

Salt River Intergroup Summer Roundup

2004 | His Story | Reading edition

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Transcript

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My name is Don, and I am an alcoholic. Am I hitting that right? Okay. My mother and my wife insisted I were a cope to show you that I respect you, but it's hot and hell up here, dude. Is that okay? Oh, that's too classy. That costs \$300 an hour. I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and my home group is simply known as an AA group. In naming the group, we looked at the long form of the third tradition and said that any two or more alcoholics gathered for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, so that's what we call ourselves.

We made it to the Exlympus St. Joseph Hospital every Friday morning at six o'clock in the morning. We have a regular meeting and our format is very simple. We have no readings. We have no rituals. Let there be light. We went back to the old way of simply being still until it was time somebody had something to say. Our format is simple. We talk about a step, a tradition, and a concept back-to-back. It may take one meeting, it may take six weeks.

We really don't care. The second Friday of every month belongs to our GSR and our central office rep. We are members of Alcoholics Anonymous and fully participate in everything. You don't need to worry about bringing a new person. If they get confused, they were confused when they got there. And following that meeting, we all go into the cafeteria and have breakfast where the real meeting takes place. See, I hate to admit this to you. I've been continuously sober since December 26 of 1967.

I tell you that not to impress you with me, but some myths and lies have entered AA in the past few years. And one of them for you new people understand this. Relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. It does occur and it will continue to occur, but if you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. We don't promise you a pain-free life, but the pain of alcoholism needs never be yours again. The pain of sobriety will be yours, but we can show you some things about that too.

What I hate to admit is that at any formal meeting, whether I like it or not, I'm only partly listening. Part of me is formulating what I'm going to say when it's my turn. And I can't help it. But at breakfast, that doesn't happen. We just talk to each other. We have our favorite 12-step call at breakfast every Friday morning. There's a fellow who, an alcoholic who was hit by a car and is pretty messed up and he comes to the hospital for treatment on a regular basis.

And he won't sit with us yet. We've only been after him for two years, but we visit with him, we'll sit at his table. He pays his way by getting a free newspaper out of the thing and passing it out to people to pay for his seat in the cafeteria. And we kind of love it. And I suppose six months or so ago, in the middle of breakfast, he had a ground mall seizure and went over back and hit his head. You know, the blood everywhere.

The response from the hospital was incredible. The EMTs and the blue carts and the red carts and the hospital administrator, everybody was there. And we're smart enough to know, stay the hell out of the way. You're in a hospital. Following their taking care of him, three of the nurses came over to see if we were okay. They watch us, you know. When we talk about carrying the message, it isn't my word as it gets carried.

It's my behavior. And they knew we cared. So they checked on us. That's pretty good stuff. You'll have to put up with me tonight. I'm a little emotional. Oh, hell, I'm a lot of emotional. My love for Alcoholics Anonymous cannot really be stated. But I must tell you the truth. Alcoholics Anonymous did not get me sober. God got me sober. And five and a half months later brought me to Alcoholics Anonymous in chains. Yeah. Somebody had to.

So that my new life would have dimension and meaning and purpose. I think the most intolerable state of being for any alcoholic is sobriety. The main reason I drink is because I can't stand being sober. And thank God you offered me far more than sobriety here. I didn't even know I was alcoholic. At the time you came and got me, and I didn't come looking for you, I was certified by one government agency as the sociopath type two.

My federal parole officer said I was a psychopath and the doctor said I was a manic depressive drug addict. I was hiding my alcoholism behind some real high drama. You can penetrate one or two of those, but you're not getting by all of them. So I didn't know. My gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous is that by the grace of God I was brought into a group who really felt that their first obligation to me was to help me find out what the hell is alcoholism and do I have it.

Because until you know what the problem is, there's nothing you can do about it. That critical identification is so important and I really didn't know. My experience with alcohol tells me that I was alcoholic from the first drink. What happened to me the first time I drank is describing the book Alcoholics Anonymous by Carl Jung as a spiritual experience. He's telling Roland Hazard that a vital spiritual experience is a phenomenon, it really happens.

The ideas and conceptions that used to rule the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side. Their entirely new set of emotions and motives begin to dominate them. That's what happened to me when I had my first drink. I didn't feel better, I was transformed. And I needed to be, I was short, ugly. Big wart on the end of my nose. Stammered and stuttered and stumbled and felt like I was personally responsible for starting World War II most of the time.

In high school. Neither front hall nor back hall. I ran with six other guys who didn't fit in anywhere either. And we got a guy from our Air Force base to buy us a bottle of whiskey one night. It was bonded bourbon. We thought that bonded bourbon was a little classier than just plain whiskey. I didn't find out two years later that all that means that some insurance company said Al Capone didn't make this seagrams did.

And we put it in the warehouse to protect you, but bonded bourbon. And a couple of drinks of that and I changed. The wart went away, I got taller, broader, cuter than hell. What I remember most is that suddenly I had planned. You see up to that point I had been a reactor to life. You did something and I reacted. And I had been gathering scripts together so I reacted correctly. Because I didn't have an original thought and my mind was terrified.

Suddenly I had some plans. It was a guy in our high school class who hadn't been treating me very well. The class bully. And around six o'clock in the evening I was cowered and by eight I was going to meet him back at Bill Bonsen's drive-in out on East Colfax in front of everybody whipping. And I could have done it. I wouldn't have had to breathe hard even. And there was a little girl in my class who hadn't been treating me at all.

And as soon as I had whipped him she and I were going to have a visit. I could have done that too. And I must tell you that's not a bad thing to take a misfit at that age and put him into the heart of life. And if that's all alcohol did I'd buy everybody here a drink. What I didn't know is that I have a peculiar condition of body, mind and spirit. And the condition in my body is that if I have one drink I will have another drink and I lose choice.

It's gone. I don't have any choice anymore. And I have a condition of mind that's just sent, can't seem to remember that. There's a peace missing. Actually my sponsor indicated there were a lot of pieces missing. And I have a condition of spirit. I feel separated and different and weird and strange. And this bothered me from the time I was little because I come from a functional home by the way. And I apologize but I really do.

That's not politically correct anymore I guess. And I can describe that to you. My folks were married 66 years continuously. One dad died. And I'm through making amends which we'll get to eventually I hope. I knew that my father was ready to go prior to that. He was 86. He had dry gang green in one leg. His memory was beginning to slip. And for him that was a disaster. My dad was an unmeasured genius. At that time he died he still didn't have a test that measured him.

And so his memory was important to him and it was beginning to slip. But he never lost his sense of humor. He told me near the end. He says you know Don, there's a great benefit to this memory loss deal. I only have to rent one movie for the rest of my life. Thank you. I'm just a country boy. My brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado in Denver. One of the foremost synthesizer musicians in the world.

And I say that because they take him all over the world to have him teach. He just came back from Stockholm with a second doctorate. When he was 19 he was writing music with Stan Kenton. When I was 19 I was my first federal penitentiary in Japan. And we grew up in the same house. He lived right next door, next room over. We headed on the same dog and just you know. So I don't get to blame my alcoholism I'm upbringing.

My dad, they celebrate their 66 wedding anniversary on Saturday. And on Tuesday he went into a coma. And on Thursday we had him pull the plug and he left the planet. That's functional. He knew how important the party was from a mother. That's functional. My sister retired from IBM as one of their somewhere upper level executives. Made good money and great babies or babies have been making busy making babies. It's scary.

Well in my family and what confused me for years is that I look just like them. If you've met one of us you know you've met one of us. We all kind of look alike. And I was at mom's 92nd birthday and here's all these little kids running around. I know I didn't do it. We all looked alike. But I can remember laying in bed 13 years old crying. I wonder when my people were going to be back from Mars to pick me up. Because I'd been left on the wrong planet.

It was clear to me. I'd been listening to human beings talk. And I didn't think like they did. And I didn't feel like they did. I was inappropriate. Oh yeah. God. I would laugh at funerals and cry out hockey games. And I brought all this to alcohol. And it changed me. It transformed me. And there is no experience less than that that will cause me to stop drinking. I have to be a different person or I'm not going to stop.

And I tried everything to be different. I read good books. I had a marvelous experience one time. I had the

privilege of sharing at the Easter meeting with the Peyote people. The Washall in Nevada. And had a vision. A true vision. I saw a great bird flying high with no head. I understood clearly that's me and my life. I'm flying high going nowhere. And it kept me sober four months. So I can tell you the truth. If you want to try visions they're good for four months of sobriety.

But I'm in for the game. I got psychiatric treatment once. I didn't want it. But I was on federal parole at the time. And woke up in the Boulder County jail padded cell and couldn't remember how I got there. But others could. My parole officer decided I needed some help. And he had three choices. Back to the penitentiary. Back to a nut house. Or outpatient treatment. And my vote was outpatient treatment of course. And I'm not stupid.

I know how to work the system. They were going to test me. And it was very important that I passed this test. So I went to the Denver Public Library and studied up on the Rorschach. An inkblot test. Because I knew I'd get one. And I needed to be just sick enough to need help. But not so sick I needed to be put away to get it. And I passed the test. And they gave me my own psychiatrist. Wonderful man. Three weeks after we started therapy he was smoking marijuana with me.

I'm not saying I turned him on but he was ready. And I always lived by the idea if you can't beat him. Get him to join you. Don't run. They can catch you. All of this kind of madness went on. I really tried everything. I want to take you to Christmas week of 1967 and then talk about what I came here to talk about. I was on federal parole at the time. For a mistake I made in 1966. I became a transportation specialist out of Mexico.

The people that hired me for the job turned me in. Along with several others. Well, when you play with snakes you get bit once in a while. I had tried a number of things and I was running out of my string. I had two little boys. Terry was about six at the time and Shawn was about four. Their mother had abandoned the ship years before when they were about one and a half and two and a half. We'd been on the road for a while.

And I was bone weary tired. We were also on ADC because I couldn't work. I am not a drug addict but I did have a liking for amphetamines. Well, they made a possible way for me to drink better. For one thing. So I was a mess. 133 pounds. The welfare check hadn't gotten earned. It was December 24th and we had no money. So we took a walk because that had become my way of life. When there's any heat at all, walk. Get the hell out of town.

Move. As long as you're moving, nobody bothers you. If you're moving, people will feed you. As long as you keep moving. We were a single parent, homeless, poverty-driven family before it was even fashionable. Because I was restless, irrelevant, discontent. We had finally landed. The whole officer didn't want me to move around the country anymore so he made me find a place to live. And we lived in a grubby old basement apartment beneath an old lady who raised cats.

And she had cats everywhere. And by some form of grace, I began to see what my life really was. The lives were disappearing. Her place was cleaner than mine was. And my lie was the boys and I are okay. We have a nice place to live. The family is intact. The truth was the family was not intact. There were two little boys living with a madman. And that was the truth of it. We took a walk in the snow and found a dollar on the 24th and went to the Christmas tree lot up on Colfax and Spruce.

And got the biggest tree on the lot for a dollar. Now I'm thinking, I've still got it. When I look back in truth,

the man saw an Auschwitz survivor with two little boys who had nothing. He had given me the tree. Out of kindness. But he went beyond kindness and took my dollar. So I wouldn't lose face. Well, this was a nine-foot tree and a seven-foot ceiling. And I keep that in my heart because it just stings. And we dressed it with garbage and crumpled up paper.

And he cut the bottom off on those little bitty milk cartons. And he got bells and took another walk. And the fellow that owned the public merchandise marked a cowboy store up there at Colfax and Spruce also. Give me a little cowboy shirt and a little pair of boots. \$10.95 worth on credit so my boys didn't have Christmas presents. He had given him to me. But he let me save face because he was a kind man. We got home and the boys had wrapped up everything that would fit in blue paper towel and put her under the tree for me.

And I started breaking. See, I'm here tonight not because of the truth. But I just flat ran out of lies. And the last lie came on Christmas day when we went to my folks' place. I told you, it would never occur to me not to go home on Christmas. It's the kind of family I come from. We got to the door and my dad noticed that 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 the lie broke. I would have told you earlier that day, leave me the hell alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And all of a sudden I can see the lie. I was hurting everybody, particularly the people I loved the most. Then my dad broke my last lie by sneaking us into the basement. The lie was nobody loves us. Nobody cares. Well, he did and he made a lie out of it. So I got to go home with no more lies, just a heart full of pain and self pity.

And I took the most honest inventory of my life I've ever taken. I looked at it for what it was and realized at that time, sadly, that I had become useless. Completely, totally useless. The boys would be better off without me. Anybody that knew me would be better off without me. There was no reason for me to be on this planet. So I took a too much supply of the garbage I was using at that time and shot it up my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died.

When you become completely useless, you either surrender or you die. And I had nothing left to surrender to. And I really didn't feel good when I woke up in the morning. Oh, man. Well, the police were at the door and I knew I wasn't dead. But I was into a state of being that I hope you'll get to. And if I sponsor you and you're not there, I'll help you there. It's my job. I was now in a state of being where I was a complete failure at living and a complete failure at dying.

I'm in a body that won't quit carrying with it a mind that won't work. And I'm still breathing in and out. What a disappointment. So I couldn't put words on it then, but I got into a state where I became willing to go anywhere anyone said. And do anything anyone said. If it done, I didn't have to be me ever again, that person ever again. I would rather die than be any part of who I was. The harm I caused and the pain I caused to people is not the stuff you write books about, it's the stuff you cry about.

I'll do anything. Well, the first suggestion was that I put my hands behind my back while I handcuffed me. I just did what I was told. I want to tell you about this, not for the drama, but because it's the first example of the power of God in my life. The power of God. And they had nine charges on me. The first one called for three years to life on the penitentiary. And the DA promised me he'd bring the other eight one at a time if I beat that one, but I was finished.

And I really didn't care. And I still owe the federal government four or five years for a parole violation because I was on parole. And I really didn't care. And I detoxed in the Denver County jail. I don't want to ever forget that. Not that it would keep me sober, but it's made me a really good sponsor. Well, I had six weeks of really severe leg cramps, headaches, all kinds of stuff. So when you come to me at five weeks and say, I think I'm going to die, I can say no.

You got a week to go. And it was on the first day there. I believe that I awakened spiritually. When I woke up, I was awakened spiritually. I was a new person. I didn't know that. You had to teach me what that was about. The first day in jail, the metaphor for my whole life showed up. I was in the classic catch 22. It's a rule in the Denver County jail that you must go to child. It's also a rule that you must wear your shoes.

And they couldn't find my shoes in my apartment, so I didn't have any. And I realized that's my whole life. No matter what I do, it just doesn't come out right. Eight ball pool was another metaphor for my life. I was really good at missing by just that much. Just that much. Well, I laid there in Detoxed and somewhere in there I can't say that I said the prayer helped, but I was willing. I noticed a change in me. What you do in the county jail with your buddies while you're walking the tier waiting for somebody to bail you out.

It was not going to come, by the way. You talk about what you're going to do when they do get there. Get a keg of beer and a little grass and we'll go up to Bergen Park and get loaded. And I can remember my mouth making okay, but in here I didn't ever want to do that again. I just didn't want to do it anymore. A different person. They took me to trial on the one that would cause me to go three years to life. They took me in a little room with my attorney and said we have been talking to the federal people and we all think you're really sick.

I'm waiting for the news. I know that. I said here's the deal. We've all agreed that if you will plead guilty to a reduced charge so we don't have to have this trial, we'll give you a one and a half to three year sentence, suspend it, give you back to the feds and they've agreed to take you to Fort Worth, Texas to that hospital down there and fix what's wrong with you. I'm not stupid and I was five and a half months with my head clear.

I signed a papers right there. Now if you know about power, you know that the power of the state of Colorado combined with the power of the federal government, if it says down goes from Denver to Fort Worth, Texas, within five days, I'm in Fort Worth. That's what they did in 66. Because I had surrendered and that's the only thing I've ever done right here and if you're new here, that's all you have to do is surrender, which is easy.

It's just difficult. Well, it is easy. All you have to do is become aware, your entire life is a lie. That everything you think you know is bullshit. You don't even have a clue. And if you'll do that, you can surrender. And if you can't do that, come see me. I'll help you. Five days later, I was in the fish tank in the Colorado State Penitentiary by the grace of God. I had surrendered and I was taken to the one place available where I could get the kind of help I needed.

Had I gone to the hospital, I'd learn new games. I can play the psychology game. They thought I was a manic depressive because I play that. They're a real manic depressive. My older boy is one. But for me, manic depressive is a game. You get too close. I'll throw you a mood swing or two. You'll back off. Oh yeah. Besides, they're fun. While there, you showed up in the third week. You came and found me. I would not have thought to ask for you.

And what's that's done to my life is I have become a troller. I go looking for drunks who don't know that if you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. And I find most of them in AA meetings. Yeah, a lot of them show up there. I find them in other places. I go to prisons. I go to hospitals. I'll go wherever they might be. But there might be a chance that they're tired of that stuff. Anyway, I can remember clearly the guard hollering out that day in our third week.

You people will come down and you will listen. I don't have anything else to do. Jim and I were just kind of laying around waiting for the next thing. So we went down. And for the first time in my life, I did the right thing. I listened. If you're new here, that's all you got to do. Just listen. We'll say it over and over and over and over until you get it. So don't worry about doing it right. You won't. Just listen.

And there were three ugly convicts. Well, two of them were ugly. Bruce was really kind of cute. But the only two were ugly. Standing there as we sat down, numbers on their chest. And the first one got up and he said, my name is Doc and I'm an alcoholic. And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and guards and drugs and all of the other circumstances of 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 mistake just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing.

And I heard him. He said, your very best thinking got you to the penitentiary. You're just not doing too good, are you? And I heard him. And then he spoke from the heart because this is about love. 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 I got my first new idea. I've been trying to live my life so it made sense to you and it never made sense to anybody.

Today my life makes sense to me. And apparently to my wife, we've been married 27 years now and haven't had a fight yet. That's true. We don't always agree, but we don't fight either. She's right most of the time anyway. She is. She picked me, didn't she? At that time to go to the AA meeting which happened on Friday night where the real people went from the outside. It was a two hour meeting or two and a half hours actually.

The inmates chaired the first half and it was a little coffee and cookie exchange and then the outsiders did the next hour. We're not allowed to go to that meeting. Until we had completed what they called a 12 step study school. What that meant is that we gave up our yard privileges and our movies and everything else every Saturday and Sunday afternoon for three to four hours and went up to the school where they carried us, hand carried us through the book Alcoholics Anonymous.

They read it to us out loud. And they shared their experience of it and with it and gave us exercises out of that to do. At the end of that period of time then we were able to go to the regular AA meeting. And in the sixth week they gave me the next group out of the fish tank because it was now my turn to give it back. This whole thing is not about me anymore, it's about giving it back. They taught me about alcoholism in a way that I could relate.

My sponsor always insisted bring your own memories to this. The book is clear, but bring your own memories to it. I was my first photo penitentiary when I was 19 years old because of alcoholism. I loved the Navy, led everything about it. I'd run away from home to join the Navy when I was 17 and save America from the communist menace and come back a hero, you know all that stuff. Two years later I'm in a federal penitentiary in Tokyo, Japan.

Because I had a 24 hour liberty, took a drink of alcohol in Long Beach, California. 23 days later I got back to the ship and it was gone. I woke up from that in Persian Square in Los Angeles after a 22 day drunken. When I got back it was gone. I'd missed a ship movement to a war zone, serious stuff. Fortunately I ran with another alcoholic who, you know, we're pretty resourcefully. He got us put on prisoner at large task which meant I was my guard and he was his guard and he got us out on a panam Clipper and we beat the ship to Japan by three weeks which really made him mad.

For the first time I was able to associate the drink in Long Beach with what happened because in the doctor's opinion it's very clear. These men were not escaping, drinking to escape. They were drinking to overcome a craving over which they had no control. What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. And if you knew, that's all you need to know for now. If that happens to you, you stay real close because it's a given.

What happens to me after the first drink is the second drink. And then I become unproductive when we don't know what's going to happen. We do know I've changed and I'm the kind of drunk that I don't like the changes. I'm not mean, I'm mean. I wasn't much of a bar drinker because it is somehow in my character that when the fight and the bar starts, it always starts on me. And I'm not good at that. I never have like pain.

In fact, I used to think I was a coward because I didn't like pain. I'm saying today, avoid pain at all costs. There's enough of it to go around, don't make any new stuff. Okay. So I began to learn about alcoholism and began to pick up my duck feathers. I had a marvelous sponsor. He didn't give a damn how I felt. Well, my life is at stake. So I was not afraid of the penitentiary. I stayed with you because you promised me I could learn to live on the street.

I know how to live in a prison. I just don't know how to live on the street. And he weighed through the self-centeredness that came about. He talked to me about the second step. He said, we'll assume that you went insane about two seconds after birth. Then we don't have to go through all the psychological stuff and track you down. I came to believe it was a power greater than myself myself by watching he and two other men walk around on their feet.

It was a very practical thing for me. This is my first sponsor who was doing a natural life sentence for a double murder. He'd committed in an alcoholic rage when he was 17 years old and he'd shoot out in a jewelry store robbery in downtown Denver. I'm a paper-mandered. I don't do that. I couldn't have identified with his drama. But he talked about the morning it happened. He said I woke up with a feeling that nobody cared whether I lived or died.

And the pain of that was the greatest started to drink to kill the pain, which it always had. Only this day it didn't kill the pain. It intensified. And in a rage he went on. See, there's only one honest human response to feeling left out. Rage. My spirit knows I have as much right to be here as you do. And whether you cause it or I cause it, I go into a rage when I feel left out. We went through some things. He very carefully destroyed all my concepts of God one afternoon.

He simply asked me to describe God to him as I thought he was. And then I'd say something and he'd chop that one off into these. I was talking mostly about Santa Claus. Most of us are. What's he done for me today? I hear a funny new thing and I ate a day. I heard a fellow the other day say, well, God isn't working for me. And

I'm thinking, well, what the hell should he? What is it? Oh, boy. I work for him. But he left me with nothing and I can remember screaming at him.

You're asking me to turn my wife over to the care of nothing. He said, why not? Nothing can run it better than you've been doing it. So one line sponsor shots. Now the things that he was saying to me would be cruel. Because truth without love is cruelty. And confrontation without a real answer is brutality. But he loved me and he had a real answer. And he never offended me with any of that. See, that's what we have here, a real answer.

Don't settle for anything less, you new guys. I am not in recovery. I recovered years ago. That's the promise here. You get to recover from alcoholism. And it's simple. That's not a big, I'm not cured of it. If I take a drink, I'm a dead meat. But I don't suffer from any of the symptoms of alcoholism. I don't have a craving after I take a drink because I don't drink. And by the grace of God, I don't have an obsession with alcohol.

In fact, I'm incredibly vulnerable because I don't see alcohol. I don't see alcohol. It's scary. There better be something protecting me because I have no mental defense against the first drink. And there is something that protects me and I'd like to share that with you because it's been proven over and over. I'll call it the spirit. I was about 12, 13 years sober. For whatever the reason you all have asked me to do this since I was three years in sobriety.

I guess I can just do it. I don't know. And I've been in New York at a conference and given a fair talk, nobody got hurt and nobody hurt me. A couple of people left. That's one of the marks of a good talk, by the way. Yeah, somebody goes to sleep and somebody else leaves. If you can do that, you're doing fine. But I'm headed home. I've got a long flight and it's an evening flight. I'm in fit spiritual condition. I'm in fit mental condition. I'm in fit emotional condition.

And because I fly with United so often, sometimes they bump me into first class. I used to think it was God's little reward to me for the good job I've done. And I talked to a flight attendant. She says, well, what it really is, is that we can't sell that first class seat, but if we can get you out of yours, we can sell it. Whatever their reasoning is, I like it up there better. And it was an evening flight so the lights were dim.

I'm headed home to the family I love beyond description. I've got a book I've been wanting to read and I've got three and a half, four hours to read it. They're going to serve dinner, real food on real plates, real silverware. Although it's funny today, don't tell them I told you this, but we're not the only insane ones. In first class now you get a steel spoon and a steel fork and a plastic knife. You know what I can do with a fork? Whatever.

It was nice. They laid the dinner out. I'm reading the book and out of the corner of my eye, I saw the flight attendant pouring this burgundy red stuff into my seatmate's glass. And that's what I saw, just burgundy red stuff. And the way the light hated it was kind of pretty and I looked around and looked at it. And my mind said, that really looks good. It's truth. Please be aware that people of long-term sobriety, I believe, are in far more danger of drinking because of the truth and the art of the lies.

You've got to come up with a lot of lies to make it okay for me to drink. But this was the truth. That really looked good. Then my mind said, I bet that's going to taste good, too. Of course it would. Why else would you give it to it? Then my mind reached into what I know about wine, whatever thinking of wine, and said, I bet

that's going to make his whole meal taste better. It's one of the functions of wine is to clean the palate.

Then a prayer began to end me. I don't know how to tell you except that I have come to recognize when the Spirit is saying, Don, and it began. And I went within. That's what I've been practicing to do. I went within. And very realized that my very next thought would have been, I should probably have one of those. Never even thinking wine. That's how vulnerable you get. So the Spirit works. I'm sure there are other times that's been that close.

But I'm safe and protected. As long as I keep doing certain things, keep my house clean inside. Actively engage in prayer and meditation. And most of my prayers are with you. Oh God. What am I going to do with this? Oh God, what can I say here? We came to a place where I really wanted what he had and he kept insisting it was spiritual in nature. So without waiting for anything, this was my nature. I went off and said to the third step prayer and had the worst experience of my whole life.

I genuinely thought I was going to get, boom. And they would spring my cell to open and say, Okay, we don't need you anymore. You can go home. I said the prayer and absolutely nothing happened. Nothing. And I can't deal with nothing. I can deal with the building catching on fire or whatever, but not nothing. And it frightened me and it angered me. And I did what you'd begun to train me to do. I went back to my sponsor and bitched it anyway.

Oh yeah, if your sponsor tells you to do something and you don't get the precise result you think you ought to get, go get you out of it. Where's mine? Go ahead, what? How come I don't get one? And he planted the seed that's still in my mind. He said, Well, dummy, which was quite a change. I was 38, 9, 84 in the morning. Now I have a name. Well, dummy, he said you ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash life. It nearly killed you all your life.

And we examined the flashes of light that nearly killed me my whole life. He said, Don God knows that you probably can't stand one more big shock in the shape you're in anyway. And he will probably come to you gently and easily as he did with me. He described some of that. And so I entered into the belief that this could actually happen for me. And I asked him, How do I make this reel, Bruce? I don't want any more of this La La Land stuff. How do I make it reel?

He said, Don God will reveal himself to you as you reveal yourself to you. I went off to take an inventory and my first inventory was a lie. I wrote it to impress him. It took two hours. He showed it to him. He said, As garbage, he wrote it to impress me. Get away from me. So I took it to somebody else in the group who was a phony because they knew he'd have to listen. And I'd work two hours on this damn thing. Somebody's going to listen.

And I'd tell him one of the worst things I'd ever done. He'd say, Well, that wasn't that bad. And I'd tell him something else and he'd say, Well, that wasn't that bad. And I woke up because some of it was that bad. I woke up to the fact that once more I had picked someone who had told me what I wanted to hear so I didn't have to change. And if I didn't stop that, immediately I was going to die a very ugly death. And you must understand I'm not afraid of death.

There's a lot of ways of dying I'd rather avoid. They're attacking me behind my back again. But to die an ugly death means that I will have to live a very ugly life for some period just before that. And that thought I can't tolerate my death. I lost track of time. What do I have left? Oh, well, we're in good shape then. Purple indicate spirituality, you know. Through the school and through the precise directions contained in the book Alcoholics Anonymous and how to take an inventory. And that's the one I use because it works.

It's a very simple little system and it works. I finally got a little inventory done. Shabby little thing. But it was the best I could do. I didn't have a lot of memory left. Did not go back to my sponsor with it. I went to my friend Jim who had been sober at the same length of time I had. Because it's sitting in there finding somebody who won't be overly affected. And I'm not going to say to him to bother him. He was crazy as I was.

But he spent the whole afternoon with me as I shared with him what I had discovered about resentment. And what I discovered is that resentment is a spiritual disease, not an emotional condition. That's what it says. From its time all forms of spiritual disease. It's the thing that separates me from you and from God. Anything that separates me from the children of God separates me from God. So I need to be rid of that.

I had to face the fact that I'm quite capable of committing any act that I've ever heard of given the right circumstances. I'm capable of that too. So God please don't get me into circumstances where that might come out. I looked at what I'd done to my family and my friends. In 1966 Albert, one of the snakes I was running with, called me from Albuquerque and said we got a problem. We got 30 kilos of good marijuana as far as war is and our driver got arrested and our traffic charges laying there.

In a hotel room we needed somebody to get it. Now at the time I was trying to get my life back in order. That's why I could call me. I was hiding out at my dad's house getting my life back in order. And my immediate response when he said well you do it was sure Albert. I'm trying to get me into kids back in order here. And I didn't do it for money. My cut was \$400 chunk change. I did it for prestige. I was the only one in the United States that this little senator could think of to call.

To go into old Mexico like Zorro and rescue the goods. That's not saying when you got two little boys. But I did it. So on my older boys birthday June 13th 1966 federal narcotics agents raided my house, knocked down the doors, knocked me down, called me ugly names. It was just a normal raid. Almost shot my son. My son Yolada shrieking the cops swung around this way and almost shot him. And I hated him. Well he went on this inventory.

And what I discovered was this. I brought them there with a hand engraved invitation. I became their job. And then I discovered that almost was the operating word behind this hate. This guy was so well trained he didn't shoot my boy. I probably would have. He almost did. And I ended up owing him immense. If I can ever find him and they're reluctant to let me know where he is. Well I tried. I owe him two things. I owe him an apology for putting him in a position where he almost shot a four year old.

I'm totally responsible for that. And I need to thank him for not doing it. Now I'm never finding him. And I know that. But I want you to know you can get free from that kind of stuff. Okay. There had been a federation in my house for 37 years. One minor exception. I'm on a lot of non-profit boards and one of them didn't fill out the paperwork right and the IRS came by to straighten it out. And when I'm in the middle of the government interrogation I get really stupid.

I don't know what it is. He just shuts me. He'd say something on me. In pretty cities. Oh hell just sign this. I'll fill it out. And he left. And I haven't heard from him since. I want to spend what Tom I have left talking about amends. The great power of setting straight to crooked path. It's not about saying I'm sorry. My sponsor said you're never to say I'm sorry ever again. You've been sorry your whole life. What you get to say is I've been wrong.

Try that. It doesn't fit in the alcoholic mouth. I went back to him after I'd finished that fifth step for Jim because he was wise enough to know what was going on. And he had a quality I was looking for. He was doing a natural life sentence but he was free. And I wanted to know about that. One of the ways I knew he was free is that when I was locked down at night he'd come by and visit with me. And in a single cell maximum security penitentiary you don't do that.

One night it hit me. He'd get none of his cell whenever he was. I want what he has. He said Don we know what you did to these people. It's all right here. But you are so insensitive you have no idea what it did to them. So I want you to go back to yourself tonight and go over this list. And sit there and take each one separately. And picture them in your mind. And see if you can feel the willingness deep in your heart to look each one right in the eye and say to them I have been wrong and I have harmed you.

Would you please tell me what I have to do to get these books to balance. And as I went over the list and became aware that I am truly willing if I've caused you any harm at all just tell me what I need to do and we'll get it square. I felt as if I were lifted from that steel chair and set free. And I've been free ever since. They started letting me out of my cell to go visit the guys in my little group. And I've been free ever since.

Then we have the tough amends to make. Said you make some by mail and some you'll have to wait till you get out. And he had me make a list of which was which and then he changed them all over. On that December 24th in addition to the tree I had gotten a string of Christmas tree lights from a drug store on credit and been arrested and never paid him. I had to write this guy he said. \$1.50 I think it was. Telling who I was, where I was, what I was and my life depended on my getting square with him.

I made \$0.10 a day. Would he be willing to set up a quarter of a month until I got that \$1.5 paid off. That puts a big time gangster's ego right flat. He said yes. See I've been greeted with kindness my entire sobriety. And I think kindness is the most important thing we have to offer people. My God when these new people come to us they're damaged. They're hurting. They're wounded. Be kind. I don't need to get up in their faces.

I need to be kind. God there's so many stories. They're really are. We'll just have to meet in the hall. I don't have time for a little bit. How do you make amends to the mother that you put in a position to say on Christmas day you and your children cannot come to my house anymore? I can't to this day think of a way. Months after I was finally released she allowed me to come by very reluctantly. And we had a little short visit.

And I found a way to ask you that question. I don't usually ask it boldly and openly. That's stupid. But I found a way to answer. And all you have to do when you ask the question of what do I have to do is shut up and listen while they tell you. It's really easy. She said honey all I've ever wondered for you is that you be happy. So for thirty-some years now I've been going by my mother's house on a regular basis happy.

I dragged my happiness along with me. Yeah wife children grandchildren great-grandchildren stories about you. She told me it was six years before she really believed I was going to mount to anything but I wasn't going to impress her. I was just giving her what she asked. I'm happy. Because of my mother I've been able to experience one of the most profound experiences of my life. I got to experience anonymity. I was asked to talk at an area assembly down in Virginia one time in Charlottesville.

In my sickness at one point I had stolen my mother's two dollar bill collection. There were sixteen bills. And I was too sick to go steal from anybody else and I knew where it was and I stole it. When I got out and went to confess that to her they were out of circulation back in the early 70s. So I couldn't replace them. I got down to Charlottesville and they took us up to Thomas Jefferson's home as part of the tour.

And he's on the two dollar bill and they were back. And they had cases of them. So I bought 32 dollars for the two dollar bills. And I love to get a tear out of the crowd. So I told him the story that night we all had a good three-hanky cry. And took him home. Gave him to mom. She pretended it didn't matter but I could see it really did matter. Two weeks later I got a letter from Virginia. No return date with two dollar bills in it.

And I got it. Someone else had done something very similar and we're not able to get free. So threw me to her. This person got free. And I became anonymous. Over the last number of years, some twenty years, that collection has built into something. I got it. It's incredible. My mom died about three weeks ago. She was 94. She got a good run. And she left me the collection. Okay. It's incredible. The number of people that had written her and had gotten that.

And she asked me one time, what's this all about? These are strange people. I said, Mom, every one of those represents somebody getting free. From a fatal disease. Self-centeredness. My sister said she'd bring that box out. She'd show them. She had two ones. The ones I gave her, which now have an extra bill on them by the way. And in this collection, she'd tell her friends about them and say, this is representative of people getting free from a deadly disease and my son's part of that.

So I've been praying about what to do with those two lower bills now. Because they're mine. But they're not mine. They came through me and they have to go somewhere. So I'm opening up a little fun. So let's say you come into town, you get sober, you got a job that you haven't got the tool, you got the tool now. We'll just pass it on. And by telling the story, it'll keep that going. Everybody who gets a \$2 bill or \$10 over \$20, whatever it is, will pass that along.

I think she'd like that. Went to my dad one time, made him ends to him. And he told me a very important lesson. I had my little list at the time. When you go make him ends, don't take your damn list. I said, pop up, I've lied to you and I cheated you and I stolen from you. He said, please stop. I know all that. All you can do by telling me the details is hurt me all over it. We're just going to have to go from here. And we did.

We spent 27 years building a relationship, father and son, man to man. So when my dad died, there was no grieving. Everything was done and said, which made me available to the young people in the family who did not understand his death. It was three or four days of what our family calls a death watch. We'd stay with them while they go. And everybody gets to say goodbye. And my mom and I were able to sit there and tell the young ones, if you have something to say, say it.

He can't answer you, but he can't hear you. Get it said. And that was a nice place to be. I don't have to go to my dad's grave with a letter. Everything got said. Because the last thing that happened is that I caught him in his office one time where he couldn't get loose. And a little bit of a narrow office. I said, pop, I've got to tell you something. I have three heroes left on this planet, and you're one of them. And we hugged.

And my dad is not a demonstrative man. He came out of the depression and they didn't touch, no touchy-feely. A couple weeks later I gave my mom a hug goodbye and looked up from his little wheelchair and said, you suppose I could have one of those? That's what this is really all about. The restoration of those relationships, particularly the family. Oh, my goodness. There's some dangerous ones that came along too. I was about two years sober still on federal parole when my memories came back.

The December before I got arrested in Cheyenne, Wyoming, I had used a bad check to pick up a prescription that I had written myself. So I got two fresh felonies that I had to look at. And I come from the old school. You got to do something about it. And I went to my sponsor and he said, yeah, we got to do something. But it also says here, if others will be affected, we need to consult with them. Well, the only person that would be affected would be my federal parole officer.

That made me a little nervous. I got to go to a federal parole officer and confess two felonies. But I don't have any choice. My spiritual well-being is more important to me than anything else in my life. So Gary and I went to him and he knew about it. He said, you're right. You got to do something about it. Here's the deal. You have my permission to leave the state. And if they arrest you, I will not violate you. Go get it done.

And on the way home, we were reading the big book. And Gary said, well, it also says here we're not supposed to be a foolish martyr and just throw ourselves into the line. He came from Shan. He said, I know the guy at the Rexall, he's a decent man. Let's do this. Let's write him a letter and lay it all out. Tell him who you are, what you are, why you want to do this, just lay it all out. Now I've got to confess to two felonies on paper and sign it and mail it.

No choice. We did that. I don't have a dramatic ending for you because the letter came back. The man had died and the place was closed. Then I got thinking, don't I owe Wyoming something? So I went back to my parole officer and he said, oh, don't you do that. He said, here's what's going to happen. You're going to go to Wyoming and confess to felonies they can't prove. Because the records are all gone and you'll have to deal with confused police officers.

And I don't want you dealing with confused police officers. So you just keep doing what you're doing and someday away we'll be found. In 1992 I was hired by the Department of Corrections in North Carolina to establish alcohol and drug treatment programs behind the walls down there. And then I came home, did the same thing in Colorado. When God has work for you to do, nothing gets in the way. And during that period of time I was sent to Cheyenne to open up an alcohol and drug treatment in a community corrections center.

Got it up and running, came back to Denver and about six weeks later it hit me. To the best of my knowledge, I stand before you tonight a free man. To the best of my knowledge, I owe no one anything. If that's not true, tell me and we'll get it square, but I'm a free man. I'm not supposed to have a passport. They gave me one so I could go to the Soviet Union one time to tell him about A. I've been all over the world.

I'm a free man. If that's what you'd like, come join us. The last demand that I had to make was to my brother. He's a straight arrow, totally honest human being. And a straight arrow and it took 22 years before he would. You know, I'd hurt him. I'd betrayed all our dreams. I'd hurt him badly. He wants to hurt the family. He didn't trust me for 22 years. But fortunately I was brought up to believe I'm supposed to square it.

I don't care what your reaction is. If I hurt you, you have a right to be pissed at me. 22 years sober, my brother invited my wife and I over for supper. And when it was over, he said, you know, Don, I'm not sure you and I can ever be friends. But this was pleasant. We can do this again. And we began to build on that. Well, while I was in North Carolina, I came home and visited my mom regularly. And my wife, you know, she was important to me too.

And one of those visits we were talking and I had my leg crossed over him. My brother came and sat down and all of a sudden he reached out with his foot and kicked me on the bottom of the shoe. And he said, you know Don, I'm really glad to see you. And he was shocked because he hadn't felt that for a long time. He was really glad to see me. He said, look, next time you're in town, let's just go up to the cabin and do a little fishing.

We have a little cabin up in the high country. What you do is learn to listen to what people are really saying. He was really saying, you and I need a whole day with no interruptions to get all this straightened out. So I made a trip back and we went. We spent the whole day playing cribbage and talking to each other and getting it done. When it was over, he said to me, you know, there's one last thing you need to know.

He said, I'm 58 years old now and I believe I made a decent contribution to life and my heart soared. You don't say that to just anybody. You have to love them very deeply together in that part of your soul. I made a decent contribution to life. He said, and he gave me the great gift that day, getting that free. But the greatest gift that he gave me is that I've been trying to tell you for years how I feel about you.

I've talked about Michelangelo and the statue of David and the anvil and the lake. Let me tell you something. My brother to you, I'm 70 years old now. And because of you, I have been able to make a decent contribution to life.