

DON P ARCHIVE

Big Book Seminar

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Transcript

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I never did get to soup. My name is Don, I am an alcoholic. And by the grace and the power of a loving God, I have been continuously sober since December 26th of 1967. And I think it's very important that we begin telling people that there's a lot of lies have crept into AA over the last few years. And I want to break one of the first ones. If you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. Relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. It does occur, but it's not necessary. So we talk about our sobriety date where I come from. I'm not caging, by the way, except in an honorary sense. I can now cook it too fast. Lays a Laissez les bons temps rouler or roule, I can even speak it.

That's enough of that. I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. And my home group is known simply as an AA group. And looking for a name for the group, we looked at the long form of the third tradition and it says that any two or more alcoholics gathered for sobriety may call themselves an AA group. So that's what we call ourselves. We meet at six o'clock in the morning at the example of St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver. Man, I've never played a room like this and had a drink section before. May I take this jacket off? It's really hot up here. Thank you.

You promise you wouldn't do that when my wife was in a room. Our meeting is a very simple one. We cover a step of tradition and a concept back-to-back whether it takes one meeting or a month or two. It doesn't make any difference. This is a complete program. Following our regular formal meeting, we all go into the cafeteria and have breakfast and have another meeting because we recognize something in our own weaknesses.

I wish this weren't true, but in any formal meeting that I'm in, I'm only partly listening. There is a piece of me that's thinking about what I'm going to say when it's my turn. And I wish it weren't true, but it is true. So if you bring new people to that meeting, we won't hurt them, we promise you. And if they need properly 12 step, we'll take them to breakfast and gang up on them. We're not above that. Lives are at stake here. If it takes ten of us, it takes ten of us.

I also go to a little breakfast meeting at seven with a bunch of wimps who can't get up at six on Tuesday morning. We learned from the Salvation Army years ago that people respond better with their bellies full. So we'd get together and we'd feed them, and then we'd 12 step them. And then the greatest thrill of my life right now, about three years ago, two GSRs came to me and asked me just because of my experience to go through the traditions and the concepts with them.

And before we started, it was six. Last week it was 42 people. And we're now going through the big book by group conscience word for word. It's my favorite activity. And it's young people. Few old-timers, Marty shows up once in a while, deck was there a while back. He came just to show off though. You ever see a man come to a regular meeting at a tuxedo? That's how I dress a little. None of those things keep me sober. None of them.

But if I don't do that, I will surely drink. But I'm very clear on what keeps me sober and the power and the grace of God. Because I didn't get to you until I was five and a half months over, so you didn't sober me up. God

sober me up. And then brought me to you so that my life could now have some meaning and depth and purpose. So I love Alcoholics Anonymous because I'm free of you, but I need you. This is where my life work is. This is where the people I love are. This is where the people I don't love are.

Because I don't like all of you. I will be tolerant and patient if the prayer works. But I love most of you. Some of you are just intolerable. And I can say that because I'm intolerable to some people too. If everybody likes you, you're still being a phony, you know. There are some people who don't like me just because I came in the room. You don't even have to do anything. One of the good-ish pieces of freedom I got. I got my freedom by the way in a penitentiary cell.

I'll talk about that tonight because that's part of my experience. I wish I didn't have to talk about it. I belong to the only organization in the world where having been in prison gives you status. You know, they'll give you a little piece of freedom. Mr. William. Another Denver Transplant. There are people who like me no matter what I do. And there are people who don't like me no matter what I do. And there are millions and millions of people that don't even know I exist.

And wouldn't give a damn if they did. And that's freedom. One more piece of freedom that I'll tell some stories. I find the solution to abandonment. Folks come. Folks go. Some stay longer than others. And my age, there are some of them that are staying a little longer than I wish they would. You'll come to that in time. I come from a functional home in Denver, Colorado. And I apologize, but I do. It doesn't mean we didn't have problems, but my family has always met the problems.

I'm the only alcoholic in it. As far as we know, we thought my son was for a while. But he went out. Oh, this poor kid. In his early teens, he tried to be a dope dealer. I saw a little marijuana and he'd come home all beat up. Because we do communicate, he would tell me about it. He said they'd took my money and they'd beat me up. And after a second of the time I suggested to him, he might want to find another occupation.

Really wasn't very good at this one. But he drank and he liked to smoke his weed and got him some trouble around it. And we were looking hopefully for his membership. And he got a job where they did random urinalysis and he quit. Just couldn't take it. I have an uncle who was a good drinker. He and my uncle Walt and my aunt Ruth were good drinkers. They were party drinkers. They drank a lot all the time and party. But uncle Walt drunk was uncle Walt drunk.

And his doctor told him one time, water if you don't stop drinking, you're going to die. So he quit. You got to be tough to be an alcoholic. Really tough. People think we're weak. You got to be tough enough to lie to the people that you love and steal from your children and sleep in the snow and destroy everything you've worked for and then start over. Regular people just can't do that. They just get on a track and they go.

And I'm one of those. Destroy it all. Build it up, destroy it again. Build it up and destroy it again. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. And I consider probably the world's foremost synthesizer musician. And I'm not the only one who thinks that. When he's not teaching there, they take him to Russia and the Scandinavian countries in the summer and he teaches there. He's the head of the Sound Engineers organization worldwide.

For years he did a symphony each year for the Denver Symphony. Was writing music with Stan Kenton when he was 19 years old. Grew up in the same house I did. Lived in the next room over just down the hall there. We petted the same dog and everything. So I kind of figured that perhaps my alcoholism is not as a result of my being mistreated anywhere along the way. My sister retired as an IBM executive. She's now dabbles in real estate to keep her hand in and takes care of my mother who's now 94 and still feisty.

Made great babies, great money. Her baby's been busy making babies. And we all kind of look alike. If you meet one of us, you know you've met one of us. But I grew up thinking there's something wrong here. One of my people coming back from out there picked me up because I'm on the wrong planet. Obviously I look like these people but I don't think like them and I don't feel like them. Just that sense Bob talked about. A little sense of alienation.

I remember when I was six to label it. I was just a little trauma. We loved to talk a little about trauma. My best friend, in fact, about the only friend I had was a kid whose birthday was the same day mine was. And on her sixth birthday I hadn't seen him so I went down to his house and this lady opened the door and there's a little party going on inside. And I heard her turn around and say to the inside it's that strange little prince boy Donnie.

And I hadn't been invited to the party because I was that strange little prince boy Donnie. And I don't know what the hell that means but that's how I felt. Let me tell you a little about functional. About four years ago, I mean four or five years ago my dad died. And he and I had been 27 years building a real honest fine relationship. I went and made amends. And we started from there and built something. So I knew all about what he was going through.

And he was in a nursing home. Had dry gangrene in one leg and his mind was beginning to slip a little. My dad was an unmeasured genius. They hadn't found a test that wouldn't touch him. Incredible human being. But he was losing his memory. He never did lose his sense of humor. Right near the end he told me he says you know Don there's a real benefit to this memory loss thing. I don't have to rent one movie for the rest of my life.

They celebrated their 66 wedding anniversary on a Saturday and on Tuesday Dad went into a coma and on Thursday left the planet. That's functional. See he knew how important that party would be for her. So he stayed and I know for a fact he wanted out months before that he was tired. That's what I come from. I didn't have that kind of staying power. Don't know why. Don't care why. Just don't care to go back to that. I brought all this kind of stuff to alcohol one night.

We got a guy from our Air Force base to buy us a bottle of bonded bourbon. I was in high school. Bounded bourbon of course is elegant. We thought it was something special. It just means some insurance company somewhere says Capone didn't make this. We know it was made by a Seagram so if you can prove it wasn't we'll give you another bottle. We thought it was pretty special. We went out east of Denver to get drunk and have fun.

Didn't know what either of those things really was. Had a couple drinks of alcohol and what happened to me is describing the book of Alcoholics Anonymous but Dr. Carl Jung is a spiritual experience. He says essentially ideas and conceptions that used to rule the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side and a whole new set of emotions and motives begin to dominate them. And that's what happened to me. I had what seemed to be a spiritual experience.

I was transformed. I didn't feel better. I was changed. I went into the evening frightened. Stupid. Short. Ugly. A couple drinks of bonded bourbon and I am gorgeous. But more importantly what I remember is that I had plans. Up to that point I'd become a reactor in life not a responder. I'd gathered my scripts together so that when you said something I'd have the right response. Mostly to keep you back because it's getting confusing in here.

I'm starting to become everybody I've ever met or read about or seen in the movies. I don't know who the hell I am and I'm on a search for me. All out here. I changed. Good change. I had some plans. I was going to go back to Bill Bonsett's drive-in where all the kids hung out and whip the bully. Not a bad plan. As soon as I was through with him I was going to have a visit with the cheerleader. Not a bad plan. But plans don't work for me.

I did not know that I had a condition of body and mind. It causes me to, once I take a drink of alcohol, I must have another drink of alcohol. I don't have any choice anymore. So by the time I got to the drive-in instead of seeing the heroic me whipping the bully and shouting up the cheerleader they saw my partners carrying me around by the elbows while I puked in the driveway. That's kind of how I drank. I told you my brother was driving music with Stan Kenton when he was 19 I think.

When I was 19 I was my first federal penitentiary in Tokyo, Japan wondering what the hell happened. This is not in the plan you know. I came out of there with a bad conduct discharge and did some time in the penitentiary and some marine Briggs. I don't want to do that again. I never did understand what happened because I loved the Navy. I really did. I ran away from home to join the Navy and save America from the communist menace and come home a hero you know.

I don't have time to go into what a hero is. You all know what that is. Instead I'm in a penitentiary and come home with a bad conduct discharge and it was an absolute rock bottom. I didn't know until you described to me what alcoholism is and its effect put me in the penitentiary. I'm on a job I love. I was a radio arm man and a radio arm man on a destroyer, the USS Brush. We were 17, 18, 19 year old kids fighting the war and that's exciting.

That age is stupid for where I sit right now but it's pretty exciting then. I learned to steer the ship. I love this. This cruise is just wonderful for me because I am home here. I've been home on the ocean forever. But they kept giving me 24 hour liberties and I kept getting back in 26 or 28 and this is the last time. I got a 24 hour liberty and 23 days later when I got back to the ship it was gone. They were going to Korea and I was in some deep trouble.

See when I drink alcohol I get lost and can't find my way home. And this particular time it was 23 days from the time I took a drink in Long Beach until the drive for another drink ended. Dr. Silkworth calls it a craving. It ended in Pershing Square in Los Angeles 23 days later. On day 22 you had to drag me back to that ship in chains. I could not go. I'd been doing things for 22 days that are contrary to who I am as long as it would get me a drink.

And the shame was on me when I finally came out of it. But I turned myself in and went back to face the consequences and they were severe. I ran with a kid who got us on a Pan Am clipper so we beat the ship to Japan. Oh he was slick. Another good drug. He got us put on prisoner at large status which means I was a prisoner and I was also my own guard. And so was he and we got all our records and we were slick. We thought when the ship pulled into Japan I got an idea how slick we were.

I don't know whether the captain was mad or not when we left but he was sure pissed when he saw standing

on the dock waiting for it. So we did our time and came home at rock bottom. And bottom is an easy thing for me to define. At any time I wake up and understand whatever I have in life, mine for my life is not going to happen. And early on that's easy to overcome. New town, new car, new job, new girl, new dreams. And off we go. And then I get distracted by something and I have a drink.

Bottom again. Just bouncing back and forth. And sometimes I don't even get distracted. I think the horror of alcoholism as I understand it. I can give you a hundred reasons why I drank. The main reason is no reason at all. That's the nature of this deal. Right out of nowhere for no reason at all. I have a drink. Once I start I can't quit. Do we have any knee walking drunks here? I'm one of them. Just one. Knee walking drunks is just exactly what it says.

On your hands and knees going down the street. Drunk. It's a good place to be when you're that drunk. Because when you finally fall you only fall about that far. Bump your head a little bit. Okay. When I was asked to try to identify my alcoholism, because I didn't know I was alcoholic when I got here. I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type two. Federal parole officer said I was a psychopath. And the psychiatrist said I was a manic depressive drug addict.

I was hiding my alcoholism behind some real high drama. You might get past one of them, but you're not getting past them all. No clue. It was suggested to me by some fine sponsors that as I go through the big book, I bring my own memories to it. Otherwise, it's just words. It's more than just identification. They describe something in there that happens to alcoholics. Does that happen to me? And I begin to understand, yeah, the craving for alcohol.

See, I tried to duck that very briefly by saying craving is, you know, craving is just, I went in for two now. I'm on the third. Chinese described it very simply thousands of years ago. Man takes a drink, drink takes a drink, drink takes the man. And alcoholism is the drink taking a drink. But I've got an actual event that I can remember to describe that craving. I can remember a night, so drunk, still on my feet, and so drunk that I knew.

If I have one more drink, it'll probably kill me. I have too much in me. And it hasn't even processed yet. And I'm going to put another one down because I need another one. And I need it so badly that I stick my finger down my throat and throw that out so now I've got room. That's not normal drinking. I compare my mother and I to see, get a clue as to what alcoholism is. You love my mother. A little bitty lady, feisty as hell, 94 now. Watch out for her cane. She's learning how to use it.

Got things in her ear so she can hear. She's tired of it. She just doesn't even pretend. She just turns them off. Right out in front. My mother loves peppermint schnapps. I mean, she loves peppermint schnapps. No, I like altoids. But if I'm going to drink, I want something to taste like booze, not peppermint. But she loves them anyway. And I watch her on the day when it's time. She gets a desire for a drink. And she takes this bottle down. It's clear stuff and she's got a little tall, tiny little glass.

Wouldn't help any of us. It wouldn't hold that much. But she pours this in. Her little eyes are shining. She's drinking for effect. She knows what it's going to be. She looks at that thing and it looks good to her. I'm with her. All the way here. Then she goes, that's disgusting for drinking. And she'll do that a couple times. And then I've heard her actually say, that's enough. I'm beginning to feel it. She loses me.

There's a sound that goes with my drinking also. And that's the sound of relief from unbearable psychic pain. See, that's why I drink. I can't stand being sober. When I'm working with new people, we don't promise them sobriety what a terrible thing to promise somebody who needs a drink. Meaningful sobriety, yes, that will promise. But I prefer to tell them if you don't quit, I don't say you're going to die. You don't quit, you're probably going to live a while just like this. How do you like that?

It gets their attention anyway. Relief from psychic pain. For some period of time now I've fit. I'm here. I can do whatever you can do. I can talk. We can dance. We can laugh. We can cry. I can feel the things that I haven't been able to feel. And then I can't. I drink past it. I'm a real alcoholic. I've lost the power of choice when it comes to alcohol. And I am so glad. Oh, I'm so glad. I've never been given the choice back.

I'm 36 years sober now and I have no more choice over whether I drank than I did the day I quit. And I'm really glad because every time I had a choice I made the wrong one. What I really want to share with you tonight is the glory and the mystery of an alcoholic staying sober over a considerable period of time. Early sobriety is kind of fun. You get a lot of attention and you get to talk for hours with guys about in the same range early sobriety.

The sponsor won't let you do that. You notice that? I've got a two-hour bit session coming up. I'm not calling him. I'll get a hold of Marty and we'll sit there and try. It's just fun. And then the fun wears off. You wonder is this all there is? Some people get it at two, some at ten, some at twenty. I'm getting a lot of them at twenty. I wonder is this all there is? I've heard everybody say everything that there is to say.

And I used to say it too. I've got two emails letting to be answered because I don't know how to answer them. And how do I put the life back in? I'm twenty years sober and the life's gone. I don't understand that. I got into my evangelistic stage around the age step and I haven't left it yet. But let me take you to the final bottom. I'm part of the subculture that came out of Berkeley in the sixties screaming out whether there's dope, there's hope, burned down city hall.

And we really tried. We just couldn't find city hall. I am not a drug addict. I'm very clear on that. I had to get clear on that. Because this deal will work for anybody, but the foundation has to be truth. The recovery process will work. The fellowships don't necessarily work for other people. I've used a lot of drugs and that's all we need to say about that. But I could start a stop when I needed to. And I've never had to deal with that.

What I had to deal with was psychic pain. But as a result of that, Christmas week in 1967 was a bitch. I was down to about 133 pounds and I was on federal parole for a mistake I made in 1966. Which put me in my second penitentiary. Bad company is what did it. And I began to take a look at my life for what it really was. And I don't know other than God's grace why suddenly I could see things as they were and the lies were disappearing. I'm not here tonight because of the truth.

I'm here because I ran out of lies. And I've got to look at my life for what it was. I had two little boys at the time. Who had already been through a federal narcotics arrest which scared the hell out of them and the police almost shot my four year old in the midst of that one. And for some reason they kept giving the kids back to me. And I want to tell you just one little story about it. Because everybody has one of these until you get here and die with it.

We all have an ace in the hole. Brother, father, sister, mother, uncle, good friend. Somebody who at the end of the trail I can go and I've got a place to stay and I can get a shower and I can eat for a few days before I start off again. And my dad was our ace in the hole. And I was trying one more time to put my life in order. See, I'm cursed with a conscience. I've known the difference between right and wrong my whole life.

I just never seemed to be able to get the right thing done and I always did the wrong thing. And so we were back at dad's place trying once again to become a good father and a good son. And that's really all I've ever wanted. And I was getting sober. And we were trying one more time. Got these kids I really loved and wanted to raise. We'd been on the road for about three and a half years. Literally. Restless irritable discontent on the road.

But I began to remember things in the clear light. One of the things I remember is during that time when we were dads, fellow named Albert called me from Albuquerque. Albert was one of the snakes that I ran with. Albert says, we got a problem. We have 30 kilos of good marijuana we got from Mid-Mexico up to Where-As. And our driver got arrested on a traffic charge and it's laying in a hotel and we need somebody to get it across the border. You want the job.

And I'm trying to get my life back in order and be a good father and a good husband. And I said, sure, Albert. Of course. And what I recognized in that answer, I didn't do this for money. This, I became a transportation expert. And I didn't do it for money. My cut was two kilos at that time. That was about \$400. That's a chump change. I did it for prestige. I was the only person in the United States they could think of to call to go into old Mexico and rescue the goods like so.

That's true. That's the only way I can describe that emotion for prestige. I'm going to be a big timer now. And we pulled it off. Because I didn't do any drinking. I dropped everything. I got a sport coat. Fattened up a little bit. Had them run a VW bus. Take care of all the details where there could be no trace to me. Let them get us a place to stay when we got to Where-As. That's stupid either. I did the volume. And 30 kilos of marijuana packed that way would fit exactly into a single air mattress.

So we got to Where-As, went to their hotel, which is actually just a house of prostitution. As soon as everybody left and the transfer was made, I didn't pick it up. They brought it to me. We moved uptown where all good citizens would stay to a more of a holiday-end type operation. I'm one of those people who's in their rottenness uses every thing available. We saw an Indian lady with a dead baby coming out of town as we approached the thing. And I tucked that into my mind. I put dirty diapers on top of that air mattress and I put my two little boys on top of that and when we hit the border crossing I turned around for no reason whatsoever and screamed at the kids to scare them so they would be crying. Because they don't mess with you when you've got screaming kids and dirty diapers.

Told the border guard they were crying because we had just seen an Indian lady with a dead baby. And I began to look at that kind of thing. That and a number of other memories brought me to what I hope you've come to if you're an alcoholic. Absolute rock bottom. I'm now a complete failure at living I can't live with me anymore. I can't think of any way out of this. I don't want to be this kind of person. Those kind of memories just tear me up. To this day they hurt and I hope they keep hurting.

I'm no longer ashamed of them. But I need something strong to change me. And I've tried everything. I've

been to psychiatrists I've had the privilege of participating in the peyote ceremonies at Easter with the Washaw. I had a great vision of a bird flying high and no head. I understood that. Dianetics. When I came out of the Navy I turned my life over to the care of a science fiction writer. I'm a good one. Good books. Church. Being saved. I've tried it.

Nothing changed me permanently. Everything was temporary. And I came to the place Christmas night when I couldn't stand being me one more time. We had gone down to my folks' place during the day. Because I would never think of not going home for Christmas. My dad met us at the door and he said, Don, I'm sorry but your mother said I can't let you in here anymore. She can't stand watching you die. And it tore up one of my lives. I'm not hurting anybody.

Just leave me alone. I'm just hurting nobody but me. And that proved out to be alive. I was hurting her and the kids and him and I could see that. And then he snuck us into the house anyway and tore up my last lie. Nobody loves us. Nobody cares. Well, he did. So I'd go home with no more lies to live with and more pain that I can live with because I recognize it become completely useless now. Absolutely totally useless to everybody. Everybody, including my kids, particularly my kids, would be better off without me. No place to go so I did the only thing you can do at that point. You either surrender or you die.

I took a two-month supply of garbage and shot up my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died. And I really believe I died. I haven't had a drink since. Haven't had a thought of a drink since. I'm one of those that's blessed. I don't even see alcohol. I am so vulnerable that God better be around because I don't see it. Cleaned my mind out of it because the main problem is me in my mind. But I didn't feel good when I woke up that morning. God, well, the police were at the door. My body was saying, you son of a bitch.

If it weren't that you can't die, I'd kill you. Now I'm a complete living and a complete failure at dying. The cops take me in. I'm on federal parole and they've got nine charges against me. The first one's calling for three years to life and the penitentiary and the DA promised me he'd bring the rest of them one at a time if I beat that one. But I was through and I really didn't care. Today I can describe the state I was in.

I couldn't have been. The reason I can do that today is that I keep looking at my life and my life is based on one thing, carrying the message of hope to you. So I spend a good deal of time thinking about how can I put this so somebody will actually hear it. I am not the person that I'm talking about. I've been totally, completely changed. I finally had a real spiritual awakening instead of the one I had with booze. And that's the only reason I stayed here with you.

If you'd offered me something that says we can teach you how to cope with this I'd have walked away. I want nothing to do with it. My first experience of power, I laid in the Denver County jail for five and a half months. Detoxed out there. Wonderful detox. Six weeks of leg cramps and headaches. On the first day in the jail, my life got summed up for me. We all have metaphors for our life. I was in a catch 22 one more time. You're required in the Denver County jail to go to chow. You must go.

To go to chow you must have shoes on. And when they arrested me they couldn't find my shoes. So I'm in a catch 22 that describes and defines my life to that point. I gotta go on. I can't go because I can't meet the conditions. And I gotta meet the conditions. So they were kind enough to call my dad and requested to bring me

some shoes. And he brought a note with it that said, Don, please don't ever call me again. And the final thing I was set free. There was nothing left here now. Had no idea about God, had no idea about anything, but I'm a failure at living and a failure dying. And I gotta find some way to live because I am alive. And I want to tell you briefly about power as I understand it. On the day of my trial they took me in a room with my attorney and said we've been talking to the federal people. They're the ones that own me. Because I was still on federal parole. We've kind of all concluded you're really sick. True. This is not new to me.

They said to tell you what we've done is made a deal. If you'll plead guilty to a different charge that we have ready so we don't have to have this trial, we'll give you one and a half to three-year sentence and suspend it and give you back to the feds because I still owe them five years. And they'd agreed to take me to the federal hospital in Fort Worth, Texas and fix what's wrong with me. I'm not stupid. I signed the papers.

God. Now if you know about power you know the one the state and the feds say Don goes to Fort Worth. But I had somehow surrendered and the power of God went to work. And five days later I was in the fish tank in the Colorado State Penitentiary saying stupid things like you can't do this to me. I didn't sign up for this. And that's where you came and found me. My experience is that we need people trolling the beaches, looking.

Not everybody knows. One of the great distresses in my life today in my A life are meetings that are closed unless you say out French or alcoholic you can't come. Our job is to help you find out whether you're alcoholic or not. We're cutting off the whole source of supply when we do that. That's just my turn to the editorial eyes. I'm not against closed meetings. But I believe in 12 stepping people sitting down with them face to face looking them right in the eye sharing my understanding of alcoholism until they can say that sounds a little like me or they can say no that never happened to me at which point it's my job to get them someone where they can get some help because we'll kill them.

But if they are you can't get away from me and my bunch. Well you can't even find my bunch. I don't believe in that either. You want that in your bunch? I came into a group that Bill Pittman described. In our third week in the fish tank three guys came over inmates numbers on their chests ugly well two of them were ugly. Bruce was kind of cute but he was nice looking fella. They came over to tell us about A. and this ugly little guy named Doc got and he said my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic and that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs and drugs and all of 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. Straight on.

What am I going to do argue with him? He said you're very best thinking got you the penitentiary you're not doing too good are you? Well here I am and then they did the thing that Alcoholics Anonymous must always do. They went one step beyond. We can show you how to live away a life that will make sense to you. We can show you a new way of thinking and if you're alcoholic you don't ever have to drink again. Now we weren't allowed to go to Alcoholics Anonymous meeting on Friday night where the real people came in from the outside for five weeks in order to go to Alcoholics Anonymous you had to first go through a five week 12 step study school met on Saturday and Sunday we gave up our yard privileges in our movies and went to school. The very first thing they said to us when we got up there these same three guys you knew guys for the next five weeks they have nothing to say. If you knew anything at all you wouldn't be here and they went over the bill Alcoholics

Anonymous with us. They read it to us they shared their experience with it and of it. You're getting that this weekend and then they gave us assignments that came out of the book not from somewhere else that came out. There's all kinds of assignments in that book and I began the journey that brought me here tonight. I went to the first federal penitentiary when I was nineteen years old because of Alcoholism and I found that in the doctor's opinion. Doc says he'd been working with men who'd been working on a business deal or proposition. It will be settled favorably to them on a certain date and they took a drink a day or two before and missed their appointment. I missed a ship move like twenty three days because I was on a twenty three day drunk and I began to get those pieces they don't all come for me the flash of light is not a good thing I love flashes of light I've had them all my life my sponsor said they've nearly killed you all your life and went over what they were Oh have you ever had a flash of light?

Yeah first time you made a touchdown first time you kissed a girl first time you made some money and more money in one day than you'd ever seen in your life anything where you accomplished something flash of light they've nearly killed me all my life because they get to thinking that's how I'm supposed to live from now on so I was pissed because I didn't have a flash of light I'd gone back to myself to take the third step and had a terrible experience I said the third step prayer nothing happened and I'm waiting for boom my cell door would spring open and they'd say all right Prince you can go home now we don't need you anymore nothing happened and I can handle if this ship starts going down I'm gonna finish my talk until the water gets this high I can handle that I can handle all the good things in life I can't handle nothing and nothing happened and I went back to my sponsor and bitched about it I suggest you do that and he gave me the guidance that I've always needed I was going I went back with the alcoholic war cry on my lips where's mine Bill had one how come I don't get one he said well dummy and that was a step up in the morning I was 38 984 and I'm dummy I got a name again well dummy you ought to be grateful you didn't have a flashlight they nearly killed you all your life and we talked about that I learned about my kind of insanity from the book Alcoholics Anonymous they had me certified as a sociopath type II psychopath manic depressive drug addict and anything else they could find because I can read I read those books and that's what they got manic depressive was a game for me my son is a manic depressive I know it's real but for me it was a game you getting too close you want to talk and I'm busy trying to figure out what's going on I found the easiest way to keep people away is throw a little mood swing you have to get pretty good at it you do it too much they lock you up and if you just do it not quite right you're the entertainment for the night at the party I don't want to go to the party anyway in the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the story of the car salesman named Jim I found me and I found my brand of insanity I won't bore you with it I don't know you've all read it 15 or 20 times puts an ounce of milk an ounce of whiskey in his milk his mind tells him that's okay he ends up he's been at AA six times by the way working with the people that wrote this book he's been there and just can't seem to get it but the upshot of it was it says whatever what other precise definition of the word may be we call this plain insanity how can such lack of proportion in the ability to think straight be anything else and somehow I got that my brand of insanity is lack of proportion and lack of the ability to think straight I don't have it I don't get angry I go from calm cool and collected to killer rage and it happens just like that fear is for sissies take your 50 cents and get on the roller coaster and get scared a little bit I like raw terror stuff that gets you out of bed makes you feel useful two steps ahead of the feds stuff like that just madness so I lack proportion and I lack the ability to think straight and without some guidance I still don't think straight I am rubber minded Bruce says we don't even think the truth is going to work for you he says you take it into your head and your mind catches it and says

something like aha I can use that later and by the time I get around to using it it isn't the truth anyway he says what we suggest for you is that you forget everything you think you may know about anything particularly spiritual matters because if any of it had worked you wouldn't be here and I balked I said come on I must have learned some truth he said it's really doubtful but it's possible I'll grant that but I'll tell you this anything that was true will still be true when we're through and all the rest of its garbage anyway so lay it down and by some form of grace I was able to pretty much lay it down took a look at my life for what it was my first inventory was a lie I wrote it to impress my sponsor that's what he said anyway I went up and spent two hours writing down the most horrible things I could think of that I had done I hadn't waited until we got to the instructions took it back to him and he said that's garbage you wrote it to impress me get away from me so I took it to somebody else you know I can spot a phony we had phonies in our group there were some guys who'd listened to that fist up just because they had to and I went to one of them and started doing it and I'd tell him something I'd done he'd say well that wasn't that bad and I'd tell him something else I'd done and he'd say well that wasn't that bad and I began to understand something I woke up I had once again picked somebody who'd tell me what I wanted to hear so I didn't have to do anything about it and if I didn't stop that I was going to die a very ugly death and I'm honestly not afraid of death there's a lot of ways of dying I don't want to participate in but death itself is nothing but to die an ugly death means that for some period of time just before that I'm going to have to live a very ugly life and I can't stand that so I got on us and got through that process I have used up two months time here I haven't gotten around to what I want to tell you yet my experience with the step process is different than some people's because but when I came time to make amends they wouldn't let me out but I got free locked up in a single cell penitentiary maximum security penitentiary one night following my sponsors directions on what to do with that eight step I finally got the inventory done took it with another fellow because I wasn't taking a chance of being thrown out again had a wonderful experience we spent the whole day the afternoon up in the school while Jim listened and I walked away knowing I finally finished something I'm no longer a sprinter in the game of life I've done it the best I can and I also knew I just scratched the surface here because I didn't have much memory left this mine had been running on terror and alcohol and speed and it was a mess so in the seven step I asked God I added to it heresy in addition to what the seven step prayer said I said and please don't let the things I haven't found yet kill me before I get to them and I found some more last week and it's petty shit oh it gets petty remember the scream and eagle he said I went into inventory looking for a till of the hunt and what I found was a little boy who wet his pants and that's kind of what it is the behaviors gross the motive is petty petty petty petty my sponsor and I did go over the amends that I had to make I come from the old school if I harmed you there is no slack and I was ready to go he said you'll screw it up if you go out there now here's what I want you to do go back to your cell tonight go over this list and take each one separately and close your eyes and picture them before you whether it's a person or a government agency picture them before you and see if you can feel in your heart a willingness to say to each one I have been wrong and I have harmed you would you please tell me what I have to do so we can get these books to balance I went over the list that night and became aware I am truly willing to look any human being right in the eye I have harmed you just let me know what we have to do and I will straighten it up and I had the experience I have looked for my whole life I was lifted from that steel chair and set free nothing was lifted from me I was lifted and set free and I have been free ever since they didn't know that so they kept me for a while but I was free one of the ways we measured the freedom in this kind of an environment nobody walks the tears but at night my sponsor had come by when I was locked down and visit with me and when I realized he's getting out of his cell whenever he wants I want what he has and shortly after this

experience and coming out of the 12th step study school they started letting me out of myself because he had done the groundwork ahead of us and convinced the administration that the study of the big work was only the beginning there had to be follow up and we needed that kind of contact and so we got out and they started letting me out of myself see my job on the sixth week is that I was given the next group and it was now my turn to do the same thing with them and thank God I had a big book all I had to do was read it to them and share my experience of it and give them some assignments of course the first thing I said to the new group is you new guys for the next five weeks have nothing to say if you knew anything at all you wouldn't be here hell I paid my dues some of the amends are funny I want to wrap this up I've got what about ten minutes?

right on the money he's got a 60 minute tape I mean he's behind me too I am messing with him we didn't have Christmas tree lights for the tree that we got for a dollar the day before I was arrested and the day before I died and I'd gone to a drug store and for a buck and a quarter of a buck and a half got some on credit we got the tree for a dollar we got the two presents for my kids on credit and I'd never paid for them I've been arrested the next day I had to write a letter to the drug store tell them who I was, where I was, what I'd done my very life depended on me getting square and I would even say a buck and a half and I made ten cents a day and had to buy all my toiletries out of that would he take a quarter of a month until the bill was paid that takes a big time gangster's ego right down to nothing I probably spent more because he was kind he let me send him some money some of the things I had to wait till I got out and I learned a very valuable lesson sometimes we have to wait the harm we've done to people has caused them so much pain they can't stand watching us took me twenty-two years to make peace with my brother my brother is a good man so he was always decent but he was shut off for me see how was his hero and he watched me betray our dreams and my dreams and his dreams and the folks dreams and he saw what he just couldn't stand being around me twenty-two years sober he invited Jackie and I over for dinner and he's a very honest man after dinner he said down I'm not sure you and I can ever be friends but this was pleasant we can do this again and we began to open that door as God will have it I ended up working for the Department of Corrections in North Carolina for a couple years when he's got a job for you nothing gets in the way and I'd fly home to visit once in a while because the secret in my life to making amends is to get regular and predictable when I was drinking I was unpredictable now I'm dull you know what I'm gonna do because I tell you what I'm gonna do and that's what I'll go do and I'll tell you what I won't do and I won't do it and you don't know what time to call me I don't know take a chance like everybody else but I am predictable I will be there sometime during this day and if I'm not I'm gone anyway so I'd fly home to see my mother because when I went to make amends to my mother can you imagine trying to find a way to make amends to the mother you're putting a position to say on Christmas day you and your kids can't come to my house anymore I can't think of anyone to clean that up what happens when you ask people at least in your head what do I have to do is you just shut up and wait while they tell you and I'd come out and visited her about six weeks out she let me come by and she was really pretty reluctant but I came by for a little visit and found a way to ask that question without being hard about it then I shut up and listen she said honey all I've ever wanted for you was that you'd be happy so from that day to this I've been going by my mother's house happy I dragged my happiness along with me wife grandkids stories about you she loves you she thinks you're something else she doesn't understand you this last little bit but she sure loves you so I'd fly home from North Carolina from time to time and I'm one of those visits I was with my brother I was with my mom and my brother came in and I had my leg crossed like you do across my knee and he sat down we were visiting and all of a sudden he kicked me on the bottom of the shoe and said you know

don't I'm really glad to see you and he was shocked because he really was glad to see me he hadn't felt that for years he said look next time you're in town let you and I go up to the cabin and do a little fishing now you have to listen closely because that isn't what he was saying he says next time you're in town we need to get up in the high country where there's no phones and no chance of being interrupted because we got a whole day of talking to do so I came home and we did we we talked all day got it all square and he gave me a great gift at the end of all that he said there's one last thing I need to tell you he said I'm 58 years old now and I believe I've made a decent contribution to life and I knew we were healed so you don't tell anybody that that's they got to be really special you don't give your heart and soul like that so we were healed my favorite story though on amends I'm going to tell it because it's my turn I believe there's no slack unless it'll hurt somebody and I've been on I got paroled and I've been on parole I don't know maybe six months or so I'm still on federal parole and state parole but the state had the feds watch me anyway I've got federal parole officers monitoring my life and I began to remember things and on my last run out there in Cheyenne Wyoming I used amphetamine to run so when it was time to run I'd write a prescription and go get some then we'd run because you got to move fast and I had written a bad check to get a script I had also written and then skipped so I got two felonies laying quietly up there in Cheyenne Wyoming and I got to do something about it and I know that if others will be affected they should be consulted well they only want to be really be affected as my federal parole officer so my sponsor and I went down to see him just laid it out to him and he's the one that put me in the state penitentiary and he's the one that got me out also he said you're right you have to do something about it but here's the deal I won't violate you if they arrest you and you have my permission to leave the state so off we go and I was nervous seeing him confessing two felonies to a federal agent on the way home Gary said you know I come from Cheyenne and I know the guy at the Rexall drugstore a pretty decent guy they're letting you start to see your kids again you have a job you're part of the community let's write him first and ask him how he'd like you to handle it well I understood that now I'm really nervous I got to confess two felonies on paper and sign it off it went I don't have a hydro manning for you because the man had died and the place was shut down I got the letter back but I was free of that I'm truly willing if I have to go back to the penitentiary to maintain fit spiritual condition I will do so but God doesn't need me there obviously because I'm not there I'm on a cruise thanks in 1992 I went to work for the Department of Corrections in North Carolina establishing and supervising alcohol and drug programs behind the walls and then I came back to Denver and did the same thing in Colorado for community corrections and in round 96 or so I was sent to Cheyenne Wyoming to set up a treatment center in a corrections facility got it all done came home and as usual it was six weeks later before it hit me it's done I'm clean because I went back to that parole officer after the letter came back and said don't I owe Wyoming something he said don't do that he says you're going to go up to Wyoming and confess two felonies they can't prove because the records are all gone you're going to have to deal with confused police officers and I don't want you dealing with confused police officers but in God's own time I got to put it back into the system and that's really kind of what the sober life is about I'm just admitting I was wrong or apologizing but actually changing and becoming useful I'm clean tonight to the best of my knowledge I'm clean I'm also aware there's some things I've missed but I'm clean if I don't get home from this trip I've had a hell of a ride and I don't want you ever morning me have a party because if you don't I'll come back I'll get you the great gift my brother gave me was I had been trying for years to try to find a way to tell you how I feel about you it's been inadequate I've talked about the statue of David and Michael and the anvil and the lake and all that stuff but as most good things in AA have come to us from non-alcoholics let me give you one more piece from a non-alcoholic I'm 70 years old now and because of you I've been able to

make a decent contribution to life so can you