

**EXPERIENCES OF MEN VLOGGING ABOUT  
SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER RECOVERY ON  
YOUTUBE**

by

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## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

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**Background:** The journey of substance use recovery is an inherently dynamic and on-going process. It is advanced through secure social support systems. Furthermore, requiring the explicit practice of self-advancement and self-efficacy. However, in South Africa, despite the continued upsurge of substance abuse, there remains a substantial gap between the high demand for treatment and the limited capacity to provide state-funded treatment. In addition, various psychosocial and socio-economic factors further impede access to treatment or recovery support. Thus, within communities facing SUD treatment barriers the exploration of individual lived experiences may deepen understandings of how men experience the journey of substance use recovery.

**Aim:** Through maximising the opportunities engendered by the current digital age this study qualitatively explored the substance use recovery narratives of men. The study aimed to explore how the men construct substance use recovery experiences on YouTube. In addition, the study aimed to explore how the men construct their individual processes of sustaining recovery.

**Research Question:** How do male YouTube vloggers construct narratives of their substance use disorder recoveries?

**Methods:** This was a qualitative study which employed inductive thematic analysis, as per Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013).

**Findings:** The study identified four central themes which were delineated into two overarching processes of recovery; namely internal and external recovery. Internal recovery comprises of the process of admission of one's addiction and identifying as an addict. Secondly the acknowledgement of one's powerlessness. External recovery encompasses two central themes. Firstly, process of unlearning and re-learning and secondly being grounded through acts of service.

**Contributions to Clinical Psychology:** The study contributes to the knowledge generation in the growing field of cyberpsychology. Furthermore, the study identifies processes undertaken by men in recovery. These understandings may aid in exploring experiences of men in who present for SUD treatment.

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## ACRONYMS

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List of acronyms used in the study.

<b>AA</b>	Alcoholics Anonymous
<b>AL - Anon</b>	Alcoholics Anonymous (Relatives and friends of persons with SUDs)
<b>APA</b>	American Psychiatric Association
<b>AUD</b>	Alcohol Use Disorder
<b>AOD</b>	Alcohol and other drug
<b>DSM</b>	Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
<b>MARA</b>	Medication-Assisted Recovery Anonymous
<b>MDMA</b>	Methylenedioxymethamphetamine
<b>MHCU</b>	Mental Health Care User
<b>NA</b>	Narcotics Anonymous
<b>NDMP</b>	National Drug Master Plan
<b>NIAAA</b>	National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
<b>NIDA</b>	National Institute of Drug Abuse
<b>RR</b>	Rationalised Recovery
<b>SACENDU</b>	South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use
<b>SAMHSA</b>	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
<b>SNS</b>	Social Networking Sites
<b>S.O. S</b>	Secular Organisations for Sobriety
<b>SUD</b>	Substance Use Disorder
<b>UNDOC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

## KEY CONCEPTS

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### **Introduction**

The key concepts are central terms which are used to describe various concepts addressed in the study. It also includes, where applicable, any related interchangeable synonyms used to refer to the same concepts. These key terms frame how the way in which the study positions various concepts as well as how these concepts are applied in the process of generating meaning within the research study. These key concepts are defined below.

### **Gender**

For the purposes of this study gender is used to denote the binary categories of sex, namely male and female, characterised by the individual's biological and morphological features (Becker et al., 2017).

### **Illicit substance**

An illicit substance and an illicit drug are terms which are used interchangeably. An illicit drug is a prohibited drug due to the law as it poses various risks to addiction (Degenhardt & Hall, 2012). This includes drugs which are prohibited for non-medical use such as plant-based substances including cannabis, cocaine, and opioids; synthetic substances such as amphetamines and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). It also includes pharmaceutical drugs such as benzodiazepines, methadone, and buprenorphine (Degenhardt & Hall, 2012). The purpose here is not intended to list an exhaustive catalogue of illicit drugs, but rather to outline the categories of substances delineated in the literature.

### **Addiction**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-V) defines the word addiction as the “severe problems related to compulsive and habitual use of

substances” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 519). United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) describes addiction similarly and states that:

Addiction is the repeated use of a psychoactive substance or substances, to the extent that the user is periodically or chronically intoxicated, shows a compulsion to take the preferred substance (or substances), has great difficulty in voluntarily ceasing or modifying substance use, and exhibits determination to obtain psychoactive substances by almost any means. (UNDOC, 2016, p. 60).

However, despite being a widely recognised term, over the years its application as a medico-diagnostic within clinical settings has been strongly critiqued (Sinnott-Armstrong & Pickard, 2013; Kemp, 2019). This is primarily due to its negative connotations and associated stigma (APA, 2013). Over the years significant advancements were made within the field of research and clinical understandings of substance use since the DSM-IV-TR (DSM-IV-Text Revision) published in 1994 (McLellan, 2017). The DSM-IV-TR diagnostic terms substance abuse and dependence were subsequently changed to substance use disorder (SUD) in the DSM V published in 2013 (McLellan, 2017). However, this change has not eradicated the terms addiction, substance abuse and substance dependence from colloquial use (Kemp, 2019). Furthermore, this includes other related terms, including “addict” and “addicted” remain utilised when referring to substance use disorders (SUDs) and persons with SUDs.

Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the terms addiction, addicted and addict will be used in reference to SUD experiences, processes or identities.

### **Substance Use Disorder**

The central feature of SUDs according to the DSM V, is “a cluster of cognitive, behavioural and physiological symptoms indicating that the individual continues using the substance despite significant substance-related problems” (APA, 2013, p. 483). The diagnosis of a SUD

requires the presence of a minimum of two of the eleven criteria as outlined in the diagnostic manual. This study however does not aim to qualify or assess the individual's diagnosis. The study frames SUDs as per the individual's self-identification as substance users. Moreover, the study frames SUDs in accordance with the individual's participation within Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or any 12 Step related programmes. Therefore, substance use, and substance abuse disorder will be used to denote a state of addiction or dependence.

### **Substance Use Treatment (In/Outpatient)**

Treatment provided for substance use refers to any interventions including counselling and psychiatric treatment aimed at treating illicit drug and/or alcohol abuse (Kadden & Litt, 2011). This also encompasses medical interventions applied to manage symptoms associated with substance use dependence and withdrawals.

### **Recovery**

Recovery is the improvements in the individual's quality of life during their remission period (Worley, 2017).

### **Recovery narratives**

Recovery narratives (also referred to as narratives) are the "Personal stories of health problems and of recovery which can be shared with others, and can provide recipients with insights into the phenomenology of recovery" (Subhani et al., 2022, p. 2)

### **Recovery Capital**

Recovery capital is the combined internal and external resources available to the individual which serve to facilitate and maintain their recovery (Bluic et al., 2017). Internal resources

include the individual's personal motivation, determination, and resilience (Bluic et al., 2017). External resources include societal or community recovery support systems (White et al., 2017), which are also referred to as social capital.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital refers to the supportive relationships and community organisations which serve to promote and maintain the process of recovery (Bluic et al., 2017). This includes the individual's relatives, friends, recovery sponsor, community rehabilitation centres, SUD treatment centres and recovery support groups (White et al., 2017).

### **Remission**

The period of remission refers to abstinence and sobriety period, where the individual disengages from any use of their addiction substance (Worley, 2017).

### **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)**

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is the largest global non-professional self-help organisation (Jacobs et al., 2012; Lembke, 2013; Rubya & Yarosh, 2017) for persons in recovery. AA is freely accessible and is reported to have a global membership of over 1.5 million members (Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). The main functions of AA are encapsulated into three subcategories, recovery, service and unity (Krentzman et al., 2011). AA aims to facilitate sobriety by reducing the probability of relapse through peer support as well as increasing the individual's sober social networks (Alcoholics Anonymous 2001, Kelly et al., 2020). Therefore, the members are presented with personal recovery management support through the individual mentorship of a sponsor (Kelly et al., 2020). AA hosts 60 to 90-minute-long meetings (Kelly et al., 2020) which take various meeting formats such as speaker focused, speaker and discussion focused, big

book focused and step focused meetings (DeLucia et al., 2015). This includes processes of narrative sharing, where individuals share their personal journeys of sobriety with fellow members (DeLucia et al., 2015).

### **Narcotics Anonymous (NA)**

Narcotics Anonymous is a specialised recovery programme which aims to facilitate the process of recovery from illicit drug use during recovery (DeLucia et al., 2015). It is founded on the same tenets as AA and is thus instituted on the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions (DeLucia et al., 2015). NA is reported to have a presence in over 144 countries and is focused on facilitating the recovery process of individuals who identify as addicts due to illicit drug abuse (DeLucia et al., 2016).

### **The Big Book**

The Big Book is the Alcoholics Anonymous literature, which outlines recovery from alcoholism's in accordance with the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions (Kelly, 2017). It was first objective of the Big Book is to share the experiences of the first 100 people who attained sobriety with the objective of helping others who undertake the same journey of recovery (Kelly, 2017).

### **The 12 Steps**

Step 1: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 21).

Step 2: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 25).

Step 3: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 34).

Step 4: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 42).

Step 5: “Admitted to God, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 55).

Step 6: “We’re entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 63).

Step 7: “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 70).

Step 8: “Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 77).

Step 9: “Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 83).

Step 10: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted to it” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 88).

Step 11: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to vary that out” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 96).

Step 12: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 106).

### **The 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous**

Tradition 1: “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 129).

Tradition 2: “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 132).

Tradition 3: “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 139).

Tradition 4: “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 146).

Tradition 5: “Each group has but one primary purpose-to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 150).

Tradition 6: “An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 155).

Tradition 7: “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 160).

Tradition 8: “Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 166).

Tradition 9: “A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 172).

Tradition 10: “Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 176).

Tradition 11: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 180).

Tradition 12: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2005, p. 184).

## **YouTube**

YouTube is a freely accessible, public, user-generated content-sharing social networking site (Holland, 2016). YouTube is globally accessible and is currently available in sixty-one languages (Holland, 2016). Over the years, YouTube has become increasingly popular, and it is the world’s third most popular social media platform (Holland, 2016). Content creators share videos on the platform and are able to assess the reception of their work through digital engagements including comments, subscriptions, likes and dislikes.

## **Social Networking Sites (SNS)**

Social Networking Sites refer to web-based platforms which enable the construction of a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system such as YouTube (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The system permits the ability of the individual to communicate and exchange information virtually with other network users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNS also aim to facilitate and support various forms of social relationships between people (Coenen, 2009).

## **Cyberpsychology**

Cyberpsychology is framed as the study of human interactions and psychological processes occurring within virtual spaces (Ancis, 2020)

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with exploring the prevalence of substance use and SUDs nationally and internationally. This is essential in contextualising the study and highlighting its significance. The chapter also proposes the motivation for exploring male SUD recovery experiences within the context of SUDs prevalence amongst men. Furthermore, the chapter includes discussions of key SUD policy and particular attention is paid to the aspects of SUD recovery. In the remaining subsections of the chapter the rationale of the study is explored and the gaps in SUD research are considered. This is followed by the aims, objectives, and research question of the study. Lastly, the chapter concludes with the outline of the thesis.

## 1.2 Overview

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) abuse remains a substantial public health crisis in South Africa (Oladeinde et al., 2020). Additionally, AOD abuse contributes substantially to the global health burden (Pradhan et al., 2013; Peltzer & Phaswana-Mafuya, 2018; Jha & Singh, 2020). The consequences of AOD abuse are deemed to be stratified across various domains; namely, public safety, productivity, crime, health, and governance (International Narcotics Control Board, 2013; Oladeinde et al., 2020). In a 2014 report the UNDOC provided a statistical analysis of the of substance abuse trends in South Africa (UNDOC, 2014). The report exposed the following findings: Approximately 270 991 South Africans were identified to have a diagnosable substance use disorder (SUD) and 1, 97 million South Africans acknowledged having an alcohol use disorder (AUD) (UNDOC, 2014). In addition, subsequent research conducted on the prevalence of AUD indicated that South Africa has the highest rates of AUD

within sub-Saharan Africa (Oladeinde et al., 2020). However, SUDs are not only a South African public health crisis but are a global, public health issue (Peacock et al., 2018). Statistical findings released by the UNDOC (2021) indicate that during 2017 approximately 275 million people globally reported to be illicit substances users. Furthermore, 60 million of the individuals constituting the global estimate were situated within African countries (UNDOC, 2021). The UNDOC (2021) also reported that in relation to the previous ten years (2010 – 2020) the findings were demonstrative of a 22% increase in illicit drug use. Additionally, the UNDOC (2021) projected that over the subsequent ten-year period, the global estimate will increase by a further 11%, with highest impact expected to be within low to middle income countries (LMICs). Disturbingly, these projections indicate that solely within Africa, the illicit substance use will have an increase of 40% by the year 2030 (UNDOC, 2021). As a result, the interest in substance use research continues to expand with the aims of addressing SUD appropriately within public and mental health sectors (Baruah & Bhagabati, 2020).

### **1.3 SUD and Gender**

Various studies have been conducted to explore the role of gender in substance use and SUD recovery (Jacobs et al., 2012; Foster et al., 2018; Becker et al., 2017). In South Africa, the gender differences between males and females who are illicit drug users is found to be an 80:20 split (van Heerden et al., 2009). These findings remained consistent in succeeding research. Statistics South Africa (2016) found that the use of alcohol amongst men remained greater than in women as indicated by a 6 in 10 ratio for men and 1 in 4 ratio for women. Similarly, in a study conducted by Jacobs et al., (2012) the findings demonstrated that alcohol use and alcohol dependence were not found to be homogenous across men and women. This was also corroborated by Foster et al., (2018), who also explored the role of gender in AUD. Foster et

al., (2018) measured the gender difference in alcohol use occurring in late adolescence and young adulthood. The findings identified and explored two types of gender effects in the development and maintenance of alcohol use disorders in men and women: namely the mean level effects and the structural level effects (Foster et al., 2018). The mean level effects pertain to the severity of the existing risk to exposure found to exacerbate the likelihood of alcohol use disorders (AUDs). The structural level effects refer to the psychosocial factors which were found to contribute to the development and maintenance of AUDs. Furthermore, Foster et al., (2018) found that, in relation to women, men consumed alcohol more regularly and in greater quantities. Therefore, increasing their propensity for SUDs (Foster et al., 2018). Additionally, Foster et al., (2018) argued that the higher mean level in men as opposed to women was supported by the statistical prevalence of AUDs in men. Thus, men were found to be at higher risk of developing AUDs due to contextual factors including exposure risk level in their adolescence (Foster et al., 2018). This exposure in the adolescent stage was found to be a predisposing risk factor for developing AUDs in later adulthood (Foster et al., 2018). These findings were comparable to Becker et al., (2017) who argued that men's early exposure to alcohol has been historically informed, shaped, influenced and facilitated by social and gender roles. According to Becker et al., (2017) men's alcohol or recreational and experimental drug use is found to be more socially accepted in relation to women. Consequently, it is argued that men are more vulnerable to developing SUDs at an earlier age than women (Becker et al., 2017; Foster et al., 2018). The gender differences in SUDs are also recognised by the DSM V (APA, 2013). The DSM V indicates the AUD is more prevalent in adult men, with a 12.4% prevalence as compared to adult women, with a 4.9% (APA, 2013). This is also supported by the findings of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) (SAMHSA, 2011). The NSDUH reported that during 2010, the estimated percentage of males and females who satisfied the diagnostic criteria of an alcohol use disorder was 57.4% and 46.5% respectively.

However, researchers who have also studied gender differences in SUDs have found that once women initiate their drug use, their rate of use escalates more rapidly than in men (Becker et al., 2017). This was also corroborated by the findings of Jacobs et al., (2009) who reported that the pace at which drug use escalates in women, in comparison to men, may be due to comorbid internalising disorders such as depression, which are found to be more prominent in women. Conversely, the research also indicated that men demonstrated higher rates of concurrent additional substance use (Foster et al., 2018). Therefore, although the findings demonstrated a rapid escalation in rate and frequency in women's substance use, men remained more susceptible to early SUDs and polysubstance use (Foster et al., 2018).

#### **1.4 SUD Treatment**

There is a multitude of research centralised on addiction. Institutions such as the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the Services Administration for Mental Health and Substance Abuse (SAMHSA) have focused on assessing and monitoring the trajectory of substance use (Merikangas & McClair, 2012). However, Pienaar and Savic (2016) argue that notwithstanding the utility of global trends in SUDs, in order for the AOD crisis to be effectively addressed in South Africa, it remains imperative to generate context specific research regarding South African AOD use and SUD recovery trends. Therefore, organisations such as the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACEDNU) aim to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the AOD trends occurring across the 9 geopolitical provinces of South Africa, with the objective of contributing to the management and intervention of SUDs within South Africa (Plüddemann et al., 2010; Dada et al., 2018).

Other organisations however focus primarily on the treatment of SUDs (Grant et al., 2016). Over the decades SUD treatment and treatment efficacy has continued to develop and advance (Gilbert, 2022). However, despite the significant advancements in AOD treatment, several obstacles remain and in turn impede access to treatment (Pradhan et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2016). Research conducted in South Africa highlights the discrepancy between the upsurge of substance use, the large gap in relation to the demand for treatment and the limited capacity to provide state-funded treatment (Pradhan et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2016). This treatment gap is also evident in international studies (Gilbert, 2022). The study *'Failure to get into substance abuse treatment'* conducted by Fisher et al., (2017) found that within the sub-sample of 239 substance users, 48% were unable to access treatment due to a lack of services within their communities. In addition, 27% of the sample remained untreated as they were unable to afford the treatment cost (Fisher et al., 2017). Thus, a significant portion of individuals battling SUDs, particularly from impoverished communities and LMICs, either have impeded access or alternatively no access to substance use treatment (Saloner & Karthikeyan, 2015). Furthermore, these structural obstacles are found to prevail through into the recovery processes of aftercare and reintegration (Manuel et al., 2017). Manuel et al., (2017) states that the social and economic difficulties faced by individual's post treatment possess significant implications for prospect of sustained recovery. Therefore, the SUD treatment gap ultimately has considerable implications on the formation of AOD policies in South Africa and in turn on the SUD interventions which are sanctioned, implemented and promoted within various communities (Pienaar & Savic, 2016).

### **1.5 SUD Policy and SUD recovery**

Historically, South African AOD policies have been characterised as predominately punitive in nature and typified by supply reductionist approaches (Parry & Myers, 2011; Oladeinde et

al., 2020). Therefore, over the years South African AOD policies have received various criticisms including the significant emphasis on supply reduction and primary endeavour of achieving a drug free society, without considering the socio-political context of SUDs within South Africa (Parry & Myers, 2011). Accordingly, over the current years, there have been noteworthy advancements in AOD policy including the recognition of the prevailing psychosocial influences in AOD use (Pienaar & Savic, 2016; Oladeinde et al., 2020). This is particularly crucial in the South African context where the current AOD trends bear strong influence from the country's socio-political history (Geyer & Lombard, 2014; Pienaar & Savic, 2016). Jacobs and Jacobs (2013) state that when addressing marginalised communities, it is important to remain cognisant of the complexities of socio-economic factors, including inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Therefore, AOD researchers underscore the importance of stakeholders and policymakers remaining supportive of the populations they wish to address in order not to inadvertently re-stigmatise or marginalise the very people they aim to protect (Pienaar & Savic, 2016).

One such key policy in South African AOD research is the National Drug Master Plan (NDMP) (Parry & Myers, 2011). The NDMP conceptualises and frames the impact of SUDs through a multisectoral approach with the aims of providing holistic approach to SUDs management in South Africa (Parry & Myers, 2011; Pienaar & Savic, 2016). This study was particularly interested in the sector of SUD recovery which is addressed within the section of aftercare and reintegration services (Pienaar & Savic, 2016). Since inception, there have been four versions of the NDMP (Geyer & Lombard, 2014; Pienaar & Savic, 2016). The NDMP (2019 – 2024) is the fourth and revised policy of the third version of the NDMP (2013 – 2017). The latter was primarily formulated and implemented in accordance with the objectives of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act (No 70 of 2008) (Geyer & Lombard, 2014; Howell &

Couzyn, 2015). Both versions of the policy aimed to strategically address substance use through an integrated, multi-sectoral perspective (Howell & Couzyn, 2015). Ultimately, the objective remains to nullify substance abuse within the Republic of South Africa and facilitating a vision of a substance abuse free South Africa (Pienaar & Savic, 2016).

The subdivision of aftercare within the NDMP recognises SUD recovery programmes as a component of holistic SUD management in South Africa (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). However, the NDMP neither states all of the various self/mutual aid recovery programmes available in the South Africa, nor does it include the recognition of family focused aftercare groups, such as AL-Anon (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). Geyer and Lombard (2014) conducted research on the content of the NDMP and found that several areas of the AOD strategies are briefly outlined and not adequately addressed. This included central aspects of aftercare such as social capital development for individuals in SUD recovery (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). Therefore, this is argued to be an important area of development in AOD policy, particularly when considering the objectives of the NDMP to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals back into their societies (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). Thus, social capital recovery is proposed to be an essential component of aftercare. However, Geyer and Lombard (2014) found that social capital did not to receive adequate attention in the NDMP in relation to the other components such as prevention and early intervention. As noted by Geyer and Lombard (2014), the focus of the NDMP remained significantly centred on prevention strategies and treatment processes (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). As a result, aftercare and reintegration are only addressed in a smaller subsection of the document and ultimately receiving the least focus in the NDMP (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). Geyer and Lombard, (2014) therefore raised concerns regarding the current strategies in place for integrated support for persons in recovery.

## **1.6 Rationale**

According to Collinson and Best (2019), treatment and the recovery management of SUDs have continued to be an area of interest in psychological research. However, less attention has been given to the experiences of recovery processes and in particular the personal accounts of lived experiences by individuals recovering from SUDs (Pietersen & Savic, 2016; Pettersen et al., 2019). In addition to findings regarding the current gap in the treatment of SUDs, namely within the aftercare and recovery process, Gilbert (2022) argues that consideration must be given to mechanisms which have been experienced to as conducive for persons attaining or sustaining their SUD recovery. Although recovery programmes such as AA and NA are recognised in SUD aftercare, as demonstrated within the NDMP, the predominant focus remained on treatment, early intervention, and prevention strategies (Geyer & Lombard, 2014). In addition, SUD research has also been found to primarily centre on understanding the pathophysiology of substance use, factors exacerbating substance use onset and addiction relapse factors (Pettersen, et al., 2019). However, SUDs are chronic in nature and therefore, recovery is a significant aspect of individual's journey (Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). Therefore, this study specifically positioned itself within understating the processes which have been found to facilitate recovery gains of men in SUD recovery as well as how these processes are constructed and shared on social networking sites such as YouTube.

## **1.7 Gaps in the Literature**

The integration of research-based practice into clinical practice continues to be critical in substance use and SUD recovery (Kelly et al., 2020). White (2010) argues that there is a need for psychology to progressively shift towards the incorporation of non-traditional approaches to substance use recovery as it will enhance understandings and conceptualisations of SUDs.

In turn, this is argued to expand the frameworks of substance use treatment and SUD recovery (White, 2010). Research on YouTube vlogs about SUD recovery experiences is a new area of exploration in the field of psychology (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This is echoed by Ancis (2020), who states the field of psychological research has embarked on a new era that is social media. SNS such as YouTube are identified as a valuable research tool which possess the potential to provide rich, raw data for academic research (Ancis, 2020). Therefore, exploratory research on vloggers who self-identify as recovering from SUD is critical in generating knowledge on this under-researched area. Ultimately, the study would generate new knowledge in an emerging field of psychology in the area of cyberpsychology. In addition, communities facing the challenges of the treatment gap integration of alternative, cost-effective, innovative, and non-traditional approaches may be explored to improve current SUD practice.

### **1.8 Aims**

The study aimed to generate understandings regarding the various meanings and processes constructed by YouTube vloggers on their SUD recovery process. In turn, contributing to clinical understandings and conceptualisation of SUDs.

### **1.9 Objective**

The study achieved its primary objective through qualitatively exploring the experiences of men who vlog about their substance use and SUD recovery on YouTube.

### **1.10 Research Question**

How do male YouTube vloggers construct the narratives of substance use disorder recovery?

## 1.11 Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter and serves to provide an overview of the research. The chapter outlines key AOD policy pertaining to substance use treatment and recovery. Furthermore, it stipulates the rationale, objectives and research question which the study aimed to address. The chapter also explores the gaps identified within SUD recovery research.

Chapter 2 is the literature review which explores the research in SUD and SUD recovery. It includes discussion regarding access to SUD recovery services, efficacy of AA/NA, followed by an exploration of studies conducted on recovery and stigma. The literature review also includes alternative recovery programmes as well as recovery and SNS. The chapter concludes with the summary section.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The social constructionism framework is defined, described and linked to the overarching research aims of the study. The chapter explores the role of language in social constructionism and the role of power and discourse in social constructionism. The chapter concludes with a summary of the theoretical framework in the study.

Chapter 4 describes the methodological employed in the study. This includes the sample and sampling procedure, the inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as discussions regarding informed consent in cyberpsychological studies. Furthermore, the chapter explores the ethical consideration undertaken in the study including confidentiality and anonymity. Lastly, the process of data analysis is introduced and ultimately directs the study into the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 5 commences with an introduction to the findings of the study. Thereafter, it outlines the structure of the narratives, explores the central themes of the study and the discussion of the interpretation of the findings of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter of the study. It begins with an introduction to the chapter and address the implications of the findings of the study. Lastly, the chapter outlines the limitations and concludes with recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Introduction

The chapter focuses on reviewing literature on SUD recovery. It explores the intricacies of SUD recovery as well as the various aspects which impact the process of SUD recovery. The chapter also unpacks the concepts of recovery, recovery identity, social capital and recovery stigma as well as their impact on SUD recovery. Furthermore, the chapter explores the role of self/mutual aid groups in the process of recovery as well as their efficacy in facilitating SUD recovery.

### 2.2 Substance Use Disorder and Recovery

The journey of SUD recovery and sobriety is inherently a dynamic and ongoing process (Moe et al., 2022). It is advanced through the realisation of secure social support systems and simultaneously requires the explicit undertaking of self-advancement and self-efficacy (D'Agostino et al., 2017). White et al., (2014) propose that one's self-advancement is measured through the ability to abstain from behaviours which may potentially compromise the process of one's SUD recovery. These destructive behaviours comprises of the conduct, practice, people or activity which possess has the potential to rupture one's recovery process (White et al., 2014). In the field of SUD, recovery is used to describe a phenomenon which encompasses various processes undertaken to effectively treating, attaining increased control and managing SUDs (Kaskutas et al., 2014; Best et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2018). To a larger extent, these processes are understood to expand beyond achieving abstinence or being in the process of remission (Witbrodt et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2018; Martinelli et al., 2020). Rather, recovery is

demonstrative of personal transformations and advancements undertaken by the individual in order to aid their SUD recovery (Kelly et al., 2018).

Melemis (2015) identifies and explored three stages of recovery, namely the abstinence, stage the repair stage and lastly the growth stage. In the first stage, abstinence, Melemis (2015) identified various processes which are pertinent to initiating the journey of recovery. These included acceptance of one's addiction, practicing honesty throughout one's life, obtaining knowledge on one's triggers, developing an understanding of SUD relapse, transitioning one's identity from a user to a sober person and developing coping skills to facilitate recovery (Melemis, 2015). This included developing alternative behaviours which corresponded with recovery objectives as well as managing one's cravings (Melemis, 2015). The remaining processes include active participation in self/mutual help groups as well as undertaking personal advancements such as self-care and abstinence from one's substance of addiction (Melemis, 2015). Furthermore, Melemis (2015) stated that during the abstinence stage, risk to recovery is significantly elevated as this stage commences after the cessation of AOD use. Therefore, Melemis (2015) frames the abstinence stage as one which is geared toward emotional and physical recovery. The second stage, repair, according to Melemis (2015) is focused on recovering from the psychological consequences of active addiction. In this stage, individuals are understood to be particularly vulnerable to distress as they begin to appreciate the ramifications of their addiction on their social, economic, and personal functioning (Melemis, 2015). Individuals in the repair stage navigate their new identity as a recovering addict by improving their relationships, making amends where possible, developing a more positive identity and continuing in self/mutual aid recovery groups (Melemis, 2015). Importantly, Melemis (2015) highlighted that the predominant threats to recovery in this stage is poor self-care and forgoing recovery group attendance. Lastly, in the study, Melemis (2015)

identified the growth stage as the concluding recovery stage. This stage requires the individual to understand their identity as an addict by exploring their predispositions in relation to biopsychosocial risk factors in order to proceed in their recovery (Melemis, 2015). Individuals address and restructure their personal negative and damaging ways of being and continue to develop healthy boundaries, engage in acts of service and continuously reflect on and reevaluate their recovery to ensure that it remains in focus (Melemis, 2015).

In the study Melemis' (2015) findings echoed the viewpoint of other researchers, stating that recovery goes beyond the process of abstinence. Furthermore, the study drew attention to a realistic comprehension of recovery due to the potential of relapses during the process. However, despite the literature indicating possible experiences to the individual's spiritual functioning, Melemis' (2015) conceptualisation does not include references to role of spirituality in recovery.

In a similar study, Kaskutas et al., (2014) explored the stages of recovery. This study recognised two distinct but interrelated segments of recovery: essential and enriched recovery. Essential recovery stemmed from the principles of honesty and acceptance of self (Kaskutas et al., 2014). These findings were comparable to Melemis (2015) who identified honesty and acceptance as one of the primary processes required for abstinence. In Kaskutas et al., (2014), enriched recovery comprised of demonstrating accountability for one's progress and growth. Once more, demonstrating essential overlaps regarding in the experiences of recovery. Furthermore, Kaskutas et al., (2014) recognised what Melemis (2015) regards as repair and growth. Thus, demonstrating an appreciation of recovery as a spectrum of experiences required to attain a holistic recovery from SUDs (Kaskutas et al., 2014; Melemis, 2015).

### 2.3 Relapse and Recovery

The role of relapse in recovery is one which is explored significantly in the literature (Mohammadpoorasl et al., 2012; Melemis, 2015; Howell & Couzyn, 2015; Best et al., 2016; Gutierrez et al., 2020). Relapses are argued to be the most challenging component during recovery (Gutierrez et al., 2020). Accordingly, relapses are included in the present conceptualisations of SUDs. The DSM – V defines recovery as essentialised by a “varying course of remission and relapse” (APA, 2013, p. 493). A study conducted by Melemis (2015) found three distinct but interrelated stages of relapse; namely emotional, mental, and physical relapse. Emotional relapse was found to be marked by poor recovery self-care, including isolation from social support, meeting non-attendance as well as meeting attendance without adequate participation (Melemis, 2015). Mental and physical relapse form the second and third phases of relapse respectively. The former is occupied with the cognitions associated with substance use and the latter is relapse characterised by the active engagement in the substance of addiction (Melemis, 2015).

According to the literature many individuals in recovery reach the final stage of relapse i.e., physical relapse, within the first year of recovery (Mohammadpoorasl et al., 2012; Fredrik et al., 2022). These findings correspond with the NDMP which indicated that relapses amongst person with a substance use disorder occurs within the range of 40% to 60% of individuals after attaining remission (Howell & Couzyn, 2015). Furthermore, the NDMP proposed that relapses are significantly prevalent across individuals who have impaired social capital (Howell & Couzyn, 2015). Best et al., (2016) support these findings and propose that relapses in early recovery are exponential due to the challenges of transitioning from previous social community to a new recovery community. Best et al., (2016) state when there is sense of incompatibility in the individual’s identity and the recovery capital identity, relapses may occur. However, in

the process of relapses, the social group serve as facilitators to assist the individual to recover from their 'slip' through practical assistance which enable one to reinitiate the process of recovery (Mohammadpoorasl et al., 2012; Fredrik et al., 2022). Therefore, social capital is found to be an essential component in the process of aftercare and is critical in facilitating recovery (Jetten et al., 2014; Best et al., 2016). Ultimately, social capital is understood to enable individuals in acquiring and further developing their sense of resilience (Galanter et al., 2013) which is found to be fundamental in aiding the prevention of relapse (Yamashita et al., 2021). Thus, aiding in SUD recovery.

#### **2.4 Identity, Stigma and Recovery**

Despite the prevalence of the terms recovery, in recovery, or recovering addict, not all persons who successfully treat and managed their SUD identify with these aforementioned terms (Kelly et al., 2018). Therefore, Kelly et al., (2018) undertook a scientific study to explore the motivations for adopting and rejecting the identity of recovery. Kelly et al., (2018) proposed that individuals alter and adopt various identities in accordance with their social affiliation. This process of identity transitioning is reported to be imperative in maintaining a sense of congruence between the identity of the individual's community and the individual's self-identity. In their study *'On Being "In Recovery": A National Study of Prevalence and Correlates of Adopting or Not Adopting a Recovery Identity Among Individuals Resolving Drug and Alcohol Problems'* the researchers analysed a sample of 1995 individuals (Kelly et al., 2018). 45.1% of the sample self-identified with SUD difficulties and adopted the identity of 'in recovering.' These individuals were found to be actively engaged in recovery support services including present participation in AOD recovery support groups (Kelly et al., 2018). In addition, others had undergone formal SUD rehabilitation treatment (Kelly et al., 2018). The study also found that 39.5% of the sample identified as sober but never identified with the

identity of recovery (Kelly et al., 2018). These individuals viewed their AOD use as inconsequential and reported that it was resolved through merely stopping all use without requiring any recovery or treatment support (Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, others in this group viewed their use as clinically insignificant. This perception was supported by their capacity to maintain their social and occupational functioning whilst continuing substances (Kelly et al., 2018). Other the participants reflected that in identifying with recovery one would imply abstinence and this was however contrary to their current practice and therefore, this identity did not match their lived experience (Kelly et al., 2018). Lastly, the remaining 15.4% identified as previously in recovery. This group represented the individuals who have employed substitution strategies and are no longer abstinent from all substances (Kelly et al., 2018). In addition, this also encompassed those who identified as in recovery previously and overtime no longer accessing or requiring recovery services. Thus, viewing their addiction as resolved (Kelly et al., 2018). The study concluded with the findings that individuals who identified as recovering, in recovery or recovering addict did so as a form of self-preservation (Kelly et al., 2018). Kelly et al., (2018) propose that due to the individual's past lived experiences and the painful consequences of AOD abuse on their lives, this newfound identity allows individuals to reorder and restructure their life in accordance with the requisites of the journey of recovery. Furthermore, the study's findings correspond to the findings of Best et al., (2016) who analysed the recovery identity. Best et al., (2016) propose that the identity of recovery exceeds serving as an indicator of the individual's rehabilitation process, but rather serves to reflect the acceptance of the social norms, expectations, values, and processes of their new social group. However, recovery identities do not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, researchers draw attention to the infelicitous stigmatisation of SUDs, the lack of psychoeducation around addiction and their role in marginalising individuals and impeding access to support (Ramlagan et al., 2010; Saloner & Karthikeyan, 2015; Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017) Despite the opportunity

presented to increase one's social capital, there remains various facets of self/mutual aid group which influence the choice of individuals regarding participating in the programme. These include prevailing stigmatisation regarding SUD and SUD recovery programmes (Lembke, 2013).

In a systematic review of 311 journal articles assessing the perceptions of mental illness, Schomerus et al., (2010) indicated that the terms alcoholic and addict are highly stigmatised. However, these terms remain widely used within the literature and are employed to demonstrate an affliction and acceptance of substance use difficulties (Caldwell & Cuter, 1998). Furthermore, the systematic review by Schomerus et al., (2010) demonstrated that fundamental perceptions of persons who suffer from substance use disorders were closely associated with preconceived 'character and moral flaws.' These included conceptualisations of individual's having a bad character or being fundamentally weak or unsound (Schomerus et al., 2010). Therefore, persons who suffer from SUDs are assumed to have deficient willpower and are ultimately held responsible for their mental illness (Schomerus et al., 2010). These misconceptions further alienate individuals and impede their capacity to access mutually supportive recovery networks (Room, 2013). Furthermore, the perception that SUDs are not a mental health disorder in comparison to illnesses such as schizophrenia (Schomerus et al., 2010), individuals may not always have knowledge of the recovery and treatment resources available to them (Gilbert, 2022). The NDMP also highlights the significant impact of stigmatisation (Howell & Couzyn, 2014). The NDMP recognises that stigma is confounded by psychosocial factors as the large majority of the individuals with SUDs in South Africa are from marginalised communities (Howell & Couzyn, 2014). Thus, stigmatisation is understood as a significant obstacle during the process of recovery.

## **2.4 Recovery and Self/Mutual Aid Support Groups**

In a cross-sectional study exploring SUD recovery Yamashita et al., (2021) found that individuals who participate in recovery groups increase their opportunity to strengthen their resilience during recovery. Resilience is recognised as a fundamental psychological trait which aids in the prevention of relapse (Galanter et al., 2013; Yamashita et al., 2021). Yamashita et al., (2021) identifies two types of resilience, namely innate resilience and acquired resilience. Furthermore, the study proposes that resilience may be acquired and facilitated through recovery group processes (Yamashita et al., 2021). Therefore, Yamashita et al., (2021) proposes that through membership to a SUD recovery programme, individuals are able to increase their opportunity to maintain gains achieved during recovery. These gains are found to be achieved through the group processes, including self-disclosure, service and community building (Yamashita et al., 2021). White et al., (2012) also explored the role of AOD support groups in SUD recovery. According to White et al., (2012) for more than a century and a half, the role of recovery groups in SUD management has been vital. This component of recovery is enabled by various religious, secular, and spiritual organisations which function outside the traditional rehabilitative treatment of SUD (White et al., 2012). Recovery spiritual organisations include AA, NA, and other 12-Step related speciality programmes which cater for specific demographics or specific AOD abuse such as Marijuana Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, AL-Anon and Alateen support groups (White et al., 2012).

However, over the decades there has been significant contentions regarding the centrality of spirituality within AA, NA and 12 Step related organisations (Gilbert, 2022). The Big Book makes deliberate acknowledgment to this tension (Gilbert, 2022) and encourages understandings of God to be personalised to the individual's personal conception of a higher power (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001). This was aimed to allow the spiritual advancements of

recovery to not be confined by religion, but reflect altruism through practices of forgiveness, acts of service and community (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001). Nevertheless, notwithstanding there being no definitive reference to a particular religious denomination (Gilbert, 2022), the contention regarding spirituality and the 12 Steps within AA and NA have catapulted the formation of more than 100 SUD recovery programmes since 1730 (White et al., 2012). These groups include groups which remain operational presently such as Rational Recovery (RR), SMART, Secular Organisations for Sobriety (S.O.S), Recovery and Moderation Management (White et al., 2012). However, spirituality and the 12 Steps are not the sole considerations regarding individual's affiliation to AA or NA. Despite the global prevalence of AA and NA, other factors have also contributed to non-membership to these organisations. Jilek (1994) conducted a study around the applicability of AA within Asian communities and found that in countries such as Japan and other Asian communities, AA misaligns with the majority of the population due to its Western conceptualisation. The study found that the members who were participating in AA were western emigrants or Asians who have assimilated into Western culture (Jilek, 1994). In response, other non-Western organisations such as Buddhist Recovery Networks were founded (White et al., 2012). Other organisations have focused their foundations on recognising that variances in AOD management. Recovery programmes, such as MARA have also been formalised to accommodate persons suffering from opioid use disorders (Galanter, 2018). As opposed to abstinence, MARA places emphasis on managing the incapacitating effects of opioid withdrawals during one's recovery process through regulated doses of methadone (Galanter, 2018).

Another study by Witbrodt et al., (2015) conducted an internet-based analysis with a sample of 9341 individuals who have a self-identified SUD. Five recovery identities were formulated based on the recovery practices of the individual. The predominant identity, with 4912

individuals, was the 12-Step traditionalist (Witbrodt et al., 2015). This group identity encompassed individuals who abstinence-oriented and endorsed spiritual elements of recovery. These individuals regarded recovery as a lifetime process and defined themselves as persons in recovery (Witbrodt et al., 2015). In addition, more than 85% of the group reported attending more than 90 meetings and 59% were in recovery for more than 5 years (Witbrodt et al., 2015). The second largest group is the 12-Step enthusiast group (Witbrodt et al., 2015). This group identity duplicated that of the 12-Step traditionalist, endorsing abstinence and spirituality. However, there were differences with endorsement of prescription drugs use during recovery, with the 12 Step traditionalist. The remaining group identities are non-12 Step identities (Witbrodt et al., 2015). This included the secular group comprising of 980 individuals, the self-reliant group comprising of 1040 individuals, and the atypical group comprising of 382 individuals (Witbrodt et al., 2015). The secular group was less abstinence oriented and regarded recovery to be a physical and psychological process (Witbrodt et al., 2015). Therefore, the group's support of spirituality was found to be negligible (Witbrodt et al., 2015). Thus, in recognising the range of recovery programmes available 12 Step related programmes such as AA and NA remain most prevalent.

## **2.5 Efficacy of AA/NA**

Pagano et al., (2004) conducted research on the efficacy of AA and NA in relation to other recovery programmes. The study found that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of one programme over another. Other studies have found the contrary (Caldwell & Cutter, 1998; Swora, 2004; Rubya & Yarosh, 2017; Kemp, 2019). In spite of the varying findings across the literature, there is a substantial amount of research which supports the role of the 12 Steps within recovery processes or programmes (Caldwell and Cutter, 1998; Kaskutas, 2009; Weegmann & Piwowoz-Hjort, 2009; Krentzman et al., 2011; Friedman, 2016;

Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). A study conducted by Kaskutas (2009) quantitatively analysing the efficacy of AA and NA amongst individuals who have previously completed substance use treatment indicates that there are positive correlations between the number of meetings attended and rate of abstinence, with findings of 2:1 ratio to attenders and non-attenders. Furthermore, the study indicated a direct correlation between the frequency of meeting attendance and rates of abstinence (Kaskutas, 2009). Caldwell and Cutter (1998) argue that individuals who affiliate to AA during the 'early recovery period' i.e., 3 months post sobriety, have an increased chance of attaining stable/ sustained recovery. In addition, early programme affiliation is found to promote identification with the perspective and objectives of AA. This is achieved through continued fellowship with other recovering substance users which in turn, increases the likelihood of the individual's embracing the programme. However, the level of engagement across members with the 12 Steps is varying and diverse. Accordingly, two categories of people are acknowledged within recovery. Firstly, AA identifies those who are "dry" (Weegmann & Piwowitz-Hjort, 2009). This is used to denote individuals who no longer engage in alcohol use but simultaneously do not actively engage in or work the 12 Steps (Weegmann & Piwowitz-Hjort, 2009). Secondly, AA recognises individuals whose active involvement, i.e., working the steps is foundational in their recovery process (Weegmann & Piwowitz-Hjort, 2009). This is supported by Krentzman et. al (2011) and Martinelli et al., (2020) who advocate that sobriety requires, beyond abstinence, the active development and advancement of the self.

Although studies around the efficacy of AA/NA is not consistent, there remains a multitude of research which indicates that AA/NA is an effective recovery programme (Vederhus & Kristensen, 2006; Krentzman et al., 2011; Laudet, 2011; Laudet & Hill, 2015). A study conducted by Robinson (2008) assessing the personal perceptions of the utility of AA. The

findings indicated that 19,2% of the 286 participants regarded AA to be unhelpful in their recovery and 42,3% of the participants found AA to be useful. Furthermore, the study found that the individuals who regarded AA as useful achieved a longer sustained recovery than those who found it unhelpful. However, the literature suggests that to bear the full scope of the recognised benefits of the programme, one requires to display a genuine openness and a sense of fellowship (Cadwell & Cutter, 1998; Melemis, 2015, Kemp, 2019).

AA and NA premise substance use recovery on the foundations of service and group support (Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017). The literature also consistently refers to social capital/recovery capitals as a fundamental aspect of recovery (Tittenburn, 2014; Bluic et al., 2017; White et al., 2017). Social capital is understood to comprise of positive social relations which aid the individual to maintain sober and continuously endeavour to advance their journey of sobriety. Research conducted on the group dynamics of AA indicate that through consistent meeting attendance, AA fosters fellowship amongst members (Rudy & Everman, 2008; Subbaraman et al., 2011; Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017). Subsequently, meeting attendance creates a space for vicarious learning (Yamashita et al., 2021) and simultaneously mobilises the group to instil hope in others. This is achieved by bearing witness to the lived experiences and personal accounts of resilience and recovery (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Collectively these processes serve to encourage abstinence and improve recovery outcomes (Subbaraman et al., 2011; Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017).

Jacobs (2018) conducted a qualitative study titled '*Women's spiritually mediated stories about recovery from Alcohol Use Disorder: A brief report*' women's lived experiences with AUD recovery through AA'. Jacobs (2018) explored South African women's AUD recovery experiences and found that their experiences were characterised by "spiritual growth and

healing with the help of a higher power; renewed purpose in life; active engagement of rehabilitation.” (Jacobs, 2018, p. 417). The women identified AA recovery to be embedded in spiritual connection which in turn facilitated their recovery process. Their affiliation to AA was also understood to provide them with a renewed sense of purpose (Jacobs, 2018). In addition, this purpose extends to give the women a new direction or life’s trajectory. Lastly, in the study, AA is found to be central in overcoming previous barriers which hindered the women’s access to treatment such as readiness or affordability. Therefore, AA was identified by the women as an effective and supportive space for the women’s individual recovery processes (Jacobs, 2018).

## **2.6 Recovery and Social Networking Sites (SNS)**

In the current digital age, the relational and communal spaces cultivated within AA and NA face-to-face platforms have migrated onto virtual spaces, along with the wave of people employing social media to increase their social connectedness (Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017). Social media engagement continues to garner prevalence and creates an opportunity for people, to disseminate their recovery narratives globally. In their study, Grant and Dill-Shackleford (2017) analysed the Social Media Preference Scale (SPS) and found that according to the responses captured through the SPS, the employment of mediated support platforms is likely to increase. The likelihood was not quantified and rather reflected qualitatively through the sample’s engagement with mediated support platforms. Mediated support platforms are recovery programmes which are freely or at a cost, available to individuals through an online medium (Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017). This includes recovery channels such as the AA and NA YouTube channels. These findings aligned with Curtis et al., (2019) also noted that with time, mediated platforms may become a more prevalent mutual-support group format, particularly due to their extended reach to individuals who may not access recovery

programmes due to the face-to-face requirements. Furthermore, the research indicates that due to the mechanics of a mediated platform relatively enhancing anonymity, the prospect of candid self-disclosure is increased (Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017). This is observed to positively correlate to the objects of AA and NA, which also acknowledges anonymity and encourages an honest account of one's recovery in order to ultimately achieve sustainable sobriety.

YouTube is currently the most popular video streaming platform with 2.3 billion users universally (Statista, 2021). Individuals on this platform disseminate content through the process of vlogging. In South Africa, YouTube is one of the fastest growing visual platforms with an increase of 53% of users in 2014 alone (Budree et al., 2019). Over the years SNS have experienced an upsurge of vlogging and vlogs online (Combe, & Codreanu, 2016; Dehghani et al., 2016). Vlogging is defined as the process of sharing or posting content in video format (Combe, & Codreanu, 2016). Through videoed accounts of personal self-reflection and self-report, YouTube houses unfiltered and uncensored records of lived experiences. YouTube allows the vloggers to exercise their agency through sole creative control in the content they produce and thus facilitating spaces for education and activism (Sobande, 2017). This therefore positively impacts research processes as it places the narrative in the hands of those who live it and formulates the prospect of collecting generous quantities of raw data at a reduced cost and time (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Furthermore, YouTube has shaped avenues to explore video-mediated social support as the narrations occurs in real-time and within a naturalistic context (Rubya & Yarosh, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). As a result, these virtual spaces have become opportune for building a sincere sense of global solidarity and commonality beyond geographical constraints (Hendriks et al., 2018). As people utilise social media for peer support (De Choudhury & De, 2014), SNS have fundamentally challenged social barriers by enabling unlimited and unrestrained access to cross-cultural relations.

Moreover, SNS are perceived to possess the capacity to curtail stigmatisation of mental illness through continuous exchanges of experiences and knowledge (De Choudhury & De, 2014; Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). Therefore, stigmatisation is essentially challenged as people are able to experience a sense of identification and affirmation of their experiences through the accounts of others who share similar lived experiences (De Choudhury & De, 2014; Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). Additionally, the reach of SNS instantaneous, widespread, and perpetually accessible to people, as and when they require. Therefore, people are able to access these meetings and channels in accordance with their needs at the time.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) also demonstrates a key interest in the role of SNS in relation to health behaviours. The NIH (2014) report that the role of social media is increasingly influencing daily behaviours of individuals as well as influencing the attitudes pertaining to health-related matters. Furthermore, the NIH places specific interest in the role of social media in advancing scientific understanding of substance use and substance use recovery (NIH, 2014). As the online community continues to increase exponentially, it is pertinent to understand the role of social media in health-related decision making and behaviour (Budree et al., 2019). Furthermore, research conducted regarding the trajectory of social media prevalence indicates that the number of users will continue to increase over time (Fredericksen, 2013; Budree et al., 2019). According to Frederiksen (2013) during 2012 the number of persons using SNS was reported to be 1.47 billion. This was projected to rise significantly to 2.55 billion by the year 2017. According to Grant and Dill-Shackleford (2017), to date, there are already a multitude of online, interactive recovery platform sites which provide individuals a space to connect with other recovering and abstaining individuals. These platforms allow an exchange of lived and tried advice for sobriety. The InThe-Rooms.com (ITR) is one such platform. By 2017 the InThe-Rooms.com (ITR) was reported to host over 400, one-hour long,

mediated recovery meetings every month (Rubya & Yarosh, 2017). In addition, by the year 2017, the platform was found to have over 398 000 active members. These SNS platforms are found to have a great influence on the individual's ability to maintain long-term recovery (Bogenschutz et al., 2007) irrespective of the absence of symbolic or physical co-presence of members (Grant and Dill-Shackleford, 2017).

## **2.7 Summary**

Notwithstanding the tensions regarding the centrality of spirituality (Dermatis & Galanter, 2016) as well as the abstinence versus harm reduction deliberation, partial or complete aspects of the 12 Steps have nonetheless been adopted by persons in recovery (Bornman & Dixon, 1998; Friedman, 2016). Furthermore, 12 Step recovery programmes such as AA and NA are found to be central in maintaining recovery and reducing the risks of relapse (Fredrik et al., 2022). The objective of recovery programmes, such as AA and NA, remains to facilitate support and nurture determinism for sobriety (Dingle et al., 2015; Mendola & Gibson, 2016). Therefore, within the safe boundaries of the anonymised programmes, acceptance of oneself is fostered and the individual is positioned into a new way of being (Caldwell & Cutter, 1998; Jacobs, 2018). In essence, the foci of the recovery programmes remain to promote the daily maintenance of the necessary changes to the individual's former social network, activities and social spaces (McCullough & Anderson. 2012).

Although the recovery support groups of AA and NA are understood to be safe spaces for persons in recovery, researchers underscore the importance of remaining cognisant of the role of stigma on recovery (Saloner & Karthikeyan, 2015, Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018). Therefore, recovery experiences such as membership to a recovery programme and identify transitioning ultimately aid in managing the impacts of stigma for individuals in recover

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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### 3.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework serves as the lens through which the study views a phenomenon of interest (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The aim of this study is to qualitatively explore the constructions of recovery narratives disseminated by men on YouTube. In addition, the study explored how the narratives are socially constructed by addicts in order to aid in the process of recovery. Therefore, a theoretical framework which centralises the voice of the individual is most appropriate. This study employs the framework of social constructionism. Social constructionism is a theoretical framework which structures meaning of experiences directly through the experiences of those who are living it (Andrews, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical framework of social constructionism. Furthermore, the chapter situates the theoretical framework in relation to the aims and objectives of the research by exploring the role of language and power.

### 3.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism stems from the field of sociology and has a relationship with post-modern qualitative studies (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionists hold the view that knowledge is continuously created and not merely discovered (Schwandt, 2003). Therefore, it proposes that individuals come to understand their social world through a continuous process of examining the historical and cultural processes which influence how things come to be and why these they have come to be (Burr, 2015). Therefore, constructionists are focused on the how meaning is created amongst people, groups, and communities within the parameters of their specific social context (McCullough & Anderson, 2012).

Social constructionism allows the group to perceive, understand and assess their experiences in a critical manner (McCullough & Anderson, 2012; Burr, 2017; Jha & Singh, 2020). This is supported by Galbin (2014) who firstly argues that social constructionism encourages an analytical stance regarding experiences. Galbin (2014) further expands on this and states that secondly through the process of constructing experiences, one is able to perceive the impact of culture and history on lived experiences. Thirdly, that this understanding and knowledge is constantly co-created (Galbin, 2014). However, the knowledge is simultaneously, sustained over time, through a process of communication and exchanges with others (Galbin, 2014). Lastly, Galbin (2014) states that ways of being, norms and rules governing the individual or the group are linked to knowledge creation. Therefore, through social constructionism meaning is dynamic and varied across time and groups (Jha & Singh, 2020; McCullough & Anderson, 2012).

### **3.3 The Role of Language in Social Constructionism**

In the paper '*Addiction and addiction recovery: a qualitative research viewpoint*' Kemp (2019) poses an important question, which positions this research and the theoretical framework used in this study. Kemp (2019) inquires how do persons who identify as addicts meaningfully construct and describe their lived experiences of substance use and recovery? Language is viewed as a central tenet of social constructionism, and it is the instrument through which people reproduce and present their world (Burr, 2015; 2017). This is echoed by Schwandt (2003) who argues that language is the mechanism through which experiences are generated, negotiated, adapted and sustained. Social constructionism understands that through language, dialogue is realised and through dialogue persons not only connect with others, but fundamentally come to be (Burr, 2015). This was also acknowledged by Brown et al., (2014) who stated that individuals who have shared lived experiences come to know this through

social exchange and that through this exchange meaning is developed and created. Ultimately, social constructionism is focused on understanding how this meaning making process in turn influences the social relations and the way in which experiences are described, shared, and disseminated (Burr, 2015).

This study frames the experiences of men who vlog about their substance use recovery through the lens of Burr's (2015, 2017) social constructionism. Burr (2003) states that without language a social construct cannot come into existence. A social construct is a concept which is created to represent phenomena or experience of a specific group (Andrews, 2012). Addiction is noted to be partially, but not solely, conceptualised as a social construct (Hammersley, 2017). Hammersley (2017) notes that social constructions of substances have also varied across different groups and communities. In some population's dependence on particular substances, such as tobacco and alcohol, are deemed to be more acceptable than a dependence on substances such as narcotics. Burr (2015) describes the processes of knowledge construction and notes that alcoholism was initially not regarded as an illness, which required treatment. Rather individuals with alcoholism were regarded solely accountable for their disposition (Burr, 2015). However, through discourses and knowledge creation, this understanding changed over time as addiction is understood to be a chronic mental illness with a biopsychosocial conceptualisation.

In addition, social constructionism was introduced as a criticism to mainstream psychology. Mainstream psychology is predominately western in its approach and locates mental illness within the individual. (Burr, 2015). However, social constructionism argues that people must be conceptualised within their social context and an integration of the contextual influences on mental illness, such as SUDs, must be applied. Therefore, researchers such as Hammersley

(2017) recognise addiction as partially socially constructed and therefore, under conducive and appropriate conditions, it may be treated. This treatment may be facilitated through various treatment approaches, including socially constructed frameworks such as AA, NA, and other 12 Step recovery programmes. The construction of AA was formulated on the lived experiences of individuals who ‘overcame’ their addiction. This was formalised and manualised in a textual format, i.e., the Big Book. Therefore, through the dissemination and exchanges of recovery discourses, individuals pursuing a life of sobriety are able to perceive and comprehend their experiences as recovering addicts or recovering alcoholics.

Furthermore, social constructionism views that there is no universal or definitive truth to the experiences. Rather, it acknowledges that these experiences are varied. Therefore, constructionism, holds that individuals who occupy the same environment may experience the environment differently (Burr, 2015). The recovery experiences of men vlogging about substance use recovery are found to be varied despite the social context facilitating the sobriety, i.e., 12 Step recovery programmes, remaining the same across the individuals. However, social constructionism proposes that this variance is able to impact the experience of the other, either by restricting or developing the experience (Burr, 2015). Therefore, in this process of narrative exchange, experiences are co-constructed as opposed to merely deduced.

### **3.4 The Role of Power and Discourse in Social Constructionism**

Another component of social constructionism is the disciplinary power and discourse (Burr, 2015). Discourse is a set of culturally significant ideas with the productive power to inform how groups are able to understand their world (Burr, 2015). Therefore, social constructionism recognises that discourse is not merely descriptive but influences how people act and what people do (Burr, 2015). AA, NA and 12 Step related recovery programmes are non-

professional led programmes and therefore are not confined to realm of mainstream psychology (Lembke, 2013). However, AA, NA and 12 Step programmes also endeavour to influence recovery behaviours and ultimately evoke a desire for members to conform to the norms and traditions of the programme. Through this process of knowledge construction, members negotiate their identity and assimilation into their social context (Burr, 2015). This is further deepened by operationalising recovery narratives which are constructed to normalise, engage and prioritise the 12 Steps within substance use recovery.

### **3.5 Summary**

The construction of recovery is not solely based in biomedical frame but is also located within the biopsychosocial process of recovery. According to Smith (2021), individuals who use illicit substances learn within the environments of social interaction. Therefore, proposing that these analysis of these experience of addiction and addiction recovery should be located within the constructed social contexts. Through the lens of social constructionism this paper assessed not only what people are saying but how and why it is being said. Ultimately, rather than ascertaining the severity of the various experiences of substance use, the attention is placed on the shared experiences, conceptions, and descriptions of the vlogger's substance use recovery processes. Social constructionism also appreciates the multiplicity of realities and therefore endeavours to understand experiences as opposed to produce a single, objective truth (Burr, 2015). Furthermore, assessing the language which is used and how social exchanges through the vlogs are established.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

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### 4.1 Introduction

The methodology required to correspond and be indicative of the research paradigm in which the study is undertaken (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The research methodology addresses the methods undertaken to address the research questions and satisfy the research aims. A qualitative research approach was undertaken in the research process. According to Silverman (2020), qualitative research aims to explore experiences and understandings of lived experience. In addition, qualitative research contributes uniquely and meaningfully to the knowledge economy. Qualitative research provided an explorative and idiographic approach to understanding the phenomenon of substance use recovery.

### 4.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure

As YouTube is a public, social media platform, there are no identified gatekeepers. Therefore, YouTube provided unrestricted access to public data and in turn facilitated the access to information which may have ordinarily been inaccessible due to geographical and financial constraints. Through the mitigation of gatekeeper effects, the demographic pool of the study was enriched, (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and the scope of the study was positively amplified.

The sample was obtained through a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive sample is defined as a group of people for who the research question will be applicable (Salkind, 2006; Laher & Botha, 2012). Therefore, a purposive sample was able to provide a in depth insights about the SUD recovery process of men.

YouTube was methodically explored for vloggers, vlogs, AA/NA/12 Step styled channels, video series, or singular unit video content relating to substance use experiences. The YouTube search engine was employed to search for various combinations and sequences of the following keywords: Addiction, my experience of drugs, my experience with alcohol, my substance abuse experience, my addiction story, my life as an addict, my life with substance, abstaining from alcohol, abstaining from drugs, recovery, 12 Steps, AA, NA, sober living, and sobriety.

Several videos were produced through the sampling procedure. The videos were reviewed one at a time according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

#### **4.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Firstly, the vlogs were screened as per the gender inclusion criteria. Only vlogs generated by males were included and reviewed for the remaining sample criteria. Thereafter, the vlogs were screened for the date inclusion criteria. Only videos dating from 2011 to 2021 were further reviewed for relevance. Finally, the vlogs were systematically screened to assess their appropriateness for inclusion in the final sample. The following criteria were assessed:

1. Individuals who self-identify as currently sober.
2. Individuals currently in recovery; or
3. Individuals currently abstaining from the destructive use of substances, as per their recording date.

All videos which were sponsored to promote use of alcohol or drugs were excluded from the sample. In addition, all vlogs shared by minors were also excluded from the sample.

The sample ultimately comprised of 9 vlogs collected from recovery channels and user-generated vlogs. Solely public videos with explicit intentions of sharing their experiences and reaching audiences were employed.

The sampling process generated predominately, but not exclusively American vlogs as demonstrated in Figure 1. Through the process of inclusion analysis South African vlogs which were ultimately excluded from the final sample consisted of men vlogging about their current substance use. In addition, the sampling process generated South African interviews which focused on stressing the prevalence of substance use. These vlogs were narrated from the perspective of the interviewer as opposed to being narrated by the substance user directly. Furthermore, the South African vlogs generated in the sampling process also included recovery centre vlogs which were narrated from the observations of the staff and not from the individuals in recovery. Other South African vlogs which were also excluded included a South African vlog of men who were vlogging about their experiences of substance use whilst undergoing their recovery process in a treatment rehabilitation centre. However, no focus was given by the men on their experiences of recovery and therefore, the data was excluded from the final sample.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to recognise that through the sampling process, numerous South African vlogs were generated. This provides evidence to support that there are South African men who are actively vlogging about their substance use experiences and this further reinforces the significance of this study. In addition, the proportion of South African participants in the overall sample was not a limitation in the study as the research focus was centred on the recovery processes of men who vlog about their SUD on YouTube as opposed to the distinct experiences of men from South Africa.

**FIGURE 1: Study Sample**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Nationality/Ethnicity</b>	<b>SUD Recovery focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
2013	Mr A	Male	White	American	Alcohol	69 min
2014	Mr J	Male	Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Narcotics	42 min
2014	Mr T	Male	White	American	Narcotics	55 min
2015	Mr S	Male	White	American	Narcotics	63 min
2017	Mr R	Male	Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Narcotics	56 min
2018	Mr B	Male	African American / Black	American	Narcotics	53 min
2020	Mr C	Male	African/ Black	South African	Alcohol and Narcotics	47 min
2021	Mr P	Male	Indian	South African	Alcohol	48 min
2021	Mr K	Male	White	American	Alcohol	11 min

*\* Table depicting some key features of the sample*

- All of the vloggers are above age 18.
- 2 out of 9 of the vloggers attained recovery through a programme and did not attend a rehabilitation facility or treatment facility.
- 1 out of 9 of the vloggers' recovery focus is alcohol and narcotics.
- 5 out of the 9 vloggers' recovery focus is solely narcotics.
- 3 out the 9 vloggers' recovery focus is solely alcohol.
- 2 out of 9 of the vloggers are South African (1 Indian male and 1 black male)
- 5 out of the 9 vloggers are American (4 White males and 1 Black male)
- The remaining 2 vloggers are Puerto Rican (Latin) vloggers.

#### **4.4 Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations**

Social networking sites (SNS) have become a popular medium through which cross border connections are established. However, the contentions regarding the utilisation of social media platforms within the field of psychological research cannot be negated. Researchers have raised various concerns, which include the person's right to privacy, confidentiality, and their capacity to consent to the absorption of their information into academic research (Buchanan & Markham, 2012; McKee, 2013; Moreno et al., 2013; Samuel & Buchanan, 2020; Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Two distinct perspectives are taken regarding the use of social media data in psychological studies. The first argues that the employment of social media is a supposition of all persons as research participants (Samuel & Buchanan, 2020). One of the core ethical concerns used to sustain the aforementioned stance is the capacity for individuals to consent to the research study (McKee, 2013; Townsend & Wallace, 2016). These researchers identify social media as a public platform. However, they maintain that it remains crucial to attain consent irrespective of the space in which the data is collected (online or offline) (McKee, 2013; Buchanan & Markham, 2012; Samuel & Buchanan, 2020).

Researchers who hold the second view also understand social media to be a public platform. The researchers argue that all data shared is considered to form part of the public domain. Therefore, the data becomes liable for public use and consequently consent within this sphere becomes nullified (Zimmerman, 2010; Moreno et al., 2013). Moreno et al., (2013) argue that research conducted via YouTube constitutes observational research as the data is public, and therefore does not require any interaction with individuals. This is supported by Zimmerman's (2010) study, which concludes that an observational study of YouTube content does not necessitate consent for videos that are shared publicly. The researchers recognise that the importance of ethical practice and state that a prerequisite for standardised ethical principles is fundamental. However, argue that their implementation must be contextualised for their area

of application. In relation to social media data, the application of consent is interrogated, and considerations regarding the feasibility, practicalities of attaining consent from numerous diversely located individuals, who at times share their data anonymously. Furthermore, the researchers draw attention to SNS privacy settings which are included into platforms such as YouTube. Here users are offered the choice to restrict access to their content at their own discretion.

This has resulted in pertinent responsibility being placed on the researcher during ethical considerations regarding power dynamics and the potential for harm in the scope of cyberpsychology (Samuel & Buchanan, 2020). Therefore, when conducting studies within the realm of SNS, the intent of the author remains essential. In accordance with the ethical considerations which have guided this study, only publicly disseminated content is employed. Moreover, heeding the recommendations of Moreno et al., (2013) caution is applied throughout the study to ensure that no harm occurs during the research process. Lastly, anonymity is maintained to mitigate needless overexposure.

#### **4.5 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Persons passively contributed to research as no direct human sampling was implemented. Consequently, the accountability of the researcher was markedly evident and the risk of unintentional disclosure of the identity of the vloggers was considered. Therefore, significance of confidentiality and anonymity was recognised, and ethical considerations frequently assessed. Consequently, videos from various vlogs were downloaded and safely stored in a password protected research folder. During transcription, pseudonyms were employed to conceal the identity of the vlogger.

Furthermore, anonymity was further amplified as the study incorporated data from the 12 Step programme YouTube channel. This intrinsically assured anonymity and confidentiality as both of these criteria form part of 12 Step programmes including AA and NA. Usernames, vlog titles, demographic information (excluding gender and racial/ethnic categories) were not stated in the findings. Any identifying events or nuanced experiences were continually monitored to assure anonymity is always maintained. The Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC) reviewed the ethical considerations of the study. Approval was granted.

#### **4.6 Coding the Data**

The data set was manually explored and coded. Each code was generated by assessing the language used in each data and each sentence was explored for codes expressing recovery experiences. Each recovery experience was then further assessed for vlogs were similarities and differences with previously identified codes. Where codes described the same recovery experience, they were amalgamated and coded to accurately represent the recovery experience. This process was repeated numerously until clear the final codes of recovery experiences were clearly identified. The transcripts were then re-read to analyse the final coding of the data. Lastly, the codes were further explored for latent meaning and four central themes were developed.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

According to Braun and Clarke (2012) analysis is an important process which is aimed at answering the research question. In order for the results to be meaningful, the procedure of qualitative data analysis must be systematic and methodical (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis is an organised and meticulous qualitative data analysis methodology which aims to:

identify, organise and response patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through the analysis of meaning across the data sample, thematic analysis facilitates understanding of collective experiences within populations (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Moreover, thematic analysis is understood to be concerned with “identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 10). This means not only exploring what is expressed but what the is the meaning, intention and significance of what is being expressed. This study specifically employed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis which consists of six phases in the analysis. These include familiarising oneself with the data, coding, generating themes and subsequently reviewing, defining, and naming the themes. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2012) state that the process of analysis is active, and that it is rare that solely a deductive or an inductive approach is utilised in the analysis. Hence through undertaking a bottom-up approach the main themes are explored in relation to the themes which were identified from the data. Furthermore, a latent analysis was employed in order to uncover the subtexts and assumptions which present in the constructions of substance use recovery narratives. With latent analysis, the data was explored for deeper meaning and ultimately explore these themes within broader SUD research (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

#### **4.8 Quality and Rigour**

It is also important to note that qualitative research is different to quantitative studies as they do not quantify Guba and Lincoln (1989) qualify the validity and reliability of qualitative research through research rigour. The study employed research rigour through constant engagement, review, and observation the data. Ultimately, through this rigorous process of analysis, the study endeavoured to uphold the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

#### **4.9 Research reflexivity**

Throughout the process of exploring, analysing and interpreting, as the researcher, I found myself constantly reflecting on my role within the study. As a result, I have found myself reflecting on my positionality as a daughter of a father who was a substance user. My personal experience of a male substance user who was deprived of supportive spaces in which to share and process his own difficulties with substances. Therefore, with other compounding socio-political factors, remained isolated, suffering both silently and out loud and ultimately taking his own life. As I continued to immerse myself within the narratives of the male vloggers, through the process of analysis, I was able to appreciate the significance of recovery narratives in facilitating understanding directly from those who battle addiction daily. My positionality as a family member of men who suffer from alcohol and narcotic addiction has underscored the objective of this study in bringing the voices of men who endeavour daily to remain sober to the fore. Few studies have been positioned in recovery processes, particularly the domain of recovery support groups in recovery experiences. Therefore, this study contributes to this gap.

#### **4.8 Summary**

The study comprised of a total of nine YouTube vlogs, which were publicly shared on the SNS. The inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the ethical considerations undertaken in the study relating to research on social media platforms. Key researchers such as Zimmerman (2010) and were considered in the aspects of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. The study employed pseudonyms and concealed all identifying information, with exceptions to gender, ethnicity and nationality. The vlogs were transcribed and coded by hand to increase familiarity with the data. The data samples were coded, and inductive thematic analysis was employed to further explore the SUD recovery experiences of the men.

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

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### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research question, which was to explore the experiences of men vlogging on YouTube about their SUD recovery. Through their narratives the men express their experiences of recovery and the various factors which have assisted in sustaining their recovery. Through their language, the men delineate two separate but interlinked processes of recovery. These processes are deemed to be equally required in sustaining their SUD recovery. These processes, internal and external recovery, form the main themes of the study and each comprise of two sub-themes. The relationships between the themes are diagrammatically depicted in flow chart. The diagram visually represents both the interrelatedness as well as the distinctness of the themes of the study. Moreover, each respective recovery process is further supported through use of a multitude of extracts from the sample. Each extract allows the theme to be explored in further detail. Although each extract expresses a shared theme, they are also idiosyncratic as the men's recovery experiences are not homogenous and remain unique to their individual experiences. The extracts are represented across the chapter through the use of italics and quotation marks. Lastly, the findings of the study are further addressed in the discussion section in order to explore how the participants make sense of their recovery in general. In addition, the discussion explores how the men's individual, and recovery specific contexts allows them to generate understandings regarding their recovery from SUD.

### 5.2 Structure of the narratives

The SUD and SUD recovery narratives of the men comprised of various components and were structured according to the 12-step catharsis method of storytelling (Strobbe & Kurtz, 2012).

The men narrated across various tragedies and triumphs of their SUD and SUD recovery. The vloggers utilised humour by employing sarcasm when delivering personal truths and hardships faced during their journey of substance use recovery and addiction. The audiences responded to the humour through various commentary and laughter. These exchanges were understood to highlight the gravity of lived experiences of SUD and acknowledge the shared journeys within the recovery community.

Mr B: *“My mother stopped becoming my mother. She no longer was my mother. She was the lady that had the pocketbook way under the bed.”*

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr B: *“My brother...my little brother he wasn't my little brother anymore he was the kid that had a jar full of quarters in the closet. My neighbours they weren't my neighbours. They were people with electronic items television sets and automobiles.”*

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr B: *“This is our story.”*

Additionally, the inclusion of these experiences on public platforms, such as YouTube, are understood to further aid in processes of personal reflection of individual SUD and SUD recovery experiences. Similarly, these narrated experiences foster a sense of universality across persons undertaking SUD recovery.

Another important component of the narratives is the introduction to their vlog by identifying themselves by disclosing their name and their identity as an addict or alcoholic.

Mr K: *“Hey, I'm Mr K, and I'm an alcoholic. I'm in recovery, I've been sober for 3 years.”*

This further intensifies the sense of universality as the recovery meeting is experienced as a safe space in which the men are able to process their SUD and SUD recovery with others who share the same journey. The men reflect on their years of addiction and offer insights into their personal understandings of their substance use.

Mr A: *“Want to first thank you for inviting me to come talk tonight. It's always an honour and a privilege to be asked to participate in Alcoholics Anonymous. Ultimately, it's a responsibility to give back what we're so freely given to me. I want to welcome anybody that's new. You know if you're trying AA one more time. If perhaps you don't think this will work for you. If you don't want to be here tonight. You know if you think this is all a big misunderstanding*

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr A: *Sorry it's come to this.*

Man in

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr A: *“I mean I don't mean to be funny but Alcoholics Anonymous wasn't on my to do list.”*

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr A: *“You know I didn't get to AA 'cause I had a bad weekend. I had a couple of bad decades.”*

The men also declared a responsibility and definitive intent of carrying the message of substance use recovery to all addicts. In addition, acknowledge the recovery support programme which has assisted in their personal substance use recovery as well as key influential people who have supported their processes of recovery. This includes but is not limited to their family and their recovery sponsor or mentor.

Mr K: *“As vulnerable as this feels to tell a camera<sup>1</sup> this, the possibility that I may help you make decisions that will take you to a better, fulfilling, healthy life is more important.”*

Mr P: *“Ah, but what a, what a pleasure it is to be here, and you know to celebrate this milestone. Uh, the D’s have become family to me. I found the meeting, uh through my friend S who’s introduced me to this meeting. And uh she shared at the morning meeting and then the, that afternoon, I jumped onto the steps meeting, and I haven’t turned back. And uh, that meeting has been phenomenal and great recovery and thank you so much for adding value to my life.”*

Through their narratives, the men were honest and forthcoming about failures and relapses experienced during their recovery. Recovery was constructed as a dynamic process and not a linear one. These experiences were positioned in a manner to account for the intricacies of recovery as well as to instil a sense of hope for other in the face of difficulty as indicated in the following excerpts:

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the vlogger’s facial identity remained concealed in the posted version of the vlog.

Mr S: *“Okay? That light is recovering addicts. That light is faith, is hope in the dark. That’s us at the end of the tunnel saying you do what we do. And you’ll be where we’re at or at least you’ll be where you’re at clean.”*

Mr C: *“Our addiction, well it's a thing of the past for me. It is something that I wrestle with every day. Of course, but God has given us the tools and God has given us the grace. Specially to suffice and to push forward. So, addiction is not the end guys it is only a fork in the road.”*

The men’s narratives highlighted various processes which aided in the recovery journey. These processes are further explored and defined thematically under the central themes of the study.

### **5.3 Central Themes**

The men shared narratives of their experiences of recovery. Recovery was approached as an active, dynamic and challenging process. However, through their individual narratives, the men represented the possibility of attaining sobriety and spoke to the inner work and outer work needed to sustain recovery. This was demarcated into two interlinked but distinct themes of recovery, namely external and internal recovery. These categories are concurrent processes which are not mutually exclusive but rather, continuously interact with one another. Both internal and external recovery processes are required to sustain recovery and the individual is required to continuously engage these processes throughout their recovery (see figure 2).

1. The first facet of sustained recovery is internal recovery. Internal recovery has two main themes; namely ‘Process of admission of one’s addiction and identifying as an addict.’ Secondly ‘The acknowledgement of one’s powerlessness.’
2. The second facet of sustained recovery is external recovery. External recovery encompasses two central themes. Firstly, ‘Process of unlearning and re-learning’ and secondly ‘Being grounded through acts of service.’

### Central Themes of The Study.

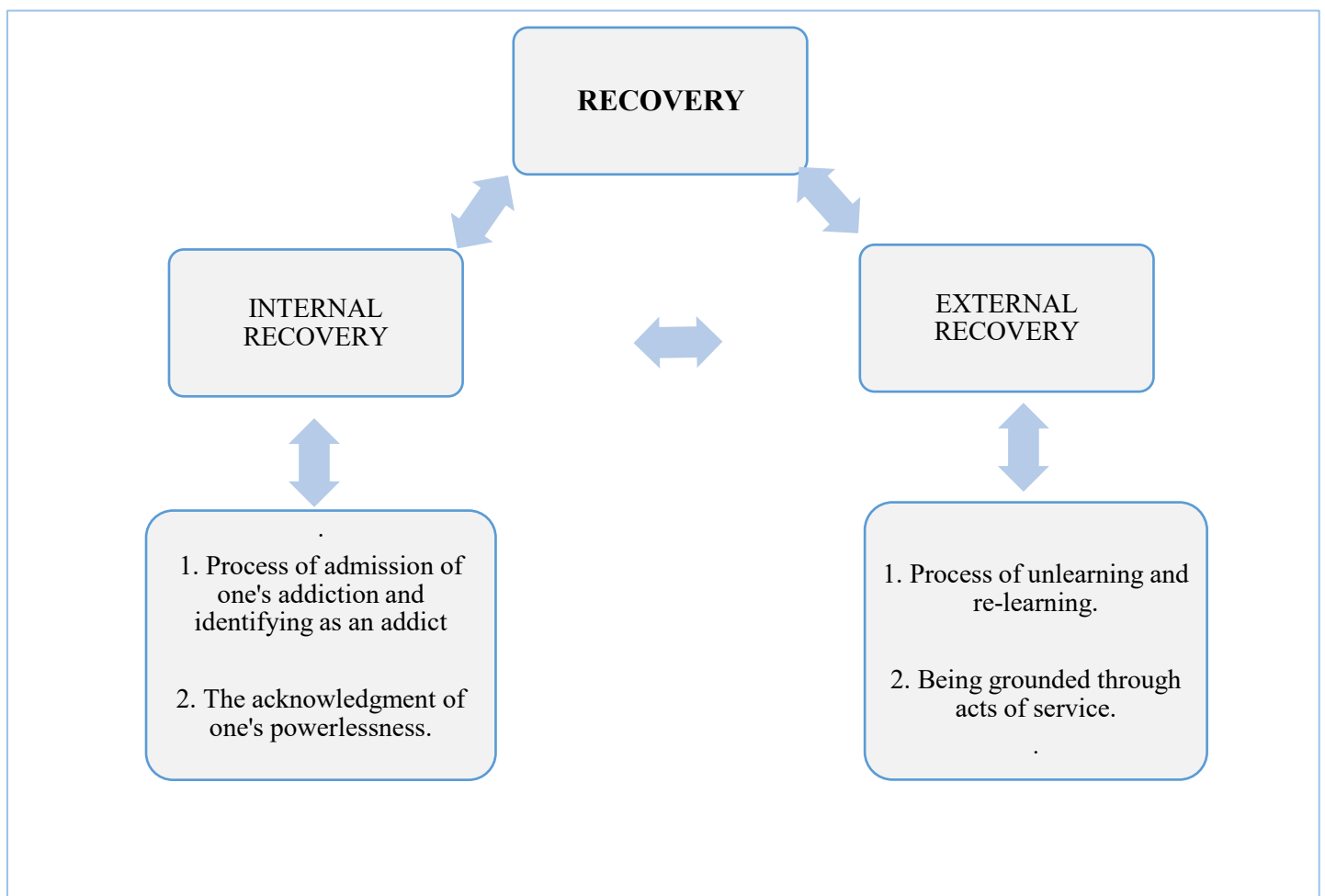


Figure 2: Diagram depicting the central themes in the study.

### **Theme 1: Internal Recovery - Process of admission of one's addiction and identifying as an addict**

Central to attaining recovery is the understanding of the individual that there is a substance use problem. This was narrated as a critical process of rebirth which begins to position the individual in new state of being. Through acknowledging their addiction and problem, their current paths of destruction and misery may be redirected. The men openly reflected on their personal experiences of their lived experiences, specifically experiences which precipitated the onset of their recovery process.

Mr K: *“If you are an addict you cannot drink, you cannot use, you cannot participate in your addiction or it will end badly, and if it doesn't end it's going to be a horrible life. This whole glamorisation of alcoholism, "Mad Men"(the TV series) they're always drinking and smoking. The reality is much, much, MUCH uglier and it is so ugly and so... damn near "demonic" that you will never forget it and it will push you to the brink of insanity or death!*

Mr C: *“...and so I remember for those seven years in my teens from the age of 13 until I was 20, I was stuck in addiction. I tried to quit on my own. I tried so many things to stop but I could not. And eventually I found myself again almost dying. And then realising... wait a minute. I have a problem. Let me speak out let me tell my parents what the problem really is. They already know there's a problem but they don't know the extent of the problem. And I think many people keep their addictions a secret because of shame because of guilt. Because they don't know how people will respond. I hope*

*that I would have spoken out sooner but I did not. And I suffered as a result of my denial.”*

Mr R: *“At the end of my addiction, I had uh, uh, I don’t know, one inch, one and a half inch, two-inch spike uh, uh, uh stem? And my, and my tongue had burn sores on it. And my lips were burnt. I was seventeen years old. I looked like I was a skeleton. Maybe forty years old, I, you know. I looked old. I was old and dying. I was, I was like a zombie amongst the living dead. An, and, and I was just talk and you know I lived in an abandoned uh truck. My mother fed me like a dog. She would leave the food in the hallway. If I knocked on her door, (knocks) she’d call the police. You know, I mean so I-I was, I was messed up when I got here.”*

Mr A: *“I had to get to AA on my own terms. That’s freedom. I mean we say freedom is another definition for nothing else to lose. I had nothing else to lose at that point. It became do or die for me. You know and I eventually got to that place and I was able to see the truth. Because if you’re like me as an alcoholic, fear is not gonna keep someone like me sober... Fear doesn’t work. Getting a third strike, living on the street, being homeless, losing my career, throwing away my education, losing my family.”*

Mr P: *“So until I reached a point of admission and acceptance, you know recovery wasn’t going to be possible.”*

The vloggers emphasise the importance of admission. Admission is constructed as a tool through which the individual is empowered and becomes an agent in their own recovery. Admission is also constructed as a transitional step toward a new identity as an addict. Lastly, admission is positioned as the precipitator for the subsequent processes of recovery.

**Theme 2: The acknowledgment of one's powerlessness.**

The process of maintaining recovery through continual surrender is shared throughout the narratives of the men. Surrender is understood to be an acknowledgement by the men that they possess a powerlessness over their addiction. The numerous years of active addiction and the associated consequences of their addictions were used to be support the men's experience of powerlessness. The men reflected on their experiences of attempting to attain sobriety on their own accord. Their attempts were always rendered unsuccessful.

Mr P: *"I am still powerless over alcohol. I still cannot manage my life on my own. And so, I had to do what I needed to do in order for me to stay sober today in order for me not to pick up that first drink. There is a slight difference however, uh, when I... Twenty-nine years ago when I went down on my knees and I prayed and I asked God to keep me sober, I didn't know what, what to expect. I didn't know what I was in for. I didn't know what life was gonna be like. Today, when I went down on my knees and I asked God to keep me sober, I knew exactly what I would lose if I didn't stay sober."*

Mr A: *"I love it when people say what's your drug of choice? I'm like alcohol is my drug of no choice. I don't choose not to drink. I'm powerless."*

Mr B: *"I don't care if they was giving away dope for free. I don't care if it started raining heroin tomorrow. I'm not using cuz I can't win. I can't win. It's abundantly clear 20 years. 20 years of active addiction has taught me one thing you can't win."*

Mr T: *"We talk about being powerless over our addiction, our lives are unmanageable. I know what that means because, that, that, that night I put*

*everything that was important to me, my hopes and dreams of being the pizza tsar, my family, my business, absolutely everything and I traded it for one stinking shot of dope. I traded it all. I traded my whole life for one shot of dope. And uhm, because I couldn't stop. I could not stop. Could not stop. I couldn't just say 'Oh I think I'll make a good choice today and not use.' I'd say that but ten minutes later I got the fucking dope man on the phone you know, and uh I couldn't stop."*

Once the men acknowledged their own limitations and powerlessness over their addiction, they then are able to create the possibility of recovery through a new guiding source. This source is deemed to supersede their own ability. The men speak of two particular sources which are "bigger than" them. Firstly, a higher power. Through what is referred to as a spiritual surrender to a higher power, the men experience a form of spiritual awakening. The higher power is said to bestow recovery onto the individual. Moreover, across the nine men in the sample the higher power is identified as God and through God, the men are able to sustain their recovery.

Mr R: *"One of the most important journeys any member of Narcotics Anonymous will go on, is the journey of seeking out a higher power."*

Mr P: *"For me was like you know signing the peace treaty with my past. You know. I'd surrendered but I hadn't surrendered to an enemy that was hostile. I surrendered to an entity whom I knew. God whom I chose. The God of my own understanding."*

Mr T: *"I did that made it possible for me to not use on my first day clean. I don't know what it was. I have to believe that it was a power greater than methat did that. Uhm and I had gotten on a prayer on my, uhm, I said a prayer on my dad's living room and uh, it was like God please help me because I*

*don't know what to do, you know. And...and He did. You know. A God that I didn't have any understanding of it all gave me the power to not use that first day clean."*

Mr C: *But I thought that all I needed was willpower at that time to maintain my sobriety. But that was not the truth. I found myself going back to the same places. I found myself going back to the same things and I found myself, you know, going back to the same people. To the same group and obviously I was not able to change. And I found myself stuck in this repetitive pattern for another four years. But when I was 24 years old I... I started looking at life. I started looking at where I was and I started doing a lot of self-reflection. because I really was a goal-oriented person and there was a lot of things that I... that I wanted to achieve in life. So, I... I started you know disconnecting myself from everybody who loved me. But in those moments, it was where I was really thinking even while I was using. I was really thinking about all that I've learned. All that my mother had told me about Jesus Christ, and I would find myself praying. I would find myself trying to have conversations with God. I remember meeting pastors would also, you know, try to encourage and... and try to help me. But I was just so stuck in this pattern and I didn't really know how to break free. I thought that it depended on me. And it was just this desire to surrender myself and to give myself over to the Lord Jesus Christ. And this guy was saying silver and gold, I have none today guys. But what I can give you guys is Jesus Christ. If you would only believe in Him. You would be made a new person. The old would be done away with and you would*

*start this new journey with God that would transform your life completely  
And I was willing that day.”*

The second source which is “bigger than” them is the recovery programme. The recovery programme is expressed as the cornerstone of sustaining one’s sobriety and maintaining recovery. Then men experience the recovery programme to be a force which is larger than them and is identified to be a source through which many, before them, have attained recovery. Therefore, through engaging with the steps, the men are active in their own recovery as well as the recovery of other. Therefore, in the process of surrendering to the recovery framework, one can achieve sustained recovery as those before him have.

Mr S: *“We don’t have to understand this programme for it to work for us. All we have to do is follow direction. I made a decision to turn my will in my life over to the good, orderly direction that this programme had to offer.”*

Mr A: *“And there’s a big difference between being in AA and on AA. It’s kind of like the difference between being in a submarine or on a submarine. AA has done for me what I could never do for myself. It’s done for many of us here tonight what we could never do for ourselves, collectively as a fellowship and as a society what I could never do.”*

Mr B: *“I owe a lot to Narcotics Anonymous. I don’t think I don’t care how long I live. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to balance the scales out for what y’all have done for me.”*

Mr P: *“When you put the plug in the jug, you just cure your drunkenness. It is only when you, when you, when you start to work the steps that you, that you treat your alcoholism.”*

## EXTERNAL RECOVERY

**Theme 1: Process of unlearning and relearning.**

The vloggers emphasised the importance of forgoing previous ways of being in the world. This included reframing their spaces, people and activities in order for these to be conducive to their sobriety. The men reflected on various experiences which were critical, and these ranged from socialising with others whilst being sober to being in an intimate partner relationship sober. The process of unlearning and relearning is understood to be continual throughout the men's recovery and presents in the initial and later stages of their lives. The men reflected and shared experiences of persevering through their challenges, including loss, trauma, tragedy and financial difficulties in a manner which does not compromise their sobriety. The men normalised the difficulty of this process and highlighted the importance of perseverance and persistence during this experience of recovery.

Mr R: *And it was hard on me. It was on me hard. And the disease was on me. And it, the, the, the voices were loud but I wanted to be down with the no matter what club. I heard the guy share they raped his daughter. Right. They raped his daughter. And said 'Yeah, they raped my daughter. They raped my baby and she was seven.'*

Person in

Crowd: *That's right.*

Mr R: *And he said, and, and he said 'I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna use.' And I was like 'Dang, he's not? (huffs in frustration) that's a good reason to use.'*

Mr C: *I had stumbling blocks along the way. I had to give up certain sins along the way. I had to give up certain pleasures along the way.*

Mr A: *“...To learn is to uncover, discover and discard what’s blocking me. And for me like a lot of us, I became willing to take actions in Alcoholics Anonymous, that I did not believe in. I was asked by my sponsor and my home group to set aside everything I thought I knew about AA, about the twelve steps, about God so I could have a new experience with this thing... Everything that I thought I knew about God, about myself and about others. All of my life I’d predicated everything on how I felt. I don’t feel like showing up for work. I don’t feel like sitting in the front, I don’t feel like taking commitments, I don’t feel like being responsible. And in Alcoholics Anonymous, I had to reverse that process and by taking the actions, my thinking and eventually my feelings changed. And it’s just that simple.”*

Mr S: *“I remember coming into recovery I didn't know how to learn and live enjoy my life without the use of drugs. I remember going to dances when I was you know just getting clean you know.”*

The construction of unlearning and re-learning is also positioned as concurrent to preceding phases of recovery which were discussed under the internal recovery. This is used to demonstrate the interwoven nature recovery and that these experiences are collectively required to sustain the recovery of the men long-term.

## **Theme 2: Being grounded through acts of service.**

The theme of acts of service is expressed as another central process which facilitates sustained recovery. The men reflect and share experiences of being on the receiving end of acts of service, as newcomers as well as long term members of their recovery programme. The act of service is constructed as a specialised intervention where one addict, who has and continues to face the challenges of addiction is able to, with their knowledge and understanding of addiction, help another addict in the same position.

Mr P: *“Assuming you had a heart attack right now, would you want me to call a cardiologist, or would you want me to call a gynaecologist? What is your choice? And it is as simple as that. When it comes to our own lives and our own health and our own well-being, we want the specialist to take care of, we want the best people. When it comes to alcoholism, as alcoholics, we can help another alcoholic. And, and, and that’s very close to my heart you know. Uh there are people that have come before us that made sure that Alcoholics Anonymous is in a good space for me to walk in. And what am I gonna do in my watch? It is my responsibility to leave it exactly the same or in a better space.”*

Mr A: *And you hear people say oh we're all the same distance from a drink. I don't believe that you think this guy here's got 4 or 5 commitments working with new people has a home group has a sponsor you think he's the same distance from a drink as this guy here that's doing nothing And I don't mean you...*

Crowd: *\*Laughs\**

Mr A: *That's what you get for sitting in the front row. See all of my life I was one decision away from a drink and today between me and that decision there's a whole world called Alcoholics Anonymous and it's about commitment it's about tradition, it's about people like you. It's about rooms like this."*

Mr J: *The steps for me are about meaning, they give you meaning, they teach you about trust. They teach you about self-forgiveness. You know. In the 4<sup>th</sup> step you find out who you really are. You know. And the traditions. They teach you about purpose. And what I mean about purpose is feeling that you belong somewhere. That you're a part of service. That we learn how to serve in NA. And in turn, we learn how to serve others."*

Furthermore, the act of serving other is understood to be an escalation in the process of maintaining their individual recovery as it embodies core factors, including commitment and responsibility. As does the framework of the recovery programme, commitment and responsibility is understood to keep the men honest and accountable to others and themselves.

Mr R: *"Service is important, you know. Service is very important. They told me that when you do service, you get off the edges. And the edges you can fall off. By doing service you put yourself in the centre of the process where it's hard to fall off, you know what I'm saying."*

Mr C: *"And now I'm in a place where I'm helping people right. I'm helping people and still growing in the process. It is a lifelong journey."*

Mr A: *"You know what's worse. Being in this room tonight being a real alcoholic and not working it's the 12 steps. It could be worse coming*

*to meetings late leaving early not having commitments not having a sponsor not being of service. I mean it's worse."*

Mr S: *"I made a decision to continue not using no matter what. I made a decision to continue making meetings. To continue calling my sponsor. To continue being involved in service and to continue working steps."*

Lastly, service allows the men to create a sense of belonging and normalise experiences of addiction. This is facilitated through meetings, sponsorship, and mentorship of other addicts. The process of serving others through carrying the message of addiction is understood to be an important step which is undertaken to display gratitude for what was freely given to the men, i.e., their sobriety.

Mr T: *"You. We've all done the same things that you've done. You haven't done anything that somebody else here hasn't done. I guess there's a name for it. That means somebody else has done it. And one of those people is in this room." And uhm, he said 'Here's what I want you to do. I want you to take all that guilt and shame you've got and I want you to stick it on a shelf and don't worry about it for right now."*

Mr C: *"But God continued using me. And it got to a point where you know I... prayed to God. And I said to God, You know I just want to reach more people. I want to reach more people."*

Mr K: *"One of the building blocks of recovery is: to get out of your own head, you help others."*

Mr J: *“...purpose is feeling that you belong somewhere. That you’re a part of service. That we learn how to serve in NA. And in turn, we learn how to serve others.*”

## **5.4 Discussion**

The study identified four prominent themes pertaining to the construction of male YouTube vlogger’s narratives of substance use and substance use disorder recovery. The four themes are categorised into two, simultaneous process of recovery, internal recovery and external recovery. These two processes are required in order for the individual to initiate and sustain their long-term sobriety.

## **5.5 Identifying the SUD**

According to all nine men, central to the initiation of their recovery journey is the acceptance and admission of one’s addiction. This also corresponds to the findings of Finn et al., (2014) who identified that the inability to recognise or appreciate the substance use problem a key barrier to SUD recovery. Furthermore, that without this recognition, the acceptance of the problem cannot be initiated and the need for intervention remains disengaged (Finn et al., 2014). This is also reflected through the positioning of this theme, by the men, in the beginning of their recovery narrative vlogs. Buckingham et al., (2013) states that prior to any SUD intervention and during the periods of active addiction individuals do not possess an identity associated with SUD recovery. These individuals experience themselves to have a low sense of self-efficacy and in turn viewing their addiction as uncontrollable (Buckingham et al., 2013). Therefore, the men use their narratives to represent the possibility of transition from their

addiction phase to the recovery phase. Much emphasis is placed on the individual admitting to their substance use problem in order to ultimately embark on their personal recovery journey, with their new identity as an addict. Through this process of identification, the individuals are able to internalise and conform to the expectations, social norms and behaviours of the group (Buckingham et al., 2013). This identity is mobilised as an agentic factor which transitions the individual from their history of isolating active substance use, lack of self-efficacy, hopelessness to having a sense of belonging, hope and higher power facilitated efficacy. According to Finn et al., (2014) prior to the admission of the addiction the individual is passive and occupies a state of ambivalence. Therefore, only through accepting the reality of their addiction do the individuals become active in their own recovery (Finn et al., 2014). Admission is understood to create an avenue for the individual to position themselves within spaces and networks which align with their recovery goals. The men speak of their daily objective of remaining sober and taking it each day at a time. This process is understood to be powered by two main entities which is discussed under the second process of internal recovery.

## **5.6 Conceptualisation of SUD**

The second process of internal recovery is engaged when the individual accepts their powerlessness over their substance use disorder. This theme of powerlessness corresponds to the theme found in a similar study which explored women's recovery experiences through AA. In the study Jacobs (2018) reported that all of the participants viewed alcoholism as a disease over which they had no control. According to Worley (2017) the experiences of powerlessness correlate with the encounters of a spiritual awakening by individuals in recovery. Spirituality has been found to be a central feature in the enhancement of substance use recovery rates amongst individual in recovery (Worley, 2017). Furthermore, spirituality is viewed through

various lenses, including encountering a connection with a higher power, establishing purpose and meaning in life or making contact with something larger than oneself (Witbrodt et al., 2014; Ghaferi et al., 2017; Worley, 2017). In the study, the men speak of accepting their powerlessness over their substance use disorder. Through this, the men are able to embed themselves into larger sources of support which are able to bestow to them gift of recovery. The men share personal experiences of recovery through God as well as recovery through the empowerment they receive through their respective recovery programmes. The men actively engage in the programme, despite their personal challenges which present with the 12 steps or any initial scepticism regarding the recovery programme. The men report that the process of accepting their own powerlessness allows them to change their perceptions towards systems which have been found to stand the test of time. Such as spirituality and the recovery programme. Ultimately this acceptance of their powerlessness allows them to surrender to a source which remains steadfast through the unknowns of their recovery journey.

Recovery is continually constructed by the men as a transitional process. The transition from former self to new identity as an addict. The transition from being void of spiritual grounding to establishing a sense of belonging through newly found spirituality or through the recovery programme. This transition is understood to be facilitated through internal recovery and external recovery. These processes are understood to require undergoing cognitive restructuring (Best et al., 2020), The men undergo processes of unlearning previous ways of being in the world and replacing them with new, sober ways of being. The men express these processes as continual experiences which bare their own challenges. According to Best et al., (2020) recovery is best facilitated through social learning which occurs through disseminated recovery narratives of others in recovery. Through hearing the recovery experiences of others in the recovery programme, the individual is able to negotiate, adopt and identify with key

factors which have helped others attain the goal of sobriety. This is also supported by Rodriguez and Smith (2014) who state that this period of unlearning and relearning is constructed through radical changes in the lifestyle of the individual, their perspective on life and consequently their sense of self. The men emphasise the importance of unlearning previous responses which enabled substance use behaviour. This meant forgoing people, places and things which no longer aligned with their identity or supported their recovery goals. Recovery programmes are also positioned in the narratives as avenues for new learnings.

### **5.7 Social Recovery Capital**

Lastly, external recovery also comprises of recovery through acts of service. According to Rodriguez and Smith (2014) the transition into new social networks can be an emotionally demanding and distressing period. Therefore, core recovery components including sponsorship and meeting attendance, provide the individual with various support platforms throughout their recovery journey. According to research conducted on meeting attendance and use of sponsorship, the risk for relapse is found to be reduced when the individual is engaging with the social resources of the recovery programmes (Aslund & Nilsson, 2013; Jetten et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Smith, 2014). These social aspects which have a benefit or positive effect on recovery through processes of social exchanges are referred to as social capital (Aslund & Nilsson, 2013). This is also demonstrated in the narrative of the men who provide personal experiences of the role of service in their recovery journey. The men reflect on being consumer of service through meeting attendance and having a sponsorship throughout their recovery. In addition, the men reflect on being providers of service. The provision of acts of service to others also allows the men to continually align their identity to the objects of the recovery programme. Thus, facilitating a sense of congruence between what they believe and how they live.

Service is a prosocial aspect of recovery and is another avenue which centres the men's recovery continually in order for it to remain the focus throughout their lifetime (Hennessy, 2017). The role of service is critical in recovery. According to Hennessy (2017) being a part of a service, being central in service and feeling positive about service are key traits for sustaining recovery long-term. This is also endorsed by the men in the study who speak of service within the rooms of AA/NA as well as outside these rooms. Therefore, through the process of vlogging about their substance use recoveries, the men are able to fulfil this primary objective and increase their digital social capital through engagements with people who are outside the rooms of the recovery programme (Bliuc et al., 2017). Through sharing their narratives, the men construct and mobilise their recovery experiences as a medium which provides evidence for substance use recovery. Ultimately, their narratives are used to instil hope for those in recovery and those seeking recovery.

## **5.8 Summary**

The study explored the rich narratives of substance use and substance use recovery. Through their narratives the men constructed processes of maintaining sobriety and furthering their substance use recovery. The chapter presented the findings of the study and explored how male YouTube vloggers construct their substance use and substance use recovery narratives. The findings illustrate that the men focus their narratives to express the processes which have facilitated their substance use disorder recovery. The men spoke to two processes of recovery, namely internal recovery and external recovery. Internal recovery included two prominent themes which assisted in initiating and maintaining recovery. The identified themes are the process of admission of one's addiction and identifying as an addict and secondly, the

acknowledgement of one's powerlessness. This process of internal recovery is the transitional process which moves the individual from active substance use to active recovery.

The men also shared experiences relating to two themes encompassed under external recovery. Firstly, the men expressed the importance of undergoing the process of unlearning and relearning during recovery. At the onset of their recovery journey the men's identity is said to transform as they navigate what sobriety means for them. This process is understood to have a direct impact on the manner in which the men engage in the world and subsequently their experience of the world. The men share personal experiences from navigating various daily life experiences to navigating periodic, distressful, and traumatic life events without compromising their sobriety. As a result, the process of unlearning and relearning is further grounded through the men's experiences of acts of service. Acts of service is constructed as a maintain process of sobriety. Through service the men are continuously able to reflect on their personal recovery journey, help others to remain accountable for their own recovery and continue to place the individual in the centre of the objectives of their affiliated recovery programme.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

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### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter concluded the study and outlined the implications of the research findings in field of psychology. Thereafter, the limitations and considerations for future research in the domain of personal recovery experiences of substance use disorders are stipulated.

### **6.2 Implications of the Research Findings and Recommendations**

This research has applications for interventions at a clinical level, particularly for practitioners who have mental health care users (MHCU) seeking SUD treatment. Practitioners are encouraged to expand their understanding of the experiences of those who endeavour to initiate and maintain SUD recovery. In particular, the findings of undertaking a spiritual awakening, which are currently excluded in present SUD biopsychosocial conceptualisation framework. Therefore, in clinical practice, practitioners may assess the appropriateness of their SUD treatment by openly engaging and exploring the role of spirituality in the MHCU recovery processes where applicable. Furthermore, to remain cognisant of any personal biases towards the biopsychosocial-spiritual framework, which diverges from traditional, western understandings of SUD recovery.

Therefore, it is recommended that practitioners possess and continuously update their resources and knowledge in order to appropriately refer their MHCU to suitable recovery support groups or programmes.

### **6.3 Policy Implications**

According to Pienaar and Savic (2016) South African AOD policies place a substantial amount of focus on prevention and treatment services. In turn, disproportionately recognising self/mutual aid groups as SUD service providers. Therefore, it is recommended that AOD policy adequately address the role of self/mutual aid recovery programmes in facilitating their objectives of serving persons with SUDs. Additionally, it is recommended that policy makers clearly account for the role of social and recovery capital in the aftercare services. This includes the incorporation of recovery support services, such as AL-Anon, which support the relatives and friends of person with SUDs as this has direct implications on the recovery of persons with SUDs.

### **6.4 Strengths, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sample has a rich variation of men of different cultural backgrounds and experiences of substance use disorders. The employment of SNS provided a wider cultural group which may have not been readily accessible outside of the scope of cyberpsychological research. However, as only 2 out of the 9 vloggers were South African vloggers, it is recommended that future research explores cyberpsychological recovery in South Africa further. Additionally, a focus for future research may include deeper investigations regarding the social and gender norms in substance use and its differential impact on men and women.

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# APPENDIX

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## VLOG TRANSCRIPTS

### Vlog 1 Transcript: Mr A

Mr A: My name is A. I'm an alcoholic

Crowd: Hey A

Mr A: Want to first thank you for inviting me to come talk tonight. It's always an honour and a privilege to be asked to participate in Alcoholics Anonymous. Ultimately, it's a responsibility to give back what we're so freely given to me. I want to welcome anybody that's new. You know if you're trying AA one more time. If perhaps you don't think this will work for you. If you don't want to be here tonight. You know if you think this is all a big misunderstanding

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Sorry it's come to this.

Man in

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I mean I don't mean to be funny but Alcoholics Anonymous wasn't on my to do list.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know I didn't get to AA 'cause I had a bad weekend. I had a couple of bad decades.

Crowd: \*Laughs\* Yeah.

Mr A: And for me like a lot of us this had to become a matter of life and death.

Uhm... Where I live in Southern California Los Angeles, they give chips for , you know, thirty, sixty, ninety days. I think they do that everywhere. And I, I was one of those perpetual chip takers. Ah, I'm, I had so many chips and key tags, I, er I could have played poker with them.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Yeah, I mean it was awful. I remember the secretary in one meeting saying give 'em back...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know I recycled through the rooms for seventeen years. And I thank God for the unconditional love and the compassion of the old timers who I remember saying 'Don't even bother taking chips kid. Just sit in the back. Shut up.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But they made it very clear to me that the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous would continue to be open. And if and when I was ready to take actions in Alcoholics Anonymous, that AA would be there for me. And uhm... as a newcomer I remember, you know there was so much guilt and shame about being you know new, I, I, you know doing that walk of shame over and over

and over again. As a newcomer, I remember what I would do is I would go into your head and look back at myself and think what a loser.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: My goodness, why can't you get this? What's wrong with you? And I know the old-timers were judging me. You know if you're new or judgey.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: We make bets.

Crowd: \*Laughs\* Recovery is cy

Mr A: Right, we're not that spiritual.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I mean think about it. I love it when they say don't judge anybody in AA. You guys hear that around here? What do they tell you five minutes later? Stick with the winners.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? Here a lot of contradictions in Alcoholics Anonymous that are not necessarily in our basic text in the literature. I remember getting out of, you know rehab, and my, my counsellor says to me, he says 'A... don't make any major changes in your first year.' So I come to AA, get a sponsor. What does he tell me? 'You've got to change everything.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? I was told don't make any major decisions in my first year. You guys seen the third step?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: How about don't get in a relationship in your first year? That's a good one.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: No one knows if that works. No one's ever done it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Maybe in this crowd.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But there's a part that we read called we're not saints. I tell people, if you got a halo don't let it choke you.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But the one I love is God doesn't give us more than we could handle. If that was really true, if I really believed that statement, then I wouldn't need God's help... And the longer I've been sober, the longer I've been separated from alcohol, the more I've come to terms with the fact that I absolutely do need God's help. I need your help. Help is the dirtiest four-letter word in these rooms. It was the hardest thing... for me to really relinquish control and ask for help. And my experience with Alcoholics Anonymous is that AA has done for me what I could never do for myself. It's done for many of us here tonight what we could never do for ourselves, collectively as a fellowship and as a society what I could never do. And (gulp) you know the interesting thing about AA, you know we, we talk about the steps as being how it works. Really the traditions are why it works. And for many years in Alcoholics Anonymous, I wanted to change everything about AA. You know my home

group's the Marina Center in, in, in Culver City and you know every week we get these new people that come in and they immediately wanna change the format and you know, change the way the way we run the group and couple months later, we never see 'em again.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And I wanted to change everything about AA as a newcomer too. And you know what? The longer I've been here, the more I wanna keep Alcoholics Anonymous exactly the way it is.

Crowd: \*Cheers – includes Applause\*

Mr A: You know the steps stop me from committing suicide. If you haven't noticed the 12 traditions, stop us from committing homicide.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Oh, you don't believe it? Get involved in a business meeting.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: For a committee.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: One of us doesn't work the steps, one of us dies right? If we don't work the twelve traditions, we all die... And again, for me like a lot of us when Alcoholics Anonymous really became a matter of life and death for me, then I started to truly respect the thing that was saving my life... You know you wanna see some drama, get between an alcoholic and a drink. Wanna see some drama in my life? Get between me and Alcoholics Anonymous... And you know I mean, for me

as a newcomer I, you know looking back at it there, what I would do is I, I, I used to come to meetings drunk. Now the interesting thing about Alcoholics Anonymous these days is if you see somebody drunk in AA, the first thing people say is ‘oh my gosh, what’s he doing here?’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? I mean think about it, with the event of treatment which swoops a lot of us up in our most desperate moments, throws us into yoga class...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Craft hour...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Nature walks...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: What I would is, I would go to, we have these late-night meetings and you know Los Angeles Hollywood, eleven thirty, twelve at night and I would go to Seven Eleven, get a Big Gulp cup. Fill it up with liquor...

Crowd: Hmmm.

Mr A: Put a little splash of Coco-Cola on top. Then I’d cruise into the late-night AA meeting.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Do some of my best sharing.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Looking for friends...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And they weren't laughing.

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr A: And then eventually started going through treatment centres and you know what, this is not a plug for treatment but by the time I finally got sober, I'd gone through treatment twenty-eight times... Not twenty-eight days like the movie.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: This isn't Hollywood. Twenty-eight consecutive times and I, I remember telling my sponsor, I went through treatment twenty-eight times. I was hoping that would get rid of the guy, you know, loser. Go find someone that's willing and he looks me right in the eye and he says, 'You know A that doesn't make you an alcoholic.' And I thought, 'You're kidding.' He says 'No, it means you paid half a million dollars for a big book.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I wasn't laughing at that either. I didn't think that was funny.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know the big book's making a big comeback in AA.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And I'm not going to start quoting pages tonight out of the big book. But page 101 of the big book...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Says any scheme that attempts to shield the alcoholic from temptation is doomed to failure. See treatment was a great place to fatten me up for another run but treatment never solved the problem. And I always thought the problem was alcohol. And a friend of mine, he said 'You know A, that little bottle of Jack Daniels you got there, that little shot glass, that little drink, that little twelve pack,' he said, 'If that's your problem, you're probably not an alcoholic.' And then in the very next breath he says to me, 'And if you are in fact an alcoholic, the type that's described in the doctors' opinion, in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous, your problem isn't alcohol.' And it took me another decade to understand what he was trying to tell me because for me it was obvious, I couldn't live with alcohol. Everyone could see that. From the time I was in junior high school, they call it middest, middle school now, I mean I'm in eighth grade, I'm already passed out under the bleachers, peeing in my pants, drooling on my desk. You know my nickname was space cadet in eighth grade. I couldn't find homeroom.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But see the greater aspect of this disease for me as an alcoholic, is not that I can't live with it but really that I can't live without it. Not happily and not successfully. And what it really means for me to be an alcoholic is that I have a mind that somehow always takes me back to alcohol. A mind that always leads me back to a drink... I have a mind, a defiant mind, a mind that'll argue with anybody about anything at any time. You tell me it's black, I'll tell

you it's white. You tell me it's big, I'll tell you it's small. You tell me to go left, I'll go right with an attitude.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And then I'll blame you for eternity.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Defiance dogs my every step. You know that's why we say denial is an acronym. It stands for don't even notice I am lying.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Think about it. You can tell an alcoholic, but you can't tell 'em much.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? You don't believe it? Try sponsoring somebody. It's my nature. You can lead me into the gates of hell, but you can't push me into heaven. That's why Wilson talks about the tradition of attraction rather promotion. For me, like many of us as an alcoholic, I had to come AA on my own terms... I couldn't do it for anybody but me. You know what all the religions and treatment centres have in common, they all send their drunks to us. And I remember like it was yesterday, that turning point for me when I was in, I was in one more treatment centre. You know I was a hundred and twenty pounds. I, I was dying of alcoholism. I, I was broken. I was hopeless. I was dirty... You know I'd let everybody down one more time. 'Member that great feeling in detox?

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr A: Some of you guys were probably just there.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know I'm... I'm sitting in the detox circle with my fellow associates.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know a vision for you.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And this woman from AA comes in, on her H and I panel. Now H and I in Southern California, I don't know if you have a similar committee here, but it stands for hospitals and institutions. And it's a committee of Alcoholics Anonymous. It brings meetings into the prisons and treatments centres and detoxes. So... you know, this woman's on her H and I panel and she's, you know talking to us in detox. And she looks us all up and down and she says 'If I could give you all the gift of recovery, I wouldn't do it.' And they looked at her and I looked at the guy next to me and I said, 'What a bitch.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And then she said something that would later change my life. She said, 'The reason I wouldn't give you the gift of recovery is because I wouldn't rob you with the journey.' And you know all of these years later I understand that that journey to recovery, just like that to surrender that each and every drunk has to walk is personal... You know and if you're new, we can't give you that. That intangible gift of desperation. Now there's an acronym for ya.

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr A: Friend of mine said God stands for grow or die. He wasn't that soft and fluffy with me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know, and I had to get to that turning point. A place in my life where my head can't get enough, and my body can't take anymore. And then people like me die. And then I stopped drinking and I have a whole 'nother problem because now I got a body that can't process alcohol and I got a mind that can't process reality.

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr A: And it always takes me back to a drink. So, there I am in this place and you know, like I said I know that nobody could give me that gift of des, desperation. It's almost like alcohol, as the big book says was the great persuader. I had to have a relationship with booze... I had to get to that place of hopelessness. And you know my experience now is that I can write all day long on step one. Until I'd beaten down that liquor store door, it's five in the morning, five, fifty-nine over and over and over again. Or paid the clerk at Seven Eleven after closing a hundred dollars for a six pack. You know or done a lot of the despicable, diabolical, disgusting things that many of us do on that journey to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralisation. You think writing about it was gonna help my, help me see the truth? I had to have a relationship with alcohol... And you know, if you're new, if you haven't noticed we're the only people that want a reward because we ran out of a burning building.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Think about it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know if you're feeling heroic because you gave up your big Thursday night to hang out with us. This is the only place on God's earth where they'll actually applaud because you came in to save your own life.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know I throw away my job, my house, my car, my relationship, you give me a little plastic chip and I'm supposed to be happy?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Mmm. So if you're sitting here thinking about drinking, that beats the heck out of being in a bar right now thinking about getting sober.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Welcome to AA.

Crowd: \*Cheers – includes clapping\*

Mr A: If you're waiting for the miracle to happen, guess what? It might have already happened. You're here.

Mr A: You know I know that for me, you know my mom and my family are sleeping better tonight because I'm here. And if I live to be a hundred years old, I could never pay Alcoholics Anonymous back for that freedom... and the relationships and the love and the roadmap to spiritual success that I found

because of Bill and Bob... (Long pause) You know I wanna welcome you again if you're new. I, uhm, I remember when I was new my sponsor said to me, he said: "A, I want you to buy a black suit." And I said why? And he said "Well if you stick around Alcoholics Anonymous, it'll come in handy. Unfortunately, you'll go to a lot of funerals." And then he said something really nice. He said: "Oh and by the way if you drink again, at least we'll have something nice to bury you in."

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: He was mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know but my experience today is that if you baby the alcoholic, you'll bury him. I needed to hear the truth about alcoholism. That it wa...

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr A: ...That it was fatal, it was progressive, it was chronic. And I know a lot of people throw the... you know the phrase out don't drink no matter what, but you know in my mind I think why don't you join Nancy Reagan's merry band of winners and just say no?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: When everything demands that I stand and deliver, I show up drunk. I have no effective mental defence against the first drink. I can't bring like the big book says into my consciousness with sufficient force the pain and suffering of a week or a month ago. I love it when people say what's your drug of choice? I'm like alcohol is my drug of no choice. I don't choose not to drink.

I'm powerless. Yet when I become willing to take other seemingly unrelated actions, all of a sudden, I have freedom from alcohol. And I really think in many ways that's the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. You know we talk about jails, institutions, and death. You know that's kinda like hamburgers, fries and a coke.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know but I do a lot of service in detox centres, and you know, there's this, this language that you hear, it's a you know, a second language, it's called victimese.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Like they just can't seem to realise that, that the drinking bone connects to the detox bone.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Or the jail bone.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: It's like a big leap for them. And I guess it was for me. That's why I have to continually stay in the middle of this thing... so I can stay really clear on the truth in my life about Alcoholics Anonymous. You know that victimese thing that they have it usually starts with I lost everything. I didn't lose anything. It was all drink coupons for me... You know I know there's a relationship for me between willingness and surrender. And I see it in my life, they seem to be equally proportional. You ever notice you'll never see anybody more willing to work the programme of Alcoholics Anonymous than the guy that comes

crawling through the back door of your, you know, your home group after a long hard run? And he'll do anything right? Ninety meetings in ninety days. First day outta detox he's got three sponsors?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? Who wants to take our whole coffee pot home with him?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Doesn't even have a trunk to put it in.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Till we lose half our literature.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And that same guy, thirty, sixty, ninety days later is looking at me right in the eye, saying you mean we gotta go to meetings every day?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And like a prize fighter I throw in the towel and then I have a ca, you know I, I start to take the towel back one little piece at a time. I take my will back. And it's so interesting, you hear it in every meeting, people that do not recover, people that cannot or will not. And I look at my resistance. The thing that's blocking me from spiritual freedom. And you know what it is? It's another form of denial. Because we talk about admission. The opposite of admission for me is denial. But there's two kinds of denial for me. There's denial about the problem but the greater aspect of denial for a drunk like me is about the solution. That these time-tested steps, this plan of action, this roadmap to

spiritual success, it's not gonna work for me. You know why it's not gonna work for me? Because it wasn't my idea.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Sound familiar?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Like minds think alike.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And you know I really had to come to terms with what that willingness and I understand for me today that there is a relationship between the act of surrender and the state of surrender. The act of surrender is what got me into AA over and over and over and over again as a newcomer but see the state of surrender is a completely different concept that's kind of like what's keeping the old timers here. It's completely different. It's kind of like watching a swan glide across a pond of still water. It's so beautiful. So effortless. It's so graceful. But you know what's going on under the water, right? That swan's paddling like hell. And if you're new, if you haven't noticed, we have a chapter in the big book: Into action. We don't have a chapter: Into feelings.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Go tell your therapist that.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right? We don't have a chapter: Into thinking.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: We ought to have a chapter: Into whining right from the podium at the noon meeting, no offence.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I'm like get a job.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And for me like a lot of us, I became willing to take actions in Alcoholics Anonymous, that I did not believe in. I was asked by my sponsor and my home group to set aside everything I thought I knew about AA, about the twelve steps, about God so I could have a new experience with this thing... Everything that I thought I knew about God, about myself and about others. Because if you added up those three relationships when I came to AA, if you took my relationship with God, plus my relationship with self, plus my relationship with others and you put an equal sign under it, it's simple math. You know what it equals right? Detox!

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Now in the therapeutic community there's a science called cognitive behavioural therapy. It's expensive right? In AA it's a buck.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And it's one sentence. You can't think your way into right living but you can live your way into right thinking. Very, very simple. Bring the body, the mind will follow. Now for me that was the hardest thing in the world to do. Because I couldn't set aside my old ideas. I couldn't let go of a belief system that I had

established from the time I was a child. And it's so interesting because, you know we have a, a circle and a triangle, the three legacies of AA, recovery, unity and service. And it's been revealed to me just from experience that, that triangle, recovery, unity and service translates into three specific actions for me. Contribute, belong and learn. Contribute is service, belong is unity, to learn is to uncover, discover and discard what's blocking me. And the more that I sit in that centre of that triangle and take those very simple actions, the more that I somehow feel wanted, needed and loved in every area of my life. And if you're new we can't give you that without taking the action. You know I couldn't experience that until I was willing to take actions here that I didn't believe in and it's just that simple. If, if there's a weight pile and I lift weights every day, am I gonna get strong? Doesn't matter how I feel about it... what I think... and those simple actions in Alcoholics Anonymous eventually began to change my perception. All of my life I'd predicated everything on how I felt. I don't feel like showing up for work. I don't feel like sitting in the front, I don't feel like taking commitments, I don't feel like being responsible. And in Alcoholics Anonymous, I had to reverse that process and by taking the actions, my thinking and eventually my feelings changed. And it's just that simple. And if you're new, I, I, I wish we could give you that but like everything else, I had to take the action. We talk about drinking all day long, if you haven't experienced it, you couldn't really understand why we do what we do. That's why normies are like I can't believe you did it again... You know now speaking about hospitals and institutions, H and I, I do a lot of H and I. You know why? Because I'm an alumni from everywhere.

Crowd:       \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And one of the panels that I have at the, at the Veterans Administration...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Ah, you know I've had it for years... One of the greatest illustrations of surrender that I've ever experienced came out of one of those panels at the VA. Now you get into a room, you know we have big meetings at the VA in West LA. You know maybe like a hundred, hundred and fifty guys. Soldiers. Now you get into a room full of soldiers and you start talking about surrender, you know what happens right?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Room gets quiet. Dead quiet. Especially marines.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: You know but if you ever watch a soldier surrender like on CNN, the illustrations perfect and you might wanna relate it to alcohol if you're new. You ever watch if soldiers surrender, you'll see the soldier take the rifle very slowly lay it on the ground, sit down on the side of the road, wait for someone to tell 'em what to do, right? When you've got forty AK-47s pointed at your head you don't throw down the gun with an attitude.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Kind of like these guys put their court cards in the basket.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Think about it. You're not sitting on the side of the road looking back at the gun because if you do, someone's gonna shoot ya. Am I looking back at alcohol, am I looking back at the magic I once found in booze? Is that the euphoric recall, the peculiar mental twist, the lurking reservation that Wilson talks about? Is that what it is? It's so interesting because for me when I look back at it, it's almost like I'm in the high school gym. Twenty-five, thirty years later. Girls are gone, the lights are out, it's an empty room, it's dark. I'm all by myself in that room saying where's the party. Now there's no disco ball where I was drinking... You know we talk about my worst day sober is better than my best day drinking. My worst day sober is better than my last day drinking. And I think about those moments, when life had its moments and for those moments as an alcoholic, I'm willing to give my life to recapture and recreate the magic that I once found in booze. It's almost like Oz never gave the Tin man anything he didn't already have. What am I trying to put in myself that's not already there? Because that idea will kill me. You know it's interesting because there's a guy named Doctor Harry Tebow and you can look him up on the internet, it's not an outside issue. In fact, he's one of the contributing members to some of our original literature and Tebow talks about the difference between compliance and surrender. And it's interesting because you know, compliance by definition is co-operation without agreement. And I've been in compliance with AA for years. Doing it for sober living, doing it for the judicial system, doing it for the parole department, doing it for DCSF. Where I live on the west side of LA, they do it for the trust fund.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But see that concept of surrender, kind of like that soldier that lays down that rifle, that concept is unconditional. (Long pause) If you're new for me I had to see that there could be no reservation, I had to get to AA on my own terms. That's freedom. I mean we say freedom is another definition for nothing else to lose. I had nothing else to lose at that point. It became do or die for me. You know and I eventually got to that place, and I was able to see the truth. Because if you're like me as an alcoholic, fear is not gonna keep someone like me sober... Fear doesn't work. Getting a third strike, living on the street, being homeless, losing my career, throwing away my education, losing my family. Did scare it straight work for you guys?

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable response\*

Mr A: That one went right over my head. Now the big book talks about the problem drinker and illustrates the problem drinker as someone that can stop or moderate given sufficient reason, right? Big difference between a problem drinker and an alcoholic. Think about it. You get a problem drinker and a real alcoholic in a jail cell for say drunk driving, you got two different philosophies going on. You got the problem drinker over here sitting on one side of the cell, you know beating on the table thinking, 'Man why'd I have that fifth beer? I knew I shouldn't have drank so much. Why did I drink so much last night? The real alcoholic sitting over here on the other side of the cell thinking, why did I take Interstate 4?

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr A: Oh, the court card people never laugh at that joke.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Problem drinkers wife says honey if you don't stop drinking and leaving you problem drinker cleans up his act doesn't drink in the house gets a little Visine. Now if my woman says to me honey if you don't stop drinking, I'm leaving you. you know what I'm thinking right. I'm thinking about single life

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And I got a look at my relationship with alcohol because if anything got in the way alcohol it was out of my life. I mean alcohol completed me. It had me from hello.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I used to say don't drink no matter what, but alcohol wouldn't listen. Alcohol was my master it owned me and if anything got in the way of booze it was out of my life. In fact, I slowly compromised everything to continue to drink and if you're new my experience with Alcoholics Anonymous is almost the same. If anything gets in the way of my recovery it's out of my life. A woman I don't care how beautiful she is how much she loves me how great she makes me look.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Oh, I got an ego I'm entitled. I remember the first time I said that from the podium there she was in the back of the room. She's like honey you don't look like an alcoholic oh my goodness you're not speaking again it's the weekend. hey, why do you have to go to all those meetings. Honey oh my gosh you know that programme of yours it's getting in the way of our relationship...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr: A            Yeah you heard that too huh. So, a couple months later it you know it's Thanksgiving dinner. It's Meet the Parents night I'm at the head of the table her and her lovely family out comes the exotic wine. She's like honey you can have one glass of wine oh come on just one glass. Sweetie it's natural wine

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A:            Four more rehabs oh yeah, I stole her purse at night went down to the hood and got an outside issue...

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A:            So, you guys relate to that huh

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A:            And she came to detox with a get-well card.

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A:            Oh yeah like I got four cards from that one. She had another problem yeah for her a slip was ten minutes of compassion.

Crowd:        \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr A:            I know I spoke at an al-anon convention couple weeks ago they didn't like that.

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A:            They can't stand to see us have fun

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I tried to send her to co-dependence anonymous she wouldn't go you know why she didn't have anyone to go with.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: It's horrible isn't it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I told her when she died someone else's life will flash before our eyes

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I'm gonna quit before I get fed to the alligators you know but that's the reality for me. if anything gets in the way AA it's out of my life. have spawn sees that pay more in taxes than I earn all year they have these huge careers and these little, tiny AA programs I've never seen one of them stand the test of time. Oh, hey what do I do for a living always stay sober. Oh what do I do for money...that's over there. Now if I get those two things mixed up I'm back in handcuffs. I get those two things mixed up I'm back in an emergency room or I get a double-header I'm handcuffed to a gurney in an emergency

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Oh, I've been there. Anything I put in front of Alcoholics Anonymous... In fact, you know would I look at it what I would do is I would build Alcoholics Anonymous around my big life and as my life slowly expanded what would happen is AA would become more and more inconvenient and what I've had to do in order to stay here and really thrive is to build my life around Alcoholics Anonymous. So if you're sitting in here and you feel like

you're on the outside of this thing looking in maybe you are and I had to really think about it was I really committed to a home group you know like that triangle recovery unity and service my head my heart and my feet had to be moving in the same direction my head is inventory my heart is service my feet are meanings that's what being in the middle of it is. And there's a big difference between being in AA and on AA. It's kind of like the difference between being in a submarine or on a submarine

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right when the shift takes a dive, I guarantee you'll find out if you're in it or on it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And the book talks about the certain low spots will I survive those certain low spots ahead... \*pause\* Life or death. See for me self-knowledge won't fix me I'm I've been every relapse prevention class known to man you know half-a million-dollar big book believe me I bet all the therapy available and I'm behind a dumpster again on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles drunk drooling on myself with a bottle of whiskey reciting Chapter five out of the big book

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right and the bum next to me is like will you shut up man you're ruining my high. Give me that bottle.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And I'm crying because I can't get back here because I got a head full of AA I got a belly full of booze and I'm separate, different and alone one more time and if you think that sounds painful you know what's worse. Being in this room tonight being a real alcoholic and not working it's the 12 steps. It could be worse coming to meetings late leaving early not having commitments not having a sponsor not being of service. I mean it's worse you have no anaesthetic. You know it's very interesting because you know we always talk about the guy in his first 30 days and we have these moments and milestones of recognition first 30 days, 60 days we ought to have a moment of recognition for the guy or girl in their last 30 days. Think about it you can always spot them just ask him how they're doing. I'm fine!

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I'm like really why don't you tell your face that.

Person in

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But you see it's a tragedy because you always hear about it later... Remember so and-so used to sit in the front row he went home and shot himself, overdose, he's got a third strike. See I don't want to be in my last 30 days I know what it's like to sit in a room or a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and be in my last 30 days. And you hear people say oh we're all the same distance from a drink. I don't believe that you think this guy here's got 4 or 5 commitments working with new people has a home group has a sponsor you think he's the same distance from a drink as this guy here that's doing nothing. And I don't mean you...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: That's what you get for sitting in the front row. See all of my life I was one decision away from a drink and today between me and that decision there's a whole world called Alcoholics Anonymous and it's about commitment it's about tradition it's about people like you it's about rooms like this it's about a loving higher power in the midst of all of that. And we talk about you know you know why the grass is greener over there it's because they're watering it And I didn't understand that relationship and I saw myself one more time back in relapse prevention class learning about my triggers. Counsellor...  
Counsellor waking ups a trigger for me...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Like sir will you please go back to your dorm. I remember telling my sponsor I said you know sponsor I... I had a degree when I came to AA, and you know what he said to me he said... You know A thermometers have degrees you. Know where they stick those. He was mean vicious insensitive to my feeling. See the knowledge is necessary. It's necessary for me to win the confidence of a newcomer. Where no one else could do it where the clergy couldn't do it...where the therapist couldn't do it... where the drug and alcohol counsellor couldn't do it...where the parole department couldn't do it. Another drunk was able to win my confidence cuz he live like me he felt like I did. Not just with a drink in his hand but more importantly in untreated alcoholism another alcoholic was able to win my confidence when we talked about resentment. When we talked about selfishness. When we talked about dishonesty. When we talked about fear. Another drunk was able to win my

confidence because he lived and felt like I did. And you know what the greatest thing I ever heard in AA was three simple words... yeah me too. And somehow through that process I realised how really the same so many of us are. It just it was just that simple. You know on the way over here we were talking I know a crowd like this do you guys remember Gilligan's Island

Crowd: \*Yes\*

Mr A: Did you ever notice that Gilligan's Island was the seven deadly sins. Think about it. The captain was gluttony, Gilligan was sloth, Marianne was envy Ginger was lust right. Mr. hell was greed. Come on I would have killed everyone on the island but Ginger.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Maybe I would have kept Maryanne around for a little drama.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But see the process of another drunk working with me and me working with someone else is that I saw that all of these instincts and all of these defects and these shortcomings that we talk about are a natural part of being human. The things that I was so ashamed of these defects. And it's so common. What I do is I...you know...I put down the drink and then I pick up the fork that's gluttony right. Next thing you know I'm naked in front of the mirror and I'm crying my eyes out saying God I can't live like this step six and seven. So, what do? I put down the fork and they pick up the credit card now I'm going to fix what I did with the fork right I'm in liposuction.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I'm back at Ross buying clothes. Trying to cover it up then I'm in bankruptcy court on my knees in step six and seven saying God I can't live like this. So, I put down the credit card and start acting out in the rooms can't go to that meeting again.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I love it. There's 400 12-step programmes they're all identical except for the first half of step one and my experience is it's so easy for me to play musical poisons in the first half of step one and never really address the problem. And I did that over and over again and what my book says is that when we straighten out spiritually, we straighten out mentally and physically. So, I love it you come into AA, and you get all these other things going on. You've got alcoholics then you got alcoholic addicts then you got addict alcoholics if somehow different right.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Of course, you got the dope fiends in the back they're worse than all of us. And my experience with AA today is that if we don't have a common problem, we don't have a common solution. Alcohol. My mind always takes me back to drinking. Self-knowledge. You notice at the end of these meetings they don't say keep coming back it works if you know it. It says works if you work it.

Man in

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: And my experience is that these principles it is only through application and practice that I become spiritually fit. \*Pause\* Thinking it through doesn't work

for a guy like me I love it when they say jokes play the tape through I love that I'm driving my brand-new car down the freeway pass skid-row and I play the tape through to the cardboard box, the dumpster you know my head tells me well skid row wasn't that bad. Toothless honey...I can make it on Skid Row. That's insanity you know normal people don't laugh at that.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Think about it I always thought insanity was doing the same thing and expecting different results isn't that what you hear in AA. That's not the insanity I live with I have a completely different brand of insanity. It's doing the same thing knowing exactly what's going to happen in what doing it anyway. Come on at least the other kind of insanity doing the same thing and expecting different results at least there's some hope there.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But I know exactly what's going to happen and I do it anyway which points back to what it really means to have lost the power of choice. Now I don't want to offend anybody tonight, but you know for me to pick up a drinks kind of like having sex with a gorilla. Oh, honey if you have sex with a gorilla it's not over till the gorilla says it's over I know you get that gorilla back in the cage it starts looking at you again with those loving eyes remember how it used to be just me and you. You promise I won't tell anybody. We're in Mexico. Awful. But that's the way my mind works on me. Delusion. You know reminds me of this guy he gets a rifle for his birthday and his lifelong ambition he's a hunter he always wanted to go to Alaska to the tundra and shoot a polar bear he's a hunter. So he goes up he flies up to the tundra he's got

this brand-new rifle he got for his birthday he sees this bear he takes his shot and he goes over to look at his kill and there's a tap on his shoulder it's a bigger polar bear looking down at him yeah the bear says... You just shot my son. You got two choices either let me have my way with you or I'm gonna maul you to death. So, a couple weeks later he's in the hospital healing up now he's got a resentment. So he gets better he goes back up to where the berries is going to get this bear so he goes to the exact same spot he sees the bear he takes his shot goes over to check out his kill tap on his shoulder bigger polar bear looking down at it the bear says hey you just shot my uncle you got two choices either let me have my way with you or I'm gonna maul you to death. Back in the hospital healing up again another resentment. Now this goes on for years back and forth. Back and forth. Finally, he's up there back in the tundra he sees the bear it's the one he takes his shot he goes over to check out his kill tap on his shoulder it's the king of the polar bears looking down at and the bear says you know we've been watching you you're not really up here for the hunting are you.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: It's a little graphic

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: But if you read the jaywalker in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous it's really not that far-fetched. See all of my life I was driven I was driven by selfishness, I was driven by dishonesty, I was driven by fear, By resentment and I look at that today it's like you know when they drive cattle it's an interesting word you ever see the four horsemen that driver herd of cattle if

you're in the middle of that herd you don't even know you're being driven the you know where cattle's driven. Right is driven to the slaughterhouse. And all of my life I live in that delusion and it's so obvious today it's so classic. You know I knew he was a crackhead I can't believe you robbed my house. Right, I met her in rehab I can't believe she drank. I mean the delusion that I live with the faulty relationship with this power based on self-reliance. The resentment that drives me to a state of spiritual maladjustment that I have only one choice to drink and unless I can find something to solve that spiritual problem, I'm doomed. My mind will always take me back to a drink and eventually I had to really see that that you know when I was talking about it earlier this body that can't process alcohol this mind that can't process reality you know a lot of people come into AA. I've seen people that I drank with. You know the doctor's opinion talks about the thing that ties us together is the phenomenon of craving. But a lot of people come into AA and as soon as they put that drink down, you know they fit in. I mean you hear it in Chapter five every time we read chapter five, we talk about our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent idea right...a) I'm an alcoholic and I can't manage my life. b) That probably no human power can relieve my alcoholism. And c) that God could and would and so I'm thinking before and after what. But for me as an alcoholic it's before and after I put down a drink. The problem drinker comes into AA and thinks he second half the step one is because of his drinking if that's true stop drinking. And a lot of people like I said coming to AA and as soon as they put down the drink everything works for them. They fit in. They're part of. The career welcomes them back. They come to meetings once a year. Never work a step and their life gets consistently better

right. They've been serene since their ass hit the seat in AA. That's not my experience. My experience every time I put the drink down the first thing, they say to me is boy you need to be on medication.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: My goodness why are you so angry...what's wrong with you? Why are you so emotional? why can't you sit still back there? And I'm trying to dog food commercials.

Man in

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Right. Think about it when I'm not drinking, I have a whole nother set of problems they're outlined on page 52 of the big book. When I'm not drinking, I'm afraid of misery and depression. When I'm not drinking, I can't control my emotional nature. When I'm not drinking, I can't manage my personal relationships. Sound familiar? When I'm not drinking them of no use to other people. When I'm not drinking them full of fear. When I'm not drinking, I'm basically unhappy. And the way that plays out for me and untreated alcoholism is I don't fit in. I'm not part of. You don't understand me. Everybody's in my way. Life's not fair. They're not treating me right. I'm not appreciated. They're not paying me enough. For goodness' sake she's cheating on me. I gotta drink. Oh yeah and some magic happens I pick up a cocktail and I intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Think about it you give me a couple more drinks fear of people in economic insecurity leave me I'm buying the whole bar drinks. Hell, I'll write you cheque. Not only are you getting better-looking honey I'm getting better looking. Right come on you give me a couple Vicodin I could comprehend the word serenity and I know Peace. Give me a little cocaine I want to start a business with you.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Now if you're laughing at any of that there's something really wrong with you guys.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Because that doesn't occur in the normal or temperate drinker. Think about it alcohol is classified by the AMA as it depressant. Nine out of ten people that pick up a drink they have a couple drinks, and they say whoa whoa I get it slow down I'm feeling it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I have a couple drinks and baby I want to get married.

Man in

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: A couple more I want to go to Vegas. You give me a couple drinks I'm trying to find the car keys I hid for myself before the first drink. See for me alcohol's a stimulant. And that's what makes me bodily and mentally different it's not how much I drink or how often I drink but the effect produced by alcohol in me is so elusive I can't tell you that you the true from the false. In fact, it does

so much for me I don't care what it's doing to me. And that's what the earth people don't understand about us. Because they don't have the same effect produced by alcohol. It doesn't have that magic hold on them that makes them clairvoyant and intuitive. And they say stuff like you drank again. We're surprised when you didn't. At some point looking at the promises what I did is I suddenly realised that alcohol had done for me what I could not do for myself. And what the promises really say at the end of the promises it says we suddenly realised that God could do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Didn't some of us suddenly realise it booze had done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Because if that's really true then there's a relationship between God and alcohol and you can see it by substitution in the promises. If you get into the ghettos in this country where everything's been burned to the ground there's only two things that stick out. Churches and liquor stores. You know why because they both give man hope. And if you're like me hope doesn't matter to someone like me until I become hopeless. Hope doesn't matter to a drunk like me until I burn my life to the ground. Until I get to a place of complete failure of all of my, resources. You know that's why we say from Yale to jail. From Park Avenue to park bench. It doesn't matter when I got to that place where my head couldn't get enough, and my body couldn't take anymore then I had those two choices. Go on to the bitter end or accept spiritual help you know and that's like a no-brainer if you go over to your local Walmart and you do a survey jails institutions and death, happy joyous and free. Hundred percent step over to your local detox ask the same question people are scratching their head saying well how bad an alcoholic death. Can I talk to my counsellor? And as comical as it sounds when I really understand

what it does for me that leads me to the place where I will make the supreme sacrifice. Cos, I don't think AA is going to work for me. That's a really hard place to be. It's a really dark place to be. A friend of mine said the definition of Hell is if God were to show you all the things you might have accomplished if you'd only believed in yourself. And if you're new and you can't believe in yourself tonight believe in Alcoholics Anonymous. Believe in the collective consciousness of this group of this fellowship of this society. I mean I think Bill Wilson was in what Time magazine is being responsible for the largest social movement of the last century... Suspect this thing's been affected like 40 to 50 million people. You know and I really had to start to look at what it is. I mean Chuck Z said it better than anybody. Said the real problem here isn't alcohol. He said the real problem is a conscious separation from God. And then he points to the eleventh step where you see the solution conscious contact with God. And for me that bridge from two to eleven is steps four through nine. Maybe what they should say in AA is rarely we've seen a person fail that's done steps four through nine. Oh, rarely have we ever seen anybody do four through nine.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I do the AA waltz 1 2 3 drink. 1 2 3 drink. 1 2 3 I'll turn my will and life over to anything but that which will solve the problem. That's why we say you want to hide something from a newcomer you know where you put it right. Stick in the literature they'll never find it. Only one thing people like us do in moderation... You know what it is right. The steps. They took a while for me to understand what the conscious separation from God was. And it's real simple. I didn't want to pray you know why... I didn't want God to find out

where I was. That simple. So, if you're new we have a chapter in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous we agnostics' have you noticed we don't have a chapter we believers there's a poem in Notre Dame. It says I saw my God. My God I could not see I saw. My soul. My soul I could not free. I saw my brother and I found all three. And that's why we talk about nothing ensures immunity from drinking more than intensive work with others. It is by reaching back in my community and helping another drunk that I see myself. My shortcomings My defects. My hopes my salvation. See for me this is the only prison where the keys inside and that's why we talk about AA being the last house on the Block because until I'd failed on every other resource I'm not going to come here and do these things. I'll buff all the way through the steps. Okay I look at two, four, nine and I'm drunk. But see for me like a lot of us the disease killed me every day and it wouldn't bury me and I kept coming back to those two choices. Go on to the bitter end or accept spiritual help. And in order to do that I had to eventually get rid of the old ideas that were blocking me. You know I had a bunch of conditional relationships with this power. You know Wilson talks about me being the actor trying to be director. Right trying to arrange the ballet the lights, the scenery and all the players and if everyone would do as I wish life would be great. You ever notice that when an Alcoholics not having a good day... You know when I'm not having a good day when I'm not getting my way. We're all like five-year-old kids here with old people's faces.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: Oh, you don't believe it cross one of them. But see. In that play the actor being the director what I had done is I had given God a role in my play. And when God doesn't meet my finite human expectations, I become separate from that

power. And I had put a label on that power. You get in a closet and pray for a hot dog. You know what will happen right. You'll know God can move mountains, but you better bring a shovel. And I had a belief system that kept me in a place of separation. I...I tell my sponsees don't pray for women. God's not a pimp.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: I knew I'd offend some people tonight but see the reality is as I was able to face and be rid of the things in myself. And that belief system that was blocking me. I started to find spiritual freedom. It was just that simple. It's like when they asked Michelangelo, they said to Michelangelo how did you make the Statue of David and Michelangelo said I never made the Statue of David. I just chipped away everything that wasn't David and there he was. It's such a simple example but it's so true for me. If you tell a five-year-old kid, I want you to go in your room and straighten out your room you think he wants to do that? You tell that same five-year-old kid I want you to go in your room and throw out all your old stuff will buy you new stuff how long would that take?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: If you're new don't rob yourself. Don't believe that this is all that there is in AA. You know if you sit in a chicken coop for 20 years guess what you won't become a chicken. And I didn't understand that unless I took these time-tested steps. Unless I was rid of the things in me that were blocking me, I would never realise the spiritual awakening that Wilson was talking about. And as I became willing to look at that one more time, I got around a group of people in AA that really knew how to take me through this process. And show me that

there was much more here than just sitting in these rooms. It was a lot more than just survival. Yeah, I remember my sponsor said A what do you want from AA and I said well I grew up in Malibu what I want is a yacht and a Lear jet. I mean I'm honest trying to make you write that down in your first year what you want. and what he said to me said A if you work steps four through nine and you consistently live in ten, eleven and twelve what you'll get... because I always wanted, I want to know what I can get right is I'm a taker. He said what you'll get is a quiet mind and a loving heart. And I looked at him and I said what do I want that for. But see you know what the opposite of a quiet mind is right it's a mind that won't shut up. It's a mind it's up at 3:00 in the morning telling you you're a loser. You're fat. See that job you got they're going to do the background check on you. It's the one that's telling you right now your significant others with their ex while you're in here.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: So, you can't stop text messaging. It's a mind it's up five minutes before me every day saying you don't need AA. And what's the opposite of a loving heart. It's a vindictive heart. It's a prejudiced heart. It's a resentful heart. All of my life I was crucified between two thieves. Yesterday and tomorrow. And yesterday I have guilt shame and remorse and tomorrow I have fear, anxiety and worry. The product of the steps for me is it I'm present. Then I'm free of those two thieves. The inventory of resentment to take an event from the past to relive it to re-feel it and to re-enact it in every area of my life. And to look at my future, the speculation of what I'm going to lose or what I'm not going to get and being free of that. Our spirits are almost like a body of water when they're perfectly still they best reflect heavens. See I know how to get there

with a bottle of liquor. But my experience shows me that unless I can find that sense of comfort and ease that I saw it from alcohol through this process there's no way I'm going to stay here. You take the love of my life away from me and you don't give me something better. I'm a dead man and I believe that's what Alcoholics Anonymous. And this plan of action. This power. This process and this programme has done for me. And I can never pay AA back for that. You know in closing if someone did to me what I did to myself I hate to say this I would have killed them if someone did to me what I did to others. I would have killed them, and they then I come in these rooms. You want me to pray... I thought God had been watching. Those three relationships with God with self and with others... I was bankrupt like I said in the beginning I was broken in those three areas. If you really look at the 12 steps by design. The steps remedy those three relationships. Steps one through three recreate and develop a relationship with God. Steps four through seven recreate and develop a relationship with self. Steps eight and nine recreate and develop a relationship with others. It's that simple ten maintains my relationship with self. Eleven maintains my relationship with God and twelve through service maintains and develops my relationship with others. So, coming out of the steps I'm able to live in harmony in those basic fundamental relationships. There was a great spiritual teacher. He was asked what's the most important thing of all your teachings. He said love God with all thy heart love thy neighbour as thyself. And if God scares you out of these rooms. Don't worry about it if you're a real drunk. Booze will scare you back in.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: We got ya... back to those two choices. I have to look at that truth in my life. In steps one through three I give it up. Four through seven I clean it up. Eight and nine I make it up. Ten, eleven and twelve I keep it up. And as a product of that I'm able to navigate around the drama. I'm able to match calamity with serenity. I'm able to stay in fit spiritual condition I am able to reach back in my community and help another drunk. See there's only three prayers in this life. One is God help me it got most of us in this room tonight. One is God give me it's a big distraction. The prayer we never say is God use me. And I thank you and the committee and everyone here for using me tonight. To hopefully carry some message to maybe just one person. And I'll be forever indebted and grateful for that part of the word spiritual is ritual. And I have to look at that simple unrelated thing that I've been taught in Alcoholics Anonymous that have truly given me that freedom. You know one of the oldest stories in AA and it's really an example how this works for me about a little five-year-old kid. Five-year-old he wants to play with his dad the dad's an accountant. He's trying to think of a way to occupy the little five-year-old boy. So, what the dad does is he grabs a map of the world you know National Geographic they have those great world maps. Dad rips the map of the world up into 50 pieces he gives his son some tape he says to the little boy I want you to put this map of the world back together and when you're done... we'll play. And he's thinking it's going to take this little five-year-old an hour finally some relief. Little five-year-old boy comes back in three minutes he's got the whole map of the world taped back together. It is perfect the dad says that's impossible I'm 50 I couldn't do that. How did you do it and the little boy says you know dad on the back of the map of the world well there was a picture of a man I just put the

man back together and the whole world fell into place. If you're new that's the spiritual technology of Alcoholics Anonymous for me in my life. To rebuild the man. One through three with God. Four through seven with self through inventory. Eight, nine with others to amends and to maintain develop and grow in those 3 simple relationships. Ten with self. Eleven with God. Twelve with others. And through that process. You know I've been given a freedom that I could have never ever imagined. I...you know people I used to hear people say I'm a grateful Alcoholic. I want to throw up. But what I've come to understand about the disease of alcoholism is that this is the only disease when treated that leaves the sufferer in a better position than if they never had the disease. And I could only discover that through doing the work. Thank you for my life

### **Vlog 2 Transcript: Mr J**

Mr J: Oh my God. I feel like I'm gonna pass out.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Seriously... I'm an addict. My name's J.

Crowd: Yeah. Hi J.

Mr J: I'm a very grateful member of Narcotic Anonymous.

Mr J: Uhm... Ah, I have uhm...(taps) besides a bunch of, you know stuff rolling in my head. I, I have ADD so my mind travels and when I share that at meeting. People laugh, they think I'm kidding... I am not kidding... Uhm, I really do. So, I wrote just something to keep me focused.

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You know? Uhm, first I wanna thank this committee for doing a fantastic job this weekend man.

Crowd \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: I mean fantastic!

Crowd \*Applause and whistles\*

Mr J: I mean thank you so much, it's... you know the serenity patrol, everybody man, fantastic job. You know when I got asked to speak, I don't, you know, in the Latin community, there's a lot of J's.

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You know? So...

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J I, you know, I, I asked 'em, 'Did you have the right one?' you know?

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Uhm. Yeah... yeah, yeah, the right one. Uhm...

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Er, you know, and I've been, I'm not gonna lie to you, if, I've been thinking about what to share? What am I gonna talk about? What am I not gonna talk about...? And uh... It just all went away. You know I wanna thank the speakers that spoke, uhm Friday, P and S also for doing a fantastic job man!

Crowd \*Cheers\*

Mr J: You know what I mean? Thank you.

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        You know?

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        Thank you so much. Ah... Er, you know I'm not gonna, I said, I'm not gonna talk about steps. I'm not gonna talk about traditions. I'm just gonna, I'm just gonna pray and I'm gonna share where I'm at, I'm gonna share my story, I'm gonna share how I got here. And... And I'm here, and I, I, I believe, I believe in Narcotics Anonymous so much... It's the only way for me. I'm not saying for you, but it's the only way for me. You know... If you haven't noticed, I'm Puerto Rican.

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        Uhm, you know what I mean?

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        Uhm... (Laughs) I got, I got clean in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        You know.

Crowd        \*Cheers\*

Mr J:        And it's funny all those years living in the Bronx, never got clean there but I got clean in Atlantic City, you know. Uhm... And... you know getting clean in Atlantic City was such an amazing, you know, journey. And ah, I met, ah, a bunch of great people. And uh, you know it's just been an amazing journey. But I'm gonna start from the beginning. I'm not gonna talk about what I used,

and how much I used, and why I used and was I born an addict. I don't fucking know, you know?

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: If I was born one, I know I am one... you know? And... Thank God for Narcotics Anonymous and I, I really, really am gonna try not to curse. Uhm...

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Really... I, I, I really am. Okay. Uh, I believe in uhm, that spiritual things happen to me on the way to recovery. And I'm gonna share some stuff with you guys that I never shared it on the floor... You know I always, I mean my wife knows about it, you know... Some of the people that I sponsor, you know close people, know about this stuff... I believe in, like, spiritual stuff... you know... And... my first experience with what we call a, in Spanish espiritista, you know, uhm, a spiritualist. In Spanish a espiritista, um, someone like a Santeria, you know that kind of stuff. My, it was an experience my mother took me when I was almost ten years old. Between the ages of eight and ten, she took me to this spiritualist guy because I was heading down the wrong path, and she wanted to find out why I was such a bad kid and in a lot of trouble at such a young age... And we walked into this place in Hammonton New Jersey and this guy was surrounded by a lot of people. There must've been like fifty people there and we were in the back. And there was a, you know there was a few other people there with their kids but uhm, the guy said, 'There's someone here from Atlantic City that has brought their son because she wants me to find out what's wrong with him.' And... everybody's looking around, you know. And I'm like in a daze because my

mother made me go to this. And I'm in a daze, and I'm just listening and they, and he, he says, you know 'It's you.' And he points to my mother. And he tells us to come up to the front. So, he says to me, 'You have a...' (laughs) 'A dark cloud over you.' You know? And uhm I'm like, not even ten and...

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: This guy is scaring me.

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Saying that I have a dark cloud over me.

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And he says to me... and to my mother, he says to me 'cause I really want, his, his Spanish accent was kinda really strong and my, uhm, my Spanish was not you know, not my uh first language... And he's telling my mother, you know 'Your kids is gonna get into drugs.' Uhm (voice thick with emotion), 'He's gonna get into a lot of trouble.' Thank you, Z... Uhm, 'But he's gonna change his life.' So... I'm like whatever you know...

Crowd \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, then he says, he turns over to my mother and this is how I know it's true. Not because I started using drugs, but he says to her, 'You're pregnant.' And my mother was pregnant and didn't wanna tell nobody because she already had eight boys and one girl, and she was tryna, she wanted another girl, you know. So, he touched her stomach and he said uhm 'You're gonna have a girl.' And seven months later, my sister M was born, you know... Uhm... You know, I don't know. You know, this is the kind of things that,

when happening in my life, you know, uhm... you know, as time went on... Uhm, you know we live in Atlantic City in a nice apartment. And our apartment burned down. And uh, we wind up living in a hotel... And in this hotel, you know they say some things happen for a reason, you know even when things happen bad, it turns out good. We, the owners of the hotel fell like, in love with my mother. And because, when the city wasn't paying for us to stay no more, he let us stay there. She worked. They gave us like three rooms, and they just treated us so good, you know. And... back then I used to love to roller-skate, and I was always on roller-skates, you know... Like to smoke weed and roller-skate for some reason.

Crowd        \*Laughs\*

Mr J:        You know?

Crowd        \*Laughs\*

Mr J:        I was wondering why I was always out of breath; you know.

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr J:        So... so I met this lady that had an apartment downstairs. And she sat there, and people used to go in and out of her house so I thought she was a drug dealer of course. Uhm... but she wasn't. It, it turned out that she was another espiritista. She was uh, a Greek lady and she had this chain with a big eye on it, you know. So, it scared the shit out of me because...

Crowd:        \*Laughs\*

Mr J:        You know she always called me to talk to her. And I would never talk to her. I would just keep rolling on by...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And she said to me, one day I came out and I was getting ready to roller-skate and she said, 'I wanna talk to you.' I said, 'I want... I gotta roller-skate.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: But it, it started pouring rain so I couldn't, we were under you know the thing. It started raining so I had to sit there and she said to me 'I have to tell you something.' She said, 'The spirits want me to tell you something.' And I was like 'Damn it, here we go again.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, she says to me, she says to me, 'I need to touch your heart.' I said, 'Okay.' But I'm, you know with my eyes closed because of that big fucking eye she had, you know on her chain...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: ...was scaring me man, you know. I mean, are there any Greeks in the house, seriously it's a Greek, it's a Greek thing, I'm not lying with the big eye. I don't know what it means but... She had a strong accent, and she was tryna tell me her name Tu-Tuka. I kept calling her Tuka, but her name wasn't that. Uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, for weeks after she told me what she needed to tell me, I kept calling her Tuka. So, she told me, she put her hand over my heart and she says 'Oh my god.' She says 'You're gonna live a long life.' She says, 'You're gonna live until you're eight one years old.' This is what she tells me, that I'm gonna live until I'm eighty-one years old. And I'm like, 'Okay, what else?' And she said, 'And you're gonna have three children.' She said 'You're gonna have a boy and two girls.' And I said 'Okay... Tuka. Thanks.' You know?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: I, can I go now? You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: 'Cause I'm like fifteen years old, you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And I went about my way. I wind up re-uniting back with my dad and move to the Bronx. And that's where I met Z... Got pregnant. 1982 my daughter B was born in the Lincoln hospital, you know. Uhm... (scoffs) After, (exhales), you know after that, uhm, I kept using. And you know how we make promises to our spouse that we're gonna stop using, we're gonna stop using and we're gonna change our life? And it didn't happen. So, one day Z told me 'I don't love you no more.' That's the worst thing from, besides when a woman tells you 'I just wanna be your friend.'

Crowd: \*Laughs and cheers\*

Mr J: Yeah, she said ‘I, I don’t love you no more.’ And that she had met someone else. (Sniffs) So I’m devastated because here I am, twenty. Twenty? Like twenty years old and I’m devastated that this woman doesn’t wa, love me no more. So, I went to board authority and I took a bus, midnight bus back to Atlantic City and my plans were to kill myself. Uhm... (voice shaky and thick with emotion) and uh, (exhales) I met a guy, you know, you ever meet someone, a stranger and tell ‘em everything about you?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: (Sniffs) I met, I met a guy, and he saved my life. The bus was crowded, one seat left, and I was like ‘Damn it man, I don’t wanna get on this bus.’ And I told the bus driver, ‘When’s the next bus?’ He said, ‘Seven in the morning.’ And it was midnight. So, I sat next to this old man. His name was JPS. I’ll never forget him. But he liked to be called JP. So... (Sniffs) I sat next to him, and he could see that I was in pain, and I was, you know, in pain. And I had this button that I used to wear that said F everybody, you know?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, I had this button on and he’s got like this smile on his face. And he says ‘Hi.’ He says in Spanish, very strong accent ‘Hi, my name is JP.’ And I turn on my overhead light and I went ‘Bro, can you read?’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And he said to me ‘I can’t read English.’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, I wasn't gonna, you know, take advantage of, uh, an older man and curse him out you know. So... He asked me 'What's wrong?' and I said 'Nothing.' And he asked me again 'Okay, what's wrong?' So, then he started automatically talking about himself, you know that he had a wife and one daughter, and he lived in Atlantic City on Sovereign Avenue and he told me his address. And I'm like 'Why is this guy telling me all this?' So finally, I opened up and I told him that... what happened, and I'm ready to, I'm gonna go kill myself but I wanted to say goodbye to my mother, you know. And uhm, how I was gonna kill myself, I was gonna jump in the ocean, so they won't even find me.

Mr J: Um (swallows) We talked all the way to Atlantic City. When we got to Atlantic City, he says to me... 'Hang in there J.' Er, all in Spanish. I can't say it the way he said in Spanish. He said a few things, but he said, before I got off the bus, he said... 'Your life is gonna change by the time you turn twenty - five years old.' So, I said 'Okay.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: But he (sniffs) he said 'Just keep your daughter in your head. Don't kill yourself. You have a daughter. You don't want her to grow up knowing that her father gave up.' (sniffs) So... you know, didn't kill myself, of course. Uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You know, and I have to say that I got clean July 24, 1988, two months after my birthday and I was twenty five years old.

Crowd: Wow! \*Cheers, whistles and Applause\*

Person in

Crowd: Hooray!

Mr J: And it's funny, you know like before we get clean, we always wanna do that last one.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: I was waiting for this guy to take me to detox and I, you know, I had twenty bucks, so I went to cop and I wind up getting beat.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And I walked all the way back home and I cried to my mother, and I said I can't, I can't wait until two o' clock, you know. I said 'I gotta do something to just c, you know, compose myself.' She gave me twenty dollars of course.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You know... I went and copped. I went and bought one bag and I swear to God if I'm lying, I'm dying on my children the name of the bag was: This is it. (Snorts)

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And I'm walking home, just looking at this bag, e, you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: It was, it wasn't like this is it. This is the shit. It was like J this is it! You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: You're, you're done after this. You know so, I got clean you know. I, I went into the detox and then I went to a rehab. And I'm still clean, you know. I, er, I came into Narcotics Anonymous you know. It's...

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: I tell you Narcotics Anonymous has changed my life. The steps has changed my life... So, I got clean in Atlantic City New Jersey. Like I said met some great people. Six months. I got a sponsor, you know. And when I celebrated my first year clean, I was so excited to have a year and I was uhm, walking to the meeting 'cause I didn't have a car. I used to walk to the meeting. And all of a sudden, I thought about JPS because he told me to look him up to let him know that he was doing, that I was doing well. So, I was trying to remember his address. I know it was Sovereign Avenue and you know, I couldn't remember so I said OKAY. How many Puerto Ricans can live on Sovereign Avenue?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: It was all a Puerto Rican Street. I mean there was, it was all Boricuas, all in the mailboxes, Santiago, Santiago, Rivera, Gonzalez. I was like what the fuck, you know?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: I was like oh my God, you know. So, I kept going to house to house and apartment, knocking ringing in the apartments and saying, 'I'm looking for JPS but he likes to be called JP.' No, nobody here by that name. Nobody here by that name. So finally, I go up, I remember his address. It was three fifty-six. I remember his address. I look across the street. I go 'Wow, that's it

right there.’ I run over there ‘cause I’m so excited. You know, a year clean and I wanna let him know that he was a big part of it. So, I knock on the door, this girl comes out and say ‘Hey.’ I, I, I say ‘Hi, I mean this might sound crazy but I’m, I’m looking for this guy named JPS. Um, you know he’s about five-five, moustache, salt and pepper hair, blah, blah, blah. And it was the wrong house.

Person in

Crowd: Aw.

Mr J: You know. So, I was ready to give up and I walked some more. And then I just went to another house and that was the house. So, another girl came out. And I said ‘Hi, I’m, I’m looking for this guy named JPS.’

And, she said to me ‘Oh, he died.’ And I said ‘Ah.’ I said ‘I probably have the wrong house. Uhm, he likes to be called Pedro.’ And she said, ‘Yeah, that, that’s him.’ She said, ‘That’s my father.’ Um, I said ‘Well, I just wanted to come and thank him because you know about five years ago, five or six years ago, whatever it was, he you know, he saved my life you know. And she looked at me and said, ‘What the fuck are you talking about?’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Just like that so I had to say it like that.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, I say ‘Yeah, you know, I, I, you know, I was, he saved my life.’ And she said to me, she said ‘My father died twenty five years ago.’

Crowd: \*Murmurs of disbelief\*

Mr J: I said, 'Well we must have the wrong person.' I said, 'I was coming on a bus from New York City, midnight bus and that's where I met him.' And when I mentioned the bus, New York City, she starts crying. Her tears rolled down her eyes and she said um, she said, 'My father died on a bus coming back from New York City. He had a heart attack...'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: '...Twenty-five years ago.' So, I said 'Okay.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Uhm.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, I'm starting to feel like I'm in the Twilight Zone.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And uhm, and ah... you know, I said to her 'Well.' I described him. I say he had a little silver little flask and on it was um: To my beloved husband from his wife, Tuti. And when the mother came out and I said are you Tuti? She almost passed out because nobody calls her Tuti but JP. So, I told her my experience that I had on the bus with him, and I described what he was wearing and everything, and uhm, that was the clothes he died in. Uhm... And they, they were getting ready to uhm, at the end of the month, they were getting ready to move back to Puerto Rico because the mother wasn't well. She wanted to die in her hometown. We stayed connected, you know, until she passed away, but I lost contact with the daughter, you know. Because every year for my anniversary, you know I would call them and let them know

I was doing good, and I'm still clean and you know. I don't know why stuff like that happened to me, you know. It just did... I went to the meeting that night to celebrate my first year... and I was speechless. I, I didn't know what to say. I was like frozen, you know. I, I didn't know what to say. It was weird. (Sniffs). You know my, the sponsor I had at the time was in California that time and uhm... I don't know. I really don't know what to say about that you know. Uhm, you know my, my first sponsor sponsored me for twelve years until he relapsed, you know. He relapsed with thirteen years clean, and uhm it was devastating for me. You know to lose a person like that, that you're close to. So anyway, it took him six years to get back to Narcotics Anonymous and he as almost three years clean and he's here tonight.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: And that is such a blessing for me, you know. Uhm, as my life kept moving on, I met the love of my life, the woman that became my wife, my best friend, M. Uhm, and er, I already had a daughter. She had a fifteen-year-old. My daughter was almost twenty and we talked about not having no kids and going on trips and all that stuff.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And it was great, and we wind up having sex and she was on birth control so I was like yes! This is gonna work.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And uhm, and she wind up pregnant on birth control, you know, so... We're in Atlantic City, in a, in our condo and she comes outta the bathroom with her

hands to her knees. So, I'm thinking she wants to have sex. I'm like, ah shit. I'm ready, you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: But then, she has this, you know test thing...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And she says, 'I'm pregnant.' And boy that shit went wooh!

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr J: It went right down, man.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: So, she said 'Well what do you wanna do?' I said 'We're gonna keep it. If you got pregnant while you're on birth control, then it's meant for us to have this child.' you know. So, we had this child. My son, G was born September 2002, you know. Our second, my second child. You know, about, my son is real special. He's autistic. He has changed my life, made me look at things a different way. You know when we found out that he was autistic, man my wife fought for all these services and you know, it's, oh my god, amazing woman. An amazing woman. And uhm, he, you know, if anybody is familiar with autistic children? They mimic what you say. You know like if you say, I love you. They say I love you. You say hi. They say hi. You know, it's just like that. So, my son stopped talking. He couldn't talk... Today he's going, right he's going to third grade. He talks, he has conversations, he reads books. And I don't have to prompt him to talk no more. To say, the first time my son hugged me and said 'Daddy, I love you. You're my best friend.'

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: That is priceless. Priceless. You can't, you can't buy that, you know. As time went on, you know my daughter's twenty, her son is like sixteen were like 'Oh my god, G needs a sibling.' You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: This was one that, where we actually planned but we said first we're gonna pray. I said 'God, please give us a son if we're supposed to have another child.' So, I prayed. About a week later, this Puerto Rican guy comes over by my house. A from my area. With his daughter D. And if anybody knows autistic children, or been around autistic children, they don't like to be around other children. They like adults but other, they like to be in their own world. So, when A walked in with his daughter, my son ran right up to her, hugged her, started kissing her and me and my wife, my wife and I looked and I go, 'Oh my god!' We're supposed to have another child. He needs a sibling. So, you know, we had sex. Got pregnant.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And she was 8 weeks pregnant, and we were going to get married in Florida. Orlando. You know we got married in Orlando. We went to Florida. She's 8 weeks pregnant. We are supposed to get married that Monday and that Friday; she starts bleeding. We go to the hospital. Celebration hospital. You know they start taking pictures of the womb and the blood and all that. And says to us there is no heartbeat. So... two things we can do. We can give you a pill and you can leave. Or we can give you a DNC. I told my wife take the pill. My wife never listens to me. So, she said she wants the DNC. We were there

10 hours. She finally got the DNC man. We were freaken devastated. We still went on our vacation, and we said we're gonna try again. So, when we got back home, we tried again and about 8 weeks later. She was pregnant again. And I was like damn... I fucken good man.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr. J: This is what goes through my head. So, she goes to the doctor. She's like 20... she thinks... the story gets weird. But this is the miracle. She believes that she is 8 weeks pregnant. The doctor does a sonogram, shows the picture, and says Mrs. you're 20 weeks pregnant. And she you got the wrong baby up there. She says I'm not 20 weeks pregnant. I'm like 8 weeks pregnant. She says no. you're 20 weeks pregnant. And she says no that can't be because I just had a DNC on this date. So, the doctor... they go all the way back... my wife was still pregnant from the DNC they did. So, the hospital in Florida kept calling us for the \$50 co-pay.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: and I said to them... dude listen. You don't want to be messing with my wife. You guys gave my wife a DNC. She's pregnant and she's ready to sue you, but I said were not going to sue because this is a miracle. So, we kept going. Bout a month or so later, she starts bleeding again. We run to the hospital. The doctor says baby is ok. We had to go every 3, 4 days to the hospital and check and everything. It was the toughest pregnancy. So finally, she's born 6 weeks early. See this ain't nothing against men, but women are the strongest people on this planet,

Crowd: \*Cheers\*

Mr J: You know because.... I do... they are. Any person... I mean it's unbelievable. My daughter was born 6 weeks early. My daughter. We named her MD because she was part of our destiny for a reason. Its beyond my wildest dream man, how this happened. You know. Uhm. Moving along. Started a business. Got a mortgage. A second mortgage. Loan... whatever. Started a business. Lost a business. With this economy, I'm still paying out loans. But this is where I believe that somethings happen for a reason. Ok. We lost a business in July, in October. My wife got diagnosed with small cell cancer. You know. Uh, it totally, totally turned our lives upside down. In and outta hospitals. Sick like a dog, we thought it was over and a few weeks ago. We found that she has more tumours on her spine. And were devastated. But uhm. In all this time. I still practice the programme. I still go to work. I take care of my kids. I feed them. I bath them. And I take care of my wife. She's my best friend. And how can you not take care of your best friend. You know. If you're married. If you're in a relationship with someone... I hope they're your best friend and I hope you thank God for them. My wife right now is in Hawaii because her son is deploying to Iraq, so she's devastated about that. She just started her chemo again and were going to just take it a day at a time and continue to move forward. And what happens... you know what's sad... is when I get in my head and I'm thinking oh my God, I'm going to have to bury my wife. I'm going to have to tell my children. And I try not to go there. You know at my job. Some other people think I'm still getting high

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: Because I'm always smiling and joking, and I keep telling them that I'm just having flash back and they don't get it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And some of them think I'm into some religious thing and they ask me where do I go? Cos they wanna come there too

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: And I say to them... you can come. I know they won't. But you can come. There is a bunch of people that are just like me. That are high on life. You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: That are high on life. You guys are awesome. You know.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: I have a ... I have a sister and she's here tonight and she just celebrated 15 years clean.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: You know. I have a great sponsor. J. Love him. My god, I have a great sponsor. Uhm... I have great friends. I still try to get to a lot of meetings. I love to serve. I love to help people. But I love to help people that love to help themselves. You know. I'm not going to waste my time if you're not going to help yourself

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr J: I'm not doing it. So... this is what the steps mean to me. I'm so glad that this is a we-fellowship and everybody comes up with their own everything. The steps for me are about meaning, they give you meaning, they teach you about

trust. They teach you about self-forgiveness. You know. In the 4<sup>th</sup> step you find out who you really are. You know. And the traditions. They teach you about purpose. And what I mean about purpose is feeling that you belong somewhere. That you're a part of service. That we learn how to serve in NA. and in turn, we learn how to serve others. One of the reasons why I don't wear NA shirts no more. And I'm not knocking anyone who does. This is my own experience on why I don't. I had a white shirt that said my gratitude speaks when I carry, share with other the NA way. And one day... I met a Wawa and I parked in the handicapped pot. Because I'm lazy. So, I come out and this old man says to me "you know you're not supposed to park there". And I aid to him, why don't you mind your f'in business. So, he came up to the car and I though he was going to hit me, and he said to me, the difference between you and I... I would never curse at you. So, as I'm driving away, slithering in my seat. I stop at the next store, CVS and I'm still thinking 'bout this old man and I get to my girlfriend's house, I walk in and his old man is sitting in my living room.

Crowd: \*Ohhhhh\*

Mr J: Oh shit.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr J: I said... how did he find my house? You know. And it turned out that it was girlfriend at the times father... visiting from Philly, and he didn't say nothing, he didn't mention it to her. He didn't say nothing. He let me squirm. All night, needless to say that relationship didn't last. But that's the reason I don't wear

NA shirt no more. Cos when I act like an idiot. I wanna remain anonymous.  
Thank you for letting me share.

### **Vlog 3 Transcript: Mr T**

Mr T: Mr T I'm an addict I'm grateful to be here it's...it's been a pretty great trip. G got to my house Thursday night, and we went to a meeting together and we got up Friday morning early and took off and...and we rode ...rode our motorcycles with a couple other friends of ours that are actually sharing that another event over in Pennsylvania. We rode as far as we could with them and then we split up and...and we stayed in Pennsylvania last night and had a wonderful time. Just me and G and M and...and we went to the grocery store and bought these big thick steaks they were just wonderful. And G made a big salad. And we had some fried potatoes and a whole mess of shrimp. And we just ate until we couldn't move. And... and...and it was great. It was just real laid back I fell asleep two or three times during the day. Just kicking back on a piece of lawn furniture and...and woke up with bugs flying in my mouth. That was great. Anyway I'm, I'm grateful for the opportunity to come here and uhm and I've had a great time so far. You know I don't uh, profess to know a whole lot. Uhm, I know uh, I know my story. You know that's all I got to share is my own story. I can't tell you guys how to do it. I can't tell you how to stay clean. I can tell you what I did. And uhm, and I did the same thing that uh, that a lot of people did before me so. Uhm, I came here desperate and hopeless and uhm, and I, I didn't even know I was desperate and hopeless. You know I was just, I just needed a, a break. I just needed a, a, a minute to regroup. I just needed to kind of get my shit together and, and then I could get back out there again. Uhm,

and what I found was a new way of life. I found something I wasn't even looking for it. I didn't know I was looking for it. And uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: But you know I, uhm, I grew up. I'm an only child and uhm, I had a... everything that I needed. I had a, a whole lotta things I wanted. My parents uhm, did not suffer from the disease of addiction. They... they were good parents. They loved me. They uh, they tucked me in bed every night and they kissed me, and they told me they love me. And uhm, they encouraged me to talk about my feelings and talk about what was going on. I never did that. But they encouraged me to do it. Uhm, I had everything that would lead you to believe that I would grow up to be a well-balanced, well adjusted, normal citizen. And uhm, you know, and here I am. At a Narcotics Anonymous meeting so (coughs). It's just kind of the way it worked. But uhm, you know I, I guess that I had a happy childhood and I had parents that loved me. And my parents taught me morals. They taught me, uhm, to be honest, to always tell the truth, to uh, my dad taught me to be a man of integrity. Look another man directly in the eye when you're talking to them and, and uh you should have no reason not to be able to look him straight in the eye if you're living right. And, and uh they taught me all these things. And these things were important to me growing up. And uhm, and then I started using you know. And uhm, and, and I was probably just an addict waiting to happen because I remember in school, they were talking about... uh, I got the same spiel A... did about you know pot will lead to heroine and all these different things. They told me I would take hallucinogens and then I'd wanna jump out of a thirty-story window thinking I could fly. And the whole thing sounded delicious to me.

Crowd: \*Laughs

Mr T: I mean I just, I just couldn't wait to get started and uh, the first time I got high I stole the pot that I smoked. I mean I, we stole it from this guy and uh, never even done it before. I'm already a thief. And uhm, so we uh, we took this pot that we stole from my friend's brother, and we took it in the bathroom. We didn't, neither one of us had ever smoked it before. We got a piece of toilet paper; we sprinkled some pot in it. We folded it over, put a piece of scotch tape on it.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And fired it up. And...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: (Clears throat) And it caught on fire, and...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And ah, I didn't get real high from that experience but, but I knew that I've broken the law.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And it was exciting. And uh, and I liked that feeling. I knew I was gonna do I again and I did and uhm, (Coughs) You know... Going through high school uhm, you know I continued to use and, and I continued to do some things right you know. I mean I did some things right and I started to work in this little pizza place. When I was fifteen years old and uh... Through, through my high school time I, uhm, worked at a couple different pizza places and I liked it real well. And, and I uh my dad when I was seventeen, he, he said I need to

talk to you. So, we sat down, and he said listen, he goes uhm, you know, 'I've always dreamed about you going to college and being a doctor or a lawyer or one of those kinds of things.' and he looked me he says, 'You, you're not gonna do that are you?' I said 'No.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: 'Not gonna do that dad.' (Laughs) I just, I'm not, I'm not a very good student, and uhm, I just, I don't wanna do that.' He says, 'You like the pizza business though.' 'Yeah, I love it.' And then he said 'Well I've got a friend that has a pizza place for sale. Let's go take a look at it.' And I said 'Alright.' And, uh we went down to a... It was on a little street in Columbus called Parsons Avenue, and it's uhm not the nicest part of town. But uhm, well we went in there and you know they had everything they needed. They had an over and coolers and mixer and slicer and um, tables and um all the stuff you need to pizzas. And um, the guys that were ah, running the place weren't very happy with it. They weren't making as much money as hey though they should make. And you know my dad said 'What you think?' I saw it. 'Yeah, let's do it.' You know. My, my dad said 'Alright.' He went out and got a second mortgage on his house... And we went into the pizza business together. So the plan was that my dad was gonna help me with this business until I was about twenty one and then he was going to turn it over to me because by that time I should be, you know, able to run a , a business. Now... That was the plan. And this is what was my vision. My vision was I was gonna become the pizzas tsar and I was gonna have...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: ...two hundred stores nationwide. And I'm gonna be filthy rich. I'm just gonna be independently wealthy and I'm gonna have this big yacht. And I'm gonna sail around the world on a yacht and I'll have to have a crew 'cause I really don't know anything about sailing. But that doesn't stop me. And we're just gonna sail around and uh, there'll be lots of hot chicks on the yacht with me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And we'll have lots of drugs and it'll just be great. I can't wait. And this all starts in this little bad neighbourhood in the south end of Columbus on Parsons Avenue. And uhm, and we got going pretty good and uh my, my head was so big. M-my ego and pride was so out of balance. I mean I was in high school running my own business. And I just thought I was all that you know. I thought I was all that and a bag of chips and, and uhm... And we got it going pretty good you know. We uh, we changed recipes a little bit. We did a little advertising. Hired some new people and you know, we're making money. Life is good. And uhm, and I closed that place up every night and uhm, we would uh, we'd stay, we'd stay around. Me and the employees would stay around to party you know. And uhm, I, when I was eighteen years old, I moved out of the house and I, I got my own apartment. And I, I got an apartment at this place called Greenbrier East and it's not there anymore. They levelled the entire apartment complex. It, it was uhm, they, it was in, in Columbus they referred to it as Oozy alley. Uhm, it was just a really bad place. Uhm there was shootings there, regularly. The police were always in and out of there, ambulances always in and out of there and that's where I moved into 'cause I didn't have any credit. And they said they'd rent me an apartment and I didn't

really care where it was. I just wanted to be out of parents' house so I could party the way I wanted to. And uhm, so I moved in there, and uhm, and we continued on in the pizza business and it went pretty well. And a couple years later we got a second store, and I could see my dream beginning to materialise with two stores. And... and uh, and I just continued to use, and it kept getting worse. And uhm, I mean I don't really know at what point I walked over that magic line or if there is a magic line or, or, or whatever but I, uh I got to that place where I couldn't stop. And uhm I couldn't stop and...and using was more important than anything else. Finding ways and means to get more that was all I really cared about. And uhm, and I you know so I started to deal and uhm, you know I thought of myself as a big time dope dealer but, I, I, I really wasn't you know. I never had very much and, and usually I used most of what I got and uhm, so... But I went along, and I really didn't have any consequences until one Wednesday night. I was driving home from the shop. I made my bank deposit, dropped it off to night slot and uhm headed on my way up a, down the road to go to the place where all the up and coming highly successful pizzas tsars would live at Greenbrier East and...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: ...and uh, and I got pulled over, and uh, and I was pretty wasted and ah they took me to jail for ah, DUI and carrying a loaded firearm while intoxicated and driving on the sidewalk.

Crowd: \*Indistinguishable murmurs\*

Mr T: And uhm, and uhm I called my dad. My dad came and got me out of jail. And uhm, we didn't really talk about it very much. Ah, he just got me out and uhm,

very next week on Wednesday night, exact same thing. Same place. Same time. Same tower. They got me again for my second DUI. And uhm, my dad hired an attorney. Uhm, we went to court. I got a little slap on the wrist. One, one of them was dropped. The other was reduced. No big deal. Now, see what I knew was that if you are highly successful up and coming pizza tsar like me, you're a little bit above everybody else. You don't really have to follow the rules. And if you get busted, no big deal. You get a lawyer. Shell out some money and everything is gonna be cool. And uhm, so everything was cool until a Wednesday rolled around and I got my third DUI and seven days later on a Wednesday, I got my fourth. And uhm, we went through the same thing again and... and by the time I was done I had, had six DUIs. All of them on Wednesday. And uhm, so I quit driving on Wednesday.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: Because I knew that what they do, you see they, they had this special drunk driving force, and they have more cops on the street on Wednesday. I knew that. So, I quit driving on Wednesday. The judge thought maybe you should just quit driving altogether. And uhm so I lost my license and, and uh, just started to ride a bicycle. And I didn't care. I mean it was okay you know. Just ride a bicycle. I still get around and I get wherever I need to go. Everything, I was always able to figure out some way that everything was okay you know. Uhm, my wife calls this phenom, this phenomenon decorating your bottom you know. And uhm, it was just denial. I just wasn't uhm, I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready to stop. And uhm, and I looked at life like a game of monopoly, you know. You roll the dice. Sometimes you get free parking, sometimes you go to jail you know. I really never had any idea that you know I could decide

to do things in my life that would you know, alter the dice throw. But I mean, that's just kind of the way I looked at it. But what ended up happening was, uhm I started to steal from the family business. Like I said, I was brought up with morals and, and uhm, and I didn't wanna start stealing but I just couldn't get enough money. You know and I had to cop. And I, and one night I just uh, I, somebody came in to pick up their order. It was like twenty bucks. And I just hit no sale on the register, I put their twenty bucks in and that night when I did the cash report, I took their twenty bucks out and had an extra twenty for myself. And I felt some guilt about that night. And uh, and I didn't like the way that felt but uhm, you know a day or two went by and that kind of went away. I kind of forgot about it so I took some more. And, and I just kept doing that. I just kept taking money and uhm, and then I'm you know I was just ta, I was taking whole deposits home, whole night deposits and, and uhm. But I always had a plan you know. Alright, I'm gonna take this night's deposit and I'm gonna cop some dope right. And I'm gonna cut it up into smaller portions and sell it and I'll probably make three or four hundred bucks plus the deposit back, plus I'll gave some free dope right?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: So, then I sell the TV just to try and get half the deposit money back.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And, and it has never worked. But my dad noticed that the deposits were not all being made, and he confronted me and... This went on for a little while and ah, it was just, it was just me doing what I had to do to keep using you know. I couldn't stop. I just couldn't stop. And uhm, and I always had every time I take

that money, I always had some plan how I was gonna get it back and it was gonna be different this time but it, it just never got back. And uhm... he called me in the back room one night and he said 'Listen.' He goes like 'I want you to know something.' He said, 'I went to get some help for myself.' He said 'It's pretty obvious that you can't stop doing what you're doing so I had to get some help for me. And this counsellor told that if I continue to let you steal money, if I continue to let you uhm do the things you're doing in this family and in this business that I'm just helping you kill yourself and I'm not gonna help you kill yourself anymore. So, I'm telling you right now if I catch you stealing fifty cents outta this place you're out. You're out of the family, you're out of the business. You're done. I'll wash my hands completely of you. And uhm, this was my dad you know. This was my Cub Scout leader. This was the man that I looked up to my entire life. And I put him in that position where he had to you know, he was gonna have to cut me off. And it, it wasn't gonna take long because it wasn't an hour after that conversation I had the fucking money, you know. And I had the dope man on his way. And uhm, so we talk about being powerless over our addiction, our lives are unmanageable. I know what that means because, that, that, that night I put everything that was important to me, my hopes and dreams of being the pizza tsar, my family, my business, absolutely everything and I traded it for one stinking shot of dope. I traded it all. I traded my whole life for one shot of dope. And uhm because I couldn't stop. I could not stop. Could not stop. I couldn't just say 'Oh I think I'll make a good choice today and not use.' I'd say that but ten minutes later I got the fucking dope man on the phone you know, and uh I couldn't stop.

Mr T: And uhm, and I ended up taking all the money from both stores that weekend. Uhm and I called my dad on Monday morning, and I told him what I did. I wanted him to hear it from me. I didn't want him to call the bank and find out if the deposits were made because I knew that's what he was gonna do. And uhm, and he said 'T... don't do anything stupid.' I said, 'I won't dad.' And I just hung up the phone. And uh and then I took the ah, the change that I just cleared out of the change drawer and uhm took to the dope man and got as much as I could get for that. And uh front. And uhm, and there was, the place I was staying I didn't have my own place anymore, I was staying with this other guy. Ah, I was just renting a room. And uhm, he had this, his, he had a cousin that would come over periodically and ah, she used the way I did. We jumped to her car; she had a car. And uhm, we just took off. And we ended up at uh, a place about, it's about seventy miles from Columbus. It's a, it was a little resort area called Apple Valley. My parents were building a house there. They were building their dream house. It's right on the lake. My mom and dad always liked to fish and boat and do all that stuff and, and ah, it was February and uhm... so we, we just were up in that neighbourhood, and I said, I told this girl I say, 'Let's just go see how this construction project is going.' You know, so we went over there. And I stood out in front of this house and the, the outside of the structure was almost done and uhm my dad's dock and everything was behind me. I'm standing in front of the house facing the lake and I'm standing up by the lake looking at it. You know, my sponsor told me there comes a time in every man's life when God will reveal to him exactly who and what He is. And that's where it happened for me. I stood there and I looked at that house and it was beautiful. You know I looked at it and it

represented how hard my dad had worked. My dad worked two jobs for as long as I could remember. And I, and I, it represented uh, it represented hard work and honesty and uhm, and dedication. And a whole bunch of things that I didn't have any left, anything left of. And I, I looked at that house and I knew I was never gonna have anything. And I knew I was never gonna be anybody. And I knew I was never gonna do anything. Uhm and I stood there, and I was just as hopeless and as desperate as I've ever been. And I put an awful lot of shit in my arm that day. And it wasn't killing the pain anymore and I just started to cry. And this girl put her arm around me, she said 'Come on let's get out of here.' And uh we got in her car, and we took off. And we went back to the house where I was staying, where I was renting a room and uh, and I walked in and the dude I was living with comes to the door and he goes 'Man what the hell have you been doing? Because everybody's been calling for you all day. Your dad's been here like five times. I can't have this shit man. I'm trying to sell dope here.' You know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And I...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: I just said 'I don't know man. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't what I'm doing anymore.' And I looked and my dad was standing, and I went over, and I let him, and he just charged in at me. And he just threw his around me and he hugged me, just held on to me. And uhm, and he says, 'I love you, but you are killing yourself.' I said 'I know dad. I can't stop.' And I said, 'I got to get some help.' And I had said that to my dad a couple times previously, but I had never

really meant it. You know with that one time I said to him ‘Dad I got to get some help.’ I really meant it. I really wanted some help. And uhm, we talked for a few minutes, and he left and came back the next morning and uhm...

Uhm, I got on the phone and I dialled like one eight hundred dope fiend or some number that I got somewhere...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: ...I don't know what it was but...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: They...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: They told me where there was some treatments centres. And uhm, I got clean in 1987 when you can, you know they had a lot of inpatient treatment centres, and they weren't absolutely impossible to get into. Uhm, they gave me the names of a couple of them, and I called around and I mean, I was ready to go right now. And nobody could get me in right now. And uh, the best, the best hope we had was this one place said that uh, they could get me in for an interview in three days. My dad said ‘Look,’ he says ‘If you can come to my house and not bring any that stuff with you, you can come and stay there. And I'll take you to this treatment, treatment centre in three days.’ And I said, ‘Alright dad, I'll do it.’ And I, I left all my shit there and I just went with my dad. And uh, I laid on his couch and shook and shivered all the things that we do and, uh and three days later I got up and I remember taking a shower and I got out of the shower and I went, and I went to shave and I had a moustache then and I was, I was shaking so bad that I, I messed up my moustache when I

was trying shave. So, I had to shave it off. And uhm, when they took me to treatment, you know and I went in there and I had this interview with this lady and uh, she asked if I had insurance. And...and I did have insurance. And we called the insurance carrier and they said that they would cover the recover treatment for alcoholism but if there is any illegal substances in your system then they wouldn't pay for it. So, she said uhm, she says, 'Mr Sir, do you have twenty five hundred dollars you could put down on your stay here a Riverside?' And my dad goes 'Lady if he had twenty-five hundred bucks, he wouldn't be here.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: 'And I ain't paying twenty-five hundred bucks for him either.' So, uhm she said hang on and she left, and she came back in the room and she put a wristband on me. And uh, she goes 'I'm going to get you in here if I got to take you to the emergency room.' And I looked at my wristband and it said that I had Doctor Pepper. My doctor was Doctor Pepper.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And I'm like great. My life is in crisis I got Doctor Pepper. And...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: ...And uhm, as it turns out, he's probably one of the foremost addictionologists in the country. Guys, the guy is brilliant, I mean he's like just good, he's got like a really big head. It's just full of brains...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: But I've got the utmost respect for him. If you'd see a picture of him, you know I'm not really lying. He's got a really big head.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And uhm, ah, so I went into treatment and uhm, they put me in pyjamas. They night. And I went down to that meeting and uhm... I sat in that meeting. They said, 'Does anybody have a topic?' And I said 'Yeah, I don't know how I'm supposed to live with all the things I've done. I've just uh, I've done things I can't live with.' You know. 'I don't know how I'm supposed to go on.' And there was a guy there at that meeting, his name was Michael. And Michael was a, he was a real addict. And uhm, he was kind of one of the original cast of characters in Columbus that started NA and he had like these glasses. They looked down like this and he looked real squirrely and he had hair that went all over the place, and he just looked like a criminal. And...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And, uh, and M... said 'Your topic is beating yourself up at the past.' And I said 'Okay.' And uh, they went around the room and people shared about that particular meeting. They broke up into little, small tables and there's only like six or eight at a table, so everybody really had time to share and, and he said, he said 'Listen.' He said 'There's no two-way tickets. What's done is done. You can't go back and change any of that stuff.' You know. He says

‘The good news is all of us here are just like you. We’ve all done the same things that you’ve done. You haven’t done anything that somebody else here hasn’t done. I guess there’s a name for it. That means somebody else has done it. And one of those people is in this room.’ And uhm, he said ‘Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to take all that guilt and shame you’ve got, and I want you to stick it on a shelf and don’t worry about it for right now. Because you’ll deal with all that when you get to steps eight and nine. That all you need to worry about right now is step one and not picking up today which you ought to be able to do because your ass is in treatment.’ And uhm, and I looked at him and like I said he looked like a criminal, and I really identified with him and he cussed a lot you know and I, uhm, that, that bought him credibility in my book. You know I’ve, I’ve been to so many counsellors and different places you know, where people were educated. I’ve never had anybody that was an addict look at me and say that, you know, ‘Yeah, I’m addict too. So what? Don’t fucking use.’ you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And uhm, well but you don’t understand, I, I robbed the family business. Big fucking deal. I blew up my family business I mean...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: You know what I mean?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: He’s talking about building pipe bombs and stuff I mean...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And, and he was one of the old timers there I mean. He was, the guy, it was 1987, he had six years clean years and, and uh...couple months later, I'm standing outside I got this guy to be my sponsor. M... found this guy to be my sponsor. And I'm standing outside this meeting hall and my sponsor always talked with his hands and he's talking to me, he's telling me about spirituality. And it's not a religious programme. It's a spiritual programme. And he's going on and on about spirituality. And M... comes walking up and he's standing there, his hair going everywhere and he's looking down at his glasses you know. And he goes 'I'll tell you the most spiritual thing that happened for me. First time I got laid clean. And I could feel it.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And uh my sponsor just looked at him goes 'M, get outta here.' And uhm, and but I remembered that and, and...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: I don't remember anything my sponsor told me, but I couldn't wait to get laid and it had been quite a while. Alright. Off track.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: So, ah, but I found hope in that first meeting you know and I looked around that room I didn't talk a lot. But I looked around that room especially when the meeting was over and that got in a big group hug and they said the prayer and then, and then I watched what they did. And, and uh, there was like little clumps of people around the room. Little groups of people that were talking about they were gonna go to Frishers after the meeting, they were gonna go bowling after the meeting, gonna go to a movie after the meeting. They were

gonna go do things. And I thought ‘Wow. These guys do things after the meeting.’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And, and I had no idea you know. Uhm, and I and I had some hope and, uh, and I looked, and I saw that they had a basic text and, and uh, and the treatment centre I was in didn’t give us that book. They gave us a different book. And I really wanted that NA book you know, and I said, ‘How much is that book?’ And they said, ‘Eight dollars.’ And I didn’t have any money, so I called my dad and I told him, ‘Dad I need ten dollars.’ And uhm, ‘For a book.’ He says ‘Jesus Christ all the money that they going to charge you for that place, they won’t give you a book?’ I’m like ‘Well, they gave me a book but it’s not the one I want.’ ‘Yeah, no shit. Like that’s new fucking news.’ And uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: So, he brought me ten dollars so I could buy an eight dollar book. And then I got it and uhm, and you know, I started going to meetings you know. I got out of there after three weeks and I just kept going to meetings. They told me, the one thing, the one thing I got out of treatment was they said ‘There is nothing we can tell you here in treatment that’s gonna keep you clean if you don’t go to meetings, you know. You gotta go to meetings. You’ll never make it.’ And uhm, and I and I gotta a spons, my sponsor told me, he says ‘Listen, so I want you to call me every single day. I don’t care if you wanna call, or you think you ought to call or you have any reason to call. Anything you wanna say. I want you to pick up the phone and dial my number ‘cause the only thing that makes any difference in your life is what you do. Nobody cares what you

think. Everything you think is wrong. Just know that if you think it. It's wrong.'"

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: Uhm

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr A: He said 'So I want you to get into the habit of dialling the phone and calling me since most of the time I'll, I won't be there anyway, just leave a message on my machine. And uhm, so I did. You know I go 'Hey B, this is S. I was just calling to check in. Bye.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And you know, and uh, I started doing it. I mean I just did what he said. He said got to a meeting every day. Call him every day. And uh, I made a decision to not go back, back to work for the pizza business. I was just gonna try to find something else to do. And uhm, so for not quite three months I didn't work at all. All I did was go to meetings. And work on my and focus on my recovery. And my parents let me move back in with them. And uhm and I didn't have a driver's license and I didn't have a car and I was living twenty miles from the nearest meeting, and I made it to a meeting every day. And most days I made it to two. You know, and my sponsor, I told my sponsor 'How am I supposed to get a meeting every day? I don't have a license. I don't have a car. I can't get around.' He says 'You got dope every day. I said 'Yeah, I remember I stole a car and drove Dayton, Ohio to buy a pound of weed.' He says 'Don't steal a car to go to a meeting.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: But ah, but I made to a meeting every day. And uhm, and I just started doing what they said to do and uh, and I started listening to my sponsor and doing what he said. And he shared his stuff with me you know. And uh when I listen to other people share and uh, I began to share and, and I gotta a thirty-day key tag. And I, and I thought you know, the freaking sky was gonna part and you know God was gonna come down himself and just hand it to me because it was such a miracle. I couldn't believe I had thirty days clean. Thirty days. Wow. And uhm, and I knew it was getting better you know, I was still crazy inside but, but I was staying clean even though I was crazy. And uhm, I just kept coming back, you know. I knew that uh, my sponsor got me started on the steps and I, and I knew that I was powerless over my addiction, my life was unmanageable so I couldn't stop using you know. I just couldn't stop. And uhm, I knew that there must have some power greater than myself that intervened because I have in fact, stopped using. And I could not stop you know. I mean I can't tell you, I can't looking back, I can't tell you one thing I did that made it possible for me to not use on my first day clean. I don't know what it was. I have to believe that it was a power greater than me that did that. Uhm and I had gotten on a prayer on my, uhm, I said a prayer on my dad's living room and uh, it was like God please help me because I don't know what to do, you know. And...and He did. You know. A God that I didn't have any understanding of it all gave me the power to not use that first day clean. You know and you got to get clean before you can stay clean. I went to meetings. And I could feel an energy in the room I don't know what it was. It was just an energy. It was uh... it was something that was helping

everybody stay clean. It was there. Something was there. I could feel it. I don't know what it was. I didn't know what to call it and that was my first concept of a higher power, and I just called a God because that's what you guys called it so. I mean I just took stole the name God and...and...and I you know my sponsor said you know you need to turn your will in your life over the care of God as you understand Him. But I'm like I don't even know what that means. I don't even understand how do you turn your will on your life over. The... none of the steps made any sense to me. Look at the steps they didn't make any sense to me I mean they told me there was 12 steps I'm like great I can find out what they are get them done get it together. Oh, look humbly ask him to remove our shortcomings. What the hell does that mean. You know. I got to that third step, and he said here's what I want you to do. I want you to get on your knees and I want you say that prayer right on the book. You know. Just read that prayer right out of the book. Take my will in my life guide me my recovery and show me how to live. I said I don't know if I have enough faith to say that prayer. He says I didn't ask you to have faith I ask you to get on your knees and read can you do that?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: I said all right and I started doing it. And he said you know he kept telling me the only thing to make any difference in your life is the action that you take nobody cares what you think and so I started doing it. I started saying that prayer and a little while after that he's I think at about four months clean he said I want you to I want you to start writing your inventory and he kind of explained how to write your inventory. We didn't have the flat book then and he said I just want you to you know he kind of gave me the directions said get

started on that. So, I brought it up as a topic at meetings for about 30 days and but never picked up a pen. And but I called B every day and and...and it would always change his answer message every day. Hey this is Bit's a great day to stay clean. Leave a message. Hey this is B why don't you pick up a newcomer today and take him to a meeting. Be you. Know one day I call in its hey this is B, T. write your inventory.

Crowd: And I knew he sponsored a bunch of people, and everybody was going to know I wouldn't work in the steps. So, I planned a Saturday. You know they say to write a little bit each day just write 15 minutes a day I don't do it that way. I planned a place to be where I could have privacy and I got some paper and a pen. And I got up at 7 o'clock in the morning. I said God whatever supposed to come out on this paper please let it come out. Let it be your will not mine. And I just wrote at the top of the page resentments, and I just started writing every resentment I could think. I thought of things I hadn't thought of in years. You know you know. And I called B up. B I'm writing about my resentments and I'm getting really pissed off. I don't think this inventory thing is working very well for me. You know it's like just keep doing it and I did that. And I couldn't think of any more resentments to write about so I real fear and I started writing about everything that I was afraid of and...and that section was really long. And I mean I wrote everything because he said if you after you say that prayer once you think of it you got to write it down. Don't decide if it needs to go just write it down so I'm...I'm afraid of spiders you know, and I write about my fear of spy me wrote about things that didn't have anything to do with using drugs and...and then I wrote about all my sexual misconduct and I was very disappointed to find it was only half the size of my fear section.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S : And I wrote a section called miscellaneous because it was stuff on there that I knew did new needed to go somewhere but I didn't know where it went. So I just wrote it in that section. And I wrote until about six o'clock that night and I called B up and I said I can't think of anything else to write. He says all right you can do your fifth step with anybody. You want you can do with a priest if that makes you feel comfortable. Or you can get a professional or something. Whatever you want to do all right. I'll pick you up on Tuesday for your fifth step. And that's how he did me. He said you know you're me... you can do it with anybody you want but I'll pick you up Tuesday you're doing with me. And uh he picked me up and...and we just drove around there Columbus has a outer belt it goes all around the city it's route 270 and we just drove around 270 and uh I did my fifth step and I shared everything with him you know. I didn't leave anything out. My deepest darkest secrets. I threw those out there. My things that were really insignificant like I'm afraid of spiders I threw that out there. It didn't make any difference. I threw it all out there. I put all the cards on the table because I want to stay clean. You know I was desperate to stay clean. I just wanted to stay clean and...and I wanted to start feeling better on the inside because I was getting pretty crazy you know and uh...he shared some of his stuff with me and I'm tell you what he was a sick pup. My sponsor was a sick one he needs to be here

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And...and but I left that thing and I remember thinking I mean I don't have any like spiritual awakening super big or anything, but I knew that I truly

wasn't alone. You know. I'm uh I'm just an addict and there's a whole bunch of us that are just addicts. And if I just keep coming back and will be alright you know. And start going to some events and I...I went to this convention in Bowling Green Kentucky it was the first Kentucky and original convention I know and I went down there and got there really...really late on Friday night at like two o'clock in the morning and the only meeting left there at a marathon meeting that went the entire weekend and I went to marathon meeting and I just started listening to people share that I'd never seen before. And there was probably 10 or 20 people from Columbus that were there and...and so there's a few people I knew. And I just stayed in the marathon meeting you know. And they had a bunch of workshops and stuff on Saturday I didn't go to any of those meetings. I stayed in the marathon meeting because that was the only place, I was comfortable. In a circle with a bunch of people sharing. I didn't feel comfortable in any of those things. And they had uh the speaker meeting that night GP was the main speaker. Slept right through it loved to tell you...you know that I've heard GP my first convention and missed it all. Sleeping in the lobby. And we didn't have a room so I was sleeping in the lobby and...and then they had a dance I woke up for the dance and I went in there and lights are flashing pretty girls are running around and... and I just froze. You know. I didn't how to do it I didn't know how to be in a social situation. The music made me want to get high. The flashing lights just kind of was freaking my eyes out and...and pretty girls I could not even begin to talk to them. Even though I heard it was going to be a spiritual experience later when in fact that happened and...and I saw I stayed in the dance for about five minutes and I left I went back to the marathon meeting and I just poured my guts out. I said I just went

in the dance man I'm 25 years old and I can't... I can't function in a dance I mean I can't...I can't be comfortable. I don't know what to do. And people shared with me to go oh yeah yeah...yeah that was me last year I was I'm in the marathon meeting now waiting on you...you know because I knew you were going to be here because there's one every year. You know this is your year evidently. And they told me it'll get better you know just keep going and. So, I kept going to as many functions. As how you know... We finished that convention and now well actually Sunday morning the guy that's my sponsor now was the speaker Sunday morning and...and he stood up there and he shared his experience and he cried from the podium. And uh and then he read we do recover first time I ever heard it. And after going through that at the dance and then hearing that read that we can't function either with or without drugs we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do. You know that's where I was. I couldn't function with drugs. I couldn't function without them. You know. I knew that I couldn't go back out and use and any working rule well here either you know what I mean. I mean I'm staying clean and I'm grateful and all that, but God I can't even go into dance for five minutes without panicking. And what is there left to do either goes on to the bitter ends best we can jail institutions or death or find a new way to live. You know and I had to find a new way to live and. I found one you know. I just kept coming back my sponsor told me just keep coming back till the miracle happens you know and. I kept going to those dances in and uh I never would dance you know. I finally got to where I could get in there and...and you know I be there, but you know I wasn't going out on the dance floor. And when I was at... I went back to the Kentucky and a regional convention the second when it was in Evansville Indiana, and I walked in the dance there and I and I felt a little

better you know, and I really wanted to get out there and dance I just couldn't quite make myself do it and this chick come up to me. She's just...God she was so pretty she goes will you dance with me. And I was so full of lust

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And so, and so full of fear. And the last one...you know. And I went out and danced with her and uh and I thought you know that living the lights you know the music didn't stop and everybody didn't notice or anything you know. And not a great time I know. So, I kept going to those things you know, and I went to a was actually a dance that there was a motorcycle club. I mean Columbus was having. They're not together anymore but they had these dances every once a month. And a lot of people from the other fellowship would go there. And some of us would go there and I went to this dance and...and I walk up and I'm talking to this girl, and I had a couple years clean by this time and I had a Harley you know so life is kind of getting together you know and I'm kind of cool I'm walking in. And then this girl's looking at me so I walk over and talk to her. And then this crazy redhead comes up and he like pushes right in between me and the other girl and she goes hey my name is L. You want to dance. And I'm like yeah sure. So, we go out and we dance. And then she goes C want you to meet my sponsor stakes me over to introduce me to her sponsor was kinda like meeting her mom and you know, and I got our number since here's my number call me shorty had it written down. She pulled it out of her pocket, and she handed to me said L red hair underlined and the phone number. And when I called her up and I asked around and...and You know she said she would, and I wouldn't picked her up and. Nine months later we were married and then we're still married and...and she's my soul mate you know and I...I love her more

now than I did the day we got married. That's a gift. You know it truly is a gift. She drives me crazy sometimes but us I still love her and...and we've built a life together you know we've...we've had it pretty good. You know it's been the last couple years have been a little rough not between her and I just some other things some stuff with our kids and our finances aren't real good right now and you know but we're hanging in there and we're hanging together. But anyway, I want to get back to something else that. You know when I was in that first meeting and that guy told me to take that guilt and shame and put it up on the shelf you know. I deal with that in steps eight and nine. So, I got to I got to step eight and my sponsor told me to make that list you know make a list of all the people you had harmed he told me to write about each situation. You know when I did that, and we sat down together, and we examined that list. And that's the step where... I mean step eight's really, it's not just a list it's another inventory. And having the experience from right my first fourth step inventory when I got to that eight-step inventory, I'm able to see things a little bit better I'm able to peel off a few more layers of the onion and I'm able to really get down there and find motives. You know and I can see where my self-seeking and my fear and my selfishness and my arrogance and myself pity drove me to do things you know. Those are the things that drive me. Those are the defects in my character my...my selfishness my...my arrogance my pride especially my pride is the worst and...and fear and those are the things that drive me those are the root causes that drives me to do things and...and I don't have the power on my own to make that different that part of who I am you know what I mean. I mean I'd love to just say God please remove all self-pity and never... never come back you know that'd be great but the best I can give to

say God please take away all my defects of character stand in the way of serving you for today. Please let me do your will and not mine you know. And then just for today I will hope and pray that you know God might relieve enough of my selfishness enough of my fear. Enough of my self-pity. Enough of my arrogance that I might be able to do something in accordance with His will for that day you know. But anyway, I kind of fell backwards there on step eight you know I...I saw how those different things were affecting all my relationships and B helped me make a list of who I was going to go to...to make my ninth step amends. And I had this whole list of old girlfriends. You know. They just scratched all those off he goes that just ain't happening. I'm like why not...I really harmed those girls. I should go back and make amends. And he says you just want to get laid. You're not going anywhere near those girls. And when he says if I'm wrong they'll show up and they haven't. So, he says here's what I want you to do I want you to make amends with your parents. Want you to sit down with them and tell them you know what you're trying to do in the steps. That you're trying to make amends that you're going to have to pay back some money and you guys need to come up with an amount of money that is acceptable for them and acceptable for you and then you're going to have to work to pay it off. And I said all right and I called my parents, and I scheduled that appointment. And I sat down with my mom and as soon as I start talking my mom burst into tears. And my dad gets a little teary-eyed and now I'm crying and...and you know we agreed on an amount of money. You know they said my mom says I don't care I just want you to stay clean. I don't care about the money. I said my sponsor said you would say that but if you really want me to stay clean you got to take my money

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: So, we picked an amount that was painful

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: And I paid that back you know and, but I'll tell you what I left that day and I left in a car that I was driving. And I had a driver's license in my pocket, and I started to drive home, and this overwhelming gratitude came on me and I started to cry in the car. And I couldn't stop crying. You know and what happened was I was free I'm free from all that shit. All that shit up on the shelf it came off. And I could see it on the shelf the whole time I was clean until I did my amends. And I had some more to make but that first one was huge. And I didn't have to look down anymore and I can look somebody in the eye. I have to look in the rear-view mirror anymore. I don't have to be afraid of what anybody's saying about me. I'm fucking free. I'm free. You know. What a gift. What a gift. I'm free. It's a new way to live. Without all that guilt and shame. Without all that remorse. Without all that self-hatred. I hated who I was. I fucken' hated who I was. I'm free of that. I'm free of all that desperation. I ain't got to use today. I don't have to use you know and we got some pretty serious going on back in Columbus um. But I ain't got to pick up. You know. The... the chips will fall wherever they may fall. But I ain't going to get loaded over it. You know. Just for today I know that and it's a gift. 2004 Valentine's Day my mom died. When I was with her there was a bunch of her friends. And my dad and I and my wife were in the room with her and when she took her last breath and...and I miss my mom you know. I miss my mom and I wouldn't have traded that experience for anything. It was something spiritual about being there.

It's...I mean it was sad. It was beyond sad but at the same time. As something kind of spiritual. You know and uh two years later my dad died. You know and my dad had cancer. He died really painfully. My wife and I were taking care of him. Hospice was then they... They were given I mean we had enough drugs in that cabinet to get this whole room high for a week. Maybe not you guys

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: But for a day. And not one drop of that stuff went anywhere it wasn't supposed to be. You know. And when he finally died, we called the hospice people and they came and... and took him away and they did an inventory on the on all the drugs and all the drugs were there and...and I buried my dad. \*Long pause\* And I just want to call him. I just want to call him on phone talk to him. \*Clears Throat\* So I do. I mean I don't pick up a phone and talk to him. But I pray. And the particular brand of spirituality that I have allows me to talk to people because I believe that we're a spirit in a body. Not a body with spirit. I believe that his spirit and my mom spirit is still out there somewhere, and I can talk to him you know. And I do and sometimes, sometimes I just know they hear me. You know. Anyway, looking at the clock and I'm seeing that it's almost six o'clock and one of the things my first sponsor told me was I don't care where you are in your story when you see that the meetings over say something nice about the fellowship and sit down.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr T: All I can tell you is the programme works. You know. If you've been here while you know that. And if you're new I can just you mean. I can't cheat you out your own experience you know. You've got to find out for yourself. Just

keep coming back because it does work, and we do find freedom. And all that insanity, that obsession to use. I mean right when I first got here, I thought that obsession would never leave you know, and it did. And... and I thought some of those outside things those outside problems I had that I just thought I'd never work through those and I did you know. And you know now I got the wreckage of my recovery to deal with. And you know it's all a gift anyway. You know to be standing here clean in Queens, 23 years clean. It's a miracle.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr T: My friend G. There's a bunch of people here that I really wanted to spend a lot of time with and there's just too many of them I can't sit down and talk an hour with each one of them, but it's been great. You know that's all I got thanks for letting me share.

#### **Vlog 4 Transcript: Mr S**

Mr S: I'm an addict named S. Scared. Blessed to be with you. Like to take a moment and uh and thank God for bringing us all here. It's just amazing. It's a Saturday night you know and we're all in this place and I'm real grateful I've got a lot of gratitude of my aunt I want to thank the Kentuckiana region for inviting me to share my experience strength and hope with you it still blows me away the people like us are invited anywhere

Crowd: \*Whoo\*

Mr S: Very, very, very grateful. I uh coming here to uh to Indiana I don't even know this Kentucky and Indiana. Thing is I do a lot of traveling you know I travel out of Cincinnati Airport. They tell me it's Kentucky the Kentuckiana regional

convention is in Indiana so I don't even know where I am, but I know I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: I do a lot of travelling in my business and this week since Tuesday, I've been on eight planes and six airports. And uh, you know when I was asked to share here, this weekend, the first thing that I told D was I have to ask my wife for permission.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: 'Cause I've learned some lessons in here, day at a time. My sponsor told me sometimes it's easier for you to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission. So now I ask for permission.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And uh tomorrow we were planning on going to the circus with my two sons. And uhm, but I'd let you know that uh there's no place that I'd rather be than at this convention right here, right now.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: So, a little bit weary off the planes. God I was on this plane. It was small. It was a small puddle jumper coming out of Cincinnati.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And it was rough weather because it was a little, it was raining and all that. And I like rollercoasters, but I don't like when planes do that shit.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Man, I was like this ain't no fucking joke.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Whooo! But when I came here and I put my bag in the room, I was soon to learn that the Kentuckiana region of Narcotics Anonymous loves me. I could feel the love.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: I'm very, very grateful to be here. It's an honour and a privilege to be asked to share my experience, strength, and hope. And uhm, you know I'm pumped up. I got a lot of love this weekend. Uhm, I'm definitely plugged in. This light bulb is shining. But the power is coming from another source.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Okay? And I know my help has come. I am just a vehicle. That's it. Everybody has a story in Narcotics Anonymous. In placing principles before personalities. It's not who's saying it. It's what's being said. So uhm, I'm not gonna get into a whole war story. That I'm not gonna do. First, I'm gonna. I want to just take a moment and uhm and dedicate this message to our predecessors. Many who are not here right now in the physical.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: But. \*Applause along\*

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: But their spirit marches on.

Crowd: \*Cheers of encouragement\*

Mr S: Because when we love those children, we're carrying the message.

Crowd: Yeah!

Mr S: And lastly, I wanna dedicate this message to the newcomer. Will everybody under ninety days clean, please stand up.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: Welcome. We've been waiting for you.

Crowd: \*Cheers of encouragement\*

Mr S: Welcome to Narcotics Anonymous.

Crowd: \*Cheers\*

Mr S: This is really a beautiful thing. Recovery is not a given. It's an opportunity. And uhm if you keep doing what we do, a day at a time, Narcotics Anonymous will give you a gift. And that gift is called a choice. And that choice is that just for today, you never have to use again.

Crowd: Wooh! \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: There's a light at the end of the tunnel. And it's not a train.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Okay? That light is recovering addicts. That light is faith, is hope in the dark. That's us at the end of the tunnel saying you do what we do. And you'll be where we're at or at least you'll be where you're at clean. You know Narcotics Anonymous is a simple programme. And I'm, I'm, I'm not a book thumper, but I bring it. I read it. These books are uh, incredible. One thing that I'm gonna share with you out of the chapter, we do recover. I think it's one of the most

profound single sentences in the book. It says we don't not have to understand this programme for it to work. All we have to do is follow direction.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Man in

Crowd: Right on brother!

Mr S: And the key to this programme is simplicity. You know uhm I'm not gonna get into a war story, how I got here is not nearly as important as how I've been able to stay here a day at a time. By the grace of God and through the love of the people in Narcotics Anonymous, I've been clean for six days. Five months. And twenty years.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: One day at a time. Sometimes one moment at a time. Sometimes one minute at a time. Sometimes one hour at a time. And uhm, if you knew you just fasten your seat belt because you're in for the ride of your life. This is a spectacular journey. The journey of a lifetime begins with one day and the first step. And uhm, you know this is a Saturday night and uhm, you know. Saturday night into Sunday were a horror show for me. It was just, it was the same old, same old, same old, same old. And I, you know, insanity for me was not doing the same things over and over and expecting different results. Insanity for me was doing the same things over and over, I knew what I was getting into, and I was willing to pay the price. It had been a; it had been like this for so long I couldn't claim ignorance. You know for so long it was like that. You know for so long it was three and four day runs. For so long you I'd be a dressing in Neiman Marcus suits, Giorgio Armani ties, Johnson and Murphy's shoes but the soles of my

shoes were so thin if I would have stepped on a piece of bubble-gum, I could have told you what flavour it was.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know when I was running hard and fast and long and uhm, you know I remember, I remem, I remember to remember where I came from.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: Uhm, you Saturday nights into Sundays you know, was just uh you know, I wou, I wou, it was hope based in desperation. It was a very dark place with not much light at all. You know it was like hoping that the cops spot would be open on Sunday. Hoping that I didn't get beaten by dummies. You know hoping that we went back to my place that you went to the bathrooms so that I could take some of yours. And hoping that when I went to the bathroom, you didn't take some of mine.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know it was always a keeper going back and forth and back and forth and you know like hiding money from myself.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Who in this world hides money from themselves?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know what I mean. Just crazy stuff. And uh, you know, uhm, I'm blessed today. I'm just blessed that I don't have to live that way anymore. You know I'm blessed that I'm not like you know I, I remember like you know g-g-going

and, and I used to cop in Harlem and uhm Wa-Washington Heights on Saint Nick Wordsworth with an auto bomb and a bible in my hand on Sunday morning, so it looked like I fit in with the people that were going to church. But I was so, I was so whacked. I was so zooted. I was so paranoid I thought the people in front of me were following me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: I was whacked! You know which is always the same old, same old you know what I mean? I'd be, I uh you know I lived in, in Fort Lee New Jersey, the first stop over the George Washington Bridge that connected Washington Heights, New York to New Jersey and sometimes when I had the money I took a bus, you know what I mean. And I'd put like a Walkman on uh, they didn't have batteries because I was shaking. I wanted people to at least think that I was like listening to music or something like that.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know. I get back to my place, I'd smoke everything up. I'd be like, you know, I'd be like lifting up the hood on the stove and smoking mozzarella cheese at the end of the night you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: It was crazy. I'd be like burning my hair with the stove. I'd have no eyebrows. I'd come out on Monday and my friends would look at me. They'd say 'Hey S, you look like you got some colour this weekend, you go to the beach?' I said 'No, I never left the damn kitchen.'

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr S: It was crazy. Yeah, it's funny today. It wasn't so funny back then.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know uhm, the last day that I used was like any other day that I used. And uh, and what ended up happening was I wasn't thinking to myself. I wasn't saying like I'm gonna make a Narcotics Anonymous meeting tomorrow night. Uhm that wasn't on the agenda. Uh, as a matter of fact. I hadn't done one of those yet. You're eligible to. And what it was, was that I was begging for change 'cause you know I was, I was on like a three or four day run. And I, I uh, you know I had like blisters on the bottom. I was, I was like all tore up and I didn't think that I could walk back over the GW Bridge, so I was tryna grab some money to take a bus back across. And I was begging for change to get back. I never did that and uhm, you know something the very next day God gave me change because he picked me up, He turned me around and He placed my feet on solid ground. I ended up in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: I didn't go to a detox or rehab. I'm a by-product to the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. I believe in one disease, one programme, one sponsor, one home group, one recovery. I am grateful for the unity and the love of this fellowship. My first meeting that I made was uhm, was at Yonkers General Hospital and I was in the cafeteria and the home groups name was the Emergency room.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Yeah, they knew I was coming. By the time I got here it was an emergency. My ass was on fire. I didn't care who the hell put it out.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And uhm, I was the only white guy in the room that night. And I'm just so grateful for my brothers and sisters in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. But it doesn't matter what or how much you used, who your connections were. It doesn't matter you know what your race, creed, religion, lack of religion, sexual identity. None of that stuff matters in here you know. It's uh, it's a beautiful thing, the unconditional love that's in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. And I don't remember much from the meeting that night like I said I didn't go to a detox, so I was out of my mind at the first meeting. And uhm, but I do remember the guy that was sharing. His name was J.M and J hit me in like, like a cannonball in the chest. He said uh 'Surrender to the high cost of low living.' And it was like, (thumps chest) it hit me right here. And uhm, like I said I don't remember much from the meeting that night. After the meeting, uhm, some guys came over to me and they said 'S, you look like you're uh, you look like you're confused like you don't know what's going on in here.' And they were right because the guy that was sharing was also sharing about shooting dope with an eyedropper in a bobo and tying up and squeezing off.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And I didn't know any of that. And I was comparing. And the guy came up to me and he said 'You know something? It's about identifying and not comparing. Everybody's got different bottoms. Just remember yours. Yours is the only one that counts.' And that was important for me. I never used needles. I thought that Narcotics Anonymous might have stood of Needles Anonymous.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: But it doesn't. It doesn't matter what or how much you used in this place. You know it doesn't matter you know, you know, it doesn't matter. None of that, you know. We, we, we might have come in on different ships but by the time you come to a place like this, we're all in the same boat. So uh, no matter what you use, welcome. And uh...

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: R. M ended up coming over to me this guy, R. M, may he rest in peace. He came over to me with a meeting list with some phone numbers on it. He asked me for my phone number too. And he said, 'Why don't you come out with us for a cup of coffee after the meeting?' Uhm and I said 'Sure.' I was down for a cup of coffee. I didn't want to go home. I had nothing to do. He said 'But first there's this business meeting. It'll be quick. Why don't you stay for it?'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Yeah. Quick.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Right. And at that business meeting, he uhm, he raised his hand and he said 'I nominate S to make coffee at this meeting.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And underneath, underneath my breath I said, 'That motherfucker.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: He's trying to do me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: But I didn't know. I didn't know that he was doing for me, that which was done for him. And that's what we do up in this place. And the thing is, that after living the way that I was living okay? I didn't think that I could be responsible to myself. All right I was living in a room with fourteen loads of dirty rancid laundry on the floor. I hadn't opened up my mail in eighteen months. I was living my life through my answering machine screening phone calls. I mean like my, my family threw me a birthday party my last year of using and I didn't show up and my mother was like 'S, just pick up the phone. We just wanna know that you're alive.' And I didn't have the courage to pick up the phone. I was sleeping on a bed with no sheets, pissing in Budweiser cans and this didn't happen in one day. I was living like this for a while and after you know, not being responsible to myself, I think how could I be responsible to this group and make coffee every Sunday night at eight o'clock? But in spite of myself, the word yes came out of my mouth. And I made coffee and I made friends. And I made one bad pot of coffee and I got to meet everybody in the room.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: That's how it was. Because I got pastello. I got pastello at the bodega. And the percolator pot, I forgot to use that thing that holds the coffee. I dumped it in the water.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: The shit was thick and strong you know. People didn't know if it was a higher powered speaker or a heavenly coffee. They were shaken.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: But you know something after the meeting, the people in the, the people in this this group came over to me and the next week they said, 'We'll come early, we'll, we'll show you how to make a good pot of coffee.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And that's the thing. That's how Narcotics Anonymous works. Nobody ever told me what to do. You people showed me what to do. The example is the most powerful message that we have up in here you know. There's a saying if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. And if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. Thank you Narcotics Anonymous for loving me.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: You know so what ended up happening was uhm, you know I remember uh, uh I had that coffee commitment, you know. I was making meetings every day. So, I would, you know, not just every day. On Fridays I'd make Friday night six thirty beginners meeting, eight o'clock candlelight we'd hop into New York City, I'd make a midnight meeting and then it was a dance club that was close to there. Uh Saturday I'd make a noon meeting, a six o'clock meeting at night, an eight o'clock candlelight meeting. I was a meeting making motherfucker.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: To be honest with you. To be honest, I'm mean I'm telling my story. This is just the way it is. I'm not the spiritual speaker. That's tomorrow on East Sunday.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: This is Saturday night.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: We're gonna party tonight.

Crowd: \*Cheers\*

Mr S: Wooooooooo!

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr S: So, I made meetings. Okay. Everything I needed to stay clean. I heard at my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting, they told me come early. Stay late. Get involved. Get a coffee commitment. Help with the ashtrays, the brooms, the chairs. When I came in, I'd say 'Can I read? Can I read?' I mean I was you know, I was gung-ho. They told me to get a sponsor. A sponsor is just another recovering addict who was a year or more clean time and a working knowledge of the twelve steps and twelve traditions. The most important thing about a sponsor is that they can be available to you. Ask that question. Will you sponsor me? Can you be available to me? That's very important. And it's just another recovering addict. Don't put a sponsor in any place where they don't belong. They're just another recovering addict and they are human too you know. They told me to learn to identify and not compare. You know they told me that uh, you know uh, it's when you identify that you're looking for a way in. And that it's when you're comparing that you're looking for a way out. And this disease speaks to me in my own voice. It's easy for me to find, find a way out and find the exit from anywhere. That's always an easy thing for me to do. Uhm, they told me to stay away from people, places and things. Reason why they told me that is you, you hear things in here, you hear things like 'If

you hang out in the barber shop long enough, you're gonna get a haircut.' You know. They told me 'You don't go into the lion's den with pork chop underwear...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: ...and tell the lion to chill out. Cause he's gonna eat up your ass real quick.' you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: 'You don't go into a whore house to hear the piano player.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: It's simple. It's simple stuff. Making meetings was very, very important. Meeting makers make it. In the readings it says those who make meetings regularly stay clean.

Crowd: Stay clean.

Mr S: Many meetings, many chances. Few meetings, few chances. No meetings. No chances. So, like suggestions are very, very important. We don't have to understand this programme for it to work for us. All we have to do is follow direction. And be loved. Let us love you until you can learn to love yourself. Because the love, this disease has met its master. Love turns dead ends into endless highways. The possibilities are so far beyond my comprehension. If I would have told you what I expected to get out of recovery in my first ninety days. I would have sold myself short like I did my whole damn life. I believed I was a C or a D. I believed I was the grades I got on my report card. And I am not the grades I got on my report card. I have been loved by you. You people

believed in me and wanted to help me in my recovery. That's why I'm here. Because you people loved me. You took a stand for me. You accepted me. You believed in me. Sometimes you even tolerated me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: 'Cause I've done some crazy shit in here.

Crowd: \*Cheers, laughs, Applause\*

Mr S: So, I'm grateful for your love. Service is a very, very important thing and I have had a commitment in this fellowship Narcotics Anonymous since my first day clean. I've had a commitment for over twenty years. I have, but my, when I got into recovery, my sponsor mandated me to be in the middle of this programme.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: And just, just for you people that, that can't hear, I do some sign language in here. You know, mandated to be in the middle. It was not negotiable. If I was not making meetings, calling my sponsor, involved in service and working steps, he told me 'Then you can find a new sponsor.'

Man in

Crowd: Wooooo.

Mr S: You know, I'm... I mean it's important. There's no sugar-coating this stuff. When they told, me when I came in here, they said 'Change or die motherfucker.' That's what they told me. When I came into meetings in the beginning, they told me 'Listen, you sh-sit down, and you listen.' They said

‘God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason. To do twice as much listening and half as much talking.’

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr S: They said ‘You learned to listen, you listen to learn. You don’t know shit about recovery. When we want to know where to cop, we’ll ask you.’

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr S: Become a student. Today I know that I don’t know. I know that I’m teachable. Every day I learn. I learn from you people. You people are my hope. Hope stands for hearing, other, people’s, experience. I get my hope from you. I was listening to last night’s speaker. I was listening to today; I was in parenting and recovery. And spiritual principles, I got what I need. I was crying and I ain’t soft. But I was crying. And I wasn’t crying for the speaker. When I cry today, I cry for me. I am blessed. I heard what I needed to hear. I’m fragile. I’m frail and I’m weak. I’m not a finished product. God is through with me yet.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of encouragement\*

Mr S: But the healing has begun. The lie is dead.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: We don’t die.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: Today we multiply. We do recover.

Crowd: Yeah!

Mr S: This is a beautiful thing Narcotics Anonymous. And the way that recovery is possible is through the steps. And I got a sponsor and my sponsor guided me through the steps. And uh, I was guided through the twelve steps and twelve traditions of this programme within my first year of recovery. And there were some people that were saying 'Oh S' in the step of the month club.' Or 'S' stepologist.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: And like, you know, listen.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Whatever. You know that's just the way it is in a year. In the readings it says the sooner we face our problems, within our society, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible and productive members of that society. The sooner. You know the thing is, don't give people misinformation in this place. You know Narcotics Anonymous, is a beautiful place. But it says in our readings, we, we uh, uh, something about after, after we came to NA, we realised we were sick people. After. I mean there are some people in here that will piss on your head and tell you it's raining.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You can't believe everything that you hear. If you believe everything that you hear, when you get into a meeting, you'll walk out more fucked up than when you walked in.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Keep what you need. And leave the rest. And take something out with ya. You know it's important to take something out with ya. You know like I remember, uhm, I heard this story. First of all, you hear different things and I heard people say 'Oh they told me to dump. They told me to dump.' And our primary purpose is not to dump. Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who is still suffers. You see the thing is what happens in here is you're only here for an hour or an hour and a half a day and then there's twenty-two and half or twenty three hours out there and if you come in and you dump... The dirty water and then you go back out for twenty two and a half hours, this glass is gonna fill up with dirty water. But if you guided through the twelve steps, twelve traditions and the principles of this programme, it's like filling this glass up with solid rocks. And if you put a rock of acceptance and hope and faith and willingness and courage and trust and humility and, and, and, and forgiveness and perseverance and spirituality and service and understanding and compassion and empathy and unconditional love and forgiveness and abundance and there is an abundance of spiritual principles mind you, there are not just twenty-four spiritual principles

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: The more rocks that you have in the glass, the less room there is for dirty water.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: You know and that's how we get through what we need to go through a day at a time in here. You know cause we go through some stuff. You know life on life's terms, listen I'm not here to paint a pretty picture in and put whipped

cream and cherries on stuff. This is perhaps the most difficult that I've ever done in my life is staying clean. But the reality is it's beyond my wildest dreams and it's been worth it. You know by, by learning through being loved by another person and learning to stay away from the first one. It's that first one that always got me. That first... I never knew. I never knew one was too many when at a thousand was never enough. I never...they told me, you know, you think that they said 'If you stay away from the first one you don't have to worry about all of the rest. If you think staying away from the first one is tough, try staying away from the second one, that's even more difficult.' And that's what it's about. And that you know that I learned through the first step. You know I have a best friend MK and MK came shared at this convention years back. May he rest in peace. A foot soldier and my hero MK always used to say that the 12 steps and the 12 traditions were like 24 wrenches that will fit any size nut that walks into rooms of Narcotics Anonymous.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: Listen anything that's coming out of my mouth I didn't come up with one original thought, idea or profound saying. But I learned to listen, and I listened to learn I become a student. I needed to learn I needed to I needed to keep something and hold on to it in that hour and a half that would keep me clean for the next twenty two and a half hours. You know when I heard things about the 12 steps that the twelve steps were about cleaning it up keep it up. Clean it up, clean it up, give it up, make it up and keep it up. And it was about trust God. Clean house and help others. And it was about trace it. Face it. Replace it and erase it. You know and those things I kept close to my heart I needed stuff like that you know. When my sponsor guided me through the principles of this

programme and as a result of that I'm here today. And Narcotics Anonymous has given me many, many, many, many, many blessings and gifts and choices and opportunities. But it's only as a result of working the steps of this programme. You know if you're clean okay. Work the steps with the guidance of a sponsor because if you're not working the steps, it's like winning the lottery and you're not cashing in your ticket. You get it you got to dig. This is some cool stuff in here. We're miracles. This is miraculous that we have a gathering like this. In my first step it says that we're powerless over...we admitted that we are powerless over our addiction and our lives have become unmanageable. And my sponsor told me said do you know the difference between admitting and accepting. And I said no. He said you admit to you and accept for me. Okay so when I did my first step, I became honest with myself. I needed to learn. I needed to tell myself the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I cannot use safely or successfully without the whole package deal and paying severe consequences for my actions. All right. My second step says that we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could...could restore us to sanity. And my second step...thank God the second step came before the third step. You know what I mean cuz a Power greater than myself was like there were many, many, many power greater than myself. You know when I was out of my mind, and I felt like using you know I remember I had a little under ninety days clean and I called up my sponsor at night. My sponsor's name was P. S because he looked like Papa Smurf. And I said pops I'm not going to the meeting tonight. I'm not making coffee. I'm going to use. My sponsor said you just hold on because I'm coming to pick you up in five minutes. And he picked me up. And they say yeah you can carry the

message you can't carry the addict. There are times in my recovery where you people carried me. All right P.S brought me to the meeting that night. Okay and I shared. And I had veins coming out of places I didn't even know I had. I don't want to be with you if I wouldn't use with you people when you were when you were using. I don't believe you clean. I don't want this. You know I want to use. And you know something by the end of the meeting I felt a little bit better. I heard someone say one time the meetings are like orgies. You come out feeling so good and you don't know who did it to you.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S : And you know what that night that night I don't know who did it to me. But I didn't leave I didn't leave before the miracle happened. You know something magical happens around the tables in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. You know. So, coming to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to Saturday I remember being out of my mind in my apartment I call my sponsor I'd feel better. That was a Power greater than myself. When I didn't want to go to a meeting, but I had a commitment, and I made the meeting and I felt better. That was a Power greater than myself. You know there are times that I remember there were times I had two cats when I first got clean. Freedom and Faith. Look there are times that they kept me clean. Maybe it's because I didn't want to smoke cat litter at the end of the night but whatever it was it was a Power greater than myself. I remember being dressed up in a suit in New York City you all dressed up going to work and I'd be fucked. I you know I'd be...they say a monkey in a suit is still a monkey. You know I didn't feel right because it doesn't matter how you dress up the outside. Recovery is an inside job. So I was going through some feelings. But I'd see someone

walking by with key chains swinging. That was a Power greater than myself there were many, many, many Power greater than myself that could restore me to sanity. The ultimate form of insanity is for me to use again. Ok that's it in a nutshell. In the third step it says we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. And listen when I was on this step it was not about God. It wasn't really a God thing. You know this whole coming to believe is a process not an event and um I made a decision to turn my will in my life over to the good, orderly direction that this programme had to offer. I made a decision to continue no matter what. I made a decision to continue making meetings. To continue calling my sponsor. To continue being involved in service and to continue working steps and with that I wrote the four-step you know. I wrote my fourth step it did you know to think about the fourth step... hell I I've been on my fourth step for two years. Can't be on you Fourth step... you ain't doing the fourth step if you're on it for two years.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr S: You know it's my understanding you're doing your work in your fourth step when you have a pen in your hand and a piece of paper. It doesn't take that long to write. You know you just do it you do. You sit down you say a prayer dear God help me to be as honest and thorough as I can be. Thank You. Amen. Get busy. You know after I wrote my fourth step and that was the first thing in my whole life that I completed without cheating because I cheated my whole life. Got kicked out of Boston University in 1979 for cheating. You know I shared the fifth step with my sponsor. And we said a prayer and we invited God. And when I shared with him he was identifying. He was writing some stuff

down. He shared some stuff with me. I felt like I wasn't alone. He was identifying. I felt the love. I felt the compassion. I felt the under the underlying stream that runs between you and me I felt the love. And what ended up happening it was like my sponsor at the end he gave me a hug and a kiss, and he told me that he loved me. And I always thought that if you knew who I really was that you'd leave and wouldn't be there for me. And this was the only time in my life that one person knew everything about me. Because different people my family knew this. My using people knew that. My girlfriend knew this. You know by the time my life became so unmanageable everyone knew pretty much that I was using, and it collided. But I'm grateful for the love that my sponsor showed me, and it was like I emerged from isolation. I was like a cocoon turning into a butterfly and it was you know it was spectacular and I've done you know several fourth and fifth steps in recovery and the sixth step says that we were entirely ready for God to remove all these defects of character. And you know it's about willingness. It's about awareness. It's about open mindedness. It's about humility. You know you the thing is the these are these are steps you know these are difficult steps this is work. This takes work but there comes a point in time where we can't rationalise and justify our insane behaviour and say well, I'm not on that step or I'll shelf that for later or that's an old behaviour. Listen if you're doing it ain't no old behaviour. You know what I mean. And this disease can be arrested at some point and it's reworking these steps and you know when my sponsor was writing my fifth step, I said like what were you writing? And he said oh I was writing down your defects the character. I said, "Well what were they?" He said "Well you got them all."

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: So, you know that was the... you know and I really believe that defects of character you know the real deal for me is it there's only one. And it's fear. You know what I mean and it's about you know if there you hear different things in here defects of characters and things that I do that I shouldn't do and shortcomings the things that I don't do that I should do, and you know. Yeah, I heard someone say a defective character is like knowing that you have a flat tyre and a shortcoming is saying fuck it I'm driving on it anyway.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr S: I believe that the six-step is about the thought. The seven-step is about the action. You know and for that defects of character if it's the anger, the fear, the lust and that was a call most killed me lust in recovery. You know like that's a whole 'nother meeting you know it didn't matter if it was free or I was paying for it I was paying for it. I was in so much pain. I mean the way to build character in that seven step is just by doing the opposite. You know if I'm self centered and selfish that it's about being selfless and be learning to be there for the next guy. A lot of those spiritual principles I learned as a result of being involved in service. You know about being there for somebody else and not expecting anything in return. These were lessons that I didn't even know that I was learning until after I was in the middle of it. And I'm grateful for that my eighth step. You know um and I'm don't mean to gloss over seven and eight because those are ongoing man. You know once you think you got it in here. You're going to get it.

Crowd: \*Yeah\*

Mr S: You know I have not arrived. That ain't happening. I'm a work in progress. And in my eighth step I made a list of all person t and I that I've harmed and became willing to make amends for them all. They were people that came from my fourth step all the people that I hurt in recovery too. Because I came in here sharing the shit up. I left bruises behind, and I made the list. And I became willing and then I went over the list with my sponsor, and he crossed a whole bunch of people off the list. You know said you know you don't make amends to certain people. You might just end up in jail or killed. He said there's a big difference between telling a lie and being a damn fool. You know and you know even before this making amends thing I remember I came into the rooms also I was in debt \$48,000 I owed IRS \$18,000 and when I had 90 days clean they found me and they didn't want to hear I was you know not going to tell them we'll listen I'm on my slogans easy doesn't. Wait until I get on my ninth step. You know. I needed to learn to be responsible early on in recovery. You see freedom is not free. With freedom comes responsibility and you know so I made amends and a lot of them to the people that were close to me. The family and got to make amends to my mother and my father. My...all of my family all the people. The custom is I mean I just I was I was a blessed that I got to make amends to my dad while he was alive. I had seven good years clean with my dad where my actions spoke louder than my words. I got to do things for my father that he never did for me. I don't blame my father I know my father only knew the love that was given to him. Listen you can't give away what you don't have. He just didn't have it. But I remember when he was dying in the hospital and changing his diapers and feeding him like peaches when he was incoherent on morphine may he rest in peace. I'm

blessed with this programme man. This is just a spectacular thing and my tenth step it says that we continue to take personal inventory. When we were wrong promptly admitted it and that's just about slowing things down taking a break. You know taking a look at what...you can't claim ignorance to what your behaviour is today. You know what I mean. There's no right way to do the wrong thing. You know there isn't there's no right way to do the wrong thing and today it's about avoiding pain and maintaining happiness. And you know it's about cleaning up my side of the street. And thoroughly. I hate people that make amends and they're like I am really sorry that I did that, but this is why I did it. Like what? In my 11th step it says that we sought through prayer meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him. Praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. And you know an important word in that step is improve. Because I came in here only knowing foxhole prayers and then I learned to say the serenity prayer. And then I've learned some other prayers the most powerful prayer for me is help dear God help me. Just one word helps and there are many different ways that I pray. I pray in silence I pray with words I could pray with music. I could pray alone I could pray with you. You know and the same is true for meditation you know the most important thing is that you find something that that's comfortable that works for you. Try different things you know the most important thing for me is praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. Sometimes I like to tell God what to do and when to do it you know but God's will is always done and um you know when the twelfth step it says that having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these rituals in

all our affairs. And there are many spiritual awakenings that happened along the way. You know I remember the first day that I didn't feel like using that was a spiritual awakening when the obsession and the compulsion to use was lifted. You know when I was able to walk around with five or ten dollars in my pocket because five was one and ten was three. You know um many, many spiritual awakenings along the way. But as a result of these steps having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps. For me this programme worked for me and when I came in, I believed that it would work for you. But I felt so shitty about myself I didn't think it would work for me. And um you know the easy part of the step is trying to carry this message to addicts and the service that we do. You know man you could teach a parrot how to carry a message of recovery. But the message is meaningless unless we live it. You know um there are many different ways to carry the message many, many ways. We can do it through group service. We could do it through different hospitals and institutions. I'm an H and I kind of guy. That was my thing. This public information there's events and activities. There are GSR commitments. There are area service commitments. The most important thing is that you...you find an area service that you're comfortable with. And if you're able to take service outside of the group then you're joining the real foot soldiers. At Narcotics Anonymous you want to strengthen your recovery. Take a commitment outside of your group. This is not how it happens. This is how it works. You know service is a spectacular thing I'm grateful for the people who did service man. I remember coming into recovery I didn't know how to learn and live enjoy my life without the use of drugs. I remember going to dances when I was you know just getting clean you know. I remember some people saying

like oh I don't want to go that dance over there they're playing that sort of music or. I don't want to go to that picnic on that side of town because they're doing that. And listen I went to every dance, every picnic, every everything, you know. I went to picnics that's where I learned how to you know eat rice and beans and collard greens. You know I'm a man of colour today because of the love that this fellowship has given me. You got to try different things and be open-minded to different things and practice. You know. We increase our unity when we participate in each other's recovery. It's not about being black or white. It's about everybody being all right. You know love has no colour and this disease has no prejudices. So why should I become prejudiced. When I come in here man it didn't me that matter who I was copping from when I was using. All of a sudden, I come in here and I'm becoming particular. Who I can love and who can I allow to love me? Ain't that something else. I'm grateful for the service in Narcotics Anonymous and you know the most difficult part of the 12-step is trying to practice these principles in all our affairs. But if you ain't practicing them in all your affairs then you have too many damn affairs. Yeah, I'm not saying I'm golden, I'm Teflon. I come up short. Just ask my fucken wife. She points it out all the time. I come up short but I'm grateful that I have steps that I could rectify. That you know there are so many blessings' gifts and miracles. Man, when I was using, I never got off the corner. There were no holidays, no vacations, no sick days I lived to use that I used to live and as a result of having some choices made. I've been some places here. Man, I've been to Wyoming and Grand Teuton National Park. I've been horseback riding in the Grand Teutons, white-water rafting down the Snake River. I've seen bald eagles flying majestically through the sky. I've

seen deer and antelope and mooses. And stuff like that. I went up in a hot-air balloon 10,000 feet up in the air where God seems so big, and I seem so small. I remember my honeymoon we went to my wife a miner got married and recovery you know blessing gift to an Earthling. A Normie. Thank God. Then it's some sick ones and he although they can work in here. Not me. Because I was sick okay, I attract what I am. It's all a mirror in here this book might as well be a mirror. Let me tell you I went to Hawaii I was I was scuba diving with dolphins and turtles under the water. I mean it was like I was underwater like 50, 75 feet swimming saying don't you know I'm a crackhead. Just incredible. Um I got married and recovery that's a blessing and a gift my wife and myself tried to have children for our first like three four years in recovery. And we went through outside help and fertilisations and in utero inseminations. I think we must have had ten of them. And then we tried in vitro fertilisation and the first one didn't take and on the second one she got pregnant, and um and people were like you know hearing me sharing meetings and they would they were like man you're gonna make a great dad. We're so happy for you. You know this is just a blessing and then later on into the pregnancy my wife miscarried, and it was just devastating man. It was really like my whole world. Everything that I longed for. Everything that I did I know that I'm worthy of and deserving of it was shattered and dumped. Went into the patent and time release. People that I saw at meetings it could have been six months later were like how you doing dad. And it would be like ah I'd have to go through this thing time-released and what ended up happening was my wife and myself took some time off from the process because it was like it was really tough. It was like you know I'm ovulating let's do it. You know if my next-door

neighbour said that to me, I'd be down. You know what I mean. But it was tough it was. I felt a lot of pressure you know, and she did - it was tough on her. She was going through her own stuff, so we took a year off and then we started again. We embarked upon it, and I remember when we were going to see the sonogram the first time to see if there was a heartbeat. I was scared I called up my sponsor I said I feel like this is the day of judgment and he said. It's not the failure or success of this event is not if there's a heartbeat, he said the success is that you and your wife found the love and the courage within each other to try again. End up by the grace of God and through the love of the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous my son A was born on July 8th, 2004.

And then what happened was a couple of years later I was I do a lot of travelling and I was telling my wife my calendar and I'm busy and I'm busy. And I'm traveling from September through November. Right after Thanksgiving my workload was going to break, and we were going to embark upon in vitro fertilisation again January 1<sup>st</sup>. And what ended up happening was by the grace of God my wife became pregnant naturally. With the God you know the thing is what the doctors said was impossible God makes possible. You know so here's a picture and you want to know something it's an honour and a privilege to be a parent and recovery it's a commitment. It's an obligation. It's a responsibility to be mentally emotionally physically spiritually nourishing nurturing and supportive. And I'm just blessed for the love that I've shown that I was shown when I got here because you can't give away what you don't have. And I've learned a different way today and I have a beautiful wife she's my best friend in the whole world. I honestly say like listen I'm a great father. But I'm only a good husband. I heard what I needed to

hear at the meetings today and I got some work to do in my relationship with my wife when I get back home. Because I could be so accepting and so unconditional and so loving and so patient and so tolerant with all of my sponsees but I ain't giving it to my best friend. In the whole world my wife you know and um I got some work to do and that's only because God speaks through you. I am loud and clear the blessings and the gifts have been plentiful. God is the giver of every gift in my have my life today sometimes thanking Him isn't good enough. Sometimes I have to praise His name because He continues to do for me that which I could never do for myself. I am so grateful that when I was running the streets that whenever I forgot about Him. That He never forgot about me. It was then that he carried me you know I want to thank once again Kentuckiana region for asking me to share this is a beautiful weekend. A lot of love. A lot a lot of hugs. A lot of great recovery here. This is really about. Living and enjoying our life without the use of drugs and I'm going to close with the story that my best friend M.K used to share. May he rest in peace. My hero and he said about this guy that was looking for his spirituality and he was looking for his spirituality and he went into the rooms. Went into a meeting and he said how do I become more spiritual. How do I become more spiritual? And you know. You gave some advice in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous if there are 12 people you hear 14 answers in here. So fortunately, the last person said you know if you want to become more spiritual why don't you ask your sponsor. If you want what he has that you're going to become willing to do what he did. And he went up to a sponsor and said Hey spons I want to become more spiritual. I want to find my spirituality. He said what do I do. He said listen I want you to go into the

woods and I want you to go grizzly bear hunting. And he looked at him like grizzly bear. What does that have to do with spirituality, but he wanted the spongs had. So, he went into the woods with the rifle, and he went grizzly bear hunting. And he was in the woods, and it was cold, and it was dark and there were no grizzly bears around and that was colder, and the temperature dropped and it began to drizzle and get wet. And he was freezing, and he was like you know he was losing it a little bit. You know losing the commitment and the focus and the primary purpose and he would say man I'm getting hungry I'm cold I need warmth I need to dry up I need some food. He said fuck this I'm out of here. And he got up off the rock that he was sitting on he's starting to walk out of the woods and what happened was this great, great big old grizzly bear. Came up it's starting to run after him, and he saw the grizzly bear and he threw the rifle, and he ran like hell. And the grizzly bear ran after him, and he hit him right upside that and the guy fell down on the floor. And the guy said dear God I hope this is a spiritual grizzly bear and the grizzly bear looked up and said dear Lord please bless this meal that I'm about to receive. And what's the moral of the story if you're looking for something you're going to find it. You know if you're doing meth or you're smoking crack and you want to learn how to shoot dope you can find it in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. And if you want some love and you want some recovery you can find that in Narcotics Anonymous. And if you want some hostage and some pain then you can go to the dance and you can find it there. And then there's a marathon meeting after way you could share the pain. You know there's a lot of great things in here. You know there's the disease which is fear and there's love and imparting. I'll say you know don't let anybody tell you not somebody because

first things first you're a child of God and God doesn't make any junk. And if nobody told you they love you today I do when God loves you more but check out who you hanging out with. Thank you

### **Vlog 5 Transcript: Mr R**

Mr R: Uhm, I wanna say that anything I share up here is my experience, my strength, my hope, stuff I believe in. Uhm, and you gotta you know take what you can and leave the rest. Eat the chicken, spit out the bones you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I didn't come here; I don't go anywhere to tell anyone how you should recover or how you should work the steps. Or if you're not doing it like we, do it in my little camp, then you're doing it wrong uh, you know. No, I didn't come here for that. Uhm, I really, I really er, am humbled and uh, I'm still in awe of God's grace and His mercy in my life. Uhm, I cursed God, I shook my fist at God, I used to unload my nine millimetre in the sky. I hated God you know what I mean, I hated God. And uhm, so to be here and to be asked to share in any capacity. And I, like this is nice and I don't wanna devalue this or degrade this, but you know I just shared in a, in a H and I meeting where everybody was nodding out and it feels like they wasn't really listening. But uh, I believe that when we share our experience and hope uh that it could pierce a heart even without you noticing, you know what I mean. And so, so I, I, appre, I, that's an honour and this is an honour, you know what I mean. Like, uhm, so alright. This is supposed to be the spiritual meeting. I'm supposed to be the spiritual speaker.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: We, we'll see how it goes you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Uhm, you know I, when I got here, I was seventeen years old. I can't, I walked into the doors of Narcotics Anonymous I was seventeen years old. And uhm and I didn't, you know, where, where I come from, there, there in the format sometimes, they say please if you're new, uh try, try to identify and not compare. And they explained that which is pretty cool. They said when you identify, you look for the similarities. And when you compare, you're looking for the differences. And even though I said it and I understood it, I didn't know how to do it, you know what I'm saying. I said well if didn't get clean at you're seventeen then you don't know what it's like you know what I mean. Or if you got seventy year, seventeen years clean but you didn't get clean at seventeen you're ain't got no experience. So, so you're telling me your theory. And so, I was too busy, uh, uh comparing, looking for differences, the difference, this is the disease of separation. And uhm, so it took me a long time uh, to finally you know, the fog to lift, the noise to die down a little bit. Uhm, I, I would shoot the messenger on a regular basis. Uhm...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And you know I read \*Laughs\* and you know, so, so uh. February 28, 1991, uhm, I joined the no matter what club, alright. February 28, 1991, I went to a place, uh some people get offended, I hope I don't wanna offend you on purpose. But I just wanna share my, my share the way I share my share and when you get your turn, you share it your way you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Uhm, but I used to go this place called Saint Marks.

Crowd: \*Laughs and cheers\*

Mr R: Right, I used to go to Saint Marks and uhm, some people don't like that, don't say that. Well, it's, it was in a meeting in Saint Marks, you know what I mean. So uhm, I used to go to this place called Saint Mark's on, on Manhattan and they had meetings from click to click, alright. From early in the morning to late in the morning you know what I mean. And uh, I came back from a relapse and this old man, uh Santos, uh, he looked at me and he said, I said 'I got one day back again.' You know I was chippy; you know. One day back, one day back, one day back. And uhm and he said uhm, (swallows) he said 'Only punks go out.'

Person in

The Crowd: Oooh!

Mr R: Right. He said I just wanna let you know, he, we uh and like that's not NA stuff. Uh, that's, that's not very nice.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Uhm, you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: But... but it messed me up. You know what I mean. It, it. it affected me in a positive way. It affected my ego, it affected my, 'cause all my life I've been tryna prove to everybody that I'm not a punk. In fact, sometimes the disease says we still gotta prove that you're not a punk to people who are not looking no more. You know what I mean. And so but all my life I ain't no punk. You

think I'm a punk. You need something sweet over here? I ain't no punk. I ain't no punk. I'm not the one. And, and so when he said that it, it, it plucked a cord that only punks could go, I didn't like that. You know I'm an addict, you know. Pilots they fly planes. Bus drivers drive busses. Addicts we smoke crack, shoot dope, alcohol to Xanax, from a to z. We've used all the mind altering substances and he said 'Now let me tell you something, once you're hear this life transforming message of hope that an addict, any addict, a young, a young, stupid seventeen year old addict who thinks he knows everything, or a, a, a eighty year old addict who thinks he knows you know, any addict could stop using, lose the desire to use and finally win a new way of life. Once you have that message and you use is a cowardly thing.' He told me.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr R: And so, so I didn't like that. And he, he was just too old for me to lay hands on him, you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, so, so it messed me up and then, then I heard that there's a, there's a midnight check in. I'm sharing my experience. And I'm not saying this in the literature. I can say my experience. I told you, eat the chicken, spit out the bones you know what I mean. If it don't apply, let it fly? All slogan. Right. Okay. So, so they said, they said listen man, you know and, and he said for all you, you know, we want you to keep coming back and we're glad you made it. And we applaud (Applause hands) that you made it back. And it takes courage to come back. But we wanna let you know, for all you, the chippy

guys, the me guys, you know one day back every week, one day back, one and can't, if you're like that keep coming back.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Right 'cause there's only they, I, they, they, I, they wrote in my basic text there's only two mistakes you can make in Narcotics Anonymous they said. The first mistake you can make is pick up. The second mistake you can make is not come back.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of encouragement.\*

Mr R: Alright? Everything else is a learning experience. Okay? So, but if you are like me and couldn't get clean and I smoked crack in the bathroom and came and got a thirty day key tag right after I took a hit, right? I came geeking to get the key tag and I geeked my way back to the seat, talking about I had thirty days clean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know what I mean. So, if you're like that please keep coming back. I'm not saying this to discourage you or to degrade you or debase you. I'm saying what, what, what messed me up, what provoked me to join the no matter what club. So 'cause Santos said only punks go out and this other guy said if all you keep coming, you know all you chippy brothers who, you know in Saint Marks they didn't have a lot of key tags, you brothers that take all the white key tags should bring them back so that we can give them to other people...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: ...you know coming, you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, so th, so they said for you brothers right, we want, even if you keep using, keep coming back. But there is an elite group!

Person in

Crowd: Yeah.

Mr R: There are members of Narcotics Anon, an elite group they said. Uh, elite, I was like what that mean? Like the Navy Seals right?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: There, there are an elite group members in NA that, that listen, that, that their girlfriends are leaving them, their children are smoking crack, they're losing their jobs, they're getting divorced, their parents are dying, their children are getting topped and no matter what happens, these eloot, these elite members are not using no matter what.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr R: And I thought to myself, I wanna be a Navy Seal in NA.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I thought to myself wan, I wanna be able to, to you know, to me that's like wearing jewellery in jail.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know what I mean. Like no matter what, we don't use like what, yeah, I got thirty days? That's right. What? I got sixty days, yeah that, bri, you know I got the red key tag. That's right. What?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And it was, you know, it was a big deal. It was a big deal to wear the key tags. You know in New York, you wear key tags, yo easy does it. Just for today. And you it was like yeah, I got thirty days, that's right, I'm doing this. I ain't nos, and it was a big deal to not use no matter what.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, if you, if you are using please keep coming back. I'm just saying these people provoked me. And to be an eloot, elite member is a violation of the twelve traditions, I know that, but it provoked me.

Crowd: Yeah.

Mr R: You understand. So, so I kept coming back February twenty eighth I said 'I'm not gonna use no matter what.' And listen I felt like using all the time. When I got my, when I came uh, out of rehab in, in December, 24 of 1990, God had removed the obsession to use. When I threw the gift back in his face, I came back with the obsession hardcore in February, in 91. And I felt like using, and uh, you know the obsession. You know, let's high, let's just do one, it'll be different this time. Don't smoke a boint, smoke a joint, you know just have a drink. You know you don't have a problem. The obsession, you can't hear the speaker, you can't hear nobody. It's on you, you know it's sitting on your head. You need medication. You're bugging out. You what I mean. Just, you know what I mean.

Crowd: Yeah.

Mr R: And it was hard on me. It was on me hard. And the disease was on me. And it, the, the, the voices were loud, but I wanted to be down with the no matter what club. I heard the guy share they raped his daughter. Right. They raped his daughter. And said 'Yeah, they raped my daughter. They raped my baby, and she was seven.' And I'm like I couldn't believe that he's sharing, just that he's sharing but he said but I'm, he said 'I'm grateful they didn't kill her.'

Person in

Crowd: That's right.

Mr R: And he said, and, and he said, 'I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna use.' And I was like 'Dang, he's not, (huffs in frustration) that's a good reason to use.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know I said that's a good reason to use, you know. And so. But I saw members and people, and I saw them. You know it says that we see, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh the members, they always say miracles happen in other people's lives, acceptance becomes trust. Right, and so I started seeing it and listen you are the hope. You always have been the hope and you will always be the hope. When I see you doing it, it says that I can do it too, you understand. If you get your GED that's what happened to me. A guy in my home group, it was a stupid guy, idiot guy right.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I, I didn't like him for nothing. And, and, and he said 'I'm gonna go get my GED. I'm going to get my GED.' And I said 'This is not GED Anonymous. This is Narcot, I don't care about you, someone's addiction and he said, and I told my sponsor, this, this cat's always a cornball. You know the one with his hat matches his sneakers.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: That cornball, he's talking 'bout his GED and you know and, and, and my sponsor had two things. One, you're jealous 'cause you don't got a hat that matches your sneakers, right.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: A-and he said two, won't you get some coverage, and you go get your GED.

Crowd: \*Laughter and Applause\*

Mr R: You know what I mean. And so, so, that guy I didn't like, he was my hope. And I got my GED. And today I got a GED. I got a Good Enough Diploma; you know what I'm saying so. (laughs)

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I'm, I'm proud of my GED. So anyway, (swallows) so I saw the people doing. I saw people getting clean and staying clean and I, and I started just following. Listen, you know if you wanna, I learned, I learned from. I had a hundred-year-old sponsor. He was a hundred years old, he had arthritis, his fingers were bent like this, and he would say 'Listen you little Mexican, you gotta stop.' And I'm Puerto Rican.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know what I mean. And he said, it like this ‘Listen here you little Mexican, you gotta stop your crap. You know leave macho me at the door. Leave poor me at the door. You ain’t no gangster. You a...’ He said, he said ‘If you was a heroin addict, I would respect you a little bit but you’re a crackhead.’

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know what I mean, crack, like you know. That’s the kind of sp, that’s the kind of sponsorship I got in the, in the beginning. And so...

Crowd: \*Laughs and cheers\*

Mr R: But I, but I said, but I watched ya’ll. Listen I hated on ya’ll. I was drinking haterade all the way.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: But I watched ya’ll, and ya’ll was doing it. And, and, and so I, I didn’t use no matter what and eventually the, the obsession wore off, right. And I get emotional just thinking about it because it was on me hard. I mean it was on me hard. I-I didn’t, you know, and I was, listen, and I, and I had and I had surrendered and yielded that if I was just gonna stay clean with the obsession on me, then that’s what I get ‘cause I-I threw the gift of God back in his face when he gave it to me the first time. So, I had yield, okay if this is how it’s gonna be, fine. I’m just gonna shake and bake but I’m not gonna use no matter what. And the, one day the obsession left me. Like you know I didn’t know it left me, I just didn’t think about it one day, I was like yo, we ain’t think about using in a, in a, in a minute.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And so that's the second, part of the, of the message. That I stopped using, lose the desire to use, so anyways... I made meetings, I did, I did all the stuff right. I'm not gonna be talking about my using. I-I smoked crack. I-I-I tell you this. At the end of my addiction, I had uh, uh, I don't know, one inch, one and a half inch, two-inch spike uh, uh, uh stem? And my, and my tongue had burn sores on it. And my lips were burnt. I was seventeen years old. I looked like I was a skeleton. Maybe forty years old, I, you know. I looked old. I had an old dying. I was, I was like a zombie amongst the living dead. An, and, and I was just talk and you know I lived in an abandoned uh truck. My mother fed me like a dog. She would leave the food in the hallway. If I knocked on her door, (knocks) she'd call the police. You know, I mean so I-I was, I was messed up when I got here. I was you know I was young, but I-I used hard. It happened quick for me you know I smoked a joint one day, and I couldn't stop smoking crack the next day.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Like you know, it was fast you know what I'm saying. So, I got, came to Narcotics Anonymous and I and I-I and I joined the no matter what, I made a com, a decision in my heart. And the decision is great, is the commitment that's the problem. You know I mean it's easy to make a decision, it's hard to honour the decision with a commitment. You, to, to, to be committed after the feeling has passed already. Like that commitment was great and I'm joining them no matter what club, but now the convention's been gone for two months now and I don't feel like that no more. I've got to be committed to the

decision still. So anyway, I did all the sugg, I made the, I made coffee. I didn't drink coffee. I was young, I never drank. I-I-I made coffee. I did the greeting thing, I did ah, service. Service is important, you know. Service is very important. They told me that when you do service, you get off the edges. And the edges you can fall off. By doing service you put yourself in the centre of the process where it's hard to fall off, you know what I'm saying.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr R: So, I-I-I start doing service and uhm, and I wish I could say that I, that I you know that I got on the NA motorcycle and uh, and I, and I had a wonderful process. No. Unfortunately, uhm, I-I-I made a lot, lotta mistakes in Narcotics Anony. I sold drugs clean, you know. Uhm, in New York and maybe most areas there's a lot of H and I commitments that not being fulfilled. So I-I did H and I with bundles of heroin in my pocket you know what I mean. Uhm, I would talk about, listen, I would, I would say, I would say 'Check it out! Check it out! Listen I want you to know that an addict! Check it out. Any addict...'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: '...could stop using. Lose the desire to use. And that's not it. That's not.' I know four guys in the, in the, in the, you know, in the detox. I was preparing, right. 'And find a new way to live! You ain't gotta live like.' And I'm sharing the message passionately. And I'm believing it. But I was in contradiction with the message I was sharing. And then I had bund, I had drugs on me, and I would go outside, and you know. Sharing clean, living dirty. That's the part of my process. And, and a lot of people's part of their process. Sometimes we

learn to talk the talk. And then for some of us, it takes a little while before our feet catch up to our mouths. You know what I'm saying.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And so, so I went through that whole. I slept with newcomers. I had, I had uh my home group, my N... She was there. And I was over there. I sat like, we sat separate, and I'd give her STDs regularly you know what I mean. So, the home group members, we when we raise our hands, I'm like 'Don't pick them. Don't pick them. No. Don't pick.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Cause it was like, uh, uh good sharing mother hubbards, wanna cha, and like uh, wha, if you don't like who you with, who chose them and it was just wish crush (indistinguishable sounds of frustration) it was insanity, you know wha I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And so, so just, I went through, what I'm saying is that I went through a lot of drama clean.

Mr R: I went, I got, I got cut in my face, I was in a shootout with two and a half years clean. I got arrested. It was ugly, you what I mean. Uhm, I, the people in my home group said 'Listen, my friends said, my sponsor said I couldn't hang around you. My sponsor ring me that you people, place and things right here in the rooms.' I was like 'Yo, who's your sponsor. Let me talk to your sp.'

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know, bugged out. And so, I just, I-I wanna cut to the, I hit a lot of bottoms clean. Uhm, I kept looking for love in all the wrong places you know. I heard somebody say, you know you, you keep looking for love on your back and you only gonna find it on your knees and you know I was like what the hell is that and you know just, and, and I heard somebody say that, that the three most important relationships that you're gonna have is one with your sponsor, one with God and one with yourself. And that's my order 'cause I didn't have a God. My sponsor, he introduced me to the step work to God and then I don't really be, said as much but, and I heard somebody else say you know, two sickies can make one well you know, uh, two snowflakes are the blizzard you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Uh, uh, uh two, they told me two wet noodles can help each other stand.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know what I mean. Just a lotta and uhm, so, so I went, so, but a, but a listen. I went, I did a lot of things that you're not supposed to do. I did, I messed up. I went to physical altercations at events like this. I, you know just, alright. So, I hit bottoms clean alright. I hit bottoms clean. So, I got clean through the grace of God, I hated God when I got here and then I didn't want nothing to do with God while I was here. Uhm and then the sec, I had a second step experience, I had many second step experiences. Uhm, but what happened is, it says this, at this point the pain of uh, the pain of, the pain of not using drugs forces us to seek a power greater than ourselves, something like that. The, the, but this part, the pain of living life without the drugs, forces

us to seek. So that's where I was at. I could no longer keep having the God of my convenience because in third, in NA you have the right to God, and it's told to and without any conscious. That is true. But there's a lot of stuff people don't wanna talk about, about the, the right to God being told to. And it says that in order to grow spiritually you must be honest about your belief. I wasn't being honest about my belief. It says we don't care what you believe in, as long as it works for you. So, it wasn't working for me. I didn't, I couldn't get honest about my belief because I didn't believe in myself, you know what I'm saying. So, so, I-I messed up with the whole higher power thing. I had the god of my convenience, then I went through a process and I, and some of us go through the same. I didn't, I didn't have a, a, a faith. I came, I came up in witchcraft. You know, they, they, they killed chickens, they threw blood over my head you know they; I grew up with man-manipulating spirits. That's what my mother was involved in. And you know when you manipulate spirits, eventually they start manipulating you. And I'm not getting into that stuff so anyway.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of agreement\*

Mr R: So, I didn't have a, a, a way of praying, I didn't have a, you know it says in the eleventh step, you know for those who been done the eleventh step, some people just go back to the faith of their child. I had nothing to go back to. I had no reference points. I didn't have like you know. I-I-I hated God because of the faith of my mother and my grandmother. My mother was a, was involved in witchcraft and my grandmother was involved in nominal, uh, uh, uh her religion, you know just to, to be nice.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And uhm, so I didn't want, 'cause, 'cause, cause it also says in literature that we gotta be careful how share that we don't offend someone who's seeking other spiritual path, you know cause it says, I, if you're ever, you know, I'm a literature guy, but I have to share my experience with the literature. Why? It says in the eleventh step that one of the most important journeys any member of Narcotics Anonymous will go on, is the journey of seeking out a higher power. It talks about seeking out, outside of Narcotics Anonymous. And any literature says, eleventh step says the most important journey you can go on, is to go outside. And it says many of us visit all the spiritual centres in our community. Some of us go, you know it, it talks about that. And what happens when we start doing that and it says that dude, the other members get afraid, right?

Crowd: \*Murmurs of agreement\*

Mr R: Uh, they, they get, don't bring that stuff in, you know, they get their black belt you know what I mean.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: And, and, and listen, and listen, if you're like me, you gotta a reason to be afraid. You know w-when I came in here from a place of spiritual abuse. It's a spiritual meeting so I'm gonna get to the spiritual aspect now, okay? But you know my side. I came in young, dumb; I didn't know much. I thought I knew everything. I was a cartoon gangster. Took me three years to understand that the disease of addiction is my problem, not crack. And so, alright. So, I had this second step experience where I was living my, you know how the first

step says our life becomes unmanageable? Well, my life was unmanageable, but it became unbearable. Like I couldn't bear to live. Like it, I couldn't you know what? I was, I was, it was just, I was having sex with a lotta pretty girls. And, and it was, I wasn't getting the hit. I was, I was what, doing this. I had some seve, I had some severe sexual issues. And I'm gonna be not, I mean severe. I mean like you know I never imagined smoking crack. I said 'I'm never gonna smoke crack. Look at these guys, they're twisted.' I said 'I'm never gonna smoke crack, be a crackhead, crackhead.' Know what I mean? I became, I-I went some place I never imagined I would go. In NA lust dragged me around the rooms like the crack dragged me on the street.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of agreement\*

Mr R: So that's all I mean, so I had some character defects. In, in the first step of the working guide, it says we have this something, er it's, there's something inside of us that, that, that, that, that we cannot control. I used; it says this same something makes up prone to behaviours clean, entire character  
(Indistinguishable muttering) I don't smoke crack. Lemme say, I don't smoke crack, but I can smoke rage, you understand. I don't, I don't drink any alcohol, but I, but I can drink some lust, you understand. I-I-I don't snort any coke, but I snort me in my soul some resentments, you know what I'm saying.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of agreement\*

Mr R: So, so, so I-I-I got other drugs that I used now that I-I can, I can use without a chemical. I can keep, I could get to keep my clean time, but I get to alter my reality. And, and, and it doesn't do me no good. It, you know, okay. So, I-I-I started seeking, you know. How do you like think about it and I'm not say, if

you're atheist, agnostic, m, I was there too. You don't, you know, and it's a process. You don't got to be there 'cause I shared today. You get, you, if you, even if you have never get there, that's your process, you're welcome here, you understand. But my process is that I needed, it says in the eleventh step also, provocative, provocative presence of God...

Crowd: Yes.

Mr R: ... right. It says in the fourth step we need to have an intimate relation that a concept of God is not enough and so there's some stuff. So, so, I started you know prov, I started saying who the hell wrote this?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: That's why I don't like, only like the basic text, you know what I mean. And so, anyway I started getting poor and I don't know if you know, if you've ever been in this place where take a shower and, and you feel dirty when you get out there clean. I'm not like, you clean and you and you, I've been, I've been sharing since I, I had two years clean because I was young in recovery. Youth in recovery. And, and I mean, I was, I guess my soul was dead, my spirit was dead, I was empty, I would talk about a higher power, but I wasn't feeling no, no fulfilment, no peace, no joy. I wasn't feeling alive. I was, it was like my, heart was heavy. It was my, you know, my soul was heavy. I was bitter. I was angry. I didn't like it when you succeeded. If I wasn't succeeding, I couldn't be happy for you. I was just messed up and, and so I, I, I went on this spiritual journey and the eleventh step says we sought to end and again this is just my process, okay? I started see, to sought means to investigate, to sear-sear, to seek after, to go chase something. That's the word sought. And, and, and NA

language is very important you know. So, I started seeking and I did a lot of things right. I-I-I did a lot of things uh you know. I don't wanna say. I did a lot of things, I went, I went here, I went there, I went over there and, and I-I knew that no matter where I went, I wasn't gonna leave here you understand what I'm saying to you. That that's part of the guidelines. That, it says in the basic text now, it says some of us stick around for a while. Now this is uh very provocative. Some of us stick around for a while simply to find salvation.

Crowd: Yeah.

Mr R: And one religious cult or another, right? Nobody gets nervous.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: That's some members' experience. That's some of us stick around, that's been my experience. Some of us stick around for a while and the twelve steps clear the way where the spiritual abuse issues, the issues of the past, the prejudice against religion, the prejudice against, that, that, that we deal with these issues and we have a, a, a, we can be clear vessels where a higher can now speak to us. And how this higher power speaks, you don't speak over there. He speaks through you, he speaks through the media, it's not that deep. He speaks, he spea, he's always been, you know God's always been. G.P right, they call him effing G because he uses a lot of profanity. I love him dearly; I think that guy carries a powerful message but they call him effing G cause he's always cursing which is good. When I got clean, I couldn't hear nothing, but I would watch G, he and G would very ang, and uh (Unseen gestures, noises and thuds)

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: You know, you know, and, and, and, and G, so I was like ‘Yeah, yeah!’ I couldn’t hear nothing. He’s like, yeah let’s get high but I was like yeah! So...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, so, so, so God spoke to me when I first got here through GP and through, there’s another guy who used to quote literature. He says you know, ‘Recovery is an act of change of all that.’ It, uh, and God was talking me through W and God would speak to me through, through my people in my home group. God would speak but I wasn’t listening so God kept telling me can you hear me now? No? Okay fine. Go. I will suffer some more. Can you hear me now? No? Okay.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Ye, can you hear me now? No? And, you know. So finally, I said I hear you, I hear you, you know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, I went to a lot of places to seek after God and let me tell you how I did it. Yeah, I, ‘cause I want uh, what I did can possibly work for you. I looked at members in my area. I said that guy is insane. That guy is twisted. That guy is pretty cool. That guy is talking about not hitting his wife no more, that guy is talking about taking his kids too. And I started looking, it’s not that deep. It’s the second step who around me. I’m not, I’ve been in jail, and I know, I know, I know you, I got a spot in the Bronx, I got a punto over here, I got a spot over there, I got a spot. I’m, I’m, I’m living life and we, we don’t shop in commissary, you know what I mean. I know when people are fake. I know, so, so I was looked, and I said, ‘Oh, this guy got it. That girl got it.’ And I didn’t

know, I didn't know what it was. But you know when you hear somebody, you want, somebody embraces you and they got it? You feel it. And so, so, I said I got it and, and it, it was hard. So, I said, 'Yo let me talk to you.' You know, and back then it was like how do you pray? It was like you know, let me see you naked. Like what do you mean how do I pray? Like, what you talking?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, people were not open about their paths. So anyways, I started seeking and what happened to me is something beautiful happened. I walked into a spot one day. I was scared. It was foreign. I was tryna overcome a prejudice of mine 'cause I-I-I all got, I wanted God, but this one particular concept of God was not welcome in my life at all. I wanted nothing to do with these idiots, self-righteous motherhubbers. Hypocrites.

Crowd: Mmmm.

Mr R: And I said but I'm seeking and I gotta be open you know, you got to be open minded is to really consider things that you don't agree with, consider them profoundly and admit it, then make a decision.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I didn't like that. I said but sure, open mind, I'd like to, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I went to the spot, and I know I'm gonna is that uh I had an encounter with God. I, I, I, I wasn't expecting what happened to me happen. I had an

encounter with God and so what happened was this. It, it, it is I go to Haiti, I go to different places, I'm sorry but, I go to different places, and we give glasses away. Right, we go, people don't, they can't see but, we give them glasses and we give them glasses, they can see, it's like they can see like all that. And, and right it's pretty cool. So that's what kinda what happened to me. When I had this encounter, somebody gave me glasses. And I was like 'Woah!' Like I can see. Like you, you, you ever seen a V8 commercial. The guy is walking around like this and then he drinks the V8 and then boom! I gotta V8, you know what I mean. I had V8. A spiritual V8. Like I, like what happened was I started to look at life from a sp, listen I started to look. Not live. I didn't start to live, I didn't start, you know I didn't stop watching porno immediately you what I'm saying. But I started to look, and I said, I started to see that the instant gratification was like stabbing my soul.

Crowd: Yeah.

Mr R: Like, like, just a, just a hit was like stabbing me in the, and uh, you know and it, it, it was, he she was pretty, and she was good. But it was, it was stabbing that I had to pay a high price for low living.

Crowd: \*Murmurs of agreements and cheers\*

Mr R: That, that the price for instant gratification was my spiritual condition. And I started seeing it but I didn't have the power to do nothing about it. I just started. I had a third step encounter. A third step is way different the eleventh step. You know the third step is the introduction, the eleventh step is now you're playing with power. Now you got, now you got your knuckle game up. Third step my knuckle game wasn't up.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: So, Alright (Swallows) so, so I started going this. So, what was my third? So, I had this encounter with a higher power and I understood that listen, I understood it. I don't know how it happened. I know you guys said it for a long time and it finally connect. See it says in here that we wanna internalise the spiritual principles so they can become a fundamental part of who we are. Not just know, the literature I knew the literature, but I wasn't internalising and then the literature says that every meeting in Brooklyn, I don't know about you, it says there's one thing more than anything else right? I don't know if you read that in your, there is one thing R, you idiot, there is one thing more than anything else that would defeat you in your recovery process. What is that one thing? An attitude of indifference or intolerance to a spiritual principle. It was like wow, like the skies parted you understand.

Crowd: \*Cheers and Applause\*

Mr R: So, so I started so, I did, so what was my third step, I needed to do a fourth step because here's what happened to me. I had six and seven step issues right. I, I was, I was listen, I was living dirty. But whatever you can imagine, I-I cou, I was dirty, I was dirty. I wasn't comfortable clean. I needed to be dirty. You understand and now I had this, this newer, uh, uh, uh this new side uh of living spiritual, but I couldn't stop living dirty. I could share clean, and I would say I have four days without masturbating but I was lying. I just finished masturbating you understand what I'm saying to you. And so but I, but I knew I, I gotta vision of the band that that I wanted to go towards that route. I wanted to one day to have integrity. I wanted one day to have a joy and

peace that had nothing to do with the things you can count. But had everything to do with things you cannot count. You know what I'm saying to you. So, I said, and I did a fourth step. I had six and seven issues. But I didn't have an adequate fourth and fifth so that I can get to an exact nature of what's fuelling this crazy behaviour. Bec, I'll give you a quick example, how does uh, when does this end yo?

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Like I do. I don't you know but here's what happened. Like I give you a quick stop it's funny it's cool but it's pretty profound. At least for me okay. I was like seven years old or eight years old and I was potty-trained. I go to school the bathroom is right there and I get this thought why don't you piss out the window.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Right, I don't I-I said what a... what a great idea.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Now you know so I go I open the window and I; you know. I'm urinating out the window. I'm buddy my name you know out the window. I'm chillin. What a great idea. I'm brilliant. Right. Five minutes later I'm like... damn immediately. I knew like ah you know I mean somebody, somebody said, listen somebody's urinated all over me from this window. Right now, check it out this is a big fifth and fourth step for me. My mother R... what is wrong with you? In Spanish. She said the bathroom is right there. My it's right that you know how to use the bathroom. It's right there. Nobody was in the bathroom. And so why did you go and do this out to and I'm looking at her and listen, listen to me I did it. I stabbed my sister once. I had a thought...the good sister.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Not the bad one. I... I had a thought. She had long beautiful hair I had a thought grab a hair and run to the kitchen. Why that's a great idea. So many times, in my life I would do things and my mother would say what is wrong with you man. She said why did you do this? Please I just want to understand why did you do this? And I looked at her and I said I don't know.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: I don't know if you can identify. Let's fast forward let's fast forward fast forward. Your honour you see that I got a thought I do things I really don't know why I'm doing them. I'm clean X amount of years. I got a thought I go act out I destroy families. I destroy friendships. Listen the sponsor is right there. The literature is right there. The 12 steps are right there but I get this thought and I go act and then destruction comes. And then the people who care about me keep saying 'Why do you do this man? What's wrong with you?' And I said I don't know. And this is very important in my life the fourth step says that a written inventory will unlock the parts of the subconscious mind that remain hidden to us even when we think or talk about what's going on. So, what does that mean that I did a fourth and fifth step and I can go back to, and I started understanding where I started picking up the lie. The fifth says about uncovering the lies. There's a lie that's fuelling my defective behaviour. There's a lie. Listen If you know me, I really believe in God. I love God if you know me, I love God I pray every day. I put on Godly music. I got God tattoos. I got God, God, God. But it doesn't matter that crap why matters is when I'm faced in a situation do I believe in God I believe in that girl that's going to give me instant gratification? Do I believe in

that God I believe in buying this shirt? Because what I believe in my heart is what I'm gonna believe... what I'm gonna behave like. It's not what I say as I started seeing a contradiction in my life regarding my faith and my actions. And the fourth and fifth step were big because I was able to put the pieces together and see that this disease been lying to me from, I'm a little kid and I've been seeing the patterns never seen. So and so the fourth and fifth steps are great, but they're overrated. And the sixth and seventh step is underrated.

Crowd: Yeah

Mr R: So, so, so I started looking at my life and I got to the six and seven step. Now listen to me. Ima share some things and I could not listen. How do you get free without God? Like I don't know you got... there's people with many years clean? I've seen forty years. Like how, how do you work a six and seven step? How do you become entirely ready to have God remove these defects? How do you go to... how do you ask Him when you don't have Him? Or... or it's just it's just nominal? It's a theory. It's a concept. It's not a relationship. You know the proof of the 11th step in my life is do I have the power, or do I don't have the power? And there's no power...The eleventh step says that meditation is of no value if it doesn't affect the way we lived. We don't change. This is very important in my life. The sixth seventh step, I always talk about them because. Right here's what happened. I started looking at my life. And... and I said in the sixth step what are the people placing things in my life that I am connected to this behaviour right. What were the places? Where Are the people? Who's in my home group? Who's in my family? Who's around me that I gotta stay away from if I don't want to act out in this behaviour? Where the places that I go? I started to identify that! Another stupid, funny story I would watch

Baywatch right and I would I forgot her name, but I would watch Pamela... Pamela by run across the beach and save somebody's life. And I'm watching and she's running by to save somebody's life and, and that would trigger that's like smoking a joint for me. I want to smoke crack. I want smoke a joint so me watching Baywatch will begin to trigger something in me. And then by the end of the night I'm on the street looking for dirty ankles. All right and I started looking at ...this has led to this. And hanging out with him. And I started to I start identifying people to put in the six step. And I said God I'm gonna stay away from them. God said this R, I'll let go of what I gotta in my hand if you let go what you got in your hand. You let go to the six-step you want you want you want love and as I get stopped the lust. You want love you can't have them both you can't serve two you're gonna have lust are you gonna have love. Which one do you want? And I and I said I want love. I want love but all my actions were based on lust. So, I saw stuff so I started doing some stuff. I stopped watching Baywatch. I stopped listening to you know R. Kelly. You know that a big deal. R Kelly was connected very profoundly to my acting out sexually. And I started, I started doing stupid things that are not mentioned in the literature. But that allowed me to be in a position to be free. So I started getting free. You know I started I started getting free. God began to give me power. There's a crass way to say. You know to get screwed you got to position yourself to get screwed right. I don't like the way that I like that picture but it maybe you can understand it. All right but it to get blessed you got to position yourself to get blessed.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr R: I started saying I started saying no to the things. I don't know about you. But even in the sixth I was going to spiritual surgery and a spiritual warfare not

listening to R Kelly was... is like getting ripped out of my soul. Not going to the dance. I didn't go to the dance. I left I don't go to dances. Why? Cuz I got married. When I got married, I said OKAY these are bachelors... what single people do. This is what married people do. If you act like a single guy, you're going to do things that single people do. And you're going to mess up your marriage. So, I, so I started, so I... Are you understanding? I started changing in six and seven. I started making decisions. Listen let me tell you what I started doing. I started living life on God's terms. That's a big deal. Now that's a big deal. So I started praying. I started praying. You know how I don't know how you pray. But it says in the literature that you should pray according to your belief. So I started praying. Like you ever heard anybody pray inside a meeting? That's how I pray. I'm like God I need help! Man did you see her? She was she was beautiful. She looked at me twice God I said you know I got that's why I pray. I don't know I don't say you know let the pray let the thoughts of my heart and the meditation of my...No! I be like God I'm bugging out and if you don't touch me, if you don't remove this store, if you don't intercede, if you don't interfere. I'm gonna embarrass you I'm gonna embarrass me. I need you I'm bugging out like. That's how I pray. And when things are going good I pray for some of y'all. Right. When I ain't got nothing, I say God bless J!

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Help all of NA with the conference agenda report... Help us to... You know when I when I'm doing good. When I'm doing good. Oh yeah pray for some of y'all. You know I mean but mostly... I'm like God I don't want to blow it. The girl is far but she gave me free hazelnut syrup. I don't know what that means but she's kind of cute. You know me. Now I want to share this with y'all cuz I'm

free. Listen I've never I'm 36 years old by this month. I have 19 years clean. Like I'm 36 years old. 19 years clean alright. I am, I am, I am so far from where I want to be right. I'm so far, I've come so far but I'm not even close to where I want to be. I understand that in recovery, I have settled many times for mediocracy. This is what a man does. Men just lust. I don't gotta be like a man that I see. I could be like the man that God wants me to be. You understand. I can elevate. I can I see the vision. We talked about vision statement. I see the vision. Vision is about preferred future. That what the picture is going to look like tomorrow. If I do the work today, we can be there tomorrow. And then I see the vision. Yeah, we got a vision. We got a good vision. And the first step says that we can find purpose and meaning in our lives right. So, I don't want to be a guy. I got a lot of issues. Listen, listen. My issues have issues. Okay. But with all with all the integrity... with a little bit and tell you I can muster up I've never been this free. I've never been. I've never lived. Like I never. I never thought that it could be like this. been March 6 I'll be married 12 years right. 12 years. That's a miracle. My son's... my sons are my convention buddies right. I got a 16-year-old... like you know we pray together. I'm really the father I didn't have. We pray. I talk to my son about sex. I said in my marriage I struggle more with lust because of all the stuff I did what other woman. I said, I said if you can... can save yourself. If you could take a vow of purity. He says dad that is hard... this girl... And I have conversations with my son that I wish somebody would have had with me. And I'm grateful that when I came to NA some of you guys had him with me. You would say... and my daughter, my daughter is nine years old. I do this a lot. I speak a lot. I sponsor people. I am an NA guy. I love NA. I'm gonna say this part of my story that's hard to talk about. I got, I got a, I

got ordained right. I got ordained in 2001 right. I said NA, NA is not a religious programme. If you read the eleventh step we don't have... NA does have any preferred spiritual path. We just suggest you find your own path and we encourage you. Even some members, you know some members are messed up and they have bad experiences in other places. And you know it says in a second step that everybody comes in the door with history and that history for most part will dictate what we believe in. So, I got ordained in 2001. I don't care about the ordination. That's great but the relationship that I'm having now. Like that I'm having the intimate sacred romance with a with... Listen with the specific God that I hated. You know like I never dealt with racism. I dealt with racism with certain people when I got here. And then I had to heal and deal in four through seven. And I had this particular prejudice with this faith and today I'm part of that faith. I wore it on my arms. Literally. And I am not embarrassed. I love NA. We like we got a building we got a beautiful building 360 chemistry right now that's it we got a beautiful and because of my supposed to St. marks we're trying to recreate the availability of Narcotics Anonymous meetings in this beautiful building. So, we got 21, 21 and NA meetings in this man in this building right. But I'm a self-centred guy. I go to different countries right and I'm not saying that I'm the man. I'm not the man. I go for me. I don't go for them. I don't do that for them. You don't know the spiritual riches I get from being of service to somebody else. Right so I go to 3<sup>rd</sup> world country I go different places I do my life. Listen my whole life is about service. My whole life. Now V.H said once at a convention you might know but he said if you want to Big Shot do something big out there. Right so I slice it. Cuz it could be a big fish in a small bowl sometimes. And I started doing this thing in 2001 and I said listen who's

my people? My people are not Spanish people. My people not Puerto Rican people. I'm not with the culture thing. My people is recovering addicts. Right so my whole life is based on serving recovering addicts from within and from without. Now I know some of y'all don't like it without stuff. That's okay. You know. It's fine. It's... I've never imagined... I never imagined that life could be like this. That I'm really free. And I have a picture that could be... you know I have a loving and caring God. Some of you guys are going to be very happy about this. My god blinded a beautiful woman long enough to marry me. Right.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr R: Listen. I got a love being caring God. What that means is that my God wants better for me than I want for myself. Loving and caring means that He has a special interest in the things, and it does eyes of my heart. Look in the dictionary. I have a loving caring God. So, if you're new right you can stay clean. Meeting makers make it. Like we say more meetings more choices. Right. Less meetings, less choices. No meetings no choice. Right make meetings. So let me finish the last line of the 11-step thing that I tell you about. Some of us stick around for a while just to find salvation. And one religious call to another. Right the next line is very important. It is important not to walk out of the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous on a religious zeal. Now I want to say that because part of the spiritual process is this is sad it's sad for me it hurts me when members like me who hated God... The literature says who lacked a working relationship with God. NA and the steps and the people help you, show you. Right, they tolerate you. They love you into relationship with God and then you leave us. You leave why would you want to leave the vehicle that God used to break His anonymity to warm your heart, to show His face to you? Now I say

that from my perspective. Because, listen we need men and women who are expressing an awakening of the Spirit on whatever level that might be and staying 12-step members, H&I guys, sponsorship being. Having entered this phase right a lot of people manipulate that. They say I'm on this reg phase you know I'm in the sixteenth dimension of the eleven step and the makers of the recovery. You know. Right, somebody told me this one they said let's say R, when I found God, don't be so heavenly minded that you're not earthly good. Right. They said don't get so deep that you muddy the waters. Right if you if you never leave the basics you don't have to come back to the basics. So I think my time is probably up now. I want to say this. Listen in the spiritual aspect like I'm having a relationship with God. I mean a real God if I can say that because I had a fake God for a while. Me not you. I raised it with a real God that's transforming my life from the inside out now. I don't use profanity I wanna I want to be humble. I want I'm not humble. When you run into me. If you ever if you know me, I want to add value to people's lives. I want to serve. I know that if I live to glorify God, my higher power. If I live to... to build up His reputation. If these hands could be hands that He can use to serve, and this mouth could be a mouth that He can use a change. If I could just live this. You know what they say. Say what you mean. Mean what you say. But don't say it mean. Right if you're new, and maybe this particular speaker was not your flavour please keep coming back. Because you're gonna get your flavour. You're gonna hear your story. Here's the thing please keep coming back right. I'm gonna tell you story. I'm gonna close is that cool? Oh, I'll tell you a quick story. I got 20 stories running through my head right now but I'm gonna tell you a quick story. Alright... alright I'll tell you uh the guru's story. If you don't mind

right. Because when I got clean, I heard the guru story and it helped me out. There was a guru. It was in the village. A guru is somebody who knows everything there is to know about everything there is to know about. Right. So, the Guru will give once a month anyone in the village and opportunity to prove that he is a guru. Any question. He'll give you the answer. So anyway. Oh, there's a young guy... like a newcomer guy. You know I mean got two years clean in the village. two years in the village um you know and so the young guy said I want to prove the guru wrong I'm going to come up with a plan to prove the guru wrong. So, the guy comes up with a plan. And he says I'm going to get a little bird I'm gonna put it behind my back right and I'm gonna go ask the guru what I got in my hand. And if the guru says I got a little bird in my hand... the real question is the bird dead or is the bird alive. If the guru says the bird is alive, I'm going to snap the bird's neck. I'm going to kill the bird and present a dead bird and the Guru says the bird the bird is dead. I'm will let the bird fly away. I got him. Right the newcomer says okay guru if you know everything that you know about everything, what do you have behind my back? And the Guru says well young man you have a little bird behind your back. It's okay very good, very good, very good. Everybody listening. Is the bird dead or is the bird alive? The Guru pauses for a moment the young man says I got him. The Guru looks at the young man's eyes and said well young man it's all in your hands right. That's as simple as it gets. It's not that deep. Not that ah-ha moment right. The point of the story is that we have 12 steps we have twelve traditions we have twelve concert we have very, very, very well experienced members in our cart. We have profound literature that is divine. I mean it comes from God written by addicts. And it's all in our hands. What we do with this as well as all

out - you know am I going to fight the old timers who's been around? Am I'm going to try to take a lead? I want to be a spiritual man I gotta find spiritual men. I want to be a spiritual woman I gotta find spiritual women. You know. Just what am I gonna do? Am I gonna keep doing what I always did? I'mma keep getting what always got? Am I willing? Do I really want something new? Cuz if I really want something new then I'll do something new. If I want something old, I keep doing the same old stuff. So, if you're new please give yourself a break keep coming back. And if you're old I got a message for y'all. I got what... two minutes people. That's a lot of time. But I want to share something nice for my predecessors. It says in the fourth step that every time we write another fourth step, we peel another layer of the onion, and we uncover new levels of how the addiction manifesting itself in our lives. So, I want to encourage the predecessor I need you desperately and we need you desperately, but we know that the disease goes after our predecessors. You know there's an old saying if you strike the shepherd the sheep will scatter type. If the old-timers not doing too good, it gives a newcomer's little hope. So, I want to encourage the old timers to please, please keep doing the step work. Um now I humbly ask you how old is your last fourth step? When's the last time you went overstep up with a sponsor? I don't say that to challenge you. I said that in loving service. Please I want to encourage you. I need you... I want to see you two years now and see you celebrate 50 years. But it's not going to happen...It says it's in the recovering relapse when we neglect doing 12-step work our programme stops so please old-timer don't neglect doing 12-step work. Thank you for letting me share you

**Vlog 6 Transcript: Mr B**

Mr B: I'm an addict my name is B.

Crowd: Hey B.

Mr B: Sup. Peace and blessings. First and foremost, I want to thank Almighty God for allowing us all to be here this evening. For that I'm truly grateful. I want to thank my lovely wife N... for riding down here with me and understanding that we were stuck in traffic on 295 for about an hour. Thank God for recovery because before recovery if I had been stuck in traffic for an hour with...with anybody somebody would have got put out. So, I'm grateful for the 12-step process for allowing me to be okay with my wife and for her to be alright with me. And the traffic not even be a pain. I want to thank the Cape Atlantic area KP landing area has been a real instrumental part of my recovery. For a lot of years, I mean I remember man I saw the pictures on the wall out there. I remember barber B who told me when I had seven months clean you could be one of my babies. I remember move outta share... I'm just getting in touch. In the capital area where I'm from we uh we buried a...an addict today she died clean. And when I was looking at her in that casket today and thinking about coming here... words escaping me...she looked so peaceful she made it. She made it. She went out like she came in clean... clean and serene. May God grant her paradise. All right let's get cracking. Excuse me. Narcotics Anonymous approved literature I don't want nobody to get up here and say what is he reading you know because I have been to things before where people have read from stuff that wasn't approved. You know they read about roads less travelled...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: Shit like that. Nah I ain't with it. This is NA. This Narcotic Anonymous. So, if I read something. It's gonna be in a literature. Don't let that... I don't want nobody leave here say you know he came up there was reading from some scriptures or something. I don't know spiritual not religious programme. In the 12-step when it talks about carrying a message. It says that another time we might find it very hard to carry the message is when we're not feeling very positive about life or recovery. It's... check it out it's probably our first impulse to go to a meeting and dump all our problems out. So, we can purge them from our spirits. But NA meetings exist to provide a place to carry the message. Dumping our problems without tying them to recovery or trying to make it clear what the message is doesn't further the primary purpose of our groups. Look you can come to a meeting dump... but look it says right here we can carry the message even if we just point out that look, we're having terrible problems but we're not using over it. And while I start off with that it's because I don't know I've been to a few meetings lately where people seem to talk about everything but recovery. It seems to me that everything is more important than trying to find a new way to live.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: The job is more important. The relationships... Relationships are more important and I'm missing the message. And I realised that it's not it's not your fault... but it's up to me to come in and if nothing else maintain the atmosphere recovery. People in my area they want to beat anybody with over ten years clean. They want to beat up. They call them old-timers. Now I looked all through this book I can't find the word old-timer nowhere in here. If you can pull me up after the meeting. I read it but I ain't found the word old-timer

nowhere in there. I heard experienced member but I ain't heard nothing about no old-timer. Now it's bad enough that we age in this process and some of us don't like to get old but you won't beat me in the head because I got here a little bit earlier. They call me old timer... there goes the old timers, and so do they say that like listen... uhhh the meetings are falling apart cuz the old timers aren't carrying a message. And services says that look everybody gets a chance. So, every time I come in the meeting do I have to share? Do I have to choose the speakers? No look I'm just another addict trying to get another day clean. We only get a daily reprieve from this. Don't put that on me. Don't put that on us. I can't carry it. I'm sorry I can't carry it. I got enough trouble getting through today without using and killing no-damn-body.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: I'm serious. I have enough trouble getting through today without ending up in somebody's prison or jail some damn where. Not even using drugs. I got enough trouble just getting through today trying to live by spiritual principles instead of my way.

Person in

Crowd: Alright

Mr B: So how can you expect me to carry an entire area on my back. I can't do it. Brother came up to me...you know... \*laughs\* I said I wasn't going to do this but you know God is in charge, so it is what it is. Brother say B man. The meetings are falling apart. You know we need you there in your spirit and we need you this... And I went to my sponsor because I was confused. I was. I went to my sponsor I said well you know they said that they need to see me more in

the Capitol area and they need to see me in the more in the meetings... My sponsor said... Uhhhhhh who are you God? when did you become God? I said well I'm just asking... I'm just asking because my whole group is in a different area now and I had to do that for my personal recovery and then a brother... he came to me and said man we, we blew life into you. Excuse me? If it wasn't for the Capitol area you wouldn't... I beg your pardon. It says in the book that we get our recovery from the God of all understanding. I didn't know that I was responsible to the area for saving my life. Well maybe I am on some level. I don't know. Look I'm just another addict trying to get a day clean but we ain't going to talk about that. We're here to rejoice in the process. I'm gonna tell a story and I'm gonna sit down. Check it out right. I'm just like you I don't care where you came from. I don't care what drugs you used. I don't care how old you are, how young you are, how rich you are, how poor you are, what you look like, what you don't look like. I'm just like you. Check it out. You know how I know I'm just like you cuz we all are here now. Look my story is your story. Here's... here's our story. I thought that drugs were the solution to everything. This is our story.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: Drugs were more important to me than... You fill in the blanks this is our story. I used to live and lived to use. Everything in my life was centered on ways and means to get more. This is our story look, look check this out. My mother stopped becoming my mother. She no longer was my mother. She was the lady that had the pocketbook way under the bed.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: My brother...my little brother he wasn't my little brother anymore he was the kid that had a jar full of quarters in the closet. My neighbours they weren't my neighbours. They were people with electronic items television sets and automobiles.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: This is our story. Our shared experience. Responsibility... I'm gonna come out this for a minute. This is my Usher suit. My little kids like Usher. They said daddy you look like Usher.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: Maybe some of that money might shake loose. Check it out our communities ... our communities were no longer places of comfort. I come from the projects. Born and raised in the projects. And when I was growing up back in nineteen...

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: Fill-in-the-blank...the projects was a nice place grass was cut. People were doing okay. But we turned it into something totally... totally different. Turned it into a place of fear. A place where people became hostages in their own houses. Afraid to come outside because of what we were doing. And it doesn't make a difference if you live there or if you came there to cop. You can't pick up one end of the broom without picking up the other. I make no distinction we're all the same. This is our story. So I live to use and used to live. I didn't know any other way of life. I thought I thought there was nothing. Nothing more important than getting bags of bags and bags and bags of heroin inside of my body. Nothing else was important. There was a point... I see a homie over there. I'm so blessed I got a guy in here. It's a that grew up with me. Right but that was

a point, and we ran together for a minute. And there was a point when we thought we thought that our crew was the shit. Wherever we went everybody wanted to be with us. That's what we thought. And we live like that. But the disease of addiction erases all illusions. One more... just one more. That's all that became important. So, I lived like that for over 20 years. At the beginning of 1987 I found myself in a treatment facility. Well let me back up before that. I found myself standing in front of a judge. And they just said well Mr B, we got a couple options. You could get with this, or you could get with that. So me being the steadfast di or die, ride or die kind of guy that I was I said well what are my choices. And he said you can go to jail, or you can go to rehab. I thought about it for about 2.6 seconds. Rehab. I'll take the rehab sir. Thank you for saving my life. So, they sent me to this place in Trenton 541 and there were meetings in there. And I came in I weighed one ...when they put me in the detox, I weighed 147. Then I took a shower and I weighed about 135.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: The identification is among here.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: So, they said all right after you eat you can go downstairs. There's a meeting down there. And I said what kind of meeting and they said Narcotics Anonymous. And I was like what's that... oh wait I heard of that. Yeah, okay I'll go so I went to this meeting all I had was a pair of jeans and I had this you remember the jacket that Michael Jackson wore and beat it with the zippers in it. I had one of them. I couldn't sell that shit. It was all I had left. I sure tried to get rid of that joint, but nobody would otherwise want that beat it jacket. Beat

it buddy they used to say. So, I'm gonna meet him with my Michael Jackson beaded jacket on. And I'm wearing a buckle. Five you know. And I'm shaking and I'm shivering. And I'm sick. And a girl who was chairing a meeting said is there anybody here for the first time. And I raised my hand and people started clapping and I just broke down. I had never ever felt such an outpouring of unconditional acceptance and love in my life. And they came over and they hugged me, and they say keep coming back. Let us love you until you can learn to love yourself. And I was I was just humbled, and I sat in the corner, and I just shook. And I knew right from there. I knew right then and there was something here that worked. So, I stayed there for a couple of weeks detoxing, and they sent me off... up in the mountains to recover. I don't know why...why they put treatment facilities...wait treatment facilities and prisons way up in the mountains. I guess they figured hard to get dope in there huh. Not... So I went to this treatment facility and it was... Uh back then they were doing 28 days. But I didn't have anywhere to go and so they kept me for like 60 days. And suggested that I go to a halfway house after that. But with 60 days clean under my belt I beg your pardon I don't need a halfway house.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: Are you kidding me? I'm recovered. Send me back to the city jack. I got people to see. There was a girl having my baby at the time. The counsellor said why do you want to go? I said there's a girl having my baby. He said well what... what are you gonna do there? Do you have a degree? Are you a doctor? You gonna help deliver this baby? I want to be there for my daughter's birth. Yeah. So, they sent me back. I remember my first day home I went by to see my grandma. You know grandma...grandma was something. Grandma

love you unconditionally boy. Grandma I love you. She don't care what you do. She just loved you. My grandma I'm just make biscuits and chicken. And just hug you. That's all she do. You want something to eat baby. Come and give me a hug. Give grandma a hug. But grandma had a good-ass memory. I said grandma I'm listening. I'm home. She said God baby. I'm so glad. I said well listen can I have a key. I'm gonna come and see you. She said well I got to go to work. I said well just leave a key in the mailbox and I'll be... I'll pick it up. She said excuse me! See I was living with Grandma before I went away, and she had this TV right.

Man in

crowd: Yeah

Mr B: Yeah. And what I did it was just me and her living in the house. But I figured if I took the TV and broke the window, she would think somebody else did that. So, she said you can't come. You wait till I get home baby. You only come around when Grandma around. And I was hurt. I was hurt. How dare you. I've been clean sixty days. Forget the fact that I've been screwing up for 20 years I've been clean 60 days. Let me in I did some steps when I was in rehab. I did a fourth step with a counsellor. Forget one two and three. I did a fourth step with a counsellor Fuck outta here. Yeah, what is that. They told me make a meeting. To get a sponsor. So, I went around to see the girl who was carrying my baby at the time. And I said well, baby I'm home you know. It's good to be back. I had like 30 bucks in my pocket. I felt good I walked the street \$30 in my pocket. And everything was alright until she said I feel good too baby I just cashed a check for \$300.3... 3... \$300. You got \$300. You got

\$300. And I was trying to convince her to give me this money because I owed it to myself to use just to treat myself good. She wouldn't go for it though. So, what I did was I had a meeting list. And they said if you feel like using call someone. Call before you fall. So, I called the first name on the list. And the guy was there. And I told him I felt like using and I didn't want to spend my money. I wanted her money. I wanted to use. This guy said where are you? When I told him where I was, he said I'm right around the corner. I'll meet you in five minutes. He met me. We walked to the barbershop he went and got a haircut, and I didn't use. And again, I had clear evidence. Clear evidence that this thing worked. But you know the first step in Narcotics Anonymous says until we rid ourselves of all reservations the foundation of our programme is in jeopardy. So I think I stayed clean another 30 days before I decided to use again. And once I started using, I couldn't stop. And it was like I had never left. That that little bit of clean time meant nothing. It was like I had never stopped. And for the next year and a half I was in and out. In and out. You know. You know kind. You see him all the time. You sitting in the homegroup and look...look... look. Here he comes again.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: I wonder what he's gonna share this time.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: And I would share that I picked up and I was back. And I wanted to get a welcome key tag. And people... See in my area... There was cold Jack. They said... I said I got thirty days. AGAIN!

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: You got so many white key tags you need to take them back to area service.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: You know. We laugh now but that shit hurt back then. That hurt. But I kept coming. I had a sponsor. I kept coming and what I did was I got so tired of people talking about me using I stopped telling them.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: And I would come into meetings like this. Oh through the grace of God and 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous... I got 30 days a day I'm gonna keep coming. And addicts would tell me the most beautiful thing in the world. At the time I couldn't hear it. They were saying keep coming. Keep coming back. Keep coming back. I hated that shit but I kept coming back. Why am I sharing this? Because I know there's somebody here tonight that's been where I am. That's going through what I've been through. And I'm here to tell you keep coming back. No matter what. As long as you don't die cuz I don't want you to leave here saying Mr B said it's okay to use. Now I ain't saying that. I'm saying as long as you got breath in your body keep coming back. No matter what because on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1988, I came into the meeting, beat down. Again. And I raised my hand and I said I'm an addict and I'm dying, and I need help. And you told me the same thing you had been telling me all along. Listen man we understand keep coming back. Cuz I was arrogant you know you ever see people who use they come into meetings and be mad at you. See I be coming to meetings hot. I use. You clean. I'm mad at the fellowship. And I say shit like man if y'all don't know how hard it is. You know to stop doing this man. Then you ain't the addicts that you say you are. Keep coming we love you.

October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1988...Tuesday night at the UAW Hall in Trenton New Jersey. I went in and I raised my hand and I said I'm an addict and I'm dying, and I need help. But my sponsor was there. And he said look...after the meeting he said...I'm gonna give you a ride. He said I don't know what to do for you. But it's obvious that you need help right now. Here's the first step. I want you to write on powerlessness and unmanageability. Because we didn't have this. We just had the basic text. And he said I want you to read that first step every day for 30 days call me and make a meeting. My first day back. He didn't tell me, well welcome back. The first year is a gift. You don't have to work any steps. Read who's an addict. Study the symbol.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That was a little shot. I know but my sponsor gave me the first step my first day back. October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1988. I have not used since.

Crowd: \*Applause\*

Mr B: You taught up. He didn't tell me there's no other fancy shit. He didn't tell... He said the steps of Narcotics Anonymous are our solution. They are our defence against relapse. You want to stop using. Here's the first step. Eat it live it. I became a first step. October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1988. I've been clean ever since I've been clean ever since. The main part of the first step that was hardest for me to get was that surrender piece. You know. I... just where I come from. You know surrender is just not a term that we use on a regular basis. But what happened was I got clean, and I started connecting the surrender with experiences in my life I'm a share this with you I haven't talked about this in a while, but God has given me this today. So, Ima run with this. Right. Check it out. Let me tell you

how I learned about surrender. It's funny. The lessons that I learned as a child didn't really hit me till I became an adult. You know maturity comes in stages. Not in ages. That's some deep shit. Write that down for me.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: So, look. Thank you. Stages not ages. I don't know. I like that. Check it out. When I was in the sixth grade. Right. Look. I grew up in the Lincoln Holmes housing project. Lincoln Homes housing project in Trenton New Jersey. We... We was tough. We used to walk around saying we should call us... they called a swing first. Cuz we... we might not win no games now, but we fight like a mother. I went to a school called junior five. Junior high school number five. So going into the sixth grade I remember I was happy that school was about to start because that year in the sixth grade I was gonna be the duke of my class. Anybody remember that. That means you could beat everybody in the class that's how we measure shit. You know. And I knew I was going to be the duke of the sixth grade because the girl who was the duke of the fifth grade had moved. Martha had moved so I knew coming in a sixth grade that I was going to be the shit. So that summer right before school starts. We all in the projects... we playing. We got a little recreation playground area there. And we see this boy. He's coming down from up the street. He don't live in the projects. He coming down to play with us. Check this out. This joker walked up in the projects with a Superman suit on. I swear he had a towel tied around his neck and a shirt his mama had painted an S on and some red shorts. He walked in the projects with that shit on. So, we're looking like who the hell is this. So, he said "Hey my name is H... Can I play with y'all?" I said where you from. He said I'm from down south. I said yeah well you ain't down south no

more. I said, "Yeah you could play with us I'll get my friends." Yeah, you could play with us. And back then we used to play a game called sneak em.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: And for those of the unenlightened that means you walk up to somebody when they're not looking, and you just punch the shit out of them. So, we told Harry where we gonna play a game. Watch this. My friend said B. So, when Harry wasn't looking I punched the shit out of him. Well, my friend S said that Superman suit should have told your ass something.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: I hit this boy and the next thing I know he grabbed me right. And I don't know. I couldn't get away. And I felt like it he was like swinging my head and he was like whooping my ass.

Crowd: \*Laughs\*

Mr B: So, I hollered for my friends. And he learned another...another game that day called stomp 'em. So, my friends intervened. Stomped this ass out and sent me back up the street. So, I didn't see H no more that summer. First day of school I'm the duke of the 6th grade. I'm walking in the 6th grade like yeah, yeah. Let me see who I've been here. I'm gonna take some lunch money. Whoo-hoo. I'm a feel a couple girls butts. That's what we're doing a sixth grade. Feel their butts. We didn't know. We just did it. how about the first day I walk into class who's sitting in the front row. That damn H. But you know... look I'm from swing first we don't go out like that. So I walked up to him and I kicked him. And I said three. That's how we used to do. Hold up three fingers. Three o'clock. Me and you after school. So, three o'clock came I'm out there with my

crew. Here come H and we lock up we get in it. I get in it. Now a part of me wants to tell you that I whooped that boy's ass. But they say this I honest programme. So, what happened was pretty much the same thing that had happened in the summer happen again. Only worse this time cut my friends didn't pull him off me in time. So after the fight I was walking home and my friend said look what you're gonna do? I said I what you mean? You will fight him again ain't you man? You know you could beat H. You know you could beat H. And I'm like yeah. I could beat H. I could beat H. I'm gon' beat his ass. So, the next day came. Now I ain't leave H alone. And surrender is as a foreign concept to me back then. I jumped on him again. I ain't even wait till 3 o'clock. At lunchtime I just went in his mouth. He threw me about. He threw me across about four tables in the cafeteria. I didn't know about surrender. And after school my friends kept telling me the same thing you could beat H. Clear evidence said the contrary but misinformed people kept feeding me misinformation. And said you can beat this. So, me and H fought almost every day. Let me see...September, October, November... we took a break around Christmas time. Got back into it. Let me see... January. For almost that whole school year. That whole school year me and H fought almost every day. It got to be so common people would say stuff like this... what you're gonna do after school? Oh, you mean before or after B get his ass whooped? I did... I had a hell of a wreck. I was like oh and thirty. I...I... thought. At one time I had got a stick right and I put a stick but I said you know when the shit break I'mma break the stick out and I'mma get up in him. You know. It's a terrible thing when you bring a stick to a fight and they take the stick from you and whoop your ass with it. I remember the last time we fought I remember it like

it was yesterday. I was laying on the ground looking up and how he was standing over top of me saying you want some more? And I remember I said nope. And. And it was like a bright light or something just shinning. And I was like I'm free. And I got up I brushed myself off and I started walking home. And this boy named J was walking with me and he said man you're a punk. I said what you mean? You ain't gonna fight H no more, I said I'm not fighting that boy no more. It has become apparently clear that I can't win. He said you're a punk. I said that may be true but I'm not getting my ass beat no more. That's good enough for me. Matter of fact I know I could whoop your ass. I ain't gonna be one them punks. And from that day on I never fought H again. Surrender means not having to fight anymore. See I can laugh about that shit today but some of y'all still fighting H today. Yes relationships you know what I'm saying it's, it's self-centeredness. Its greed. Its lust and you can't win. It's abundantly clear you keep doing the same shit over and over and over again wondering... asking yourself how did I get here again cuz you won't surrender. Yeah I can laugh about H whooping my ass back then. But he ain't beating me up no more. See I ain't got no more H's. All you got to do is get me one time. I told this gentleman in the elevator. I said man I don't care if they was giving away dope for free. I don't care if it started raining heroin tomorrow. I'm not using cuz I can't win. I can't win. It's abundantly clear 20 years. 20 years of active addiction has taught me one thing you can't win. The surrender is the key. Surrender. That... that stumbling block. When I was trying to get past that boy has now become the cornerstone of my recovery. I was talking to my wife. Look she gets mad at me sometimes because I don't argue and shit. I'm in surrender mood constantly and I know she probably she

don't say it out loud. I know under breath should be probably saying you know you're a punk. No, she don't say that shit. Out loud. No, I'm just kidding. But what I'm trying to teach not just her, myself, my children, the men that I come in contact with and the women that I come in contact with is that... Listen. I don't sweat the small stuff. It's not that damn Important. Every battle is not meant to be won again. You know for so long I was so wrong. When I first got in recovery you couldn't tell me once I get a hold of a little bit of right oh I'm gonna beat you in the head with this. Oh don't let me be right about nothing. And it got so screwed up you know I became so self-righteous that I thought I was right all the damn time. Today I don't have to argue with anybody. The truth doesn't need my proof. It is what it is. And if I'm right I'm right. And if I'm wrong I'm wrong. It's okay. I can admit that on the way down here I got into a little... so I keep talking about that was a long ride down here. Thank God for the step process. I got into a little thing with my wife and I found myself raising my voice a little bit too loud because what she was saying was on point. So, I had to take another look. So, we drove about two miles in silence. Not two miles. I'm getting better J. I'm getting quicker. We drove about two miles in silence, and I said you know what honey you were right; I was wrong as hell, and I apologised. She said OKAY baby. I like it when you say that. I just I just want to live in peace. For so long my life was run by chaos and turmoil. As a matter of fact, we thrived on it. We like confusion. Keep 'em moving... keep 'em guessing. They can't watch you. I thought I was the slickest cat on the earth. There wasn't nobody I couldn't game. I couldn't hustle. I couldn't get at. Just keep confusing going on and I could somehow get what I wanted. It was hard to give that up. Even after coming to the rooms of

Narcotics Anonymous. You live a certain way for so long it's hard to let some of those things go. Yes, I let the drugs go. Yes, I did. I let the drugs go but the lifestyle, the manipulation. See I always thought that either through intimidation or manipulation I could get you to do what I wanted you to do. So just because I ain't using I'm sharper now. I got better skills now. I can see clearly now. I got other motives and all that brought me was pain. I don't know about you. I like to think I do but I didn't come here to get clean to live in pain. I'm not showing up for that shit no more. I'm not volunteering to be your doormat. Nor am I volunteering to be your master. Neither one of those positions are good. For me today. I'm just a humble servant. I like that position. I like being a humble servant. That's what S is today. Let me finish this up. Let me tell you a little bit about how good God has been. Although I know I don't have to tell you. Everybody in here got their own story. You know I can see it on your face. I can walk up to you and I can see it on your face. And I know you can tell me how good God has been in your life. I'm just gonna share a little bit about how good God has been in my life. When I married my wife I had two daughters from previous...thank you I had two daughters. She had one and we had one together, so we have four girls in the first house. We had a one bathroom for all children. So, we have four daughters. Now like I said my wife she had a daughter when I met her. And um this girl is the light of my life man. I mean um I always wanted a son you know you know. It's a man thing. Maybe I don't know. I always wanted a son cuz I wanted him to be a little athlete. You know a little ball player you know or boxer or something macho. You know so I could sit in the stands and go that's my boy. You know I can ride on his shit. You know how are you wanna

do right on your son shit. That's my boy. I want to be like well no. Just but I don't have any sons. But this daughter...this girl is everything I could have asked for. on the son... she's tough. She's a hell of a ballplayer and I spend inordinate amounts of time and money and effort just to keep her playing ball because she loves it. And sometimes my wife gets mad because her father is not an active part of her life. And I tell her listen you can't be mad at him he got the same disease I got. Only his ain't arrested. And if you think he fucked up. Let me start using. But... but I understand where my wife is coming from she's like...because this girl loves her daddy. The last time he came over to our house...our house...cause he's welcome in my house long as he can act right I ain't got no problem with that. And we gave her a picture of her playing at the Nationals and they went outside and he was showing her how to shoot baskets. I put up a little basketball court in the driveway. And he was showing her how to shoot baskets and I saw the look on her face. She was so happy that her daddy was there. And that's okay I can't...I can't do that. I can't take his place. I don't want to. But we have a special relationship. We went to a practice Sunday and the coach from another team came over and he said oh I like the way you play. And are your parents here. She pointed in the corner she said there go my dad right there. And I said thank you God. What did I do? What would I do to deserve this? You know I've been a fuckup all my life man. I ain't been responsible for nothing. I ain't took care of nothing until I came to Narcotics Anonymous and met y'all. That's the only way I learned how to be responsible. The step processes. The love. The unconditional love. Yeah, the gossip been the backbiting and all of that shit too that y'all have given me has made me the guy that you've seen me today. Yeah, this I know

you talked about me is alright. I talked about you too. So...so I forgive you so. Thank you. Forgive me. But all of that goes to make up the guy that you see standing here today. My wife sometimes she's just overwhelmed. People call the house constantly... constantly I mean just to say hello. Just to do this and I keep telling her listen this is what I'm a part of. This is who I am. Not only am I like this in here but I'm like this out there too. The guy you see standing up here is the guy that you'll see going to work at six o'clock in the morning. Check this out. This is what I learned. I remember when I first started working you know how when you first get in recovery, and you first get a job you want everybody to know you're recovering. You know you come in the job and it's Monday morning and everybody's like are you doing, and you like but for the grace of God hey I'm here I'm grateful to have a damn job. Thank you. What the fuck is wrong with this guy? Oh, I'm just happy to be alive. Thank you. Give me a hug. That's how I was when I first started working. Man, I was so fired up and enthused to be a recovery and have a damn job. You know everybody on the job knew I was...I beg your pardon. I go to meetings. I don't drink buddy. No fucken drink. Get out of here with that. I don't drink. No, I don't do drugs. No matter of fact come here and let me show you something. I used to walk around with a basic text in my pocket and shit. Twelve steps damn it. That was 18 years ago check this out I work in a in a fairly big organisation today. And maybe out of the 200 employees there maybe two or three of them know that I'm in recovery. The rest of them just think I'm a hell of a guy. They they've written newspaper articles. I talked to a lady from 60 minutes about the work that we do because what I do on my job I learned to do in here. You know I worked with a lot of a lot of clinicians... which I'm

one too. But you know and then they study, and they've read, and they write papers and all of that but I got my training sitting on the front row here. And we go to training sessions to learn how to have empathy for the people we serve ain't that a bitch. I learned that on the front row. Right here I learned to feel what you feel and right here because you felt what I felt right here. So, on my job they just think I'm a hell of a guy. Oh, what a great employee that guy is. Boy he shows up he does this he does that, and I just say to myself if you only knew. I'm blessed to work in the with it with people in the criminal justice system. And my boss said the clinical director she's always saying how do you know so much about prison. Check this out the first day we got this contractor working the jail's right I had four people working for me and so we all had to fill out these forms to go into the prison. So when they came back my director she said well everybody's clearance came back okay and I said great she said except one person get didn't get good. I said now who the hell didn't get cleared. How dared they not tell me. They all told me they could pass a check. She said it was yours. Excuse me I'll clear that up. Just a little misunderstanding. She's always how do you know so much about the prison. I read a lot. I just and the reason why I say that it's just it's not even necessary for them to know what I do and who I am because what I do and who I am makes up the employee that they have today. And all they need to know is they paying me for doing the damn job. And that's it I don't have to beat anybody in the head with my recovery anymore. I don't have to prove to anybody that I'm recovering. Today I'm clean. I know that God knows that. You know that that's enough for me. So listen I want to again thank Almighty God for allowing us all to be here and enjoy and experience this recovery. I

owe a lot to the Cape Atlantic area and. I owe a lot to Narcotics Anonymous. I don't think I don't care how long I live. I don't think I'll ever be able to balance the scales out for what y'all have done for me. You made me the person that I am the day you allowed me to open up enough to see the beauty of life. You loved me so much you allowed me to feel God's unconditional love. Not only do I feel it but I express it. Today we were listening to this song on the radio “the boys say I don't care if you're gaining a little weight. What do you say baby? I don't care some yeah when your hair turns grey. I love you I say I still want you if you gain a little weight. Yeah, yeah see that's all that's what I'm talking about. So we riding and the song was playing and I told myself that boy is deep. That's a deep piece right so my wife said what you're talking about? I said that's real unconditional love cuz I'm not gonna kick you to the curb if you lose your job, if you gain a little weight, if you break your leg, if you go blind, if you get shot. You know if you get grey hair, if all your hair fall out. You know what I'm saying. If you lose that that nice ass that I like. If you lose... I ain't... you know what. Because this is unconditional. God taught me how to do this and he blessed me with you so how could I not return the favour. I'm an addict my name is B thank you.

### **Vlog 7 Transcript: Mr C**

Mr C: My name is Mr C and I know that comes as a shock to many people but that is who I am I have learned to embrace why I am because I now understand God's sovereignty over my life and why he chose for me to grow up the way that I did. But as a youngster I didn't really understand what God was doing because I didn't know God, so my journey goes back to the North West where I was born in Mafikeng. My mother obviously is an African woman, and she obviously was

not with my father at the time. She moved to Johannesburg to a place called Eldorado Park and she would later meet my stepdad there and they would parent me and raise me together. So, I was adopted by my stepdad hence my surname. And I grew up in a coloured community and I think it's one of the greatest blessings that God has ever given me because I am so diverse. But as I mentioned to you guys, I struggled a lot with this as a younger boy because I wanted to fit in. I wanted to be loved. I wanted to be accepted and because my biological not in my life. I was afraid of rejection and so I know in the beginning I desired my parents' approval. But as I got into my teens, I desired the approval of my peers. And so as a result of just being teenagers just being experimental and being social and wanting to have fun we started doing things that we should not have done. Now I know there were some environmental factors here. There were a lot of things influencing our behaviour. I think also as youngsters we were overexposed not only to the illegal street drugs that you find today but also to these socially acceptable drugs like nicotine or alcohol and even caffeine. I mean all these things are addictive. So I remember being a teenager with my group of friends and we just wanted to be cool and we wanted to try out smoking and so we started smoking heavily then we started experimenting with marijuana. Then we also started buying cigarettes as a result. And we were just having fun. I mean we are just the cool guys you know, and we were just these young boys you know trying to act grown up and the problem was that we thought these things were cool because we only knew about the highs that we were told right. By people but we never knew about the lows that came with these and so this was a real, real struggle for me and this is where my path of destruction began. It began with the experimental phase where

I was just trying things out right. And so we kept doing this thing. We were not doing it all the time but as we progressed. It became something that we did regularly and now with drugs... everybody starts for the feeling and effect but many people don't know that the feeling and effect leads to withdrawal and dependence and so we didn't know that we were becoming dependent on these things. But we started doing them more frequently and, in the beginning, it was more social. So, I remember being this 15-year-old boy and I was just chasing this feeling. I just wanted this high, and I remember a group of my friends saying that we should try something stronger. Maybe we should try this new drug on the street or this drug or that drug just to see or experience how it may feel. And so that was the result. We tried it and I loved the feeling. I chased the feeling desired the feeling and our lives began to revolve around this one thing. Now my parents obviously noticed some changes in my behaviour as well as in my thinking and I also noticed changes in the way that I felt at the time. So, my feelings my emotional intelligence definitely was disturbed. I mean, I struggled with depression a lot as a child, and it was induced by these substances that I was using. So, my parents decided to move to another area in hopes that it would you know bring about a change but that's not what really happened because now I had this problem and whenever wherever I was going, I was taking this problem with me. So, I remember us moving and me just finding the same group of friends. Finding the same people to surround myself with and continuing that same destructive pattern and so addiction is progressive and the longer you use the worse things get okay the consequences are always negative. And so, my family suffered as a result of my addictive behaviour. My peers suffered as a result of my addictive behaviour because addiction doesn't only affect the

person using it affects everybody else connected to them and so I continued this lifestyle of destruction. We were known as the party guys. We were known as the drug guys. We were known as the promiscuous guys. We were just having fun or so we thought. And I went through lots and lots of pain. There was a lot of violence in my life. As a result of my addiction there was a lot of legal issues. I guess because of stealing or being caught in possession with things or being found drunk in public or you know we were just doing things and we were getting into lots of trouble as a result. And so I just became this problem child uh...that my parents had to deal with. And I remember there was even an instance where my sibling looked at me in my face and said I don't even know you anymore. I don't even know who you are because that's what drugs do right. They change us as...as people. Your morals your values. All of these things are stripped away. And may I mention to you guys that I was never really a believer during this time. I didn't know Jesus Christ during this time. The only Christian that I knew was my mother. And she was always telling me about Jesus Christ. Always sharing the gospel with me. Always buying me books about people teaching about Jesus Christ. But I never read those books and I never had an interest for it anyway. I just wanted to live my life. It was YOLO<sup>2</sup>. I just wanted to enjoy my life. But the reality is that I was not enjoying my life. I was actually, actually a slave to these passions. I was a slave to these desires and as a result I started hurting the people that I love. And this brought about a lot of guilt and a lot of shame. I remember even trying to take my life and I didn't just do it once. I did it a few times because I was looking for an easy way out. And I know that people probably thought I was being selfish. I know that. I was. But in my mind

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<sup>2</sup> YOLO: You Only Live Once

I thought I was alleviating my family of this problem... Being me. Being myself and so I remember for those seven years in my teens from the age of 13 until I was 20, I was stuck in addiction. I tried to quit on my own. I tried so many things to stop but I could not. And eventually I found myself again almost dying. And then realising... wait a minute. I have a problem. let me speak out let me tell my parents what the problem really is. They already know there's a problem, but they don't know the extent of the problem. And I think many people keep their addictions a secret because of shame because of guilt. Because they don't know how people will respond. I hope that I would have spoken out sooner, but I did not. And I suffered as a result of my denial. And I remember being admitted into my first rehabilitation centre and experiencing sobriety again. It was such a wonderful experience. But I thought that all I needed was willpower at that time to maintain my sobriety. But that was not the truth. I found myself going back to the same places. I found myself going back to the same things and I found myself, you know, going back to the same people. To the same group and obviously I was not able to change. And I found myself stuck in this repetitive pattern for another four years. But when I was 24 years old I... I started looking at life. I started looking at where I was, and I started doing a lot of self-reflection. because I really was a goal-oriented person and there was a lot of things that I that I wanted to achieve in life. And... and I thought to myself like I'm at this age and I... I really have nothing to show for it. You know I even found myself, I mean on the streets as a result. My parents could not take the trauma anymore. And I... I couldn't take the fact that I was traumatised and so, I... I started you know disconnecting myself from everybody who loved me. But in those moments, it was where I was really thinking even while I was using. I'm a very

reflective person. I was really thinking about all that I've learned. All that my mother had told me about Jesus Christ, and I would find myself praying. I would find myself trying to have conversations with God. I remember meeting pastors would also, you know, try to encourage and... and try to help me. But I was just so stuck in this pattern, and I didn't really know how to break free. I thought that it depended on me. I thought that I had to perform some kind of work or do certain things in order for God to be pleased with me. Those were the lies that I believed. That God wouldn't love somebody like me. That God wouldn't forgive somebody like me. Let alone have a relationship with somebody like me. But about five years ago I found myself going to the very rehab centre that I now work at. And of course, at this rehab centre they had the option of uh... going for spiritual counselling. And this of course was from a Christian perspective. I found myself going to chapel. I found myself reading the bible. I remember the book of Psalms really had an impact on me because I loved poetry. And I could really relate to the Solomon's prayers. And this was just drawing me closer and closer to Him. And I remember going for the sermon once in the chapel. I don't remember the minister, but I know the spirit moved that day and left an imprint on my heart because he was preaching the gospel. And I know I had heard the gospel before, but it made so much sense. And it was just this desire to surrender myself and to give myself over to the lord Jesus Christ. And this guy was saying silver and gold, I have none today guys. But what I can give you guys is Jesus Christ. If you would only believe in Him. You would be made a new person. The old would be done away with and you would start this new journey with God that would transform your life completely. And I was willing that day. I stood up it was an altar call, and I went to the front and I was happy. I was

excited. I remember I was crying that day. I was so emotional because for the first time, I mean God loves me. And I... and I... and... and I... I understood that He sent His son as a demonstration of that love. And I desired that love and I experienced that love that day. And that changed my entire perspective now obviously. I was not changed immediately. I now had to begin this journey as a believer. And so that was the case. I remember going home...being so excited. Just wanting to read the word. My mom's the only Christian I know. So who do I go to? Moms! What do I read? And I started with the gospels, and I continued reading God's word. I prayed. I started getting involved in church and I started growing and growing and growing and growing. And God gave me opportunities to minister and to share my story with people. And people were getting impacted. It was just so amazing. Yo guys! Like it's still amazing. To be honest with you I'm even getting so excited just sharing my story with you guys. And I remember God... you know getting a job and... and I was just so... you know... Even at my job I use opportunities to share the gospel. I just wanted to tell people about the saviour you know. This person who has saved my life. I mean if anybody saved your life you'd want to tell everybody about them too right. And that was my case because I knew a lot of people were still stuck in that life and I wanted to let them know... Look here we can't reform ourselves only Jesus can transform us completely. Because He promises to give us a new inner being. A new heart and He removes the stubborn heart. And that was the result I just... I just went with it guys. I had stumbling blocks along the way. I had to give up certain sins along the way. I had to give up certain pleasures along the way. But God continued using me. And it got to a point where you know I... I prayed to God. And I said to God, you know I just want to reach

more people. I want to reach more people and I remember getting a phone call not long after that from Elim Clinic specifically. And they wanted me to come there. And share my story. And then they kept calling me frequently and then I started getting involved in the pastoral counselling. There and then I started helping them with the marketing. And then we were travelling all over the country. To companies. To schools. To all these places and as a result of my faith I met other believers who were just as passionate. That I as... as I was, and I started getting involved. The name ministries and we just working together and we spreading this gospel. That is saving people's lives and so to be honest with you guys, Jesus saved me from something. For something right but I had to come to the end of myself. I had to recognise my need for God. I also had to recognise that I failed God. And I also had to see Him. For who He truly was and God demonstrated himself to me and displayed himself to me through the person of Jesus Christ. And as a result of... of him just giving me that inclination to say God I need you. I surrender. I... I gave my life to the Lord and... and it's been a... a journey of transformation ever since. I mean it started with me believing and trusting in Jesus Christ and as a result I began living my life to honour Him. And now I'm in a place where I'm helping people right. I'm helping people and still growing in the process. It is a lifelong journey. Nobody ever arrives. But I know that if people want freedom, it starts vertically. It starts with God. You want forgiveness. It starts with God. Death is where it all starts. That is our origin. And Jesus says that He is the only way to God. And I knew that because He connected me to God. And I am the person that I am today as a result. So, Jesus wants to free us guys. He wants to free you from the penalty of your sin. He wants to free you from the bondage of your sin. And He also wants

to free you from the guilt and the shame of your sin. And He did that for me. But he also frees us to something. He wants to free us so that we can live to our full capacity. That's what life and abundance means that we can live the life that He created us to live and also to serve. And that's the main thing. We serve God and by serving God we serve others. And that's the greatest pleasure that I've ever experienced in my life. And it's all a result of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and our addiction, well it's a thing of the past for me. It is something that I wrestle with every day. Of course, but God has given us the tools and God has given us the grace. Especially to suffice and to push forward. So, addiction is not the end guys it is only a fork in the road. God bless

Interviewer: So, Mr C thank you for sharing your testimony with us um when you retell your story of where you come from where you are now what goes through your hearts and your mind?

Mr C: Just being reminded of how far Christ has brought you I would say sometimes it is painful to go through those memories but there's also just the joy of salvation you know. I just remember god's faithfulness and I could see that I'm no longer where I used to be and so that gives me great joy that I was once in this place but because of God and because of Christ. I am where I am now so it brings me great joy because I get to remember the days that I received the light so it's a great joy for me it is sometimes painful you have to really visit but great joy nonetheless.

Interviewer: So can you recall at what point you started struggling with identity because you know you mentioned this in your testimony and you've mentioned this in a conversation before part of this addiction was wanting to be accepted so at

what point did you realize that you're different from the people around you in a sense and when did that actually start affecting you on a personal level?

Mr C: Well for me it happened when my parents obviously told me that my biological dad is not really my dad and of course as a child also picked up differences you know so that sort of caused this... then what am I and who am I kind of thing. You know so there was always this sort of thought in my head like you know why am I here am I a mistake. You know why did daddy leave this...this you go so that was really my... my struggle and so it's when my parents told me the truth that that I really started wrestling with it a lot yeah so when this identity crisis started.

Interviewer: Um was there any form of support or counsel you had around you to try and work through this. What...so what I'm actually trying to ask is what led you to feel as though fitting in with everyone and you know starting to experience with substances was the cure to your identity issues

Mr C: I think it honestly started with my experience of rejection. Right so of course in our country to be honest with you it is like post-apartheid and so people are very tribal. In a sense you know so this is my group. That is their group and so I was always led to know that I was different. That I was not one of them and I guess my parents didn't know this because I never spoke to them about it. But there was always this I'm different from these...I'm not like them or I'm not this enough or dead enough. So, it all started with my rejection issues and then also being rejected from people around me. You know just injured me even more and made me realise okay I'm not really fitting in so...so what can I do to avoid being rejected all the time. So maybe I should conform. Maybe I

should do what people do or do what people think is cool and... and maybe that will make people love me. Other than my folks. I knew my parents loved me, but I wanted the rest of the world to love me as well.

Interviewer: And do you feel as though you found a certain level of acceptance and love when you were involved in all that you're involved in

Mr C: Yes, definitely I think it's because these things were associated with being cool. Okay so the group of people that I surrounded myself with they were okay. You know as long as you did those things if you did those things, you were one of us. So it was sort of like a gang mentality thing and if you didn't do what they did you were considered uncool. You were considered you know uh not to be part of the clique. So, it's just the mentality that people have like you if you are going to be around us then you're going to have to act walk and talk like us kind of thing. And that's how we influence one another in the wrong way.

Interviewer: Yeah, and so you mentioned that um you hid this from your parents for quite a while. Yeah, so you were in a sense living a double life. Yeah, and how...how did you actually pull that off? I'm wondering because I know I... I can't hide things like how did you pull that off?

Mr C: Okay so and that's such a good question the thing is at home you know I was my parents' baby. You know...I tried to be as good as possible. I tried to be good at school. I tried to do everything well enough for them to not notice. But when I was with my group of friends then I was a totally different person. But the thing with playing these kinds of roles is that sometimes you can... you now take that role home with you. So, there was an overlap and then they

started seeing those very attitudes that I had out there with my friends. I started actually taking it back home and that's when they started also noticing changes. You know it's like actors for instance... Some actors get into a role and then they struggle to get out of that role and that's actually what happened to me. I got into this role, and this became my life. I based my entire identity on that lie and began to live it and I said OKAY this is what I do. This is how people will perceive me. People must fear me to respect me. You know so if I did the things, I was the guy. You know he's cool because you know C's the man. He's got stuff. He's...he organises. He's the life of the party. You know so that's...that's where it really started for me.

Interviewer: So, what was that conversation when your parents started noticing how...how was that revealed. Um did your mom or your dad approach you and say C um we notice something's not okay. Like what was that?

Mr C: Okay so what happens with especially with addicts right is that we try to conceal our addiction as much as possible. But there are times where you're gonna slip up so there will be evidence. Like for instance there was drug paraphernalia. Like my mom would find certain things or the smell of alcohol on my breath. Or you know me being up for late hours. So, she would see these changes in my behaviour. My grades dropping at school lots of fights at school. Irritable, paranoid, aggressive. So they picked up those changes but because my parents were not as clued up about these things they just thought maybe it's just the alcohol or maybe it's just a group of friends. So, they were suspicious but they could never really catch me out. And if they did, I became very defensive which is one of the first things that addicts do. We're very defensive. Now you know...I'm not...you know even if I'm caught red

handed, I was still... it's not mine. You know. It's J's or G's. You know...who left it in my school bag. So uh they would go to an extent to hide it and that's what I did. But I... I'm glad that my parents communicated supportiveness, so they were seeing a problem then they were letting me know hey we're noticing this. And we really love you we care for you. And we can see that you are harming yourself you know. So, you need to speak up and own up if you need counselling. What do you need? We're here to help you. The funds are available. So, they always communicated supportiveness and love. It was never like they were shunning me as a result, but they could really tell something was up, but they didn't know how far I had...I had really gone.

Interviewer: And you mentioned that there was a point where you came clean to your mom. You write about your drug addiction. Um what led you what was that final straw to say you know what I'm done. I need help and let me approach my mom. What happened to get you to that stage.

Mr C: Obviously I just think the consequences of my addiction as well as the guilt and the shame that I was carrying because these were people that I loved, and they were being affected as a result. And I... I had to lie to them continuously. I had to deceive them. I even had to manipulate them to some extent. So knowing how they had raised me and the morals and values that they had instilled in me, I knew that this wasn't the right thing to do. You're not doing it right by your parents. So every time I see them or be around them this guilt would come up because I know that what I'm doing is wrong. And that I'm harming them and. So I just think it got so much that I just couldn't bear the burden on my own. And I just felt this prompting to open up but I was fearful as to how they would respond. Like how are they gonna kick me out? Are they

gonna stop loving me? Are they gonna you know you get what I'm saying? So I waited too long I think. I should have spoken out earlier because my parents responded in love, they wanted to help me. Like yes. What do you want? Let's do it. That's you know so...so they didn't shun me as...as I perceived in my mind. They were actually there to help me every step of the way so, I... I was blessed in that I had a very supportive family. That sort of they stood by me. I mean when I got into trouble they were there. They were picking up the pieces with me my friends were never there. The ones that I was using with. The ones that I was doing the things. They were never there. If I got arrested, they were not there. If I was in hospital, they were not there. When I was you know in rehab, they were not the ones visiting me. It was my loved ones. It was my family. So I had to come clean and I think that's what every addict needs to do you need to admit that you have a problem. If you don't admit nobody can do that for you. You know. Then we can't deal with the issue. So you have to say okay I need to own up. I've messed up and I need to do something about this. So, it's very interesting.

Interviewer: Um you know how you mentioned that your parents were by your side every step of the way. Were supportive. You know even when you would land yourself in trouble. Yeah, and it's interesting because my perception I guess in a situation of that nature would be so different as a parent to what extent like where do parents draw the line between support and enabling what...what about what your parents were doing was support and you know instead of enabling yeah you know

Mr C: I love what you're asking because my mother wrote me a letter right while I was in rehab and obviously them being there was a good thing. But it was also

a bad thing and my mother realised that. And she said to me the last time I went to rehab she said I can no longer act as a buffer between you and the truth. You get what I'm saying. So, I think everybody has a tolerance level and my parents had to reach that point where they were also on the verge of giving up but there was still that hope that I could change. And this is why they were still willing to help me. But they wanted me to know. Look we love you C but this thing we hate and so we are letting you do this we are going to help you, but we are no longer going to act as a buffer so if you are going to persist in this behaviour, you are ultimately going to destroy yourself. And there was...there is nothing that we'll be able to do in a sense or as a result. So, I love the fact that my mother said I've been acting as a buffer between you and this thing, I'm stepping aside you need to deal with this. You know what's wrong, but we are here. We love you. We're rooting you on but we can no longer enable this behaviour by being there for you when you are not making use of these opportunities that we are giving you.

Interviewer: Yeah, and how did that make you feel when your parents got to that point?

Mr C: I honestly was afraid so of course I was losing a lot of things right as a result, but I never thought that I'd lose my family. Like I...I even mentioned that no... no my little brother like said to me that he didn't know who I was anymore. I mean this is somebody I really love and so him saying those things and...and...and them just kind of seeing this change in me. And not recognise I mean for me I just wanted to show my family look I can change. You know I can become a better person, but I don't know how to. I don't know how to get to that point. And so it really hurt me that that they were not really recognising me. And I could see that I'm losing myself, so I had this fear of losing them. I

was like yo I'm losing the only people who have been there for me this entire time. So, I'm losing the only people that truly love me as a result of this behaviour because that's what addiction is. It's a consistent destructive physical or emotional behaviour regardless of the consequences. So, it's not like the addict doesn't know. They know but they cannot really help themselves because they're so caught up in this thing.

Interviewer: So, a common thread in your story is your mother and how her spiritual beliefs influenced you and her support in general, But I'm wondering you weren't a believer this entire time right. So, what were your spiritual beliefs?

Mr C: Well, I was a person obviously struggling with identity so I was caught up in like every wave. Like every new thing. If it was new age. I remember even trying to become a Muslim at some point. I ... I even tried to do some Hinduism. On this I was really as just as confused uh religiously, If I may say as I was you know... concerning my identity so I was looking for the truth. But I wasn't Christian, and it was just like something that I... okay this one. I don't want but I want to try all these others and see if they may lead to God. So, I was going to that thing with there was a new thing. A new belief. I would take that and if this one okay that one sounds more true than this one and this one looks more true than that one and maybe this one will lead me to God or maybe this one... don't so I was just as confused. Uh about God as I was confused about myself.

Interviewer: So, you actually were on a search for truth that you did you wanted to know who God is.

Mr C: Yes...yes, I remember when I was 16 so I kind of thought I was Christian, but I really wasn't. I abandoned like faith the concept of religion. I think I was

like 16 years old I'd watch the documentary that kind of lied to me. When I think about it now, but they were saying you know this is a myth and that's not true and this was made up and this is a fabrication. And I was like okay if this thing is a lie, then I need to find something else. And so, I professed to be an atheist but because of all those near-death experiences. I knew that there had to be a God because I kept going through these things and surviving. Or you know I...I got through so many things and I'm like you know and everybody was just telling me there's a God. You know there's a God there's a God. So, I believed in the God but not specifically in Jesus Christ. So, I did become an atheist later on I believed in the concept of a God but I think it was of God that that that I could manipulate and control. A God that was fine with the way that I was living my life. A God that I would only call on when I was in trouble. So yeah, that was that was sort of my thing. But I did believe I just wasn't sure you know if especially with Christianity...This was the faith you know. If ...if this is the one because I...I thought, there are so many you know so maybe I should find my own way everybody's going that way maybe I should find mine.

Interviewer: And but what was it about Christianity that made you rejected at that time because logically I would think your mom is a Christian so that would be the first your first point of exploration, but you almost chose every other part but Christianity. Why do you think that was?

Mr C: As I said like uh, we were told certain lies about Christianity. Okay about you know religion being used to manipulate people and so it was always people always focused on Christianity when they would say that, or this was used to endorse slavery. Or this was used to perpetuate this or perpetuate you... you get what I'm saying so Christianity was always made out to be the enemy and all

these other religions are fine. No these are okay, but Christianity was always made to...to look out like the enemy. So, I think my mom did an incredible job, but I didn't know at the time. I couldn't see that the reason why she loved me was not only because she was my mother, but it was also because I couldn't get why she was not giving up on me. I would even tell her like stop like you need to stop loving me like this but when I became a believer, I could see oh this is where she was also drawing strength from. To continue you're going to say she had a source of love and that's why she was able to pour, and I couldn't understand that love.

Interviewer: In your testimony you mentioned that you were hanging around the wrong people so once you were saved how did you go about changing your group of friends? If that is what you did how did you handle those personal relationships after coming to Christ because now, you're a new creation so what happens to everyone else.

Mr C: Yeah, so there...there were certain pillars that I uh developed in my life that sort of helped me because I remember that I hadn't been to rehab just once. So I'd been to rehab a few times so I'd also learned about mistakes that I was making because when you go to a rehabilitation centre they teach you certain skills. And so, what we would do is that we don't change everything as we are told. Like we want to change this part and not that part and we end up falling back. So, the these are the five pillars that are still keeping me to this day so. Number one is...is putting God first. You know and one of my favourite scriptures was proverbs chapter 3 verse 5. The scripture talks about trusting in the Lord with all your heart and not leaning on your own understanding. You know. Acknowledging Him in all your ways so that He can strengthen your

path. So that helped me a lot. Talking to God daily. You know. Reading His word and just you know guarding my time with God. And so, my second pillar was that I had to change my playmates which was all my playgrounds and my playthings. So, any place or person or thing that was associated with my addiction I had to disconnect myself from because I realised that it's much easier to avoid temptation than to resist it. So, if I'm going to put myself back in these places I will ultimately fall back because they triggered some for me. You know things like even like the music that I was listening to at the time I had to change I had to find this new circle of friends and there are certain places that I still do not go to. Like I don't want to go to a bar. I would not go to a club. I would not put myself in this situation because I know that it's much easier to avoid than resist. Of course, also having a mentor helped a lot. I think that's so crucial. Just having somebody who's in support of your recovery and in support of your relationship with God. Who can walk that journey with you? Also taking your sobriety one day at a time. Like because I felt other times, I was rushing myself. I wanted to accomplish a lot in such a short space of time instead of just enjoying every moment and Jesus' kind of shocked me when he said do not worry about tomorrow. But tomorrow will have what is about itself. So, you focus on today. You seek God. For today you focus on being sober. For today. And then number five was obviously making a plan for temptations because they'll always be there. You know God said even to Cain you know the like sin is date your dough. Like it's right there. It wants to devour you. It's there and so the more you grow in sobriety these things also grow and there's it's so easy for people to slip. So just always being on your guard for temptations so that just really helped me because I knew that if I'm not changing it I'm choosing it. And so, I had to

change everything. That meant being lonely. I mean not having friends for a while but I've been closer to my family. I've been closer to my siblings you know, and I did find new friends. Friends who believed in what I believed and of course and...and we inspired one another. And obviously we did have friends who did not believe but they were also stirred and desired. What it is that they saw us have so...so these pillars have kept me to this point and it's always something that I share with the guys at the clinic. As well like look it starts with God. The power is not really in the method you know it's in the source but these pillars will...will help you but you need to keep practicing them.

Interviewer: And have you reached out to any of um...your previous friends who are still stuck in that life have any of them actually come out and come to salvation?

Mr C: Yeah, so there are many of my friends who have uh after a while of course they didn't believe it they knew me as they perceived. Like we know you bro you did this before you'll be back and so one year passes and two years passed and they were like wait a minute like C's really changing. Even when I would you know make a turn, I wouldn't like stay with them but I'd visit them. I'd always feel this prompting to go and share with them that hey you know to go share Jesus with them. Like look it's still possible because it's really working for me, so I did have friends who ultimately did uh get saved as a result. But I also have friends who are very resistant of me who broke of all contact with me as a result of that and then I've also had friends who...who got worse. Some of my friends passed away. Some are in prison. You get what I'm saying so I...I didn't manage to pull everybody, but I managed to inspire a lot of people and many of these friends of mine are still rooting me on because they know where we come from. And it still gives them hope when they see me winning, they feel like hey we're

winning too. And I'm like guys but you need to come over on this side and then live in this victory as well so it's still uh drawing a lot of my friends in but some of them well they...they no longer want anything to do with me.

Interviewer: And have you ever had a moment within because you've been saved for five years now and you're clean for five years.

Mr C: Yeah, praise the Lord.

Interviewer: And have you ever had temptation to go back and if so how did you overcome that?

Mr C: Yeah so...\*Laughs\* Well the thing is like I said with you...you know temptation is always going to be there. Yeah, so there are times when I've been exposed to certain things that I've been trying to get away from. And then obviously my mind would normally just think about the pleasure but there's a principle you know that I've learned. And that's just kept me away is that I've learned to hate the consequences of my addiction more than I love the pleasure. I remember the lady was my therapist at the time said she liked uh that I was a consequential thinker and she said if you think this way you will actually keep yourself away. So, I would think about going back but then I'll also think about what comes with that. The guilt. The shame and I...I just don't think it's worth going through all of that again. You know. For that moment of pleasure and so God told me it's another way okay. What's really better. Are you gonna...you know? You compromise for this moment and go you know so that's what also keeps me away just the pain and just gratitude towards God. Like if I do go back people are just gonna say yeah C's back on it. They're gonna say yeah and he's a Christian you know and so what's that going to do to God's name. What's He

going to say about what He's and He will not be the one to blame. Obviously, it would be my choice. So those thoughts have come but then there's this immediate reminder that hey you know, and God obviously uses scripture as well a lot. So thank God for His word. Um. God says that we you know we have to take every thought captive and...and bring it to the obedience of Christ so that helps to just remembering scripture as well. And God does that. Just immediately you know. If I look it's like He'll remind me. You know. What His word says or just remind me of the consequences thereof. So He's faithful he really is he always provides us with a way out. I just think people don't take that gap does that you know that just that small gap that instance you know that God gives you like run will flee you know says the word son sounds like flee from your youthful lasting passions pursue righteousness faith in love along with those who call on the law from a pure heart. And so, I find it easier being transparent as well about my struggles so I don't hide it you know. I'm open like that hey moms I'm having temptations. Hey pastor yo I'm struggling with this you know I'm struggling with lust or I'm struggling with this and I'm afraid that it may compromise my relationship with God and lead me to even you know more devious sins. Because it starts with small little compromises you get what I'm saying so we are the ones we have these desires for these things and so God helps us to resist those desires and instead to...to adhere to His so that helps me a lot.

Interviewer: Amen so I want to ask you so many more questions, but we have run out of time. We definitely have to do a part two like we definitely have to do that um but C it was so good having you here. Thank you so much thank you for sharing your testimony so honestly. So openly um and really for all of the words of

encouragement that you've shared. As well I know that you have a natural knack for speaking and speaking life into people. So, this is what he does guys. In case you're wondering why he's so eloquent praise the Lord hallelujah. Just to conclude how can people reach you what are you involved with if there's someone who is actually struggling with addiction right now what is the step one that they can take um in order to move towards recovery.

Interviewer: Yeah, so obviously it is them acknowledging that they have a problem and then of course seeking help. There's so many uh sources available. So many places. Even the clinic where I work. They can contact there. They can ask for information about rehabs. If they don't have money while there's other places that do it for absolutely free but if you personally want to get hold of me you can find me on Instagram right now you can find me on Facebook. And I think that's about it you can inbox me there. Tell me what your situation is and then we'll pray and see what we can do about that and how we can help you okay.

Interviewer: Okay thank you C.

### **Vlog 8 Transcript: Mr P**

Mr P: Thank you S. My name is P and I'm an alcoholic and it is definitely by the grace of God that time's over. Uh, just for today I want to thank the Shivering Speakers for asking me to, to share with you this evening. Uh, it is indeed a privilege and an honour and uh S, you may have heard me a number of occasions but that was just for three minutes. You should come close and hear the, hear my heartbeat or feel how fast it's racing and, and, ey, it's a kind of nervousness that I haven't overcome in all these days in Alcoholics

Anonymous. Ah, but what a, what a pleasure it is to be here, and you know to celebrate this milestone. Uh, the D's have become family to me. I found the meeting, uh through my friend S who's introduced me to this meeting. And uh she shared at the morning meeting and then the, that afternoon, I jumped onto the steps meeting, and I haven't turned back. And uh, that meeting has been phenomenal and great recovery and thank you so much for adding value to my life. So my voice will be a little croaky because I'm still a little nervous but hopefully it will, it will work itself out by the end of the meeting when it's your turn to comment. (Laughs) Uh, my being at this meeting today or any meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous is my appointment with God. I found God in these rooms, and I've found God through you people. Uh, and I wanna to apologise if there's someone that may not have my conception or perception of God. Uh, but for me it's all gratitude to the God of my understating for my being in Alcoholics Anonymous. And so, when I come here, you know I don't want God to be disappointed with what he sees. Uh, I don't want him to scratch his head and I say that I should have given it to the guy behind P, or the guy in front of P. Uh, you know it is by His grace that I'm sober and of course, you know, he's certainly gonna wonder if I had squandered this gift that he had given to me. And uh, you know, sobriety doesn't only co, it comes with a responsibility. And, and, and Doctor S, and the, you know and the, at the end of his letter, he states that you may rely absolutely about what these people have to say about themselves. And he's talking about being drunk. Uh, someone that society wanted to kick out and he is telling the people that are reading this book that you can rely absolutely on what P has to say about himself. And immediately it places the responsibility of honesty on me. And uh, you know, ah for you to

depend absolutely on what I have to say you know it has to be something of substance, something of weight. Ah, but much of what I'm going to say this evening and much of what I know in our colleagues anonymous, someone else knew before me and it is through these meetings and interaction with people like you that I've come to learn, and I've come to believe. Uh, so I come here not seeking self-satisfaction, but I come here with a deep sense of gratitude uh, for God to Alcoholics Anonymous, the programme of recovery and, and wonderful friends that I've found in Alcoholics Anonymous that have helped me to stay sober, uh you know, through these years. Thirty years of being in Alcoholics Anonymous was no different this morning. Ah it didn't give me any kind of immunity, uh, against that first drink. Uh, I suffer from an illness, you know. Uh, and every day I, I, I wake up with untreated alcoholism and every day is the day that I have to treat it. And so, it doesn't matter what I did in the last twenty nine years and three hundred and four days, it's what I do today that would keep me sober. So my first decision this morning was the decision to stay sober and even though it may be the thirtieth anniversary, I am still powerless over alcohol. I still cannot manage my life on my own. And so I had to do what I needed to do in order for me to stay sober today in order for me not to pick up that first drink. There is a slight difference however, uh, when I... Twenty-nine years ago when I went down on my knees and I prayed and I asked God to keep me sober, I didn't know what, what to expect. I didn't know what I was in for. I didn't know what life was gonna be like. Today, when I went down on my knees and I asked God to keep me sober, I knew exactly what I would lose if I didn't stay sober. And it is through coming to Alcoholics Anonymous that, you know, your losses become your gains and, and ignorance becomes knowledge

and, and, and so today, you know, I this is. I come to Alcoholics Anonymous, uh not because I'm scared of getting drunk, uh not because I got a marker register but I go as many, I go to as many meetings as I can because I need as many meetings to give back what was so freely given to me. And, and I wanna pay tribute to my dad, my late dad was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous who carried this message to me. And he carried this message to me when I was a, a, a college graduate, a secondary school teacher and he had only two years of formal education. And he carried the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to me. So, this illness of alcoholism is not only for the degraded, it's also for the degreed and, and, uh you know, it doesn't require any kind of uh, formal education. Uh, it requires an acceptance. It requires a belief; it requires a few basic principles that allows me to stay sober. But you know, I, I come from an alcoholic home. Uh, I grew up in an alcoholic home and I was always wanting what the other side had. Uh, when I looked over the fence, uh my neighbours seemed to have better stuff than us. Uh, their toys were always better, their parents spoke to them better. Uh, when I went visited my friends and, and I saw their parents sit around the, the dinner table or the coffee table and, and talk lovingly to them, I thought something was wrong. Uh, because those things I didn't grow up with you know. My mum was emotionally absent. Uh, she was affected by my dad's drinking. She was affected by her dad's drinking and then obviously my mine. and so, you know growing up as a kid, when we used to get home from school, uh my mum used to have a few slices of buttered bread for us and a cup of tea for my sister and I. And, and you know when, when I got home before, I, I, I, I started to have that tea and butter bread, I would always ask my mom you know, are you still angry with dad? And, and she would

always tell me no. But the manner in which she told me no, I knew that she was too angry at him. And so, I didn't enjoy this bread because you know, the drama of the previous night, uh the thoughts of, of the fight at school etcetera. And you know the next day was the same and the next day was the same and by Thursday that anger would have subsided and uh, you know I would enjoy that, that buttered bread and tea. And guess what? It's Friday and the drama of the alcoholic home repeats itself. And, and you know I knew it was going to be another weekend of, of, of trauma another weekend of, of vulgarities and all of these things. And I grew up with that you know I loved my dad, uh... and I didn't think that there was anything wrong with him. I just thought that my mom just interfered with his drinking. And I picked up my first drink at the age of thirteen. And, and, and these guys that invited me to the first drink were giving me, a, a farewell party. We were moving home from the area that we were living in. And, and, and they didn't buy, they bought half bottle of alcohol and we went and bought a packet of cigarettes and some, some soda to go with it. And, and you know once that alcohol was finished, the guy said, "That's it" and you know uh "Party is over" but it wasn't over for me. On the first day that I drank, I needed more alcohol and, and, and I went, and I got more alcohol. Forty or fifty years down the line, I meet these guys, they can still have a few drinks and say party is over and go home. And, and, and sometimes if we're having a meal and these guys are having a beer or whatever it is, and they can ignore that beer and they can actually take a bite of their meal. They can leave the beer on the table, and they can take a walk and they can have a conversation with friends. And that beer troubles me. How could you do that to alcohol? And, and this I'm talking about in sobriety you know. I couldn't understand and I used to tell these

guys you know people give drinking a bad name (Laughs) And, and (Laughs) And you know at that point in time if I had known that you know this uh, this was going to take me down a path of degradation, misery, humiliation and the whole lot of negativities that I associated with, I would have probably uh, not gone on further. But there was one important thing that I wasn't aware of, and I only got to know about it in Alcoholics Anonymous and that when it comes to alcohol, I'm bodily and mentally different from other people. And, and it took me a long time to understand that. And so you know, uh life had started to become unmanageable, career choices had changed. Uh, I ended up doing something that I really didn't want to do. Uh but you know as my drinking progressed in me in my early days uhm the goal post started to shift and, and my ambitions uh you know diminished. And the important aspects of my life were relegated they became secondary issues. And I scraped by you know uh just, just, just making it with little success in whatever I set out to do. When I qualified as a teacher you know I thought that they would respond, I would be placed with responsibilities and, and I used that as a signpost in my life to say that uh you know this where maybe I would make the change. And act-actually I wanted to make that change at that point in time and, and when I got to that point in time, I wasn't even twenty-one years old uh when I qualified and uh, I said, 'Okay, when I turn twenty one then I make that change.' And then I moved it to twenty-five. And all along though the desire was there, I didn't realise that you know unless I'm in me and how was I to know about it because I, I didn't know anything about this I didn't even know I was suffering from an illness. And you know I just thought that it was normal for people to, like me to drink. Uh, driving under the influence of alcohol, uh license being endorsed,

suspended sentence, time in jail, a whole lot of drugs in my life. Uh you know life had become unmanageable. Uhm, resigning from a job, geographical changes, all of these things were not powerful enough uh, for me to stop drinking you know, such was my powerlessness. I remember uh, I resigned from the teaching profession and then I went and I reapplied and I was sent to a school and when I got to the school, I introduced myself to the principal. And remember I made all of the promises that I'm going to pitch up to school regularly, I'm going to mark the books, I'm going to be ready for the test etcetera, and I get to the school, and I announce my, and I introduce myself to the principal and he greeted me. Obviously introduced himself and the first question he asked me was do you drink? I don't know if he smelled the alcohol of the previous night, or he could see alcoholism on me, but he could have asked me any number of questions and he asked me I drank. Uh, of course I developed a resentment towards that guy because how could he? Could have asked me any number of questions. And so he asked me to go and familiarise myself with the staff and you know get to know them. And I get to about one meter away from a guy that was standing on the sports field whom I've never met in my life. And as I get to him, he tells me they're only sending alcoholics to the school. And, and then this was someone I didn't know and, and you know my reputation had preceded me. My reputation had gotten to the school before I had gotten to the school. And, and you know that was a situation and you know, uh, with us Indians, we have these big functions, and our weddings last a week. I mean the function and the build up to the wedding last a week. (Laughs) I'm not saying that the marriages lasts a week, but the celebrations last a week (Laughs). And so uh, you know if you got to uh to a night before of a wedding and you suddenly

saw people picking up their bags, getting the children together and getting their husbands together, you must know that I arrived at that function. And, and, and you know my cousins didn't want their husbands to be with me and they didn't want the children to see because I would start off, uh, being the...you know, being the live wire of the party and I'd end up messing up that part. And I didn't want to do these things. I didn't have any intentions. I got ready and I got to that party uh, you know and I told myself you know, when I was teaching I used to have this battle and I had this battle every time. When I got up in the morning and I thought about the night before, fights I had caused in the pub, uh, the arguments that I had, the debates about sport, politics, thing which I knew nothing of and, and when I got up in the morning and you know, my mind will tell me that if you drink today you're going to die. And at two thirty when the school bell rang, my heart used to tell me if you don't drink today, you're gonna die. And I used to have this battle between my mind and my heart and, and, and, and my mind would tell me 'Go there and have one beer or go there and have two beers.' And, and you know I didn't know about this phenomenon of cravings. And I wondered how I'd gotten it wrong every day, day after day, after day. And, and, and you know, I couldn't understand that by this time you know, I became the lower companion uh... People who loved to be with me no longer wanted to be with me. My friends suddenly decided that they didn't wanna drink today and then er, you know, even though they wanted to drink they wouldn't drink because of me. And, uh you know life had become unmanageable. Uh, they I, I was in relationships, and you know, I had girlfriends, but I'd like to refer to them as hostages you know. They got away as quickly as they could. Uh and you know and even though I, I, I wanted to be

in these relationships, they weren't powerful enough to keep me, to stop me from drinking. My dad had joined Alcoholics Anonymous in November of 1989 and in April of 1990 or around that time, he, he suggested Alcoholics Anonymous to me. And you know the thing about this, this illness is that you know I'm unable to see the spiritual melody of my own, uh my own spiritual melody. Other people can see it in me. And my dad saw something in my drinking that I couldn't see. And you know I thought he wanted me to go to Alcoholics Anonymous because their lives were unmanageable because of my drinking. And (Laughs) and so you know I'd take the decision to go to Alcoholics Anonymous. I had stopped drinking about two weeks before I went to Alcoholics Anonymous, and when I got to this first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, I made a decision that a) it will not have anything to do with my sobriety. I didn't wanna drink, but I didn't wanna be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and one of the reasons I gave 1) I was too young; 2) I was too educated and 3) I thought that there was a stigma attached to me being in Alcoholics Anonymous. And for the next fourteen months these three things, either individually or collectively conspired to keep me drunk. Uh, and you know I'd come into Alcoholics Anonymous; I'd go to a few meetings and then I'd think I didn't need this stuff. And I'd go and I'd continue to challenge the devil in his own playground, continue to sit with my friends, uh pour the drinks for them and, and, and before I know it I was, I had that first drink. I didn't know, I didn't stick around in Alcoholics Anonymous long enough to know that you don't take the first drink. I didn't stick around long enough to know that you know you change your, your playmates, your playgrounds and your playthings. I didn't know all of these things. And so I succumbed to that first

drink and you know and then I'd realise you know when I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I realised that it is easier to stay here than it is to get here. And each time I tried getting back into these meetings you know it wasn't that the size of the door had gotten smaller, it was just that my head had gotten so big that my head couldn't fit through these doors. And, and it and you know, I had a problem and, and it took me fourteen months and you know it was on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1991 that I had my first day of sobriety again. And, and, and you know this thing about admission, and you know, uh I've learned that you know we can admit, we can admit that we're alcoholic, our lives have become uh, unmanageable etcetera but until this admission becomes acceptance, you know recovery was difficult for me. So, what happens in the head has to somehow move into the heart because it tells me in our literature that we must concede to our innermost self. And this is the first step in recovery, not of recovery, it's the first step in recovery. And so this message from my brain didn't reach my heart and I couldn't concede to my innermost self. So until I reached a point of admission and acceptance, you know recovery wasn't going to be possible. Start coming to Alcoholics Anonymous, and you know I learned the term white knuckling it, you know through these online meetings and I dare not say the, the name of the platform that I, that we are using, lest we as Alcoholics Anonymous endorse this platform. (Laughs) And I'm very mindful of our traditions but I learned, uh that you know uh the term white knuckling. And so, uh but I was just scraping by each day you know, just making it not to take that first drink and a sigh of relief when I went to bed because I knew I was quite safe. And I looked around me and you know I saw people that were, that were effortlessly laughing and enjoying life and you know they probably came in after I did. And

the difference between those people and myself was they had found God and I haven't as yet found God. And you know this thing is about acceptance. I had to accept that I couldn't do anything about my illness, uh without a power greater than myself. Uh, you know my powerlessness couldn't be sorted out by me and, and you know, so, so accepting God and you know. So, I'd get down on my knees and I'd ask God, I didn't, my God didn't have a name. I didn't have a form, I didn't know what this God looked like I just, I just said you know, 'God please keep me sober.' And at the end of the day it was 'Thank you god.' And you know uh the thing about this is that you know, I heard in the meeting the other day that when you put the plug in the jug, you just cure your drunkenness. It is only when you, when you, when you start to work the steps that you, that you treat your alcoholism. And this, this illness of alcoholism you know progresses even when I'm sober and I think it progresses more rapidly when I'm not drinking. And, and, and you know so, so I had to, I had to come to accept that you know I was walking around with untreated alcoholism and uh, you know I have a sponsor today and the best part of that relationship is that he knows he's my sponsor. Uh, there were people whom I said were my sponsors before they didn't even know that they were my sponsors you know. If there's someone that had good quality, sobriety and you know I tell people that this is my sponsor and then and you know I never use the person and you know. Alcoholics Anonymous is not a spectator sport and neither is it, neither do I, do we recover by association you know. I'm stay with giants in Alcoholics Anonymous and I travel with giants and Alcoholics Anonymous, but I could never be as sober in mental to do what they did. And, and, and you know standing next to the person, the best person or the person with best recovery and

driving to a meeting with the person with best recovery doesn't make sober person. I have to do thinking about these things and the thing about the steps is that you know, I, I look at my recovery in, in you know in phases and the first phase that I, I you know of working these steps is a phase of obedience. I, in got to do it as a sense because when I obey these steps then I start to stay sober and as I continue to, to do these steps out of obedience, I start to enjoy life a little, and then comes the next phase of walking. These steps which is uh enthusiasm because it comes from enjoyment. And finally the last phase of which I aspire to and I'm still, still haven't been there is the stage of zeal. You know the effortlessness into which you just work and you get into the step in you, your, your powerlessness and your character defects etcetera and you know that's the phase which I strive to get towards. And, and you know, uh sometimes I have a good day and, sometimes I don't but, but you know Alcoholics Anonymous is always a work in progress. I will always be a work in progress. And you know they have terms like spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection and I always use that as a cop-out to justify my bad behaviour, as an excuse for my bad behaviour. But today when I look at spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection it means that I should be getting better every day. And, and you know I shouldn't, at the same point. And (Long pause) when I got to the steps and when I came to believe that a power greater than myself would restore me to sanity and when I made this decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God, I'd realise that you know step three, unless I do step four, unless it is followed by the action of only becomes a conversation that I have with God. The action of step four verifies this decision that I made and so after a few years in Alcoholics Anonymous uh, I took out these pages uh and, and you know I

started doing my inventory and I started writing my inventory and you know I was in Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm a fairly good guy so I just printed out a few pages and I went through it. Then I needed a few more and I needed a few more and those pages became like sixty-nine pages of inventory. And this is being in Alcoholics Anonymous and, and, and you know whilst I was doing these and there were five columns on these pages and in the first three columns, I had a field day taking other people's inventory and in the fourth and fifth column, there I learned who I was. And you start to see and you know in our big book it tells us, 'We start to see life from a different angle.' And the angle that I started to see in life was that I am not the victim anymore. I was the perpetrator. And, and you know Father Ed, uh Ed says that you know uh, when someone asked him what's heaven? And he says that heaven is a new pair of glasses. And, and in doing the step four for me is a new pair of glasses because I start to see life differently. And, and Father Ed said that you know if, if I, if you ever find me in heaven, it is by walking away from hell. And, and when I started to do the step four you know, I started to walk away from hell. Somewhere in our fifth chapter it tells us that we need to grasp and develop a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. It's not about grasping. It's about developing and when I start to work these steps, I start to develop a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Because step four is about, is about being honest about of who I am and what my part in all the drama of my life has been. And, and, and you know up until this time I, I was still not so sure that God was gonna remove these bedevilmments uh because I was confused a little bit about God you know. I was looking for God as if he was lost. And, and when I read our literature, it told me that God is deep down within me. And I was looking for

Him everywhere else except within me. And I realised that when I had done step four, I realised what had been blocking me from God. And they were layers that I needed to peel out. And once I got rid of those layers, I got to God. I got to the source, and I was now ready to tap into the source. I was now ready to make that connection. And, and, and this was after a six-hour conversation with my sponsor. Oh, and step five for me was such you know, I, my, I've overcome my nervousness now and you know my talking at an AA meeting is much like my alcoholism once I start, I can't stop. And so (Laughs) and you know but when I started, when I started with the step five with my sponsor you know I was stuttering, and I was stammering, and I couldn't put two words together. And uh, because I was most vulnerable, I was explained, I was telling someone else who I am. But you know what at the end of that, that fifth step, it was the first time in my life that three different entities knew exactly the same thing about me. I knew the same thing. God knew the same thing. And my sponsor knew the same thing. And there was never a time when three different people knew exactly the same thing about me. The story always differed as it moved from one person to the other. And there was the first exercise in honesty and there was the first demonstration of honesty in my life. For the first time I was being able to be honest to the extent that Alcoholics Anonymous asks of me. And I knew that life was gonna get better until my sponsor told that you know what you're gonna be stomping for a long time on six and seven. And, and, and my alcoholism sensed the weakness there. And you know, you know whilst I am busy trying to get sober and I'm working with God and I'm trying to work these steps, my alcoholism and my ego and my character defects, they're not gone too far away. They're probably around the corner doing sit-ups and press

ups, just getting ready to get into my life. And, and at six and seven it sensed the weakness, it sensed that I'm vulnerable and you know that maybe I'm not too keen on this. And my alcoholism told me you know what life still, life sucks, so what's the point? Why the hell do you need to get rid of all of these things? And I didn't want. I wanted to prove my sponsor wrong. I didn't want my alcoholism to whip me the way it had been whipping me all of these days. And the extent of my recovery will determine how much my alcoholism whips me. And so, you know, my sponsor called me again and he says, "How's it going?" and I say, "You know what I am battling on six and seven." And, and he told me a few things and that's when I realised it's not a pray and wait step, it's a pray and do step. And I wasn't ready for the period of anxiety and the period of unknown. And this is where my God had come into my life. And I had to pray to God to remove the anxiety of the unknown because I didn't know what a life was to be. Not to, not to swear a cab driver. I didn't know what life was not to swear the guy they just cut in front of me on the freeway. And so I had to get used to a life without character defects and this meant a period of withdrawal. And this is where I had to be entirely ready because I had to ask God to help me to overcome this period of withdrawal, to help me to get through this period of anxiety of not knowing what it is on the other side. I didn't know what life was beyond my character defects. And everything that I really wanted lay on the other side of fear. And I had to ask God to help me overcome this fear. And you know the beauty of this is that, you know in these, in the middle section of this programme it give you a whole step to prepare and then to execute. And in step seven you know I had to humbly ask him uh to remove, remove these defects of character. And then of course I made that list and I didn't show it to my

sponsor and he wasn't very thrilled about it. And I realised why, why you know. Why I should have showed it to Him because you know, we're not dealing with a common cold here. Uh we're not dealing with the, with something that a pill can sort out. We're dealing with matters of life and death. I am not here because I drank too much of milk or I have ingrown toenails. I am here because I have a life-threatening illness. I have a fatal illness and it's called alcoholism. Without help it is too much for us. And, and, and you know and so I had to be so mindful of these things and I had to listen to my sponsor. I had to have a sponsor that was louder than my head. I had to tell my spon, I had to have a sponsor who, and JK mentioned that and he says "You know my sponsor told me exactly the same thing." When I told him I drank the mortgage money, I took the mortgage money and I spent it on, on alcohol he said "You mean to say you stole." And if I told him that I spoke to someone whom I shouldn't have still been speaking to, he said "You mean to say you cheated on your wife." And, and you know so he, he pointed out the exact nature of my wrong. He pointed out the exact nature of my wrong and, and so you know, I eventually made the amends and step nine for me was like you know signing the peace treaty with my past you know. In step three, I'd surrendered but I hadn't surrendered to an enemy that was hostile. I surrendered to an entity whom I knew, God whom I chose, the God of my own understanding. And you know along the way before I just continue with that, you know talking about my character defects I, I found that working the traditions in my life had actually helped me overcome many of my character defects. And you know uh you know in step uh I run a business. I'm self-employed. And, and you know my character drift, uh defects can help me maximise my profits in the business that I run. And

you know tradition seven tells me that we should be self-supporting through our own contributions. And, and, you know and that whatever I do and whatever ah money I earn should be out of the efforts of my work and talents. I shouldn't be dependent on the talents and the so-called generosity of other people. And so, you know I'd learned to, to, to limit myself to that. I learned to understand I had to live within my means and, and tradition seven had allowed me and you know when I look back at my, my worst character defects, my worst character defects, the problems of money, property and prestige. And you know the step tells me what my problem is and the tradition tells me what my life is like. And you know if AA were a song, and you know when I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I'd just be humming the tune because I'm new to this. And when I were, when I, when I worked the steps, I learned the first verse of that song and I learned the lyrics. And I start to sing the song. And when I learn the traditions, I learn another verse and I start to sing the second verse. And so were the concepts. And if each one of us had to teach the other person the song, we'd all be singing the same song, the same tune, the same words. And wouldn't Alcoholics Anonymous be a wonderful place? And you know, when I come into Alcoholics Anonymous and I, and I, and I stay away from that first drink, when I take, when I take my first step you know I move a little away from that first drink but I'm still within reach of the first drink. And when I work the second step, I move a little away from the drink but I'm still within reach. And so, it is with the third. But as I continue to take those steps, I move further and further away and by the time I got into the twelve steps, I'm out of reach of that first drink. And if I had to add the traditions and the concepts to that, how far away from that first drink would I have gone? And this is what AA is about. It is a

three-legacy programme. It is not only about recovery, it is about recovery, it is about unity and it is about service. For me to just come here and recover and do nothing else is still, I'm still self-centred and selfish. I'm still, I'm still taking from Alcoholics Anonymous. What do I bring to the table of Alcoholics Anonymous? The twelve steps asks of me, the fifth tradition asks of me, the closing lines and the preamble expects of me to carry this message to the alcoholic who still suffers. And when I work and you know my hats you know, hats off to our co-founders. They, they wrote the book to allow me, P to carry this message in a consistent way. I don't wanna be the big book that a newcomer reads. I just wanna be the person that takes him into the big book. Let him read for himself what's on the line, not what's in between the lines, what's on the lines. I want him to read that. I don't wanna be the big book. I just wanna be the conduit. Because it tells me that having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps. Which steps? The previous eleven. We tried to carry this message and he tells me to whom I carried the message, tradition five is embedded in the twelve steps. We carry this message to alcoholics! Not to anyone else. We carry the message to alcoholics. Tradition five is embedded there. Our traditions were developed in 1950 or accepted in 1950. The book was written in 1939 and there's an evidence of tradition five. Our primary purpose, our singleness of purpose. And that's what he tells me who I should carry it to. There are a number of things that has happened to me as a result of coming to Alcoholics Anonymous. I stopped smoking. But that was the only thing that really happened to me. (Laughs) I, much of my bad habits are still intact. (Laughs) But whatever it is happens to me outside of Alcoholics Anonymous, I shouldn't bring it into this meet. I mean in Alcoholics Anonymous; I shouldn't bring it

and expect you people to believe that it's going to work for you. And you know people that have a problem with understanding the swift tradition of our singleness of purpose and I, and I, I sometimes I can be crude, or I tell it to them you know. Assuming you had a heart attack right now, would you want me to call a cardiologist, or would you want me to call a gynaecologist? What is your choice? And it is as simple as that. When it comes to our own lives and our own health and our own well-being, we want the specialist to take care of, we want the best people. When it comes to alcoholism, as alcoholics, we can help another alcoholic. And, and, and that's very close to my heart you know. Uh there are people that have come before us that made sure that Alcoholics Anonymous is in a good space for me to walk in. And what am I gonna do in my watch? It is my responsibility to leave it exactly the same or in a better space. And, and, and service in Alcoholics Anonymous you know has been the golden handcuffs that has kept me close uh, close to Alcoholics Anonymous. Uh, I, I have done general service apart from the service at my home group. I have done general service in our Alcoholics Anonymous and you know I've been, I've been down that triangle. And uh you know service in Alcoholics Anonymous and the principle behind service doesn't get bigger than one alcoholic talking to another. Whether you're talking to the alcoholic directly or indirectly, all we're doing is doing our best to make sure that the message reaches the alcoholic. And in our service, if being of service in Alcoholics Anonymous meant for me, I couldn't be with my son on his eighth birthday because I had to tell him Y, I'm off to a board meeting away for the weekend and I'm not gonna be here. You'd have to have your birthday on your own. Service in Alcoholics Anonymous meant for me that I had to close my business for a period of a week when I had to attend

the world services meeting uh, and you know I had to go away, and I had to. So, so service in Alcoholics Anonymous and if you're not inconvenienced a little in uh, when you're doing service then I don't think you are doing service, or I say for myself I don't think I am doing service. Because it comes at a price. It comes. But what it is? It is about giving back to what was so freely given to you. It means not being with your family. It means having to explain. And you know I met my wife when I wasn't drinking, I was in Alcoholics Anonymous and sobriety and when I introduced myself, I think the second thing that I told her was that I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. And a friend in AA remarked that, that was the worst pick-up line that he had ever heard. (Laughs) But you know I, I needed, I needed to make sure to tell this person you know what is first in my life, what is my primary purpose you know. I don't want my primary purpose to become my family, my job and everything else. Losing focus. These things are important to me, and I don't neglect them. I'm mindful, I might not even put food on the table at sometimes and I need to be mindful of the job that I do. But I should not lose fact of my primary purpose. I should not get involved in this chase of money, property and prestige because it diverts me from our primary purpose. And so I try to keep it as simple and you know as possible for me. Uh and you know it might work for someone else but for, for P the alcoholic, very often people would tell me that you know you do a lot on Alcoholics Anonymous and a lot of service. And I tell them I got to do a lot and a lot of service in Alcoholics Anonymous because I'm more sicker than other people. And, and you know I need to do a little more than other people. And so, you know uh acceptance and service you know as you go deeper down the triangle, the positions get fewer and the bosses get uh, get more. And, and you

know I had to, I had to reach that stage of acceptance, but I was grateful. And you know with service, my twelfth tradition tells me that I don't ever make a career or an ambition of Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't have any ambitions in Alcoholics Anonymous. When it comes to service all I need to do is put up my hand and say I am available. And God through the group conscience will decide whether they need to use me. And God had saw it fit to use me in the various positions. I've had the opportunity of being a regional trustee, the chairperson of the board in South Africa. I've had the opportunity of representing South Africa at two world services meetings uh, meeting delegates from fifty-five other countries. And, and you know what their problems are no different from ours. The height of the curb from the road to the pavement is exactly the same in Mexico City, as it is in South Africa as it is in Australia. The, the fact that our hands get shorter and our pockets, get deeper when it comes to the seven tradition is the same throughout the world. And, and, and you know so we have no different problems. And you know coming to the seventh tradition, uh for me the seventh tradition is just not by the way it's part of my preparation of going to the meeting. When I go to a meeting, I know exactly what I need to do as far as my seventh contribution, contribution is. So I don't get to the meeting and when the hat is passed around then I scramble in my wallet, I look at all the notes that I have and then I pick up a coin. I know exactly what I'm going to do when it comes to the seventh tradition. And, and that is my responsibility. And, and I, I make the greatest contribution to the seven tradition at my home group because I know where the money is going to. I know exactly what the money is going to be used to. And I come to your group and I'm not comfortable with what you're doing with the money, I probably pay for the cup of coffee and

nothing more. And I, when I go to a group that I know is contributing to the general service office and to the area and to the district then I'm, I'm more than happy to part with my money. And yeah, and you know it's not, it's just something that I, I'm, I'm serious about Alcoholics Anonymous. I love you a lot but I love Alcoholics Anonymous more and I'm not gonna make any bones about that. And then and, and that has gotten me into trouble you know. Uh because I defend Alcoholics Anonymous with my heart and, and with all the might that I have. And you know it tells me in the fifth step there's so many, there's so many references in the fifth chapter rather that tells me that I do this programme with my heart. It's an all or nothing step. It's an all or nothing programme. You know rigorous honesty. Tara from the very start. Complete abandonment. And you know fearless and searching. All of these things tell me that I need to do this programme with my heart. And so you know uh if I'm not going to do it that way you know it tells me half measures avail that's nothing. Half measures don't avail us fifty percent. And eight out of twelve steps don't avail us seventy five percent. They avail us nothing. It's only when I do twelve out of twelve do I get the full benefits of Alcoholics Anonymous. And so, I sponsor people. And, and I think I saw one or two of the guys that I sponsor are here on this meeting. And thank you guys for my hometown and my country for being here with me. And they know that I'm a difficult sponsor. Uh you know I, I don't mess around. I, I also tell them that you know maybe it's time I move because I don't think I'm bringing any good to you. I'd rather you stay sober than get drunk because of me. And then if and if we, if we can't see, if we can't find common ground then you know we got to move because this is, this is like I said you know it's not a common cold it's a matter of life and death. And I,

and I was detracted, or I deviated when I was talking the twelve step. And finally you know the twelve step in Alcoholics Anonymous tells me that you know I got to wear this badge of Alcoholics Anonymous with distinction. When I practice these principles in all my affairs. And uh excuse me the eleven tradition tells me that our public relations policies be, is based on attraction rather than promotion. S, please remind me of the time ah. And so, you know our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion. So, what is it that I have that someone's going to be willing to go to any length to get you know? What is it? If you want what we have and are willing to go. What is it that P has that a guy who walks in here for the first time is gonna be willing to go to any length? It has to be something of substance. It has to be something different from where he comes from. And so, sobriety is not only a requirement, sobriety is a responsibility. Because what do we carry? The, we carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. And what is the message of Alcoholics Anonymous? That we have had a spiritual experience. I mean you know...

S: Five minutes P.

Mr P: Thank you S. And, and you know the fellowship has so many, so many messages you know. And I'm, I'm not saying that they are incorrect messages, but you know they tell me stick with the winners and you'll win with the stickers. Stick with a bunch and you won't get peeled. Meeting makers make it. And sometimes I wonder what do meeting makers make it? Because I've been doing so many meetings, I made nothing until I got to the steps. You know this fellowship will sustain you. But the steps in the programme will change you. The steps and the programme will change you and the name of the game is change. Nothing changes if nothing changes. You know you can come into

Alcoholics Anonymous, and you can go to as many meetings as, as possible and the good news is that you won't drink. But the bad news is that it's never about the drink. It's never about the drink. It is about an illness called alcoholism of which drinking is just but one symptom. And so... What do you wanna be? Do you wanna be happy, joyous or free or you just don't want to drink? That is a question I had to ask myself you know. I didn't want to scrape by every day. I didn't want to scrape by every day. I wanted to end the day grateful. And you know step ten for me the, the orange juice on the floor step as I like to call it, is that you know it's a step where, when you spill orange juice on the floor you know exactly what you have to do. You can't let it get messy. You can't let people slip on it. You can't slip on it yourself. So you've got to just wipe up that orange juice. And step ten tells me that you know I stay sober today on what I do today. All of that service that I had done, all of those things that I told you about you know what's good for them? That's how go, that's what God needed me to do at that point in time. What is it that I do? I cannot dry today's clothes with yesterday's sunshine. I need today's sunshine to dry today's laundry. And so, step ten keeps me in the moment. And, and uh you know I love the part about step ten it tells me that we watch out for resentments, anger, dishonesty. And it uses a word they call 'when these appear'. It doesn't say if it appears it says when it appears. So, it's going to appear. So, my defects you know until God removes them completely they never ever remove completely. They just move from alcoholism side to my recovery side. And they can oscillate between the recovery and the alcoholism side. All it needs is a little bit of weakness and a lack of vigilance on my side and my character defects come back and start running the show. And step ten makes me find out about my character defects

before you find out about them. And I got to be vigilant. And so, what a beautiful day it is when I go to bed, and I retire and I take that inventory and I don't owe anyone an apology. I wasn't dishonest. I, I don't have to tell someone something that I, I should be telling them. And I find that those days get better and they get more. And, and, and you know it is because of this vigilance. I can't understand you know sometimes I tell my friends I don't know how one could get bored in AA because there's so much of work to do you know. I thought that when I did those sixty-nine pages of inventory on the fourth step it was the end of inventory. It was actually the start of inventory. Twenty-four seven, three sixty five for the rest of my life. Alcoholics Anonymous is not a spectator sport. It is something that I gotta do every day. I can't watch others getting sober and expect to be sober. And, and you know when I completed my service, I had to accept the fact that I needed to go back to my rooms and set the chairs, make the coffee, put up the slogans and do all of those things. It does not indemnify me or escalate me to any other level. I just, just did, just did these things because God needed me to do those things to be sober. And when it's over I return to being a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. So, I try to stick to the basics so that I don't have to go to basics. And, and you know Alcoholics Anonymous have made a huge investment in me in service and I need to give them a return on my investment. And that is why I keep coming back to these meetings. Uh you know, I don't wanna be the sage on stage, I'd just rather be the guide on the side. Uh you know sitting on the porch on the rocking chair and watching the kids play. They're gonna hurt, they're gonna fight and they're gonna lose their balance. I can just continue rocking. The only time I would get up from the chair and go onto the street is when they are in danger of getting knocked. And that's

the position that I'm trying to aspire to. Uh sometimes my ego won't allow me. It wants me to be in the middle of things. But it's a work in progress and so I hope that at some stage I would just be able to sit on the rocking chair and watch the kids play. So, I wanna thank you for making this a special day in my life. Thank you for allowing me to share part of my life in your or with you. I certainly am not nervous now as I was when I started this meeting. S, thank you for being a wonderful host and thank you all for listening. May God bless you.

### **Vlog 9 Transcript: Mr K**

How's it goin? Mr K here, and I'm gonna sit down and tell you about my experience with addiction and recovery. I've been to jail, I've been homeless, I've been to rehab three times. I put some links down in the description below. If you're on your phone you got to hit that drop down arrow, it'll take it down to the description. And I put the links for some books, the Alcoholics Anonymous website, check it out... and stick around for a brief summary of my experience with addiction and recovery, and subscribe, if you'd like to. I'm going to try to tell more and more about myself, hopefully it'll help those of you in need, looking for help and answers. Good luck to you. Hey, I'm Mr K, and I'm an alcoholic. I'm in recovery, I've been sober for 3 years. 3 years ago...on January 18th will be 3 years ago I had my last drink and if you're watching this video you're probably wondering if you or someone you know is an alcoholic. Chances are you or someone you know is an alcoholic because people who are not alcoholics don't sit around and wonder if they are. Anywho, I'm here to tell you what I know, and you can take it or leave it, hopefully it helps you out or helps a loved one out. Here's the facts: I spent 20 years of my life from age 14

to 34. 35 roughly...Drinking and using drugs, heavily chronically... I've been to jail, I've been homeless, I've been to rehab three times. I have been on the entire scale of...of all of that. I have been in a automobile accident in 2007 that put me in a coma for three months... broke all these ribs, this entire side of my body...coma. I had to learn how to walk again, I had to learn how to talk again. Tracheotomy, lung surgery, the whole nine. I almost died, my mom said that the Catholic priest read me my "Last rights" and I was off to wherever we go after this. So if you're wondering, and if you're feeling hopeless, let me tell you my short story and maybe you can get something out of it. It is my belief that you are of the of the addicted type your entire life. Addiction is a disease, a disorder of the personality, the spirit, the mind and eventually the body... and social life. It attacks all fronts of one's life. It affected my life even before I found (my drug of choice was alcohol) and before that it was Freihofer's chocolate chip cookies when I was eight... nine... ten (years old) I would demolish an entire box because anything that feels good, I want it all until I learned otherwise. Once I did learn otherwise, I adjusted accordingly, and it took almost a decade to finally be able to stay away from it. There's a ton of sayings in recovery, one of which is that "It's easier to stay sober than it is to get sober." This is absolutely true in my experience, it's a progressive illness and as you drink, the years go by, and it gets worse and worse and your consequences will get worse and worse. You have three options if you are of the addicted type: get locked up, get covered up with dirt, or you sober up... those are your three options. Jails, institutions, and death, if you stay on the path. I'm here to tell you these past three years have been some of the greatest of my life... the greatest of my life and my days keep getting better. Long story short, I was a mess. For two

decades, I was a mess. It started out fun, through my 20s it was fun. In the Navy, early 2000s, I blended in. Sure, I blended in. I went around the world and wasted all my ports on seeing the world drunk on more than half of them. Parties, friends disappeared, family disappeared... after a while you just... The consequences grow. DUIs, hospital visits, everything from falling on my face to wrapping my car around a tree. These all would be embarrassing if I didn't know for a fact that this thing is a disease and it takes one's dignity, life, spirituality, physicality, health...my family didn't trust me when I was drinking. Why should they? Your family won't trust you, your friends won't trust you... as Hunter S. Thompson once said you can turn your back on a man, but never turn your back on a drug... and that is true. Employment: I've lost countless jobs because I could not stop drinking. As vulnerable as this feels to tell a camera this, the possibility that I may help you make decisions that will take you to a better, fulfilling, healthy life is more important. It is a disease, but it is your responsibility to do something about it if you want to live a healthy life. Around 2011 I took a Greyhound bus from New York where I lived, all the way down Florida. My uncle J and aunt N were among the only people that had anything to do with me at that point, and Uncle J has had his run... he is sober, he's about 6, 7... he might be 9 years sober now. He had his story, so he was willing to help me out. I tried to use my military benefits to go to the Art Institute of Florida, I ended up drinking rum out of coconuts in my dorm and getting kicked out of there and getting kicked out of school. Just like many schools before, and many jobs before, these are all dead ends. If you are an addict you cannot drink, you cannot use, you cannot participate in your addiction or it will end badly, and if it doesn't end it's going to be a horrible life. I know functioning alcoholics that...

sure they're alive, sure they're not in jail, but they are just miserable excuses for human beings, and they will tell you themselves that same thing. This whole glamorisation of alcoholism, "Mad Men"(the TV series) they're always drinking and smoking. The reality is much, much, MUCH uglier and it is so ugly and so... damn near "demonic" that you will never forget it and it will push you to the brink of insanity or death! Check out AA (Alcoholics Anonymous.) Read the book. All it is... is a bunch of people with the same interest, a common goal and that is: to better their life through sobering up. There's a lot of resources in there and that's where I just kept coming back to... to get sober. That's where you can begin, you can also begin on the internet research things like this video. So, congratulations on taking a first step and exploring options and stuff. Let me tell you a bit about what I went through. My dad... fortunately I have a loving father that said "once you're serious about getting sober come live with me and we'll get you back on your feet" I happened to be \$20,000 in debt, I was virtually bankrupt, I had exhausted all of my resources. My credit cards were ran up, I had no place to live, I had been homeless for months and I just was in the worst shape possible. I moved into my dad's house and for the next few years I just went to AA (meetings), and I worked at Kohl's department store for \$8.25 an hour. I worked my way out of debt. Once I started getting healthy... although I had a couple relapses. A year would pass, and I would think that I could go out and drink like a "normal" human being again and... that wouldn't happen. We...you cannot. I guarantee you if you are of the alcoholic type many have tried, for hundreds of years, to drink like a normal human being, but this is a disease. It is some sort of complex disorder of the chemistry, of the physiology of "God knows what" but the fact remains: you cannot drink without bad things

happening. So, the definition of addiction is: "Continuing a compulsive behaviour regardless of negative consequences." That's exactly what you must be going through if you're watching this. If you just like to hear me talk, God bless you, so do I. Long story short, it took me a while. After my third rehab I finally said: you know what, I am going to just get a job I may not like, but I'm going to go to work like a "normal" human being, and I'm going to not drink. I'm going to work on my independence and my spirituality, and my health and I continued to go to AA meetings, and I continued to go to my new job. It was a factory job that I don't necessarily like! One of the building blocks of recovery is: to get out of your own head, you help others. In my case, and in everybody's different personalities you find different ways to do that. I had to start with plants. "Can I keep a plant alive and water it?" "Can I keep a fish alive and feed it?" lol... and then myself before I could move on to helping my dog and then I graduated to my sister, my niece and nephew, then my dad... Now I have my own house. I was homeless a couple years ago... now I have my own house I was jobless, now I have my own job, I've been there for almost two and a half years! I'm here to tell you that I did it. I'm here to tell you that thousands of people have done it. However, you do it, the highest priority in your life if you find yourself having negative consequences from drinking and drugging, is get sober, stop using, stop drinking. Once you get healthy, and if you put those things down you will get healthier by the minute, by the second, by the day, those turn into years... All kinds of things start building on top of each other. If you continue drinking, if you continue using drugs, you will go downhill and at the bottom of that hill is Death: Six Feet Under. Alcohol and drugs... they're a beast. If you need help, reach out. Private message me. If you know me: call

me, message me, text me. It's a good time (if ever there's a good time to be an addict) it's a good time. We live in a good time. The understanding of addiction is... is getting better and better. So, in summary, I was the walking dead for a while. I found my way out. If you need help, you're not alone and... "Nothing changes if nothing changes" so get off your ass and do the damn thing Thanks!  
I'll see you next time.