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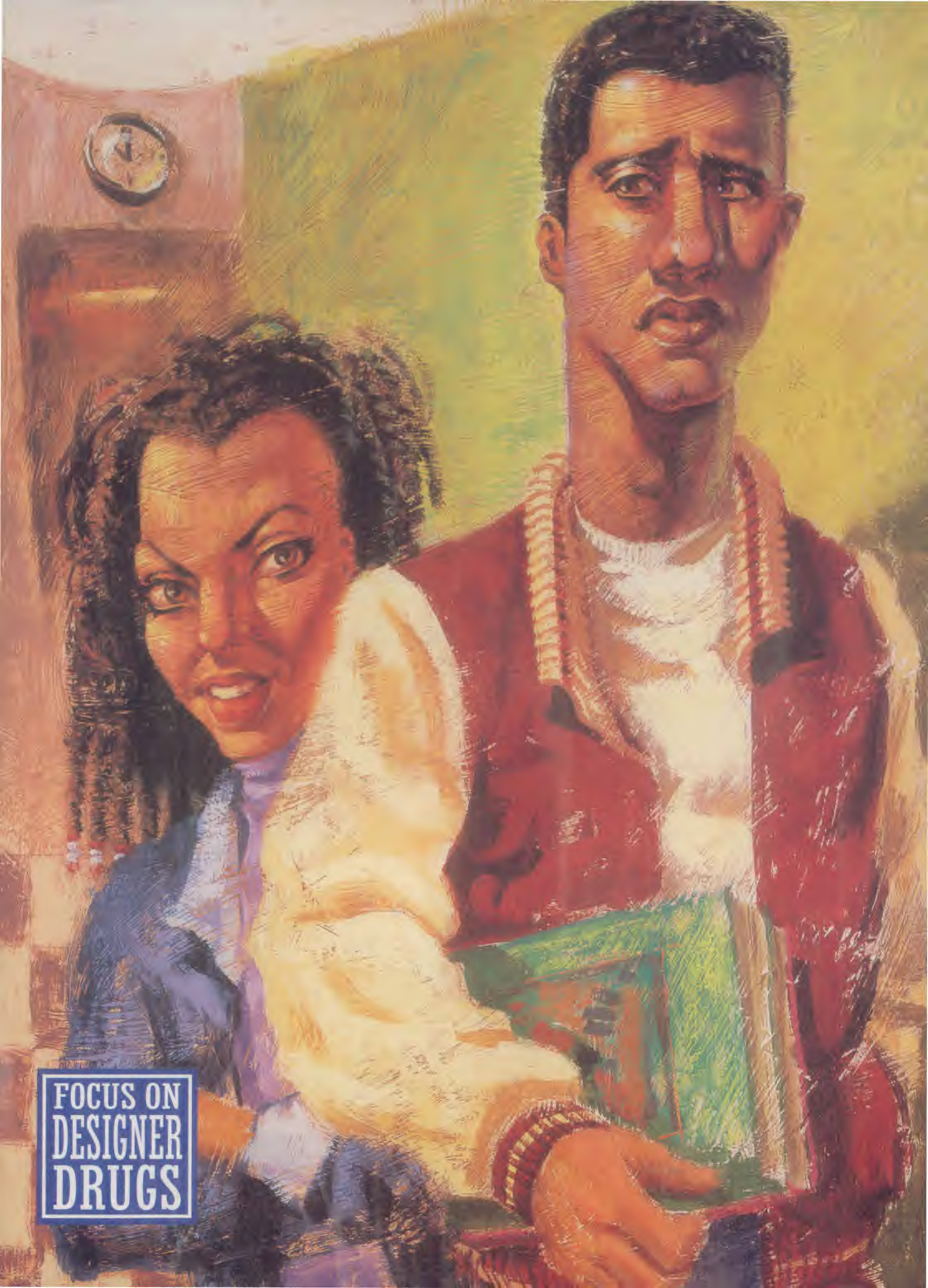
AVOIDING THE VOID

# John Cooper

Skillet's

**RAVING MAD, P.10**  
**METH LAB BUST, P.5**  
**ONE TIME IS TOO MANY, P.18**  
**DESIGNER DRUG ALERT**





FOCUS ON  
DESIGNER  
DRUGS



*He tells his story, hoping  
that others won't follow  
the road he chose.*

**W**hen Grant was a child,  
his greatest dream was  
to become a basketball player  
and help his team win an

NBA championship. The black-haired, brown-eyed boy spent hours with his basketball, practicing into the night, shooting hoops in front of his parents' garage.

As Grant grew into a six-foot-four-inch young man, he made the junior varsity high school team, and he was only a freshman. He had never felt more important or proud than the day he walked out onto the court with his teammates for that first game.

Grant had been impressed with the girls who always seemed to hang around the basketball players, but he'd felt embarrassed and awkward around them. But now *he* was a basketball player, and he did his best to impress the girls.

"I was walking down the hall to English class," Grant began, "when I spotted Jade. She was really hot, and I'd been trying to impress her for some time."

Holding his head high and strutting his stuff, Grant thought he was Mr. Cool, a regular Casanova.

"I was walking down the hall to English class," Grant recalled, "when I spotted Jade. She was really hot and I'd been trying to impress her for some time." He would do whatever it took to win Jade's heart, that was his problem.

# GRANT'S LAST REQUEST

BRENDA SEGNA



"I looked over my shoulder to make sure that Jade was watching me," Grant continued, "and when I turned back around, I walked smack into an open locker door. My nose started bleeding, and sure enough, Jade saw everything. Everybody laughed, and I sure was embarrassed."

Grant watched the older guys on the team with their cars and their muscles and the girls, and he told himself he was going to be just like that too. He made up his mind right then that he'd do whatever it took to stay with

buzzing sensation. He made his way to the kitchen, where Jade offered him a beer. The two of them went outside and finished off a six-pack.

Sitting out there on the porch with Jade that night, Grant was feeling pretty good; he'd finally got the girl of his dreams, or so he thought.

A few weeks later he told his parents he was going camping with Steve, but instead Grant and Jade headed to a rock concert in another city. As soon as they hit the interstate Jade popped the top

wasted that she had to prop him up just so he could walk into the auditorium. Later he couldn't remember even one song the band had played that night.

At first Grant was hooked on the energy lift, finding he could put in much longer days in the gym without feeling tired. It also gave him more confidence. It was easier to act cool and talk to girls, and he didn't need much sleep. But it wasn't long before his interest in basketball disappeared.


"You think you're on top of things, in control," Grant said, "while in fact the drug is taking control of you."

Grant's need for meth escalated, and since he was strung out most of the time, he began selling it to support his habit. By his sophomore year his dream of a basketball career had faded; he quit school, and was no longer dating Jade. In fact, most girls didn't seem to be all that interested in him anymore.

All of us at one time or another have embarrassing moments in our lives that we think we can never live down. However, alcohol and drugs do not improve those situations. They do not provide coordination, popularity, or character.

So don't kid yourself. Using drugs and alcohol is serious business—that means *all* drugs and alcohol. It doesn't matter whether you're sipping wine coolers or beer, or smoking marijuana. They're all addictive. And the cold hard facts are that they damage dreams, relationships, and lives.

Two months ago Grant died of complications from the damage meth had done to his internal organs. He asked me to tell his story in the hope that others would not take the same road he did. So I have. ▀



**Don't kid yourself. Using drugs and alcohol is a serious business. And the cold hard facts are that they damage dreams, relationships, and lives.**

the "in group." He'd win Jade's heart as well.

As the school year progressed, he discovered that being a basketball player had its own little perks. Like he automatically was invited to the coolest parties. Though he'd never had a drink before, he knew a lot of high school kids who did, and he was curious to find out what the big deal was. So on a Saturday night he didn't even have to think about it when his friend Steve asked, "Do you want to go over to Jade's house for a party?" Steve opened his coat and showed Grant two bottles of Mad Dog, a cheap wine.

"Let's go" was all Grant said.

On the drive over to Jade's, Grant unscrewed the cap from one of the bottles for his first taste of wine. It was *awful*, but the two guys had finished the first bottle by the time they reached the party.

Arriving at Jade's, Grant was already experiencing a strange

off a beer can. Later, while they were still on their way, Jade offered him methamphetamine, a widely available but illegal drug.

Known on the street by various names—crank, speed, glass, ice, or simply meth—the drug comes in many colors, but is usually available as a yellowish crystal-like powder or a rocklike chunk. It can be smoked, snorted, injected ("slammed"), or ingested, and its effect is dramatic.

Jade dropped a walnut-size chunk of crystal meth onto a notebook she held on her lap. As she sliced off a piece and readied it for smoking, she bragged about what a safe pick-me-up it was.

"You ever smoke any of this?" she asked.

"No," Grant admitted. But not wanting to sound uncool, he added, "but I'm willing to give it a try."

By the time they arrived at the concert, Grant had helped Jade finish off three joints. He was so



# DANGER: Death Lives Here

FOCUS ON  
DESIGNER  
DRUGS

**Meth is a highly addictive stimulant that messes up your central nervous system—not to mention the toxic danger of meth fumes after a drug bust at a clandestine methamphetamine lab.**

Is there a hazardous toxic waste site in your state? your county? your town? your neighborhood? If you live in the Midwest, the chances are that your answer is yes.

Though the bulk of illegal methamphetamine is manufactured in Mexico and southern California and shipped over the “cocaine pipeline” to large cities across America, a large amount of meth is made and peddled in rural areas throughout the Midwest.

In 1997 law-enforcement agents busted more clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in Kansas and Missouri than anywhere else in the United States. Kansas Bureau of Investigation agent Kirk Thompson said, “Meth

is the agency’s number one investigative priority.”

Like many other illegal drugs, meth is a highly addictive stimulant that messes up your central nervous system. The pupils of your eyes are dilated, your appetite decreases, and euphoria reigns.

Alertness and energy skyrocket, but so do your heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, and breathing. You sweat and gasp for air. Your vision becomes blurred. You become so dizzy that

you can hardly stand. An overdose shifts your blood pressure and temperature into overdrive, sending you racing down the fatal road toward a stroke or heart attack.

Despite the amount of meth

**Anyplace used for a clan lab becomes contaminated—unlivable. These fumes can be deadly.**

**B Y J A N E T T E M . K E N N Y**



snorted, smoked, injected, or dissolved in water or alcohol, addicts never reach their first-time euphoric high. That inability contributes to the state of high agitation most addicts face daily.

A meth high can last for six to eight hours. But as the rush fades, they slip into the "tweaking" state. "Tweakers" are prone to violence, delusions, and paranoia. Abusers are awake for days on end, which adds to their irritability and instability.

According to law-enforcement officers these paranoid druggies are more apt to carry weapons than other illegal drug users, and they typically manufacture illicit meth. These strung-out addicts are the "cooks," mixing up volatile chemicals in kitchens, basements, garages, sheds, RVs, and house trailers. Very often rental properties are used for the illegal manufacture of meth.

Clandestine labs might be in your county, your town, or on your street. You could be walking or driving by a "clan lab" every day and not know it.

Even though you may take a stand against drugs, coming upon a clan lab could injure or kill you. Unless you got a whiff of the noxious fumes or recognized the signs of a clan lab, you would be unaware of its life-threatening danger.

After being inside a clan lab for less than a minute, KBI special agent Rick Sabel stated, "Special agent Larry Thomas, two other agents, and I ingested some fumes from one of the biggest labs we have ever encountered. We ended up going to the hospital. I had to go to a pulmonary specialist who tested my breathing."

Oddly enough, the fumes don't seem to bother the cooks or those

**After a raid on a Kansas clan lab, the house was so contaminated with hazardous chemicals that in the short time we were there it was burning our eyes."**

*—Emergency Management Director, Chuck Magaha*

hanging around the lab, probably because they've gotten used to them. But death lurks there just like a time bomb waiting to go off. Poor handling of the volatile chemicals used by meth cooks can result in poisonous fumes, flash fires, and deadly explosions.

After a raid on a clan lab in Leavenworth County, Kansas, emergency management director Chuck Magaha expressed his concern. "The house was so saturated with these hazardous chemicals that in the short time we were in there with the KBI chemist it was burning our eyes," Magaha said. "The chemicals permeated the walls, carpet, curtains, and insulation. We're talking an immediate situation here," Magaha continued. "The KBI chemist said that if a pregnant woman walked in there, it would kill her unborn child."

Any place used for a clan lab becomes contaminated—unlivable. High concentrations of these fumes can be deadly.

But fumes aren't the only danger. If a fire erupts in a clan lab set up in a hotel or apartment building, automatic sprinklers that are designed to extinguish ordinary fires will only fan the chemical flames.

The toxic smoke from a clan-lab fire chemically burns your airways and lungs, and anyone inhaling this smoke can end up with chemical pneumonia.

"One of the things that concerns us is contamination," said KBI special agent Bruce Coffman. We know that the lab and all its contents are contaminated, but so are the ground, streams, rivers, and lakes—wherever the waste is dumped.

Remember, clan labs can and do operate in homes, turning an ordinary kitchen into an illegal laboratory. Cooks even use kitchen pots and pans and other household items for the production of meth. If you come upon a clan lab, you might not notice the activity or the deadly risk to your health.

Be on the lookout for large quantities of stored chemicals and the secretive mixing of them. Another clue: It's unlikely anyone other than people involved in the chemical field would own chemist's glassware.

If you've stumbled upon a dump site or clan lab, or suspect someone of manufacturing meth, get far away from the area and call the police or sheriff. Immediately!

"If we know that we have a meth lab, we use a respirator with two filters," KBI special agent Sabel said. "They're the newest on the market and supposedly can eliminate most fumes and odors in the lab."

After a lab is seized, the cooks

**E**ven though you may take a stand against drugs, coming upon a clan lab could injure or kill you. Unless you got a whiff of the fumes or recognized the signs, you could be unaware of the lethal dangers.





**A**fter a meth lab is seized residents are removed from the site. The drug task force comes in to collect evidence and remove volatile chemicals. The agents wear "moon suits" and self-contained breathing apparatus to protect themselves from the fumes. They also tape around their sleeves, gloves, pant legs, and boots so no skin is exposed!

are arrested and other residents are removed from the site. Then a special drug task force comes in to collect evidence, evaluate and process the lab, and remove the volatile chemicals. Wearing "moon suits" and self-contained breathing apparatus, these agents more likely

resemble the characters from *Star Wars* than law-enforcement agents.

The white tixev suit, fire retardant gloves, and respirator protect the wearer from the toxic chemicals and fumes. But to be safe, agents apply tape around their sleeves and gloves and

pant legs and boots so no part of their body is exposed.

You don't have to be a meth user to suffer from its deadly effects. Beware of clan labs. Toxic fumes can permanently damage your lungs. Flash fires and explosions kill. ■





# DRUG BUST

CHOICES BY KAY D. RIZZO

**W**hen it comes to designer drugs, what you don't know can hurt you. Fifteen-year-old Becky and her 17-year-old sister, Julie, attended a "rave" party with Julie's friend Angie. The party was held at Angie's college-age boyfriend's condo. Booze flowed freely, but Julie and Becky stuck with soda pop. Both girls admitted later that they suspected by the behavior of others at the party that club drugs were being used.

Under the pulsating lights and hot music, Becky was flattered by the attentions of a college sophomore guy named Tyler. Unfortunately 15-year-old Becky failed to notice when Tyler emptied a tiny packet of powder into her soda.

Hours later she found herself on the bathroom floor lying in her own vomit. She couldn't remember where she was or what had happened, but by the disarray of her clothes, she suspected that she'd been raped.

Outside on the patio, her sister, Julie, hadn't fared any better. Both girls had been victims of ketamine hydrochloride, a dangerous date-rape drug.

Ketamine, ecstasy, Rohypnol, GHB, and other designer drugs have gained popularity with the

teen-to-20 crowd because of their cheap intoxicating highs and because of the belief that the drugs are safe. That shows what they know, or don't know.

So what do you know? Take the following quiz to discover facts that you should know about these life-threatening drugs.

## 1. The term *designer drugs* means the drugs

- ☐ A. were manufactured by major fashion designers such as Ralph Lauren or Armani.
- ☐ B. are designed simply to produce a safe, good time.
- ☐ C. are modifications of other illegal drugs.

## 2. Special K

- ☐ A. is a breakfast cereal.
- ☐ B. is an upper.
- ☐ C. is a sedative vets use on animals.

## 3. Ecstasy, or MDMA,

- ☐ A. grows on wild mushrooms.
- ☐ B. isn't illegal in other countries.
- ☐ C. is a synthetic drug that can cause permanent brain damage.

## 4. Herbal ecstasy

- ☐ A. is made from herbs and spices.
- ☐ B. is like drinking a giant-sized Pepsi.
- ☐ C. is a drug that produces

seizures, heart attacks, strokes, and death.

## 5. Getting "roached"

- ☐ A. means having hallucinations of bugs crawling all over your body.
- ☐ B. makes the user feel light-headed and giddy.
- ☐ C. is the term for using Rohypnol or GHB.

## 6. A guy slips Special K into a date's drink to

- ☐ A. help her have a good time at the party.
- ☐ B. spike her drink.
- ☐ C. rape her without her being able to remember the details.

## 7. People get introduced to club drugs by

- ☐ A. accident.
- ☐ B. taking milder stuff.
- ☐ C. their peers at nightclubs or "raves."

## 8. If you suspect a friend is using a designer drug, you should

- ☐ A. mind your own business.
- ☐ B. try it to see if you like it.
- ☐ C. get help.

## 9. If you suspect drugs are being used at a party, you should

- ☐ A. not jump to conclusions. Wait and see what happens before panicking.
- ☐ B. ask your host for a hit.
- ☐ C. leave the party immediately.

**Hours later she found herself lying in her own vomit. She suspected she'd been raped.**



**It is a myth to think that club drugs aren't dangerous. Life is too beautiful and holds too many exciting adventures without blowing your entire future for a moment of ecstasy or whatever other street drug from a grimy underground lab.**

10. One way to protect yourself from a date-rape drug would be to

☐ A. refuse to drink anything, even sodas.

☐ B. take aspirin to ward off the effects of the drug.

☐ C. make a pact between friends to watch out for one another during a party.

11. A teen would be naive to believe that

☐ A. a date-rape drug would never happen at a party of their friends.

☐ B. one trip on designer drugs will not hurt them.

☐ C. they can party with users without ever being tempted to give drugs a try.

## ANSWERS:

• 1. C. Designer drugs, or street drugs, are a modification of illegal or restricted drugs made by unlicensed and untrained amateurs in an underground lab where there are no quality-control standards or practices. They can be extremely dangerous. And they have nothing to do with the fashion world.

• 2. C. Special K (ketamine hydrochloride) is a surgical anesthetic used by vets on animals. On the street it is one of the primary date-rape drugs. When taken, the victim becomes disorientated and cannot remember what happened. The effect lasts anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, and can produce a K-hole or terrifying near-death experience, delirium, amnesia, high blood pressure, flashbacks, and fatal respiratory problems. These are just a few of the side effects.

• 3. C. Ecstasy, or MDMA, does not grow on mushrooms or on anything else. It is manufactured synthetically and can cause seizures and permanent brain damage. (I need all the brains I have. How about you?)

• 4. C. Herbal ecstasy's principle ingredient is the herb ephedra, also known as ma huang, which can have dangerous effects on the heart and nervous system. (Since I have only one heart, I'm not going to mess around with something that could dangerously effect it. What about you?)

• 5. C. Getting "roached" means using Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), a strong sedative. This drug is also used as a date-rape drug. It can cause hallucinations, paranoia, vomiting, fainting, and death from dehydration.

• 6. C. Special K is one of the primary rape drugs. Guys like it because they can't be prosecuted for rape if the victim can't remember what happened to her. (Nice guys, huh?)

• 7. C. The main way kids get these designer drugs is from their peers at parties, where overdose and death can and does occur. The mixture becomes even more lethal when alcohol is involved.

• 8. C. If you suspect your friend is using, get help immediately. Parents, teachers, guidance counselors, pastors, and the Internet can give you the information you will need to save your friend's life. Just like the motto "Friends don't let friends drink and drive," you should have one that reads "Friends don't let friends kill themselves by using designer drugs."

• 9. C. If you're at a party where you suspect drugs are being used, including alcohol, the most commonly abused drug, don't walk toward the exits, run toward them. A slight turn of someone's hand and a simple Diet 7Up can become poison to your brain.

• 10. C. Obviously, refusing to drink a soda at a party is radical, and taking an aspirin? Talk about a dumb solution; trust me, it

won't ward off much more than a headache. However, if you and your friends attend a party, plan ahead. Watch out for one another. If one of your friends starts acting loopy, get them out of there as quickly as possible.

• 11. A, B, C. All of the answers are correct. Talk about ditsy, that's what it is to think that no one in your circle of friends, or strangers invited to such a party, would ever do anything so stupid as to bring along designer drugs. One trip on a designer drug can be your last. If you party with users, sooner or later you will be tempted to give one of these dangerous concoctions a try. The best way to be certain that doesn't happen is to avoid contact.

Life is too beautiful and holds too many exciting adventures without blowing your entire future for a moment of ecstasy, or GHB, or cherry meth, or roofie, or whatever other street drug being manufactured in some grimy hole-in-the-wall underground lab.

Remember, criminals are doing it for money. What's your excuse? ■

## RAVES

"Raves" or all-night parties continue to attract teens and young adults who may think Ecstasy, GHB, Rolylnol, and other club drugs are harmless. This is not true. While researchers continue to study club drugs with a sense of urgency, treatment and prevention strategies are being developed. And the bottom line is simple: even experimenting with club drugs is an unpredictable and dangerous thing to do." "Club Drugs Aren't 'Fun Drugs'" — by Alan I. Leshner, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health. Used with permission.

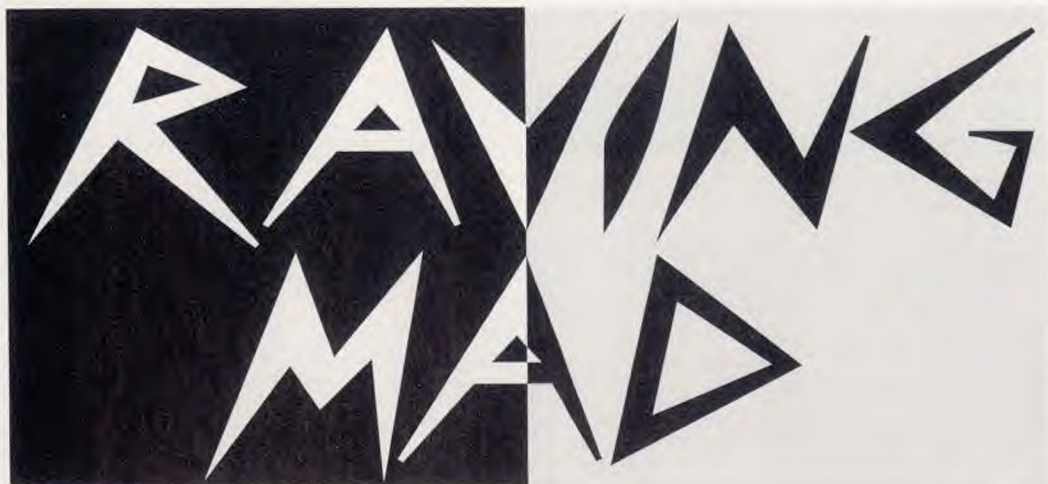
For more information, call their clearinghouse at 1-800-729-6686 or visit the National Institute on Drug Abuse's special Web site at <http://www.clubdrugs.org>.







E C S T A C Y



## YOU MAY BE LUCKY, BUT EVENTUALLY YOUR LUCK WILL RUN OUT.

Gerald had just reached his seventeenth birthday when a somber thought hit him one afternoon as he was riding home from school in the back seat of a friend's car. That thought was: *I'm so unhappy.*

Sure, things weren't all that bad. After all, he wasn't like poor Lenny, who sat next to him in biology and had been diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia; nor did he have to face the problems of Joey, whose father had been sent to jail for embezzlement, leaving the family embarrassed, ashamed, and all but destitute.

In fact, on the surface Gerald's life seemed pretty good. He was, if not in the top of his class, nevertheless one of the better students. He was somewhat popular, never had a zit, and though he wasn't much of a jock (he'd never even tried out for a team), his awesome skateboarding skills gave him a lot of respect. And the girls, even if not the best and the prettiest of them, still seemed to like him. Of course, his home life wasn't the greatest, but he'd learned to live with his parents' constant bickering and his older sister's three Ritalin-filled, out-of-wedlock children living in the house as well. But even with these problems, he couldn't understand why he always felt depressed. No, he wasn't suicidal or anything like that. It was just that he didn't have any real aim, any goal, any purpose. He was just *bored*. He didn't know

what life was about, or why he had to do the things he had to do. Just get up, go to school, find a job, have a family, and then one day die. None of it made sense to him.

Drugs and alcohol gave him some relief, but if he was depressed when he first took it, then more often than not the drug only made his depression worse. And drinking enough alcohol to forget his problems was sure to make him sick the next day.

One night, however, while at a party someone asked him if he wanted to try some ecstasy. "X" is what the person he hardly knew called it. Bored, depressed, and ready for anything, Gerald popped the pill in his mouth and waited. Nothing happened for quite a while. He thought he had been duped (the year before someone had given him some laxatives, telling him it was speed—the only place he had run to was the bathroom). But about an hour later . . . Gerald's life changed forever.

He had finally in his sad, short, and unhappy life found—"ecstasy."

There's no question about it, of all the drugs on the market today (that are legal *and* illegal), if there's any one that can make the depressed feel happy, the bored feel excited, and the lethargic feel energetic, it's 3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine,

**FOCUS ON  
DESIGNER  
DRUGS**

ILLUSTRATION: PERRY STEWART; ART DIRECTION: ED GUTHERO

**B Y E R I K W I L L I A M S**



## Studies show that there can be long-term memory loss and cognitive impairment with permanent damage to a portion of the brain.

MDMA, also known as ecstasy, X, the love drug, the hug drug, Dennis the Menace, hamburgers, white doves, rave, and disco biscuits. And though the drug's popularity goes up and down, it remains one of the more potentially dangerous drugs out there. That's especially true because there are a lot of people out there downplaying the potential problems that anyone experimenting with ecstasy could face.

And there are many dangers. Although not as much research has been done on it as on some other drugs that have been around longer, enough is known that should warn anyone that, whatever the possible benefits, they are far outweighed by the risks.

"What are the risks?" you ask.

Ecstasy is a form of speed, a stimulant. It gives the body the sensation of having lots of energy. You feel very awake, very eager, full of vigor and vitality. Nothing, of course, is wrong with that if it's natural, but when artificially produced, as with ecstasy, there's a big problem. In fact, a number of deaths have been attributed directly to this drug because of that problem. People who take the drug have gone to "rave" parties (in fact, there are some promoters in different countries, including the U.S., who promote rave parties), at which, flying on these disco biscuits, people dance and dance and dance all night, never stopping to drink, to rest, to recuperate, to give their bodies a break, because their minds are telling their bodies that they don't need it. In some cases, their bodies have actually overheated (the use of alcohol at the same time didn't help)—and they died!

The August 25, 2000, Baltimore *Sun* reported that as many as 1,000 people who attended a rave party, where partygoers supposedly shared a pacifier dipped in the drug ecstasy, were being urged to see

a doctor, because one of them had been diagnosed with meningitis.

A report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* talks about the problem with ecstasy. One case they mention tells of users collapsing unconscious or having convulsions while they danced nonstop. By the time people realized they were having trouble and took them to the emergency room, their body temperature had soared as high as 110° F, their pulses raced, and their blood pressures dropped. Even with treatment, they might die within two hours or up to 60 hours after being admitted.

Of course, those were extreme cases, and not everyone taking the drug goes raving mad or dances until they die. But one doesn't have to die from the drug to still be adversely affected by it. Ecstasy works in the brain, causing increased amounts of a brain chemical called serotonin.

It's the increased flow of this chemical that produces the sensation of energy, well-being, and optimism. Serotonin causes those feelings normally, but when artificially produced at a great rate, such as with ecstasy, serotonin makes people feel really good, often to the point of being foolish (some cases have been reported of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases or even unwanted pregnancies because those on the drug feel so positive and optimistic about life that they didn't take any precautions).

**A**s is always the case, however, when the effect of the drug wears off, the serotonin supply, which was overworked, doesn't replenish itself so easily, and users find themselves oftentimes facing severe depression that lasts a lot longer than the ecstasy high. A lack of serotonin can lead to major psychological problems. Studies show that there can be long-term memory loss and cognitive impairment with permanent

damage to a portion of the brain.

Ecstasy users may experience cracked enamel, worn teeth, and jaw problems as a result of the severe teeth grinding and jaw clenching that accompanies the use of ecstasy. One dentist reported that he'd seen users with their front teeth worn down to nubs and their molars worn to flat stumps. How would that look when you smile?

Although more research needs to be done, clinical evidence shows that the more the drug is used, the greater the potential for permanent brain damage. Some research shows that in certain cases, extended use of ecstasy leads to symptoms that are similar to Alzheimer's, not a particularly cool side effect for someone under the age of 80 or so.

Another problem with the drug is that it's really easy to make on your own. You don't need a chemistry degree. Just about any bozo with a few simple gadgets and few readily available chemicals can produce the stuff. And unfortunately, as long as there is a market for it, which there seems to be, there will be those who will make it, despite the fact that its manufacture, possession, and use are crimes.

For now, though Gerald knows those things, he's not listening. So far he hasn't had any real problems with the drug, outside of the depression that follows. And there was the time that, because the drug lessens pain, he'd burned his hand without realizing it until it was too late. It resulted in only a few blisters that did hurt for several days. But if that's all that ever happens to him because of his use of ecstasy, he'll be lucky . . . very lucky indeed. But sooner or later, no matter how good or lucky or happy the drug makes him feel, if he keeps up with it there's no question—his luck will run out. And you don't have to be raving mad to see it coming. ■

**Ecstasy is a form of speed . . . A number of deaths have been attributed directly to this drug. In some cases their bodies actually overheated and they died. Ecstasy is no joke.**





*Maybe the next person to OD would be me.*

I could feel my back being massaged by my boyfriend Mike's warm hands as I listened to the soothing music of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* floating delicately through the TV room of Mike's house. Jared and Colleen only a few feet away, sat massaging each other as well.

"This feels so great. I feel so happy," Jared said, looking up from behind Colleen.

"It does. We should take ecstasy more often," I said as I bent my head to kiss my boyfriend.

"I love you, Samantha," he whispered as he leaned closer.

"I love you, too," I said, and we kissed. I felt like we were the only two people on earth. The music began to fade, and the room was silent. Beautiful silence invaded my head until I heard a scream.

"No! Oh, no!" Jared yelled. He was frantic. He sounded so afraid. Colleen lay slumped on the floor. She lay lifeless, barely breathing, her fragile, skinny body completely pale.

"She just passed out on me. I don't know what's wrong," Jared cried.

I placed my hand on Colleen's chest, feeling for a heartbeat. It felt like a locomotive was trying to rip through her chest. It seemed as though it must have been beating 1,000 beats per second. Jared picked Colleen up and cradled her in his arms. "Colleen! Colleen!" he screamed directly into her ear. Tears began filling his eyes.

"Lay her down and hold up her head," I said.

I felt her heart and pulse. They were both pounding. I didn't know what to do. It wasn't my idea to take the ecstasy pill. I just went along with it, as I do with everything. That wasn't the point now, though. My best friend was about to die. I did the first thing that popped into my mind. Raising my hand, I slapped her cheek with all my might. There was

no response; not even a flinch. I did it again and again until her cheek was puffy and blue. Still no response.

Mike finally spoke, "Let's get her to the bathroom and put her in the tub."

"Come on, Colleen. Don't you dare die on me. Colleen," Jared called. He was shaking. He was terrified.

Mike turned on the cold water and the bathtub began filling. Jared laid her body down next to it.

I felt reassured with Mike there. He always made me feel as though

everything would be OK. How'd he do it?

"OK, let's dunk her," Mike said as he and Jared lifted Colleen's limp body into the tub of cold water and put her head under the water. No response.

I walked out of the bathroom and began pacing back and forth in the hallway. My mind was racing and my heart was pumping too fast. I didn't want to cry. I wanted to be strong. I wouldn't let myself be weak. Too much depended on being strong.

"Samantha!" Mike yelled. "Bring me some bread."

I didn't respond—my voice wouldn't allow me—but I ran to the kitchen to find bread. I was so glad that Mike was here. *This has happened to him before,*

**I kept  
hoping that  
she'd learn  
her body  
couldn't take  
this type  
of abuse.**



I thought to myself. He'd told me how he'd given a friend CPR when he'd stopped breathing. Mike was no amateur at this, but is that really a good thing? How many more drug-related situations were we going to be in?

*Where's the bread?* I asked myself, looking everywhere. I finally spotted some biscuits and decided that they would have to do.

Racing to the bathroom, I heard Jared say with relief in his voice, "She opened her eyes. I think the water is really beginning to revive her."

"What do you want with the bread?" I asked Mike, wondering how Collen was supposed to eat it.

"Let's put her back in the tub and turn the shower on her," Mike said.

He and Jared lifted her back in and turned on the shower. Mike held her mouth open so that she could get the water into her system.

"OK, give me the bread," he said.

I handed him a biscuit, and he began tearing small pieces off and placing them into Colleen's mouth. He then pointed the shower nozzle at her mouth and sent water down her throat. It was a way of force-feeding her.

Jared had his hand in the tub and was splashing water around. He looked like a crazy person—crazy with fear.

The first biscuit was almost gone. Mike was putting the last piece in Colleen's mouth when she began coughing.

"Colleen," Jared cried as he snapped out of his trance.

"Let's lift her out of the tub," Mike called, handing the leftover, soggy biscuit to me. I set it on the sink, not knowing if we were going to need it again.

Mike turned the water off, and they lifted Colleen out of the

**It wasn't my  
idea to take  
the ecstasy  
pill, I just  
went along  
with it as  
I do with  
everything.**

tub. She was still coughing. She pointed toward the toilet, and Jared helped get her there as she began puking. I ran over to her and held her thin locks of wet hair out of her face, just as I had last week when she'd had too much to drink. I kept hoping she'd learn that her body couldn't stand this kind of abuse. She was too little. She shouldn't do everything so excessively.

"She'll be all right now," Mike said. He was soaking wet and breathing heavily. He was worn out.

"Thank goodness," I said, breathing a sigh of relief.

Colleen stopped puking, and Jared held her, cradling her like a baby. She was shivering, so I wrapped a few towels around her that I'd found under the sink.

"Just keep her awake," Mike said. "If she starts closing her eyes, slap her or put her under some water. I'm going to go change." He walked out of the bathroom and down to his room. I heard his door close. I didn't want to leave Colleen, but Mike needed some comforting too. I think we all did.

"Mike," I whispered as I peeked into his room.

"Hey, good-lookin'," Mike said. He always said that to me. "Come and lie down with me."

I lay down next to him on the bed and put my cheek against his chest. His heart was racing.

"Are you still rolling?" I asked. I wanted him to say no.

"Yeah," he said, smiling. "Are you?"

"I guess, but Colleen kinda took my buzz away. I just want to chill. I'm sure glad that you knew what to do," I said.

"Whenever something like this happens, it's like I change into the Doogie Howser mode. I feel as though I know exactly what to do," he explained.

"Well, I'm glad for that, because I sure didn't know what to do at all. This has never happened to me before. It really frightened me," I said. I heard the sound of a slap coming from the bathroom and Jared yelling Colleen's name. I started to get up to see what was wrong, but Mike grabbed my arm.

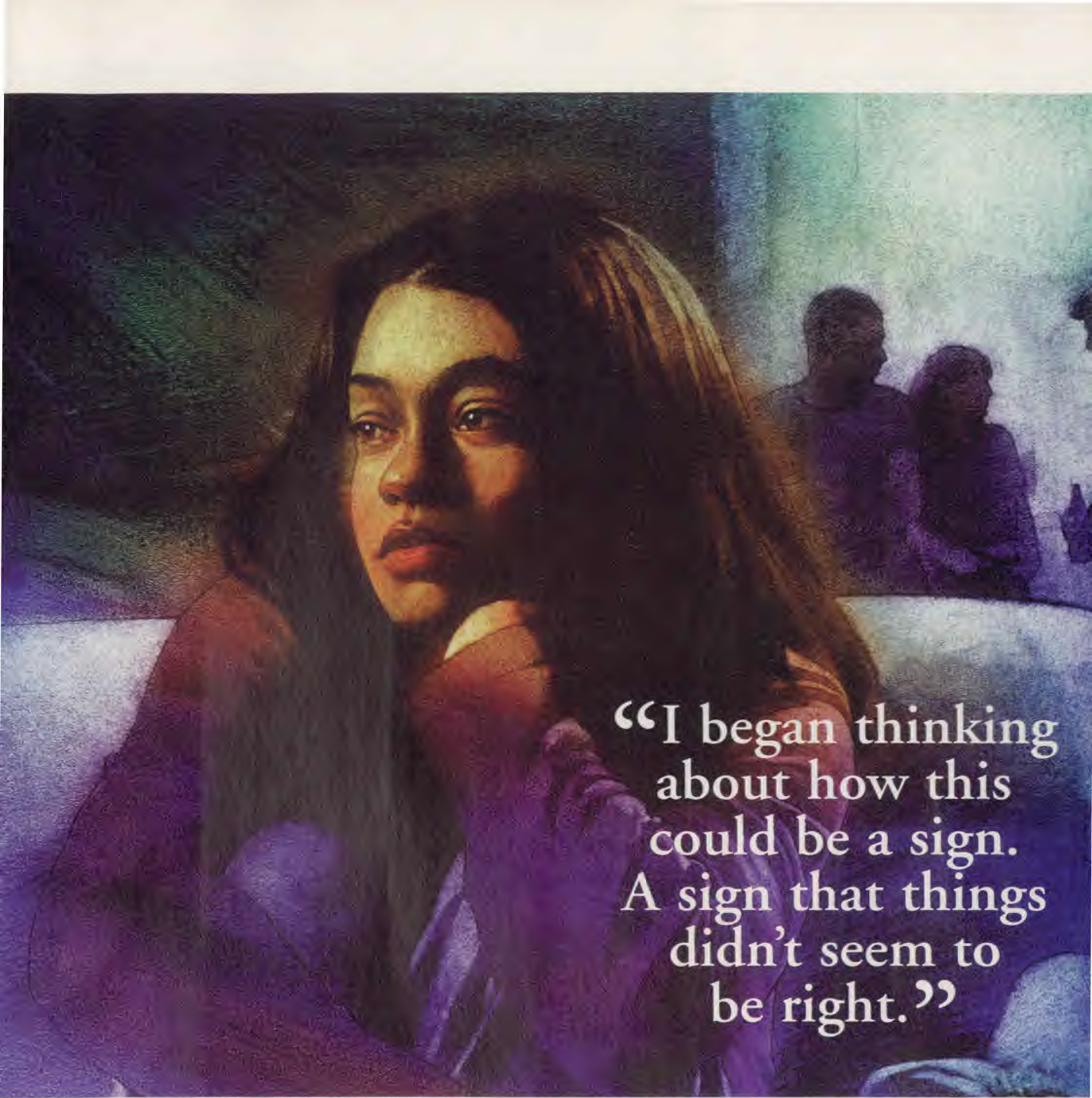
"What are you doing?" I asked, pulling away from his grip.

"She's fine. Colleen will be fine. Jared just needs to keep her awake, that's all," he said in his reassuring voice. He always made me feel better with that voice, but I began to cry anyway.

"I don't want this ever to happen again. Please don't let this happen again, Mike," I said. I knew I probably looked and sounded as if I were going crazy. I wanted Mike to tell me this would never happen again. After all, he was the responsible one.

"Ah, baby, stop crying. I promise that this will never happen again. Now you just lie still and try to get some sleep. You have to get up early for your volleyball game. Do you need anything? A cigarette or a drink?"





“I began thinking about how this could be a sign. A sign that things didn’t seem to be right.”

he asked. He was always taking care of me.

“More like a joint,” I said, trying to laugh through my tears. “Will you go check on Jared and Colleen once in a while?”

“Yeah. I will. Good night, Baby Sam,” he said, and left the room.

My ever-present nickname. No matter how old I got, I’d never outgrow it, because I would always be the youngest.

I lay in bed and stared up at

the ceiling. I wanted to dream of happiness and the good things you’re supposed to dream about, like angels, smiles, and love. Mike promised he wouldn’t let this happen again. But who knows? Maybe the next person to OD would be me, or maybe I’d be the first person to die.

I lit a cigarette and began thinking about how this could be a sign. A sign that things didn’t seem to be right. The drugs and

the scares were real, but they just didn’t have an impact. I’m a slave to drugs. They run my life, and I do nothing about it. But what can I do? Nothing. I’m too helpless and weak.

I put my cigarette out and got comfortable. My mind was swirling with thoughts of the evening, but I didn’t want to think about them. I wanted to sleep. Sometimes all you can do is sleep.

Baby Sam is going to sleep. ■

ILLUSTRATION: NATHAN GREENE





♦ Singer John Cooper overcame the loss of his mother and went on to musical success with the energetic band SKILLET.





“You think people will think so much less of you if you’re not participating (in getting high). But a lot of times just the opposite happens. They respect you for it, and you can tell that some of them would rather hang out with you and just walk away from all that stuff.”

by Michele Deppe

# John COOPER:

AVOIDING THE VOID



The only thing better than being a singer and guitar player in a Christian alternative band is to be a member of the band named Skillet. And then to be nominated for two Dove awards.

Dream on, you say? Not if you are John Cooper, and that is *his* life that we just described. Awesome, you say, but what is it really like to be a star?

Well, first of all, you’ve got to know how to have fun and enjoy what you do.

And John Cooper knows how to have a good time and is one of the craziest people I know. When asked to describe himself, he used the word “radical.” *(continued on page 28)*

• (Left) High-voltage band: John Cooper (center) and his SKILLET bandmates: Corey Cooper, Trey McClurkin, and Kevin Haaland.



# ONE TIME





# IS TOO MANY

Prom night was everything Melanie had dreamed it would be, until . . .

“ . . . and tune in next month for *Teen Talk*.

Our subject will be sex and teen pregnancy. This is Melanie Spencer reporting live from the campus of Whitman Senior High.” Melanie, the host of the monthly rap session *Teen Talk*, quickly pulled off her microphone and headphones, grabbed her books, and hurried off to her next class.

As a 17-year-old senior and honor student, Melanie had great aspirations to become a prominent news anchorwoman. She had her dreams and goals in place and knew that she could achieve them if she kept on the course she had set for herself.

From early childhood she had learned to respect the moral ethics taught by her parents. And she knew in her heart that they were right, but this year, however, something was changing for her—she had a serious boyfriend. She’d met Ronald during their junior year, and they’d become good friends. This past summer she’d begun the first step toward achieving her dream, as she’d enrolled in a journalism class at the community college.

Now as seniors Melanie and Ronald spent more time together, and their emotional ties grew closer.

Things were really getting exciting now as the school year was winding down and final

exams and the prom were only weeks away. Melanie was even more excited when she received her acceptance letter from Penn State University—her first choice.

One day while she was heading for class her friend Alexis caught up to her and said, “Hey! What’s up, girlfriend? Are you going to the prom with Ronny boy?”

“I really don’t know yet,” Melanie replied.

“Well, what are you waiting for? There are plenty of girls in line waiting for him to ask them,” Alexis said.

Melanie was silent for a moment and then finally said, “My parents won’t let me go to the prom alone with a guy. Daddy insists on going with me as a chaperon.”

Alexis looked surprised and responded, “I’ve got an idea. Tell your folks that you’d like to spend the weekend at my house.” Melanie cringed at the thought of lying to her folks. “And,” continued Alexis, “you can wear my sister’s prom dress from last year. It’s da’ bomb! I can hook your hair up for you too.”

Despite the struggles with her conscience, Melanie did want to go with Ronald to the prom. “I’ll think about it” was all that she promised.

When Ronald finally called her two weeks before the prom he asked, “You are going with me to the prom, aren’t you?” He was met with silence. After a pause he asked, “What’s up with you, anyway?”

“It’s my parents,” Melanie finally blurted out. “Daddy says I can’t go unless he chaperons.”

“You’re kidding me. This is a joke, isn’t it?” Ronald asked angrily.

Then Alexis’ idea came into Melanie’s mind. “All right,” she said slowly, “I’ll go with you.”

Earlier Melanie had told her parents that she wasn’t going to the prom. So before supper the

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What if Ronald has AIDS or some other disease? How could I have let myself go this far?

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day of the prom she asked if she could spend the weekend with her friend Alexis.

“We’re sorry, Melanie. We know you’re disappointed because of our decision,” her father said.

And her mother added, “So if this will help ease some of your disappointment, it’s fine for you to spend the weekend with Alexis.”

Melanie excused herself and dashed upstairs into her bedroom, closing the door quietly behind her. Throwing herself across her bed, she thought, *How could I have let Alexis talk me into lying to my parents?*

B Y C L A U D I A N . T Y N E S



# Her ultimate dream of being a virgin on her wedding night was shattered.

Later that evening as Ronald and Melanie made their debut, all the events leading to the prom faded from Melanie's memory in the enjoyment of the evening. "Are you having fun?" Ronald asked her as they danced to the soft music.

"Oh, it's wonderful. Everything's so beautiful," she raved. Yes, prom night was everything that Melanie had dreamed it would be.

When it was over and time to leave, Ronald said, "This has been a great night. Let's go to the all-night party so we don't have to have it end yet."

Melanie responded nervously, "Ronald, you know I can't go to an all-night party!"

He responded angrily, "Come on, baby, what do you mean you can't go? Lighten up *just this one time*," he insisted.

Melanie's emotions wreaked havoc over her mind and conscience. "All right, I'll go," she finally said. Feeling out of place at the party, she watched her classmates drinking.

When Ronald came to her with a can of beer in his hand and held it out to her saying, "Here, Melanie, this one's on me," Melanie surprisingly took it and drank all of it. Soon she started giggling and laughing hilariously. Her vision became blurred and her memory lapsed. She was walking down a path that was totally foreign to her.

What Melanie didn't know was that someone—perhaps Ronald, perhaps one of his friends—had added GHB, the date-rape drug, to her drink.

When she awoke hours later, she had trouble understanding why her head ached so bad. And

then she didn't recognize where she was. All at once she froze in horror as she stared at herself in the mirror on the bedroom door and saw that she was lying naked on a bed with Ronald beside her sound asleep.

Grabbing the bedspread and covering herself, she wondered, *What in the world have I done? How could I have allowed myself to go this far?* The pressures she had succumbed to were intimidating. Her ultimate dream of being a virgin on her wedding

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When fall came and her classmates were heading off to college, Melanie was waiting for a bus that would take her to a boarding school for unwed mothers.

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day was shattered. All kinds of thoughts were running through her head: *What if Ronald has AIDS or some other disease? What if I get pregnant? How could I ever tell my parents? They trusted me.*

Shaking Ronald furiously, she yelled, "Wake up! Wake up now and take me home!"

A few weeks later Melanie's parents noticed that she seemed more quiet than usual, but thought that it was just all the pressure of final exams and the ending of high school. For Melanie it was a girl's worst nightmare. Her fears had come true. She'd missed her monthly cycle, and knew she must be pregnant.

How could she tell her parents the truth? But this was too traumatic for her to handle alone, so the next day at school Melanie went to see her guidance counselor and told her the whole story.

Later that evening as she and her parents sat in the living room, Melanie buried her face in her hands and sobbed out her story. "I'm so sorry and terribly ashamed of what I've done." As she spilled out the events of that evening when she'd betrayed her parents' trust in her, they were stunned. Melanie could hear echoes of her parents' warning ringing in her ear: "One time is too many. One time is too many."

Her mother opened up her arms and held her as they cried together. Her parents' hearts broke as they realized that their dreams for their daughter had taken such a different road than they had hoped.

When Melanie finally told Ronald about the baby, he wanted to get married right after graduation, but she refused his proposal.

Melanie graduated in June with honors, but when fall came and many of her classmates were heading off to college, she was waiting for a bus that would take her to a boarding school for unwed mothers. She tried to keep back the tears as the final boarding call for her bus was announced.

Melanie's dreams were halted temporarily because of her own struggles with alcohol, the date-rape drug GHB, sex, and teen pregnancy. She has vowed to share her story with other teens. She tells them of the results of making wrong choices. She tells them of the consequences of sex before marriage. And she tells them that safe sex is *no* sex, and that one time is too many.

And she should know. ■



# T H E “ I N D R U G ”

**P**arents and young folks beware! The latest “in drug” on the street and school campuses is the drug GHB (gamma hydroxy butyrate). In California GHB is not only illegal, but it requires no medical prescription, and can be made from household solvents. GHB is colorless and odorless, and it can easily be slipped into the drink of an unsuspecting person. Thus its popular name is date-rape drug.

According to police officer Richard Gibson, a drug recognition expert with the Auburn, California, police department, GHB is a depressant to the nervous system. It affects the user much like someone who has had too much alcohol. Officer Gibson reported that 600 gallons of this drug had recently been confiscated in a local raid.

I watched as Mark, a senior at Del Oro High School, was tried in Placer County Peer Court for possession and being under the influence of GHB.

During a May Day festival the defendant, Mark, and a classmate were spotted by the vice principal as they hovered over the campus dumpster. Mark was throwing up. As a court witness, the vice principal testified that he took the boys into his office and noticed their bloodshot, glassy eyes and slurred speech. Fifteen to 20 minutes later, Mark slumped down in his chair, unconscious. His parents and the campus youth police were notified and Mark was rushed to the hospital.

Later he was arrested. Since it was his first offense and he admitted his guilt, he was referred to peer court. On the stand the nervous teen related that one of the school's popular

guys had approached him and his friend the day of the festival and offered to sell them a capful of GHB.

“I didn't like its taste, and it made me sick,” the teen explained. When asked by the prosecuting attorney why he took it, Mark responded, “I wanted to be popular like the guy who sold it to us.”

Mark was suspended from school for five days. And when he resumed his classes, he was granted permission to drive only to school,

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**When asked why he took it, Mark said, “I wanted to be popular like the guy who sold it to me.”**

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soccer practice, and his two part-time jobs. Mark called his yielding to temptation a relapse, as he'd previously completed a rehabilitation program for marijuana use.

The attorney who was defending him before the peer court asked the jury of 12 teens to return a fair verdict. “One not so harsh that it would ‘bury him,’” she requested.

The prosecuting attorney summed up her case by asking for a sentence harsh enough to make an example of the offender.

The 12 jurors returned with their verdict. Mark was to serve twice on the peer court jury, put in 15 hours of community service, tour the jail, and participate for six months of rehabilitation, including a drug education course.

The jury foreman stated, “The popularity of drugs comes and goes, but GHB is now the in drug on high school campuses.”

As concerned citizens, parents and teens alike, we need to be educated on GHB and other illegal drugs. Let's each do our part to make the world a better place to live. ■

**B Y S H I R L E Y M . P O O L E Y**



# ISN'T THAT JUST SPECIAL?

*Special K is not just for breakfast anymore.*

BY CELESTE PERRINO WALKER

In fact, it's not just a name for a breakfast cereal.<sup>1</sup> It's also the nickname for ketamine hydrochloride, a drug used by veterinarians to anesthetize small animals so that they can perform surgery on them. Unfortunately, it's also been showing up at teen parties where it is snorted, injected, or mixed with water and drunk. Eighteen-year-old Donald Matthews of Massachusetts could tell you all about it, except that the first time he abused Special K was the last time.

Donald was at a party with some friends when he apparently mixed Special K with heroin. Maybe he was trying to get that "near-death experience" associated with the drug. But he got too close. When he dropped dead, his friends dumped his body behind a shopping plaza, where

he was found later by a shopping center employee. A girl who was at the same party ended up at the hospital.

Pushers and abusers don't like people to know it, but Special K can be fatal in high doses. It stops your heart. Of course, people who abuse Special K aren't likely

**Ketamine robs you. If someone took all your money and gave you back a dollar, would you consider yourself enriched?**

to take too much of it on purpose, because then they'd miss the "trip" it would give them. That's why drug pushers can claim that Special K is one of the safest "recreational drugs" around. Nobody *wants* to take too much.

Instead, they are trying to experience the "dreamlike" state that Special K reportedly gives. Unfortunately this dreamlike state isn't without cost. "I have a big question," a teen wrote on the Internet, "and this is very serious. About a week ago a friend of mine

and I sat and did about \$80 of Special K. And by the end of the night all I could do was lie on the floor and shake. Everything smelled weird, and I felt like I was floating. Anyway, ever since that night I have flashbacks, and I feel high all the time. I can't eat or sleep. My mind is completely eaten up. Did I overdose? I know that I went into a K-hole [jargon for a bad trip], but how bad did this affect me?" (Edited for clarity.)

Horacio Preval, medical director of the comprehensive psychiatric emergency program at University Hospital at Stony Brook, said he has seen more than 10 people between the ages of 16 and 21 come into the unit for treatment of psychosis that he said was brought on by Special K. According to Preval, two had to be hospitalized for "persistent psychosis attributed to Special K."<sup>2</sup> In short, Special K can make you nuts, and there isn't conclusive evidence of how long this will affect you.

Besides this disturbing aspect of Special K, "it can cause you to lose all of your inhibitions and leave you with no recollection of what took place," says Florida state senator Virginia Brown-Waite. She is sponsoring legislation to outlaw ketamine in her state.<sup>3</sup> This loss of touch with reality has made Special K a dangerous date-rape drug. The Federal Drug Enforcement Administration has been collecting data on ketamine since 1993, but it isn't listed as a controlled substance yet. If ketamine is "scheduled" as a controlled substance, penalties for having the drug would become very stiff.

Many states are individually moving to make it illegal. Right now it can be obtained legally only by a prescription, and doctors and vets don't just give out prescriptions for an anesthetic. So most of what is available



was either smuggled over the border or burglarized from veterinary hospitals.

Think about it. This is a drug used to put animals to sleep. Monkeys under the influence of this stuff have been observed swishing away flies that aren't there. It has very limited approval for use in humans on a legal basis, being used primarily on children and the elderly for operations or dental surgery because it is less likely to suppress the respiratory system. But these people are hooked up to monitors, watched over by medical professionals, and given controlled doses. Even under these circumstances, the results have not always been successful.

"In 1970 I had a back operation," writes a patient. "I was 24, in excellent health, both physically and emotionally. I had just completed my first year of law school. . . . I awoke from the anesthesia to the most petrifying, unpleasant experience of my life. I experienced hallucinations that were beyond description. I also experienced severe memory loss. . . . I was unable to recognize family and friends. I was also very anxious and restless. I said things that made no sense. According to the anesthesiologist, I was 'insane' for five days.

"My family and I were later told that my reaction was worse than the norm, but certainly not atypical [unusual]. I have always been surprised that this drug [ketamine] is still available, but I understand it does have positive pediatric and vet uses."

Another lovely benefit of ketamine is the puker factor. This is the sick-to-your-stomach feeling most people get from an anesthetic. Vomiting follows. Ketamine causes hallucinations and makes people feel as though they are no longer in their body, that they have died and gone



**M**onkeys under the influence of this stuff have been observed swishing away flies that aren't there.

"My mind is completely eaten up," said one teenage user.

somewhere else. Because it is an anesthetic, it stops the user from feeling pain, which could lead to them hurting themselves or someone else. It also lowers the heart rate, and so with larger doses it can lead to oxygen starvation to the brain and muscles. An overdose makes the heart stop.

Where ketamine is available it is often mixed with other drugs or palmed off as Ecstasy, a different drug altogether. "The tablets change every week, and even the people who are selling them don't know what's in them. Ecstasy, ketamine, it's all a red herring. The important point to bear in mind is that every weekend tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people are taking tablets containing unknown substances. We don't know what the long-term consequences will be," says Liverpool drug researcher Alan Matthews.<sup>4</sup>

And on top of that, ketamine is addictive. Another longtime drug

researcher could tell some pretty sad stories of intelligent people who don't seem aware or care that they're becoming dependent.

Ketamine is dangerous, destructive, and deceptive. It promises to enrich your life, but it really robs you. If someone took all of your money and gave you back a dollar, would you consider yourself enriched? No, you would be outraged! But that's what ketamine does. It takes away everything. And unfortunately there may never be a way to get back what it steals. Whatever it has to give you in return simply isn't worth it.

Special K isn't so special after all. ■

<sup>1</sup>John Cloud, "Is Your Kid on K?" *Time*, Oct. 20, 1997, pp. 90, 91.

<sup>2</sup>Olivia Winslow, "New Drug Concern: 'Special K,'" *Newsday*, Oct. 12, 1996, p. A-4.

<sup>3</sup>Carrie Hedges, "Cheap, 'safe' high is costing lives. 'Special K' animal tranquilizer is the latest rage on the rave scene," *USA Today*, Feb. 16, 1998, p. 3A.

<sup>4</sup>"Ketamine: Trick or Treat?" First published: "The Face," June 1992 © Peter McDermott.







# IT'S ALL ABOUT CHOICES

*The more I thought about Amanda, the more I realized that it could have been me.*

**W**ith Christmas money burning a hole in my pocket, I came bouncing down the stairs. "I'm walking on sunshine, oh! oh!" I sang at the top of my lungs as my excitement grew. This was my favorite day of the year. Well, maybe the second after my birthday. It was the first day of the after-Christmas sales. I could just picture it—clearance racks everywhere completely stocked with merchandise bearing red-lined price tags. I could have anything my little heart desired—well, almost. The possibilities were endless. As I entered the kitchen feeling

Looking at her I thought of the life she could have looked forward to but now would never get to have.

cheerful and completely caught up in my own excitement, I was startled by the look on my father's face. It showed shock as he slowly hung up the phone.

"Who was that?" I questioned.

"That was your grandmother."

"Oh? What did she want?" I asked.

My father hesitantly replied, "Well, she called to inform us that your cousin Amanda died last night."

My jaw dropped open as I stared at him in complete disbelief.

"But I just saw her at Grandma's house, and she was fine then," I quietly mumbled to myself. This

couldn't be happening. Amanda was much too young to die. Why, she was only 16!

"How did she die?" I asked. I had to know, no matter how terrible the news might be.

"She was shot while at her boyfriend's house. There were drugs involved," he explained slowly.

"But why would anyone want to shoot her?" I questioned.

"Honey, Amanda had made some bad choices in her life. No one meant to hurt her; she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

**B Y A N N A S H A L E S**



I didn't really cry until the family gathered at the funeral home. I don't think I fully understood or accepted what had happened until I saw her lying there, lifeless, in her casket. Her blond hair was fixed just the way she had always worn it, curly with thin, wispy bangs. She was wearing the red sweater she had received as a Christmas present from Grandma and her favorite light-colored denim jeans.

From a distance Amanda looked just like she had in life, but coming closer, I could see that there were vast differences. When she'd opened her present from Grandma, she'd sprung to her feet, the new red sweater tightly clutched in her hands. "Oh, thank you, Grandma!" she'd exclaimed, running to give her grandmother a hug.

Now lying there in her casket, Amanda's hands were pale and wrapped limply around a single red rose. On her finger she wore a class ring with the same color stone. A few of her closest friends had placed letters addressed to her inside the casket. What they contained I could only imagine.

I don't recall arriving at the funeral home, and I don't remember leaving. But I do remember standing there and gazing at Amanda in her casket. I was chilled; I was scared; but I was also mesmerized.

Looking at her, I thought of the life she could have looked forward to, but now would never get to live. I thought of the graduation cap with the funny blue tassel that she would never toss into the air graduation day. And the college acceptance letters she would never receive. The more I thought about Amanda, the more I began to realize that it could have been me. She was a typical teenager. The captain of her cheerleading squad and

an honor student. She was excited to have received her driver's license and felt as if her life had just begun.

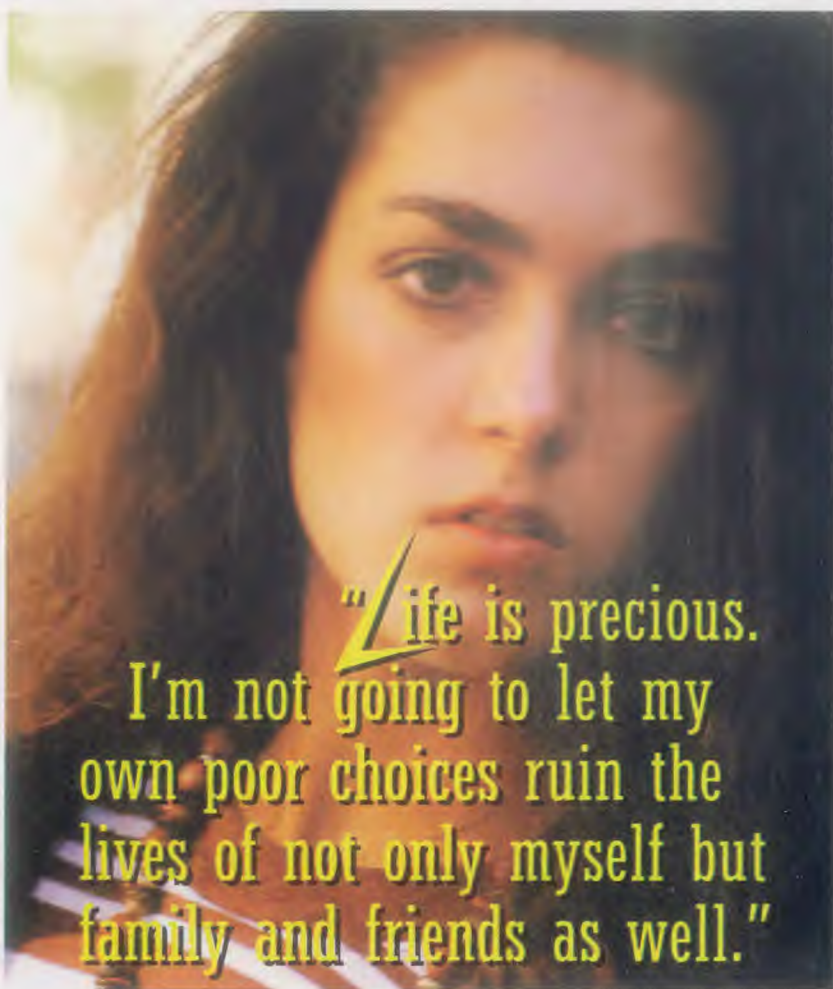
Amanda's bad choices began when she decided to become friends with a new, more exciting group of young people. She said that hanging out with the same old crowd was boring, and she needed a change. Soon after this change in friends, Amanda began dating a much older guy who was involved in the drug world, and he quickly pulled her into that world. Whether Amanda actually was a drug user, we'll never know. This association with drugs certainly added a lot of unnecessary danger and fear to Amanda's life.

At that moment, while I stood before Amanda and thought of

the choices she'd made, I promised myself two things. First of all, I determined that I wouldn't make the same mistakes she had. And second, I promised myself that I would never put myself in such a risky situation as she had on the night of her death.

I now realize that could have been me. I could have been the one lying lifeless in the casket. But I won't be, because I've made the decision to control everything that happens in my life. I'm not going to let my own poor choices ruin the lives of not only myself but of my family and friends as well.

Amanda's death was a preventable tragedy. Won't you make the decision to take control of your life . . . before it's too late? ■





# LISTENING

## FEEDBACK FROM READERS

### Old Man Winter

When he wakes up, he makes it cold.  
He tells the sun to leave,  
And no matter how hard the sun tries,  
He will not let it out to see.  
On Groundhog Day we ask, "Please, stop the  
bad weather."  
But no matter how we ask him,  
He makes it cooler for the rest of his time.  
Finally spring comes and everybody is happy,  
Except Old Man Winter,  
Who sits all alone crying,  
Waiting to punish us next time.

— Jordan Enoch, 13  
Atlanta, Georgia

### ONE BEING

One more time I tell myself.  
One foot in front of the other,  
Then two, then three.  
One more leap of faith;  
One more time I'll try.  
Though there's pain, I will survive.  
One lost hope,  
That's all it takes.  
One moment and everything's at stake.  
One more beat, and I sit and pray.  
All I hope to see is  
One more day.

— Jenny Nofsinger, 14  
Irving, Texas

### I Wish There Was No Bell at All!

Ding, ding, ding.  
Oh, no, when I hear that ring,  
Classes are about to start.  
First we'll learn about the heart.

Then off to zoology,  
But wait, my schedule says biology.  
So I start to run.  
Boy, school is just no fun.

Biology goes by quite quick.  
When is lunch? I'm feeling sick.  
As I look around for a place to eat,  
I realize, then, there just isn't a seat!

I still haven't eaten a thing.  
Great, the bell is about to ring!  
Off I go running to tech class now.  
I really think I should take a bow.

The school day now is about done,  
But I wish that it had just begun.  
For I haven't done a thing,  
'Cause that bell keeps going ding!

— Marcey Masters, 13  
Syracuse, New York

### Rowboat

The rowboat sat alone on the shore.  
It was battered on one side from the crashing waves.  
It was a green boat with the paint beginning to peel.  
It was a lonely boat that wanted so badly to be a  
big ship and sail on the ocean.  
However, as the wind blew, the rowboat started  
to sway.  
Then it began to rain.  
The tide carried the rowboat ashore and left it on  
the beach, just as lonely as it had been before.

— Sam Jones, 15  
Dallas, Texas

### PROCRASTINATION

It's so easy to put off  
The things we'd rather put in a trough.  
Doing my chores day by day;  
There's gotta be a better way!  
Can't every day be like a vacation,  
With no schedule or regulation?  
Oh, if there were only nine days in a week,  
It would give two more days to seek  
More excuses for procrastination.  
I need to change my destination,  
But this feeling of laziness will not leave.  
Only seven days to fill my mom's pet peeve!  
Stress is such a pent-up feeling.  
My headache really has got me reeling!

— Mitch Nugent, 13  
Syracuse, New York



# John COOPER

(continued from page 17)

In high school everyone loved to have John around because he was fun to hang out with. Despite his high-voltage personality, John says that he never had any desire to use drugs or get drunk.

"It's kind of like going to lunch," he explains, "and everyone is eating squash. I'm still not going to eat squash, even if everyone in the room is! That's how I feel about drugs and alcohol. I'm just not interested."

Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, John started playing the piano when he was about 6. His mother was a piano teacher, so it would seem natural for him to play the piano. But that wasn't enough for John, for along the way he picked up the trombone and then the guitar. In high school he played in a couple bands that were good enough to get attention in the local music scene.

Not everything in John's life has been good, though. When he was 14 his mother died from cancer. It's hard to imagine that he wasn't bitter over this, but he wasn't. As much as he missed his mom, he didn't cop a bad attitude. He didn't decide to numb himself against the pain by getting stoned or even by losing himself in his music. John relied on his faith and love of family and friends to help him get through this difficult time.

However, not everyone handled his mom's death as well as he did. Some of his friends were angry and disappointed. Mrs. Cooper had been a popular piano teacher, and her outgoing personality had drawn kids to her. She had involved herself in her students' lives more than just teaching them to read music. In fact, after her death several of her students quit

He's still pretty wild and hyper onstage, but he'll be the first person to tell you that you don't have to get high to have fun or make it through difficult times.

.....

playing the piano and haven't taken lessons since.

One of John's friends was particularly upset over Mrs. Cooper's death. And one day he even admitted to John that he often went to visit his mom's grave. "I go over to where she's buried and just hang out and talk to her." John has been puzzled at this guy's response. Maybe it is because this guy and others like him felt loved and respected by his mom, and they didn't know how to handle her death. John and his brothers were prepared for that loss by Mrs. Cooper.

Before she died she told her kids, "If something happens, don't blame God." That message stuck way down deep in John. So when his mother died, he didn't feel bitterness, only acceptance. John has always believed that there is a plan for his life. So he has never wanted to hurt himself with drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex. He figures it is because with his faith in his heart, he didn't have a void that needed to be filled with abusive substances.

John says, "I have a lot of friends who party now just like they did in high school . . . and tryin' to find happiness by getting high and going through relationship after relationship. It's sad. It's like the song by U2, 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For.' I just never felt like I was looking. Even when my mom died."

John has experienced what it's like to turn down drugs and alcohol in places where he went during high school. "It's weird," he says. "You think people will think so much less of you if you're not participating [in getting high]. But a lot of times just the opposite happens. They respect you for it, and you can tell that some of them would rather hang out with you and walk away from all that stuff."

John says that a lot of people offer him beer even though they know he doesn't drink. They like him as a person and want to include him and make him feel welcome. They say such things as "It's OK if you want beer; I still know that you don't really get into partying and everything." John says, "It's as if they have a weird sense of hospitality." But he doesn't mind saying no anyway, even though his host feels a little uncomfortable.

He's still pretty wild and hyper onstage, and will be the first person to tell you that you don't have to get high to have fun or to make it through difficult times. "Having your mom die is probably one of the hardest things a person can go through," John reflects. "But there have been other people in my life to help me get through. They've even sort of adopted me as part of their families."

John Cooper is still trusting his faith and advises kids not to try to fill voids in their lives with drugs, alcohol, and inappropriate relationships. ■



# LYRICS

"More Faithful" by John Cooper

All the things my feet thought  
to be firm  
Are falling with urgency,  
Tearing back my false sense  
of security.  
Some say things change,  
nothing stays the same,  
But the sweetness in my ears  
Safe in your arms speak the  
word I love to hear.  
You have been more faithful  
than the morning sun.  
You have been more faithful  
than knowing night will  
come.  
You have been more faithful  
than the changing of seasons.  
All the things I thought that  
I used to know  
Are falling down again.  
Our disillusionment is how  
we grow.  
Some say things change,  
nothing stays the same.

In a world of inconsistency  
When everything's a lie,  
What can cause my heart to  
believe?  
You have been more faithful than  
the morning sun.  
You have been more faithful than  
knowing night will come.  
You have been more faithful than  
the changing of seasons.  
You have been more faithful than  
the morning sun.  
You have been more faithful than  
knowing night will come.  
You have been more faithful than  
the morning sun.  
You have been more faithful than  
knowing night will come.  
You have been more faithful than  
the changing of seasons.  
(1998 Ardent Music LLC, 2000  
Madison Avenue, Memphis, TN  
38104, 901-725-0855.)

*John Cooper is an incredibly talented singer, songwriter, and musician. He plays bass, keyboards, and piano for the Christian alternative group Skillet. Skillet records on Ardent/ForeFront Records.*



Hey You, I Love Your Soul is their second album, released in 1998. Invincible is their third album, released in 2000 after a tour of Europe. This album just had a third song go to number one on the charts.



Cooper advises teens not to try to fill voids in their lives with drugs, alcohol, and inappropriate relationships.



# JUST BETWEEN US

## ECSTASY OR AGONY?

When I was growing up, there was a chemical company that advertised on television that they were committed to "better living through chemistry." Their commercials talked about how their innovations were going to make food more abundant. Or how their chemists were developing ways to make consumer goods more durable, more efficient, or less expensive. And as I became an adult, much of what that company promised came to pass. Unfortunately, it seems that some people today tend to take that slogan way too far.

There are chemists at work these days whose efforts have nothing to do with developing a stronger carpet fiber. No, these people come up with ways to take ordinary substances and, through chemistry, turn them into new types of drugs.

These "designer drugs" offer the illusion that your life can become better simply by swallowing a pill or potion. Media outlets reinforce the delusion that such drugs as ecstasy really don't harm you. The illusion is reinforced by the various colors and shapes that manufacturers use for an ecstasy pill. How can something that cool-looking hurt you? Beside, that friend of yours offering to sell the pills at \$5 to \$20 per pill promises that you can't get addicted to them.

Does ecstasy really come with a no-risk guarantee? Consider this:

- Researchers have shown that ecstasy damages certain types of brain cells. Once these cells are destroyed, ecstasy users suffer from decreased intellectual ability, mood swings, and personality changes. You're even at risk for chronic psychiatric illnesses, such as depression and anxiety.
- Because ecstasy suppresses your urge to eat and drink, drug users have suffered severe, even fatal, dehydration or heat stroke during parties.
- More than 15 percent of babies born to mothers who took ecstasy while they were pregnant had some sort of significant birth defect. The average for the general population is 3 percent.

Not exactly the benign, mind-expanding pill it's cracked up to be.

The problem with ecstasy—and any other drug, really—is that it can take your mind to places you think you want to go, quickly and without any effort on your part. Unfortunately, over time, drugs always let you down. You have to use them more often and in larger amounts. And ultimately that limits your freedom.



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CAFE



# PUZZLE Making Positive Choices

BY TAJA DUNNISET

First, circle all the words listed in the word search puzzle below. Write the leftover letters from left to right, top to bottom, to answer the question What will you do when tempted by tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs?

ANSWER  
BEER  
BRAVE  
CHOOSE  
CIGARETTE  
COOL  
DEAD  
DEPRESSED  
DRUGS  
ECSTASY  
FACT  
GHB  
GRAVE  
LEARNED

LIFE  
LOOK  
LOVE  
METH  
NEED  
NO  
OPTIONS  
SHORT  
SMILE  
SPECIAL K  
TIME-TESTED  
YOUTH  
WILL  
WISE

Y L O O K W R E E B T G  
E O I S M I L E W C R T  
C P U I L S O L A A R L  
S T C T H E V F V O B O  
T I O O H S E E H O  
A O E F I L W S N O G C  
S N D E T S E T E M I T  
Y S L L I W A N S W E R  
D I E T T E R A G I C N  
A D E N R A E L U S E E  
E E S O O H C B R A V E  
D E P R E S S E D L Y D  
M E T H K L A I C E P S

ANSWER: I will choose wisely!

"I'm still not going to eat squash, even if everyone in the room is!" That's how I feel about drugs and alcohol. I'm just not interested.

— Singer John Cooper of the band SKILLET



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