

Announcer ([00:03](#)):

C13 Originals.

Sari (child) ([00:12](#)):

There, I put her right here. My job is to make sure the baby is all right. Right now she's very hurt.

Bill Crawford ([00:12](#)):

Well, when is the doctor going to look at her?

Sari (child) ([00:12](#)):

We don't have a doctor.

Bill Crawford ([00:27](#)):

I thought this was a hospital.

Sari (child) ([00:30](#)):

It is, but it's a different kind of hospital.

Bill Crawford ([00:30](#)):

Could you tell me what kind of hospital it is?

Sari Crawford ([00:36](#)):

This is a tape recording of my dad and me from 1997 when I was about three and a half years old.

Sari (child) ([00:41](#)):

Oh, okay.

Sari Crawford ([00:41](#)):

We're at home in Reno, Nevada. My dad's name was Bill, Bill Crawford. And we were very close.

Sari (child) ([00:51](#)):

Very sick people that we have to 'zamin.

Bill Crawford ([00:53](#)):

And have her examined, exactly.

Sari Crawford ([00:57](#)):

My dad came to Synanon as an addict in 1959. He was one of the first 12 people to move in. He became a leader. He was a big shot, as they said in Synanon. And he was one of Chuck's closest and most trusted confidants.

Bill Crawford ([01:11](#)):

I have to go?

Sari (child) ([01:12](#)):

Yes, sir. So they can examine...

Sari Crawford ([01:15](#)):

At the time this was recorded. He didn't live in Synanon anymore. He had been out for almost 20 years.

Bill Crawford ([01:21](#)):

Let me see if I got this right. The doctor has to come by once in a while?

Sari (child) ([01:22](#)):

Once in a while.

Sari Crawford ([01:27](#)):

My dad was an addict, a bad one until he got to Synanon. That's when he got clean for the first time since he was a teenager, but it wouldn't last. His addictions were dormant in Synanon, but they came roaring back after he left. His years of alcohol and heroin abuse had led to hepatitis C and ultimately terminal liver cancer. He was an alcoholic up until the day he died when he took a lethal dose of morphine that he had been saving for the occasion. Maybe all of that was bound to happen after he left Synanon, but I think it has a lot to do with how he left. I didn't know about all of this until I was older. I didn't know how much he was haunted by his past. Not only his addictions, but the people too. I didn't know that he always had guns around or that he was always looking over his shoulder because when I was growing up, I didn't know that the name Bill Crawford was near the top of the Synanon hit list.

Bill Crawford ([02:57](#)):

This is the stop button.

Sari (child) ([02:58](#)):

That one?

Bill Crawford ([02:58](#)):

Yeah. Push it. [recorder clicks off]

Sari Crawford ([02:58](#)):

My name is Sari Crawford and this is The Sunshine Place.

Margo McCartney ([03:12](#)):

I loved Bill. He was great. He was intelligent. He was educated and he was laid back. He understood Synanon in a level that was not about power. He had power, but he never misused it.

Sari Crawford ([03:31](#)):

This is Margo McCartney who came to Synanon in 1963. She's talking about my dad.

Margo McCartney ([03:38](#)):

One of the ways of dealing with problems in Synanon was to yell at people and cut them down to size by humiliating them and screaming at them. Bill would never do that. He would just call you in his office and he'd sit you down and he'd look at you over his, he had wire rim glasses, and he'd look at you for a long time. And then say, "Why'd you do that?" I mean, it was so disarming. He became one of my best friends. And who knows, if we had been single at the same time we might have gotten together. I really loved him.

Sari Crawford ([04:16](#)):

Miriam Bourdette's timing was a little bit better than Margo's. She was single when she met my dad.

Miriam Bourdette ([04:22](#)):

He was interesting. He was well-read. He played jazz. I introduced him to folk music.

Sari Crawford ([04:32](#)):

My dad was married when he came to Synanon, but his wife split. So he and Miriam started dating.

Miriam Bourdette ([04:38](#)):

We went to the Troubador and other clubs in LA. I mean, I remember seeing Linda Ronstadt. I remember seeing, I think they were called The Doors. He went to Berkeley school of music, allegedly to study classical music. And he discovered jazz. And that was his downfall. He's a good looking guy. He almost always wore glasses. I don't think he could see very well without his glasses. He had crinkles around his eyes. I was attracted to him and I did fall in love with him.

Sari Crawford ([05:25](#)):

And he fell in love with her back. He proposed and she accepted. I don't know if she asked for her father's approval or not, but Miriam lived with the Dederichs and Chuck who she called big daddy gave his blessing. In case you're wondering, Miriam isn't my mom. So I guess it's not a spoiler to say that their marriage didn't last, but some great things came out of their relationship. I want to tell you about one of those things now. It was something called the trip. But in order to do that, we have to go back to the beginning. The following quotes from Chuck are recreations.

Chuck Dederich ([06:09](#)):

Sometime in July, I think around the middle of July of 1959, the tension, I suppose, the fertilizing and tillage and the work and everything, the plant took root and burst above the soil so that you could see it. It happened in a very dramatic form. The night of the big cop out.

Sari Crawford ([06:28](#)):

When Synanon was just getting started, something happened that would become a foundational part of Synanon lore. It was called the night of the big cop out.

Chuck Dederich ([06:45](#)):

The night of the big cop out was a very interesting sociological, philosophical, psychological, spiritual phenomenon. It was an explosion.

Sari Crawford ([06:58](#)):

Synanon had two main rules from the beginning, no drugs or alcohol and no violence, but in the beginning, both rules were enforced pretty loosely. More than anything, Chuck needed his group of drug addicts and criminals to stay. So he was permissive. Some of them still used while they thought the big shots weren't watching, but they weren't fooling Chuck. And he knew that if Synanon was going to continue, the drugs couldn't. One night, he gathered all the members together in the clubhouse and told them to cop out to anything that they'd been doing wrong or that they'd seen somebody else doing wrong. The only other option was to leave.

Chuck Dederich ([07:39](#)):

And everybody began to confess their sins. It gathered tremendous momentum. And then they began to cop on each other. Then they began to accuse each other and it turned into a tremendous explosion. It wound up from almost sheer exhaustion. It seems to me around three or four o'clock in the morning and everybody went to bed. Before we went to bed a lot of people came to me and said, "Something's changed. I'm going to go for this. I'm going to stay clean and I'll kill any son of a bitch that tries to bring any dope in here." There are a lot of versions of this explosion. It has all the elements of a real, terrific legend. I'm firmly convinced of the importance of legend, ritual and so on.

Sari Crawford ([08:38](#)):

Cop out day became Synanon's first official holiday. Something about what Chuck was doing was working. It wasn't just rehab and it wasn't quite therapy or psychiatry, but it was somehow all of it. And it was becoming something else too, something that involved rituals, belief and devotion. In 1968, a writer named Guy Endore wrote a book about Synanon. After spending years observing Chuck and his flock, he noticed similarities between Synanon and a religion. Endore interviewed a lot of the early Synanon members for his book. And one of them was a young leader in Synanon named Jesse Pratt who had this to say about Chuck.

Jesse Pratt ([09:24](#)):

I used to ask myself, "Why? What is he doing it for?" Obviously a sense of power, a sense of having control over people's lives. He could release them from the chains of their addiction, but once he had these people in Synanon, he could also throw them out. Anyone he threw out would shortly land in jail or be dead from an overdose. Don't you see that this power of life and death made him a kind of god? That's why he never wanted anyone to leave.

Sari Crawford ([09:59](#)):

Guy Endore asked Chuck about his feelings on all this God business.

Chuck Dederich ([10:04](#)):

Of course you understand that man creates his own gods. And I just happen to have the right physical characteristics for that position. I've got the deep voice, the big chest, the authoritative manner. You realize that for a baby, the man of the house doesn't seem to have any real function. He's some powerful and mysterious manifestation that erupts out of nowhere and disappears again. Well, what kind of a thing behaves that way? Why, that's God. That is why it's such an easy trick to play God for the grown up children, that most of the addicts here are.

Sari Crawford ([10:44](#)):

Here's what Betty said.

Betty Dederich ([10:46](#)):

I remember a moment in one of our dissipations when someone started to worship Chuck as a God and kneel before him and ask his forgiveness, and then everyone started to do that. And I became alarmed. And I cried because I didn't want him to be God. I wanted him to be a man to love and kiss and go to bed with and cook for. And he consoled me. He said, "Here, feel. I'm real. I'm no god. All this is just symbolic."

Sari Crawford ([11:26](#)):

Betty was describing a moment that happened during a dissipation. A dissipation was a really long version of the Synanon game that Chuck was experimenting with. These games were more about cooperation and discussion rather than attacking and defending. Dissipation could last all night without interruption. Sleep deprivation led to an altered state of consciousness where the exchange of ideas was more open and free flowing. The goal was to achieve a peak experience, a term coined by the fame psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow met with Chuck and he was impressed by him. He even wrote a paper saying that Synanon was on the verge of replacing psychiatry altogether. And Chuck was impressed by Maslow and his concept of a peak experience. After all, Chuck had experienced one.

Dr. Sidney Cohen ([12:21](#)):

Well, I think it's time for you to have your lysergic acid. Drink this down and we'll be back after a while and see how you're doing.

Sari Crawford ([12:31](#)):

The voice you're hearing is Dr. Sidney Cohen. And he just gave his test subject a dose of LSD.

LSD Study Participant ([12:37](#)):

Everything is in color and I can feel the air. I can see it. I can see all the molecules. I'm part of it. I'm oh, just like you're released or you're free or... Can't you see it?

Sari Crawford ([12:54](#)):

In 1957, Dr. Cohen conducted a study at UCLA on the effects of LSD on alcoholics. Chuck Dederich was a part of that study. Chuck's LSD trip had a profound effect on him. He said...

Chuck Dederich ([13:09](#)):

That experience changed my whole life. I could never cry until then. However, at that point I cried uncontrollably for several days. I felt feelings of love and scenes from my early childhood flash back to me. I was left with feelings of omnipotence.

Sari Crawford ([13:34](#)):

After the study was over. Chuck never used LSD again, but he did share the experience with Betty. She took a dose of LSD with Chuck by her side, and she described the experience like this.

Betty Dederich ([13:48](#)):

And there's one moment of that trip that will haunt me all my life. Chuck was sobbing and holding me. And I was looking into a mirror and watching my face changing over to the White race. But Chuck was saying, wasn't it more beautiful before? And I cried and said, "Yes, yes. I like myself just as I am."

Sari Crawford ([14:15](#)):

Chuck wanted to give his people in Synanon and experience as powerful as the one he and Betty had, but without the use of drugs. That's where he was going with the dissipations. He just needed to go further, but he knew he was close. He said...

Chuck Dederich ([14:32](#)):

There's really no need for LSD any longer. We have better ways of taking a trip. We find that we can loosen up people psychically, shake them out of their hangups, bring them more tears and laughter than they've had in years and lead them through expiation to forgiveness. And to such love for their fellow man as many of them has never experienced in their lives. I think of these extended games as powerful tools like royal jelly and a beehive capable of producing a new breed of human beings.

Miriam Bourdette ([15:14](#)):

The big shots of Synanon had long, long games, overnight games. And yes, they were a mimic of his LSD experience. Chuck wanted that extended so that all people in Synanon could have that experience

Sari Crawford ([15:39](#)):

Here again is Miriam Bourdette, who at this point in the story is Miriam Crawford. She's picking up where Chuck left off. Chuck was working on a way to manufacture a peak experience. And it needed to have the same qualities as the big cop out, symbolism, ritual, and unity. It needed to have as powerful an effect as LSD had on Chuck. What Chuck had in mind was something he called the trip. And it was going to take place over the course of three days. That was the idea, but to figure out how to turn it into action, Chuck needed my dad. Here's Miriam.

Miriam Bourdette ([16:26](#)):

So Bill devised the first trip and he had been reading a book, Two Years Before the Mast.

Sari Crawford ([16:35](#)):

Two Years Before the Mast is a novel based on a diary of a sailor at sea.

Miriam Bourdette ([16:40](#)):

In the book, the watches were four hours on four hours off, four hours on four hours off. And so he devised trip based on that notion. And there were activities for each four hours. And it all had to do with the idea that your soul yearns to touch the soul of all other people but it can't because it's locked in there by your configuration is what Chuck called it. And you have to crack that configuration so that souls can touch. And that was what the trip did. It took a lot of soul to conduct those early trips. I mean, you had to be able to get inside other people, to leave their configurations behind and expose their souls. It took a lot of soul for Bill to even conceive of this notion.

Sari Crawford ([17:56](#)):

By the end of the 1960s, a new generation was showing up at Synanon.

Chuck Dederich ([18:01](#)):

The new generation, whether they are runaways or rebels and residents, use marijuana as a symbol of discontent with the basic values of the establishment.

Sari Crawford ([18:11](#)):

As the times changed. So did the drugs

Chuck Dederich ([18:14](#)):

With LSD, the user believes he is discovering inner truth, that he is making a pilgrimage to the soul, that he has achieved unity with the universe.

Sari Crawford ([18:25](#)):

Elena Broslovsky was one of those psychedelic pilgrims.

Elena Broslovsky ([18:29](#)):

I did have a guided acid trip before I moved into Synanon. That was the summer of love, baby. I was in the Bay Area and I was on Oak Street. I stuck my thumb out. This guy picked me up, total stranger. He said, "You want to come with me? I'm going to the Synanon street fair." And I went to the street fair in San Francisco. And Bill Crawford was walking around with his curly hair over the nap of his neck. Didn't have that clean cut look, had love beads on. And it was this amazing scene where these fabulous rock bands were there. Country Joe and The Fish. I started playing the game shortly after that.

Sari Crawford ([19:15](#)):

Elena moved into Synanon in 1969. She wasn't an addict, but she was hardly a square.

Elena Broslovsky ([19:22](#)):

I come from privilege and yet I left home the day I graduated from high school. I did not want to step into the life that the people around me envisioned for me. And I was seeking something.

Sari Crawford ([19:43](#)):

Elena found what she was looking for in Synanon. And especially in this experience called the trip.

Elena Broslovsky ([19:50](#)):

The participants all wore plain, white robes. Staff wore the same white robes except had a Mobius loop around their neck

Sari Crawford ([20:02](#)):

Mobius loops, which were worn like scarves symbolized the infinite. Different colors represented different roles and responsibilities. Each trip had a conductor, guides and shepherds.

Elena Broslovsky ([20:15](#)):

Those of us in the plain, white robes knew that we were seekers and that our job was to cleanse our own souls. The yellow loops were the shepherds. And their job was to take care of us and to make sure we were protected. The orange loops were the trip guides. Their job was like a priest urging us to

confess. Then there were trip conductors who were the only ones with different colored robes that had a very royal look. And so to the gut of somebody that's in a state of dissipation, tired, the symbol immediately opens you up to what they're saying and towards the purpose of examining yourself and purifying yourself so to speak.

Elena Broslovsky ([21:16](#)):

My first trip, we went into a room to introduce ourselves. We sat in a big circle and then these various game groups were established. First, it was harmless like anybody that has kids. As they're ramping it up, anybody that's ever had an abortion. I did get up and I walked to the side of the room where all these other women were who I'd never met before, but there was this connection automatically because we had shared this painful, scary, at that time, illegal experience together. It was jarring. Part of stripping away my defenses. And then the guides would lead us into a game. We would game very hard. And then there would be these lovely sessions in between where we'd read Emerson in front of the fire. We'd do various physical things, we'd dance and come back for more gaming.

Sari Crawford ([22:33](#)):

Midnight on the second day of the trip was known as the witching hour. Trippers were blindfolded and guided by hand into a room filled with the sounds of Gregorian chants. Stations were set up where shepherds and guides washed the feet of the participants with hot water and oils. People became very emotional and cried from the experience. At four o'clock in the morning in a dark room illuminated by candles and incense, a Ouija board was set up.

Elena Broslovsky ([23:12](#)):

So the first time I ever saw a Ouija board, I was with Miriam. I remember Miriam was in the bathroom and the Ouija board called for her. I thought this was so amazing. There were two people in ceremonious robes. I remember seeing their hands moving so furiously fast that I don't think they could have been faking it, but the words were poetry, philosophical, loving. Everything that came from it had a certain poetic beauty to it.

Bill Crawford ([23:56](#)):

Witching hours, a Ouija session, 12th trip epiphany, January 7th, 1968. Bill Crawford, conductor, Abra Cadabra trip.

Sari Crawford ([24:11](#)):

What you're hearing now is the typed words of a transcript from a trip that was conducted by my dad. I founded in an old, three ring binder that belonged to a woman named Sylvia Sternberg.

Bill Crawford ([24:22](#)):

Let yourself be open, willing to live. Forcing life is like telling the green banana to turn black. It will, when it is ready. So will all life be what you desire when you stop asking it to change and let it happen. Let this trip happen and let yourself happen in life.

Sari Crawford ([24:46](#)):

Here's Sylvia.

Sylvia Sternberg ([24:49](#)):

I remember the Ouija board pointing Bill and I out and saying we were old souls. So there was a mystical element to it. And that was good because you felt like, "Okay, this is other worldly." It was a 72 hours dissipation and I mean, a dissipation you didn't sleep. You don't sleep at all. You do have a dream state during that time where you may feel like you're hallucinating with that sleep deprivation. And I think it turns you into an infant. "Just let me sleep. That's all I want to sleep." I think it does break you down. Most people came out and went, "Wow, that was 2, 3, 4, 5 years worth of therapy without the therapist." None of us were trained therapists, but we were trained gamers.

Sari Crawford ([25:44](#)):

My dad conducted the most trips out of anyone in Synanon. One of his specialties was something called psychodrama.

Sylvia Sternberg ([25:52](#)):

This was one incident that happened where somebody was talking about their father who had molested her. And he came in and pretended to be her father. And he gently, very gently brought them out. It was called psychodrama and he was really good at it.

Sari Crawford ([26:14](#)):

Here's Margo McCartney.

Margo McCartney ([26:16](#)):

I worked as a guide sometimes. We often would use psychodrama. I think it brought a lot of people to see exactly who they were inside. Even the people who were watching just like when you're watching a film or a play. It makes you realize that there is nothing that you're incapable of. You'd say, "I could never do that." You don't know what you could do under what circumstances would present.

Sari Crawford ([26:46](#)):

Here's Mike Kimble who had gone from a high school heroin addict to the head of the Synanon bootcamp.

Mike Gimble ([26:53](#)):

I remember being in one where a Vietnam veteran did a role play of killing children and women. We would act it out. I was a rock and the veterans was hiding behind me. I remember this. And he just starts crying when he's pretending he is ready to shoot these children. And he would start crying. And it was like, "Oh man." They were trying to help him do it over again, but not shoot. I remember him saying to himself, "I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do this." And we played it out where he didn't. So he could relieve himself of that guilt. I mean, after staying up for that much time, you're ready to admit to war crimes.

Sari Crawford ([27:42](#)):

Here's Elena Broslovsky.

Elena Broslovsky ([27:45](#)):

People like to call it a breakdown. For me personally, it was a breakthrough. And very powerful to watch and be part of. People talked about their deepest secret, their biggest sin.

Sari Crawford ([28:05](#)):

It must have been how people felt on the night of the big cop out when Chuck made them confess to all of their sins. You can draw a straight line between that night and the trip. After the night of the big cop out only the true believers remain in Synanon. After the trip, new believers were born and it all ended on the third night in a celebration.

Elena Broslovsky ([28:29](#)):

After that experience, we were all turned loose into this ballroom. The whole community would be there. All the people that weren't in the trip, ready to embrace us. And we ran down the stairs and people were hugging you. People were dancing. We had a tribal dance called the hoopla, which is like line dances of today. It was completely joyful, wonderful, peak experience at the end of the trip.

Sari Crawford ([29:03](#)):

Here's Sylvia.

Sylvia Sternberg ([29:05](#)):

At the end of the trip, you patch people together because people are raw and open. Now you can't just leave them that way. It's like cutting open a part of you. And now you're going to heal. The fact that it's a party and people are hugging each other and feeling really good about each other, it's very important. It's the healing. People left the trip, had a chance to start over. I think people get very lonely and very isolated. And here's this trip and this is your group of people. This is your people, right here. Now you are one of the tribe. So yeah, it was a great indoctrination. After a trip, I think you felt connected to Synanon. I know I felt that way.

Reverend D.D. Harvey ([30:16](#)):

Many of them claim, they have found some new feelings, new insights, a new religious experience. But I would like to point out that these and I have known between 1200 and 1500 addicts in the last 10 years of my life that I have not found one-

Sylvia Sternberg ([30:34](#)):

The person speaking is Reverend D.D. Harvey, who was one of Synanon's first supporters from Square Society in Santa Monica. He was so supportive that he moved his family into Synanon. Reverend Harvey said, "I once belonged to that church. But if Jesus came into Synanon, He would say, "This is the place." Even as Chuck led Synanon from drug rehab to self-contained society, to whatever it was becoming next, there was always one constant. It was a business. And so in order to keep his business growing, he needed people. Attracting new people meant appealing to a younger generation with a whole new set of problems. People like Robert Navarro.

Robert Navarro ([31:26](#)):

I was 25 years old at that point. I'd been out of the army for about three years. I was disaffected after coming out of the service. I was disaffected about having to go into the service. But anyway, got into

drugs of a bantomweight level. A lot of pot, a lot of LSD. Never used a needle. So I was a quasi dope fiend but an addiction is an addiction.

Sari Crawford ([31:56](#)):

A counselor told Robert about a place called Synanon that could take him in, along with his wife and two young sons.

Robert Navarro ([32:04](#)):

We went down to the Santa Monica club where they had set up interviews, which was really a Synanon game. And they told me to leave the game. And so I was out by myself for about another hour. Finally, somebody came out and said, "Your wife is a dope fiend and you're not really a dope fiend. So we're going to take your wife in and we're not going to take you in." I didn't know this for several years. Part of the reason that I was not accepted into Synanon at the time that we had the interview was because they weren't accepting men, because they had so many single guys coming off the streets and they didn't have enough single women.

Sari Crawford ([32:51](#)):

Peggy moved in. But Robert was told to wait. After nine months, they let him in as a lifestyler.

Robert Navarro ([32:59](#)):

There was a lot of experimentation trying to figure out what to do with all these god damn lifestylers. Santa Monica was a big facility population wise. So in order to bring some organization, coherence, they were divided into tribes. Groups of 75 to 100. So there might be 5, 6, 7 tribes. And then over the tribes was the director of the house. Every facility had a director. If you wanted to do something in Synanon, the first level of authority that you had was your tribe leader. It's like the army in a way, your squad leader. You have to go to your squad leader before you go to your commanding officer. The same thing happened in Synanon. They would usually pick a couple, married couple, to be the tribe leaders. If you were thinking about trying to change your job, change your housing. Actually, if you were single and you were interested in somebody and somebody was interested in you, if you wanted to have sex, you'd have to go to your tribe leader because you'd have to be assigned a guest room. These were bedrooms that were set aside for people to have conjugal visits.

Sari Crawford ([34:15](#)):

But Robert wasn't single. Peggy though, was at a different facility.

Robert Navarro ([34:20](#)):

I thought we were going to be reunited. I think that was her idea too, but I wasn't allowed to communicate with her until it was sanctioned. And that was a common practice. They said dope fiend couples usually don't work out. They usually split. They put them in different facilities. I didn't see her for about a year and a half after I moved in. It became apparent over time that it wasn't going to get back together again. So I got together with somebody else, another lifestyle who had gone through a breakup in her relationship. Relationships were fluid in Synanon, but that was an experiment. We were living in the social experiment and you never knew what was going to happen next, which was part of the attraction. 1972 was the year that Synanon's population was at its height. We hit 2000 residents at

one time. I can't think of another commune that was as big ever in its history as Synanon was at that time.

Sari Crawford ([35:31](#)):

The people business was booming and increasingly those people were paying their way in. They also brought useful skills with them from all walks of life. Lifestylers came in ready made to help Synanon move in whichever direction Chuck wanted. But it wasn't quite that simple.

Robert Navarro ([35:51](#)):

Taking in lifestylers was a tricky situation because Synanon was a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Lifestylers really couldn't come in under that rubric because it wasn't technically part of the mission of Synanon, which was rehabilitation of dope fiends and people with serious addictions. In their charter for Synanon that formed it 1958, there's no mention of squares or lifestylers. In fact, the charter doesn't even refer to drug addiction. It refers to character disorders. So that could be anybody.

Sari Crawford ([36:37](#)):

The language in the charter gave Chuck a built-in loophole. A person with a character disorder could be anybody. Chuck said...

Chuck Dederich ([36:47](#)):

People have the misapprehension Synanon is just in the business of curing dope addicts. Of course that isn't so. Synanon just happens to be a better way for people to live together. Here, criminals stop committing crimes, dope addicts stop shooting dope, whores become ladies, squares stop taking tranquilizers.

Robert Navarro ([37:10](#)):

So as Chuck went along, he was less interested in curing dope fiends. He had figured that out. He had taught how to do it.

Sari Crawford ([37:20](#)):

Chuck was so good at curing dope fiends, that other people started copying him. Therapeutic communities started opening up around the country using his model. And a lot of times, his people.. Here's Margo McCartney.

Margo McCartney ([37:35](#)):

He resented people leaving. He didn't want people to leave, which was pathetic. His assumption was if you left, you would fall back into using drugs. He was always saying, "Ah, you're going to fall in a manhole and die."

Sari Crawford ([37:54](#)):

When addicts in Synanon were rehabilitated, they graduated and we're free to return to society. But the idea of graduation didn't make sense to Chuck anymore. Not only was he losing people, but he was sending them back into a society that he felt was responsible for the problems in the first place. He said...

Chuck Dederich ([38:16](#)):

You don't civilize a native just to return him to the jungle.

Sari Crawford ([38:21](#)):

Chuck and his board of directors decided there wouldn't be any more graduations from Synanon. Here's Robert.

Robert Navarro ([38:28](#)):

You were a splitee. You weren't a graduate. You didn't leave in good graces. Instead of graduating, Fudgy left. And now he's on loser's corner. He's going to fall down a manhole. These all came from the old man. There wasn't much optimism held out for people who decided that they were cured or cured enough. And they were going to go try their hand at life. That was a marked change from the original concept. I mean, a lifestyler coming into Synanon isn't coming in with the expectation, "Oh, I'm going to be here for two years then I'm going to graduate." A lot of them had PhDs. What are they going to graduate to?

Sari Crawford ([39:12](#)):

Back to the lifestyler problem again. As a nonprofit, Synanon didn't have to pay any taxes as long as they stuck to the mission. But how did the lifestylers fit into that mission?

Robert Navarro ([39:24](#)):

It was all in teaching the new dope fiend who just walked in the door and probably hadn't had a job in six or seven years or something like that, how to get a work ethic. We were taking care of each other. That was the therapy. In order to do that, you had to take care of everyday life. There had to be meals put on the table. Some people had to fix the toilet. Some people had to build new buildings, all that type of stuff. Everybody had a job in Synanon. And pretty much every job was seen as employment education. That was a contradiction right there because what's the point of giving somebody all this education if they don't go out and use it?

Sari Crawford ([40:10](#)):

The IRS was starting to wonder the same thing. For the first time ever, Synanon had to pay taxes. And even though it was a very small amount, Chuck knew he had to do something about the lifestyler problem once and for all.

Robert Navarro ([40:25](#)):

It really didn't fit into the charter and people knew it. They were always attempts to try to legally structure Synanon in such a way that the lifestyler issue would not cause too much irritation with the IRS.

Sari Crawford ([40:42](#)):

In July of 1974, a document came across the desk of Chuck Dederich. It was from his close confidant and head of the legal department, Dan Garrett. It said, "A proposal to declare that Synanon is a religion." The idea was that if Synanon was a religion, they'd have even more tax advantages than they did as a nonprofit. And it would be harder for anyone to scrutinize how they used their money. And also as Dan

Garrett wrote in the proposal, "Nobody graduates from a religion." Here's what a Synanon lawyer said about it on tape.

Synanon Lawyer ([41:21](#)):

One of the reasons that we're pushing this thing right now is because we may want to shut off our books from inspection by government agencies and people that we don't like. Then we may be able to set up certain walls around Synanon, which make it more difficult to fuck with us.

Sari Crawford ([41:45](#)):

Declaring themselves a religion was easy, but having that declaration recognized by the US government would be difficult. Chuck gave his best people the task of making it so. They'd have to submit an official application to the IRS. And it was a process that could take years.

Robert Navarro ([42:03](#)):

We went out interviewing a bunch of people to get declarations from them that we would attach to our petition or to hopefully get this change of status. We were collecting declarations from the families of dope fiends who had been in Synanon and almost all of them wanted to sing Synanon's praises. And they were willing to talk about Synanon in religious terms. They could see it as saving someone's soul. Saving someone's life is transformative. It's transcendental in a way. We had rituals, the game, but I never thought of Synanon as religious. You have to worship something. Synanon didn't worship anything. The idea was to look at something and to think hard about it and take it apart and kick it around and shout at it. Religion is not that way. It's faith. The only thing we took on faith, I guess was Chuck.

Sari Crawford ([43:10](#)):

About a month after Dan Garrett submitted the proposal to Chuck, it was voted on by the board of directors and approved in a unanimous decision, but they'd have to wait and see if the IRS would agree with them that Synanon was a religion. In the meantime, there was only one question left to answer, a rhetorical one. Handwritten by Dan Garrett at the bottom of his proposal it asks, "Who will be God?" Next time on The Sunshine Place.

Alvina Gambonini ([43:48](#)):

I mean, it could be two or three in the morning and there'd be a knock at the door.

Sari Crawford ([43:54](#)):

Synanon is changing. And the kids are feeling those changes the most.

Alvina Gambonini ([43:58](#)):

It had to be pretty terrible for some of them to be escaping during the middle of the night. I believe some of them thought what do they have to lose?

Sari Crawford ([44:08](#)):

Chuck is making an example out of his youngest followers.

Chuck Dederich ([44:12](#)):

The hell with a non-violent approach. Every time a kid sasses you, knock him on his ass.

Julie Roberts ([44:19](#)):

And I was told to take my glasses off. And I was punched and thrown to the ground and picked up and thrown to the ground. "Get up, get up." "No." And they hit me again. And that was the first time.

Sari Crawford ([44:32](#)):

And many kids had to choose between suffering the abuse or risking everything trying to get away.

Julie Roberts ([44:38](#)):

And then I saw one girl standing by herself. She had tried to run away and they had found her. And he just kept hitting her and hitting her. And then an announcement was made that if any of us kids were thinking about running away, next time it was going to be worse.

Sari Crawford ([45:03](#)):

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