

Final talk, Puttin' Sober AA Group

2005 | Stories of Recovery | Reading edition

FORMAT	DURATION	RECORDING ID
Transcript PDF	00:47:02	DP-2005-DENVER_01

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Transcript

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Let's say the serenity prayer, God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Thank you. I give you our good friend, Don P. Never mind. My name is Don and I'm an alcoholic. And I'm a recovered alcoholic. I do not know any of the symptoms of alcoholism. The main one of course being the physical allergy to alcohol that causes me to one another drinker since I take one.

Well I don't drink so I don't worry about that one. The man is the mantle of the session that causes me to take that drink where I want to or not. And God has been very kind to me. I don't see alcohol. It has to be drawn to my attention, which makes me extremely vulnerable. Maybe if I talk this way or be better, indulge me please. I'm working on part of the problem. I did not know I was an alcoholic when I got here. I was certified by one government agency as a sociopath type 2.

I'm still not sure what it is, but I can tell you it ain't good. My federal parole officer said I was a psychopath. The medical people said I was a manic depressive drug addict. I was hiding my alcoholism behind some real drama man. You can get by it too, maybe even three of them, but not all of them. My favorite was not a depressive. And please understand, that's a very real condition my son had. For me, it was the game. I learned real early on that if you want people to stay away from you, throw a mood swinger to you.

It works every time. You have to get really good at it, because if you do it too often, you'll lock your way and try to fix it. And you've got a whole new game to deal with. If you don't do it well enough, I invite you to parties to the stand up comic. That's what I'm trying to avoid anyway. God Jesus is what's at hand always. He will not mess my life up to make yours better. Get over it. But he is what's at hand and why I came to the end of my road Christmas 9, 1967.

The end of the road was very simple. It's been a week during the most thorough inventory I've ever done in my life. Many of you was honest. I looked at who I was and realized I had become completely useless. A great place to be. It doesn't feel good. And if you're in AA so you can feel better, go somewhere else. Really? But what it did was bring me to that point of total surrender. As long as I can be useful, I can stay here. When I become useless, I gotta go.

I had two little boys that had been on the road with me. A little emotional part of me. For four and a half years, they went through the different arrests. They went through everything with me. And they'd have been better off in a foster home than I knew it. The upshot was that I took a two month supply of methamphetamine, hydrochloride, good stuff, right out of the drugstore. And shut up my arm, drank everything in the house and we don't die. What a bitch it was in the morning.

I woke up and what I woke up to was a simple thing. I'm a complete failure at living and a complete failure at dying. What a bitch. The body won't quit and the mind won't work. And the police are at the door. Now there's your first clue that I ain't dead. Well, they don't need them in either of the places I was taught you gonna go. And

I couldn't have verbalized it then, but the attitude was very simple. My being was.

I wanted to go anywhere anyone says. Do anything anyone says, if I don't have to be him anymore. And I haven't been. I came to a fully awake. No idea what to do with it. Just fully awake. Now I get most of my lessons from my grandchildren. And I was thinking the other day, my little granddaughter, Gianna. When the babies are restless, they give them to me. Because I know what to do with babies. They're laying on your chest and hum. A pretty single sleep. For God's sake, don't yell at them.

Can you imagine that? Trying baby and yell at them to shut them up. Somebody had a hitch in the head with a stick. But she was, I hung her on to sleep. And was looking at her and I thought, you know this was, it would be, I can't imagine. Coming back into the room, waking that baby up and then leaving the room. What a terrible thing. So, because God uses whatever's at hand. Oh, I'm sorry. Flaunt me to the moon. They had nine charges on me and the first one called for three years of life in the penitentiary.

I've been in three of them, which doesn't mean anything. Because that's not to deal. Better? Well, you missed all the good stuff. Sorry. We plea bargained that one. They took me in a room of my attorney and the federal people. Because I still owe them five years and they were kind of anxious to have me back. Instead of having a kid guilty to a reduced charge they had available. So you got to have an A group two hours from here and a charge available.

That they would give me one and a half to three years sentence. And the other option was to go back to the feds for five years. And I'm not stupid. So I took the deal. Now the federal officer that negotiated this changed his mind at the last minute. He'd been in touch with the hospital. And on paper I'm untreatable. Sociopath doesn't know the difference between right and long. How are you going to help them? They're a psychopath. A sociopath does. They just don't give a damn.

And I'm both. So they said just lock him up so he didn't hurt anybody else. And so he did the deal for me. I was really worried about my Social Security because what they did was let me plead to guilty on charge on the only one in the state that never pled that way. Which I find interesting. And I thought I was going to Texas where they could fix what was wrong with me. So in five days I'm supposed to be in federal hospital in forward Texas.

Getting fixed. The federal man at the last minute changed his mind. Said we can't do anything for this one. Just lock him up. So I was taking five days later to the fish tank in Colorado State Penitentiary. Great place. Built in 1894. Made out of rock quarries from the great place. Fish tank you don't know. That's where they spend four to six weeks teaching you how to live in this community. Because you don't learn that quick.

You're in trouble. They thump in bumpy and decide we're going to put you to work and all that. In our third week three convicts came over to talk to us. I knew they were convicts because they had green clothes with numbers on them. Ugly. Except for Bruce. Bruce is kind of cute. He really was. But no crusty old bastard named Doc got to put in first. And he said this. My name is Doc and I am an alcoholic. And that means that I'm a policy over alcohol and drugs and guards and all of the other circumstances of my life.

And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look to the award the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. Well we'll do the argue with you. You said your very best thinking got

you the penitentiary. You're not doing too good are you? Well no. Then he gave the promise we can show you a new way of thinking. We can show you how to learn to live a life that will make sense to you.

My life had never made sense to anybody because it's trying to make sense to you. And one quick look you say I don't make sense. From the time those little people would come to me and say why did you do that? And early on I told them the truth not very long but I told them I don't know. They said well you must know you did it. They told us a number of things that day. The main one was they invited us to what they called a 12 step study school.

You were not allowed to attend the A meeting till you completed the step work. You weren't fit. They brought real people in from the outside. And my sole partner and I Jim didn't have a hell of a lot to do anyway. And Jim was one of those guys that one of the first emotions that returned to me was compassion. I didn't know what it was but I knew that I knew why I was there. Jim didn't know. He had done what you know I've all been terrified of.

In a car drunk in a blackout he killed people. So what the hell let's go. I'd been to NA in the federal penitentiary didn't hurt a damn thing because I'm not a drug addict. I too loved speed. When treatment came out with that drug of choice that's mine. The drug I don't have any choice over at all is alcohol. So I'm very blessed because when I got here the entire focus of the A was recovery from alcoholism. Which if you think about it brings about sobriety all by itself.

Unfortunately I'm a little concerned about A today. The focus is shifting to sobriety. And don't drink. We're told at the very beginning that's something we can't do. So I spend any time with techniques and styles and charts and graphs and questionnaires and that help us. But I was spiritually awake which meant I began to see things spiritually. One of the mistakes I had made most of my life is that I thought I was a human being trying to have a spiritual experience.

And I had lots of them. I'm a spiritual being. Having a human experience. And what is that for you? Bring it on. I'm not gonna outlive it anyway. So bring it on. But I was the three guys that were working with it. There were three of them. Bruce and Phil and Roy. Completely different personalities. But the message was identical. Bruce was doing a naturalized sentence for a double murder he'd committed in a shootout downtown Denver.

The man telling me the story could not do that. And I could see that. And I asked him about it. I've been taught to ask questions. He said, that's right. I've been changed. God changed me. And the only reason I stayed in the AA was to be changed. I didn't know I needed to be sober. I was five and a half months sober when I got here. How much more sober am I gonna get? God changed me. I didn't care who changed me. He'd been changed.

Roy was... I smuggled some stuff across the border to using my kids. It's a terrible story. You all have what? It's my cover. And the guy had hired me for the job, turned us all in. And when you play with snakes, you get bit. That was so reprehensible what I did. I drove a toy. Now I understand the kids now are on the road for four and a half years. And everybody has an ace in the hole. You got one? Mother, father, aunt, uncle, friend.

Crashed out my cocks for a few days. Rested up, fattened up. And then my dad was an ace in the hole. He

had a carriage house and the kids and I lived at it. And I just come off a hard road trip. And we were sitting there and I decided it's time for me to put my life back together. Because all I've ever wanted to be was a good father and a good son. So busy putting my life back together. And Albert called from Albuquerque.

Said we got a problem. We got 30 kilos of really good graphs as far as it were as. And our driver got arrested on a traffic charge. And it's land and motel. We need somebody to bring it across. What do you do it? Well, I'm trying to get my life together. So I said, of course. I didn't do it for money. At that time it was \$200 a key. That's chump change. I did it for prestige. I was the only one in the entire United States.

This little cynic could think, could pull this off. I'm going to go into old Mexico and rescue against. I take great, I get tickled because you know who the president of Mexico is now? Man named Fox. That's Zorro. It was finally running the show. Anyway, so that piece was laying there and God used whatever it had. Bruce was incapable of committing that act again. And that's why I wanted it. Roy Nichols was a bank robber.

Well, not really, he was a robber. He wasn't very good. But Roy's big kick was robbing supermarkets. He really liked the thrill of going from station to station to station. Because every minute you're in there, you're in higher danger. What he really liked was when he put a gun to your head and watched your face. Didn't do it for the money. So I began to identify with him. He was not capable of doing that anymore. And I asked him about it and he said, that's right, I've been changed.

And God changed me. They didn't say, hey, change me. They didn't say my sponsor changed me. They didn't even say the big book changed me. God changed me. Now, Roy is an interesting case because we, by the way, went through the 12-step study school in five weeks. In the sixth week, I was given a new group. And with my sponsor's help, it was now my turn. And every now and then, Roy would get pissed at the group. Did you ever get pissed at your group?

Just couldn't stand it anymore. And he disappeared for two or three weeks. And went back to sell out seven and hit out. And of course when he came out, I said, what are you been doing? He said, well, I was completely off-basin. I've been riding inventory so I can get clear. Now I can come back. Phil Guterres, God, I don't know. He had 13 kids. Obviously, he wasn't drunk all the time. Phil was a very dangerous human being.

He came from Guam when he was 17 because they couldn't handle him anymore. He had a family here, so they sent him here. And a few years later, they wanted to send him back to Guam and Guam when taking, so they put him in our penitentiary. Because it seems the last time he got drunk he threw three people out of three-story window. Now I lived in sell B-4, nine-right. B-block, four-story up, nine-silled down on the right side.

And this is a guy who throws people out of windows. And he came to me one day with a smile on his face. I don't know if you've seen oil smile, but this is the captain of the pirate ship. He said, I've been thinking. I've been here seven years and you're the first person I sponsored. You will stay sober. As you wish, Phil taught me about love. It starts right there, which is rescued of penitentiary. Nobody ever questioned Phil's touching his mouth.

These were my mentors. I don't find the word sponsor in the big book. I do find the word protege, which well-defined. There's two places that define sponsorship, or it describes it without defining it. If you're serious about this, it says we suggest you find somebody who can show you precisely how they're recovered. We call

that sponsorship now, and that's good. Sponsorship is so important that I don't want to demean it in any way, but it's gotten skewed.

Sponsorship is the act of taking someone through a proven process that will awaken them to the spirit within. That's the only thing that's going to save your ass. I can't. Nobody else can. But the spirit will and does. So how do I tap into that? I'm asked to do the one thing I'm incapable of doing. Get honest. Anyway, that put me on a track of some things spiritually. We're healers, we're storytellers. We're not smart.

We wouldn't be here. We'd be home watching law and order. I don't even know what it is, but it didn't sound nice to me. I like to watch Heaven Castel. So I look at the great healers. She's one. My wife is a nurse in a research unit where many of her babies died, so I watched her. She picked those babies up and packed them. That's all she did. And say, you're in the right place. You're going to be all right. That's what we're supposed to do when the new people come in.

We take them by the hand, we touch them. Then I looked at the great master. And what was it he actually did? Well, he was kind of a traveler. He spent a lot of time on donkeys and dirt roads. He'd come upon some guy who was crippled, blind, had running sores, and sitting by the side of the road died. Now this guy thought he was alone because he was crippled and blind and had running sores. The master knew better. He was crippled and blind and had running sores because he thought he was alone.

So the first thing the master did was say, you cannot be alone once that happens. You don't have to like it, but you're no longer alone. Then in giving this, you don't have to do this anymore, you know. He sounded off mayor. And because he had the understanding that I am you and you are me, then he would say to them, would you like to get up? Not everybody wants to get up. And if the man said, well, yeah. He'd say, all right, I'll be real still because I'm going to give you the magic.

Get up. And he said it with such conviction that it was believable. Believe the lies ran out the window. So my task since they got to A was to be believable. I am an alcoholic. I know exactly what that means. I know I'm completely powerless over everything, protecting this thing. In fact, Janice, some night when you got nothing but law and order, there's a repeat. Just tie yourself in your chair and let her run. Make sure you're tied down tight.

So if I come and look you in the eye and tell you, you don't ever have to drink again, you don't. And I can say that with certainty because I have it. And I'm incapable of not drinking. But I haven't. And if you'd like to learn how that occurs, I'll show you. I'm not good as a relationship counselor. Well, I've never been able to figure out how to have a successful, sick relationship. What can I do? We didn't spend a whole lot of time worrying about not drinking and sobriety.

We just didn't. We spent most of our time not learning new stuff but getting rid of the old stuff. So it isn't in the way. You got a busy mind? Shut it off. The only way I know what to deal with issues is create brand new issues. I'm tired. So I'm not good at that. If you come to me and ask me to just sponsor which job should I take, first one is going to give you money for God's sake. You're never going to be CEO of General Motors.

But you might make a good dishwasher, I don't know. Just take the damn job. Early on, Bruce said, are you tired of getting busted? Quit going with those cops. Oh, probably it takes a little time to catch up down there.

Said, would you like some money? Of course. Get a job. And once you've got it, you might even think about showing up for it now, man. And while you're there, you might want to do some work. And at the end of a prescribed period that they decide, they'll just give you money.

It'll never be enough, but it will always be enough. So I don't have any money problems. I'm ready to rich women. Yeah, rich beyond belief. One of my heroes is Mickey. He's getting trouble now and then. When he went to the guidebook, he said, when you're screwed up, go find so many more screwed up. Let's see if you can help him. And sometimes the best self I can give you is to tell you how screwed up I am. Then you'll feel better.

Then maybe we can do something. He'd go down to detox. Talk to drugs. My real hero and that family's Marie, she puts up with this shit. One last thing that I want to turn over to my two dear friends. God uses what's at hand. And you taught me, absolute honesty is absolute. What does absolute mean? Means absolute. What does thorough mean? Thoroughly. And so when I came out, I was supposed to go back to Texas and the same parole officer changed his mind.

I went to the federal judge and said, he's been in AA for a year and a half. Let's put him on the street and watch him for six days. We'll know where he's going to beg him. So they did. Now, it was a memorial day weekend. I had \$17 in that suit that gave you the flashing sign on the back, said, just out. And after the fetch process, they turned me over to the state. And this was an old, six foot six former narcotics cop.

I was the acquaintance of his. So I'm not a drug addict, but I was a pretty good dealer. It was back in the days when you gave officers acid away. I'd hope nobody put it in the reservoir. And his worst to me was, do you report to me every night after work, which means get a job by tomorrow or back you go. Not a hell of a lot to interpret or to process. Get a damn job. So I knew I could work at Burger King out in Aurora.

And understand, I truly do live by the spirit, the promptings of the spirit. Never been wrong yet. And I'm in pretty good shape spiritually. And got to the bus stop and the bus had a new sign on it. They have exact fare. Drivers carry no change. Couldn't get on the bus. But I'm away out of the jail. One of the guys they did time with gave me a little notice, said, if you need to work, just go see this guy. So I can't get on this bus.

And he's only three blocks away. Minute man, daily labor service. He didn't say get a job. General Modi said, get a job. So I walked on down there. And total absolute honesty is, it's a trip. You're at risk every time you do it. Walked into Jack's little place of business. I said, Jack, my name is John Prince. And I just got out of the penitentiary. I'm an alcoholic and I've also had a little drug problem. But I need a job.

He said, you're just what I've been looking for. Well, in my position I'll take anything he's got. He's got things to fill. So he got me on a hotel room and changed that obvious suit into some jeans. And God uses what's at hand. We went down to the Dickson paper company. Dickson said, well, we don't hire ex-cons. They don't bother me, I'm not an ex-con. I'm a man and I've been the president. There's a difference. But we can't start it until tomorrow.

If you work on your payroll, we can start it. So we went back down and Jack was one nervous. He said, I've got one more opening. If you want to work today, you can. This is about 11. And this young kid with a bandage on his arm, he and I went out to Abbott Laboratories. Abbott makes the stuff I like the very best. So I'm spending

the afternoon unloading boxcars or trailers into a bandage that I work hard. And made the discovery that it's gone.

It's just gone. Didn't want it. I worked so hard they offered me a full-time job and I had enough sense to say that I don't think so. So I went back to Dick's and paper the next day and unloading boxcars or paper. And I checked in at York Street because that's where he told me to go. Don't miss York Street. It's the best reason in the world to stay sober. So I was able to kind of help some of the other guys get some job.

A guy named Al who was about six weeks sober. He and I went to work unloading boxcars. This is in June of July, hot. And he looked in the boxcar where I was loading stuff out and said, do me a favor, climb down here and look down the tracks and tell me what you see. Big, ugly, molting parrot walking toward us. I said, I see an ugly parrot. He said, thank God. I thought I was 17. He said, you know we've got to catch it.

Because we're going to tell this story. York Street, no we don't have a bird. So we all got him a parrot and I had some fun. A couple months later, they called me in and offered me a job on the docks working for them. Apparently the higher men who have been to prison. Well, that meant I had to fill out an application. They want your last ten years of work history. Let's see, 1966, Doug's mother. You know, it's what it did for a living.

And they never read them anyway. They just went ahead and hired me. And a couple months after that, the dispatcher called me in. And he had my application and he had a funny look on his face. He said, did you really do that? I said, yeah, I did. He said, did you get it across? I said, yeah, I did. He said, well I've been thinking. We have this little delivery truck that delivers paper to the print houses in downtown Denver and goes out east on copaction, deliver sacks.

It seems to me you have the necessary skills to get things from here to there under difficult circumstances. So I got that job, which set me up for being able to make a very important amendment. I don't have time to talk about it, but it's very important. A real job, driving a truck. So whatever, just be honest, tell the truth. I've got to decide who the car is going to fall. I'm about to run out of steam. And I don't want to keep my steam in the car, so I'm going to have to do something different.

Knowing that I would not have the standard. Knowing also that, well you're all lovely. Love me and brought me here for that. I'm only the messenger. It isn't about me. So I got two big guns. One out of Seattle, a lot of the Manhattan County was. And know this. I love you. And one of my old mentors described that for me. Love is the active concern for the welfare and the growth of that which we love. So I love you. I know it's scary.

So I was looking at, of course I'm looking at my life over because it's short. What's my legacy? Because of the presence of God and whatever has given me. I've been able to open a lot of people up for they could love me. That means they're now open to love. Let me go. Active concern for the welfare and the growth of that which we love. So it is. Well, West Parish. God, he was lovely. Man. So this loaned tech showed up in my life 14 years sober, going struck, revving mad because you've been in an A2 law.

And had no clues to what that meant. And I watched him wake up. And I would like you to hear.