



I can't, **We can**



A Publication of San Fernando Valley Cocaine Anonymous
(including Bakersfield)

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I can't, We can is a bi-monthly publication published by Cocaine Anonymous of San Fernando Valley. It is intended solely to provide information for the fellowship of Cocaine Anonymous. We hope to communicate the experience, strength, and hope of C.A. members reflecting recovery, unity, and service, within the bounds of friendliness and good taste. This Newsletter presents experiences and opinions of Cocaine Anonymous members. Those opinions expressed herein are of the individual contributors and are not to be attributed nor taken as an endorsement by Cocaine Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous World Services, Cocaine Anonymous World Service Office, Inc., Cocaine Anonymous of San Fernando Valley or **I can't, We can**. The editors reserve the right to edit any submissions in adherence to the Twelve Traditions of Cocaine Anonymous. If you would like to know more about Cocaine Anonymous, the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, please write and ask for C.A. World Service Conference approved literature at CAWSO, 21720 S. Wilmington Ave., Ste 304, Long Beach, CA, 90810-1641, USA. E-Mail to: info@CA.org or by Fax to: (310) 559- 2554, Contact CA by phone at (310) 559-5833. Also note that the C.A. World Service Office web page is: www.ca.org. Please also note this publication and all its contents are copyrighted by Cocaine Anonymous of San Fernando Valley. Any unauthorized duplication or publication is prohibited.

San Fernando Valley
Cocaine Anonymous
Celebrating 25 Years of
Recovery

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Happy Birthday SFVCA

July 8th, 1984 was my first day of sobriety. I knew my drug of choice was cocaine so I called a friend of mine who had been sober two years and told her to please find me a CA meeting and of course she did. I walked into my first meeting on a Wednesday night. It was on Sherman Way and Woodley next door to Beeps. I walked into this room and saw a lot of smiling faces as well as just a group of happy people.

I listened to people share what is now called their experience, strength and hope. I will never forget some of the shares I heard that night, they were sharing their feelings and talked about how they got to the program. Another man shared his Niece had been murdered and he didn't have to get loaded, he had five years at the time, he is still sober today. I thought that seemed like a lifetime to me.

One of the most important things I heard was to just "keep coming back", so I did. There were only three meetings in the San Fernando Valley and we were part of the Los Angeles Area.

About one and a half years later, the Valley decided it was time to become an area of its own. So a bunch of people got together and put the first SFVCA Board together.

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(Happy Birthday SFVCA cont'd)

I have watched SFVCA grow through the years. A couple of years later SFVCA started its own H & I group. There were so many people being of service then, as well as today and hopefully tomorrow. I have been involved in service work since my first meeting ranging from the Meeting level to Area level as well as World Service level.

I am proud to say I am a member of Cocaine Anonymous as much today as I was back in 1984.

This program saved my life as it has for so many others. The friends I have made in these rooms are the best friends I have ever had. No matter what has happened to me in my sobriety I have never had to go through it alone. When they told me you don't use no matter what, I listened. I still go to two to three meetings a week, work with my sponsor, am of service and help others.

So I say "HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY TO SFVCA.

I will keep coming back.

Susan T.

Out of the ashes

San Fernando Valley - 1984 was the year that my life changed forever. I was "somewhat tricked" into the Care Unit in Canoga Park. I thought I was going to "Club Med" and showed up with my dresses, high heels, and jewelry and loaded to the gills. Once de-toxed enough to go to a meeting held there in the unit, I saw the 12 Steps hanging on the wall – When I realized I had to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood him – I was ready to bolt. In my mind it was a religious cult. Then this sweet little nurse that had walked the floors with me at night handed me the poem "Footprints in the Sand" and a new beginning was born.

That is where I met Helene H, Susie T., Tom M, Steve F., Ken C., and so many more – other addicts that were staying clean. That was a miracle to me. After leaving the Care Unit, going back to the boyfriend in San Diego and relapsing, I moved back to the San Fernando Valley and started going to meetings. A short time later I heard the name "Cocaine Anonymous" and that was truly the beginning of the best years of my life.

There was a group of us that would head over the hill to "Cocaine Anonymous" meetings. Then our core group started talking about how to start our own CA meetings in the Valley. It was not very long before we started that first meeting – then another – then another until we had a large number of CA meetings in the San Fernando Valley and eventually we decided to take the steps necessary to become our own area.

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I came in search of a life

Those are some of the words I heard when I first came to Cocaine Anonymous in April of 1984. I walked into the smoked filled rooms to support my friend "who had the problem". You see, she was shooting Cocaine and I thought that was a horrific way to live. As for me, I would spend days and days and days snorting Cocaine and dropping valiums. It was a way of life for way too long; however, I never thought it was a problem since I still had a roof over my head, a job and my car. I was okay!!! Little did I know how out of control my life had been!

My first meeting was at Woodley and Sherman Way in Van Nuys. The room was filled with people laughing, hugging, kissing and even talking to one another like they liked each other. This was very foreign to me. I heard people sharing their experience, strength and hope and their personal business with everyone- I thought these people are out of their mind. I knew nothing about Cocaine Anonymous or what it did. I had never even heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. I had no idea there was a place for people who suffered from the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction. I had no idea there was a place for me in my lifetime.

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History of Bagels by the Beach
Sunday 10:30-12:00
Malibu Recreation Center

The origins of this meeting are somewhat hazy in the minds of the old-timers who still attend the meeting. Linda S. tells of the meeting starting at Mort's Deli in Pacific Palisades in the very early 1980's. She does remember that they were kicked out (for not tipping) around 1984 or early 1985. At that point, the meeting moved to a bank building at Webb Way Road and Pacific Coast Highway. From then on it was called "Sunday Morning Malibu". It was listed as a 10:30a meeting in the CA Los Angeles Meeting Directory at least through 1990. According to Mort S. and Julie D. around 1993 the meeting was again looking for a new location. The trusted servants at the meeting had always seen and talked about the Michael Landon Center at Malibu Bluffs Park but thought that they would never let people "like us" in. At that time the secretary for the meeting was a prominent attorney. He spoke to the Parks Commissioner and "voila" we got the room. Still a Step-Study meeting, we do a step a week and a tradition on the first Sunday of each month. Despite several attempted "huge" rent increases, occasions where the meeting couldn't get into the building, or had to have the meeting in the janitor closet of the building, over the years the meeting has stayed at the Michael Landon Center and grown. From 10-20 people in the 90's and into the early 2000's to the last few years where the meeting averages 50 or more people and to the occasions with 70-80 people in the last couple years. To today when after the recent fire that burned from PCH to the ocean, the meeting has an even better view of the ocean.

Lee R.

Reprinted from the September 2007 edition of "I Can't We Can"

History of a meeting From The Neck Up
By Audi H.

My name is Audi H. and I am the founder of "From the Neck Up" which meets every Tuesday evening at 7:30 p.m. My primary purpose from the start of each day till the end of each night is to carry the message that there is recovery from that hopeless state of mind and body and that the solution is simple one day at a time.

Having just entered my 15th year of sobriety, one of the biggest assets to my recovery is 12 step meetings and fellowship. As a founder of our CA meeting, I have been asked to describe how our meeting got started. We started our meeting on the back patio at a sober living home in September of 2003. The meeting was mandatory for all residents/guests of the sober living home and of course, the purpose was to carry the message of CA.

As the meeting grew, we contacted SFVCA and soon thereafter, our meeting "From The Neck Up" became accredited and placed in the SFVCA directory. Conversations between guests, local people in recovery, treatment centers etc. helped to keep more and more people coming to our meeting. In November 2004, I was blessed to build and complete a brand new co-ed sober living facility in Tarzana. We moved the meeting to the newer, larger home (to accommodate the growing number of group members). Today, sun, snow, rain or shine, the meeting is in full force. When cold or raining, the meeting is held inside the building as was designed. When weather permits, we are outside where everything was custom built for the purpose of holding 12-step meetings. There is custom lighting, fire pits and seating for over 150 people. The format of the meeting is chips, birthdays, speaker, and then we break and continue with participation.

Audi H.

Reprinted from the February 2007 edition of "I Can't We Can"

(Out of the ashes continued)

I had never felt so loved. I had never felt like I belonged anywhere until then. We went to meetings every night – I mean every night - then out to coffee till late in the evening. It didn't matter that we had to get up and go to work – this was our time!!!

The fellowship was truly a fellowship – we had parties every weekend – celebrations of recovery! I'll never forget the first convention in Santa Barbara. We were there for each other through all of the good times and definitely through the not so good times. We worked the steps, we called our sponsors, we were of service and we became “productive members of society”.

My story is one of relapse. Out of at least 30 or so addicts in our core group, I was one of the “very few” that chose to use again.

I was living in and running a co-ed recovery house, “Genesis Recovery House” on Sepulveda and really loved what I was doing. Dana B. was the Director (God rest his soul) and we worked very hard to put that house together. Then I made the mistake that many in my position do – I stopped going to meetings for myself. Instead my life became about “saving” people. I eventually left Genesis and went to work for a treatment facility in Marina Del Rey.

I was sponsoring people but not being sponsored. A wise old lady “Miss Adelaide” once said, “If you have yourself as a sponsor – you've got a fool for a sponsor”. No wiser words were ever spoken.

Eventually, after being in a car accident – I went to a doctor (without telling anyone) and made the decision to get pain meds.

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(I came In search of a life cont'd)

We sat behind the tall people in the meeting so we could not easily be seen. I made my friend stand up as a newcomer and introduce herself. I, of course, did not. You see, I did not have a problem. She had a daughter to take care and therefore, she could not do drugs the way she did. Had she only snorted like me, perhaps she would not have had such a problem and we would not be sitting in this meeting. I heard nothing about 90 meetings in 90 days. I did not hear the readings state the word “we” and not “I”. I did not understand the whole “we” concept.

We came back a week later (good newcomers) and still sat behind the tall people. This time, however, I spoke with another person during the break. He asked me about my “disease” and I told him I was there to support a friend. There was something in his voice, a kindness, I think, that I trusted and I freely shared with him how I was getting loaded. He called me an addict (not quite that language) and I was demoralized. Yet, for some reason I trusted what he had to say. I thought he had all the wisdom in the world and yet he had 60 days. Had I known about the program, I would have known that no one had the right to call another and addict, and I may not be here today.

I kept coming back to the meetings, listening carefully to what was said and they were all talking about me. How did they know how I felt? How did they know how empty I was inside? I was frightened. I never shared in a meeting. I always went to fellowship every night. We stayed till we were so tired we could not talk anymore or hold our heads up. We were so scared we were afraid to go home to be alone with our thoughts unless we were so tired we would pass out. And then, we would repeat this every day. At about 54/55 days sober I started to hear voices. They would tell me ‘it was okay to use, no one would know’. This was repeated day after day in my head. I was afraid to tell anyone because I thought they would lock me up in a hospital. I was working for Psychiatrists at the time and what would they think? I was at a Saturday night meeting and my friend Tom was the speaker. After he was finished speaking, questions were taken. Now mind you I had never shared in a meeting up until this point because I felt that I had nothing to offer.

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(I came in search of A life cont'd)

I told him about the voices I was hearing and that I was unable to understand conversations within a group of people. Nothing they were saying made any sense. It was a like being on a bad acid trip. His response to me was, "You're where you should be, this too shall pass"! How dare him!!! What kind of response is that for someone so frightened! I left the room right after that. I went out back to the parking lot and paced and paced, cursing out loud. After a few minutes a friend by the name of Greg came out back. He stood against a car with his arms crossed around his chest (very intimidating for me). I saw him and stopped. He looked at me and said "are you done? I said "yes" and he proceeded to put his arms around me and he told me I was going to be okay. I was finally home!!!

As time passed I started to be of service. Almost 2 years after I arrived, several people got together and discussed the possibility of become our own area in the San Fernando Valley. We started as part of the Greater Los Angeles Area but we had enough meetings at this time and enough members to branch out on our own. We asked Johnny S. and several others of the original members of Cocaine Anonymous (November 1982) to come out to our first meeting and share their experience in getting started. They were of enormous help to us and in June of 1986 the San Fernando Valley had its own Cocaine Anonymous Board of Directors and we were an Area of our own. I had the privilege of serving on that board along with some wonderful friends. It was a most amazing experience. One I will always treasure. I had the opportunity to also be the first delegate to the World Service Conference representing the San Fernando Valley along with Steve F. It was chaotic, yet energizing. We got to meet people from all over the country who represented their areas for Cocaine Anonymous. It was amazing to see how many states had meetings and were represented there. I remember crying at the 1st World Service Convention in Santa Barbara when I met a gentleman from New Mexico. Cocaine Anonymous was there too!!! And now, we are all meeting from all over the country to do the business of Cocaine Anonymous as a whole. It was amazing. We were growing by leaps and bounds.

There have been many changes in Cocaine Anonymous in the past 27 years that I have been here. Some good, some not so good, but one thing always remains the same, the support and the love experienced in the rooms of our meetings. I have always served this fellowship and will continue to do so as long as God sees me fit enough to do so. I know of no better way to pay it forward to those who came before me and those who come after me. I know of no better way to give back what was freely given to me. Thank you God and Cocaine Anonymous for a life I could never have imagined possible free from a helpless, hopeless state of mind.

With love and service and much gratitude,

Helene H.

(Out of the ashes continued)

I had convinced myself that I could take them as prescribed – that lasted for a few days and there I was again – getting high – trying to pretend I was o.k. The bottom line – I was not o.k. It didn't take long until I woke up one morning and I had surrendered. I called my boss and broke the news that I was getting high. That ended my job and I had to tell everyone what I had done. That was the hardest thing I had ever done. The disappointment was huge and I felt it. But my girls Helene H., Susie T., and Lisa S., were there for me. They loved me “no matter what”.

During the previous few years some of us had stepped on to a path of deep healing. We were going to weekend retreats as well as a weeklong intensive workshop that dealt with childhood abuse issues. There was a lot of love and healing happening there. I had found my “family of choice” in these people. So when the relapse happened I fled to Palm Desert to work for them.

A year later I helped them move their company to Hawaii. That was a beautiful time in my life. Not too long after arriving in Hawaii things started to change in this family of choice. Things were not so spiritual after all. Once again I was in a position of importance – a very dangerous place for a drug addict. I had just celebrated 4 years sober and again had a medical situation where I decided it was o.k. to take pain meds. That led to another relapse. Then again a surrender followed by 2 years of sobriety.

In December of 95' I was going to massage school, cleaning houses and legging up polo horses. It was a really beautiful time in my life. Going out to Waimanalo early each morning and riding some of the most fabulous horses you would ever see then going to work for some really great folks, each day was bliss. Then I broke my back. I had back surgery – then I relapsed again. I had a second back surgery – then I relapsed again.

Another geographic became my solution so I made an attempt to leave Hawaii. First I moved to Florida to live with a crazy ass cousin I hadn't seen in over 30 years – that didn't work at all so I moved to Seattle to live with my dear, dear friend Duggie – that didn't work so I went back to the San Fernando Valley.

Helene H., Susie T. and Lisa S., was there for me. I know it was difficult for them to see me in such a bad way – but that didn't stop them from loving me and literally taking care of me. But I was not ready.

I tried to make it at the Women's Odyssey House where Susie T. tried everything possible to get through to me – but she couldn't. So I moved in with Helene H. and lived on her couch for a few months. She loved me and tried so very hard to help me, bless her heart she tried so hard. I know it was so very hard on Helene – I literally broke her heart.

Finally after realizing I was too chicken shit to jump in front of a bus - I just gave in and moved back to Hawaii. That was where my doctor was – it was where the state paid for my doctor and my morphine. So there I was – back in the land of “Aloha”.

I was sleeping on the floor of a friend's house and staying loaded most of the time. I went to meetings – I would go to AA while taking drugs then I went to NA meetings while drunk. What a horrible way to live. But it was a way of life for me at this point. I just wanted to be high more than I wanted to be sober – period.

Then I moved in with a dear friend that had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. I was living in a multi-million dollar home on the side of a mountain in Lanakai, Hawaii I “had it made” so to speak. I could get high and not have to worry about anything else. Then my “knight in shining armor” arrived. He was in the form of an old High School crush that when I went home on leave from the Air Force I had done a bunch of cocaine and slept with him. One day he called my mother and found me in Hawaii.

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(Out of the ashes continued)

After a few weeks of phone calls I went back to North Carolina where I was born and raised – to be with the “love of my life”. It was just another geographic and he was an alcoholic of course – but bless his dear heart, when I ran out of my pain meds he was the very one that cared for me. It was a short-lived love affair that turned into a nightmare. Once I cleaned up a bit I was not willing to partake in some things I was willing to do when loaded and drunk. That was the beginning of the end for me.

I moved back to North Carolina on December 6th, 2000 with 90 days of morphine and Xanax. On New Year’s Eve I had 12 Xanax left. It was all a blur – reuniting with my biological family – becoming a part of this man’s family – all the while – I was trashed. Then I ran out! I started to detox and this man had to take me to work with him every day to keep watch over me.

Eventually I came around but continued to drink a lot. Drinking was a way of life for us – every night we were drunk. But this was a relationship that was based on sex – that was it! I allowed myself to be a part of the sickest – soul damaging behavior ever in my life. This behavior ended when I ran out of the drugs. Even though I could be drunk – I just couldn’t participate in that behavior any more. This started to break down the relationship – he became very angry – he couldn’t accept the fact that I would no longer damage myself in that way.

I felt stuck – I felt desperate and all alone. On May 9th, 2001 I woke up and the desperation was overwhelming. I had finally given up on living. I felt that checking out was the only answer for me. I started to drink and finally I got up the nerve to put a gun in my mouth and pull the trigger – the gun didn’t go off so I pulled the trigger again – nothing happened.

I will never forget that morning – looking out over the beautiful landscape and deciding to end my life – once and for all. But my Higher Power had another plan. Once I realized I couldn’t get the gun to work – I hit my knees – and I begged the God of my understanding, the God that Cocaine Anonymous gave me to help me get the help I needed to save my life. I knew that I could not do this alone. Nothing else mattered at that point – not what “he” would think, not what my family or his family would think.

I pulled myself together a bit, went downstairs and drank the rest of the wine and picked up the phone. I called the local mental health clinic and told them the truth – everything – gun and all. Then I got in the car, drove myself there and once I arrived it became very clear that I needed intensive mental health services. So I ended up at the state mental hospital that my mother had threatened to send me to for most of my teenage years. I was terrified but I was willing.

When “he” arrived home from work and headed for the garden – I prayed for God to help me tell the truth. So I went to the garden and told him what I had tried to do. His reaction was, “next time you try to kill yourself please do it outside – don’t f-ing mess up my house”.

But in the end he packed a cooler full of beer and we headed up the mountain to the “nut house”. That was the beginning of my new life. I went back to the basics. I spent two weeks in the mental hospital; 28 days in treatment and 6 months in a recovery house. I listened to that wise old lady Miss A and she helped save my life. She was tough on me because she saw how much I needed that. She reminded me that I didn’t know much but had much to learn.

Miss A insisted that I receive mental health services, which is one of the critical elements of my recovery today. I am the dual-diagnosed addict. My bi-polar illness must be treated as seriously as my sobriety. One without the other could lead me to an eventual downfall. It has been over 10 years now since I woke up and put a gun in my mouth. Today it is hard to believe I was there.

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I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt

I used to think I knew what normal was, now, I'm not so sure. In the beginning I used to look at those people (drug addicts/alcoholics) as if they were in another world, a bubble if you will. I never even imagined that one day I would be inside that bubble. The transformation happened so slow that I wasn't even aware it was happening. The insidiousness of drugs and alcohol is truly cunning and baffling. I guess I should have heeded my mother and father's advice about drinking. I just never thought and it would lead to the level of drug addiction I have come to experience.

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am an addict and an alcoholic. I can say that now with freedom and conviction. For I truly believe that I have the disease of drug addiction and alcoholism. I can do many different things in life; drugs and alcohol just are not one of them. That doesn't make me any less of a person, I just understand that whenever I drink or use I end up face down, passed out and broke — EVERYTIME!

I have often tried to control and enjoy drinking and using, but once I start the disease takes over and I just never know where I am going to end up. It usually ends with me embarrassing my family and humiliating myself. I just could not grasp the concept that one was too many. Oh I always knew that one-thousand was never enough, I just could not understand that if I took the first one that I was no longer in control. That phenomenon-of-craving would always set in and I would be off and running. The run would last either until I ran out of money or passed-out cold.

The first time I saw step one, I knew that my life was unmanageable; It just took my awhile to admit that I was in-fact an alcoholic and an addict. It was when I made that admission to myself that I was finally able to let the recovery process begin. I realized that I had a disease and that the only way to arrest that disease was to admit that there was a problem and that I could not handle it, especially not alone. It was then that I truly discovered the "WE" in the first step. I realized that I was not in this all by myself and that all sorts of other people were just like me.

I also realized that they were willing to help me without anything in return. This is when I realized the true nature of one alcoholic helping another. At that point I realized that I was not alone and that there was help for me too. This they say is the first step. As long as I don't pick up the first one and talk my problems out with another addict or alcoholic then I have a chance. So I have learned to do this, no matter what, one day at a time.

Robert H.

(Out of the ashes continued)

I work with homeless Veterans, assisting them in re-building their lives and becoming productive members of society. I support their vocational needs – finding jobs in the community where they can thrive. Every day I wake up and go to work with a grateful heart. I am grateful to be sober and I am grateful to be able to provide something important in another human being's life. But hear me folks, I am not in the business of saving anyone but myself.

Today I am so grateful to have had the many blessings that came to me from that "core" group of addicts and alcoholics that took me in and showed me a new way of life - that group of "valleyites" - my SFV peeps. Today I cherish those relationships that have lasted the test of time. I am truly blessed.

Sara