**Dean Johnson**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

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**Minnetonka, Minnesota**

Dean Johnson -**DJ**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

Ann Perry -**AP**

**AS:** This is Amy Sullivan. I'm with Dean Johnson at his home in Minnetonka. It's January 20, 2017. Dean would you just state your name and say that you give me permission to record this?

**DJ:** This is Dean Johnson, and you have my permission to record this.

**AS:** Thank you. Would you start by talking about your childhood? Where you grew up, your family of origin?

**DJ**: I grew up in *﻿Leave it to Beaver* ﻿land, which is how I characterize my childhood to a lot of people. I was born in 1952. I was number six of seven children. We're all baby boomers. My hometown was Valparaiso, Indiana, which is about fifty miles east of Chicago. When I say *﻿Leave it to Beaver* ﻿land it's because all the neighborhoods resembled the show. That relationships—getting away with a couple of little criminal activities periodically was okay. Lecturing, even a paint stick periodically from my father, kept me in line. At that time Valparaiso had a thriving, wonderful, hundred-year-old downtown. You could ride your bike everywhere. This was *﻿Leave it to Beaver* ﻿land.

**AS:** Where'd you go to college, or did you go to college?

**DJ:** I did go to college. My father was a piano teacher. He has a master’s degree in music. In the course of his career he was primarily a private piano teacher. He had his own clients; he rented space at a music store. At times he had piano lessons at our home. I think as my oldest brother and sister were approaching college the notion of putting seven kids through college was strenuous. Somehow he found himself in the music department at Valparaiso University. All of us, having a relationship with the university, got free tuition. All seven of us went to Valparaiso University.

**AS:** That is a good deal.

**DJ:** Pretty extraordinary. Then in the course of that tenure, I honestly don't recall, and both my folks are dead so I can't ask them. I don't know where my father abandoned the music and became a librarian or a library scientist. Ultimately he became the director of libraries at the university, which was the job he retired in shortly after I graduated. Maybe it was a little after I graduated. He was still employed there when I graduated in 1974. I don't know, because music was the love of his life.

**AS:** He must have had some…

**DJ**: More money, who knows. Valparaiso University wasn't the place for him to continue his private piano clientele. I think part of it simply was that he needed to decide if he was going to nurture private piano students outside of the university career or just abandon it. He only took cream of the crop; his piano students always won state trophies. He was very well known. He played the organ in my church for forty-five years, something like that. We grew up in a Christian environment. Of course we went to Sunday school because Dad played the organ.

**AS:** What church did you attend?

**DJ:** This was Emmanuel Lutheran Church, which when I was in my youth was a very small, maybe two hundred seat, one hundred and thirty-year-old building. It was pretty cool. Attached to it was a lunchroom in the basement and a gymnasium on the second level. That church started a Lutheran school. At some point where my oldest brother, who is ten years older than me, was already in fourth grade or something like that. They started not a kindergarten but a first through eighth grade parochial school. My class size, again *﻿Leave it to Beaver* ﻿land, was twenty-four kids. Twelve boys, twelve girls. I didn't know anyone that was divorced. I didn't know anyone of different color, persuasion, religion, nothing. When I graduated from Emmanuel Lutheran School as an eighth grader I was just shocked to go to a junior high in the public school system and meet hooligans for the first time. Big boys. I was a big fish in a little pond. I was very good in all the sports.

**AS:** At your small school.

**DJ:** We only played other private schools, Catholic or Lutheran schools all around the region. Get into junior high I couldn't even survive on the C team in basketball. That was probably my first mental challenge: you used to be hot stuff and now you're not. My favorite sports: basketball, football, baseball—I couldn't compete at that level. I absolutely could not. I did play tennis in high school, but I quit that when I was a senior.

Anyways, went to Valparaiso University and worked only because at that time was the oil embargo, '73, '74. The economy was terrible and it was like, “Now what do you do?” I had a geography degree. I started out as a civil engineer. I hated engineering and did criminology, philosophy—all of the liberal arts stuff. As a Lutheran university you took theology. I actually have a minor in theology. I took those courses not in pursuit of anything other than they were all interesting and stimulating. Here I said my class size in grade school was twenty-four. Most of the class size in the theology department were seven, eight students. You got to become very intimate with all the professors. This was the love generation and I had experimented with the drug of the day in those times. It was very stimulating to be able to have really a one-on-one relationship with a lot of professors when you are in school. All of my friends went to Purdue, Indiana University, Indiana State, some went to Butler, some went to very small schools like Shelley [Dean’s daughter] did at DePauw. A couple of my friends went to Notre Dame. All of those schools with the exception of DePauw, the class size you've got freshman English and it's six hundred students in a stadium. I had a very cultured education from the time I was born in a very sound, stable family environment when I got out with a geography degree and a minor of theology it was like, "Where are you going to work?"

Valparaiso University is ten miles from all the steel mills that are on the south side of Chicago or Lake Michigan. All of my older brothers at one point in time worked at the mills. I was the only one that hadn't. I had a neighbor that was a general contractor and I did a lot of road construction work from the time I was a sophomore in high school all through my undergraduate years. I worked at that construction company. I didn't have to endure the mills. A friend of mine who worked with an engineering firm said, "We're contractors to Youngstown Sheet Tube Company and they need help. It's not working in the mill. You don't work for Youngstown Sheet Tube you work for this engineering firm." I interviewed, they hired me at the steel mill. [Phone rings] It's a massive structure. I suffered a year at the steel mill. They wanted to hire me. I started out as an engineer and they said, "Look we'll give you a full-time job not with this engineering firm but with Youngstown Sheet and Tube." We were assigned to the engineering department. They said, "We'll give you a full-time job and you can go to school and get your college degree and stay here forever." I thought there couldn't be anything more ghastly in the world.

I went and met with my advisor in the geography department. He said, "I have a friend down in Illinois that they have a city planning program. I'll see if I can get you in." A week later we met and he said, "You're in. The good news is for most of the term that you're down there you'll be a graduate assistant and you'll have free tuition. All you've got to figure out is room and board. Your first fall quarter you have to pay out of state tuition and your room and board and whatever." So I went down and I have a sister in St. Louis. I lived with her that fall quarter. I don't remember what it was, but I saved money from my previous job and paid out of pocket for that first quarter. Then I had a free ride for two years. This was a two-year master of science in city and regional planning. There were not a lot of planning schools in the country back then.

I'm in line the first day of registration and who's next to me but Ann Roberts Perry from Minnesota. I'd never been to Minnesota. She'd never been to Indiana. These were the old days when you didn't do everything online, you stood in line. You're killing time chit chatting and I was just madder than heck after we finally had table openings and went our different ways, I didn't write her phone number down. Here we are in a graduate program—how hard is it going to be to find somebody? I had no classes with her that fall. I finally bumped into her in a hallway somewhere. Then we exchanged vitals. She hated where she was living and I told her I was living with my sister and I didn't like that, and from that following quarter we had classes together and one thing led to another. By the end of our second year we decided we were getting married.

**AS:** Did you move in with her?

**DJ:** She moved into my house. I had roommates in the first semester, first year. They were all done after that year. I'm wringing my hands and going well, "I've got this place and nobody's going to be here next year." She goes, "Okay." It was like, "Woo." We weren't officially even dating at that point because she was trying to dump this guy who was graduating a year ahead of us also. I didn't like him. He was from Montana or Wyoming or somewhere. She goes home for the summer and I stayed down there and worked at an outdoor festival, which was another story and a great thing that doesn't relate to addiction. Ann came back and I called her over the summer. She said, "I'm planning on staying with you." That worked out and I dragged her to my parents at Christmas break and on the way home she said, "I could never live in Indiana." You have to drive through south Chicago, Gary, Indiana to get to Valparaiso. She said, "Nothing about Valpo, but I couldn't live that close to all that crap." Our deal was whoever got the first job that's where you go. The options were we could stay in St. Louis, which was a hellhole of the world. We could move to Indiana, which was another hellhole of the world according to Ann. Or bless her heart she found a job. She diligently went out and got a job.

We moved to Minnesota and got married the week after we graduated. I'm a Minnesotan now. I've lived here officially longer than any other time I spent in Indiana or Illinois. We were married five years before we had Spencer. We had both gotten sick of our careers to the point where we had gone through a period of time when all we talked about was our profession twenty-four/seven—got old after a while. We kind of figured that out. I think we were both thirty when Spencer was born. We had talked it out. It used to be you had kids at twenty and now today it's forty. At that time thirty was kind of a pivotal time otherwise the medical community was concerned. When I first met Ann her first words to me were, "I don't want a family."

That's the difference between being in *﻿Leave it to Beaver* ﻿land and her experience with an alcoholic father and a mother that was a little bit milk toast, couldn't deal with the family. Ann was the second oldest and she literally raised all of the younger siblings. She was always a take charge, very strong personality. We didn't clash that much because I've a very strong personality, but I'm also very outward. Ann is a little bit more of an introvert when it comes outside of her personal ground, her corporate environment, or the immediate family. She's not as gregarious or outgoing as I might be. She might prefer a less travelled path when it comes to being with people and I'm okay.

In all of my working career through construction I learned how to communicate with and deal with complete blue collar, almost uneducated people to very prima donna architect and engineer types. It gave me a wonderful background on, “How do you succeeded in life?” That was probably the best training for me to have that much variety. Also I knew how my brothers hated working in the steel mills. That kind of cultured my attitude about a lot of things. I can't be emotional in front of a crowd, but I can stand up and talk business in front of five hundred people. None of that bothers me. When I get emotional I can't contain myself. I can't even talk sometimes. I just have to pass. I'll tell Ann, "You finish it." I can't do that. My stomach's in my throat when anything is emotional. When it's professional I'm lucky. I can wing it. When I go to meetings now I don't do any prep. I listen to book tapes on the way. I just mellow out and go in there and hit them. That's a blessing from a career standpoint. Now people that have to deal with me professionally say, "That guy talks more than anybody. Are you going to talk all night Dean, or are you going to let us get down to business?" You have to be conscious of how far to explain things.

I'm right now in this process of working with twenty-three communities doing long-range comprehensive plans. I've got sixteen of those clients with orientation meetings in January and February. They're all night meetings. It's ghastly. I had four meetings this week. I’m just exhausted. Back when Ann and I met you're used to having twenty-hour days. When you get retirement age this night stuff is a killer. That's the far end of this mental issue. What do you want to know about children?

**AS:** When your babies were born. You guys were thirty…

**DJ:** We were thirty. Spencer was born in 1981 and Shelley was born in April of 1984. Three years apart. Spencer was delayed in school as a summer baby. They were class years apart. Spence was a great kid. I participated in the delivery for both of them. Spencer was a little rough on Ann. We had a midwife and he was not breach, but he was rolled over and she couldn't get him to do this and that. They were wanting to do this in one of the new-fangled birthing chairs because it was so much better on the woman. Then here's Ann on her hands and knees in the bed propped up and getting a massage trying to move Spencer a little bit. Finally, a doctor came in and helped.

He came out naturally, but when he came out all I saw was this white, wrinkly stuff. I thought, "My God he came out butt first." It was his head, it was severely wrinkled and it was pure white with this cheesy stuff. They whisked him away and I'm hearing all this chatter and clatter, "Give me this! Give me that! I need the..." I'm panicking. I'm like the kid's got problems. They're just cleaning his nose. They're just cleaning his nose but they're doing it all quick. I'm just watching this. When Shelley was born, the doctor said, "Do you want to clip the cord?" The whole thing was calm. She had an epidural so she was calm. That was the difference of the two, but they were both perfectly healthy at birth and essentially healthy as they were raised.

Spencer was terribly shy. He was my shadow. He not only looked like me, he walked in my footsteps behind me. I'd turn around and look for him and he'd be right there on my butt. He'd almost walk with his nose in my rear end. He couldn't talk to people. He was extremely shy. Shelley on the other hand—if some criminal was sitting on a park bench going, "Hey, honey come over here." She'd run right over there. They were very different in that regard. Spencer was one of the more inventive, creative people that I knew from children. Certainly more creative than me. He could build a spud gun. He and his cousin built a guillotine for mice and frogs. Where did this devious, I don't want to say it's violent, but I mean it was violent. You're chopping the heads off of frogs. We don't know where that came from. We didn't hear about any of that stuff until these kids were in college. They started sharing stories.

Well he was in ninth grade and got caught taking liquor to school. Three boys got detained and just based on the work schedule I lost the draw and had to go sit with the DARE cop, the principal, and I don't know who else. Looking back, it's a serious deal. They had taken a 7-Up or a Pepsi bottle and poured vodka in it or something. Somehow they got in study hall. I don't even remember the details. Three boys got bounced out. One of the dads was an assistant coach with one of the sports. It was an embarrassment. Of course it was all his fault.

**AS:** Spencer's fault?

**DJ:** Yes, I think the blame largely came. He physically brought it. They all planned it, but it was the first time that he stole alcohol, that we're aware of, the first time he stole alcohol out of our liquor cabinet.

**AS:** Where was he going to school at the time?

**DJ:** This was Wayzata East Junior High. He went to junior high. I think by the time Shelley got through they converted to a middle school system. Spencer started going to high school at the old Wayzata High School, which was all of three miles from here. He graduated from the new, magnificent, enormous facility eleven miles from our house. It was either bussing for a half hour or me driving them for half an hour or ultimately when Shelley was at the high school he drove one of our cars and drove the two of them to school. They went to school together I think his entire senior year and her sophomore year. They got along pretty well. He, like any kid, would pick on a little sister, but defend her to the death if somebody else wanted to pick on her. Otherwise they were natural irritants to each other.

I can picture Shelley and her cousin who was the same age and then her brother and Spencer who were also the same age at Easter. The little girls are in their dresses and got their beautiful hand woven baskets and they're getting ready to go collect the eggs in the yard. The boys are in blue jeans. They're laughing like little devils. They went out and scooped up all the goodies before the girls even walked out the door. Then you're consoling these weeping little children. The boys are sitting there behind the tree. This is the way they were.

He was diagnosed with ADD. I think that was before they added ADHD to these. At an early age it was recommended he go on Ritalin. At a relatively early age, I think fourth or fifth grade, I can't remember, he was on Ritalin all through high school. He personally claims that that was what put him down the path. That somehow got him into this habit even though it's a well-used, monitored, legal medication. He attributes this to that. He and Jamie [Spencer’s girlfriend] talked about whether Aidan [Spencer’s son] would have ADHD, or whatever his position was, don't get him on Ritalin. Avoid it like the plague. There were a couple of times when Spencer was not performing as a student. He was not necessarily ever a stellar student. You could tell he was capable of getting As and Bs, but he was more frequently getting Cs and some Ds. There was an attitude change at junior high probably before high school. We went to a family counselor. This was dismal. The guy was a specialist with adolescents. We go in there and he stands up and he's just a nerd. His barn door's open. Spencer's laughing and he couldn't take anything seriously.

**AS:** No, after that point. It's over you might as well leave.

**DJ:** He's like, "Don't you ever force me to go to one of these clowns again." He developed a very nasty attitude about anybody who was under the guise of the medical community. He always felt he knew what was in his brain not some other moron. That was consistent. That developed at an early age.

Shelley if I can depart, was a wonderful, a delightful little girl. Dolls and all of that stuff. She had a doting mother and father. You try to be careful not to spoil. We had a lot of wealthier friends where they got all the great toys.

From an early age we emphasized to them all of the natural things—and particularly Spencer. He grew up with this whole outdoor mentality. I'm not a hunter, so I don't know weapons. None of that included weaponry, but it included fishing, hunting, camping, outdoor skiing, cross country, downhill, everything. From the time he was eight months old was the first time we went up to Ely to Burntside Lake—a place called Camp Van Vac and took him on a weekend before he was one-year-old. Ann and I had been to the boundary waters and one of our acquaintances, a neighbor right here who could see the house said, "You don't have to give up that experience. Come up to Camp Van Vac." It's true. These were glorious sixty to eighty-year-old cabins that were far enough apart you didn't see the neighboring cabin. They had pit toilets. They had a central toilet for people who couldn't stand the thought of an outhouse. You had running water in the cabins but you had privacy. Most of them had boat docks. We climbed through the ranks from 1982, the first year we went there, until we left in 2003. We had stayed from 1981 to 2002. Twenty-one years, thirty-one years. That's twenty. That's right. I was thinking Spencer was thirty-four. We were twenty-year alumni at this place and again graduated from having the worst cabin to having the best cabin by the time we were done. Most of the people in camp take the same cabin the next year. You grow up with all of these families that are in your week. We actually gravitated to two weeks. From that standpoint they both learned new friends with no other connection other than Ely, Minnesota. Both kids went through boat training and all of that and got their license to boat. Both learned how to water ski and all of that stuff.

When they were in middle school we said, "Wouldn't you guys like to go to Washington D.C. or Yellowstone or something like that?" "Yes." "Well we'd have give up our week at Camp Van Vac." "No way." They never went on those educational trips. We never took Christmas trips unless it was skiing somewhere up in Duluth or Wisconsin. Every spring break we went to New Mexico, California, Colorado, wherever and did ski trips. They never saw Washington D.C. or Yellowstone because our emphasis was always these family trips that were outdoor oriented.

Shelley was on the high school ski team at Wayzata. Spencer never did that. He played football, baseball, didn't like basketball, tried hockey. So they were both very sport oriented. To go back to Spencer, I think there was a bit of this rebellious attitude that probably was eighth or ninth grade. There was a lack of commitment for school at that same age. Even though he had gone through the public school, I should probably say because he went through the public school system from the time he was in kindergarten versus me entering and being shocked at what I saw in eighth grade. He was used to it by then and whatever element was kind of over the edge was his preference. He had no time for anybody that would think about being in choir or band or those sorts of things. They were the laughable segment. As a parent you're like, "Oh please get into choir and get into band." We don't care if you're a nerd. Get in the computer club. That wasn't for Spencer. He was always on the fringe with his friends.

**AS:** What do you mean on the fringe?

**DJ:** The ones that wanted a different type of experience. It wasn't just going to a movie.

**AS:** He was around those people.

**DJ:** He would prefer to be somebody that would come up with the idea that, “Let's go to auto racing.” Something a little more thrill seeking. If I could characterize him it was he was a thrill seeker. He was the type that would find, and they did find, an old zip line at a former gravel pit. We're talking a sixty-foot drop. He'd be the one that would do it. He had a friend take a picture of him when he let go of the zip line into the water. He's halfway down to this thing. That was high school. Yes, a thrill seeker.

We were aware of—because the Orono police called me, and one of our friends who happened to be there, that they had both of our boys at the police station. They were caught at the Wayzata Country Club, which was closed because it was November. When a neighbor called and said there's a car parked there the cops snuck up on them. Opened the door and the guy he goes, "Man there was one cloud of smoke that came out when we opened the door." Steve, my friend, and I said, "Alright we've got to keep a straight face. We have to be stern." We told the cops, "We want you to scare the living shit out of them." They did a good job of that. First offense, whatever. They turned them over to us. It's part of our own discipline.

**AS:** They were smoking pot?

**DJ:** They were smoking pot big time. It was his buddy's older brother, who if I could describe the Eddie Haskell of the world. Steve, his father, showered his love on the older boy Matt, who was Eddie Haskell who got away with murder. He bought these kids pot. But Johnny, the one Spencer's age, was always the one who got caught. He was the troublemaker. I always felt bad for John who spoke at Spencer's celebration because his dad never gave him the time of day. They've got to rectify that because his older brother's got some health issues and other stuff and owns a business. John's kind of running the business. I'm like, “Okay, Steve, when are you going to go back and let John know maybe not that there was a mistake all this time, but how much you appreciate him?” That's a different topic.

Spencer was on the edge. We were aware of a culture of trying things. We never witnessed, and it's easier to witness alcohol than any other thing that kids might get involved in. Sometimes as long as they chewed gum or whatever and the high from pot was down or it was just lousy pot in those days. It was easy to masquerade that. I'm not aware of other things other than pot or alcohol at that time in high school. College I think it all entered into a whole new realm. Friends of his who freely admitted to exposing him to Oxycontin were the ones that didn't have these genes missing and had no trouble with saying, "Hasta la vista. It's time for me to grow up and move on." The time period—I think in his early twenties, late teens until mid-twenties—he was in that period of trying a lot of different stuff along with friends to this day we'd bump into and they have normal lives and have walked away from that wildness. His fringe buddies, I could name seven of them, Spencer's the only one who couldn't walk away from it, which is completely consistent with what the medical community—

**AS:** With statistics.

**DJ:** Fifteen percent. If you're one in seven that's it. He was not doing well in school. We could tell that and we said, "We're not spending this kind of money on that." I don't know if it was a year and a half or two years that he lasted at the U [University of Minnesota]. The U would have been the last place on earth he should have gone. He should have been at St. Cloud, a much smaller place. He's not this extrovert. He's the introvert. He'd have done much better in a smaller setting.

**AS:** Lost in the crowd a little bit.

**DJ:** It was easy to be overwhelmed by somebody who's like, "Class? You go to class?" That's what happened to him. There was nothing serious, nothing pressing in his mind. That's the real start of being high more than half the time. In high school it was way under the radar. I don't think terrible, but only he could confirm that.

Then there was a period of time he was working in the landscape business. He worked for one of my brothers in law at a flooring company. He was maintaining jobs. We'd bump into supervisors and one of his supervisors was at our old church. He'd go, "Oh gosh Spencer's conscientious. He's a top worker." Yet, like most of the people in construction and landscape tend to be a little high on the job but most of them are not doing pills. They're smoking pot when they move from one job to the other. They're able to deal with that. Spencer, from when people introduced him to Oxycontin, was spending more and more of his money on that sort of legal medication. It wasn't until—

**AS:** Was he getting them legally?

**DJ:** He was buying from anybody he knew. He's buying them on the street. At the point in time that he was getting them off the street they were still being dispensed like today. Today the quantities are certainly down which has led to the increase in heroin. There's a complete relationship to that.

Let me back up. He had a girlfriend that was off the charts with personal problems. She was adopted. Her parents tried to put her in a commune down in Arizona to straighten her out because she was a nonconformist and was experimenting in drugs. They left her down there for a year. Anyways, she latched onto Spencer and she was the type when she'd get high or mentally unstable in a crowd of people she'd scream rape and cops would come and accost Spencer. It was a terrible relationship. When she was normal she was a sweet, wonderful girl. Ann and I found ourselves sitting in downtown Minneapolis at the Hennepin Medical Center because neither of her parents would come and she had freaked out. We're sitting in the room until they can get a psychiatrist in there, holding her hand and getting phone calls. The mother's just going, "There is no way. Her father's out of town. He's coming back tonight." Finally, the dad calls me and he's madder than heck that we're dealing with her. It was a very, very peculiar thing.

That resulted in her getting into some personal calamities legally. Doing bizarre stuff, kicking a window in, whatever. She finally got into some sort of rehab and then had gotten into some women's housing in downtown. I haven't seen her personally, but Spencer saw her seven years after the fact and she'd been sober for seven or eight years. Actually one of his sober home managers was dating her. It's a small world. When that relationship ended, which would have been probably 2005 or '06, I'm pretty convinced at that time Spencer had not seen or done anything with heroin. I know he was snorting coke with this woman. He told me, he admitted it. Blowing a lot of his money on that. Whenever he was able to get the pain pills he was routinely getting them.

He met Jamie, she was still a student at the University. We had moved from our house to this house. The old house was vacant. We let Spencer and Jamie live in our house while she finished school. Unbeknownst to us until she's about five months pregnant, other than saying, "Geez is Jamie putting on a little extra weight here?" Neither of them told us she was pregnant. She finally got fed up with him not telling us and she told us. I'm like, "Okay, good. That explains a pretty large posture there young lady." It was just getting worse. When we had first met her, she was slim and trim and appeared to be the type that could struggle with weight gain but at that time was attractive and very conscientious about her appearance. It was just like, "Boy school must be rough. Something's slipping."

Aidan was born in September of 2008. During the time they were living at our house she would never tell us anything. She just didn't know us. She didn't feel comfortable with us and so we weren't getting anything from her. It was only in my dealings with Spencer: “Well, wait a minute. Jamie's the student. Why is she able to pay rent and you're not?” It was apparent to me again that he was wasting all of his money on medications.

**AS:** Do you think she knew that he was using?

**DJ:** I don't know to the extent about the pills. Clearly they met through mutual friends who had gone to Wayzata. She went to Wayzata as well but she's like five years younger than Spencer. They were never in school together. She was partying with a group of kids who may have had other siblings who were also in Spencer's group. They met while she was with a younger element of the same group that Spencer was hanging out with. That's how they got together. She liked him. Spencer was a good looking kid. There wasn't any reason on the surface until his situation deteriorated that he shouldn't be someone you'd want to be with.

It was only after Aidan was born and Spencer called me in the morning. He says, "We got off on the wrong side this morning and Jamie's upset. I just want you to drive down to the house and see if there's a cop car down there." He was real agitated. This was like 7:30 in the morning. I'm going, "What are you talking about?" He couldn't to my satisfaction come close to explaining himself or describing what the situation was. He goes, "I got to go. I'm late for work already. We just got into an argument." I would officially, other than some bizarre times that he was with this former girl, this was the first time that I thought there was a pattern. When he was with this other girl he was still drinking. The last ten years he didn't drink, it was all drugs. When he was with her they were drinking, smoking, cocaine, a lot of stuff.

**AS:** You thought maybe drugs were a part of Jamie and Spencer's relationship?

**DJ:** I think Jamie has this potential of being a binge drinker, but doesn't have a sustained drinking problem. We've never seen any of that. She's very capable of, like when you're in college, overdoing it. I mean getting hammered to where you don't come home or stuff like that. We had Aidan and she was supposed to get him and didn't show up. Her parents would leak a little bit of information that she could go over the edge. We thought maybe this nursing student isn't quite...That's not her character. It's just that occasionally she can get out of line. She'll get out of line in an environment that she shouldn't be in. That could be with other men or it could simply be with her girlfriends but just totally overdo it.

It was sometime after September 2008 that Aidan was born and this behavior was going on. I remember that Christmas we had a lot of snow activity, so Jamie and Aidan were both over here waiting to open gifts and stuff like that. He's shoveling for twenty-six straight hours. He was just a mess. Part of it you'd say is natural for having to snow plow like that but he was a zombie. It was these pain pills. He was probably getting speed and other stuff to keep up with that regimen.

We had an intervention, if you will, in February of 2009. That's the first time he went to The Retreat [rehabilitation center]. We just said, "Your behavior is bizarre. Here are your options." We literally read him the riot act and said, "You're either going to go and take care of yourself or you’re done." Jamie was firm in spite of the fact that she probably was covering for him a lot. She got to the point where she realized she couldn't cover anymore. She said, "That's right. You're out of my life."

I remember taking him down to Fairview and they were evaluating him. They didn't even tell us that he had Oxycontin in him. They released him and we had already booked a room at The Retreat. In the middle of the night they said, "You've got to take him. He's got to detox. We don't take them unless they detox." That was the first time we ever even heard the word detox. Apparently he was going through some physical reactions to not having this Oxycontin. I remember when we were heading down to Fairview to have him evaluated. I'm like, "Spencer where is this stuff?" He took me to three or four different places in the basement, up in the rafters, in the insulation. He's pulling this out, he's pulling that out. A bag of pills here a bunch of pot. I'd say, "Is this it? Is this it?" Afterwards six months later I can't believe he threw all this stuff down the toilet. He's just weeping. He probably had five hundred dollars worth of stuff in there. Once he sobered up it was like, "I can't believe he'd do that." That's kind of his mentality and attitude for the next ten years. "I'm not responsible."

He told us every time and where there certainly were real moments of recovery they were glorified and his pattern of reuse was almost immediate for the first five years and then the next several years he would occasionally have what I think Nancy [Espuche] just experienced with Lucas, a year of sobriety. You go to a meeting and you go, "We've made it a year. This is incredible." You're so thrilled, you're so happy. Deep down inside you're saying to yourself, just outwardly when you have no evidence, "It's been a year." In Spencer's case and in Lucas it wasn't the case. I can't say because there were several times when we thought for sure, five months, six months of sobriety so forth that he could turn the corner. We knew enough about alcoholism but that's a life challenge. You always want to have a drink. It'd be the same thing with opiate addiction. All during his rehab it was, "I can't do Twelve-step. I don't believe in Twelve-step."

**AS:** All rehabs or the first one?

**DJ:** In every one. It was always, "Twelve-Step is a bunch of bullshit."

**AS:** He went like thirteen times, fifteen times.

**DJ:** I think where Ann gets that number includes the detox not just a physical rehab program. She's kept that chronology. Someday we should corroborate that. At least a dozen rehabs for the thirty-day period of time.

**AS:** A dozen harsh stops right?

**DJ:** Yep. In controlled environments. However, as we learned, even if you're down in the resident program in Fairview they get the drugs right when they're in rehab.

**AS:** Did he get kicked out?

**DJ:** He got kicked out of The Retreat.

**AS:** He did it on the first one?

**DJ:** Second time. He made it through the first Retreat. That's a function of early on, I'm convinced many of these places didn't know how to conduct urine tests. He routinely cheated them. I don't know if you were at one of the Nar Anon meetings. This is how life goes on after death. I had like a squeeze bottle, it's a liquid, it's a prescribed not antiseptic but a bacterial agent. My scalp dries out. It's not psoriasis. It's very seasonal. I would get dryness in my scalp and the doctor says, "This is called betamethasone and it's liquid." I also used betamethasone because in the winter I break out in a rash. I had this little bottle of betamethasone and here it was just before Thanksgiving or something. I take this thing put it in my hair and I'm like, "What's that smell?" It was full of urine! The SOB had taken the top off, filled it with urine and so in one of his tests he'd have this little bottle and if anybody saw the bottle it's a prescription. When we were going through his things I'm like, "That's my betamethasone. He must have borrowed that." It was full of pee. All over my head.

**AS:** That is horrible.

**DJ:** Six-month old pee on top of it. Whose pee was it?

**AS:** It was probably not your son's.

**DJ:** No. If he was carrying it around, he needed clean pee. They had these other methods where you warm the urine or you freeze the urine. All these things that they claimed worked. Scientifically could it? I don't know. I couldn't care less. I don't want to go there because that's not my responsibility anymore. I am convinced that while he only got caught and kicked out of The Retreat his second visit—I'm beginning to believe that there might not have been thirty days of sobriety when he was in those residential programs. You don't know. Where do you want me to take this?

**AS:** Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Spencer as a father through all this? Some of your experiences and some of your emotional states.

**DJ:** Before, during?

**AS:** If you could describe what your relationship was like before? It sounds like it was pretty good. During his addiction and as you became more drawn into trying to help, could you just talk about your experience as a parent and a father?

**DJ:** Both kids growing up, and even their friends will say, "Oh my gosh your dad is the greatest dad on earth." On the outside you'd say whatever this guy was doing was working. It was how not only his kids reacted but his friends' kids. Our old house was a neat piece of property, the yard was huge. We owned a quarter mile into a wetland. There was an island and upland area of trees in the center of this big wetland. In the winter we'd make paths out there in the snow in the cattails. The kids would build forts. They weren't getting an experience where their dads were with them. I went out with them. You can say up that hill—it's starting to melt—I create sledding paths. Aidan and his little sister sledded all last weekend on this little dinky hill. We did that in both our front and back yard. Not only my kids, but my friends would say, "He's the greatest dad."

**AS:** Did you feel like the greatest? Did you feel like a good dad? Were you enjoying yourself?

**DJ:** I had a wonderful relationship with my dad, but it was different. My dad never threw a baseball to me. My dad never pitched a horseshoe, tossed a Frisbee. My dad was not that type. I didn't seek to go do anything other than what I liked. My father tried to give me piano lessons, what he liked. I was incapable of receiving that gift. I had to play baseball, basketball, football without my father. That didn't inhibit the relationship we had. There was not a physical, recreational—but my parents bought a cabin on the border of Michigan and Indiana right near the border of Ohio when I was in eighth grade. My dad learned how to water ski, and it was a big piece of property and an older cabin. We had lots of sweat equity in taking stumps and rocks. All during junior high and high school I was the only one really at home. I worked my butt off and so did my dad. Here's this prissy librarian/music teacher and he's working his butt off and I liked that. I taught him how to water ski because I knew how to water ski. He water skied at age fifty, the first time. I was real proud of him.

I didn't go out to seek this natural relationship with my kids. That's just my preference. When we have Aidan, we're like, "Aidan you can take your iPad to the cabin, but you're getting a half hour in the morning and a half an hour at night. If you don't want that than you need to stay home." Here it's lot harder because his mom raising two kids alone, working twelve hour shifts. She puts him to bed he's got the iPad. That's the sad fact of life. He puts himself to bed. When he comes here we read to him until he falls asleep. He loves that. We did that to our kids. We read to them at night. When the kids had their friends over for a sleepover we read to them. I think that relational thing is pretty simple.

**AS:** You were present.

**DJ:** We were always there. During his addiction I was not the textbook person. I was getting lectured a lot. I would freely say this in front of Ann. I'd be sitting at my desk working and she'd shove an article in my face. I'd go, "Set it aside." "You need to read it." While we were on the same page dealing with addiction she absorbed herself in finding out anything and everything medically, physically, socially, emotionally, and was constantly pestering: look at, read, do this, do that. Much of that time she could not deal personally with Spencer. "I can't deal with him right now." I'm caught in this barrage of being the one that deals with him and also being lectured about what I'm doing wrong to where clearly more than once I'd say, "Fine. You do it. You feel so strongly about it you do it. You do it that way."

As we went through this I certainly got far better and recognized and understood what enabling was and letting go and things of that magnitude. My early enabling was like anyone's you would expect. When he was using we kicked him out. We got to the point where when you're not using, when you're in recovery we'll help you. That's where the dilemma in talking to people in our small groups at Nar Anon, that's a personal thing. You have to decide what's crossing the line again when you're helping. Spencer understands that I promised and would deliver on coming through when he's in recovery. Of course he would. It's just him. He's going to hold me to it. Ann and I were mostly in sync throughout this process. Obviously some couples get divorced. That was helpful.

Spiritually both of us advanced in our own faith maturity. I grew up in it. Ann bounced from one, and some pretty kooky religions, to the other. Nothing was stable. My environment was real simple. I got baptized, I got confirmed, I went to a Lutheran grade school, a Lutheran college. How straighter could it be? I had a little bit of rebellion though when I got out of college and it was like, "Okay, the pressures aren't here anymore. Where do I take all of this?" It didn't go anywhere. That kind of got recreated for me. A part of it was when we had kids. We didn't force Sunday school on them, but we were going to church fairly well in the time they were being brought up. We also went to different churches because I never had one here. I never have. I also struggled with the notion—and this is all of Christianity—that it's Jesus or it's no one. That message can be conveyed by certain churches to be completely exclusive and by other churches to allow some inclusivity of those who are heathens. I got over that hurdle during this addiction. I also got involved, pushing ten years, so it's about the same time we're dealing with addiction.

The neighbor you can see back here is a very passionate Christian and a musician and involved with prison ministry and got me involved in a Monday night men's group. We went to a church in North Minneapolis for three years—we actually operated out of the Salvation Army Men's Center and that was okay until a new captain, or whatever you call the leader—we not only had to take our own breathalyzers every night, we had to sign statements about this and that. We were doing pat downs to come in there to go to Bible study. It was just crazy. Under the old management the men's center, which Spencer went to two different times, could hold a hundred and thirty-eight people. At the time we were in our Bible study and this new mission came in. They were routinely filling thirty-eight beds. They were excluding—for whatever reason I never understood—one hundred people. Our Bible study group divested itself of the Salvation Army and our group is called Freedom Works, which is a post-penal rehab with housing options for people. It is a Christian group. They go and recruit people while they're in prison. Somebody decides good candidate and bad candidate. They pick them up when they're released from prison and bring them to safe housing. I'd say the rate that they have is far better than the rate for most.

**AS:** Of recidivism you mean?

**DJ:** Their recidivism is like—I can't remember if it's a high number? Is that bad or is the... Their people sixty percent of the time are not going back to prison. Without a program like that that recidivism is the opposite. It's eight out of ten are going to wind up in the same spot.

**AS:** You're doing this prison ministry. Are you doing this while your son is in active addiction?

**DJ:** It started right at the time when we had the first encounter, when Aidan was just born. That would have been 2009. Did I think that something like that would allow me to have an awareness of what prison and what prison recovery is like? No way. I did it because my neighbor badgered me for ten years to get more involved and do some volunteering. "Don't be so damn selfish." I go, "John, the big problem is I got three or four night meetings a week. I don't need another night commitment. If you go and hold this Bible study on Saturday noon and we're not up at the cabin…" They're all evening.

I started going and then while Spencer was in Montana, he and Jamie moved to Montana a year after this first encounter. We could tell that while things were going well for six or eight months after his first rehab and he was working again and she was working. She was at a nursing home and wasn't happy with it. The nursing employment options in the Twin Cities in 2009 were awful. People were leaving. She went on the Internet and found a job in Wyoming and another one in Montana. I said, "I've been out near Kalispell, that's a nice place. but you don't want to go to Wyoming. That is nothing more than a hillbilly, redneck, oil refinery town." She interviewed them both and took the job in Montana. He was visibly using and the issue was whether she was going to let him come or not. By default, having a one-year-old at that time she let him come.

He claims to me, and I don't have any reason not to believe him, that he was clean for nine months out there. Maybe it was because he didn't know a damn soul. He finally was advertising, he was putting flyers in mailboxes to do handyman jobs, snow plowing and whatever even though all he had was a shovel, no truck. Eventually he got a job with a landscaper out there and that's what got him in trouble. They said, "You don't need Oxycontin. We've got heroin." That's where it started, of all places, out in the middle of Montana. That would have been like 2010, something like that. Six or seven years ago. While heroin has always been prevalent in this market it's like it's out in Kalispell, Montana? That lasted about a year. Then she finally for the first time told us what was going on. He was stealing her stuff, pawning her stuff. I'm reimbursing her for the lawn mower and stuff like that. Little did I know at that time, relating back to this Freedom Works Bible study, what criminal activity was associated with drug use.

**AS:** Thank you for the soup, it's really good. Did you make it?

**DJ:** Yes, we had some turkey breast for the kids last week. I always keep the carcass of anything.

**AS:** Me too, and boil the heck out of it.

**DJ:** Split pea with ham and Aidan loves this. I love making soup. I'm drifting, point me, steer me.

**AS:** Let's talk about his last month or two, and then what's happened afterwards for you.

**DJ:** There was a period of time being on and off again with Suboxone. There's no housing for Suboxone. Nobody accepts it.

**AS:** Or methadone.

**DJ:** You have these programs where hospitals are administering this and line you up with a doctor that can administer it, but insurance or whatever—you graduate, you're on the street and there's no safe, sober environment for people who are being medicated through the medical rehab community. I can't tell you how many philosophical arguments I had with people. "Do you take Suboxone?" "No, no, no. We're an abstinence program. We can't have that influence here in our group." I get off on a tangent. Why are people putting them on this and no one out there is tolerating it? One guy says, "I've been in this business thirty years. We're an abstinence-based house. I can't change. You may have a valid issue." I always would apologize to people. I'd get too furious. We'd have the names of forty places. We found two. Cornerstone in St. Paul and…

**AS:** New Way in Minneapolis will.

**DJ:** New Way, yes. There were two or three of the places right around 20th Street, South Minneapolis. I was thinking of Serenity Village. We're the only two sober homes. Then you had these other rehab/living places. I can't think of the names. Kim's daughter's been there. There's two or three of them. If you wanted a single-family house, inconspicuous where you can have rehab it's two places. In St. Paul if you're on Suboxone it was $980 a month. If you weren't on Suboxone it was $580 a month. They doubled the price plus they kept the Suboxone so you'd have to find a way to get from whichever living unit it was to their dispensary. I'm like, "What is that teaching anybody in recovery? They're still in the hospital?" Give me a break.

**AS:** And we don't trust you.

**DJ:** Part of our problem was having exhausted all the options. He got kicked out of Serenity Village. He got kicked out of Cornerstone in St. Paul.

**AS:** Because he relapsed?

**DJ:** Using. The last time at Serenity, by the way the owner of Serenity has relapsed twice—he's a meth user, probably crack too. They will let people come in if there's evidence of recovery and they're clean or whatever but the minute there's any kind of secondary behavior they're just like, "I'm sorry you're not a good influence." I don't blame anybody for that. I have no problem with that.

However, the progression had taken place and we filed charges legally with the police, as did some others. We had mounting legal problems. When he got out of rehab two years ago there was no place to go. We finally said, "If you're clean you do this." We both agreed, it wasn't just me pushing Ann; we both agreed: what are the options? Send him to some other state that allows this and then he's not close to his son? His son was part of his rehab. We let him stay here. On a day when his son and his son's mother were coming over here and we were all going to go to the auto show or the boat show, we're like, "Aren't you ready? We've got to go." He was acting agitated and I go upstairs and the bathroom’s locked. I finally go get the little stick and push it open. He's hunched all over the floor and had shot up. Here it was five, six months.

To this day, or up until he died, he maintained that he got overwhelmed because of his continued feelings for his ex. This remorse about how bad he felt and he had to use. I said, "You know what? I believe that. That couldn't have been Johnny-on-the-spot because I don't keep heroin in my house. Somehow you had figured out in advance." He's going, "I had that hidden in the bathtub for longer than you think." He did. He had this panel that ripped out underneath the whirlpool and he claims he could have used it two months earlier and he didn't. That day everything overwhelmed him and he couldn't deal with it. I have no reason to doubt that. I'm not an addict so I can't understand that. From what he has told me in his moments of sobriety and in moments of use.

What I've seen in all these family programs and when I hear other recovery professionals talk about things all of that made sense to me. We think he was probably sober for another five months and then something fell apart in the fall. We were like, "We're not tolerating this. We're not dealing with it." It was benzos. That's when he got into this period of benzo use. He met a guy that was buying all this crap on the Internet. These were like elephant tranquilizers. I had a state patrol office say, "You've got to come down here and get your son and move his car." They didn't even incarcerate him. He couldn't even talk. I'm looking at this guy, “Like why didn't you remove him from the scene?” As a result, he was getting a bunch of warnings, repeated warnings that we're not unaware of.

**AS:** You were not aware of?

**DJ:** We were not aware of. Finally, he gets a notice. I just opened it. I violated every rule in the book. I just opened it and they revoked his license. You're going to have to go, too. It's a procedure where you have to have a medical person saying he was on these meds from his Suboxone doctor. He's blaming it all on this stuff. I'm like, "No, there's something else out there." His doctor confirmed that the stuff that he was using even if he tripled the dosage wouldn't make him drive that way. We found out in his police record that he had like five call-ins, people on the road, "Hey, here's a license number. The guy's swerving all over the road." He had five of these. They never found him. That's what was leading up to the Christmas before he passed away.

**AS:** A year ago.

**DJ:** We were frantic. We started the week before Christmas trying to find him a place. We thought, "St. Joe's in St. Paul." At the last minute the guy's going, "We've got an insurance snafu. You can't do this,” or, “We can't do that." We were just beside ourselves. We went through Christmas with him here. He came to Church with us and he was sound asleep the entire service. He had used before Church and used again Christmas Eve. We had all of Ann's family, twenty-five people here that night. He was just a mess. The odd thing—we were just oblivious to it. We were like, "We're not going to let it ruin our party." Ann's brother just was like, "Why aren't you dealing with this?" He got real ugly about it. Everybody else pretty much was like, "That's what the disease is." Her brother's not one that has any remotely liberal leaning thought in his bones. Something happens it's military and it's black and white: fix it. When Spencer died he came around a little bit. Political persuasion didn't, but I think he understood the seriousness of this disease.

Leading up to all this we finally get him back into Fairview again. I go up to visit him. Ann said, "I can't deal with it. I can't go up there." I took Aidan twice I think. I was seeing him the evenings they had open. I cheated a couple of times and just went in until somebody kicked me out. Every Sunday for the family I would take Aidan there. He's like pumped up. He goes, "I got the greatest counselor this time. They're like, ‘Get back across the street. Get yourself a degree in counseling and share these experiences. Help others.’" Was this a ruse? Was it the ultimate in his ability for deception? I don't know. To see somebody so pumped up.

We had housing at something called River's Edge, I don't know what it was. It's out of Burnsville, but they have a Minnetonka facility. We're on the way there and Spencer's calling them up and going, "Well we're coming over. Where's the house at?" They said to him, "This is a lockdown facility." We had no idea that where he had gotten located by one of his counselors was no cell phone, meds were regulated by the whatever, and in the first thirty days he had no visitation rights. I'm freaking out, too. He's going, "Did you know this?" We didn't show up. Then it took us a month to find Greg, where he died.

**AS:** Greg's sober house.

**DJ:** Greg McFarland, New Heights Sober Living. The irony of that is he was connected to our church for the last six years that we were there. We had no idea that he was in this business. He's a former alcohol abuser. He said, "I used every drug. Alcohol is probably my weakness." That very last weekend then, Spencer earned his first overnight away from New Heights sober. All we think is turned this leaf, everything looked great from his attitude at Fairview. We had Aidan for the weekend. He came here. The two of them got to sleep together. He gets up Saturday morning and said, "I missed the meeting at New Way on Thursday. We have a makeup day today. I need to go down there." We're like, "That's cool. We've got Aidan anyway. Are you coming back?" "I'm coming back, but I can't spend the night. I only got the one night." We knew that. Sure enough he came back at three o'clock and then after dinner he went home. I'll tell you his complexion, everything, all the good signs that you want when you're seeing somebody in recovery. He wasn't broken out with all kinds of crap. He wasn't spooky and talking weird. All of those signs were gone and he spent that quality time with his son.

We get the call the next day that he's dead. It was a mind blower. It was inconceivable and yet when you package it that's the hideousness of the disease. We learned, as did Nancy, that there was a ruse within that last month. He was in fact using and getting away with it. While he wasn't stealing from us, and apparently wasn't in trouble or stealing from somebody else, he had figured out probably from new contacts at Fairview, all the time he was there, plus probably hanging out with people who are in mandatory rehab at New Way. He nurtured some contacts and in the police report that we saw, the night that he acquired this stuff from the woman who's killed five people he was buying it from some woman in Bloomington. My feeling is he probably had one, two, or three of these relationships going on. He went and told us that he had saved some couple over at Walmart in North Minneapolis when in fact it was probably he was getting them this stuff. Maybe he could have helped them. I'm sure what was happening was he'd get four bags and he got to keep one or whatever. Somebody else was buying it. That was our last weekend with Spencer.

How was your walk?

**AP:** I don't want to interrupt. I know you're recording. I want to send you a podcast that was especially made for today. I'll look it up, but you have to listen to the entire thing.

**AS:** I will. I don't skimp on podcasts.

What do you want to tell me about where you are now and where you've been since he passed in your thinking and in your grief and your own recovery?

**DJ:** As I mentioned at the first Nar Anon meeting that I went to. Both of us. It was probably four weeks or five weeks after he died. Not knowing how to feel, not knowing how everybody else is going to react to you. Not knowing what possible contribution you have any more when you're the face of death. Your experience is the end. It's not what anybody who attends these meetings wants to go to. You sit and say, "How do I contribute?" Fortunately, Barbara had come and relayed her own personal experiences.

**AS:** Of losing her son.

**DJ:** And how positive things can be. Not necessarily how they were at that moment but how it can be and how it's helped her life. How she related all of that to Twelve-step and so forth. I found myself—that first night when it came for me to say something—saying, "This is the ultimate letting go." People in grief can't let go. I'm not saying I've done that, but I had my own personal spiritual experience, as you know, three days after he died that still provides all the clarity I need.

**AS:** Can you tell me about that? I've only heard little bits of it. What happened?

**DJ:** How detailed do you want me to get?

**AS:** As detailed as you want to get.

**DJ:** I know you said one thirty.

**AS:** I've got ten more minutes or fifteen.

**DJ:** Without getting carried away. Our first night was with Ann's family. You're total zombies. Our second night Greg, the sober home owner, had talked to us the first night and said, "I have a house meeting and this is a first for us, too. Could you possibly come down here and talk to us?" We're like, "You've got to be kidding." Somehow Ann and Shelley and I all went down there and it was powerful. We're all just absolutely weeping. Nobody had done this.

**AS:** Nobody had done what?

**DJ:** Nobody had gone through this experience. They were there. They had eleven police vehicles, emergency vehicles blocking the whole street off. They put tape around the entire block.

**AS:** Because he had just died there.

**AP:** The death investigation.

**AS:** But people were still living there.

**DJ:** Yes. Twenty people in this house. They've got some of them that were upstairs when it happened. Some that were outside. Some that weren't home at all or were coming back. They've got police tape everywhere. It was just this trauma. How do we talk about this? We go do that Monday night, Tuesday we see the pastor about our celebration. I'm in the back yard with Pee Wee and at that moment while she's peeing I had this feeling. The next day, I knew I had heard the words on Tuesday. "I'm not alone, I'm finally home." I couldn't see him but it's probably the Holy Spirit saying, "He's with me." It was the start of having confidence that his life was so horrible that now it's good. He needed to go. It's allowed me to accept losing my only son. Anyways that happens Tuesday night.

Wednesday morning, the third day, I wake up and Ann and I weren't sleeping at all, four hours, three hours, wake up frequently and didn't go to bed until like 2:00. At 6:00 in the morning I'm like, "Oh my God, I thought of a client." I'm the only one that can do this and they had this scheduled public hearing. I hadn't done any of the work. I woke up and I went down and sat at my computer and thought, "How am I going to do this?" I didn't even get that client file open when this "I'm not alone, I'm finally home" comes back into my head. I picked up a piece of paper and in ten minutes that song was there. I still have the handwritten version. I just sat there. I probably sat there twenty, thirty minutes just thinking what happened? How did this happen? On the back of the paper I wrote, I was sitting here so I wouldn't forget what happened. If I had gone nuts or if something happened to me. I wrote it down. This took like ten minutes. Maybe an hour now has past by myself, sitting at my desk. It's light out at that time of the year.

I'm chomping at the bit to share this with Ann. I go up there and she's sound asleep. I'm like, "I can't wake her up. I'm not going to do that." I went down and I sat in her easy chair. I never do that. I was just looking out the window and again not seeing anything I had my body or my mind filled with a spiritual experience, which was not specifically this, it wasn't specifically that. I wasn't seeing something; I wasn't hearing anything. There was an exhilaration. I mean like fireworks, but I'm not seeing them. My body is slowly getting pumped up. I'm not moving a muscle. Ann comes down there and we're used to seeing each other sitting in a chair, blind, looking out the window. She's going, "Are you alright?" I jump up and I'm going, "This is beautiful!" I'm going, "No, no, no. I'm not some crazy Evangelical freak. I don't know what I'm saying." I'm babbling. She's not buying this. She's not coming any closer. I just go, "Go over and read that on my desk." She went and saw the music and then she read this other thing. We're hugging each other and crying.

Finally, she gets up to make coffee. Goes into the kitchen and I'm exhausted because now it's probably an hour and a half since I got up. I got down on my hands and knees. I was going to pray. I found myself walking. I had sandals on and I kicked them off and I laid there and I just started praying. I laid on my back and I started feeling the same thing I was feeling in the chair. I wasn't seeing lights; I wasn't hearing a thing. The ground wasn't moving at that time. I'm feeling this presence that is inexplicable. I'm like, "Lord, I'm yours. I'm convinced. I'm not a doubting Thomas anymore. I'm yours. Take me." Then I thought—because now I'm feeling physical movement in my body. I'm not levitating, but I'm feeling this. I'm like, "You can't take me now. This will kill Ann." I'm saying to God. I said, "Okay." These experiences were obviously physical to me. I'm probably racing to beat the band even though I don't recall a physical activity. My pulse rate was probably exploding. "I'm yours. Take me. I'm joining you right now." Then I said, "No give me five minutes." I called Ann and I said, "Come in here." She finds me laying on the floor. What did I say? "Hold me."

**AP:** You were saying, "Feel this."

**DJ:** I wanted like the movies where you see, "Take this moonbeam" and it shoots out of my finger into you. I'm holding her and she's like, "What's going on here?" I tried to explain that this was spiritual. It's not me. We probably laid there for five, ten minutes. She's like, "I just have to figure this out." She went back in the kitchen. I laid there and now this shaking was concerning me. "I'm yours." All of a sudden. I probably was doing breathing trying to tone myself down. Maybe I was there ten minutes and I rolled over on my side and slowly pushed myself up. I'm going, "This is cool. My number wasn't up." I walk into the kitchen and Ann looks at me like, "Your face, you're tan, your bags are gone under your eyes." I'm like, "Let me tell you. I didn't tell you when you were hugging me, but I was crawling on the floor and I found myself kicking off my sandals like Moses in front of the burning bush." She told me first about my face being tan before I said anything about Moses. If that isn't enough.

I text the pastor. I'm going, "You've got to find a little time for me. I had a pretty bizarre..." He didn't answer me. That was Wednesday. Thursday I get a text back. He's going, "I'm so sorry." Wednesday they have a Wednesday night service. "I'm doing a new sermon series and I was just struggling yesterday and can you come over?" So I went over. I'm sitting down and I'm relaying all this to him. He's smiling and I'm thinking "Oh my God. He's heard it. He's heard this fifty times. He's just going to pat me on the back and say 'Let's see how you're doing after the celebration.'" Before I was finished with the story he goes over and he's got this enormous cupboard that's a dry erase board and he had his entire outline of this new seven-week series and it was referred to as "A Call versus a Calling." He says, "I just wanted to tell you how I struggled all day yesterday coming up with the final content." While I'm going through this is when he was trying to figure out what his final content would be for this series. He says, "I never had a call. You've just had a call. You're one of the lucky ones. My call I was sitting on my ass." He said that to me. "I was sitting on my ass watching a football game eating a whole bag of potato chips and my high school Sunday school teacher calls me and says, 'Get off your fat ass and go to theology school.' I had a calling, but it wasn't a sexy call." Here his whole thing is about call versus calling. "I just got to tell you the timing of all of this is so remarkable because for the first time in my career as a minister I used an analogy from Hollywood." There down here was call and next to it was Moses and the burning bush. [laughs]

In between that time Ann and I went back to Greg's to get Spencer's belongings. I told him of my experience and he said, "What time did you go to bed last night?" Ann says, "Two o'clock." He said, "I woke up at two o'clock. I came down here and turned off a couple of lights. I just couldn't sleep.” I was sitting at my computer and I heard a door close. I got up and I looked over. This is an old B & B, so it's huge. Twenty people live there. He goes, “Then I hear the same thing. A door close, but nobody came down. I went back to my computer and just like you always feel somebody's eyes on the back of your head." He turned around and he claims that he had a vision of Spencer and Spencer said, "Hey, it's cool I was just checking on all my friends." Pretty spooky. I have never had a vision of Spencer. I've had many Spencer moments. This takes the cake, that whole song. The whole time leading up to the celebration.

**AS:** You wrote a song? You wrote music? I wasn't there.

**AP:** Amy wasn't at the service.

**AS:** I couldn't be there.

**DJ:** I'll print and e-mail you. I wrote this summary down, and then it has the song.

**AS:** Could you take a picture of it and send it to me?

**AP:** Did I give you a copy of his memorial? I think I've got an extra.

**AS:** I don't think so.

**DJ:** When you say a picture.

**AS:** You had written it down, your handwriting.

**DJ:** Oh that one. That one I still have in a file somewhere.

**AS:** If you can.

**DJ:** The song now, everything's packed up.

**AS:** Are you saying that a tune came to you?

**DJ:** Even the melody came to me. On my handwritten, again my father being a piano teacher I know what notes look like. I used to sing in the choir in the Lutheran school. I was trying to as this melody was coming to me and then I hummed it and even recorded myself and gave that to the pastor. The music director at our church was on vacation until the Thursday before the celebration. All she had were the written words and I actually sang a verse and the chorus. She nailed it.

**AS:** That's so beautiful you guys. I never saw this.

**AP:** I thought I gave you a copy.

**AS:** If you did I'll return this.

**AP:** I've got like five extra.

**AS:** Oh, my dear.

**DJ:** I have a hard copy right here.

**AP:** You could just take a picture of it.

**AS:** Is this the song?

**AP:** Yes.

**AS:** I don't remember seeing this.

**AP:** Did you ever meet Spencer?

**AS:** I met Spencer very briefly at the first picnic that we had at St. Louis Park.

**AP:** That's right.

**AS:** Aidan was there.

**AP:** That's right.

**AS:** Doreen's daughter talked to him, went outside with him and chatted with him. I think he was in some form of recovery.

**AP:** Usually he'd relapse in the fall, Christmas time is what I want to think. I've got it all written down somewhere. That's what I've got on my list to do. To start this insurance. They're looking at the insurance. Then I thought that I should talk…

**AS:** Thank you, Dean, that was really very powerful. I appreciate it.

**DJ:** Yesterday Jamie tells us about Aidan moving and she got all emotional. All I have to do is hear somebody whimper and I'm gone.

**AP:** He can never speak publicly. I mean you're a great public speaker.

**AS:** But with emotions.

**DJ:** It can't include emotions. I couldn't go to my own retirement party. Don't plan one. That got me going and then Ann says, "Nancy wants to talk to you."

**AP:** Nancy called yesterday.

**DJ:** Talk about our experiences. Nancy and I talked for about forty-five minutes. We're both bawling. Then I had to go to a meeting last night. Then this, it gets me pumped up.

**AS:** Thank you.

**DJ:** It's positive.

**AS:** I have to agree with that.

**AP:** It is very cathartic to talk. Have you talked to any other people who have lost their kids?

**AS:** Yes.

**AP:** Is it helpful to them, too?

**AS:** Yes. I did. People in different stages of grief. I think that you two are the first people who I've talked to so quickly after. We talked in the beginning of July. It had only been two months, three months.

**AP:** That was right near his birthday.

**AS:** You brought the pictures out.

**AP:** I still haven't taken them out.

**AS:** Sometime when we have a moment more. I have to go. I would like to talk with you about or just get your thoughts even in writing about this case with the dealer and these five people whose death she's being charged with. Your take on it. How you've processed it.

**AP:** I haven't.

**AS:** Kind of just if you have a moment and you're thinking about it and you just wanted to write it down for me. I feel like it's very controversial because there is this grey area. It's not the black and white. Even though the drugs are illegal and what they're doing is illegal what the addicts are doing is illegal, too. I'm just kind of interested in that grey area.

**AP:** That's what's difficult. Especially—I'll put it in Aidan's perspective. Here we tell him that his dad died of a brain disease. Yet, somebody's being charged for his murder.

**DJ:** Even outside of that perspective, his behavior is such that whether it was this woman or another he might have had three dealers. He voluntarily did this plus we were told from a victim advocate…

**AP:** I got the letter yesterday.

**DJ:** Having to go see therapists, losing work, or whatever. We get a letter back going, "You're not eligible for this because your son did illegal activities." The question you're posing is not a sensitive one to me. I'm in agreement with you. But I've gone beyond that. If I was forced to go to this trial I probably, whereas when you read some of the things from the other parents. They want to go in there with a gun and shoot her. I'd probably forgive her.

**AP:** I'd like to have the drug companies up there with her.

**AS:** The oxy.

**AP:** The therapist I'm seeing, I said, "I just don't know how to deal with this. I don't feel anything towards her. But yet I want to represent how Spencer would feel and he'd want us to forgive her."

**DJ:** I think so, too.

**AS:** Think about Dylan Roof who just went into that church and gunned down all those people and what was their response? We're going to forgive you.

**DJ:** And his was no remorse.

**AP:** And no remorse. She might choose to have that, too. It doesn't matter. Then we think well, maybe we shouldn't even participate at all in it.

**DJ:** I have no intention at all.

**AS:** Of going you mean? Participate how? They want you to testify?

**AP:** No, no, not testify but just go and hear what the trial is. I'd probably go more for interest or to read a victim's statement, which would be one of forgiveness for her.

**AS:** That would be powerful.

**AP:** Or ask why the drug companies aren't up there with her.

**AS:** Just get that in the record. That would be powerful. Has she been charged?

**AP:** She was supposed to go on trial two days ago, the 17th, but then the judge had a conflict so now it's rescheduled for the 20th of March. You're more than welcome to come with me. I don't want anybody making a political statement out of it.

**DJ:** I don't want the newspaper sitting there.

**AP:** All the other men that have died using her heroin have been named in the paper and Spencer hasn't. That's the way we want to keep it.

**AS:** For Aidan.

**AP:** I could care less for us, but for Aidan.

**DJ:** Maybe the silver lining is that he's moving to Kansas City and this won't hit the street until after that.

**AP:** We haven't talked to the prosecuting attorney at all. She might plead guilty, or they'll come up with some settlement. What's scares me is that the Hennepin County attorney, Mike Freeman, this is political hay that he can make by getting somebody with five convictions against her. This other mother that's such an activist, I just don't want to talk to her.

**DJ:** If you consider somebody like Michael, relatively young person, early in the stage of recovery this would be devastating.

**AS:** Who is this?

**AP:** This woman, this family that lost their twenty-year-old son. He'd only been using about a year. They don't have the experience of dealing with the disease that we've had.

**DJ:** If they're ever viewing us and her at the same time the answers would be well we're like, "Our son had absolutely no quality of life.” “Our son didn't have a chance to experience life." When you ask that question and you think you've got five different individuals you’ve probably got at least two and maybe three different opinions on how they attack this. Part of my release, part of my letting go is not wanting anything to do with this. I don't need to read police reports anymore. I don't want the details. It's part of letting go because it can't possibly help me. It might hurt me. I'm not fearful of that. For Ann to want to pursue it, she's got to do it. I don't have any problem, but I don't want her to be dragged into my attitude and I don't want to be dragged into hers. The pastor made that clear. You're going to have totally different paths on how you do this. Let's just hope you can stay joined at the hip while you're going down these paths. You too Pee Wee.

**AS:** Pee Wee's the dog by the way.