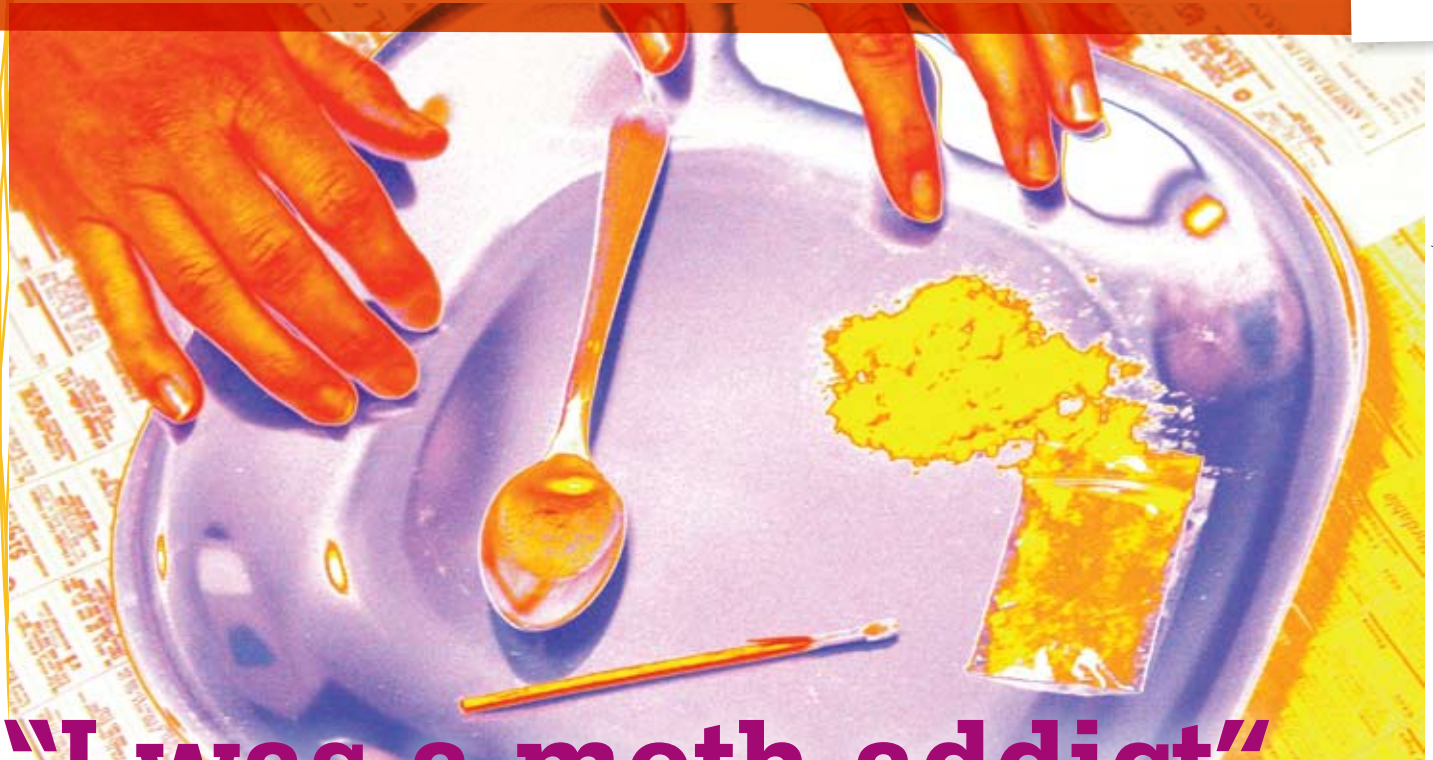


BECAUSE I

PHOTO: KATIE EGAN, HAMILTON '09



“I was a meth addict”

AS TOLD BY DANIKA*

“I was 12 when I first started smoking pot. My name’s Danika. I’m 19 years old and I’ve been in sobriety from methamphetamine since July of 2007.

I grew up in California and Arizona, living a perfectly comfortable life. I had a good childhood, my parents stayed together, I had a normal relationship with them, etc., etc.

Then, the summer before eighth grade, I started drinking and doing pot.

The next year, freshman year, was when it started totally going downward. I’m an only child and I wanted to fit in with the older girls, so I tried meth and cocaine. I did a little bit of cocaine every once in a while after that, but I immediately got hooked on meth. I loved the feeling. It made me feel whole, accepted.

The addiction progressed really quickly. I started by using it on the weekends, but after a month, I was already using it every day. At 14 years old I was finding people to pawn stuff for me, or stealing money from my parents, so I could get enough money to pay for my meth. I was eventually taken out of public school and enrolled in a Catholic school, but that was even worse. The Catholic school was filled with people addicted to cocaine. I started pawning and trading bigger things, stealing bigger amounts

of money, getting worse and worse with my addiction. In my senior year of high school, I even slept around with my boss at work because he sold drugs and so I could get more drugs without paying for them.

When I got into college, my addictions got completely out of control. I smoked crack for about nine months. I still slept around so I could get my hands on drugs. I stole jewelry from my parents, pawned my own jewelry, literally lived paycheck to paycheck; I even did check fraud so I could pay for everything else while still getting my drugs. There were two guys that I slept around with who wrote fake checks for me and got me drugs as long as I would sleep with them. I lived with them for awhile.

My life was going out of control. It was already out of control. My mom pointed it out, but of course I didn’t listen to her.

When I didn’t listen to my mom, she threatened to call the cops on me, which didn’t go over too well with the two guys I was staying with—so they kicked me out. Then I finally came home. I didn’t eat, I didn’t sleep, I looked like death. My life had become unmanageable, unable to maintain.

My mom told me to get treatment, and I refused, but then the next day I slept for 20 hours. After I woke up, I had changed my mind after realizing how uncontrollable my

life had become, and I told my mom I would get treatment. Before I entered the treatment facility, I was on lockdown at my house for a week, and then I finally got sober at the facility.

When I was first getting sober, I felt a lot of shame. I felt (bad) about the kinds of things I did to get high and when I got high. But I learned to realize that I’m a better person for becoming sober, and that my past was a me on drugs, not the real me.

There were physical problems as well. I had a lot of health issues, since I had been smoking meth for a pretty long time (five years). I had created scar tissues in my lungs and burned my stomach lining from the meth, so I had to be on a lot of medication. I’m lucky that I hadn’t smoked it much longer and that I hadn’t gotten worse, because I still have my teeth, and my skin isn’t in as bad of condition anymore.

Now I’m in beauty college, working to become a cosmetologist and work with hair. I work in a resort and keep up with my sobriety. I hang out with other people who are either sober or in sobriety. You know, stress isn’t a good factor in a drug addict, and so I just pray daily and take life day by day. I’m happy with my life now.”

**Danika asked that her last name not be used*

—Jina Kim, Hamilton '09

GOT *high*

METH IS STILL A CONCERN IN ARIZONA

TUNE OUT? It's your choice

You can skip this article if you'd like; the only thing it might do is save your life. We've all heard it before from parents, teachers, guest speakers and others: don't do drugs; they're dangerous. The response: headphones on, hoodies up, and completely tune out.

Many of us believe that it won't happen to us. We'll try anything once. We won't get addicted. We won't die. What about the girl that took one OxyContin pill and it killed her? Or the guy who's heart gave out after one line of cocaine? It's these kinds of incidents that Marylee McClure, Maricopa County Attorney's office Crime Prevention Media Coordinator and program coordinator for DrugFree Arizona, tries to stop.

She has learned that when teens can no longer get easy access to prescription drugs to keep the high, they turn to the next best thing: black tar heroin. Teens don't think of junkies and needles because "it is smoked, just like pot, with a hollowed-out pen and tin foil. This is happening to all socio-economic groups," McClure says.

"THERE WERE TWO GUYS THAT I SLEPT AROUND WITH WHO WROTE FAKE CHECKS FOR ME AND GOT ME DRUGS AS LONG AS I WOULD SLEEP WITH THEM."

With drugs such as meth, use has declined from more than 6 percent to 4 percent. Because a lot of meth comes from Mexico and we are so close to the border, meth use in Arizona is higher than in other places. As a result, local government has bombarded local media with messages to scare teens away from meth.

"The grotesque images of a campaign launched by the Maricopa County Attorney's office and the AZ Meth Coalition has caused meth use among teens to go down," McClure says. She likes to call the decline "the perceived risk factor" because there is perceived risk of the dangers of meth among teens.

Even with use declining, the danger is still out there. Most people don't die the first time they try drugs, but they will get addicted. McClure warns that "the addiction is what kills you. If it doesn't do that, it can mess up your relationships, career, life. When you get addicted to a drug you are no longer in control, the drug is. Drug addictions can turn you into a person you don't want to be." She also noted that withdrawal from prescription painkillers, heroin and meth is so painful that people will turn to drastic measures to avoid withdrawals.

Breaking an addiction is one of the hardest and most painful things a person will ever go through. There are several treatment options. McClure points out that "first, you must want to stop using the drug. A teen who is sentenced to treatment or whose parents force them to go will relapse." The most painful part is overcoming the physical addiction during a detoxifying period.

So did this article save your life? Not yet. But next time you are put in a situation involving drugs, you might make an informed decision on what to do. You may now put your headphones on, hoodies up, and tune out.

— Andrew Berkley,
Brophy '09



azTeenmagazine.com

What about other drugs?

Why does meth get so much attention when cocaine and heroin usage is also prevalent amongst teens and young adults? Here are some statistics from the Arizona Meth Project that put things in perspective:

Meth is a man-made stimulant that affects the pleasure centers of the brain. It is one of the most addictive drugs around, even more so than heroin. With repeated use, meth turns off the brain's ability to experience pleasure on its own, without the drug.

Meth is a kitchen-sink drug, meaning that it is made from chemicals. Ingredients include acetone (nail polish remover), iodine, fertilizer, pool cleaner, lithium from batteries and the chemicals found in drain cleaner, road flares, lye and brake fluid.

Side effects of usage include lack of interest in personal hygiene, anxiety, reckless behavior, loss of teeth and skin rashes called "speed bumps."

47% of Arizona's county sheriffs report that meth is their number-one drug problem.

34% of Arizona's young adults have been offered meth.

14 is the average age at which Arizona teenagers start using meth.

TO GET HELP

If you or a friend need help with a methamphetamine problem, visit **DrugFreeAZ.com**, **CrystalMeth.org** or **FreeVibe.com** for information and resources near you.