that he picked out to do it in? I said, well, yeah, probably. He says, you're not. Do you suppose that when he's all through humiliating himself today, that he gets to go home and he had me. What he did for me was to hand carry me into the new mind that Dr.

Silkwood promises us. The foundation of my life is simply this. Anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will ever have in mind for me, period. And I do live that way. I get woeful sometimes. What the hell? I'm just a kid. But that is all I live. And since I started living that way, the contrast is magnificent. I'm a traveler. When I live my life by my way, I end up in an eight by ten toilet.

It's actually was seven by nine. I thought it was eight by ten. I took my grandson down to the prison the other day, and some of the cells on display. It's seven by nine. My little grandson got in there and made a profound

statement. He said, Grandpa, I don't understand. How can they put people in these things? They're too small. Well, they don't put people in those things. People put themselves in those things. My world had gotten that small.

And I opened it up to eight by ten up here. I had to. Seven by nine is too tight for me. I'm a traveler. Since I started working for God, I've been all over the world. Literally. U.S., Canada, Russia, Japan, Puerto Rico. Where the hell am I today? See, if I'd have only gone to places I'd have thought of, I'd have missed all the great places. I couldn't have a lasting relationship with anyone. And when Jackie begged me to marry her, I said, as you were.

Why is she in here? My children were afraid of me. Nobody's afraid of me these days. Nobody. My granddaughter came to me the other day, a little Gianna. I said, Grandpa, you're the best grandpa in the whole world. I'm a curious fellow. I said, well, what do you think that? She said, oh, because you love us so much. She also described the alcoholic mental process one afternoon. I sit on the back porch and swing and watch them.

It's one of the great things about being my age. You get to sit on the back porch and swing and watch things and nobody bothers you. Kids were all playing with the balls out in the back. Our yard's always full of kids because they're the real lesson-givers of this planet. And she wanted the green ball. And the minute the boys discovered she wanted the green ball, there wasn't a chance in hell she'd ever get close to that green ball.

And I watched her go through her gyration. She's brilliant. Nothing she could do would bring it about. She ran up on the porch and sat on the swing next to me and was quiet for a minute. She says, Grandpa, they won't give me the green ball. They have ruined my life. That's kind of insanity I suffer from. She said to me a while back, Grandpa, how come it is that you know everything? Because I understand the grandpa role.

I do. I'm select even what I show you. But what I said to her is, honey, it's simple. I've lived a long time and I pay attention. And this is about paying attention. Recovery is about paying attention. To what's going on about me and what's going on within me. We're promising the big book not only will I be able to utilize my past, I will see how my experience can help others if I'm paying attention. Very important in sponsorship.

I need to see what you need. And to do that I have to learn to listen to you. What you're really saying because you don't know how to talk yet either. You can't read and you can't talk. I got 60. Good. 65 is it? Well, 68. What the hell? I get frustrated by, I've been doing this for 33 years. And I've been living with the sense that where I am God is for 36 years. And so I have miraculous stories to tell you and I've run out of time here.

But there are a couple I do want to share with you about setting straight the crooked path. I come from the old school of a man's where if you did something wrong, you must do something about it. There's no slack. Unless it's going to harm somebody. I had the opportunity, my last nine years of my work life, I worked for the Department of Corrections in North Carolina and then came to Colorado and worked in corrections there for seven years.

When God has worked for you to do nothing gets in the way. Nothing. When I was about three years sober, I'm still on federal parole and my memories began to come back. They will do that new people. God is very merciful. You don't get to remember all the bad shit you did because it will kill you. It will come slowly as you get better. And one of my memories came back in December before I got hit in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I had used

a bad check to pick up a prescription I had written myself.

So I can write as good as any doctor so we could get out of town. Now that I remembered I got to do something about it. But we're given pretty simple directions. It says in the big book if others are going to be involved, we talk to them about it. Secure their consent. The only person who would really be bothered by me going to Wyoming and confessing two more felonies would be my parole officer. So my sponsor and I talked it over and got clear I had to go to my parole officer and confess two more felonies.

Made me a little nervous. But I needed his permission to leave the state. And he listened to the story and said, you're right. You have to do something about it. Here's the deal. If they arrest you, I will not violate you. You have my permission to leave the state and go. So on the way home Gary and I talked about it and he said, it also says in here we're not to be the foolish murderer. And just throw ourselves into the lion's cage.

Others will be involved. He says you're active in AA. They're letting you visit your kids again. There's a lot of people will be changed by this. He said, I come from Cheyenne. Let's do this. I know the guy that directs always a decent man. Let's write him a letter. Lay the whole thing out and ask him how he would like you to handle it. Well, that's consistent with my spiritual experience. I got free, locked up in a penitentiary cell when I'm working on the aid step.

With the suggestion that my sponsor said, can you look them all in the eye? Picture them in front of you. If you can look them all in the eye and say to them, I've been wrong enough harm to you. Would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get the books to balance? And I was set free that night, lifted from that chair and set free. So now I'm really nervous. I've got to confess two felonies on paper and sign it and mail it.

And I don't have a high drum ending for you because the letter came back. The man had died and the place was shut down. And then I got thinking, well now, don't like all Wyoming something. Back to the Pro-Loster. He said, don't do that. Here's what's going to happen. You're going to go into Wyoming and confess two more felonies they can't prove. Because the records are all gone. You'll have to deal with confused police officers.

And I don't want you dealing with confused police officers. He knew about it. He said, you just keep doing what you're doing and an opportunity will be made for you. Three, four, five years ago, while still working in corrections in Colorado, I sent to Cheyenne to open an alcohol and drug treatment program in a facility. I got it up and running and came back in about six weeks after I got back. It hit me. It's over. I'm clean.

An opportunity will be made the minute you get willing. It may not happen today, but an opportunity will be made. It took 22 years to make amends with my brother. Because he's a decent man, a stand-up guy. And he had watched me betray our dreams, all the promises, break the family's heart. It's a long time before he could really trust me again. And when I was in North Carolina, one of the ways I make amends to my mother is I go see her on a regular basis.

She said, honey, all I've ever wondered for you is that you be happy, so I go by happy all the time. And drag happiness with me, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, stories about you. And I was visiting her from North Carolina, and my brother came in and sat down, and I had my leg crossed over like that, and all of a sudden he kicked me on the bottom of the shoe. And he said, you know, Don, I'm pretty glad to see you.

And he was shocked because he was glad to see me. He hadn't felt happy all the time, going away. And because he's completely straight, he said, listen, next time you're in town, let you and I go up to the cabin and do a little fishing. Now, God's made me a listener. When you'd ask people, what do I have to do? You shut up and listen, while they tell you. What he really said is that you and I need a whole day by ourselves with no interruptions, so we did.

Didn't do a whole lot of fishing, played a little cribbage, but we talked. And we got it all shook out. And my brother said to me, now, there's one last thing you need to know. He said, I'm 58 years old now, and I believe I've been able to make a decent contribution to life. Now, you don't just tell anybody that. That's your soul. It only goes to people you really, really care about. You really love deeply. My heart soared.

We're back. My brother and I are buddies again. But the great thing he did for me that day, he only gave me that gift. He gave me the gift I had looked for for years to tell you how I feel about you. So you didn't get me sober, but I was brought to you to learn about love and service and how to be part of a family. I've told you, I've used the story of the statue of David and Michelangelo and the anvil and the lake and all that.

And they were all insufficient. Well, for my brother to you, here it is. I'm 79. And because of you, I've been able to make a decent contribution. That's very important. We're all on notice. One day at a time doesn't mean just live one day at a time. That's all we got. And if we have anything to do with each other, it must be done now. See, I will never be by this way again. And neither will you. Even if we meet again, I won't be the same and neither will you.

So we need to transact our business and get it done. Be kind. Nothing works better than kindness. The people coming to us are badly wounded, self-inflicted wounds most of the time, but wounds nevertheless. They don't need to be yelled at, pushed around, beaten up, or pampered. They need to be told the truth. If you are alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. You don't ever have to live in the kind of pain you've been living in ever again.

We do not promise you a pain-free life. But the pain of active alcoholism need never be yours. And the pain of active alcoholism is that I'm different and I don't belong here. Well, if you're alcoholic, you belong here. You're sicker than hell and sorely. And we're all going to get well together and I love you very much. Thank you.