

Wayne Qualifies

By Bear Kosik

Good morning, everyone. My name is Wayne and I am an alcoholic. I'm terminal. I've made clear the cancer's back a third time and it ain't good. I called in hospice. Maybe I've mellowed after thirty years or maybe it's the morphine, but recently I like to start out by letting people know when I'm up here that like some television shows you see I ought to come with a warning: mature content, viewer discretion is advised. I'm a rude, crude, sonofabitch and I've gotten used to it. Take it or leave it.

When I came into these rooms, I was a mean, stubborn bastard. I ain't mean anymore. I did not do this thing pretty. Then again, I never was pretty. I remember I was dating this girl in high school. I told her that if the prom came after my eighteenth birthday, I was going to go drunk. Two weeks before the prom, I turned eighteen. I walked down Broadway in Rensselaer and hit every bar and gin mill. And she said she wasn't going to go to the prom with me. Well, I had the goddamn tickets, so I invited someone else.

I remember one time I was speeding down the Northway going over a hundred but by the time the cops got to me I was only going ninety-five. My old lady picked me up at the state police there on Route 9 across from Siena. You know where I'm talking about, that place is set back a ways. Before we were off the property and on Route 9, I'd fished a can from under the seat they didn't find and popped it open. I held that thing up as a trophy.

Anyhow, the first meeting I ever went to was at OLA in Albany, Our Lady of Angels. There must have been a hundred people there. It was a speaker's meeting. And some sonofabitch was speaking and this here poor bastard stood up somewhere near the back and said "What's the

point of coming to these goddamn meetings if all's your gonna do is go out drinking anyway."

And I walked out.

I think that's when I had called up EPA or EAP or whatever vegetable soup place and they sent me to counseling. Now, they told us all we weren't supposed to drink but if we did we ought to be honest and tell on ourselves. This one guy was always coming in saying he didn't drink and how great life was and they all patted him on the back and applauded. I came in and told 'em I'd been drinking and they'd be all mad at me. They told me to be honest! Next thing, that guy gets a DWI while in counseling and I'm the one they extended.

They told me to keep track of my drinking. I went into the counselor's office one day and dropped a bunch of red swizzle sticks on his desk. He said, "Is this for the week?" I said, "Hell, no! That's just Wednesday night." Then the counselor said I had to do three meetings before I could be released. So I came in one day and threw the three slips on his desk and he said "What's this? I figured you for one meeting and four drunks." I said, "No, I did three meetings and five drunks."

Another time, they asked me if I had ever had any thoughts of suicide. I forget what fancy name they called it...idiocy...incarnation...ideation. Maybe that's it. Anyhow, I started ticking off twelve to sixteen ways to do the job. Next thing I know, the bastards are putting me in for a twenty-four hour watch. I don't know.

That was 1984. In 1986, I came out of a blackout as I was t-boning a Toyota pick-up truck coming off of Aiken Avenue down here. I didn't have the balls to stand up and face the consequences. I ran. Wheel was coming off the one side. I got home and told my wife what had happened and said I'm done. So, next day, I was in work and the boss called me in and said "Wayne, do you have a drinking problem?" And I said, "No, it's when I stop drinking I have

problems.” So anyhow, they said they were going to go send me to rehab for twenty-eight days.

After I seen the guy, I called up the boss from some bar in Albany and told him this is gonna cost some heck of a lot of money. The bastards wouldn’t let me off the hook.

That Saturday night, I went to the races to Lebanon and we ended up over there on Everett Road after. I was supposed to go to rehab on Wednesday, but they called first thing Monday and said they had a bed available. I thought, for crying out loud, I can’t even get in one last good drunk. I had given my one son one of them there book bags for Christmas. I stuffed some clothes in it figuring it would be easier to carry if I left early. But I did the twenty-eight days. I got out and a couple of days later I got antsy and called a friend. He took me to a meeting and I’ve been going ever since.

I’ve told you people when I hung an eight-pointer and when I caught a six-inch perch. I told you when my kids graduated. I told you when they got married. I told you when I had grandchildren. I told you when my son killed himself. You were there for me and held me up. I remember coming in and talking about pulling that pin and retiring, afraid what I was gonna do with all that time on my hands. And you listened to me and put up with my bullshit. And you told me “keep coming back, Wayne.” I told you when my first great-grandchild was born and two weeks later I told you I had lung cancer. I wasn’t going to tell you that. But I have learned through these years that it’s better to bring that bullshit up here. Good and bad.

My son came see me the other day. He’s a goddamn minister. He said “I see you’re not wearing that watch I gave you.” He gave me a watch, you see, for my twenty-fifth anniversary and it came with a note. I ain’t never been much for wearing watches. I told him the damn battery died and your old man don’t know how to fix it. Besides, the note meant more to me than

that watch. I remember he was maybe eleven and he told me, "I didn't ask to have an alcoholic for a father." I told him, "I didn't ask to have mouthy kid." Yeah, well.

I always felt like I didn't fit in. I did not want to be here. I came in here a'hootin' and a'hollerin' and a'cussin'. I fought you bastards tooth and nail. You people kept saying, "keep coming back, Wayne." Some other guy came in same time as me. He was all, oh, this is so wonderful. Oh, I love coming here. I was celebrating my first anniversary and that poor bastard had gone out again. I seen him coming in and going out. I don't know.

You told me to be honest with myself. I told you about how the first time I went hunting after I got sober, we were up in the cabin and some guy opened some Crown Royal on the far side of the room. I could smell it clear across the room. And I came back here and told on myself that I wanted to drink it. You people said, "keep coming back, Wayne."

A month ago, a lady sent me a letter, a note really. She told me how much it meant to her that thirty-five years ago I went to pick up her young son who had been arrested for shoplifting. She didn't want his dad to know. Anyway, it got that I couldn't finish reading the note. I guess I have made a difference. I don't know.

The one thing I do know is I don't drink and I go to meetings. I've been going to the same damn three meetings every week, Friday, Sunday, and Tuesday, for thirty years. Like I said, I ain't done it pretty. But it's as simple as that. I don't drink and I go to meetings. To the newcomers here in the room I say, if I can do it, you can, too. You come in here and bring up your garbage. And things might not get better, but you will get better. Now, that's enough happy horseshit out of me. Does anyone have a problem or a topic or just some plain, old bullshit they want to talk about? Thank you.