

WHAT IS CMA?

VOICES OF THE[®]
FELLOWSHIP

If you think you have a problem
with crystal meth, you're in the
right place. You always have a
seat here. **Welcome home.**

I keep telling new CMA groups that I run across, "You know, you're a new group—there's only twenty, thirty of you. You are like the fresh footprints in the sand. You are the first birds walking across the beach in the morning, and the rest of civilization is going to follow you. So, walk carefully and have fun and watch the family grow around you." —Pete S.

WELCOME HOME

My story is most likely not so different from yours, nor is it terribly unpredictable. I would seek meth, engage in sexual conquests starting around 11 p.m. Tuesday, and last for many hours—if not days. If I recognized the apartment needed cleaning, I'd go into hyper-cleaning mode, scrubbing until my hands were sore and red. Or I might spend too much time on one project while associating with people who weren't there. And so on.

It was winter in Los Angeles, 1995, and I was getting clean—again. I tried stopping meth one year prior, but due to extraordinary cravings for meth and an inability to be honest, it was a failed attempt. Something different happened this time. I was willing to listen to the strong suggestions from a substance abuse counselor with whom I was meeting at the time. I remember calling her and explaining how I'd spent the last year battling the daily decision to use meth or not. Meth won that battle at a rate of 98 percent. The counselor, Lu, told me about this guy, Bill, who was running special meetings for meth addicts. Lu gave me Bill's phone number and strongly suggested that I give him a call. At this point in my life, I was all out of bright ideas. I knew I had a history of resisting change. If I wanted to try stopping or cutting back on the meth use, I'd better give this guy a call.

Despite my ambivalence, I called Bill and left him a message. About two days later, he returned the call. He told me to meet him at a West Hollywood clubhouse on the upcoming Friday night. I was reluctant, but it was West Hollywood, a town that's mostly offered me liberation and a lot of unpredictable nights. I figured, How bad can it be? So I showed up.

Friday night, I took a walk down Santa Monica Boulevard to the address he gave me. For many years, I had DJ'd at a club directly across the street. I remember looking out the window of that club. I'd notice people standing in front of this green door smoking cigarettes and laughing. I didn't know what was going on, and I never thought I'd be joining them. I opened the green door and walked up a narrow wooden staircase. At the top of the stairs stood this short older man wearing a red leather jacket and holding a Guzzi motorcycle helmet. He reached his hand out to me and said, "Welcome home." Those two words meant so much to me, as I was not welcome in many places at the time. By the end of that meeting, something magical happened—I found my new home.

The meeting featured mixed-up, clunky-sounding readings about God, jails, institutions, and hope for a meth-free life. They handed out poker chips for days without meth and gave cakes to celebrate people who had achieved multiple meth-free years. There was a man speaking about getting friendly with tree people and a few guys vibrating. I recall walking out of that meeting thinking that I couldn't wait till next week.

I quickly became a regular, got a cute sponsor, and started spending time with this group. We would meet at Nina's house every Friday before the meeting. Then we'd walk like a small pack of wolves on a mission to our Friday night meeting. Afterward, many of us would get that late-night bite at the French Market. At the end of a Friday night affair, any one of us would be too tired to think of scoring meth. It was truly a memorable, magical experience. In those days, we didn't talk much about spirituality. We simply did a lot of things together to keep each other safe from getting loaded.

In the first year, I wanted to give back and be a part of something special for the recovery community by offering my talents as a DJ. I talked with my new friend Pete, who was a retired DJ, about doing something. He thought it would be a good idea to have a dance to raise money to support the clubhouse where the meetings were held. The beauty of this experience is that it gave me a chance to develop a fun sober event where we didn't have to do meth. A trend started, and eventually, we began hosting dances to raise money for the local CMA District.

At this point in the story, you might be asking how I survived on one meeting a week. At the time, I'd attend noon AA meetings primarily at the same center that hosted CMA on Friday

night. This routine eventually changed as more CMA meetings popped up.

After a couple of months in the program, a friend of mine invited me to what I recall was the second CMA meeting that emerged. It was held at the same clubhouse at 2:30 on Saturday afternoon. I remember Bill telling me how he chose a Friday night time slot for the first meeting because that was generally when a person might start seeking meth. He picked the 2:30 Saturday time slot because that was usually when someone might start looking for more meth after being up for more than 24 hours.

Within a couple of months, more meetings started to form: Sex and Sobriety on Wednesday, the Beginners' Group on Monday, Relapse Prevention on Tuesday, and on Sunday, a round robin. By the end of 1995, there was a meeting every day of the week in the West Hollywood and Los Angeles areas.

My first year in CMA was dedicated to showing up and being part of a new kind of family. I didn't want to use, and I found a lot of comfort hanging out with this new gang. We were like the misfit toys from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*—all of us with special talents, skills, and the ability to express love to each other. It felt like we were answering the call for help from the grips of our addiction, and the only way we could survive was to spend a lot of time together in and out of CMA meetings. It wasn't about who was working on their Steps back then, and it wasn't about who was more spiritually fit. It was about a strength we developed by staying close to each other, one meth addict talking to another and holding each other accountable.

Then there was that cute sponsor. He started working with me. My early instructions were to page him daily on his beeper and start writing about things like, "How am I powerless over meth?" I started doing some Step assignments, but I was not too invested. We'd go to CMA meetings and enjoy the fellowship together. We ended up having sex, and that can really put a damper on Step work. I figured if I wanted to stay clean, I'd better find a new sponsor whose program resonated with me and was someone I didn't want to have sex with.

I started paying closer attention to our little CMA group as I searched for a new sponsor. There was one fella named Eli, whom I respected as a friend. I loved that we had a similar religious background. Then there was Bill, my first friend in

CMA. I ended up asking Bill, and he agreed to do it. I continued working with Bill until the day he died in 2008.

It was a special time. I made many new friends, met my husband (whom I married years later), and got to experience CMA in its infancy. I managed to stay clean for many years based on the premise of my first year in CMA. After eight years of recovery, I experienced a relapse that lasted about a year. When I made the decision one more time, I came back to my home, and years later, I haven't left.

The most significant gift was learning about the strength of people coming together to overcome relying on meth to solve their problems. It was, and still is, a source of incredible power. It's why I keep coming back and offering my service to sponsor others. I was hopeless when I came into CMA. Then I found a place to call home.

Over the years, I've attended meetings all over the country, and CMA members are out there doing it just like me. We are living our lives by practicing the Twelve Steps of CMA, embracing and enhancing spirituality, and most important, being of service to each other through love, support, and fellowship. Thank you, Bill, Pete, Eli, Nina, and everyone else who was there for me at that little West Hollywood clubhouse for the CMA Friday night meeting in the winter of 1995.

TRAVELING IN UNCHARTED TERRITORY

I had been returned to the pod at the Denver County Jail after a day at court. My fast-talking mouth failed to do what it normally did: get me out of trouble. Instead of being put back on probation for the umpteenth time, the District Attorney decided he was tired of my bullshit and was recommending I serve the 12 years in prison that were hanging over my head for the slew of felony convictions I acquired over the past 18 months.

I felt as if my world was crumbling around me. The destruction had become unstoppable once my heavy partying progressed to addiction four years prior, but now the consequences of my actions were staring me straight in the face. That night I was overcome with the realization that the root of all my problems had been fear—fear of success, fear of failure, fear of commitment, fear of being alone, fear of a life addicted to meth, fear of a life without meth. I had gained an understanding of myself now that it was too late.

A week later, a friend bonded me out of jail and wanted to see me. (He, of course, wanted drugs as I had been his dealer for years.) I owed him at least that, and I certainly wouldn't use after the heaping helping of self-knowledge I had just received. But when I pulled the needle out of my arm, the anxious, frantic, almost neurotic inner voice that was usually quieted by drugs only yelled at me louder, telling me I was a piece of shit and deserved every bad thing I had coming to me.

I left my friend's house and slithered back to the condominium he let me stay at until the bank foreclosed it. I was at the jumping-off point with nowhere to go. My friend Adam, who had

been forced to enter treatment after his first felony and night in jail, called me to ask if I wanted to go to a Twelve Step meeting. Meetings seemed like a last recourse for losers who couldn't handle their drugs, but I wasn't in any shape to judge. (I still did anyway.) I was overcome by the happy faces, the similar stories, and the welcoming invitations after the meeting to attend other meetings.

I had attended one or two (or three) meetings every day for about a month when Adam and I decided to try a CMA meeting. We did not go there initially as it had a bad reputation, stemming from a member who sold meth in the rooms and caused great harm to the fellowship. This member did go on to start several meetings around the Denver metro area, though: Loaders (biker), Sketchin' Out (gay), and Arapahoe House (rehab facility). The meeting we went to, Kicking Tina, was located right in the middle of Capitol Hill and of all my meth activities.

Kicking Tina was started by Rod R., who worked in recovery and was a shining example of hope for crystal meth addicts. Early members included Jim E., Daniel G., and Steve S., who all reached out to those of us who slowly found our way to the meeting. It was quite small at first but grew quickly as those of us who started in other fellowships found a home there. For myself, I can say that my shares resonated more in the rooms of CMA. Try talking about six-hour-long sex sessions, stealing identities, or dumpster diving in an AA meeting, and people look at you like you're crazy.

As the Big Book states, a fellowship grew up among us as we all started to put time together. Everyone showed up early and stayed after the meeting to catch up. We'd all go as a big group to Pete's, a Greek diner and a Denver institution since the '40s, for late-night food and fun. We all had sponsors and service positions and kept each other in check. Our phone list grew, and we welcomed newcomers to this family we created. It initially only met once a week, on Thursdays, but meetings were added on Mondays and Tuesdays due to the increase in attendance. We began a literature study, performed group inventories, and participated in Area meetings. For a significant amount of time, it was the most well-attended CMA group in Denver.

More than a handful of times, I would see someone new, and, hearing their name as we introduced ourselves, I realized it was someone I knew and loved from my using days whom I hadn't recognized at all. Funny how a separation from daily meth use

will help a person's appearance. The rooms took on a magical air, and it seemed everything in life would work out well if we just stayed the course.

I'd found employment and even hired an attorney to help with the impending prison sentence I faced. I'd been attending court-sponsored meetings as a representative of CMA and spoke often. I never had my court slip signed, because I participated for altruistic reasons, not to look good to a judge or have my restitution reduced. Without realizing it, my actions had been noticed by the D.A. I was eight months clean when I went to court for the eight felony and ten misdemeanor charges I had in three different counties. I brought my sponsor, my lawyer (and grand sponsor), Adam, and two other lawyers who were members of the fellowship to speak on my behalf. The judge let me know he was not interested, as my record spoke well enough for me. The D.A. who recommended the prison term came in just before the gavel came down and asked the judge if he could relay what he'd seen of my behavior over the past months. He told of how I had, for the first time in the years since I'd been on probation, gotten a hold of this program. He said it would be a travesty of justice to send me away. I was given three years of probation, which, by the way, I completed early.

With my freedom secured and my schedule suddenly open, I jumped into service work, giving it all I had. I knew I'd been shown grace and treated my recovery as a new lease on life. By the end of my first year, I completed the Steps and began sponsoring other addicts. I grasped an understanding of the program, which hadn't made sense previously. I began to form relationships with members who became the elder statesmen of the fellowship. Walt W. came into the rooms after me but had an amazing knowledge of the program and a level of commitment that I still admire. Bear P. had significant time but relapsed after an enormous personal tragedy. He returned to gain even more time and became a strong presence in the rooms. We were definitely people who normally would not mix, but we heard the calling and took action. I cannot think of a time when we were asked to do something for the fellowship that we declined. We all understood that this was far bigger than us. We just got to be a part.

That first year in CMA was exciting and special. For most of us, we were traveling in uncharted territory. We often had to reach out to members of more-established fellowships to ask how to address some new aspect of running a group or an Area. We are

indebted to those who came before us. Looking back, I find that many who were a part of those early meetings are no longer around, because they moved on to other fellowships, chose an easier, softer way, or wanted their misery back. I realize that we all have different journeys, and I am just thankful for the time our journeys ran along the same path.

THE PARTY ISN'T OVER

Last night was CMA's annual holiday party on Washington Square. And, wow—what a night! Hundreds of happy guys and gals eating, singing, dancing, and generally carrying on. Everybody getting their holiday groove on, everybody pitching in in some way, small or large. Will and Bruce manning the boffo buffet. Jono tinkling the ivories. Karen cutting up the dance floor, even with her leg in a brace. Sam bringing the house down with "Frosty the Crackhead." And nobody in the place was high or drunk. That's my idea of a happy holiday.

Eighteen years ago, I hated parties. I would never have gone to something like that. Oh, I "partied"—but there was nothing festive or fun about it. Crystal meth offered a tantalizing fantasy of immediate, intense connection, but it was an empty promise. The reality was total isolation and profound despair. When Friday came around, I'd find another drug addict to take hostage and hide away from a world that judged and despised me. It took years of abstinence, healthy fellowship, and Step work for me to realize the world didn't hate me—I hated myself.

And in 1999, I had every reason to. Things had completely unraveled for me, starting six years before, when the love of my life had broken my heart. I felt abandoned—when he'd see me on the street, he'd cross to the other side. I took to spending my nights self-medicating in the East Village bars, seeking comfort from basically whoever was next to me at last call.

My decision-making was poor, to say the least, and within a year, at 25, I tested positive for HIV. Panicked, I made an "adult" choice and left behind my dream to be an actor—though,

honestly, my drinking and drugging had pretty much stalled that plan already. Desperate to get health and life insurance, I took a dull job I quickly grew to hate. This all happened a few years before the antiretroviral cocktails came out; it was a terrifying time to have HIV. The self-loathing tape I started listening to then played on long after the medication miracle of '97 and '98. I was a pariah.

Sometimes, I think I would have killed myself without alcohol and drugs, particularly coke and meth, which I did almost every weekend. They were the antidote to my despair and isolation, taking me to a parallel world where the shades were always drawn. Guys in that underground city loved me—well, they loved my body, the only part of me that wasn't twisted out of shape. No one cared what my status was. No one cared about my shattered dreams. I couldn't see it, but in fact, no one cared about me at all.

If you're reading this book, you can probably fill in the rest of this story. The fantasy fell apart. Within a few years, my fool-proof solution had fooled me, and I was on the brink of actual suicide. Staring at myself in the mirror at 5 a.m. one dark night, I said, "This wasn't supposed to happen to me."

The journey back to life—back to the real party—started right there. With the help of my few remaining friends, I found my way to a psychiatric hospital on May 21, 2000. I never intended to quit using, and certainly never imagined I'd go to those icky meetings in church basements, but that's just what happened. Miraculously, I haven't had a drink or drug since.

After five days in the psych ward, I went to a rehab in Pennsylvania for several weeks. The night before I came home to the city, the counselors told me that if I wanted to stay clean, I'd need to get to meetings every day. I only knew a couple of sober people in New York—one of them, my buddy Tim, gave me a rundown of all the queer-friendly groups: "Mondays you have Cocaine Anonymous on West 4th; Thursday, there's a great NA meeting, mostly lesbian heroin addicts. Amazing. Friday is AA at the seminary on 9th Avenue. There's always Perry Street AA. And, if you're brave, on Tuesdays, there's Crystal Meth Anonymous."

When I walked into that tiny room at the LGBT Center and took my seat—an old, bent-up, orange metal chair—I didn't feel especially brave. I was terrified of going back to crystal. I'd been told

to do whatever it took to stay sober, and I was doing my best to follow that instruction. Don't pick up, no matter what, and go to a meeting every day. So here I was.

Let me tell you about early CMA in New York: Tim was right—it really was different. For the first six months I came, there were never more than six or seven of us. I saw the same four guys almost every week: Bob M., Eric M., John T., and Michel B., who all had a year or two at that point. They hadn't fled gay AA—most of them I'd see on the other nights of the week at the other fellowships—but they believed tweakers needed a room of our own where we could tell our story without any fear.

We didn't follow a set format. Fellows today would be horrified, but there was a lot of crosstalk. It wasn't so much a Twelve Step meeting as it was a group therapy session. Without a counselor. Well, not exactly—Bob was our reluctant shepherd. I later learned that he'd been there from the beginning: He and Enrique M. had held meetings in their apartments for a few months in 1998; the next year, when Eric brought CMA back to New York after a trip to LA, Bob helped him find a room at the Center.

Bob was a teacher, so taking us fledglings under his wing came naturally to him. He was gentle, honest, never doctrinaire. When I got 90 days, he gave me some juggling balls. "You need to learn new hobbies," he told me.

Somehow, our little club stayed clean. But even though crystal was sweeping through New York, our numbers didn't change. The drug had this dark reputation, and that applied to CMA, too. No one in gay recovery took us seriously. Finally, we adopted the attitude of "if we build it, they will come" and decided to make things a bit more formal. We borrowed the format from my other home group, the Monday Cocaine Anonymous meeting. We introduced set readings, including the Steps. We offered a few concrete suggestions and encouraged people to attend other fellowships—this would also horrify many people today—giving out a list of all the gay AA, CA, and NA meetings in town. We had speakers. Certain things stayed the same. We kept going to Jerry's BBQ on 8th Avenue after the meeting. And we stayed honest. Brutally and beautifully honest.

Before long, we had a dozen or so regulars. People who'd been scared off by the casual bull session began to come back. So we started a second meeting, on Fridays, at GMHC. The first few weeks, three of us met in a closet. But that meeting

grew quickly—it was Friday night, after all. Next came a Step meeting on Sundays. We were all working the Steps in the other fellowships; why not do them in CMA? By the time the Center moved back to 13th Street from its temporary home on Little West 12th, our Tuesday group had numbered almost twenty people. They put us in a room on the fourth floor where we still meet today. Rapunzel's tower, I call it, because you can really let down your hair.

By the time I had two years, we had meetings almost every night of the week. We had guys who didn't do other programs at all—their friends, fellows, and sponsors were all in CMA. Our first, best allies turned up about that time: Roy Y., from 9th Avenue AA; Joe S., from CA; and one night, at Tim B.'s invitation, Ava L. They were instant old-timers, if you will, who lent us a bit of cred.

Eventually, a few of us decided we needed an Intergroup. So, in consultation with Los Angeles, we started one. We established a public information officer, built a website, wrote pamphlets. We kicked off Share-a-Day in 2004, inviting Don N., one of CMA's founders, to be our first speaker. "Quit doing drugs," he told a hundred or so of us, "and stop being an asshole."

They say we're always walking one way or the other toward relapse or recovery. My journey into sobriety started after I hit bottom, in the moment I first asked for help. A few people, friends and therapists, suggested I stop using for a week or two. That was it—one simple, straightforward suggestion. I said OK, yes. I'd try.

But one suggestion leads to another. They're kind of like dominoes—if you really give one of them a go, it sets up the next one, and the next, and so on. When I stopped using, I suddenly had time to fill—well, people suggested, go to meetings! There, of course, more dominoes fell into place: Get phone numbers. Watch out for people, places, and things. Pay attention to HALT. Was I lonely after the meeting? People suggested I get over myself and go to fellowship. There I heard about getting a sponsor, so I did. He told me about the Steps, and they led me to a Higher Power and the inventory process. I kept saying yes.

In terms of the Steps, it went like this: I admitted my way wasn't working (Step One), learned about your way (Step Two), and decided to give it a try (Step Three). I took a long look at my screwed-up interactions with people (Steps Four and Five) and

tried a healthier approach (Steps Six and Seven). Finally on sounder footing, I cleaned up the wreckage of my past (Steps Eight and Nine). All grown up for the first time in life, I could take care of myself inside and out (Steps Ten and Eleven) and even begin to help others (Step Twelve).

That last bit is key for me. Pretty quickly, life got full and complicated again, with boys, work, and a whole host of other successes and failures. Making time for other people's problems, people suggested—doing service, maybe even being someone's sponsor—was the best way to really get out of myself. It's an inside-out journey, if we're lucky, and I've been very lucky.

Thank God I said yes. Today I find myself at the center of a beautiful mosaic—all these suggestions. At any time, I can reset the dominoes and start knocking them down all over again.

Back to parties: Living on that basis, they seem like a great idea. In the past 18 years, I've reconnected with my family, becoming a dependable son again. I've had several boyfriends. And when those relationships ran their course, we became friends. My exes don't cross the street anymore when they see me. I went back to acting and worked solidly for a decade in the theater. Auditions and agents and all that are a lot easier when you can show up for stuff day by day. Eventually, I returned to writing, an even older dream, and stopped acting. In the last few years, I've become an activist-organizer, working on causes important to me.

The common denominator in all of this is people. For the most part, they don't scare me. And when I do feel fear, I remember something my long-term sponsee and dear friend André likes to say: "Fear is excitement without the breath. So take a breath, and get excited!"

Thanks to CMA, I came back to the party. Why would I ever leave?

TIME TAKES TIME

It was a steamy hot summer night in Atlanta in 1997. I had been up for at least seven days. As I was about to leave this guy's place, he sparked up a joint and offered me a Xanax, which I took right away. My best thinking was that I would get sleepy about the time I got back to Buckhead. It was about a 20-minute drive up I-85, a 16-lane interstate that passes through the city center. Watching the city lights twinkle at average speeds of 85 miles per hour made this one of my favorite stretches of road. I had been living in Atlanta for about three years and had been awake most of that time.

But on that night, I don't recall the city lights at all. I blacked out heading north on the freeway, and my next memory was of my car crashing into a curb just outside my friend's apartment complex. Fortunately for me, it wasn't on the interstate. I probably wouldn't be here to tell this story had I passed out just five minutes earlier.

This is the story of my using. An endless succession of emergency room visits and close calls through the late '90s and early aughts had followed the fabulous, carefree, fun, and exciting early '90s. I had taken my first hit of meth in late 1993 after a rave. I soon found myself eating far less acid and XTC, which at the time seemed more detrimental. No more blackouts and bad trips for me. Quite the contrary. I could now be up all night and remain razor-sharp. I traded long nights of oblivion for coherent conversations chock-full of philosophical platitudes.

It felt like I had arrived. I was totally at home in the early '90s rave culture. I had been terribly fearful and lost as a teenager

but had practically grown up overnight at the age of 13 when I sold my Nintendo and bought a fake ID that made me 18 years old. Now I could get into the clubs, and that's the only place where I felt like I belonged. I was able to kiss other boys, and the occasional girl, and no one thought any different of me. I was an out gay teenager, and I was widely accepted by my peers. It was awesome. Drugs and alcohol made it all possible, and I am grateful I had them to turn to as a teenager, a time when life was full of angst and despair.

Eventually, the drugs turned on me, and everything that could go wrong began to go wrong. So I fled Atlanta. I bounced around North Carolina, Baltimore, and D.C. for a while. Then, at the age of 25, I moved down to Miami Beach. It was late 2002. At this time, I had been partying as a lifestyle for over ten years. I had worked at a resort all summer long before that and saved up my money so I could begin again. I was ready for a fresh start at a new life. It took all of the money I'd saved just to put down the first and last months' rent and a security deposit on a new place.

I had no job and no prospects. I knew absolutely no one in Miami. After my friend who helped me move left, I felt entirely alone. I quickly took to the only places I knew how to navigate, the bars and clubs. But things were different. I was different. I made no friends. I only made the acquaintance of other people as shady as I was. We mostly used and robbed each other. The carefree good times of the early '90s were far behind me now. In fact, I had some big cares and concerns beginning to mount. How was I to get and hold down a job? How was I to pay the rent? How was I to survive? I had never done these things successfully in the past, but I'd had friends to lean on in North Carolina and Atlanta. I now had none of those things. I was alone and afraid. I was relying on family to bail me out just to keep from getting evicted. But they'd grown more than weary of my cries for help, and I'd grown tired of pleading for it.

Then a dear friend confided in me that she had joined AA. This came as a surprise to me. She was about a six-pack-a-night type of drinker. It seemed harmless to me. I figured if she was addressing that, I was surely a candidate for a Twelve Step program. Before her admission, I'd had little to no knowledge of Twelve Step groups. But shortly thereafter, I found a flyer in my doctor's office waiting room. It read, "Meth=Death." I'll never forget the flyer. The words were typed over a split image of a healthy young man on the left and the skull of what remained of

the man's image on the right. It was a campaign commissioned by the AIDS Foundation. I was struck by its bluntness. The back of the flyer listed the only two CMA meetings at that time: one on a Monday night and one on a Wednesday night. They had both just begun. So I did what any good addict would do, smoked some pot, popped some Valium, and downed them with some red wine. After all, it was only crystal meth I had a problem with.

I don't remember the details of that first Monday night meeting, but I do remember the sentiment and how at home I felt. Most of all, I remember connecting to people in this strange new city for the first time. At the advice of my newly sober friend, I asked someone to be my sponsor at that first meeting. I returned on Wednesday, and yes, I kept coming back. I relapsed on crystal meth many times in my first two years of spotty recovery, but I continued to get up, dust myself off, and move forward. In that time frame, I watched as CMA in Miami Beach grew from two meetings a week to a meeting every day. I was honored to do service during this flourishing time in CMA history. I also made some of the most meaningful relationships of my life in a place where only months before I knew no one.

In April of 2005, I had a big breakthrough. I picked up another white chip and asked the woman who gave it to me to be my new sponsor. She accepted. Up until that time, I had continued to take Valium, which, although prescribed, was keeping me engaged in active addiction. She advised me that I'd need to stop taking the pills if she were to work with me. I agreed. I know this may be controversial, but I had to look honestly at how this started. I had begun taking Valium long before it was prescribed. Only after I'd become addicted did I convince a therapist that I needed to remain on them. After stopping the pills, I reset my day count for April 10, 2005, and haven't picked up a drink or a drug since. I completely surrendered once I stopped putting all drugs and alcohol in my system. It was so much easier to remain sober after that. I swiftly worked the Steps using the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous just before moving to New York City.

When we get sober, we hear that we need to either change nothing or change everything. In my case, it was change everything. It was so fantastic to be in a new city where the fellowship was vast and strong. I began doing service there at 90 days sober. I spent the first six years of my recovery doing service at every possible level in New York. It was a great honor and

privilege to give back to the community that had welcomed and supported me for all those years. In 2010, I visited San Francisco for a CMA retreat. I fell in love with the people and the fellowship, just as I had in New York several years earlier. I became fast friends with a core group of fellows from the Bay Area, and in 2013, after a couple of years of living in either New York or San Francisco, I officially made San Francisco my permanent home. I have remained sober through it all.

In the first half of my sober years, I had very little success in jobs and managing my finances, but shortly after moving to San Francisco, I found a career that suited me and am now a proud business owner. This is important to mention, not because of the cash and prizes, but because I know what it feels like to want it all in early recovery and feel a little stuck. This experience has taught me that time takes time. I did not throw in the towel when things weren't going my way. On the contrary, I have remained, above all, grateful for my sobriety in times of scarcity as well as bounty. This fundamental faith in my Higher Power's plan and the process of recovery is the key to my success in sobriety.

Because of the Twelve Steps of CMA, which I have had the opportunity to work several times in the past twelve years, I have a very close bond with my parents, friends, and fellows alike. I have been truly blessed with a life beyond my wildest imagination. It's a secure life full of peace and contentment. I now consider myself a member of several Twelve Step fellowships. But first and foremost, my story is a testament to CMA. It provided me a place to identify back when there were only two meetings per week in South Beach. Over the past fifteen years, I have seen CMA expand and mature in numerous ways. Its fellowship now extends around the globe, and I have seen it save the lives of countless fellows. It continues to save mine, and I'm hopeful it will save yours, too.

I'VE ALWAYS DONE TOO MUCH

I was encouraged to tell my story in an educational fashion: a kind of "how I did it." Sometimes I wish I had been paying better attention to the details. The only actual instructions I could give that would be truly accurate would be how to make a pipe out of a light bulb. But I'll try at least to tell you what happened.

My sobriety date is June 16, 1996. Crystal Meth Anonymous and I are less than a year and a half apart. When I arrived in recovery, people didn't talk about crystal meth in public. It was a secret lifestyle, a life in the shadows. Sub-par was the norm. That is not how my life started, but that's definitely what it had become by the time I got here: sub-par.

I'm originally from Detroit. In 1972 my family moved to Phoenix. It was an absolute culture shock. I'd always felt that I was different, but it had mostly been an idea, a feeling. In Phoenix, it was an inescapable reality. When you are the only black kid in your grade school, there is no hiding. So you learn to embrace your difference. And to capitalize on it.

I was always popular, always picked first for the team. Being the popular black kid made me an overachiever. I was constantly looking for other people's approval to justify my presence. It took me a long time to shake the idea that I had to please everyone around me in order to exist.

And being popular was hard work. I had to always be in trouble *and* always be on the dean's list. I was in the play, the musical, and the student council. I swam, I played tennis, I played soccer, I played baseball. I was in the choir; I was on the yearbook

committee. All that work, and the only reward that really mattered was getting invited to all the parties.

By the time I was in high school, I was selling alcohol out of my locker. I don't know how I came across those little liquor bottles, but I had a *lot* of them. I didn't drink, but a lot of people did, and it made me even more popular. So popular that I decided not to go to college after high school and moved to Hollywood instead. And that's when I feel I grew up.

Hollywood, California. 1984. I learned how to drink bad beer and disgusting liquor. My ability to do acid and cocaine was second to none. I just liked being unconscious in a conscious world. At the same time, I somehow started a career in corporate banking. It was the mid-80s, so everybody was doing cocaine everywhere, all the time. At work, in the bathroom stalls, all you heard were snuffles. Everyone I worked with had sinus problems, and Monday mornings were always, *always* horrendous.

But nobody at work was as bad as I was. I couldn't show up, my performance was terrible, and I was a bitch to work with. Eventually, they had to let me go. I found myself unemployed and about to be evicted. I was 21 and already out of options. So my father bought me a plane ticket back to Detroit to work for my family. I swore I would never do cocaine again. And I meant it.

But no one had ever told me it was the first drink that got me high. I had a cocaine problem, not an alcohol problem! It took me all of two weeks before I found cocaine again. In a year and a half, I was unemployed, about to be evicted, and out of options. Again.

I did what anyone would do: I stole \$5,000 from a drug dealer. He quickly put a hit out on me. So I packed up my things and got on a midnight Greyhound to Manhattan. The usual.

When I got to New York, I knew I had *really* arrived this time. I had found my people. Things were going to be different—I was going to be different. I was going to leave powdered substances alone. Three days later, I was already strung out. Thank God I'd paid rent on my apartment in advance. I knew being homeless in New York City was not a good idea.

Through a series of happy coincidences, I somehow got my dream job on Wall Street, working as a stockbroker. All my friends were New York club kids (many of whom are sober

today). I was barely 24, living a glamorous life in New York City. I was unstoppable. By day, I was in a suit and tie, by night in sequined hot pants and combat boots. I danced at the Sound Factory and the Limelight, all the legendary clubs that no longer exist. Alcohol and drugs were working for me. They kept me happy. I had the boyfriend, I had the career, I felt in charge.

I was offered a lucrative job and moved back to L.A. In three months, my paranoia convinced me to steal from the company that moved me there. They fired me, and my life came crashing down. Again.

On a whim, I moved to Salt Lake City. In the twelve years before I got clean, I had lived in 24 apartments in four states. I tried to outrun myself many, many times, but I always caught up with myself. In Utah, I learned that the lightbulb was a multipurpose instrument. And that it worked well with my new favorite drug: crystal meth.

Pretty soon, the voices got so bad I had to move back to L.A. I came up with new rules for my drug usage: I couldn't stay up for more than three to four days in a row; I had to sleep and try to come down. I was trying to avoid the voices. I hated the voices. I have friends who *still* hear the voices, and they've been sober for years.

I had lots of menial jobs to accommodate my lifestyle. I worked in an adult novelty store. I did movie surveys over the phone. The only work I could do consistently was prostitution. From time to time, I would run into someone who knew me from my corporate banking days or from Wall Street. I still remember the disappointment on their faces when I would tell them that I was selling condoms and lubrication for a living now.

I, too, was disappointed in what my life had become, so I went back to school. My boyfriend was dying of AIDS, as many friends were, and I wanted to be able to do something constructive about it.

When my boyfriend first got sick, I was kicked out of his hospital room because I wasn't family. Two male nurses came and got me and took me into his room. At that moment, I decided to become a nurse. I finally had a sense of direction, a calling that wasn't financially motivated. I knew that was what was going to fix me. By acting like a good person, I'd *become* a good person.

Instead, I stayed a tweaked-out mess. My boyfriend had been transferred to a nursing home for hospice care. I would go in to see him sweaty and dramatic. When he died, I wielded my self-pity like a weapon. I used it to get drugs, companionship, drinks, and more drugs.

By the time I realized that crystal meth was controlling my life, I was staying in an apartment building with three drug dealers for neighbors. I was living on Ensure. People had padlocks on the outside of their doors to protect their drugs.

I somehow still had friends. On the outside, I was still popular. On the inside, I was vulgar and ashamed. I was so ashamed of who I'd become. I didn't know anyone who had changed their life. I used to cry a lot. Everything about my life at that time was just sad and self-destructive. I was trapped in my downward spiral, and I figured I would take my own life soon. I had wanted to die for a long time. I'd just been too chickenshit to do it.

Then one day, I ran into Todd, an old roommate from my early days in Hollywood. He had two years of sobriety. That was unheard of to me, but he had that look. Clear skin, clear eyes, he seemed genuinely happy. Seeing him like that planted a seed.

I decided to give crystal meth one last shot. Either it was going to work for me this time, or I was going to have to stop everything. My parties always started on Thursday and ended Tuesday night. I was set for my party. I had drugs, money, and a man that loved me. I only had 20 minutes of fun in that four or five days. All I did was have conversations with people I didn't care about that had no beginning and no end, just a lot of middle. I was done; my experiment had failed.

I called my friend Todd and told him I needed to go to a meeting. He took me to a late-night group and tried to introduce me around, but suddenly I couldn't talk. I was scared to be away from people, and I was scared to be with them. But even though I couldn't speak to anyone, I went to meetings anyway.

Then I relapsed. I watched my behavior change back immediately. I saw the exact same life coming back at me, the life I was trying to get away from.

I went back to meetings in an attempt to start over, to really try. But I didn't hear anyone mention crystal meth. So I kept my usage to myself. It was considered dirty back then, even in

recovery. I thought I had to keep it a secret. After about a week or so, this guy Michael W. spoke at a meeting about a new fellowship he had just helped start called Crystal Meth Anonymous. They had one meeting on Friday night. Perfect.

I went to that late-night meeting. There were only maybe ten or twelve people there. But I knew one person, Nina. Nina and I had partied together. She told me that she had almost a year clean, and I believed her.

I got my first commitment at that meeting. I brought the cookies. I stayed sober during the week for that meeting. The fellowship was so small back then that we were all very close. We called each other all the time. Bill Coffey, the founder of this program, was perfect. He encouraged me to share and to work with others. He would say, "The tiniest gift in the world is one that's all wrapped up in itself." That man literally held my hand during early sobriety. I didn't realize that we were making history, or I probably would have paid more attention. I shared everything at that meeting. Every Step I worked, school, work, my new job. Everything.

Soon we had a Saturday meeting in the afternoon. By then, I think at nine months, I got to be secretary there. What a privilege. It was so much fun. Everything became fun: just living life, hanging out with my friends. Even school became fun.

When I turned one, my friend Steven B.B. threw me a party, and all these people came. I was so emotional that when they asked me to speak, I couldn't. My friend Manny took me to Gay Pride. They were showing me that I could do anything, go anywhere, and be myself. Sober. No shame, no humiliation, no embarrassment. I was finally happy.

When I was eighteen months sober, three very close friends overdosed and died. Sobriety suddenly became very real and very serious. I'd already been through the Steps, but I wanted to do them again.

I got scared and became an overachiever again. I had a gaggle of sponsees and commitments everywhere. I was speaking all over town about the joys of sobriety. I had graduated with my first degree and believed that my sobriety was untouchable.

That idea was quickly proven wrong. I had sex with a sponsee. True story. I became obsessed with him while being riddled with

guilt and shame at the same time. I learned so much from that mistake. I never judge another person's sobriety. My sponsor and many people with time taught me that even good people make mistakes, sometimes very serious ones.

That mistake made me realize that I had other issues to look at beyond my abuse of drugs and alcohol. I always believed it was meth that created my bad sexual experiences. But this time, I was sober, and meth hadn't been involved. It was just me and my thinking that had messed me up. Fortunately, it only happened once. I've yet to put my sobriety in jeopardy since.

At five years, I had really begun to trust my Higher Power, to see how beautifully it had affected my life. My problems are of my own making. Whenever I try to control the outcome, it just gets messy. But if I can step back and let my God work for me, I win every time.

It's been over 21 years now, and I have been allowed to do everything I ever wanted to do. I've traveled to places I had only seen in magazines. I have three educational degrees, five letters after my name. When I think about how I used to sell condoms and videos for a living, I laugh out loud. I now live in Oakland, overlooking a beautiful lake, with a wealth of friends all over the world. And all it took was sharing everything with someone, a little hand-holding, and believing that I was worth the effort.

I am honored to contribute to Bill Coffey's legacy. He was always the loudest person in any meeting, and he had the biggest heart for the newcomer. That should never be forgotten.

RACE IN CMA (IS IT REALLY AN OUTSIDE ISSUE?)

The Tenth Tradition of Crystal Meth Anonymous states, "Crystal Meth Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the CMA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

On August 9, 2014, America changed. Michael Brown was shot and killed in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. My original reaction was that that day was no different than other days. On any given day, Michael Browns are left for dead in the streets of America while the court of public opinion puts their lives on trial to determine whether or not they deserved it.

On August 9, 2014, I was three years and two months sober and certain that I would never become a dead Michael Brown on trial in the court of public opinion. I was certain that my middle-class status and education, punctuated by a rigorous program of recovery, would inoculate me from the fate of state-sanctioned implicit bias.

The weeks and days that followed August 9, 2014, proved me wrong, as I was forced to affirm and reaffirm in the streets of New York City that #blacklivesmatter. More specifically, that #myblacklifematters. While disrupting traffic with raised fist and joyful outcry, I began to experience a spiritual awakening. After surrendering to the disease of crystal meth addiction three years earlier; after three years of service in Crystal Meth Anonymous; after beloved sponsorship and rigorous Step work; and after having multiple years of recovery from meth more than once, I was finally being restored to sanity—all over

again. Beyond being gay, beyond being sober, beyond being HIV-positive, I was graced with a newfound pride in being black.

Despite this newfound spiritual freedom and black liberation, I was confused. Outside of the rooms of CMA, I was consumed with the joy, the dignity, and the excitement of the #blacklives-matter movement. At school and work and church and home, I was celebrating, debating, and learning more and more about the BLM movement and its personal and public imperative. Everywhere I went, and in every conversation, whiteness was being decentered and blackness was being celebrated. I reassessed every institutional involvement of mine and reevaluated every relationship, except in CMA. CMA was my racism-free zone. I resolved to check my every "ism" at the door so that I could recover from the disease of addiction.

I was confused by the deep feelings of guilt and fear that overcame me as I began to note the not-so-subtle signs of racism in the rooms. I was confused by the sudden need to self-censor after years of strong sobriety, faithful service to the fellowship, and deep sober relationships with my fellows. I was confused by the notion that the people, places, and things that I had come to know and love and trust for survival were suddenly feeling untrustworthy. I began to notice that I was one of only a handful of black recovering addicts in the program. I began to notice that most black newcomers entering the rooms remained silent before eventually leaving. I began to hear microaggressions, like the words "hood" and "jail" and "uptown" and "bbc" with a different ear. They were no longer funny. They began to hurt more. Worse yet, I could not name it. It was so common that I could not confront it. And I was angry that I could not leave the rooms for fear that I would lose my sobriety. As my friend Donald would say, "She was shook, honey!"

That's when these very familiar words came to me: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." While the #blacklivesmatter movement is an outside issue, the black lives of CMA are not. Racism in the fellowship is an inside issue, as it happens inside the rooms—every day, in every meeting. The shocker here is not that there is racism in the rooms of CMA, but that I presumed there was none. Somehow, I had come to believe that systemic racism existed only beyond our walls. Acknowledging the verifiable evidence of structural racism in Twelve Step recovery and even sober racists in the rooms of CMA was my first step toward renewed sanity.

In CMA, I learned that the first step to freedom is acceptance. After accepting that racism exists in the rooms of recovery, the next step was to ask, What am I going to do about it? Nothing. I don't mean that there was nothing I could do about it, but there is nothing that I will do about it. It is not my responsibility to eradicate racism in CMA. I learned here that what other people think about me is none of my business. I also learned that I should pray for you and change me. As such, it is not my responsibility to call out racism in CMA.

But that didn't seem like enough either. Seeing racism at work and deciding to do nothing about it seemed cynical at best and suicidal at worst. In CMA I also learned, "To thine own self be true." As such, I realized that the best way to begin addressing anti-black racism in recovery is by being true to myself. I realized that if I want to see more cultural diversity in recovery, then I must start with me. Being true to myself means accepting, embracing, and celebrating my whole black and gay self in recovery. How does race inform my disease? How did race affect my crystal meth use? How did being black and an addict further produce feelings of shame, fear, and guilt? Who are my role models in recovery, and do they embrace my identity as much as I embrace theirs? Can I live a full sober life while ignoring racism in the program?

Six years clean and three years after #blacklivesmatter, I have learned from CMA that #myblacksoberlifematters. I am learning that I can bring all of me into the rooms. I am learning that my feelings are not unique. If I am feeling confused and afraid, then someone else probably is as well. I am learning that there is great joy and healing in identification and empathy with my black fellows. Most of all, I have discovered a new freedom and a new happiness in the friendships that I have developed with other black recovering crystal meth addicts. After 43 years of living and six years clean and sober, I love myself more than I ever have, without pretense or compromise. Because of my black gay sober fellows, I see my face and my story reflected in the face and heart of other fellows like never before. Because of my black, HIV-positive sober fellows, I am learning that accepting that racism and sober racists exist in CMA is so much easier than fighting against racism and racists in the fellowship. My solution is to surround myself with people who honor and celebrate my truth and to reach out to others who might feel the way I feel and need the love I need.