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**0:00:16 John S:** Hello, and welcome to AA Beyond Belief, the podcast. I'm your host John S. Today's episode features Mark C, from Wichita Falls, Texas, who talks about his recovery, Holy Wars, and doubling down on love and tolerance. So how you doing my friend?

**0:00:32 Mark C:** I'm doing well. Nice to talk to you.

**0:00:34 John S:** Good talking to you. You say you just got back from a meeting.

**0:00:38 Mark C:** Yeah. I just walked in the door.

**0:00:39 John S:** And how was it?

**0:00:40 Mark C:** It was fine. I go to a conventional meeting here in town, a conventional meeting at a conventional group. And they were tied. There were 14 people there, and six of those people were atheists.

**0:00:56 John S:** Is that unusual for that meeting?

**0:01:00 Mark C:** It's usually not nearly half and half, but there will usually be several atheists in the room.

**0:01:07 John S:** That's kinda interesting.

**0:01:08 Mark C:** And approximately half of the people in the room completely opted out of the Lord's Prayer, which is typical as well.

**0:01:18 John S:** That's really interesting. Now, Mark where exactly are you? You're like in West Texas, right?

**0:01:22 Mark C:** Yeah. I'm in Wichita Falls, Texas. We're about 120 miles northwest of Dallas, Fort Worth, on Highway 287. And if you continued on that road, you'd eventually wind up in Amarillo, Texas. So we're about halfway between Amarillo, Texas, up in the panhandle, and Dallas, Fort Worth.

**0:01:45 John S:** Gotcha. Alright. So I figure, and that's actually a pretty good size city then, Wichita Falls.

**0:01:51 Mark C:** We're around 100,000 people, give or take in our city.

**0:01:55 John S:** It's kinda funny, when you get to know somebody on Facebook, I always have this impression that you're living in some dusty little, desert town somewhere. [chuckle] Not the case.

**0:02:04 Mark C:** It's pretty much everything out here is dusty, it's little, it's me. In our county, for example, there are 150,000 people, in our entire county. And then here in Wichita, we've got about 100,000. A lot of those are... We have an air-force base here, which is a NATO training base for fighter pilots, who are allies, and our own US troops. So we've got a lot guys from all over Europe here and so that makes things interesting too.

**0:02:38 John S:** I just wondered 'cause I thought around here, I don't know if I've ever been to a meeting where there's been that many open atheists. And just about every single meeting here closes with the Lord's Prayer. But if I remember right, are you the one that started the not saying the Lord's Prayer, and it started catching on at that group?

**0:02:58 Mark C:** Yeah. I was. I guess part of my story we'll talk about... It lightly touches on what I call a "holy war," which pretty much went on incessantly for the first two and half years. When I came in very early on, I would attempt to be feeling like I was a part of, and I would stand in the circle, and of course I'm not praying. I am an atheist, but yet I was made to feel that really I shouldn't be in that circle. There would be snarky remarks. There would be, "Look the atheist is praying. We got him praying. It'll be anytime now." This kinda noise, and then some people would just look at me and smirk, and give me the evil eye and stuff. And eventually, I didn't take too much of that. In the context of a lot of other very negative things that were going on for me to say, "You know what, that's horseshit. That's intellectually dishonest for me to stand here with this."

**0:04:06 Mark C:** And as a matter of principle, I refused to do it. Prayers, this, beliefs have nothing to do with me getting sober, nor a part of my recovery from this hopeless state of mind and body. And to be intellectually, rigorously honest about that, was a challenge. And when I opted out, that of course just fed into the ongoing holy war, and of course a big issue is made out of that as the... It took me a little time in that context to figure out how to respond to the backlash from simply opting out of the prayer. And when pretty much anything you ever say is vocally attacked in public, in front of everybody, what do you do with that? And it took a little while for me to begin to figure out, "Well, how do I explain myself in this circumstance? This environment?" And eventually the preamble of course helped me do that. Logically, if you look at the preamble, well AA's not affiliated with any religion or sect. And the Lord's Prayer is technically, Protestant's prayer.

**0:05:23 John S:** Yeah. The one that we say in AA is a Protestant version, isn't it?

**0:05:27 Mark C:** Absolutely is, yeah. It's not, "Our Father." And a good Catholic, if he's square with his theology and the teachings of his church, he's not gonna be involved in a religious exercise that's usually with non-Catholics. A lot of Catholics still are like that and think like that. Early AA history had some problem with that.

**0:05:48 John S:** That's right.

**0:05:50 Mark C:** Clarence. The guys up there from North Akron.

**0:05:54 John S:** That would seem to be like in the early days of AA. That was really the primary concern, is trying to make it acceptable for Catholics, rather than worrying about...

**0:06:04 Mark C:** Well, yeah. I don't know if it was unacceptable to, it was unacceptable to Catholics. Clarence, and those guys, that's part of their problem. Their religious superiors were saying, "What are you guys doing down there?" And the rest of that's history. They really took off from there. It was interesting. But eventually, I came down to that narrative, that Protestant Christian beliefs, nor any Christian beliefs, are not part of what got me sober or how I live sober today. I respect your right to have any path you like and to practice any ritual you like but you're gonna have to just be a conscientious objector, a principled dissent position. It was surprising I was the only one. And we humans are kinda sheepish. We like to herd up.

**0:07:03 John S:** We do.

**0:07:05 Mark C:** And collect together in these little flocks. The outliers a problem. And so part of that for about, I don't know, I guess I noticed maybe after about a month of sitting out this prayer, I noticed somebody else sitting out. Across the room, he's sitting out of the prayer. And pretty soon another one, and then another one, then another one. And so it's to the point now, without any kind of a floor fight, without any kind of motion, motion as in Robert's Rules of Order motion, at pretty much any given meeting we'll have, we may have roughly half the people completely opt out of the Lord's Prayer, and have the freedom to do that without having to put up with a bunch of BS about it, while the Christian Protestant or Catholic contingent can have that as part of their deal and nobody gives anybody any guff about it. That's how I approached it and over time that has had some influence on others to say, "I don't really like doing that either. I'm not gonna do that either."

**0:08:15 John S:** I tell you man, I admire you for doing that. I could see that probably could have worked in my old home group if I would have tried doing that. Because god, there are a lot of people there that they didn't take it too serious. They just said it because that's what you do and I think if they would've really thought about it, they probably would've started sitting out, they see other people sit out.

**0:08:34 Mark C:** Yeah. And once they begin to hear a narrative, and if that narrative's coming from our literature, the preamble for example, and you have the opportunity to maybe explain yourself a little, then it seems to carry some weight.

**0:08:49 John S:** It's kinda funny but it's only in the Midwest and the South, and I guess in Canada too, [chuckle] where the Lord's Prayer is being said in AA meetings. I guess they don't do it in New York and the East Coast or in California, I guess they don't say the Lord's Prayer. Maybe some of the meetings do. I guess the US is still pretty into it.

**0:09:10 Mark C:** Well, sure. Protestant Fundamentalists, and Evangelicals, are probably the lions share of most religious believers that flock to AA. We do have a few Catholics here, they have trouble with the Lord's Prayer.

**0:09:29 John S:** The last time I ever went to my old group, that's the only time I told them I was an atheist, I don't go to their meetings anymore. After that, this Jewish guy came up to me, I'd told him about this agnostic meeting, he says, "So you guys don't say that stupid fucking Lord's Prayer do you?" And I said, "No, we don't. Do you not like the Lord's Prayer?" He says, "I hate that goddamn thing." And I said, "Well, why didn't you ever say anything?" He says, "It's not even worth the trouble." He told me. But I think it would have been worth the trouble, if he were to let people know just how much he hated it and hated saying it, then maybe people would listen to him. But that's going on in AA all over the place right now.

**0:10:04 Mark C:** Oh, sure. My first few years sober I was still traveling with what I do for a living and I went to AA meetings in seven states, and every meeting I went to closed with it. And as a result of me not doing that and being open about who I was, I'd met a few atheists here and there along the way. Well, I say "every one", except for one meeting I went to an agnostics meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota and of course they did not say it. But I found it a little boring, [chuckle] and I'll say why: Because everybody was pretty much on the same page about everything.

**0:10:44 John S:** You mean at the agnostic meeting?

**0:10:46 Mark C:** Yeah. And that meeting as I recall it, there was a lot of religion bashing and stuff. And I am not opposed to being mad in the proper context, you know, have a little fun with it, but that's not why I go to AA.

**0:11:04 John S:** That happens sometimes with these agnostic meetings. Our group goes through it periodically. It kinda depends upon who's there and where they're at in their recovery or their experience just dealing with traditional AA. 'Cause people get... They just have to get it out of their systems because they've either been beaten down for years trying to conform to other peoples' beliefs or they've just realized that they don't buy it anymore and it's just kinda a shock to their system. But we went through that for a while in our group. We had quite a period, kind of a rough period where some people really had some hard hurt feelings about how they were treated by their old home group. And they were just so relieved to have another AA meeting they could go to talk about it that, boy, that was the subject for a long time about what was wrong with AA basically.

**0:12:00 John S:** But yeah, I don't like it either. It doesn't really help with what we're really there for. And speaking of that Mark, I was reading your story. You had a long descent into alcoholism, and then you had a long road to atheism. This isn't anything that happened to you just like overnight. I thought that was kind of interesting. You wanna kind of go into a little bit about your journey and how this all happened, you know, from alcoholism to recovery, and from belief to atheism?

**0:12:33 Mark C:** Yeah, sure. I was about eight or nine years old when I took my first drink. We were at a 4th of July celebration, big family event, large family. And my little cousin and I were the youngest two little squirts running around there, and some of the older timers decided it was time for these boys to find out about stuff, and they made us drink a beer. They had these big old galvanized wash tubs full of iced beer, where they made us sit there in these little lawn chairs, suck down that beer. 'Cause we were being curious, you know. And we both got hammered and sick, and I just hated it. And my cousin, he didn't hate it. And by the time he was in high school, he was a full blown alky. By the time he was in his early 20s, he was in full-blown drug addiction as well, jails, hospitals, running from the law, and all kinds of stuff. He died of cirrhosis of the liver at 32.

**0:13:40 John S:** God. That's...

**0:13:41 Mark C:** And so, I just remembered, I came out of that experience with an aversion to alcohol. I didn't like the effects of it. Or it's taste.

**0:13:50 John S:** And how long did that last?

**0:13:53 Mark C:** That lasted for quite a while, actually. I smoked my first joint at 12 years old. I discovered I liked marijuana. And by the time I was 17, I was smoking all the time and I was using amphetamines heavily, all the time. I was managing a weird schedule I had with those two substances. And in the interim there, all through that, there were all kinds of other drugs. Lot of LSD, hash, peyote, and stuff like that.

**0:14:30 Mark C:** But I walked away from all then when I joined the service, and never really looked back on it. I drank a few times in there as a teenager. Boone's Farm Strawberry Hill, I remember one time. But looking back on it from my perspective now at 60, the last few years I've

been examining my life about this, I realized I couldn't remember anytime that I drank that it just didn't go kind of weird and crazy. That it was always to excess and I don't know if I mentioned that in my story or not, but that seemed to be the predominant theme of me and alcohol. I'd get sick, but I never got sick on this other stuff, see? And this is kind of how it sort of evolved. But like I said I walked away from it when I joined the service. I drank a couple times in the service and both those times, that I recall, got pretty hammered. It just wasn't a couple, deal. But my apparent version to alcohol and the use of drugs was given a pretty significant boost, as a result of a what I call now, in the context of AA, a transformative religious experience on a Houston freeway. And that was my introduction into the beginnings of a Christian life and Christian ideas.

**0:16:06 John S:** Yeah, that was really interesting.

**0:16:07 Mark C:** Christian world views.

**0:16:10 John S:** You actually had like a burning bush type of an experience right?

**0:16:13 Mark C:** Yeah, it was quite a bit like that. I didn't see white lights or anything, but it was life altering. It changed the way I looked at the world, existence. And that put me on a better path in life in some real way because I was not raised in any of that, and so that was kinda novel to me. But I began to study the Bible just incessantly and Church history, and I suppose those two interests developed into a much broader interest in history at large. 'Cause if you study those two things, you're immediately drawn into the history of philosophy. You're immediately drawn into a lot of things, cultural, social histories, all kinds of stuff. Everything is inter-related. But I spent a couple of years in solo independent study like that, but didn't know any Christians. And I came out of that period on the basis of a verse in the New Testament, in Hebrews. It says, "Do not forsake the gathering together of yourselves as is the habit of some, but encourage one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24 and 25 is the verse there. Kind of applies to AA in a way, doesn't it?

**0:17:40 John S:** Yeah.

**0:17:40 Mark C:** I hadn't thought about that. But that verse prompted me to reach out to others and I began to attend this little Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. And there I was... The first time I was ever really exposed to some pretty vibrant Christians, who accepted me and loved me and encouraged me. It just fed into the whole world view. You could see the same kind of thing happening in AA, out of this isolation. A lot of us, we're in utter isolation at the end, and maybe we've spent some years in utter isolation. I know I did. But just walking back into a social setting was just a huge challenge. And to see somebody that had something you had in common with and finding some encouragement like that, is just profound, isn't it?

**0:18:39 John S:** Yeah.

**0:18:40 Mark C:** It can be quite powerful. So that's how I look at that. My early days, of course, most of the people I had began to be associated with, were pretty much, Bible literalists.

**0:18:54 John S:** Yeah, that's what you mentioned.

**0:18:57 Mark C:** When we look at the texts, the Bible, they took it very literally. They were not modernists, or Liberalist in the sense. But over time, they say the Bible is probably the world's best

handbook on atheism ever written. Voltaire had something along those lines. The people, most of the people who are believers, don't dig in that deep to the Bible.

**0:19:24 John S:** No.

**0:19:25 Mark C:** If you do dig in that deep, you're gonna find yourself in lots of trouble, because there are some things that just don't add up and can't add up, and eventually the wafer thin excuses about that no longer support you, and you have to just admit this thing falls to the ground.

**0:19:46 John S:** Yeah. I find the Bible pretty interesting. I had an experience kind of like yours, although I didn't study it as much as you did. But I knew absolutely nothing about religion, and I was still drinking at this time. I guess I was miserable, so I by myself sat down and read the Bible cover to cover because I didn't know anything about the damn thing, and then I decided I was gonna take a class about the Bible. So I went to this junior college, and I took a class. The most interesting class I've ever had in my life: The New Testament as literature. So we didn't study it...

**0:20:17 Mark C:** Interesting.

**0:20:17 John S:** Yeah, we didn't study it from a theological standpoint. We studied it as a book, as literature, and it was taught by an Episcopal priest. And it was really fascinating, because then you learn this is a book that was put together by human beings, it was put together, like some of the books, like a century after Jesus supposedly, even lived. It was very, very interesting. But it put it all in perspective, and it gives you a little bit better respect for it than... If you try to take it literally, it ruins it, I think. But if you look at it from a historic perspective, and as literature, it's really interesting. And, like you say, it opens up other doors, because then you get interested in learning the other things about what was going on during those times.

**0:20:58 Mark C:** Exactly.

**0:21:01 John S:** But I didn't get into as deep as you did. You really... You can quote verses.

**0:21:06 Mark C:** Yeah, it was my life. That whole world view is my life. Bible study, and fellowship with Christians, and disciple-ship and scripture memory. You heard me quote the chapter and verse to that verse I tried to give earlier. The guys I was running with, some of those guys had memorized the entire New Testament. They'd majored on that stuff, and so that was part of our daily routine, was memorizing the words of God.

**0:21:40 John S:** And during this time, when you were doing this, Mark, your drinking wasn't... It was pretty manageable, right? You weren't...

**0:21:48 Mark C:** Oh absolutely. Yeah. I'll reintroduce then, alcohol into the story, so we don't get tired of the theological absurdities here. Eventually, I started looking up some guys that were at the reform stage. John Calvin, those kind of guys, were reformers, in that sense. Presbyterians, reform guys, they of course were not tea totalers. And I had a little bit of Bailey's Irish creme in a cup of coffee at a Christmas Eve function, with my mentor, sponsor/disciple maker guy, that I was learning a lot of stuff from. And some of the other guys that were hanging around this outfit that we hung around with, it was called the Navigators. The Evangelicals that are in the audience will probably recognize that group. And it was very casual. But it wasn't too long after that, within a year or so, I was drinking a couple of beers after work every day. I had found that something about

alcohol, this disciplined approach to it, just did something for my mind and body that I found just pleasurable. It calmed me down a bit. I just felt better.

**0:23:05 Mark C:** And the occupation I was in, of course, was of extremely high stress, and extremely demanding. A lot of public interaction and people with people that are in all kinds of really horrid circumstances, and they're emotional, and volatile and not generally reasonable, about anything. And that occupation turns out, seems to crank out alcoholics by the thousands.

[laughter]

**0:23:33 Mark C:** Like cops, and lawyers and doctors. These high stress occupations, produced a lot of high functioning drunks. It's just what it is. But I maintained that sort of an intake for a few years. But I was drinking daily, and over time it just slowly increased, and in terms of quantity, and duration of when I was drinking, kind of see it on a bar graph, just takes off and then it just goes across and gradually gets more and more and more. Then about 10 years in, I'd occasionally have this thought, "Well, I seem to be drinking more and faster than my buddies around me." But we all drank heavily. And I'm involved in my profession considerably, and those guys had a lot drinking.

**0:24:21 John S:** So during that time when your drinking was getting out of control then, were you still into the religion thing?

**0:24:28 Mark C:** Yes, absolutely. I was still in theistic belief, yeah. And it was slowly, alcohol was slowly, almost imperceptibly, taking more of me than I knew. So by the 10-year period, I was going, "Well, maybe I'm drinking a little more, I'll just... And then I'd blow it off." 20 years into it... I drank for 30 years. 20 years into it, by the time 20 years rolled around, I sort of knew that whatever this was, it was a problem, and I really need to start trying to work on this thing. And the memory of my cousin was in my mind then, thinking about him a lot during those days.

**0:25:16 Mark C:** I still think about him a lot. So I try to, at that time, try to control, moderate, quit. I would moderate, in terms and control in terms of not drinking every day. And then, when I did drink, not drink as much, for as long a period, when I was drinking. And sometimes, I would have these little periods that I thought were successful, I even quit a couple of times. The longest time was for three months. But I started again. And instead of getting any better, it just got slowly and progressively, worse. And I spent about five years trying everything I could do to kind of figure that out. Like I said, I had these little successes every once in a while, and it would kind of encourage me to think, "Well, I think you got this. I think you're getting a handle on this." So this delusion, had not been smashed at all. I was still hoping to drink like a regular person.

**0:26:19 Mark C:** And I think Wilson really knocks that stuff out of the park, when he keeps talking about that kind of thing, in The Big Book. At least it resonates with me to the point where I feel so confident I can repeat that to most drunks, and they'll sort of maybe get it.

**0:26:36 John S:** Yeah. That was my experience, too. I'm in meetings sometimes, and people say that they never really tried to... They say, "Oh, they never wanted to drink normally." Or whatever. I don't know what I was thinking, but I would always tell myself when I'd go out to drink, I was not gonna get drunk. I would tell myself, "Tonight, I'm just gonna go out and have a few drinks." I'd tell myself that, but inevitably, I would get drunk. So I wanted to have some control over it. I wanted to have a way to drink. And sometimes, to be honest with you, I still would like to be able to drink normally. But I know I can't. But that was a big part of my drinking is that, "This time, I'm gonna

do it right." And so, yeah, I had three DWIs, each one a year apart.

**0:27:31 Mark C:** That'll make you poor. [chuckle]

**0:27:32 John S:** Oh God, yeah! This was a long time ago, but they weren't as serious about it as they are now. I mean, you go to prison now for that. But it was getting pretty serious back then. So I was looking at doing six months in jail, which for me would have been just absolutely horrible. They gave me probation. I got lucky, but...

**0:27:55 Mark C:** Yeah, you did.

**0:27:56 John S:** Yeah, nowadays, they go to jail. People go to jail and they get a felony for three DUIs.

**0:28:00 Mark C:** A lot of times, unless they're well-connected, and they have a really good lawyer, at least in this part of the neck of the woods. If you're from a well-connected family, and you've got good money. I know some guys that have five or six DUIs, that are still walking around free.

**0:28:20 John S:** Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that's the case here, too.

**0:28:23 Mark C:** Our justice system's pretty rigged.

**0:28:24 John S:** Oh, it is, yeah.

**0:28:27 Mark C:** But yeah, your story is kind of where I begin to find myself at about the 20-year point. It had to come to that point where it was just taking on a life of it's own. And my drinking would take a life of it's own, in the sense that I would ignore my initial choices of how much I was gonna drink, how long I was gonna... That kind of stuff. It just kind of take off. So I'd have all these little successes, but it'd be interspersed by many more periods where it is like, "Well, I didn't intend to do this at all. And this is pushing me towards that point of incomprehensible demoralization." Which I think Wilson hits that pretty good too.

**0:29:11 John S:** He did. Absolutely. Me too.

**0:29:14 Mark C:** But five years before coming into AA, I had given up. I just gave up. And the last couple years of it, I was pretty much always drunk. I was high-functioning for so long, I had quite a bit of money stacked-up, and I don't spend a lot of money, because I'm a cheapskate. So I could essentially, live and not work for a few years. And that's pretty much what happened. Over the course of those years, I had started to turn down more assignments 'cause I preferred to stay home, and be drunk. It just slowly took it all. But yeah, I'd thrown in the towel, and I had come to that point of surrender, really, which is part of the step one business. I know my story doesn't talk much at all about the steps. It's too wordy as it is and maybe another story for another time. But that surrender to this fact about me and booze, that it had just kicked my ass, and I could not figure out a way to fix the problem. I gave up.

**0:30:24 Mark C:** I was pretty much always insanely drunk, during that last couple of years. When I woke up, I was still drunk and I was drinking before I was putting coffee on, and I drank all day and all night, 'til I either passed out or I blacked out. And then I'd wake up the next day and start all over. And that's the way it went. And that's just what it was for me to... But a point in that, during

living in that mental state and that level of it, I decided I wanted to live. I had become quite ambivalent, about living or not living. I didn't care. I hadn't cared for quite a while. But I decided I wanted to live. I had three grown children from a marriage that had lasted 20 years and I had three grandchildren. And the oldest one at that time, was six years old. I had never been invited to her birthday party. They had more damn sense than to invite a drunk to a little kid's birthday party.

**0:31:33 Mark C:** And I was 30 days sober, and I got invited to a birthday party for my oldest granddaughter, for the first time. I stood on the side of the pool over there trying to hide, and I was just weeping. 30 days sober, and I was seeing some fantastic things and that's just progressed. Now I have nine grandkids and they just keep coming along. So what we were talking about.

**0:32:01 John S:** Well, so you were describing the point now where you decide you wanna live. So is this where you get to AA?

**0:32:10 Mark C:** Well, yeah. That night, it's about 10:30, I was hammered out of my mind as usual. I'm leaning up against the countertop in my kitchen 'cause I can't stand, and I decided I wanted to live. And my phone book is right there and I grabbed the phone book. What I knew was, I couldn't fix it by myself, that if the problem could be fixed, I was not at all confident that it could be, it would require me doing a completely different course of action. And the one thing I did know was that drunks got sober in AA. AA seemed to be drunks getting sober. And I knew for a fact, I had no doubt in my mind that I was a drunk. And I called the number, and a nice lady got on the phone and told me where a meeting was, and the time, and I went to my first AA meeting the next day. I think I related in my story that I had not a lot of knowledge about AA. I could look at the 12 steps back during my period of ardent Christian belief, I had been an atheist for 15 years by the time I made the decision to reach out for help and just walk through the doors.

**0:33:20 John S:** Okay. Yeah. So that during your drinking period, you decided, you lost your faith, in other words? You embraced atheism basically.

**0:33:32 Mark C:** Well, actually, that was long... If you read de-conversion stories, which you can, like I say, on Ex-Christian.net, for example, is a great place to hear testimonies, if you wanna call them that, or stories of people and their de-conversions away from Christianity in whatever form; fundamentalist, liberal, whatever, theistic belief in general. That's usually a long, slow, gradual process. So if I could throw out some terms, it would probably trace my personal evolution, from ardent Christian Protestant theism, to a general theism, to agnosticism. Well, there's a little period there where I thought deism was attractive. The atheists pretty much destroyed deism in the 18th century, if you'll read the intellectual histories of it. They had some help, of course, from their Christian apologist friends. But then I became agnostic leaning toward theism. Then I considered myself basically an agnostic. And I didn't quite know what those terms meant then. Agnostics disregards belief, or knowledge, rather. Theism is belief. Atheism is a lack of theism. Doesn't tell you a damn thing about what I might believe, it just says, "I do not hold theistic beliefs." This has nothing to do on knowledge, what a guy knows, or what...

**0:35:06 John S:** Right, exactly. Exactly. And that's where The Big Book gets that wrong, or the 12 on 12 that says the atheist...

**0:35:12 Mark C:** [chuckle] Wilson never was a non believer. He was never an agnostic. He was, by his own words, he was never an atheist. He always was a believer. He was not a theistic believer. But he was a believer. He believed that there was this intelligence, supernatural, nebulous, woo woo

fuzzy thing. He became a theist as a result of his conversion experiences, white light experience, the Belladonna gig, and his perception, his interpretation of that experience into the proposition that, "God is personal, He loves me, and He's gonna do business in my life." That's a different point of view that there's a cosmic intelligence out there somewhere.

**0:36:03 John S:** Exactly.

**0:36:04 Mark C:** So he's clueless. And he was not a philosopher, he was not a religious historian, he was not a theologian, but he tried to become a lay Christian apologist, without Jesus, in The Big Book. Those are technicalities, but those kind of distinctions, and definitions of words, begin to bring some clarity into this picture. Yeah, so basically I was agnostic leaning toward atheism. No theism. Or theists. And then eventually, one day, I was sitting there reading... The one thing I did not lose, all these years, was my fascination with history and philosophy and religion literature. That's been the one major undying passion in my life, in terms of the life of the mind. And I could read and think, drunk as a skunk, and write too. So I realized, I am without theistic beliefs.

**0:37:04 John S:** And this was while you're in AA, right? This is your...

**0:37:07 Mark C:** No, this is before.

**0:37:08 John S:** Before? Oh, I gotcha.

**0:37:10 Mark C:** Way before. This is me coming to be intellectually honest about what it is I believed or didn't. And I go, "I am without theistic belief, therefore by definition I am without theism." You see what I'm saying?

**0:37:28 John S:** Gotcha. So how was it in AA...

**0:37:32 Mark C:** It bothered me. [chuckle] "Now what?" It bothered me. 'Cause all of these beliefs I'd held for so long, even though they'd been eroded by thinking, what do you do with that? What do you do with it?

**0:37:46 John S:** So you show up in AA, and... Are you drawing similarities between what's going on in AA and your past experience with religion?

**0:37:55 Mark C:** Oh, absolutely, without question.

**0:38:00 John S:** And so how did you overcome that, and stick with the program? How do you overcome that and deal with it to stay sober?

**0:38:07 Mark C:** Well, one, accept reality. That is the reality, I immediately begin to of course, explore our primary text, The Big Book, and read it several times, in different kinds of ways. And to me, as far as my point of view about it is, it's essentially a theistic religious text.

**0:38:32 John S:** It is, it is, absolutely. AA is a religion, in my opinion, it truly is a religion. I want it not to be a religion, but it is a religion.

**0:38:43 Mark C:** For a lot of people, it damn sure is.

**0:38:45 John S:** Yeah. If you treat it, I guess if you act like it's a religion and treat it like a religion, it is. And it was for me. It's not now, but it was.

**0:38:53 Mark C:** Sure. And well, even back during those days, John, it helped keep you sober some, didn't it?

**0:38:58 John S:** It did. Yeah, I can't knock it.

**0:39:00 Mark C:** Even with those views, you think?

**0:39:01 John S:** And life was actually getting better too, that's the thing too. Everything was getting better.

**0:39:05 Mark C:** Yeah. So it carried you along a positive path, even though you came to a position later, "Well, X, Y and Z here is completely false." Right?

**0:39:16 John S:** Exactly. Right.

**0:39:18 Mark C:** And in fact, if I hold those, those are really delusional beliefs, is that there is no rational justification for believing those things to be true. It's just, that's kind of how we're wired. We believe a lot of shit that we've got no justification for, but if we're looking for justified true beliefs, that becomes a different question. So I could see the first four chapters as essentially, Wilson's long argument for the existence of a personal creator God who is all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful, and upon which, if you did not place your confidence and faith, you were probably gonna just die drunk.

**0:40:09 Mark C:** He's making that long argument. And it comes in pieces for the first couple of chapters, but once you get to chapter four, that's where he sets out to become the lay theistic apologist, by laying out the reasons for believing that such a being exists. You see what I'm saying? And unfortunately, he begins to look at that chapter in the context of an argument, which it is, then every plank of that argument is predicated on a logical fallacy. It does not follow. As an argument, it fails. His cosmological argument... What's interesting about those arguments to me, is that if you go back to evangelical apologetics, the latter half of the 19th century, the first couple of decades of the 20th century, pretty much what you see in The Big Book is standard fare evangelical apologetics, for the existence of God. That's what's really interesting. It's far more Protestant and Evangelical than people wanna think about. But that takes some background to do those kinds of investigations. I knew a lot about it, so I see it. But what else is going on in there, for example if you look at the serenity prayer, which is not in The Big Book, right?

**0:41:30 John S:** No, it's not.

**0:41:31 Mark C:** That gets tagged on, then in every meeting I've ever seen, if you look at the gist of that prayer, the core concepts come straight out of Stoic ethical philosophy, particularly Epictetus. Now, Reinhold Niebuhr did not credit Epictetus or the Stoics, and he remodeled the thing so that it's a petition, that serenity is a gift of God. But no, Epictetus says, and the Stoics said, "Serenity is a result of a rational exploration of these things that I have power and control over the things that I do not have power and control over, and understanding the difference between those two things."

**0:42:15 John S:** Well, isn't that interesting? Well, I never knew that. I never knew that's where that came from. So he actually borrowed that from the... That's the ancient Greeks right?

**0:42:25 Mark C:** Yeah. And Roman. Epictetus was a Roman.

**0:42:27 John S:** He's Roman, okay.

**0:42:28 Mark C:** This is the latter part of stoicism.

**0:42:31 John S:** Okay. So he gets this from ancient times. I didn't know, I never knew that. And he turned it into more of a...

**0:42:36 Mark C:** Most Christians will come up with crap like that and rephrase it, and try to find some kind of originality, but in a sense there's nothing that original on the planet.

**0:42:48 John S:** No. It's kind of funny about the serenity prayer, because some people think that the serenity prayer is a good alternative to the lords prayer and that it's not sectarian, or affiliating with religion or anything. Like for example if you go to New York city and go to meetings there, they don't say the lords prayer but they do say the serenity prayer. So do you think that that's even acceptable?

**0:43:12 Mark C:** I'm sure it is for some people but for me, I'm a metaphysical naturalist, I'm an atheist. Prayer as put is a petition to God who's gonna give you something. In my view, that God does not exist.

**0:43:27 Mark C:** Exactly, well that's my view too.

**0:43:28 Mark C:** You see I'm without that. But the core of concepts of what's going on inside that prayer, came out of a very rationalistic, non-theistic philosophical thought. Epictetus. Epictetus' manual, to be specific. And once you begin to understand that which I had been exploring for years, ancient Greek and Roman thought, that is the environment in which Christianity was born. So my curiosity has been on all kinds of trails. There's a great deal of stoic thought in the New Testament. And if you get looking at it, for example if you'd pick up Marcus Aurelius' meditations and begin to read that, and think about the stuff you have heard in AA over the years, you're gonna go, "Holy shit there's a lot of stoicism in here."

**0:44:23 John S:** Yeah. There's...

**0:44:25 Mark C:** There's a lot of basic religion.

**0:44:27 John S:** I think it's gonna be a thing at the convention. I think Jesse, is gonna do a panel on stoicism in AA, and that's probably what he's gonna be talking about maybe.

**0:44:39 Mark C:** Oh yeah. He and I kinda, we talked about that when he and Dorothy made their little trip through the... Across the plains and stopped for about 10 minutes, I got to meet those two. They were pretty tired but they...

**0:44:52 John S:** So he's into that.

**0:44:53 Mark C:** Yeah. That will be awesome to see Jesse again and everybody else that I get to meet.

**0:44:58 John S:** But you know, pretty much everything in AA is like that where if you just take out the supernatural and you just focus on actually the action or the thought behind, then they kind of make sense.

**0:45:13 Mark C:** Sure. One way to look at the 12 steps, for example, if you look at the end of step 12, where we are putting these principles. Principles are guiding our affairs. Well, what is the principle of step one? What is the principle of step two if you're taking theistic beliefs out of it? There's still a principle going on there, it's operating below the content whatever, as it's written, same as step three. So the first step is essentially... The way I talk about it for me is this basic surrender to this one fact about me and booze. That's the first one. And the second and third ones really are extensions of a growing surrender to some other fact about existence. I do not control a great deal, mostly everything is outside of my control, so there you go. So theologically, in the Christian context, it's put in contexts of submitting to God, depending on God, and trusting God that he's gonna figure a better plan than you do. But it's a surrender, you see what I'm saying? It's a wider surrender, than just this fact about me and booze. It's the surrender of, "I really don't control very much. I don't have power and control over very much at all." So that's another way of looking at it, I suppose.

**0:46:40 John S:** Yeah. So where you are at now, we kind of started with where you're at now. So you're very comfortable now as an atheist, you've been sober in AA for a long time, you go to traditional meetings and so... Talk about that a little bit. So you're managing pretty okay with your traditional meetings?

**0:47:03 Mark C:** Oh as a traditional meeting goes, our group generally reads out of the Daily Reflection everyday, which is just... It's agonizing.

**0:47:15 John S:** It's a crappy book. I hated it when they first came out with it.

**0:47:20 Mark C:** It's hyper evangelical, there's no question about it but...

**0:47:25 John S:** Yeah, it's ridiculous.

**0:47:26 Mark C:** And of course the evangelicals here in the west Texas bible belt, love the dog out of that because they look at AA as a field of pre-evangelism, for their particular sectarian views. That's really what's happening there. So a lot of their...

[overlapping conversation]

**0:47:42 John S:** So you go to your group at any given time, you do have other open atheist there but... So is there actually... Do you have people that give you a really hard time about being an atheist?

**0:47:56 Mark C:** Yeah. The first couple of years in my experience in AA, it was a daily... It was a daily ongoing holy war pretty much perpetrated by two basic groups, who were formed around two basic leaders. One of those groups and leaders were of a literalist mindset, with regarding The Big Book.

**0:48:20 John S:** The Big Book. Yeah, we have a group like that here.

**0:48:21 Mark C:** The other faction in this group was led by a guy who was a liberalist. Okay. He didn't take it literally, he was more open, but they were involved in perpetuating a hostile daily situation for atheists. And there were four young atheists in the group when I got here. I watched them drive four of those people out of the room. I'm sorry, there were five of them. I had nowhere else to go. I was 54, they were young. The youngsters, they're not gonna put up with much of that crap, they're not gonna be around. And most old-timers won't either. Most people won't,ie.

**0:49:08 Mark C:** I was desperate and there was nowhere else to go. And as I was saturating my mind with the literature of AA and the history of AA, and pretty much everything that I could get my hands on that Bill Wilson had written and began to look at his evolution over time, I began to see a huge disparity between what was happening in that room as a practical matter and the larger, more diverse, principles that are in play on paper about the fellowship.

**0:49:40 John S:** Right. And if you talk to old-timers that have been around for 40 or 50 years, they'll tell you that in the '60s and '70s, it really wasn't as religious as it is now, that it's become more fundamentalist in the '80s and '90s. Yeah.

**0:49:56 Mark C:** Sure. Yeah, exactly. And really that's a reflection of what's going on in American society, with the Evangelicals beginning to come out of the woodwork, in the '70s and re-engage in the political sphere. And they shift to the right, farther to the right, become more vocal, more demanding, and more derogatory to anybody that they did not like. And we've got a congress full of people like that now and they control most of the state house legislature. We see the kind of legislation that those folks attempt to deploy upon all the citizens of the country.

**0:50:40 John S:** And so our society has gotten really silent.

**0:50:43 Mark C:** Same process is going on inside AA.

**0:50:46 John S:** Yeah. And what's happened to AA though I think too is that, the only people who will stick to AA, I think are the religious people, or people who can at least tolerate it. So now that's the problem you have in AA I think. If I go to my area assembly, the Western Missouri area assembly, I'm like the only open atheist there. But the only reason for that is, the only people that will put up with AA are the people who are believers, who are okay with the belief system. If AA itself would loosen up there would be more people like us, of our mindset in AA, but it's tough to be one out of a couple hundred people who are standing out of the Lord's Prayer. [chuckle]

**0:51:39 Mark C:** Or one out of six people. It's no easier.

**0:51:45 John S:** Yeah, or if you're a young person, you're like...

**0:51:48 Mark C:** It might be harder.

**0:51:48 John S:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, absolutely it would be harder. Especially if you're brand new, you're at the bottom of your life, you might not even wanna live anymore and you go to one of these goddamn meetings, and people are telling you about God and if you don't believe in God, you think, "Well, this is crazy." That's what people think now. Back then for whatever reason, it was

different. The times were different before the internet, that I would just accept crap, easier than I would now. With the internet, you get more information and you're just not gonna accept... You're gonna run into some situation, you can say, "Oh, this is bizarre. This is... I'm not going to do this." But back then you didn't really have that much information and you just said, "Oh, okay, well, this is what you do."

**0:52:33 Mark C:** "That's the way it is. This is what you do. That's what you believe." Think about it. Let's just kinda... There's a very natural explanation for all of that. The information age really is the information age. It started with the printing press and you and I happen to have lived during a period of time where it has just grown exponentially.

**0:52:57 John S:** Oh, man. It's changed everything.

**0:52:58 Mark C:** It's mind boggling. There's hardly any of us that can comprehend just how much this has grown. Thinking back, when I'm a kid, there's two channels on the television. They go off at 10:30.

**0:53:13 John S:** I know. [chuckle]

**0:53:14 Mark C:** And what, out of the networks, there's three networks. I'm sorry, there's three. One of them stayed open after the news because Johnny Carson was on, it was Jack Paar, before that. And after that it was the test pattern. Which means that...

[chuckle]

**0:53:27 John S:** Right, I remember. I remember.

**0:53:30 Mark C:** And they'd play the "High Flight" poem and the guy flying a jet plane, which I loved as a kid. But that was it. Any other information in your little town you were raised in came from your preacher or your parents or the people at your church or a small, little local newspaper or the library. And that was it.

**0:53:53 John S:** Yeah. It was easier for AA to kinda control it's message too, because the only thing you would know about AA, it was always positive it seemed. It was from some movie you saw, or maybe you read Dear Abby, or it was something like that. I had never had any idea it was so damn religious. I honestly... I never read the 12 steps. I never knew that God had anything to do with AA. When I was growing up as a kid.

**0:54:20 Mark C:** I knew it.

**0:54:22 John S:** You did. I figured it was just like... I don't know. It freaked me out at first when I saw it, but then, I did just go along. I was okay. I said, "Okay. Well, there's gotta be some psychological aspect to this." So then after a while, I actually, I guess, believed... I don't know what I did. But I was definitely one of those Big Book thumpers, for a long time.

**0:54:44 Mark C:** Yeah. It's almost... It's almost surprising if it does not happen.

**0:54:48 John S:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's yeah.

**0:54:51 Mark C:** Think of it like that.

**0:54:52 John S:** Yeah. You wanna fit in. So yeah. You wanna be one of the guys.

**0:54:58 Mark C:** And that's why it's natural.

**0:55:00 John S:** Oh yeah. I could learn that Big Book and everybody thinks I'm great.

**0:55:04 Mark C:** Yeah, absolutely. Now, when an atheist starts quoting that Big Book and taking them to places they don't wanna go, like the Spiritual Experience Appendix II and real places they really would rather avoid, then it gets kinda crazy. So this meeting today...

**0:55:21 John S:** Well, I'll tell you the funniest thing. Go ahead Mark. Go ahead.

**0:55:25 Mark C:** So this meeting today. I said there's 14 people there, six of them atheist, two of those people were hardcore Southern Baptist Christians. And one of 'em, the guy, has no wife, the guy goes to the morning meeting. Actually, part NA, but he does NA and AA. Whenever I say something, he gets... Whenever I start to say anything, he gets up out of his chair, walks out of the room, to this day. And here we are, this meeting going down, and there's no talk of God or spirituality at all, but just the whole process of self-examination, surrender, doing this in context of other people, taking responsibility for our lives, trying to clean up our past, owning that stuff, living a more responsible, positive, productive life, as a series of actions. We had just got the copy of the new Grapevine, which in the back of it has, it says, "October issue is gonna be all about atheists and agnostics."

[laughter]

**0:56:34 Mark C:** And I held that up. And the guy's sitting right across the table from me. And I go, "And here's a historical event, the October issue of Grapevine is gonna be all about atheists and agnostics in AA, who are still atheists and agnostics and work the program in their very own ways and in all kinds of ways and here we are." Now, me and this guy, we get along fine outside of meeting. I'm friendly to everybody. I really could care less what somebody believes, right? And they're awful damn concerned about what I don't believe, but that just goes with the turf, right? So our brochure for our conference in Austin, January 1st, I posted it up on the bulletin board. It stayed there until June, which was shocking.

**0:57:25 John S:** Yeah, that was pretty good.

**0:57:26 Mark C:** What would have happened within that first three years of my presence in the room, it wouldn't have lasted five minutes. But the last couple of months, we've had some guys that started coming to the morning meeting, and they're pretty much hardcore evangelicals. And so, they've been taking that thing down.

**0:57:49 John S:** Isn't that funny?

**0:57:49 Mark C:** And now, I'm up to number 10 now. I took a picture of it, along with some other stuff I posted from our literature. So they're trying to do this little holy war. So if I attend that meeting, I start to say something, four of 'em will get up out of their chair and walk out of the room. So that's this ongoing holy war by some of the people. They just happen to be the more religious,

evangelical people, and what I've started doing with them is asking them what the word "theist" means. And not a single, goddamn one of them could tell me, which is kind of typical. I said, "Well, do you know what the word 'theism' means?" Well, I said, "Unless you know what those words mean, you have no fucking clue what the word 'atheist' means." I think you oughta read a book. Because they've been pretty shitty, so I'm get a little shitty back to them a little bit. I noticed it started changing when I stopped being a doormat and a real nice guy, ignoring all the shit, and calling their hand on this bullshit. That's what has changed. That has what has widened the gates, that cannot happen without conflict.

**0:59:11 John S:** Right. You're probably right about that. I chose not to do the conflict. I guess, I could have stayed at my old group and somehow fought to change it, but I just decided to leave and start an agnostic group.

**0:59:26 Mark C:** I know, and I love that. I love it. I chose not to go that route. It may eventually happen here, but if I could double down these twin values of honesty and tolerance, which I think, on paper, that's what AA is going after, if you look at fine total of a great deal of the general service conference stuff and most certainly, Bill Wilson's later views, that's what he was all about. Widening those gates. Honesty and tolerance. Everybody needs to be welcome. We don't get to force our views on other people and have them feel like they don't belong, because they don't believe like the majority.

**1:00:04 John S:** Well, we need people like you. We need the more atheists out there at the regular meetings. If we're just in our own little silos, and we don't ever get to interact with each other, then we're really less likely to bring about any change. The change is gonna happen by doing the things that you're doing. Like if you sit down the Lord's Prayer, and you're the only one doing it, and then the next week you got another guy doing it, and next month you got four or five guys doing it? That's how you change. And what I do... I'm not changing anybody. We're just gettin' our own little place together. Which is nice, too. But I don't know, it all works together. I'm trying to tell myself I need to go to traditional meetings anymore. I don't go to traditional meetings anymore.

**1:00:45 Mark C:** All of it's necessary. If you think about the Jews, during World War II in Germany, what happened? They were rounded up and put in ghettos. They were partitioned off, from the rest of society. In a sense, though, it's been necessary for non-believers to form their own groups. That are in fact, friendly toward non-believers and not hostile, really for anybody. But at least not hostile to the non-believer. That's a form of ghettoization. Those people have been subtracted out of these home groups where they could actually have more of a long-term impact on the nature of AA, then just go and hide and run. I had been hiding and running from a lot of things in my life and decided, yeah, hell I even made a brochure for starting a group. I was about two and a half years sober, I was ready to firebomb the place and go black ops on some of these people and do some bodily injury to people. It's crazy. And I decided, "No, I'm going to double-down on honesty and tolerance." I wrote my first letter on toleration to the group, spread that around. That caused a fury. It broke the backs of both the Literalist and the Liberalist.

**1:02:11 John S:** That's funny.

**1:02:12 Mark C:** The holy war ain't gonna stop. It was interesting. There's some things worth fighting for.

**1:02:18 John S:** Yeah. You're right about that. You're right about that.

**1:02:21 Mark C:** And so for me, yeah, I go to meetings and there's a lot of stuff that most of us atheists just kinda, it's just part of the atmosphere, but meaningful for some of the people in that room right?

**1:02:37 John S:** True. Right.

**1:02:37 Mark C:** And part of the tolerance is that each guy's entitled to his own story. Each guy's entitled to walk to the path that only he can walk to keep himself sober. So if those beliefs help him do that, I'm damn sure all for it.

**1:02:54 John S:** Yeah, I am too. I am too.

**1:02:56 Mark C:** But a lot of the time that's not reciprocated, is it?

**1:03:00 John S:** No, that's not.

**1:03:01 Mark C:** No, it's not. So the challenge is what do you do about that when it's not reciprocated? You just gotta continue doubling down on that and realize that we all change.

**1:03:14 John S:** Well, I deal with it... Just to the service level, I deal with it. I don't have a problem in Kansas City with the other eight people from outside other groups when I work in the districts and stuff like that. No problem whatsoever. But when I go to the area assembly where there's people from groups all over the Western Missouri, then I do, but it's kind of a subtle thing. They don't come up to me and directly confront me, or anything like that. But if something's actually, push comes to shove, then I find out what they're views are and what they actually think of me, and it's really kind of eye-opening when that happens.

**1:03:58 Mark C:** Well, usually you know before that happens, don't you?

**1:04:01 John S:** Yeah, you always have an idea.

**1:04:03 Mark C:** If they're giving you the "evil-eye," it's...

[overlapping conversation]

**1:04:06 John S:** Well, it was really funny... It The first time I showed up there, I was kind of uncomfortable because I was the only agnostic group, I still am at the area assembly. I was the first agnostic group ever there. And I know that people were very suspicious of me. I had a guy that was friendly to me tell me that people were talking. I had another guy come up and tell me that someone had questions... But they would never ask me directly. They wouldn't talk to me directly. When it was time to have lunch, I'd be eating lunch alone, while everyone else was at tables. It was kind of a lonely experience. But over time...

**1:04:45 Mark C:** Sure, this ostracism is real.

**1:04:48 John S:** It is. But over time it got different.

**1:04:50 Mark C:** And it's painful, isn't it?

**1:04:51 John S:** It is.

**1:04:51 Mark C:** It's painful, isn't it?

**1:04:52 John S:** Mm-hmm.

**1:04:53 Mark C:** Well it's designed to be painful.

**1:04:54 John S:** It's not that way now down there. Now, I actually go there. I sit with people. I have lunch. They're more friendly. They know me and it's a lot different. But I'm gonna take it to the next level. I'm gonna try to change a few things. But anyway, that's another story.

**1:05:07 Mark C:** It's interesting, though, what happens over time, John, and you're experiencing that at the service levels, that you're in.

**1:05:15 John S:** Yeah, it is interesting.

**1:05:16 Mark C:** Give it time and you continue to express goodwill to everyone around you, even the ones that by their looks and by their statements, you think they hate your guts. And some of them probably do. But you continue to extend to them the right hand of fellowship, for example, acceptance. Not let that interfere with what you have in common.

**1:05:41 John S:** Yeah, that's true.

**1:05:42 Mark C:** Over time, that... I think we underrate what can happen there.

**1:05:47 John S:** Yeah. I think you're right.

**1:05:48 Mark C:** I really do. We're gonna have to experience pain and rejection and ostracism. Rumors, I could address a whole story on the rumors that have been started about me over six and a half years, by the religious components. It's just gonna be part of the turf, but, I don't know. It's been a heck of a journey. I'm damn if I'm sober.

**1:06:09 John S:** Me, too.

**1:06:10 Mark C:** I have met so many fantastic people like you and all kinds of folks now from all over world.

**1:06:16 John S:** I know. Isn't that amazing? I love that.

**1:06:18 Mark C:** That are in recovery. I do a lot of compensating with people in Facebook recovery groups, most of which do a little stuff on some of the groups that we all know about. But unlike other groups where there's a big admixture of people and their various views. Those kinds of conversations get real interesting, sometimes.

**1:06:39 John S:** Yeah. I had to leave one of them. I left the Rowdy Rum, 'cause those people piss me off.

**1:06:44 Mark C:** Oh, they kicked me out of there in two weeks.

**1:06:46 John S:** [chuckle] Did they kick you out? I just left.

**1:06:48 Mark C:** Oh, yes. It was Christian cult-ish dog pile from day one because I was honest about being an atheist. It seemed like the rest of the atheists were just playing patty-cakes, playing the evasion game. Yeah. That's what it is. But there's one called the Rum Rejects. You get into there if you've been kicked out of the Rum.

[laughter]

**1:07:12 Mark C:** Yeah. The Rowdy Rum is the biggest online AA cult I know of.

**1:07:15 John S:** Yeah. It's gonna be fun to see you in Austin.

**1:07:18 Mark C:** But there's some good people over there.

**1:07:19 John S:** Yeah, there are. It'll be fun to see you down there in Austin. Are you doing any panels or workshops or anything?

**1:07:26 Mark C:** No. Really, I come to even talking about this pretty, hesitantly. I don't like... I like being behind-the-scenes kind of guy.

**1:07:39 John S:** Gotcha, gotcha, gotcha. Yeah.

**1:07:41 Mark C:** I guess some people are attracted to that. I never have been. I've been always more of a writer, a thinker and a doer, in a little way.

**1:07:53 John S:** Yeah. That's cool. It's gonna be fun to see you there.

**1:07:54 Mark C:** Yeah. But I'm looking forward to it. And I think a lot of you guys that haven't been there will really like Austin.

**1:08:01 John S:** Oh, yeah. I've never actually been to Texas. I'm looking forward to seeing it so, that'll be fun. I'm driving all the way down. We're driving from here. It's like a 10-hour drive.

**1:08:10 Mark C:** That's the best way to do it.

**1:08:12 John S:** Alright, Mark. Well, I think our tornado sirens might be going off here or maybe, it's just... Anyway, it was nice talking to you.

**1:08:23 Mark C:** It's great talking to you, John. I appreciate everything you guys are doing over there at AA Beyond Belief and these little podcast things. I was hesitant to do this even.

**1:08:32 John S:** Oh, man. I tell you what. I love these podcasts. They're so much fun.

**1:08:34 Mark C:** I just have really enjoyed listening to how you do them and listening to your inner views and they've been fantastic.

**1:08:42 John S:** I tell you, it's a lot of fun to do. I get to meet so many interesting people. It's been a good experience. So yeah, good stuff. Alright. Well, you have a good night, my friend. I'll be talking to you soon.

**1:08:53 Mark C:** Okay. Thank you, John.

**1:08:55 John S:** Bye-bye. Well, that's it for another episode of AA Beyond Belief, the podcast. We'll be back next week with Ben B, for a discussion of steps eight and nine. Until then, do take care and be well.

[music]