

The Don Difference Series
Rachel Rayburn

0:00-0:31 I specialize in homelessness, drug use, and qualitative research methods. I mostly study desistance from crime and deviance. So, a lot of people have studied why people start committing crimes and that's been an interesting topic and researched pretty well. But I've always wondered when you want to change or you can change your life, how do you do that? So why and how people quit.

0:32-1:21 It was a project that was started in 1991 from Jim Wright and he taught it at Tulane University in Louisiana for 10 years. While he was there, he got a grant to create a treatment program for homeless substance abusers. I kind of became fascinated with this idea of longitudinal studies, following people up over the life course. And I asked him, 'Do you have any studies where I could go and follow people up over their life course?' and he said, 'Yeah, I did this study, New Orleans Homeless Substance Abusers project ... 1991. But there's no way that you're ever going to find any of them to re-interview them. They're homeless, they're drug and alcohol users, and Hurricane Katrina came and devastated the community and a lot of people left.' I said, 'Just let me try.' So I tried and it became successful.

1:22-1:47 I've gotten great funding through Purdue to continue my work in Louisiana. Got to hire students in our department so I have research assistants and they're learning these tools, these research methods. They're getting to talk to people. They're getting to learn all about it, so it's been ... it's been very rewarding. I think they like it, but I also think it makes them mad sometimes because they see things that they don't want to see. And I push them to do that.

1:48-2:12 I ask them, 'What do you want to do when you get ... what do you want to do when you graduate?' Sometimes they'll say, 'I wanna' be a law ... I wanna' be, I wanna' be a police officer, I want to work at a prison, I want to work, um, as a U.S. marshal.' And I say 'Have you ever been in a cop car? Have you ever been in a jail? Have you ever been in a homeless shelter?' And a lot of the times, the answer is no. And I say, 'Guess what we're doing. Um, guess where we're going, we're going to juvenile corrections today.'

2:13-2:41 I try to take something that angers me or is not satisfactory and I try to do something about it. And I really push my students to do that, and if they complain I try to have them do something. So I structured ... I made this new

assignment pretty much saying 'find something that's a social problem that angers you.' It could be anything you want. It could be panhandlers; that seems to anger a lot of people. You're going to find a social problem and you're going to write a proposal to do something to make it better.

2:42-2:45 (Music)

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