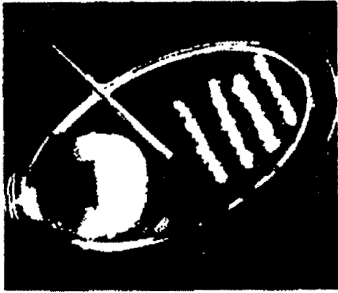


the new hollywood connection: 'cocaine anonymous'

by Laura Daltry, LA Times, Calendar: Sunday, December 26, 1982 - pp. 183 & 208..



The actress was nervous. In her 20s, pretty, with a face familiar from a continuing role on a popular TV series, she was facing 50 people in a Hollywood screening room on a recent night and talking about her drug problem and recovery. She rattled on at double speed in a high, girlish voice, her eyes searching for encouragement from friends in the audience.

"Morning after morning," she went on: "I promised myself I wouldn't do cocaine ever again, but by evening, it was, 'Well, just one little line (a small portion) and, after that one line. . .'"—shrugged "there was no stopping. I found myself hanging around with the sleaziest people—they had nothing to offer but cocaine.

For nearly two years, she has managed to stay off drugs and alcohol. "My life has never been better," she beamed. The audience applauded with a passion.

This was a new weekly cocaine self-help meeting. Free and open to admitted drug and alcohol abusers, it was launched in early November by Tom Kenny, director of alcoholism services for the Motion Picture and Television Fund. The fund is charitable organization supported by contributions from people who work in films and TV.

The audience included one major film star and a number of character actors and actresses as well as a veteran movie director, screenwriters, several middle-to-upper-level studio executives, technicians and a few people outside the entertainment industry.

Cocaine use is considered by some to be of epidemic proportions in the entertainment community. In recent months, stories of "cocaine-ravaged Hollywood" have received widespread play in the media.

Kenny said that, to his knowledge, the group was the first of its kind to address cocaine

abuse. Already two other free "Cocaine Anonymous" programs have begun in Los Angeles. One, involving a private group in Studio City, was organized by a man who attends Kenny's sessions. Another takes place at Beverly Glen Hospital (see accompanying article).

Kenny said he "was getting a lot of calls from people with cocaine problems. When I suggested they check out Alcoholics Anonymous, some said their problem was cocaine and they didn't think they could relate to A.A. So I got together with two or three people in the industry who had overcome their cocaine habit, and we started the meeting by word of mouth."


In five weeks, the attendance has doubled. Kenny is bracing to organize more such meetings after the holidays, to deal with the expected response to a major drug and alcohol awareness effort by movie studios. Kenny is preparing 25,000 "awareness cards" listing the warning signals of drug and alcohol addiction and his phone number. In early January, the studios will distribute the cards to all employees. Kenny said he'll direct callers to the cocaine meetings, to A.A. or to inpatient hospital and recovery house programs as the callers needs dictate.

(Kenny asked that the location of the meeting not be disclosed. Those interested can call him at 937-7250.)

Officials at Columbia Pictures, Universal, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Brothers, MGM-United Artists, Paramount and the Burbank studio complex said they plan to enclose the cards in paychecks or interoffice mail envelopes.

Although studio officials acknowledge that drug and alcohol abuse is a growing problem, most take the defensive industry line that it's no more prevalent in entertainment than in the general work force.


Several studio personnel directors cited new treatment-oriented policies aimed at giving workers whose drug and alcohol problems affects their work a second change. "Where these people would have been fired in the past," said Roy Regan, MGM


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Above, Tom Kenny, who started the "Cocaine Anonymous" program, which will be publicized with awareness cards, left, in pay envelopes of employees at the major studios.

personnel head, "now they're not fired if they go through a treatment center successfully."

The self-help program is based on the same principles as AA, he explained. Many of the people in the cocaine group also attend AA meetings. Veterans of these meetings who have managed to stay "clean" share their experiences with newcomers.

In graphic—sometimes sordid—detail speakers describe how their cocaine "habit" progressed from occasional recreational use to obsessive dependency. They also describe how they now deal with life—tragedy, success, boredom—without drugs. People are urged to sever connections with dealers and users and immerse themselves instead in meetings and the fellowship of other recovering members.

"By the time people call me," Kenny said, "their marriages and careers are in serious trouble and cocaine has destroyed their financial situations." Problems with the Internal Revenue Service are common. "They keep deferring tax payments to buy coke and have no money when the bills are due."

He noted that often people with cocaine dependencies also abuse alcohol and drugs other than cocaine.

"The bottom line on this question of people who say they have only a cocaine problem is that when they go broke from buying coke they trade that off for heavy drinking." (With cocaine costing upwards of \$120 a gram, some users spend thousands of dollars a week on the drug.)

Like AA, the cocaine group urges members to "surrender your lives and your will to a Higher Power," whether that be God in the religious sense or, for agnostics, a faith in the program itself. Several people at the meeting talked about praying. Others scattered phrases like, "God's will" and "faith in my Higher Power" in their conversation, and there was an upbeat, revivalist tone the gathering.

Most people introduced themselves by first name only, anonymity being a key principle of the program. "Who you are, what you do and who you know should be left outside these meetings," one participant, a businesswoman, explained after a session. "We are not here to cut movie deals, but to share our common experience and recover from very serious—sometimes devastating—drug problems."

In contrast with the relaxed, gregarious veterans of the

meetings, several newcomers shifted uncomfortably in their seats and listened to the speakers with skeptical expressions. Once young woman bolted from the room, looking frightened and upset.

The format of the meeting called for 20-minute talks by two speakers, followed by a coffee break and then group participation.

The first speaker, the actress, was followed by a man in his 40s whose abuse of "every chemical I could lay my hands on" spanned nearly three decades. His face was lined far beyond his years, but his skin had a healthy glow and his eyes were clear. He was dressed neatly in boots, jeans and a flannel shirt.

In a deep growly voice, he described how he had stayed high from the tail end of the pills-and-pot beatnik era, through the psychedelic 1960s, to the "better living through all chemicals" 1970s. For the last five years, he's been clean and sober "through the grace of God and the fellowship of other recovering alcoholic-addicts."

"I always wondered if I could ever get enough cocaine in one

sitting to the point of saying, 'All right, I've had enough.'"

A few years back, he got a chance to find out. A San Francisco rock groupie dropped by one day with a "bag the size of a pillowcase full of San Francisco-rock-star-quality coke." On her way out, she duped a "whole, huge, enormous pile" of cocaine on his kitchen table. It took him almost two days non-stop, but he said he didn't quit consuming the drug until the table top was clean.

"The point of telling you these old war stories," he said, his dark eyes panning the audience, "is not that everyone else here doesn't have equally horrible tales to tell, but that if you're an addict like me,, you will never get enough cocaine. You will either stop drugs and alcohol altogether, or you will die.

"I'm a miracle," he said quietly, flashing a smile from the corner of his mouth. "It's a miracle for a stone junkie alcoholic like me to be sitting here alive. And if you're here tonight, you're in the right place if you want to stay alive."

The vast majority of people who use cocaine "can take it or

leave it." Kenny said. But, like the small percentage of drinkers who become alcoholics, some cocaine users will become obsessed with it. Heavy users exhibit radical personality changes, becoming irritable and intolerant. In the acute phase of cocaine psychosis, they suffer paranoia and delusions. Physical effects include exhaustion from lack of sleep, severe weight loss and heart problems.

After the two speakers had finished, the secretary of the group, a former studio department head whose rabid cocaine habit cost him his job, passed a collection basket to help cover the cost of coffee and refreshments. Most people dropped in a dollar. During the brief coffee break that followed, veterans gave their phone numbers to newcomers, saying, "Call me anytime," and, "Call me before you call your connection" (cocaine dealer).

After the break, the meeting was opened to group participation. People raised their hands and in turn talked briefly about their problems and insights. It wasn't an interactive encounter group in which a person outlines a problem

and others in the group offer advice. Rather, it was a series of brief, unrelated speeches. As members explained later, the process is called "sharing." The theory is that an upsetting experience loses its power to upset when it is shared with a sympathetic group. A screenwriter explained, "The more the secrets, the more the insanity."

One after another, people raised their hands and spoke. A woman in her mid-30s told of watching as her lover shot to death over a cocaine deal. A film director described how he had broke into tears during a business meeting. A woman television writer's voice was cracking as she talked about the change in her life since she quit drugs and booze. "Last year, hitting bottom, I almost died twice. I would not be alive today without this program and the people who spent hours talking to me on the telephone when I was feeling crazy, the people who loved me and forgave me and gave me hope when all I wanted was to get dead," Now, she said.

DRUG PROGRAM: 21 DAYS, \$7000

To advertise its new program to combat cocaine addiction, Beverly Glen Hospital in West Los Angeles took out ads in entertainment trade publications—Billboard, The Hollywood Reporter and Daily Variety—as well as the Westside edition of The Times.

The in-patient program at the small drug and alcohol rehabilitation hospital lasts 21 days and costs an average of \$7,000. "That's about the same amount the abuser would spend for 2.5 grams of cocaine a day, which is peanuts to heavy users," said psychotherapist Allan

Rosenthal, 31. He developed the voluntary program, which includes detoxification, drug education and intensive individual and group therapy. Launched five months ago, the program has 17 adults and six adolescent in-patients.

Rosenthal calls cocaine "the most psychologically devastating" drug. He said its abuse has reached "epidemic proportions" not only in the entertainment industry and other highly paid professions, but among the less-affluent blue-collar workers "who deal the drug to a small circle of colleagues to cover the expense of their own use."

Although Rosenthal said the hospital offers on of the most specialized treatment programs against cocaine addiction in the nation, he stressed that in-patient treatment offers no

guarantee of permanent recovery. In fact, he said, the long-term recovery rate of cocaine abusers "is so small that I will not work with anybody privately unless at the end of the first month of treatment" they join an ongoing self-help group such as A.A.

In early November, the hospital provided a room for a weekly, free "Cocaine Anonymous" meeting open to drug abusers. The group now averages 30 people. Rosenthal said the response from doctors and other health-care professionals has been "so overwhelming" that he envisions a mushrooming "Cocaine Anonymous" organization in Los Angeles, complete with a telephone hotline, literature and an administrative office. —L.D