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CELEBRATING POSITIVE CHOICES



Travis Pastrana: Poster Boy for Clean Living

Also in this issue:

Filling the Void • When Fun Is Not Fun • Kiteboarding

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POSITIVES VERSUS NEGATIVES

I was reading a *Dennis the Menace* cartoon recently. Correcting Dennis when he used a double negative in a sentence, his nemesis Margaret informed him that a double negative makes the sentence a positive one. That gave him an idea. Heading home, he asked his dad if he could have a piece of pie and was told that he'd have to wait until after dinner. Asking his mom the same question, he received the same answer. Since he'd received a double negative to his request, he went to the kitchen to enjoy his pie. Unfortunately his parents did not see the humor in his interpretation of double negatives. He was sent to the time-out chair, where he determined that once again he couldn't trust Margaret.

If you feel that your life is too full of negatives and, unlike Margaret's wisdom, they're not canceling each other out, sit down in your time-out chair and do some serious thinking. Think about things such as Where do I really want my life to be heading right now? Am I on the path that will lead me to where I want to be three years, five years from now? Are there other options, other choices?

You don't need to make all these serious decisions on your own. There are many people around you who care about you and want to help you make right choices. If you feel that your life is hopeless and you don't know what to do, talk to someone you trust—a family member, teacher, school counselor. They care and want the very best for you.

Spend time dwelling on your positive points—great smile, good personality, fast runner, good at Uno—whatever they are, and very little time on the negatives. There is a saying that goes something like this: "Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone." Ask author Norman Cousins about laughing. It saved his life when he was diagnosed with a terminal illness—he laughed himself to good health.

Begin your day with a smile and share it with your family, your friends, a stranger, and see if it doesn't brighten your day. Thinking good thoughts helps to put a smile on your face and makes it harder to think bad thoughts.

Just maybe Margaret had something there about double negatives—let's just change the equation to be double positives. They are always going to be positive and will make us feel so good.



Anita Jacobs

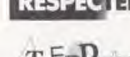
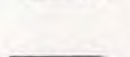


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Filling the Void

by Nicole Tuning

I was curled up on the couch, a low orange-yellow thing in that tweedy material from the 1960s and 1970s, crying my heart out. Painful as it may be to the eyes, that upholstery does make a great handkerchief.

I heard the back door slam, and the sound of keys clinking and something heavy sliding onto the counter. And then a voice called, "Mandie? Are you here?"

I let out a relieved breath. It was only Mom. Poking her head around the corner she said, "I'm back from getting groceries." Then looking closer and seeing my red-rimmed eyes, she asked, "Is everything OK?"

I hurled a wad of soggy tissues across the room toward the waste basket and answered, "Yeah, I'm fine. I have to use up the extra salt in my system." This wisecrack, unusual for me, fell from my mouth as flat as a pancake.

Mom cocked her head and asked, "Would you mind telling me what you were using the extra salt for this time?"

I sighed and rolled my eyes. I could tell that she wasn't going to leave. A part of me was glad, but another part thought, *My problems are mine; go find your own.*

"Well, it's just that . . . school choir auditions are in two days," I began. "All the girls are talking about it, but I just sit there, alone as usual, and nobody bothers to ask if I'm auditioning. I had almost forgotten how . . . how lonely I am. And this just made it all come up again."

Mom didn't say anything, so I plunged on. "I don't fit anywhere. I never have. I'm the weird former foster kid, and shy at that. I hate discussions. I'm not really good at anything. I'm . . . I'm like a mistake."

Mom smiled and said, "I think this is turning into another pity party, Mandie. You've always kept to yourself. I'll never forget the day you arrived—just 7 years old, with nothing to your name but your teddy bear. I've never stopped being thankful that we adopted you. You're a very special individual, with many talents and abilities that you're burying underneath insecurity and reserve." Starting to count on her fingers, she began, "Let's see. You have compassion for others in difficult circumstances, you're more mature than most kids your age, you're a wonderful mimic, you have a beautiful voice, a great sense of humor, and . . ."

"Shy, without good friends, and upset by change," I finished for her.

"Mandie, everybody has good and bad traits," Mom began. "It's a matter of choosing which side you focus on. Tomorrow is a new day. Why don't you grab it with both hands and live with your good side forward? Life may not be as bleak as it seems." Then giving me a wink, she disappeared into the kitchen.

I thought about what Mom said. *Tomorrow is a new day. Why don't you grab it with both hands?* "Maybe I should at least try it," I said to myself.

And so it was that two days later I stood nervously eyeing the students sitting on folding chairs in the office of Mr. Delaney, the choir director. I edged onto an empty chair and looked at the girl next to me. She was mouthing the words on a piece of sheet music that she was holding in her hand. She didn't look like a snob. I swallowed hard. *What if I appear to be a dim-witted, attention-hungry, nervous chatterbox? Stop thinking like this,* I told myself, rubbing my clammy hands together.



My heart was trying to pound its way out of my body. *Just start talking to her without thinking about it, or you'll never open your mouth.*

"Hi. I'm Mandie Jenson. Have you auditioned before?"

She shook her head. "I just sing in my church choir. My name is Heather McDaniels. Your shirt is really cute!" she exclaimed.

I blushed and said, "Thanks. I can sing better when I wear impressive clothes!" We both burst out laughing. A few minutes later we were so busy chatting that Mr. Delaney had to call Heather twice before we heard him.

"Hey, I'll meet you in the cafeteria at noon," Heather called. "Third table, OK?"

That was the best lunch I can remember having. Heather introduced me to her friends Denise, Sarah, and Jen. I could hardly believe the small step of friendliness I had taken in Mr. Delaney's office had covered such a huge distance. *I have friends!* I shouted inside. Within a few days the girls and I were talking, laughing, and sharing our clothes as though we had known each other all our lives.

When the list of choir members was posted two weeks later, we all crowded around the bulletin board.

"Look, Mandie!" Sarah squealed. "You're a soloist!"

I shook my head in shock. "Did Heather get in?" I asked.

Jen was speed-scanning the list.

"Hmmm . . . yep. There she is. Heather McDaniels, alto."

Heather grinned. "I didn't think I'd make it. I was still hoarse from the football game. Congrats, Mandie." She gave me a huge hug. "We're gonna rock!"

"I don't have *time* to rock," I confessed as we started down the hall. "You know those 50 families from Bosnia who are being brought over here? They literally have nothing but the

clothes on their backs, and those aren't in the best shape. I'm trying to organize a food and clothing drive for them."

"Wow!" Denise's eyes were as big as CDs. "That's a big job, Mandie. Are you always such a saint?"

"I'm not a saint," I replied emphatically. "It's just . . . I know what it feels like when you don't have a home and you don't have anything to your name and you don't belong anywhere."

Jen shot me a quizzical glance. I continued. "See, guys, I'm adopted." Contrary to my expectations, none of the girls fainted or ran away screaming; they just waited for me to go on. "I don't know much about my mom except that she couldn't take care of me. So she put me in foster care. I was moved to four different foster homes before the Jensons adopted me when I was 7."

"That's neat, Mandie," Heather said after a moment. "No, not that you went through all that. I mean it's cool that you want to use your experience to help other people. Really cool."

I could hardly wait to tell Mom about choir when I got home. She screamed and then made me dance around the room with her. I thought she'd gotten it all out of her system, but she hadn't. After we finished supper that evening, Mom brought out an enormous homemade chocolate cake.

"This is to celebrate Mandie's position as soloist in the high school choir," she said, beaming as she set the cake on the table. "That's quite an accomplishment. You cut it, honey. Oh, I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Stevens called this afternoon. She said that she has some clothing to donate for the refugees. It looks like this is shaping up to be quite a year for you."

I slipped a piece of cake off the knife and onto Dad's plate. "Yeah," I responded. I thought of everything that had happened in the past few weeks. It had taken effort, but the hole inside of me was filling up. Heather and the girls, choir, helping the Bosnian refugees—there wasn't much room left to be lonely. *And my family*, I reminded myself. *I can't forget them.* "Yeah," I repeated. "Quite a year. And this is just the beginning." 🎸



The Innocent

I'm Muslim, as you can see.
Why won't you come and play with me?
Bad things were done for all to see.
Please believe it wasn't me.
I feel sad, and I cry too
Just like all the rest of you.
Do not blame me for what they did,
After all, I'm just a kid.
I'm American just like you;
So please understand, I'm a victim too.
Don't blame us all for their bad act.
You must believe we're not all like that.

Kimberly Myhre
Shepherd, Montana

Pressure of the Game

The score is tied 9 to 9;
I come up to the plate
to hit one last time.
The bases are loaded,
And there are two outs.
The whole game for my team
depends on this play.
I step into the batter's box
and take a deep breath,
hoping she'll give me some-
thing to hit.

She pitches the ball;
I swing with all my might;
And what do you know—
The ball went out of sight!

Elizabeth Craig, 16
Hebron, Nebraska

Elegy to a Friend

I remember when we were young,
Running through meadows where
the bees stung.
All the times we shared from winter
to fall,
And now you're gone forever, all
and all.
I remember when you said,
"We'll be married when we grow
up—Mr. and Mrs. Yun."
Everything you said came from a
heart full of fun.
I remember you cured those with
depression,
And now you are one of those who
has an obsession.
What happened to you that made
you so mad?
Now, all and all, everyone's sad.

Jaclyn Zakin, 14
Marietta, Georgia

What Drugs Do for You

As I walk through the city, my heart is full of pity.
All those older people smokin',
And their little children chokin'.
Smokin' isn't funny
Because you're spending too much money.
Smokin' hurts your lungs, sonny,
So you'd better listen, honey!
Your voice will crack,
your lungs turn black, and your abilities will
surely slack.
If you sniff cocaine, you are sure to feel the pain.
When you smoke some weed,
Without precaution you'll
proceed.
You may have an illusion—
But not a good conclusion.
Using dope to smell like smoke
Is like having your neck in a strong rope.
Beware! If you use tobacco,
You could become a very dull wacko.

Daniel Elliott, 12
Indianapolis, Indiana

The End

Soon it will all be over—
12 years of hard work and fun.
An injury
May cause the conclusion of my baseball career.
Why did it have to happen?
All those years of spitting sunflower seeds with teammates,
Digging into the batter's box,
Staring down the opponent.
All those years of leading off first,
Hustling around the bases,
Sliding into home,
And knowing I had given my team the lead
Will all become memories.
Now just three months remain.
Soon I will be just a spectator.
My high school baseball career
Will be over.

Sean Greene, 17
New City, New York



Choices • By Kay D. Rizzo

LOVE'S UPS AND DOWNS

Ever have a friend say, “I’m depressed”? Most of us have probably said that at one time or another. But we didn’t mean that we were clinically depressed—just in a bad mood or disappointed about something.

Real depression is more than a case of the blahs. It’s more than life’s normal ups and downs. Depression is a serious health problem that affects the total person. It’s a “down” mood that lasts for more than a couple of months. Depression changes one’s behavior, physical health, grades, and the ability to handle even the smallest of problems. It can lead to alcoholism, drug abuse, running away from home, and suicide.

Do you feel depressed? Do you have a friend who is depressed? Can the illness be cured? Friends need to know the facts.

Take the following fact or fiction quiz to uncover the myths about teenage depression.

1. ___ Teens don’t suffer from real depression.
2. ___ Teens who claim to be depressed just need to pull themselves together.
3. ___ Talking about depression only makes it worse.
4. ___ People who talk about suicide may commit suicide.
5. ___ Telling an adult that a friend is talking about committing suicide is betraying your friend’s trust.
6. ___ Depression can be treated.
7. ___ People don’t always get help, because they don’t recognize the symptoms in themselves.
8. ___ Clinical depression affects 3 to 5 percent of American teenagers every year.
9. ___ All depressive disorders are the same.
10. ___ The only help your friend needs is you.

ANSWERS:

1. **FICTION**—Depression can affect people of any age, race, or economic group.

2. **FICTION**—Depression is not a weakness. It is a serious health problem. Both adults and kids need the help of a trained therapist and/or a physician.

3. **FICTION**—Talking with a friend may help the individual recognize the need for professional help.

4. **FACT**—Talk of suicide should be taken as a warning signal. If a friend talks like this, take it

seriously. Make a responsible adult aware of your friend’s need—immediately!

5. **FICTION**—Those who are depressed aren’t thinking straight. It is an act of true friendship to get a depressed person help, and you may save a life.

6. **FACT**—A professional can treat depression in several different ways. Between 80 and 90 percent of depression can be helped.

7. **FACT**—It is difficult to recognize the symptoms of depression in yourself, because you aren’t always thinking clearly. The most important step toward treating depression is asking for help.

8. **FACT**—Out of 100 friends, four could be clinically depressed at any given time.

9. **FICTION**—There are various forms of depression. Only a professional can diagnose someone’s depression correctly.

10. **FICTION**—By now you know the best thing you can do for your friend is to help him/her get professional help.

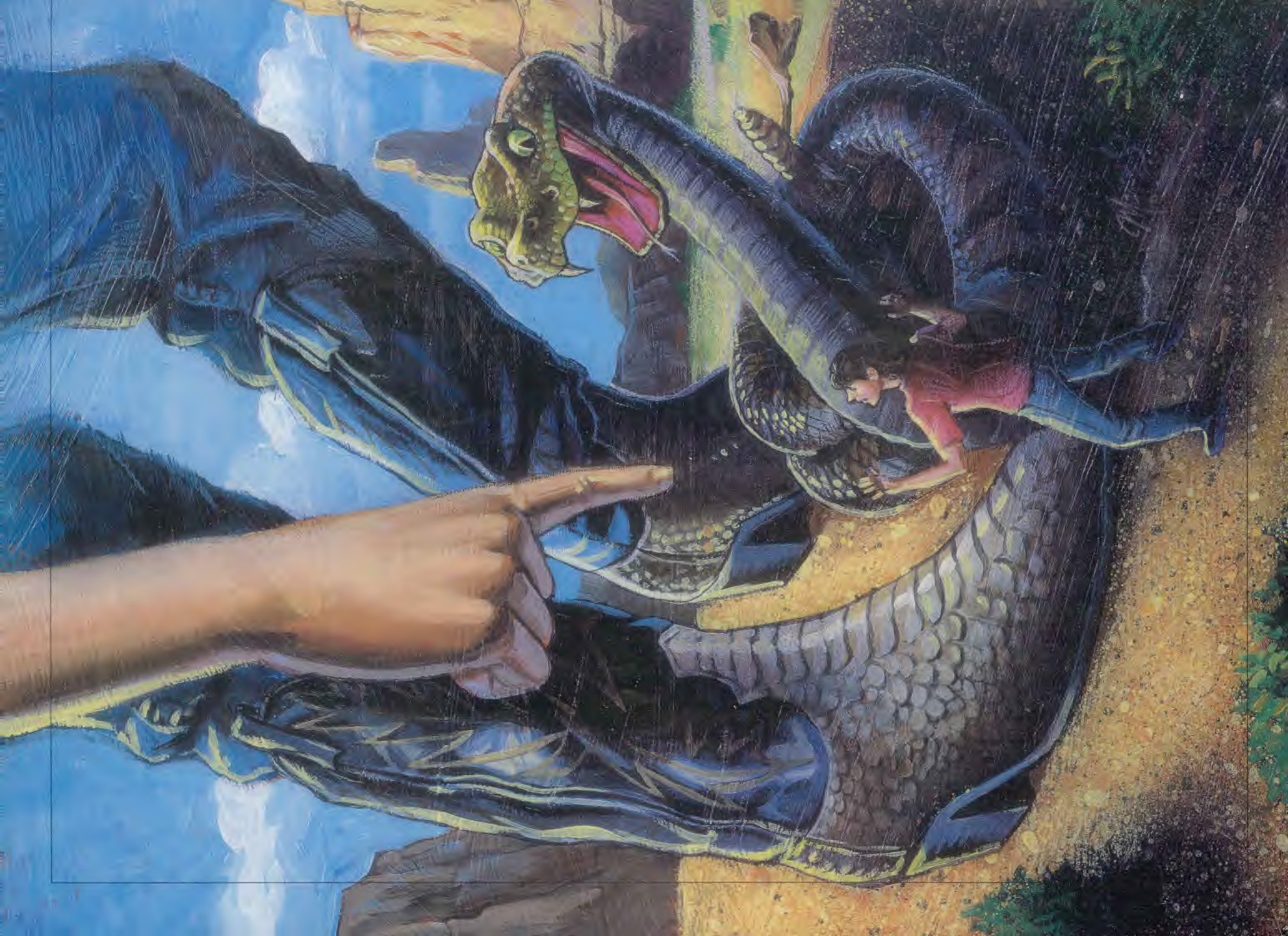
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DEPRESSION

The first step in defeating depression is to identify it. Put a check in the boxes that pertain to you or to a friend you’re concerned about.*

- ☐ Expressing feelings of sadness or emptiness, hopelessness, guilt, or worthlessness
- ☐ Unable to make decisions
- ☐ Unable to concentrate and remember
- ☐ Loss of interest in ordinary activities, such as sports or talking on the phone
- ☐ Having more problems at school and at home
- ☐ Loss of energy
- ☐ Having trouble falling asleep, staying awake, or getting up
- ☐ Losing or gaining weight
- ☐ Headaches, stomachaches, or backaches
- ☐ Being restless and irritable
- ☐ Wanting to be alone most of the time
- ☐ Cutting classes or drop activities
- ☐ Drug use or suspected drug use
- ☐ Talk of death, suicide, or have attempted suicide

*If you checked several boxes for yourself or for a friend, get help! Listen and encourage, but get adult help.



Years ago a famous poem entitled "Richard Cory," by Edwin Arlington Robinson, told about a young man (Richard Cory) who apparently had it all: money, prestige, class, grace, everything. One stanza in the poem is told from the perspective of someone jealous of this fortunate and proud Mr. Cory. The stanza went like this:

"And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was every thing
To make us wish that we were in his place."

Of course, most of us at some time have probably felt that way, jealous of someone who we thought was better off than we were; someone who might get higher grades, might have nicer clothes, might be a swifter, more gifted athlete, or have a good-looking boyfriend or girlfriend.

Or maybe they had of all those things—like Richard Cory.

Jennifer kind of felt that way about Stacy. Stacy was a cheerleader, a straight A student, and the steady girlfriend of the captain of the basketball team, a guy who once had been interested in Jennifer until Stacy came along. Also, Stacy's folks were wealthy (she drove around in a sporty new convertible); Jennifer, in contrast, lived with a single mom who worked two jobs just to keep food on the

clothes that probably cost what Jennifer's mom made in a week. It was just the whole way she walked and tended to look down her nose at everyone else that really bugged Jennifer. And then there was the time Stacy won some national award for English, and the time she was recognized in some *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, and the time she . . .

Poor Jennifer, in contrast, worked hard to maintain a B average, had two left hands when it came to sports, and . . . sure, she had a boyfriend, a nice guy. But let's face it, Harry, with his bifocals, frazzled hair, and stooped shoulders (he had all the posture of a coat hanger) wasn't gorgeous George, not by a long shot.

Just thinking about Stacy made Jennifer feel depressed, made her think that she was no good at anything, just a loser. At times she wondered what life itself was all about, and if it was worth it.

Jennifer isn't alone in her thinking. A lot of people struggle with the question of self-esteem. In fact, there's even an organization called the the National Association for Self-Esteem (NASE) to help people who struggle, as do millions of teenagers, with the question of self-esteem.

"The National Association for Self-Esteem (NASE) welcomes you to our empowering Web site. The purpose of our organization is to fully integrate

LOWER THAN A SNAKE'S BELLY

by Conrad Jones

table for Jennifer and her younger brother.

And, to make matters worse, Stacy was kind of stuck-up. She knew she had a lot going for her, and she loved to flaunt it. It made Jennifer sick the time she showed up at a school dance, dangling tall, gorgeous George T. on her arm, with bright sparkling jewelry shining in the spotlights and designer

self-esteem into the fabric of American society so that every individual, no matter what their age or background, experiences personal worth and happiness" (www.self-esteem-nase.org).

Probably all have struggled at some point in their lives with the issue of self-esteem, and that's because as humans we all make mistakes, we all

mess things up, sometimes in a big way. There is nothing wrong with being aware of your weaknesses, because we all have them. The question is How do you deal with the things about yourself that you don't like?

And the key to learning the answer to that is to find the right balance. Humility is one thing (we all need some humility), but to have a very low self-esteem is another. Taken too far, it can lead to severe mental problems, even suicide.

"Each year in the U.S., thousands of teenagers commit suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds, and the sixth-leading cause of death for 5- to 14-year-olds" (*American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Oct. 11, 1998). Many of these unfortunate and needless deaths (about 5,000 each year) without a doubt can be linked to problems of self-esteem (for more information see www.aacap.org/publications).

So how does one deal with the heaviness of low self-esteem, especially a young person? Here are six steps that offer valuable help.

First, accept the fact that everyone, even the "best," is a human being. And just because their outward appearance might show confidence, surety, and even arrogance, they, like you, still have their own fears and insecurities. You are not alone in having feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Everyone does at some point in their lives.

Second, dwell upon your good points. Everyone, no matter who they are, has some strong points. Maybe it's nothing more than your hair or the color of your eyes. Maybe you are good at music. Maybe you have a kind, loving, compassionate heart. Whatever it is, focus on something about yourself that you like or that others have said they like about you.

Third, if you are feeling especially low, it would be good to speak to an adult whom you trust, someone who knows you and who might be able to give you some good advice. If you can't talk to a parent, maybe there's a teacher at school or a neighbor who has earned your trust and respect.

Fourth, just accept the fact that no matter what you can do, there will always be someone who can

do it better. Just as there will be someone who is better than the person who is better than you. And the cycle continues. All you can do is be the best that you can be, no more. If you could do more than what you are doing, then you're not doing your best.

Fifth, though it's hard for young people who would like to set the world on fire, take it easy. You need goals and should work toward them, but you should realize that you can't have everything you want in life. Learn to be as happy as you can be in your situation. Sure, if things need to change, you need to work on changing them. But accept the fact that life won't always turn out the way you would like it to.

Sixth, no one likes a braggart. As much as possible, especially if you are feeling really down on yourself, try to avoid being in contact with those who make you feel lower than a snake's belly. Jennifer's biggest mistake was that she thought too much about Stacy. When she kept from thinking about Stacy, she felt better about herself.

We live in a world that can feel like a mean, cold place at times. It may seem to press on with no concern for us and there's not much we can do about it. But we can seek to take control of our lives, realizing that everyone struggles with self-doubts. Press ahead in confidence but at the same time with a healthy humility.

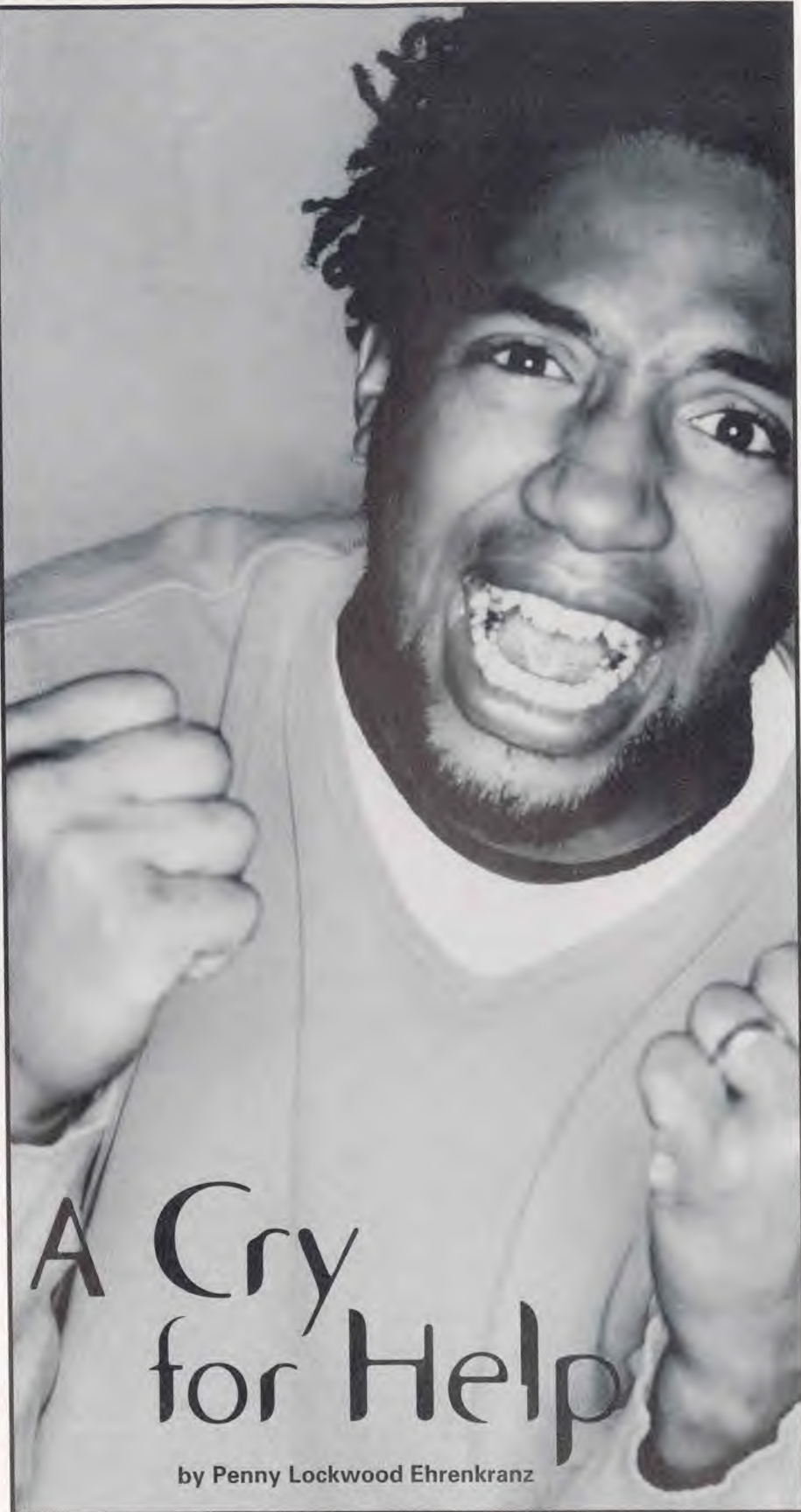
There's a lot of freedom in knowing that all that's required of you is to do your best. Struggle, self-doubt, personal insecurity are all a part of human life and growing up—just don't let it be the whole part. Just remember that even those who seem to have it all have down days.

If you struggle with low self-esteem, paste a smile on your face and go find someone who needs help—a child, an elderly person, maybe your mom and dad. Helping someone else is a great way to build confidence in yourself.

In thinking of others
I forget about me.
I become the person
I really want to be.

Get out from under that snake's belly and make it a great day. 🐍

**Each year
in the U.S.
thousands
of teenagers
commit
suicide.**



A Cry for Help

by Penny Lockwood Ehrenkranz

Have you ever thought about taking your own life, or do you know anyone else who has?

You're not alone. Suicide rates are climbing. The rate for White males, aged 15-24, has tripled since 1950 and doubled for White females during the same time. The rate for Black males aged 15 to 24 has risen two thirds in the past 15 years.

Statistics from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) are grim:

- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students.
- Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among all those 15 to 24 years old.
- Suicide is the fifth-leading cause of death among all those 10 to 14 years old.

What can you as a teenager do to help? Anais Surkin is a 16-year-old junior at the Northwest Academy in Portland, Oregon. As a sophomore in 2000, she became involved with the Northwest Chapter of AFSP and now serves as chair of their youth board. During the summer of 2000 she also did an internship at the AFSP national headquarters in New York City.

According to Ani her involvement was an accident. "Honestly, it is something that I would have never thought of getting involved with on my own. I knew someone who was on the AFSP-NW board (she has since moved to Hawaii). They were looking for teens for the public service announcements (PSAs) and for the youth board, so she asked me if I would like to participate. I thought it was a good cause, and the rest just fell into place."

The PSA in which Ani became involved consists of two 30- and one 60-second television spots and two 60-second radio spots produced by AFSP in the Northwest and aired in theaters and TV and radio stations across the country. U.S. surgeon general David Satcher participated in the launch of the campaign called "Suicide Shouldn't Be a Secret." The PSA was funded by a grant from the Ronald McDonald House charities and featured Ani and other Northwest area teenagers who knew teens who had either taken their own life or were suicidal.

The students were not paid for doing the PSA nor was there any script. Instead, they spoke from their hearts about their concerns for their friends. One teen said, "It's a hard situation, because you do risk making that person very angry and losing a friendship." Another spoke about how "horrible [it would be] for me if she never talked to me again, but I could live with that, because I know she'd be alive."

If you think a friend might be suicidal but you aren't sure, Ani says to look for the following warning signs:

- Feelings: desperate, angry, guilty, worthless, lonely, sad, hopeless, helpless.
- Thoughts/things they may say: "All of my problems will go away soon." "No one can do anything to help me now." "I just can't take it anymore." "I wish I was dead." "Everyone will be better off without me." "I won't be needing these things anymore." "I can't do anything right." "I just can't keep my thoughts straight anymore."
- Actions: Giving away possessions, withdrawal (family, friends, school, work), loss of interest in hobbies, abuse of alcohol or drugs, reckless behavior, extreme behavior changes, impulsivity, self-mutilation.

- Physical: Lack of interest in appearance, change/loss of interest in opposite sex, disturbed sleep, change/loss of appetite/weight, physical health complaints."

Ani explains, "The above are possible symptoms, but not everyone who is suicidal displays all, if any, of these symptoms, and not everyone who displays these symptoms is necessarily suicidal. Follow your instinct if you are concerned that your friend may be suicidal; regardless of the symptoms, *ask*, and show that you care."

The AFSP lists three steps teens can take to help their friends:

1. Take your friend's actions seriously.
2. Encourage your friend to seek professional help; accompany them if necessary.
3. Talk to an adult you trust. Don't be alone in helping your friend.

Bev Cobain, cousin of Nirvana rock star Kurt Cobain, was working with mental health patients when Kurt took his own life. She and fellow Bremerton, Washington, resident Flemming Funch conduct Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) workshops for teens and adults interested in suicide prevention.

Ani, who participated in the ASIST training with other youth board members, has these suggestions for teens who believe a friend might be suicidal:

"Talk to them. Try to understand their situation, why they feel this way. Ask them directly if they are considering suicide.

"Show that you care—listen.

"Take your friend's actions seriously.

"Encourage your friend to seek professional help; assure them that you do care and will stay involved. But you just can't take all of the responsibility on your shoulders. If necessary, accompany your friend to a professional.

"Make out a contract stating that they won't hurt themselves without talking to you first, or before going to see a professional, or even that they won't hurt themselves until the next day, whatever is appropriate.

"Talk to an adult you trust; don't be alone in helping your friend."

Seventeen-year-old Rachel Alevy, a student at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon, is a member of the youth board and attended the



“Show that you care—
LISTEN.”

ASIST workshop with Ani. She became involved with AFSP after a boy in her school died from suicide. She also had several friends who were depressed to the point of hurting themselves. Rachel agrees with Ani, strongly urging students to seek responsible adult help if they know a friend who is potentially suicidal.

Megan Abbott, who works for AFSP National in New York City, suggests teens contact the office at 1-888-333-AFSP if they are interested in becoming actively involved in teen suicide prevention. Teens in the Northwest can contact Ani or Rachel at AFSP_NW_@hotmail.com. A list of local chapters can also be found at the AFSP Web site: <http://www.afsp.org>.

Currently the only operating youth board is affiliated with AFSP Northwest and AFSP in New York.

There is a student chapter at Southwest Texas State University in central Texas. Megan says AFSP National is looking “forward to seeing how they work, and if there may be possibilities in the future for further teen or youth components to our chapters.”

Further, she adds, “If there is no local chapter, we would encourage teens to become involved in another aspect of suicide prevention during their high school years, such as volunteering at a local hospital or mental health association, or receiving training as a crisis counselor and volunteering in a crisis center.”

Finally, if you know anyone who is showing such danger signals as previous suicide attempts, talking about death or suicide, planing for suicide, or suffering depression, then take it seriously. Be willing to listen and encourage them to seek professional help. In an extreme emergency, remove potentially dangerous items (razors, medications, guns, knives) and take the person to the hospital or call your local emergency number. You can make a difference by becoming involved and helping those in need. Perhaps you'll save a life. 🌟

Check it out

For more information, see:

- 1. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**, 120 Wall St., 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10005, 212-363-3500, <http://www.afsp.org>. “When You Suspect Suicide,” “Prevention,” “Child and Adolescent Suicide,” “Preventing Teen Suicide Today—What Parents and Teens Can Do,” *Lifesavers*, vol. 12, no. 2, quarterly newsletter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (Spring 2000); PSA and press release April 10, 2000.
- 2. Katie Pesznecker**, “Reaching Out Against Suicide,” *Oregonian*, June 24, 2000, p. D-1.



Travis Pastrana

Poster Boy for Clean Living

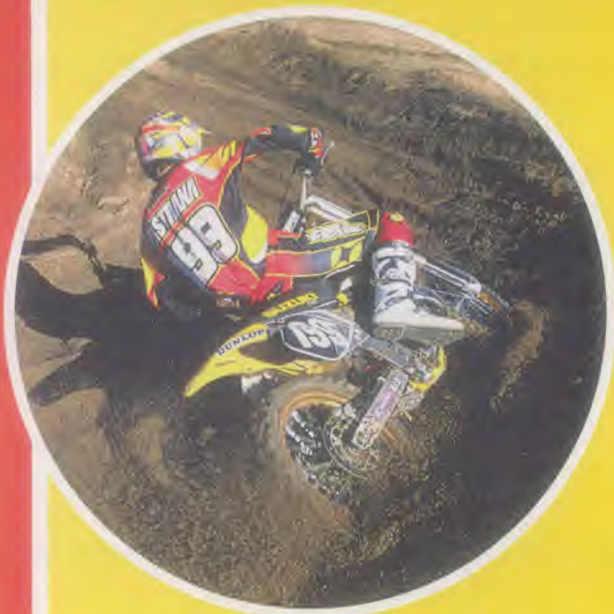
by Deena Bartel-Wagner

The world of motocross was turned upside down when Travis Pastrana burst upon the scene at the age of 4. Since that time Travis has earned title after title, and by the time he was 14 he was the world freestyle champion and a five-time national amateur champion. Now at 18 Travis still has never lost a freestyle contest in which he's competed. But that's getting ahead of the story. Let's go back to the beginning.

Photos supplied by American Suzuki Motor Corporation.







Career Highlights

- 2001** 125 EAST SUPERCROSS SERIES CHAMPION
- 2001** ESPN ACTION SPORTS & MUSIC AWARDS-MOTOCROSS RIDER OF THE YEAR
- 2000** YOUNGEST RIDER EVER TO REPRESENT USA FOR THE MOTOCROSS DE NATIONS, FRANCE; TEAM USA WINS!
- 2000** SUMMER X GAMES GOLD MEDAL—FREESTYLE MOTO X
- 2000** ST. LOUIS SUPERCROSS 125, FIRST PLACE
- 2000** DAYTONA SUPERCROSS, FIRST PLACE
- 2000** EAST/ WEST SX SEASON SHOOTOUT CHAMPION
- 2000** THIRD IN ROOKIE SX SEASON (THREE WINS)
- 2000** AMA ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
- 2000** NATIONAL 125 CHAMP—ROOKIE YEAR
- 1999** HORIZON AWARD—BEST AMATEUR MOTOCROSSRACER
- 1999** SUMMER X GAMES, GOLD MEDALIST
- 1999** SUMMER GRAVITY GAMES DOUBLES, GOLD MEDALIST
- 1999** SUMMER GRAVITY GAMES, GOLD MEDALIST
- 1999** WON FIRST 125CC PRO RACE EVER ENTERED FIVE-TIME NATIONAL AMATEUR CHAMPION, 1992-1999
- 1998** WORLD FREESTYLE CHAMPION AT AGE 14

UNDEFEATED IN FAF EVENTS AND X GAMES

Travis was just 4 years old when his parents bought his first bike. "It was a one-speed Honda Z-50," Travis recalls. "I kept begging my folks for one, and my dad finally said I could have one if I could learn to ride my bicycle down the steps by Christmas. I accomplished that and the next thing I knew, I had my first motorcycle. Since then my parents have made a lot of sacrifices so I could race. They come to every one of my races, which is really important to me."

Currently Travis, who is a member of Team Suzuki, races in motocross and performs in the freestyle motocross events. The youngest person to ever win the 125cc event, Travis also is the youngest rider ever to represent the United States in the Motocross de Nations in France. And he helped lead the U.S. team to victory in 2000. "There are different types of riders in motocross," says Travis. "You are either a private rider who pays his own way, a semiprivate rider who has some shop and dealership sponsors, or you are a factory rider who is employed by one of the five major bike companies. I am very fortunate to be a member of Team Suzuki."

Travis's accomplishments and feats have awed many as he continues to move up through the motocross racing and freestyle divisions. "I'm truly living a dream by being able to ride a motorcycle for a living," says Travis.

"It was an amazing feeling to break the record and win the 125cc championship," he recalls. "But freestyling is part of who I am. It's very different from racing, but I believe it makes me a better racer. I'm always looking for new and different ways to do things on my bike. That has given me an advantage on the race track. I like to find my own way and look for different ways of doing things."

Riding seems like an understatement when you consider that he does back flips with his bike, performs his "Superman" move when he is airborne by raising himself from his seat, grabbing the rear of his bike with one hand and the handlebar with the other, sailing behind his

bike and then sitting back on the seat just as the bike touches the ground. And then you can't ignore his signature in-the-air "fender grab/nac-nac/can-can," in which he lets go of the handlebar, throws one leg over the bike, then throws the other leg over the bike—all before landing on the ground.

With alternative music and baggy pants a part of the world of motocross, stereotypes are pretty common for people involved in this sport. And yet at 17 Travis is somewhat of a curiosity in this scene. Among fans and sports-writers alike Travis is known as the "poster boy for clean living." Without a single tattoo or any body piercing, Travis doesn't fit the typical image of motocross riders. "I'm not worried about projecting a certain image," he says. "I want to ride motocross, and so that's what I concentrate on right now. I know a lot of guys are into the party image and other stuff, but I just want to try my hardest and do my best at what I'm doing right now."

Travis is also known to be there for his fans. He's obtained the reputation of being the last rider to leave postevent autograph sessions. "My fans are important to me," he says. "They've come out to watch us race, and they just want to express their support for our sport. I want to meet them and let them know I appreciate their interest."

It seems that doing his best carries over in other areas of his life, too. Travis graduated from high school at the age of 16 with a GPA of 3.9. "My mom home-schooled me," Travis reports. "Since I travel all over the country for races, it's what worked best for me." After graduating, Travis enrolled at the University of Maryland for his college courses. "With their distance learning program, I can continue to race and still work toward my college degree."

He's studying for a degree in communication, with the hope of someday using what he's learned in the sporting world. Travis has continued to pursue excellence in his studies, maintaining a high GPA even though he's on the road for months at a time.

Travis knows a lot of teens face many pressures in their lives. "Every pressure is different," Travis says. "I think it's really important to recognize that if your friends are heading in a direction you don't want to go, it's time to find new friends."

Being a celebrity at 17 with worldwide fame could become a big burden, but Travis tries not to let it affect him. "I make sure I spend time

with my friends just doing things we've always done together. That's not always easy because of my schedule, but it's important to me, so I make time for it."

The other activities he enjoys include golfing, jet skiing, boating, and mountain biking.

Travis knows that the day is coming when he won't be racing in motocross. So he's started investigating a new sport. "I'm just getting my foot in the door with rally cars," he reports.

"They're exciting, and I'm enjoying it so far."

One could say that Travis Pastrana has it all—fame, fortune, and doing what he loves to do. But he knows that it takes hard work and dedication to achieve the things that are important to him. "I've always dreamed of racing in motocross," says Travis. "I don't think it matters what you choose to have as your passion. The important thing is that you make a choice to do something with your life. Once you've found what you want to do, get a good education and go for it. If you really want something, you can make it a part of your life."

And Travis Pastrana is living proof that good guys don't always finish last! 🏁

**Travis
graduated
from high school
at the age of 16
with a GPA
of 3.9.**

Heidi was a girl who knew what she wanted out of life. By her senior year in high school she had worked out a list of priorities, a list of the things that she believed were important to her. And she gladly told everyone what that list was.

"Here it is," she would say, flashing her big, toothy grin, etched with her bright-red lipsticked lips. "It's fun, fun, fun. And not necessarily in that order, either!"

Yes, for Heidi life was supposed to be nothing but fun, fun, fun—one party after another, one drug after another, one drink after another, and one boyfriend after another. *And why not?* she thought.

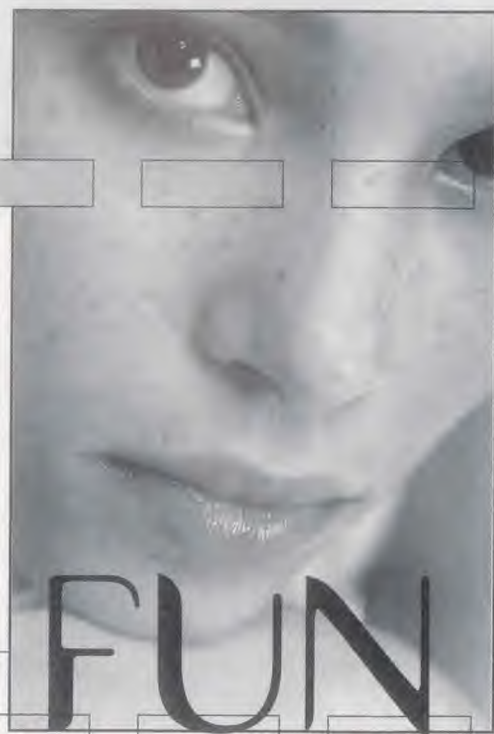
Her father, after all, had run off with a younger woman when she was only 9. For her dad, having fun must have been very important; otherwise, why would he have abandoned his wife and three daughters? And her mother? Well, she was at bars, at discos, and at clubs more often than either of Heidi's older sisters. So for her mom, having fun must have been important too; otherwise, why spend more time having fun than at home with her youngest daughter?

So Heidi did what Heidi learned, and that was live for fun. And so far, without many exceptions. Oh, well, there was that one drunken incident when she was taken to juvenile detention hall for the night—that wasn't much fun. And there was the time when she was on acid and fell and cracked her spine—that surely wasn't fun, especially with all the pain she still felt in her back. And it wasn't much fun the time she'd had that *slight* accident and, well, had to go to the pregnancy center and all that. But those were the exceptions to the rule. And Heidi's rule was only fun, fun, fun.

Thus, with such a philosophy of life, how could this cute, talkative, and bouncy 17-year-old girl turn down a drug called ecstasy? With such a name it must be fun to the tenth power. She'd heard about it and knew that it was floating around the school. Yes, if anyone could get their hands on it, it was Heidi.

Her first experience with ecstasy was at home with three of her girlfriends. They sat around, popped pills, and waited for . . . ecstasy. Barbra, one of her friends, suggested that they take a

When Fun Is NOT



by Benjamin Selleck

FUN



drink or two, but they told her no, because they'd heard that alcohol tended to dull the effect. Ecstasy, after all, was a stimulant, a version of methamphetamine, and so drinking booze would work against precisely what they wanted to experience to the fullest.

"Wow!" Heidi said before long. "Now I know why they call it ecstasy."

And she's right. The name ecstasy fits the drug (after all, who would get excited about calling something by the chemical name of methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)? It's not as if someone would call up a friend and say,

"Hey, dude, wanna come over and do some methylenedioxymethamphetamine?"). Indeed, the name ecstasy fits, at least on one level—the level of the powerful high that users of ecstasy experience. However, as with all drugs, the story doesn't end with the rush, the high, the fun that drug use can quickly bring. On the contrary, the high, the rush, the fun are only the beginning of the story, not the end. And as Heidi and many others have learned, are learning, and will learn, the end is rarely ever as "good" as the beginning. And if that's true with any drug, it's true with this one for sure.

Ecstasy—also called Adam on the street (because it's a close chemical relative of another drug, called Eve), XTC, beans, and love drug—is a synthetically made chemical compound. That means it doesn't come from plants like cocaine, heroin, or marijuana. Ecstasy is similar in nature to methamphetamine and mescaline. Ecstasy hits people with a double whammy: they get stimulation, as from amphetamines, and hallucinations, as from LSD.

Users talk about a four- to six-hour high in which they are overcome with profound feelings of happiness, of relaxation, of peace, and serenity. Ecstasy removes all sense of anxiety, fear, and anticipation. Those under its influence may feel a deep empathy for others, which leads to a sense of closeness and bonding that might not otherwise be there, hence the misnomer “love drug.”

On top of that, because it's such a powerful stimulant, people who eat one tablet after another can go for two or three days without eating, drinking, or sleeping. They just dance and talk and have, well, as Heidi would call it, fun. This has led to what are called “raves”—parties that go on for days with people flying high on ecstasy. One doesn't have to be Albert Einstein to figure out that someone using a drug that has them going for days and days without any sleep and without much food or water, is looking for trouble.

And ecstasy is nothing if not trouble. Though not as addictive as heroin, ecstasy comes laden with a host of problems, such as nausea, chills, sweating, tremors, and blurred vision. And those users who stay on it for days have suffered severe exhaustion and dehydration. Aftereffects for many include anxiety, paranoia, and severe depression.

But these are only the minor and often short-term effects of MDMA. Those who use MDMA (and the number has been increasing over the years) face the prospect of permanent brain damage. Though research in this area is still relatively new because MDMA has only been a problem for the past 10 years, studies show continued use damages the nerve endings in the brain that transmit serotonin, a crucial biochemical that's involved in all sorts of important brain functions. It is believed that the use of MDMA can lead to long-term problems with depression, anxiety,


memory loss, and other neurological disorders. Also, over the years people have died from MDMA overdoses, not to mention those users who are killed indirectly by the drug from being involved in car accidents.

In one report a 22-year-old guy high on ecstasy parked his car by a utility pole, got out, climbed up the pole, and was electrocuted by one of the 138,000-volt lines. In another case a healthy 18-year-old woman ingested 1½ hits of ecstasy and some alcohol within about an hour. She collapsed and died. And the stories go on and on.

Though exact numbers are hard to come by, all indications are that MDMA use is on the rise. Some estimates say that its use has risen by 500 percent in the past five years. Emergency room data indicate that MDMA use is up dramatically. According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, emergency room cases caused by MDMA rose from 70 in 1993 to 2,850 in 1999. Data from poison control centers reveal the same disturbing trend. One study showed that from 1999 to 2000 ecstasy use rose in all age groups from eighth through twelfth grades. The biggest jump (almost 20 percent) was in the twelfth grade. Over a six-year period police seizures of ecstasy tablets rose from 196 in 1993 to 143,600 in 1998. Seizures in 1999 almost doubled those in 1998 (see www.usdoj.gov/dea/concern/mdma/mdmaindex.htm).

In short, the message isn't getting out that ecstasy is anything but ecstasy, at least not in the long term. Sure, like all drugs, at first there's the thrill, the fun, and the rush. That's why people do drugs. But like all drugs, you don't just use the drug and walk away later, as if nothing happened or nothing changed. Drug use of any kind can change everything, even the things that you don't want to change, and in almost every case the change is for the worse—often big time.

Fun, fun, fun . . . that's what Heidi thought ecstasy was, that is, until she had another one of those unfortunate exceptions, this one leading her to a three-day hospital stay when she collapsed at a party from an overdose of MDMA. Will she ever learn?

Fun, fun, fun, that's one thing; ecstasy, that's something else altogether. 



I SUSPECT MY BOYFRIEND DEALS DRUGS



I've noticed lately that my boyfriend has been spending a lot of money despite the fact he's jobless. I suspect he's selling drugs. Should I confront him? Jenny

As a concerned person you have every right to ask him where he's getting all his extra cash. But be prepared if he tells you a story too bizarre to believe. If he really is into pushing drugs, more than likely he'll not be as forthright as you would expect. People who dabble in drugs rarely are honest. If you definitely do find out that your suspicions are true, you may want to reconsider your relationship with this person. Those who deal in illegal activities usually make poor friends.

I'm 15, overweight, and have discovered that using amphetamines helps me lose pounds. If I'm careful, is it safe to do this? Krissy

I'm afraid not. Using street drugs to lose weight can have dire consequences. They could cause you to lose more than you bargained for—like your life. And let's not forget the fact that many people

become hopelessly addicted to the same kinds of drugs. Wouldn't it make more sense to find a healthier and safer alternative for reducing your weight? Changing your eating habits and regular exercise are two good places to start. If you still are not convinced, talk it over with one of your parents, a counselor, or your physician. Using harmful drugs to try getting healthier just doesn't make sense.

It seems as if every kid in my school uses drugs and/or alcohol. Is it the same all over the U.S.? Craig

No, it isn't. It may appear to be that way, but there are literally tens of thousands of kids across the country who stay far away from alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs. Young people who use illicit drugs usually stand out like a sore thumb. They demand attention and usually get it. Kids who are clean and sober rarely draw negative attention to themselves. They're too busy having fun and living life the way it was meant to be lived. I believe that those who refrain from getting

high deserve more credit than they currently get. All teens who are slaves to pot, alcohol, cigarettes, and all the other dangerous substances could learn valuable skills from them.

I'm 17 and quit using dope on my own last year. I was wondering if I'll ever be able to go back to getting high again in the future without the problems associated with it. Jared

In all my years of working with teens who have had tobacco, alcohol, and other drug problems, I have yet to see any of them be able to control their use once they begin getting stoned again. What got them into trouble in the first place usually gets them into trouble again and again. It's better to accept the fact that you can never use drugs again; and that you'll always be a better person for it. Take pride in quitting. You should be proud of yourself. Believe me, you don't want to miss out on all the good stuff that happens when we distance ourselves from the bad stuff. 🌀

Go ahead, ask Gary his advice on some of those big questions. Gary Somdahl is a dad who puts his skills as a licensed youth chemical dependency counselor to the real-world test all the time. His latest book is *Drugs and Kids*.

Send your questions to:

ASK GARY

Listen magazine
55 West Oak Ridge Drive
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

KITSBOARDING

Freedom in the Third Dimension

words by GORDON O'NEAL / photographs by STEPHEN WHITESELL





Imagine a sport that's a cross between surfing and sailing. No, it's between windsurfing and sailing. No, it's between parasailing and hang gliding. No, it's between windsurfing and hang gliding. No, it's between parasailing, surfing, sailing, and hang gliding. Or between snowboarding and parasailing. Or between skateboarding and windsurfing. Or between waterskiing and sailing. Or between . . . ?

What's going on? What are we talking about here? Just one of the newest, most exciting, and hottest adrenaline-pumping sports around, that's what. And it's called kiteboarding.

You say you've never heard of it? What are you? Someone who was born in some cave in Borneo somewhere? Or on some deserted island off the coast of Patagonia? Just kidding. Actually, a lot of people have never heard of it, and it's not because it isn't one fantastic sport, but only because it's so new, barely older than most kids still in elementary

school. Though new and still not that well known, it won't be either new or unknown much longer, because once the word gets out it's hard to see how it wouldn't become one of the most popular sports around, like surfing, sailing, hang gliding, snowboarding, parasailing.

Kiteboarding is pretty much what it sounds like. It's using a board with a kite and letting the wind pull you across the water (and not just water, actually, but we'll come to that later). With a specially made board and a specially made kite (your kid brother's paper kite won't cut it), you can quickly get one of the greatest thrills of your life as you literally use the kite to pull you around ponds, lakes, and the sea while you jump, flip, spin, and roll in a fast-paced rush of wind, water, muscle, and skill.

The philosophy behind it is simple. In the water version it's like you are wind-

surfing, except that instead of a sail attached right to the board, your sail is a kite flying in the wind overhead, and, depending upon how you maneuver the kite, the board, and your body, you will sail, surf, and even fly (some people have done jumps more than 200 feet long and almost 100 feet high). Not many sports allow you that kind of rush, to be sure. It is, as one enthusiast called it, "freedom in the third dimension." Only a kiteboarder could know what that means.

Like any sport, kiteboarding takes skill, practice, stamina, and energy. You don't just get on and go (well you might, but you'll find yourself going places and in ways that are not necessarily the safest, such as heading straight for a dock, a dam, a seawall, or any solid objects that are often found around water).



Almost anyone in the sport would recommend that before you start, you take lessons that are available almost anywhere people kiteboard. There are more and more places not just in the United States but around the world (there are even world competitions held), as the sport is catching on. If you don't take lessons (perhaps none are available), one Web site recommends that among other things you talk to other kite boarders, get an instructional video, and go online (there's a ton of information there), as well as do as many practice runs as you can. Otherwise, you'll find yourself facing what they call a "kite mare." Like any sport, no matter how much fun it might be, kiteboarding just isn't worth getting hurt over.

Lessons are, however, highly and definitely recommended, and they're not all that expensive. Some places offer beginners' courses for about \$150 to \$200, which includes equipment and generally enough training to get you started. Advanced courses are offered as well, for about the same price. Few people who have gotten into the sport were ever sorry they took lessons. You can save yourself a lot of time and aggravation if you take lessons in the beginning from those who know what they're doing. One place says this about its beginners' course: "Learn the skills and knowledge you need to begin kiteboarding. Topics include understanding the wind window, basic kite safety and control, kiteboarding equipment, and more. You will launch, fly, and land a high per-

formance trainer kite." Sound cool? That's because it is.

Though the sport itself is relatively new, kites originated in China thousands of years ago. About 700 B.C Buddhist missionaries to Japan introduced kites, which they called paper falcons, to the island, where they were used for religious purposes. In ancient China, in what was perhaps the first bit of hang gliding, scouts were attached to kites so that they could observe the position of enemies from the air. Even through World War II kites were used for military purposes (they were attached to metal wires and sent up in the air to form a netlike structure to try and keep enemy planes from coming in too close). And then there's just the fun of regular kite flying itself. For centuries it has been a favorite pastime of children in all lands.

Kiteboarding itself got started about 10 years ago. An American named Cory Roeseler caused a ruckus on a Hawaiian beach. He was on water skis and was being pulled across the water by a homemade kite. For years at his home in Oregon he had been experimenting with various kite-skiing systems in which he would use kites to pull him across lakes. Windsurfers didn't take this guy seriously, so the story goes, until they saw that he was getting pulled across the water faster on his kite than they were with their sails! Then they started taking it seriously.


Meanwhile, over in France a couple of brothers had been experimenting with something similar, particularly a new kite design (kiteboarding kites are

like a cross between a kite and a parachute). Though there's still some debate over who really started the kiteboarding craze, most kiteboarders don't care who or where or when or how. All they know is that the sport is there, and those who do it just love, love, love it.

It's not hard to see why. Imagine sailing over the waves with a canopy wind pulling you so fast that with a series of the right moves, you can go flying through the air with enough speed and momentum to do all sorts of turns, flips, and twists (moves called table tops and tail grabs are some of the more technical names). And this is just in the water. There are those who use kites to pull them across snow on a snowboard or across land on a skateboard with great big wheels.

However, for now kiteboarding on water is where the sport is the most popular. This thing is taking off so fast, though, who knows what will happen next.

As far as sports go, the equipment, though not as cheap as, say, a pair of Rollerblades or a skateboard, isn't going to cost you what a speedboat would for waterskiing. Plus, until you're able or ready to make the plunge, you can always rent what you need (the wind and water come free).

So what are you waiting for? Check it out. But just remember, this isn't a sport for boozers and dope fiends. Why ruin with drugs something that's a cross between waterskiing and surfing, or parasailing and windsurfing, or . . . ? Well, do it yourself and then you tell us. 



GRACE NOTES

by Michele Deppe

Have you ever griped at the dinner table and been reminded that we live in a privileged society? Your parents do have a point. We do have a lot to be grateful for, not only because we live in the greatest country on earth, but also because we have so many personal blessings.

One teen is doing everything within her power to help us spruce up our attitudes and to aid us in acquiring a simple skill: learning to say thank you and really mean it.

Not only does 14-year-old Ali Lauren Spizman think that our expressed thanks to others is way overdue, but she also thinks that each of us improves from the inside out when we celebrate the kindnesses of others.

A little bit of appreciation can go a long way. And Ali should know, for she wrote a book about it, literally. In 2001 her helpful resource guide entitled *The Thank You Book for Kids: Hundreds of Creative, Cool, and Clever Ways to Say Thank You!* was released.

To gain firsthand knowledge of this topic, she corresponded with many successful people on the subject of gratefulness. In a letter to Ali, Michael Eisner, CEO of Disney, said,

"It suddenly occurred to me that a thank you is really an opportunity to give back to someone who had given me a gift . . . I've tried not to forget this lesson." The founder and cochairman of Atlantic Records told Ali that famous people possess the humility to say thanks. He has been the recipient of thank yous from artists such as Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, Phil Collins, and Aretha Franklin. Ali has received heartfelt messages about the personal importance of being appreciative from Hillary Rodham Clinton, actor Dennis Haskins from *Saved by the Bell*, Apollo 17 astronaut Eugene A. Cernan, Harvard University president Neil L. Rudenstine, and others. Most important to Ali, though, are the stacks of notes from family and friends, representing years of love in her life.

Ali's message makes a lot of sense. She says, "If kids discovered the importance of expressing kindness, they would see that they have the power to make the world a better place. Knowing that you are a meaningful part of something makes us feel special and helpful. Perhaps if more kids were making a difference, they wouldn't have time for bad things like drugs and alcohol. Plus, once you

help others, you also see how fortunate you are, no matter your circumstances."

A buoyant optimist, Ali insists that each effort to show gratitude makes the world a better place. "I just feel like each kid can make a difference," she concludes. "So often we are just rude to each other, and I think we do it the most when we don't feel good about ourselves."

A perfect case in point is the flack that Ali has gotten from a few people at school who have made fun of her book. But Ali doesn't let it get her down. In fact, she just keeps coming up with more ways to have a positive impact on the world.

She created the Thank You Kids Campaign that provides cards and stationery. "I go to homeless shelters and hospitals and places where they can't afford a lot of stuff, and I hand out blank cards," she says. "It's amazing that even a very sick person can feel better after writing a heartfelt thank you note to a nurse who cares for them every day."

Ali's family have also helped her to stand confidently on her own two feet; she receives a lot of strength from them. "My mom leads me in good directions. My dad is awesome, and my brother, Justin, is one of my role models," she confides. "They have all taught me to be thankful."

Ready to count yourself among those who are appreciative? Ali's book is crammed with

tons of suggestions, but here are a few to get you started:

- Be specific. Writing "Thanks for the birthday present" doesn't really warm the recipient the way a thoughtful note with a less generic message does.

Try something along the lines of "Aunt Lisa, you are the ultimate shopper! Thanks for all of the workout clothes that you got me for my birthday. I can now go to the gym in style. Everything fits great, and I appreciate your thoughtfulness." See how much more punch a few details can add?

- Make a list. Are you way behind in expressing your thanks? Chances are, there are a lot of people in your life who show you kindness on a regular basis. So turn over a new leaf. Make a list, and write some

appreciative e-mails, pen some letters, or make some phone calls.

- Sign on. Start a kindness movement among the people in your world. After all, "what goes around, comes around," right? Share an encouraging word and a sincere thank you.

For more ideas log on to Ali's Web site at www.thankyoukids.com to find out how you can join her campaign.

We live in a wonderful country, and we are rich with special relationships. Determine to cultivate gratefulness for all that you have. Learn to say thank you. 🙏





Big George, Big Dreams

by Céleste perrino Walker

Around Traverse City, Michigan, they call him Big George, but the biggest thing about George Corliss is his dreams. For Big George the sky's the limit. Thirteen years ago he founded Listen America, hoping to help kids say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. He wanted to help them make good decisions and become the kind of people who care about their communities and make a success of their lives. And he thought the best thing he could do was share his dream with others.

"I knew right away that I couldn't do what I wanted all by myself, so I shared the vision I had for helping young people face problems and overcome them." Sure enough, lots of people wanted to help kids stay substance-free and make positive choices. It wasn't long before George had more than 200 volunteers to help with his program. They now work in 22 counties and 70 school districts.

One of their primary jobs is to go into schools and teach kids what tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs do to ruin their lives. They have a lot of different speakers and programs, but some are particular favorites. "One of the most popular programs we have is called the 'Wheel of Misfortune,'" says Big George. "It's a classroom game show. And it's hilarious. We actually bring a great big wheel into the classroom, and the teacher plays Vanna." In addition to the "Wheel of Misfortune," they have other classroom game shows and a variety of speakers with unexpected talents.

"Mike Scudder, one of our speakers, shoots free throws," says Big George. "He'll shoot 200

free throws in a 45-minute presentation. And he's talking the whole time. He talks about setting goals, how to reach them, and how tobacco, alcohol, other drugs, and destructive decisions will keep you from reaching your goals. One year he was here for two to three weeks. He shot 11,000 free throws. He missed 38."

Besides the school programs Listen America works with kids who want to help other kids stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. "Kids talking to kids is the number one way to reach younger people with this type of message," Big George says. It's one thing for an adult to encourage kids to make positive choices for their lives, but it means even more if it's a kid giving them that message.

"We even teach kids to give stop-smoking programs for adults. We let them name the groups themselves. One group called themselves The American Lighter Fighters. The adults have to answer to the group every night. It's one thing for them to rationalize to other adults in the group why they took a puff of a cigarette, but having to explain it to the young people is another thing altogether. It's really powerful what these kids bring to the table. The amount of energy they have for anything they set their mind to is unbelievable."

One of the incredible things about Listen America is that it takes thousands of dollars to run their programs, and they raise it all themselves. "We don't take any state or federal funding. We don't ask the schools for money. We raise all of our funds from the communities we work in

through business and personal contacts," Big George explains. In addition to all the programs they supply 10-15 million pages of materials to the homes, schools, and communities that they work in—that's every year.

Community is where it all happens. It starts in families and moves outward into the community. Everyone is responsible for making good choices for themselves and helping others make good choices too. Listen America believes in communities supporting young people. They have a strong emphasis on the community and have family-based activities to help parents become great role models for their kids.

When the Search Institute collected data from nearly 100,000 kids, they came up with 40 developmental assets. These are powerful influences that help to shape the lives and choices of kids. Based on the 40 developmental assets they identified, Listen America sponsors their own awards program each fall. Big George wants to help kids grow up to have strong characters so that they can make good choices in their lives. So he rewards that character in a unique program.

"We have each of the schools choose two female and two male students in every grade, 7 through 12, who are leaders in their communities, who exhibit a high number of the assets, and who are putting them to practice in their own lives," explains Big George. "From the schools we work in, more than 1,000 kids are nominated. We also give away scholarships to the graduating seniors. We place the awards based on character, and we try to focus on kids making great choices and trying to change their communities. This is our sixth year doing the awards program."

Big George knows what's down the road for kids who choose alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. He's been there. "Before I became a Christian I had a very bad substance abuse problem myself," he says quietly. "I know from my own experience how it can ruin your life. When you add alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to any situation, you're just setting yourself up for failure."

Failure is not part of Big George's vocabulary now. He wants to help kids succeed. His big dreams have reached more than 1 million kids so far, with no end in sight. He's proved that with big dreams and positive choices you can change the world, one life at a time. 🌟



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*Listen America is a subsidiary of Community Crusade Against Drugs



Since 1948 *Listen* magazine has presented a consistent no-use message regarding tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs by way of positive role models, true stories, factual articles about drugs and their effects, self-help articles, and positive alternatives.

Long before current trends and terminology gave credit to how essential certain assets were in the development of good character, *Listen* magazine was presenting the virtue of searching them out and cultivating them.

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