



Running to
Make a Difference

Shaun Alexander

NO COUCH
POTATOES
ALLOWED

IT'S the
RAGE

DRINKING
to DEATH

UNHOOKED

!ster

CELEBRATING POSITIVE CHOICE



I remember leaning against the wall and tugging at the soft carpeting as I listened to everyone in the group share their names, claims, and feelings. When my turn came, I stared at the floor and reluctantly muttered, "Hi; my name is Laura."

A unanimous "Hi, Laura" followed.

"I am a drug addict and an alcoholic." I felt a twinge of pain every time those words passed through my lips.

"Today I feel pain and anger," I said to the group, just as I had every day since I'd been here.

I stared listlessly out the window, watching the rain fall as the rest of the group each said their piece. I was 16 years old and confined to a treatment center. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. I came from a good family. We lived in the suburbs. I went to a private school. I had people who loved me. No, it wasn't supposed to happen this way at all.

I can remember the first time I took a drink. I was 13 and the alcohol made me feel good, as if I were the only person on earth. With each passing day, however, I could feel myself fading, and the gnawing emptiness inside of me became excruciating. One night as I lay in bed, feeling miserable, I wondered if getting really drunk would help me. In our society it seems to be an accepted belief that alcohol will heal all pain. In television shows and movies the characters often respond to heartache with "I need a drink."

So, I thought, *maybe I just need a drink.*

Drinking alone, several days a week, led to drinking at weekend parties, which led to smoking pot. I used to be overcome with anxiety when I found myself in large groups of people. Just holding a conversation with my peers seemed like a formidable task. No matter how I dressed or styled my hair, I always felt awkward and out of place. But when I used drugs and drank at parties, I could feel all the disquiet melting away, and I began to feel comfortable in my own skin. Soon I was using alcohol and pot every day.

In retrospect, I can see the progression from recreational use, to dependency, to full-blown addiction so clearly. When you're in it, you tell yourself that you won't go any further than you already have or that you'll never cross that line. That line is very thin, and eventually you cross it, perhaps without even realizing it. I did everything I said I wouldn't do. In the beginning, when I took that first drink, I never imagined doing the things I did in the end.

After I spent nearly a year using only pot and alcohol, something snapped. The pain got worse; the feelings of emptiness and loneliness ran deeper. I turned to what had been my constant companion for the past year—drugs. But something was wrong. Pot and alcohol weren't enough anymore. I had promised myself I would never use hard drugs, but when the magic of my former companions wore off, I was desperate to try anything. I wound my way into the "druggie" crowds and began habitually using an array of uppers, downers, and hallucinogenics—anything that would numb me and blot out the emptiness. Soon my days were reduced to blurred interchanges of dark and light. I became a one-dimensional being, high or not high. Nothing I swallowed or snorted ever made me feel better. I was hooked on the numbing sensation of alcohol and drugs. I couldn't go a day without using and having a fiery knot of desire burning in the pit of my stomach.

As time passed, my buried emotions began to push their way to the surface, and the numbing effect became harder to achieve. When I had begun drinking and using drugs, I had thought, *I won't ever spend another endless night sobbing in the corner of my room.* But as I fell deeper and deeper into addiction, it seemed as though all I did was cry. I had begun using in an attempt to contain and control my emotions, but eventually addiction swallowed me whole.

What ultimately manifested itself was an overwhelming sense of guilt. I lied and manipulated everyone around me. I stole money. I stole drugs. I fabricated stories to explain away my strange behav-

UNHOOKED

By Laura M. van den Berg

iors. I soon found that just balancing all my lies became a full-time job. Consequently I felt a crushing guilt about being deceptive and hurting everyone in my path. The guilt was so painful that it became one of the driving forces behind my addiction, and the deadly cycle continued.

Halfway through my sixteenth year I hit bottom. I became so physically crippled by my drug abuse that I dropped out of school. I had destroyed all my relationships with friends and family. I had lost everything I used to value. But still that wasn't enough to jolt me back to reality.

Halfway through my sixteenth year I hit bottom.

It happened a week before I checked into treatment. I took two kinds of sedatives, a painkiller and almost half a bottle of vodka, in the course of several hours. I passed out, and when I woke up later I was unable to move. I couldn't even lift my hand off the bed or sit up. I couldn't lean over and look at the clock to see what time it was. My entire frame was shaking and dripping with sweat. I could feel my heart frantically pounding as I struggled to suck in oxygen. I remember thinking that I was dying, and I was scared. I used to ignore the fact that addiction kills. I wouldn't ever get that bad—that dependent. But now being faced with the possibility of death was terrifying because I realized all at once that I wanted to live.

After drowning in addiction for more than three years, I checked myself into a treatment center and stayed there for six months. The first month I wasn't sure that I wanted to give up my addiction. I knew it was killing me, but I clung to it nevertheless. It was the only thing that felt safe, familiar. I began to bargain with myself little by little. First I decided to give up drugs but not alcohol; then I decided to give up everything but the pills. But one day it hit me with the sting of an unexpected slap—it was all or nothing. I didn't have a prayer of a chance unless I gave it all up. What happened next is best described as a grieving process. Drugs and alcohol had been my crutch for so long. I had relied on them to numb my emotions, and now I had to adjust to feeling again. Addiction had also become so entwined with my sense of self that when I gave it up, I felt as though I was losing a huge part of who I was. Later I realized

that addiction was only covering up the real me, and stalling who I could become.

I'd had this notion that life in recovery would be boring. I thought my life would consist of 12-step meetings and dull nights at home. In my first year out of treatment I was able to complete my GED and enroll in college. Then I began to pursue my interest in writing, patched up friendships, and improved my relationship with my family. I began to smile and laugh, and finally felt that I could begin to enjoy my life. Living a life immersed in addiction is not fun or glamorous or exciting.

Yes, there were highs and lows during my first year in recovery, and at times I was tempted to return to drugs as a way to help me cope with my emotions. But when I look back and see the strides I have made, I'm so glad that I resisted.

I have been sober now for three years, and life is an exhilarating, fulfilling adventure filled with all kinds of possibilities. I am able to love, cry, laugh, and address the problems I face without the aid of drugs. The ability to experience life actively has been the most rewarding aspect of sobriety. When you're high, everything loses its color. Moments aren't good or bad, just minutes of your life that have since passed. Time just carries you through, and everything is gray. Today my life is brimming with color and light. I have something to give the people around me, and I have something to give myself. ■

FACT ATTACK

Peer pressure comes in different forms, such as advertisements, and makes us believe that consuming and overconsuming alcohol are commonplace. Then we think there's nothing wrong with that. Ads are on billboards, TV commercials, and movies. Out of more than 81 G-rated movies, almost half showed characters drinking an alcoholic beverage. Another example of peer pressure: one youth at a party says, "I have to drink because these people are so much older, and I have to impress them."

Know that once-a-month binge drinking (which means consuming five or more drinks at one time) can cause blackouts (you don't just pass out). You won't remember while drinking. Just imagine how vulnerable that would make you.

What Is ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS?

Can you explain what Alcoholics Anonymous is? *Martin*
Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share a common bond—an alcohol problem. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees, and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are held in thousands of cities around the world. Many adults and teens have turned their lives around after joining this effective group and getting sober.

Is it possible to use drugs periodically once you quit? *Kate*
Wouldn't that defeat the whole purpose of quitting in the first place? Most of those who give up drugs do so after they've suffered negative consequences as a result of using them. It wouldn't make much sense to go back to the same old behaviors that once resulted in trouble. Most of those with drug problems, who went back to using and tried to control their habits, find that it is nearly impossible. Any way you look at it, drugs are problematic, whether you do them all the time or periodically.



PhotoDisc

My friend is 17 and smokes around her newborn baby. Isn't this dangerous for the child? *Kelli*

Of course it is. Secondhand smoke is a serious issue, especially for children. Studies show that kids exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to have chronic coughs, bronchitis, and ear infections. They usually have less efficient lung function and are much more likely to develop respiratory illness later in life. Try to educate your friend either to give up cigarettes for good or to at least stop smoking around her baby. You'll be doing her and her child a great big favor.

I've given up smoking pot and using other stuff and am bored. Is there something I can do to take my mind off getting high? *Carla*

You've made an excellent decision, and I commend you for it. Giving up dope isn't easy. It oftentimes leaves a dark, empty void in our lives. The secret is filling the void and keeping ourselves happy and busy. Make an effort to map out different interests and goals in your life and then commit yourself to attaining them. Take up old hobbies or find something new and exciting to do. There are literally millions of things with which to keep ourselves occupied. The only way to find them is to search for them. But don't give up. 🍀

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.

When you're a teen, it may seem as though everyone (parents, teachers, coaches, friends) has control over your life except you. While their advice might be genuine and helpful, it's time for you to realize that you don't have to let other people decide your life for you. Taking charge can be as simple as setting goals and making plans to reach them. And there's no better time than the beginning of a new year to get started.

What's a goal? A goal is something you want. But there's more to it than that. A goal is also something you're willing to work for. It's more specific, more defined, and more measurable than a dream. In many ways goals are the stepping-stones to your dreams. They help turn the impossible into the possible. Goal setting breaks down seemingly out-of-reach dreams into small, manageable, practical steps.

Don't be fooled by three common goal myths:

Myth 1: "Who needs goals? I'll be fine without them." Wrong! Success doesn't just happen by accident or sheer luck. It's more often the result of hard work. Striving to meet a goal can be a very satisfying process. You might even find that having a goal gives you extra energy to put forth your best effort.

Myth 2: "You're either born a goal setter or you're not." Contrary to what many people think, goal setting is a skill that can be learned, just like learning to play an instrument or drive a car.

Myth 3: "I have to do it all by myself." It's true that reaching a goal is a personal process. But this doesn't mean you can't ask for help when you need it. Believe it or not, people in your life will most likely want to help in any way they can. Knowing you've got support can make the pursuit of a goal even more exciting.

Contrary to these myths, goals matter. Ask any successful adult or teen: "How did you get where you are in life?" and chances are they'll answer that setting goals was the key. Why are goals so important?

Check out these five reasons that goals are worth having:

1. They help you be who you want to be. When you know how to set a goal and go for it, you chart a path of action that takes you step by step toward the future you want.

2. They boost your confidence. When you set a goal and reach it, you prove to yourself and others that you've got what it takes to get things done.

3. They give your life purpose. Goals give you a sense of direction. When you're going after your

This Is YOUR LIFE

By Beverly Bachel

goals, you're less likely to spend your days feeling bored or wasting your time.

4. They encourage you to trust your decisions. Sometimes it's easy to go along with the crowd and be swayed by what other people want you to do. When you keep your goals in mind, your choices will become clearer. You'll learn to trust your decisions, because they're right for you.

5. They prove that you can make a difference. Whether you want to make a difference in your own life or in someone else's, goal setting helps you achieve what you set out to do—one step at a time.

Chances are you already have hopes and dreams for your future. It's fun to imagine the amazing things you might do someday. But what about today? Are you doing anything right now to help make your dreams come true? If not, now is the perfect time to start.

Some goals, such as doing well on this week's test, are short-term. Others, such as attending college on a scholarship, may require a lot more time and effort. These are long-term goals. Usually long-term goals are broken down into several smaller, short-term goals that help keep you moving. But short-term goals don't always have to support long-term goals. For example, you could set a goal to clean your room by the time your favorite TV show comes on. Setting and achieving small goals such as this can help you develop the skills you'll need for reaching bigger goals later on.

Labeling goals as short- or long-term isn't the most important thing. What's more important is making sure that goals have the power of the three P's.

Positive: Who could get fired up about this goal: "Practice my jump shot so I don't look like a loser on the court"? Goals should be phrased positively if they are to help you feel good about yourself and what you're trying to accomplish. A better alternative is: "Practice my jump shot for 15 minutes three times a week so I can help my team win more games."

Personal: Goals must be personal. They have to reflect your own dreams and values, not those of friends, family, or the media. When they do, you'll be more motivated to succeed and will take greater pride in your accomplishments.

Possible: When you're setting goals, it's important to consider what's actually possible and within your control. Getting an A in class may be possible for someone already earning a B, but unrealistic for someone who's struggling. A more reasonable goal might be to improve your grade by one letter, or to spend 30 minutes a day studying for the class.

Although no goal-setting method is foolproof, it has been proved that writing down goals and developing an action plan greatly increases their chances

of success. The most successful action plans are step by step. That's why a goal ladder—in which each rung represents a different step—can be a useful tool. It creates a powerful visual image of where you're headed and what actions you must take along the way.

Here are the five steps to building a goal ladder:

1. Write it down. At the top of a sheet of paper, write down your goal (positive, personal, and possible) and a realistic deadline by which you intend to accomplish it. Like goals, deadlines should be as specific as possible. "Before school starts" is more specific than "sometime this year." "By June 22" is even more specific.

2. Brainstorm. The next step is for you to brainstorm everything you'll need to do to reach your goal. Ask yourself what it will take to move from one rung to the next. Write down all your ideas and then review the list and eliminate any that aren't useful.

3. Create the goal ladder. Number the remaining ideas or list them in a logical order. Think about what action you must take first. The first step, or "rung," represents the first thing you need to do. What comes next? And what comes after that? There are no right or wrong answers—you should just put the ideas in an order that makes sense to you.

4. Set deadlines for each step. Keep the goal's deadline in mind. Establish deadlines for each step by asking, "How long will this step take to complete, and when do I want to complete it?"

5. Start climbing. Once you have your goal ladder in place, you can begin climbing the rungs to success. Don't be afraid to ask for help along the way. And remember, it's the journey that matters most. 📌

Beverly Bachel is a writer, artist, consultant, business owner, and author of *What Do You Really Want? How to Set a Goal and Go for It! A Guide for Teens* (Free Spirit, 2001). She's also the founder of Idea Girls, a group of entrepreneurs dedicated to developing products that inspire others to pursue their dreams.



PictureQuest



GOOD TIMES

What's your idea of a good time? Kickin' back with a few friends or getting sloppy drunk? Puttin' on the sticks and heading for the slopes or vomiting up your toes after a "foam party"? Just how bright are you? The following quiz will tell you whether your "bulb" is a "100 watter," a "10 watter," or just plain "burned out."

- 1. When I see kids on MTV partying with booze, ecstasy, or other drugs,**
 - a. it looks like they're having fun.
 - b. I think, *That is my idea of a good time!*
 - c. I wonder how they can be so dumb.
- 2. At the parties I attend,**
 - a. there is booze around, but I can take it or leave it.
 - b. the fun doesn't start until someone brings the beer.
 - c. if there's alcohol around, I don't know about it.
- 3. Thinking I can't have a good time unless I drink**
 - a. is probably true for some people.
 - b. makes sense. It helps me relax and lets me be me.
 - c. is ridiculous. If I have a good time at a party, I want to be able to remember it the next morning, minus a headache.
- 4. When it comes to drinking booze,**
 - a. I can take it or leave it.
 - b. I drink as much as I want. Bring it on, baby!
 - c. I steer my way clear.
- 5. The last time I got drunk was**
 - a. the only time.
 - b. not such a big deal.
 - c. never. There are more than 3 million alcoholic teens in the U.S., and I don't plan to be one of them.
- 6. I think the legal drinking age should be**
 - a. lowered.
 - b. like who cares? Kids will drink when they want to anyway.



Terrill Thomas

- c. right where it is. Eighty-seven percent of adults who drink began before age 21. Twenty-five percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. is drunk by underage drinkers. Most teens who try booze will continue using it.
7. **If I'm at a party and my best friend (and my only way home) has had too much to drink, I**
 a. try to sober him up before we get into the car.
 b. say, Hey, he's a good driver. What do you want me to do about it? Walk home?
 c. take his car keys from him and either drive him home, call a taxi, or call my dad to come get me.
8. **The crowd I hang out with**
 a. drinks booze, but that doesn't affect me and my choices.
 b. gets down and dirty drunk on a regular basis.
 c. doesn't need drugs or booze to have a great time together.
9. **When I hear that one third of all high school students binge drink (five or more drinks in a row at one occasion) at least once a month, I**
 a. don't binge, so why should I care?
 b. ask, "Where's the party?"
 c. feel sorry for them that they can't have a good time without being blasted out of their minds. Do you know how gross you look tossing your cookies all over your shoes?

Answers:

- If your answers were mostly a's, you're a 10 watter—there's a light upstairs, but not too bright.
- If you answered mostly b's, you're burned out, and you'd better change your lightbulb before you crash in the dark.
- If your answers were mostly c's, you're a "100 watter," and your future is neon-bright. 🌟

DRINKING



TO DEATH

By Christy Amwake as told to Christy Heitger-Casbon

Finally—Senior Skip Day is here!” my friend Amanda* exclaimed. “Today’s gonna be awesome! We’ll lounge on the beach, play volleyball, scope guys.”

“But we’re sophomores,” I said.

Amanda rolled her eyes in frustration. “Who cares? This is our chance to hang with seniors. Please come!” she pleaded, tugging at my arm.

“My parents would kill me if they found out I ditched school,” I said.

“They’ll never know,” Amanda promised.

“Let’s go.”

Bottoms Up

When Amanda and I got to the beach, I couldn’t believe my eyes. Hundreds of kids milled around on the sand, like an army of hungry ants invading a picnic. We scouted the area and finally found a prime spot to perch. After a couple of hours baking in the sun, I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was my friend Mike, inviting me to join his party down the beach.

I couldn’t believe Mike was including me. His friends were so cool—and all of them were seniors.

“Go ahead,” Amanda said. “I’m gonna play volleyball for a while. I’ll catch up with you later.”

I felt funny abandoning Amanda, but I wasn’t about to pass up a chance to hang with the cool crowd.

As we approached the group, I noticed everyone was holding Styrofoam cups.

“Wanna sip?” Mike asked.

The intense afternoon sun beat down on my already-burned shoulders. Dying of thirst, I peered into his cup.

“Water?” I asked.

Mike smiled. “Nope—it’s vodka. Want some?”

I’d never had liquor in my life and didn’t want any now, but everyone was drinking. I could feel dozens of eyes staring at me. Tiny beads of sweat formed at my temples and slowly crept down my neck.

Oh, what’s the big deal? I thought. *Just one sip.* I gingerly lifted the cup to my lips, opened my mouth, and swallowed. As the warm liquor slid down my throat, my impulse was to crinkle up my nose in disgust.

Gross! How does anyone stomach this stuff? I wondered. It tasted like rubbing alcohol.

“Whadaya think?” Mike asked.

I grinned and nodded, trying not to gag.

“Here,” he said, topping off my drink. “We’ve got plenty.”

Just then my cell phone rang. It was Mom calling to tell me that the school secretary had reported my absence. Busted! I knew I’d be in big trouble when I got home.

“Problem?” Mike asked upon noticing my worried expression.

“Yeah. I’ll probably be grounded for the rest of the year,” I said.

“Hey, then you might as well enjoy this afternoon,” Mike said with a wink, nudging me to take another swig.

My mind swirled with mixed emotions. On one hand, I knew my parents were already ticked and would be even more upset if they knew I was drinking alcohol, but on the other hand, I thought, *I’m already skipping school. Why not act a little crazy while I’m at it?* This was my opportunity to “live on the wild side.” I took another sip.

“Come oooon, Christy,” Mike teased me. “You’ll hafta drink faster than that if you’re gonna catch up with us.” Sure enough, everyone already seemed pretty wasted—laughing, dancing, and goofing off.

Getting drunk looked like fun.

"OK," I said. "Fill 'er up!"

"Now you're talkin'," Mike said.

The Brink of Death

For the next hour I drank—fast. I figured the more I drank, the happier I'd be. But after downing several cups of vodka, I stopped remembering how happy I was. In fact, I stopped remembering, period.

Before long, Amanda came looking for me.

"Let's go," she said.

"Naaah," I whined. "I wanna stay with these guys!"

"No!" Amanda insisted. "You came with me, and you're going home with me."

I reluctantly got in her car, but soon after leaving the beach, we pulled into a gas station to use the bathroom. As I clumsily stumbled out of the front seat, I tripped and hit my head on the curb. Amanda helped me up, but a few moments later I collapsed—and stopped breathing.

The gas station attendant called 911, and within minutes the ambulance and a sheriff's deputy arrived. The deputy called my mom to tell her that I'd bumped my head and that she and my dad needed to meet us at the hospital. Mom assumed they needed a signature for permission to treat me, but when my parents arrived in the ER, they were horrified by what they heard.

"Your daughter's situation is very serious," a doctor told my parents.

"We're doing all we can to save her."

"What?" Mom gasped in disbelief, her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "I thought she just bumped her head."

"Does she have a concussion?" Dad asked.

The doctor shook his head. "The bump's not the problem," he continued. "Christy has ingested a lot of alcohol. Her blood-alcohol level was measured at near-lethal levels. We pumped a liter of fluid from her stomach."

Dad's heart dropped as he reached for Mom's shaking hands. "Will she be OK?" he asked.

The doctor hesitated for a moment, then said, "She's in a coma right now and isn't breathing on her own. We won't know if she's suffered any brain damage until she wakes up—if she wakes up."

All the color drained from Mom's cheeks as her

knees buckled in shock. "If? What do you mean if? How can she be in such bad shape? I spoke to her just a few hours ago."

"We want to see her," Dad said.

My parents entered my hospital room, and Mom took my pale, ice-cold hand in hers. I already looked dead.

"She's hanging on," the doctor said. "But we're going to send her via Life Flight to another hospital."

"She'll survive, right?" Mom asked in desperation, her lips quivering with fear.

"We're doing all we can, but there's no guarantee that your daughter will make it to the other hospital," the doctor replied somberly. "With alcohol poisoning, respiration is the first thing to go, and the heart is the second."

A Second Chance

By the grace of God, my heart didn't stop, nor did my will to live. Two days later my eyes fluttered and slowly opened to the sight of my parents' tear-stained faces. They looked relieved, but I was disoriented and afraid. I didn't know why there was a jumble of tubes attached to my arms and stuck down my throat.

I tried communicating with my parents by using sign language, but they didn't understand. So they started through the alphabet, and whenever they got to the letter I was thinking of, I would nod. Their eyes filled with tears when they discovered the phrase I was spelling out: "Hold me."

While I recuperated, I reflected on the poor decision I'd made to drink that day at the beach—a decision that nearly cost me my life. Although I didn't die that day, I did suffer a huge loss—my parents' trust. I felt ashamed for skipping school, getting drunk, and making Mom and Dad endure

such agonizing, emotional anguish. That day will forever be etched in my mind as the worst and best day of my life. At age 15 I nearly died, but miraculously I got a second chance. Not everyone does. ■

*Names of friends have been changed.

It's been more than five years since Christy Amwake's near-fatal alcohol poisoning. She's currently pursuing an electrical engineering degree from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. Christy Heitger-Cashon is a freelance writer living in Tallahassee, Florida.



Don't Get in



That Car

The Facts:

During a typical weekend, one teenager dies every hour in a traffic accident—and 50 percent of those accidents involve alcohol.

Even Being a Little Tipsy Can Be Tragic:

In 2000 more 17- to 22-year-olds died in low-blood-alcohol-concentration crashes than any other age group. That includes the times when the driver's alcohol level was just below the legal limit.

Getting Arrested for Drunk Driving Isn't Just Criminal; It's Also Expensive:

In Virginia, for example, the average drunk driving arrest will cost about \$5,600 (that's the price of either a good used car, 375 CDs, or 800 \$7 movie tickets).

What You Can Do:

If your friends insist on having alcohol at a party, you can't stop them. But you know it's illegal if they're underage. In honor of Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month, in December *Teen People* asks that you take the following steps:

• Plan Ahead:

The time to decide who's driving is not after you've had a couple of beers. Decide on the designated driver or arrange another way to get home *before* you go out.

• Watch Out for Your Friends:

If you think they have had too much to drink, try to get some food in them (to slow down further alcohol absorption) and talk to them calmly about how they're getting home. That way, it's less likely to turn into a drunken argument. Don't let them drive.

• Be a Concerned Host:

If you're serving alcohol at a party (which, again, is illegal if minors are present), collect people's keys as they arrive and have someone sober hand them back out. Serve lots of food and nonalcoholic drinks, and never push alcohol on your guests! They may be too polite or embarrassed to say no.

From *Teen People*, December 2002/January 2003.
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In Sydney, Australia, a 29-year-old bodybuilder, happily married long enough to have had four children and with no prior history of aggression, took a hammer and battered his wife to death. He then killed himself.

Another Sydney bodybuilder, 22, not previously known for violence, was out with a woman he knew. Then, he stated, "Something snapped." He slammed her head against a wall until she died. Police said it was one of the most brutal attacks they had ever encountered. Both bodybuilders had been using steroids. Both assaults were called classic examples of steroid rage—'roid rage.

'Roid rage—uncontrollable bursts of anger and violence by steroid users—is one of the darkest, least-understood aspects of steroid abuse. Steroids, particularly when taken in high doses and in combinations used by athletes and bodybuilders to build strength and muscle, may cause radical changes in behavior. Mild-mannered individuals have been known to become raging monsters. Others become paranoid, believing that people are plotting to hurt them. While most of those experiencing 'roid rage are men, women can be affected too.

Many of those who experience 'roid rage come from caring families. Most have never used other drugs. Most have never been in trouble with the police. Many have no history of aggression. But what is most frightening is the fact that they do not feel sorry for their actions afterward, no matter how violent their behavior.

'Roid rage is elusive. The evidence is hearsay incidents related by steroid users and abusers. As in the cases of the Sydney bodybuilders, 'roid rage is sometimes presumed by the police, based on a violent crime

investigation. At least 20 other murders have been attributed to 'roid rage. The level that triggers 'roid rage seems unpredictable. While the married bodybuilder was taking massive doses of steroids, the younger one was not. If his actions were really 'roid rage, it was caused by the smallest dose of steroids yet recorded.

No one has done a full, controlled scientific study of 'roid rage—a double-blind test in which half of the participants get steroids and the rest get placebos (a harmless substance, like sugar or starch, disguised to look like the drug being tested). One double-blind steroid study done by a university in California looked at whether steroids actually helped build muscle. Because no increased violence in the steroid users was seen among the 43 volunteers, some claim it proved 'roid rage is a myth. This study was not looking at violence, however. Steroid doses were smaller than those often used by athletes, and only emotionally stable men took part.

To study whether steroids cause violent behavior you would need another test—one in which participants get very high doses of steroids, and are put under stress. Some bodybuilders use steroid doses 20 times greater than the maximum recommended—enough to damage health. No ethical scientist or doctor would run a drug study knowingly using doses that might damage health.

That leaves statistics as the

main way to study 'roid rage—add up incidents and compare them to steroid use. It works if there is enough information. Statistics first linked tobacco use to cancer. Those studies used histories of tens of millions of smokers over decades. Even then, initially the link was slim. Fewer people use steroids. Most do so illegally and do not want researchers studying them.

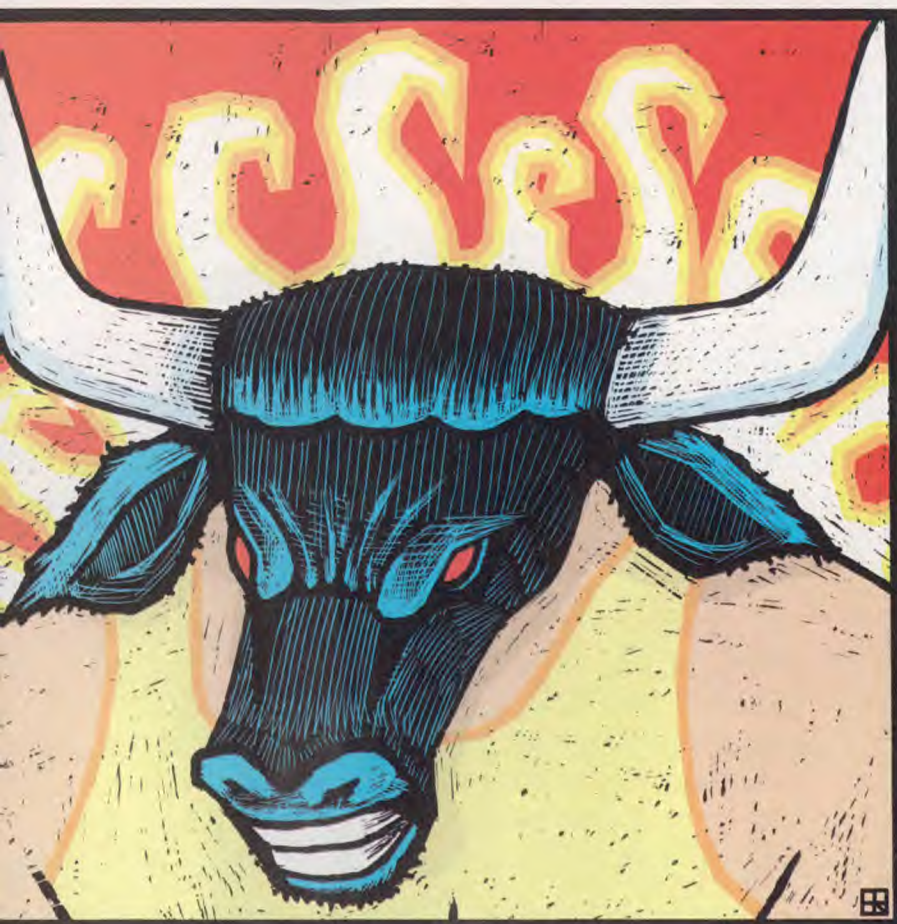
Some statistical studies have been done with small groups. Three studies done between 1980 and 1990 showed that more than half of the steroid users demonstrated greater irritability and aggression while on steroids. These studies involved fewer than 100 people. It may be a long time before statistics tell us if 'roid rage is real.

For now, the world is divided into believers and skeptics.

Jesse Ventura is a believer. Elected as governor of Minnesota on the Reform Party ticket, Jesse Ventura was once a professional wrestler. In his autobiography, *I Ain't Got Time to Bleed*, Ventura spoke frankly about steroids: "... guys who took a lot of them were susceptible to what became known as 'roid rage.' They'd suddenly snap under the slightest pressure and would go into a frenzy." Ventura, once a Navy SEAL—as dangerous as

IT'S THE RAGE

By Mark N. Lardas



Brandon Reese

it gets in the Navy—decided that steroids were too dangerous for him.

Richard L. Sandlin, a weightlifting and bodybuilding champion, is also a believer. He testified on steroid use before a congressional committee. He said that steroid use made him aggressive and combative. Ironically, two years after he quit using steroids, he began setting power-lifting records.

Parker Chamberlin is a believer now too. One night, after weeks of massive steroid use, he went into a rage and killed his mother. He was 15 years old and an honor student and high school football star.

Many other users play down the serious effects of 'roid rage. On an Internet message board steroid users were asked if they'd ever seen or experienced 'roid rage. More than half of the 45 users who posted an

answer denied that 'roid rage exists.

Some stated that they had never experienced it. Others felt that the term 'roid rage was used to excuse violence that would have happened anyway. One user stated, "Roid rage is in your head. If you are mentally strong, you can control it." Another said, "Anger is a state of mind."

Others, nearly half of the users, stated that they had been through rage events, or that they had friends or family who claimed that the steroid user was affected by anger. One user claimed that he had not experienced 'roid rage, but that his girlfriend had broken up with him when she claimed that she saw it in him. For some steroid users denial is just a river in Egypt (as the saying goes).

Some said that steroid use made them feel irritable or angry. One

user said, "The results are worth the anger and 'roid rage." However, his friends might not agree.

Several felt that mixing painkillers with steroids made anger harder to control. One stated, "Don't take a painkiller on top of steroids or you're likely to kill someone. . . ." Great advice, but if you are taking steroids to improve athletic performance, that means you are competing. Competition means you could get hurt. Injuries mean pain. Pain you could kill to get relief from—and you might kill if you do.

None of these stories—pro or con—proves that 'roid rage exists or that it is a myth. Because people are different, steroids have different effects. Some people can take steroids like jelly beans without going into 'roid rage. Others snap after taking a few pills.

Scary?

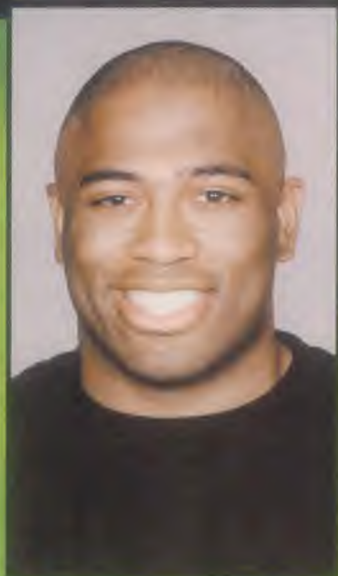
Yes.

We know that steroids hurt the body if misused. 'Roid rage is not cancer or a heart problem that could happen in 20 years. However, it may be life or death today or next week.

Bulked up on steroids, you are stronger than most of those around you. You can kill without meaning to do so. When rage takes over, you are likely to go after the person closest to you. That is most likely to be a friend, a brother, a sister, or a parent.

Most people use steroids without becoming uncontrollably violent. Some lose it. When you take steroids you gamble your health. You may choose to use steroids, anyway, despite health risks. Just remember: you do not just bet your life when you take steroids. You bet the lives of your family and friends, too. ■

Seattle Seahawks running back Shaun Alexander Tells His Story.

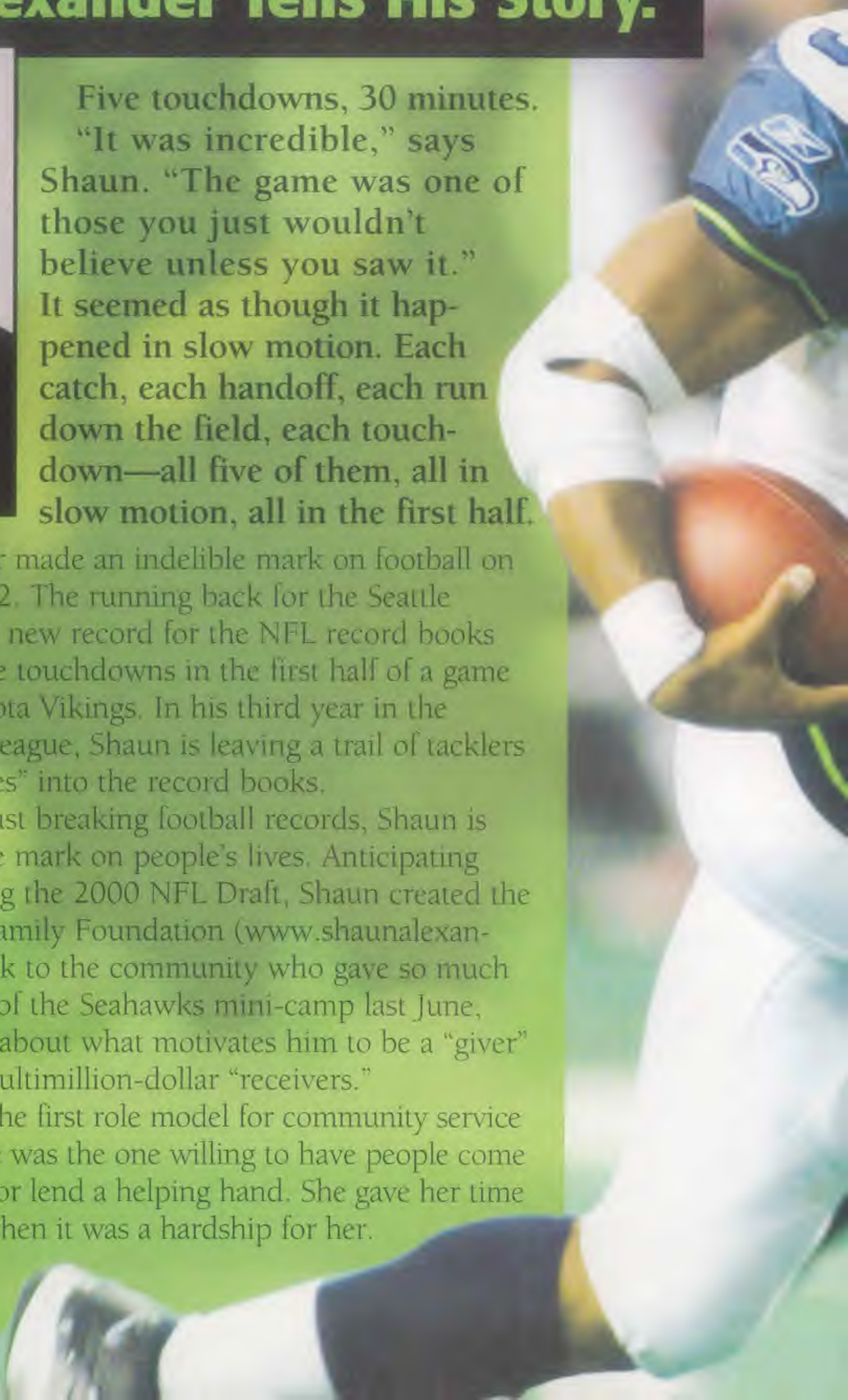


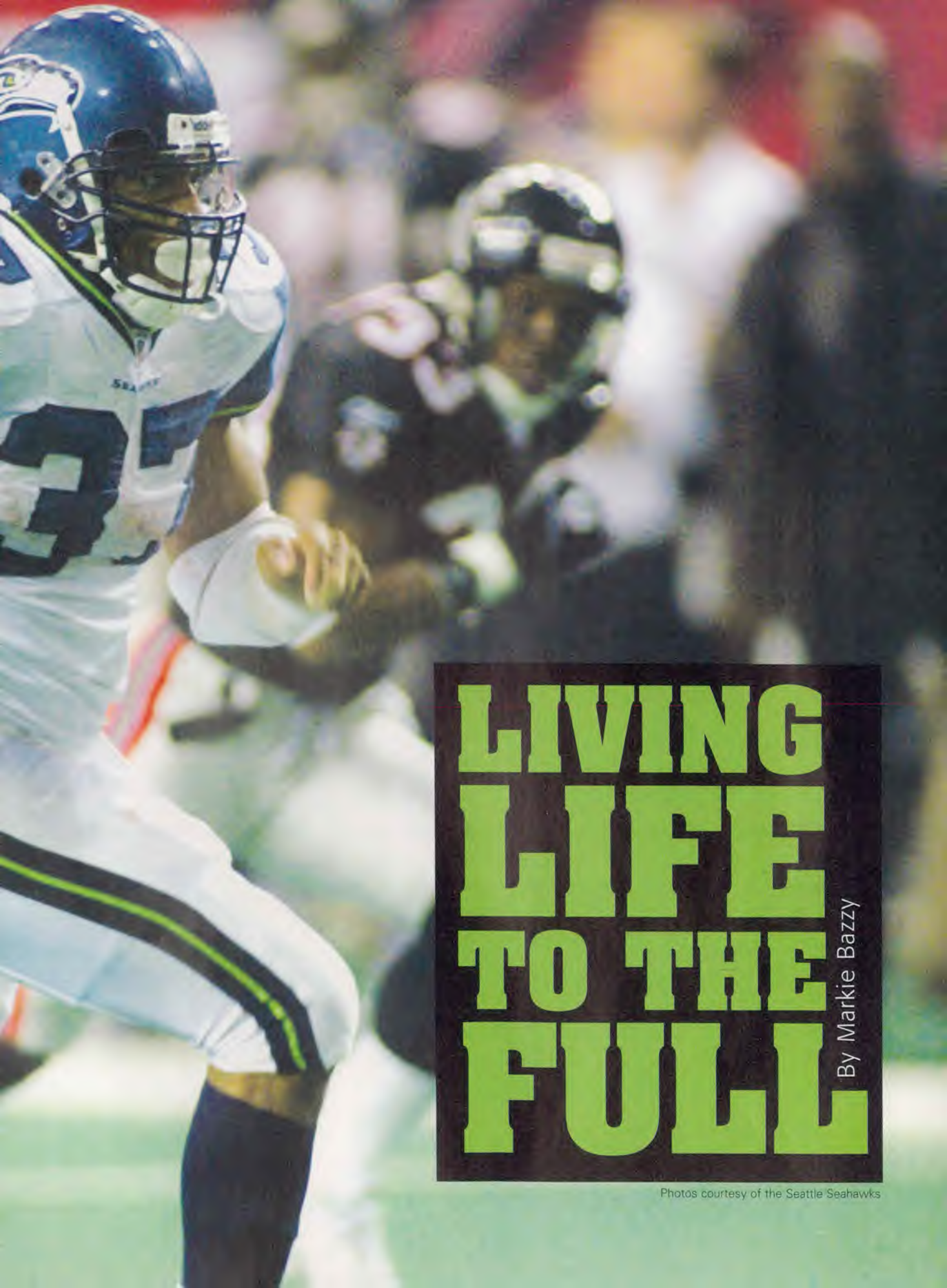
Five touchdowns, 30 minutes. “It was incredible,” says Shaun. “The game was one of those you just wouldn’t believe unless you saw it.” It seemed as though it happened in slow motion. Each catch, each handoff, each run down the field, each touchdown—all five of them, all in slow motion, all in the first half.

Shaun Alexander made an indelible mark on football on September 29, 2002. The running back for the Seattle Seahawks created a new record for the NFL record books when he scored five touchdowns in the first half of a game against the Minnesota Vikings. In his third year in the National Football League, Shaun is leaving a trail of tacklers behind as he “rushes” into the record books.

But more than just breaking football records, Shaun is making an indelible mark on people’s lives. Anticipating being drafted during the 2000 NFL Draft, Shaun created the Shaun Alexander Family Foundation (www.shaunalexander.org) to give back to the community who gave so much to him. At the end of the Seahawks mini-camp last June, Shaun and I spoke about what motivates him to be a “giver” in an industry of multimillion-dollar “receivers.”

Shaun says that the first role model for community service was his mother. She was the one willing to have people come over to their house or lend a helping hand. She gave her time and money, often when it was a hardship for her.





LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

By Markie Bazzy

Photos courtesy of the Seattle Seahawks

"That's how I thought good people were supposed to live," Shaun remembers. Then came college at the University of Alabama. As a player for the Crimson Tide, Shaun had the opportunity to speak at banquets and be around people who had charitable foundations.

"I realized they impacted a lot of people who

earth. The youth will eventually become the grown-ups. If they teach their kids right, then those kids will be able to take care of the next kids, and so on, like a chain reaction."

The Shaun Alexander Family Foundation provides Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for disadvantaged families in Seattle, Washington;



would've had tougher lives without [the help they received]," he recalled. "I want to be able to help other people, too, even if they didn't know I could provide a way for them."

Two of Shaun's coaches, one from high school and one from college, had sons born with a disability—one with Down's syndrome and the other with a form of mental retardation. "I saw the kind of men they were, and I wanted to help people who were in their shoes," Shaun said. So he set up his foundation to help at-risk kids, troubled kids, and physically- and mentally-challenged kids.

"I think the biggest thing is that I always want to be able to provide knowledge for everybody on

Alabama; and Kentucky—all places Shaun has lived and played football. Shaun says that it is amazing the kind of people the foundation helps. "They are people who don't just have their hands out, but who want to turn around and give what they can give—prayer and blessings."

One year, Andrew Zow, then starting quarterback for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide, accompanied Shaun's crew as they delivered dinners. He asked a mother if he could pray for her and her family. She replied, "I need to pray for you and give thanks to the Lord for sending people like you."

Prior to the Christmas season, volunteers for the foundation purchased Christmas presents for

underprivileged children. They asked a brother and sister if they could have anything that they wanted for Christmas what it would be. The sister answered, "My brother wants a bike, so my gift would be a bike for my brother." Then they asked the brother, and he said, "I know my sister wants a doll, so I don't want to get anything. I just want a doll for my sister." These are the kind of families Shaun loves to help.

Shaun doesn't just donate money to his foundation or find volunteers for the foundation's activities; he's a hands-on participant. He speaks at youth rallies, fund-raising dinners, and loves to get kids involved in his projects. For one such occasion he went into a school to film an announcement for an upcoming youth rally. He went to a classroom where the kids were acting up to ask

In addition, for elementary students it's an opportunity to put math skills into practice. They are asked to use mathematical equations to discover Shaun's average and rushing yardage needed to get 1,000, 1,200, or 1,500 yards. For junior and high school students, it gives them a good guy to watch (although Shaun is the first to admit that he's not perfect) and some great prizes, plus for those who do really well, an opportunity to attend a professional football game.

You don't have to know Shaun personally to know that he likes to enjoy life. Beginning with the after-football parties he threw as a kid, those good times followed him through adolescence into adulthood.

"I'm always having fun. We throw parties and barbeques here all the time, and there's not any

SHAUN'S TOP 5

Reasons teenagers should get involved in community service:

- You will learn how to be a giver.
- You will find out who you really are.
- You will find tons of ways to help people.
- You will build character.
- You may find what you want to do for life.

them to help with his video. "I went to a boy who was lying on a desk and said, 'I need your help.' I think it was one of the few times that [the boy] ever saw somebody who he thought he couldn't help," Shaun laughed as he remembered. The boy helped Shaun make the video and ended up bringing several friends to the youth rally that night. "It's really cool to be an impact on somebody's life like that. I love seeing teenagers getting ready to explore a new part of their lives. I like that about kids, and that's what I try to put into them."

Last year Shaun instituted the "Rushing for Dollars" program for elementary, junior high, and high schools in the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, area. Students in participating schools get pledges for how many yards Shaun rushes in a season. Fifty percent of the money raised stays with the school. Forty-five percent goes to Shaun's foundation, and 5 percent supports the Tuscaloosa News' Newspapers in Education program.

alcohol or drugs, but there's tons of people having a good time. When you're around me long enough, you realize that everything you're doing is fun, but there's no alcohol or drugs."

Someone once asked Shaun if he was surprised that he scored five touchdowns in one game. Shaun's answer probably surprised the questioner. "My goal was to score five touchdowns in the first half because I knew it had never been done before."

Shaun lives his life by three things. First, he places God before everything in his life—including football and fun. Second, he sets incredibly high goals. Whether it was a perfect school attendance or scoring touchdowns now, he sets "crazy high goals" (as he calls them) and works hard to accomplish them. And third, he just has fun. "I think if everybody does those three things, then they're going to live a great life. They are going to make the world an awesome place," says Shaun. 🍀



TRUANCY CONFRONTED

By Shirley M. Pooley

The smiling teenager skipped from the courthouse with a cell phone attached to her ear. In a voice ringing with excitement, she said, "And I have to write a 1,000-word essay on my goals."

"What did you think of your experience in Judge Garbolino's courtroom?" I asked her.

"I was really scared at first, but the interview was a good experience," she replied.

A preventive approach to the problem of truancy grew out of the frustration and concern of people such as Karen Green, coordinator of Peer Court, and

Gary Pantaleoni, vice principal of Placer High School.

Since the opening of the Galleria, a shopping area in Roseville, California, petty crimes such as stealing, committed by teens, have increased. Most of those defendants have to appear before Peer Court, where it is found that they also have a truancy problem. Schools don't get paid if a student isn't in their seat. A Placer High student who is truant three to five times has to appear before the Student Attendance Review Board and can be suspended for three to five days.

Two years ago Green and Pantaleoni spearheaded the Placer Truancy Panel program that is operating today. Karen Green, Gary Pantaleoni, Judge J. Richard Couzens, and four students who completed the Peer Court program, appeared before the school board to present their rehabilitative program. A panel of three to five students, who had overcome their truancy problems, would serve as a panel to interview their peers and decide on a fair sentence. The school board approved their innovative program.

The primary focus was to determine the underlying problems causing truancy. At a mandatory session the offender meets with Karen Green to work out a plan and take responsibility for their educational goals. The student's parents are encouraged to attend the court when their teen appears before the panel.

"The truant student seldom participates in sports or other extracurricular activities at school or in the community," Green states. "They feel hopeless and have given up on themselves. Our biggest challenge is to get the teen connected to a program or a mentor in the community."

Some of the reasons given for students skipping school include: having to baby-sit younger siblings, an unresolved conflict with a teacher, or the inability to understand required lesson material. One girl stayed home to hide the bruises from a beating by her boyfriend.

A plan of rehabilitation could include tutoring, community service, conflict resolution with Counselor Pat Malberg, or student-teacher mediation.

The defendant guilty of truancy is confronted with tough questions such as "Are you aware that almost anything you receive today will be less than you receive from the regular court system or the School Attendance Review Board?" "Do you realize that your parents can be ordered to court and convicted of a crime and be fined for your nonattendance?"

On May 14 in an introductory talk before a crowd of students and parents in Judge Garbolino's courtroom, Green spoke of the opportunities that the program offered: "You have the choice of negotiating with your parents. Or would you rather have a probation officer in your face? Or have the court parent you?"

At the monthly session there were three panels. Three students sat at each table in readiness to do the interviewing. Each defendant was called forth to vow on the Bible to tell the truth. The interviewers

were given a list of questions to ask each student. Several parents spoke before the panel members. After the interviews, the three panel members left the room to discuss the various sentences. Upon their return, they presented them to the nervous defendants.

The sentencing options include:

1. Serving on a Peer Court jury the number of times stipulated.
2. Suspended driver's license, giving the length of time.
3. Participating in a truancy focus group.
4. Mediation (a parent, teacher, student could all be participants).
5. Panel members are free to come up with sentence requirements of their own.

Adam James Perron, 17, has been one of the panel members. Now a junior, he relates, "In my sophomore year I held the record for truancy. I thought school wasn't very challenging, and I had better things to do."

When he moved to Kawaii, Hawaii, with his parents they found that the schools there were on strike. Adam lost credits for his entire sophomore year. Upon returning to Auburn, California, he counseled with Karen Green, and they laid out a plan for him to catch up. Adam's been taking 10 classes at Maidu High School, and he attends two classes at Placer High. A part-time employee at The Boys & Girls Club, Adam tutors and helps the kids. "I'm proud of myself," he states.

Lisa Bell, a 15-year-old student in the program, had difficulty concentrating in class as a result of attention deficit disorder (ADD). She passed her time daydreaming about working with animals. In counseling sessions with Green, she fulfilled her community service requirement by assisting a veterinarian. Lisa also received help writing a résumé that resulted in a part-time summer job working for the vet.

"Karen helped me. I found someone who cared about me," Lisa said. Mrs. Bell, Lisa's mother, found that appearing in court with her daughter was a very frightening experience. "However, what I thought would be a very negative experience turned into a positive one," she added.

At this writing, 165 students have participated in this program. The Placer Truancy Panel is the only one of its kind in Placer County. Sacramento County is initiating a similar program thanks to the guidance of students, teachers, and mentors in their community. We can be proud of their efforts. They are all winners. ■

THE GUM WRAPPER

Rushing into the girls' rest room, Frankie put her book bag down on a ledge and went over to the mirror. Nothing had changed. There she was, the same old plain—no, ugly—Frankie. Just the same as before it had happened.

Looking with disbelief at her reflection, she recalled the still-unbelievable moment. She had been walking down the corridor, when she collided with a solid bulk standing in her way.

"Oh—sorry," she had stammered, glancing up. This was when she had felt that loathsome red flush crawling up her neck at the same time she became aware of the disturbing odor of Jeff Haynes' cologne and his hand lightly touching her arm.

"Thought I was goin' to have to throw a block there to get you to stop." Jeff had stood smiling down at her with that adorable lazy grin. His eyes had slid over her easily. "Where you been keepin' yourself?"

Frankie had scrambled desperately for a clever retort. "Oh—just around," she had replied lamely.

"Well, look, Frankie, I've got to beat it to history class. But how's about goin' to the Teen Club with me Friday night?"

Frankie had wondered if she had heard him correctly. "Sure, Jeff," she had stammered. "That would be great."

"Super. I'll pick you up about 7:00," he had said, playfully poking a chewing-gum wrapper behind her ear before taking off.

Why had she accepted so quickly? Why couldn't she think of anything original to say? But he had asked her for a date when there were dozens of other girls dying for him to look their way. Jeff, the star quarterback on the football team, wore his good looks and popularity with casual indifference. Mother kept telling her that looks were fine but that people really like you for what you are. But it was difficult to believe that Jeff had suddenly discovered something special about her personality. Frankie hitched up her book bag and strode briskly to the lunchroom, her head held higher than usual.

She spotted Melissa beckoning frantically to her from a table in the middle. There was no escaping Melissa. Pulling Frankie down to a seat beside her, Melissa was choking from drinking her soda and laughing at the same time.

"Frankie, have you heard the latest?" she sputtered. "Guess what some of those crazy idiots Jeff Haynes runs around with are doing now! They've set up a pool and are giving \$50 to the boy who can get the most girls to go all the way with him between now and homecoming. And so Jeff and all the rest of his buddies are going

around lining up dates with all these queer nerds. And they are going to get proof by . . ." Melissa continued talking, but Frankie had tuned her out; she was concentrating on tearing the gum wrapper that was in her hand into tiny shreds and dropping them on the table.

Suddenly Frankie blurted out, "Uh, Melissa, I've got to go to my locker before class. Talk to you later." Rushing from the room, she was amazed that she could continue to act normal when there was this knife turning around and around inside her.

Just as Frankie reached the sanctuary of the deserted hall, the floodgate of tears broke. Spotting the counselor's office, she bolted inside just to gain some privacy.

Trying to talk between a paroxysm of weeping, Frankie blurted out, "Don't say anything, please—just let me sit here for a minute."

Miss Lanier started to get up from her desk, but seemed to think better of it. "If that is what you want, Frankie, but you might feel better if you get off your chest whatever has you upset."

"I was such a fool, such a silly fool," Frankie hiccuped.

"You are a human being. And we've all acted foolishly from time to time," Miss Lanier said gently.

"But the whole school will know what a fool I was! How could I in my right mind have thought Jeff Haynes would ask me for a date? He only wanted to see how far he could . . ." Here the uncontrolled sobbing started again.

Miss Lanier sat for a minute or two in silence. "Frankie, you know I want to sympathize with you, and that might make you feel

By Betty Majette Murphy



better. But I don't think that would really be of help to you. Do you know Jeff very well?"

"No, he's never even spoken to me before. I suppose I was so flattered that he asked me out, I just didn't think very clearly."

"Well, in my opinion, Frankie, you were doing Jeff Haynes a favor by agreeing to go out with him. You are an outstanding young woman."

"How can you say that? I'm ugly, ugly, ugly! I'm just a complete disaster! I never know what to say to boys. I blush whenever one looks at me."

"I'd like to give you a couple of things to think about, Frankie. First, you have to assume some of the responsibility for this situation. You did agree to go out with Jeff, even though you didn't know him. The other thing I want you to think about is that if you think you are a 'complete disaster,' then others will probably see you in the same light. But if you recognize that you, Frankie, are a special person, unlike any other, with unique qualities, people will want to know what you are all about . . . what makes you tick. If you are dissatisfied with your looks"—

here Frankie nodded vigorously—"they can be changed with little trouble—by making sure you have scrupulously clean hair and complexion and attractive nails. You need to wear becoming clothes that reflect your personality, not just what's the fad. But it's the inside of you that's going to take consistent, hard work on your part. I want you to repeat after me: 'I am a worthwhile person who is interesting to be around.'"

Frankie repeated it dutifully, staring at her feet. Miss Lanier continued, "Please say it like you mean it, looking me in the eye." Frankie did as she was asked. Miss Lanier continued.

"Now look at yourself in the mirror every morning and keep saying that to yourself until it sinks in. If you do this faithfully, I promise it will work! Now, what can you do about Jeff?"

Frankie looked at Miss Lanier thoughtfully before answering. "I'm going to find him and say, 'I found out what you're up to, and I think you're a real scumbag. I'd rather drop dead than go out with you.'" She blew her nose and wiped her eyes, even managing a faint smile before she left Miss Lanier's office. As she glanced toward Miss Lanier on her way out, she saw that she was nodding her head in approval.

Wanting to catch Jeff before the end of school, Frankie pushed her way through the crowd. When she spied Jeff cornering another girl, Frankie butted in, looking him straight in the eye. "Excuse me, Jeff, but I've got something to tell you . . ."

As she found her way to her last class, a big grin spread across her face. "Man, that felt good, really, really good!" ■



that little trip take?"

Well, the in thing now is to count those steps. Some say we should not be taking less than 4,000 steps per day (which according to my calculations is a little more than a mile). Others, in the know, say try for at least 10,000 steps. If you're sitting on the couch right now



wondering what your step count might be, why not make an investment in a pedometer—they range from \$10 to \$20 at any sports store.

But don't stop there! Go a step fur-

ther. Why not take a personal and honest inventory? Are you a sideliner or a participant in things that require physical exertion? Do your friends joke about you being allergic to fresh air and exercise?

It has been said that we Americans have engineered activity out of our daily life. For us to be as healthy as possible, this trend needs to be reversed. "Why reversed?" you ask. Well, look around you. Take a good look. You can easily distinguish those out-front

What is a couch potato, anyway?

The simplest definition is "one who is inactive." That is, one whose exercise is limited to doing push-ups—pushing up from the couch, or pushing up from the table, or walking—walking from the couch to the fridge and back. The big question for the couch potato might be "How many steps does

people who exude energy and enthusiasm for life while others seem to be on the inside looking out.

If that thought sets your wheels turning, try something really bold: poll a guy or girl in a school-wide survey. (When you're finished, it would make a great piece for the school paper.) Just ask one simple question: "Do you participate in any form of exercise?" If the answer is yes, then ask what they're into, and whether they feel it makes a difference in their life.

Maybe it's also time to ask yourself the same question. If you come up shy, why not check out a sport—or something like a drill and dance team? Or do you consider that to be all fluff? If so, then hang

a need for diversion from an extremely tense home situation. She had reached a crossroad in her life—the battle of low self-esteem versus determination to rise above it all.

Tiffany, however, had the "right stuff." She came back the following year for another try at auditioning, and made the grade. Today, as a graduate, she has high hopes for her future, most of which she says is related to her Golden Girls experience.

Another young woman, Anna, was transplanted the summer before her junior year. Her father, a pastor, had relocated his family to Conroe. For Anna, the lonely adjustment period lasted only until she was accepted into Golden Girls that fall. Her only need was friendship—the lasting kind.

But both of these girls, along with all others who choose an activity such as the GGs, soon bump head-on into the grit and grind—long hours, hard training, aching muscles, and occasional short-fuse tempers. The only couch for them is the one they fall onto at the end of a grueling day. So much for the fluff.

This is where Mrs. Fayla Curry, the Golden Girls dance team director, and parents come in.

Mrs. Curry tells of parental anxiety. She says, "I consider 'educating parents' to be an important part of my job." Over the years as teacher, trainer, and on-the-job-mama, Mrs. Curry has discovered this to be the biggest issue relating to new members. "Many moms," she says, "are not ready to let their young daughters deal with the everyday conflicts that come up in this large group."

One mother, now an avid supporter and encourager, tells the effects of her daughter's early trials and tests. The mother made frequent calls to Mrs. Curry until one day she said, "I realized that I was denying my daughter the opportunity to grow into the confident and talented young woman she has become."

What about dads? Hear what one devoted father said of his daughter's team participation: "I watched her flourish . . . coming out of her shell."

Other interviewees offered different perspectives, but Lauren, Amanda, Jenny, Tiffany, and Anna all agree on one common thread—"self-discipline, time-management, and healthful living." Although they came from different backgrounds, with different preparatory skills and benefits, they shared a common need—that of keeping their "golden" life in balance.

Interviewed separately, each echoed the benefits of maintaining personal health—mental, physical,

NO COUCH POTATOES ALLOWED

By Jan Tickner

on. The Golden Girls of Conroe, Texas, will set you straight.

Admittedly, most of the girls who try out for a school dance program such as the Golden Girls (GGs), a Conroe High School precision dance team, are generally first attracted more by the fun and friendship than by healthy living and exercise.

This was the case with Tiffany—she qualified as a couch potato and didn't know it. When I questioned her as to why she wanted to belong to the GGs, she confessed, "I never gave a thought to things like health, exercise, or even friendships. I just wanted to dance and have fun."

Her story got stickier, though, when she told of not making the cut at her first audition. She said, "I was crushed." Pausing, the pretty young girl looked down, shook her head, and finally continued, "That was a bad year." For her, this was far more than just an extracurricular activity; it was linked to a need—



and spiritual—the most difficult thing about being on the team. Required to keep up with studies, they had to make every practice—daily and lengthy—especially in times of seasonal appearances, competition, or programs. It would be impossible had they not been drilled in responsibility and accountability.

Mrs. Curry, speaking of her years as teacher, trainer, and on-the-job mama, said, “It’s amazing to watch the young girls when they first come into the organization. They soon learn how to deal with a variety of things. Their interests change. Their priorities develop.”

The word “priority” prompts another subject we can’t escape when we’re speaking of physical and mental well-being—the matter of obesity. Despite legitimate worry, those repeated trips to the fridge, super-sized portions, and

junk food are not considered the sole contributors to the nation’s obesity epidemic. Some scientists argue it’s mostly a result of inactivity. They claim the average calorie consumption hasn’t changed much in recent decades, yet the number of calories worked off each day has plummeted.

We can blame many things, but especially the accessibility of wheels (four, not two), computers, and don’t forget remote controls that keep us on the couch. All of these make it too easy to remain sedentary.

So, whether a guy or girl, it holds true that the future depends upon a willingness to extend yourself physically, mentally, and spiritually. You have a choice! Here are a few suggestions:

Never ride when you can walk. Remember the “step counters.”

Never take an elevator when you can run the stairs.

Coach youngsters.

Volunteer in a hospital or retirement village.

The list of opportunities is endless—and so are the rewards.

What possibly begins with self-centeredness soon leads to an attitude of others-centeredness—a commodity not shared by all teenagers today.

Now! How about it? There’s something out there for everybody. But first, get off that couch! 📖





I Have This VOID INSIDE Me

Why do I feel as though I have this void inside me that I need to fill? It's things such as the clothes I wear and the people I hang with that help me feel better. Is that going to last? *Cherie*

Traveling as I do, I constantly observe that fashion is a defining statement of who many people think they are, or who they want to be. People want to look like Britney Spears, or Christina Aguilera, or Justin Timberlake, or anyone else on today's pop charts. Tomorrow's chart will feature someone else with a different look and style.

If you're caught in a web of having to look just right in order to feel good about yourself, it's a bottomless pit! Just when you think you have the right look, someone comes along and changes it. When there is a void in your self-esteem, an empty hole, it shouts to be filled! You want it filled with something, anything, but the question is What? Look around, and you will see that alcohol, sex, cigarettes, and drugs almost always step into the picture.

With an emotional void, the pressure to fill it with something is always going to be there. This is where the choices we make become evident. Make


the right ones, and you can be the healthiest and happiest person around. Make the wrong ones, and you can feel the devastating effects for the rest of your life. Unfortunately, all too often critical decisions are made as a result of what we think others are thinking about us.

Your friends can try to convince you that certain actions and attitudes are considered cool and acceptable, but they may not be the positive choices you want to make because the information may be false or only partially true.

Remember, you have a destiny to fill. And you want to be the best person that you can be.

My parents are getting a divorce. Why? Don't they love me and my sister anymore? What can we do? *Gary*

First of all, I want to tell you that you and your sister have absolutely nothing to do with your parents' divorce! Sometimes even adults do and say things that are not the right choice. But your parents do love you very much! Nothing either of you did or could ever do can change that fact! Also, as hard as it may feel to you at this point, there is nothing you can do to change the fact that your parents are getting divorced. The divorce or separation of your parents is between them, not you or your sister and them.

Your parents and you will have some tough decisions to make in the future about things, but one thing you need to know right now is that you have nothing to do with your parents' decision to separate from each other. The best thing that you can do is try to be supportive of both your parents, because believe it or not, they are both hurting over this big decision as well. Talk with both your parents openly about everything; you deserve to know what's going on. The more all of you talk, the better it will be in the long run. 



Television police shows always have an exciting episode in which undercover officers score a big drug bust. The "drugs" are always a snowy-white powder, and the bad guys always "look bad."

But real life isn't quite as tidy as that. Sometimes it's difficult for a police officer to grasp a situation immediately. The suspect may be high on an unknown substance that can affect their behavior in a variety of ways, and real drugs don't always resemble television's cornstarch cocaine. That's why police officers need to be knowledgeable about drug paraphernalia and the jargon that goes with it, as well as how people respond to particular drugs and what those drugs look like. Good cops do their homework.

So what kind of homework material does an undercover agent study? Detective Steve Walton can tell you, because he wrote the book. It's called *First Response Guide to Street Drugs*. "There are a lot of thick, ominous books about drugs," says Detective Walton. "But this one is less than 80 pages, and is small enough to fit into a briefcase, cargo pants, or lab coat pocket. The charts inside make it ideal for quick reference." The book includes a glossary of terms and common uses, effects and risks associated with the top 10 street drugs.

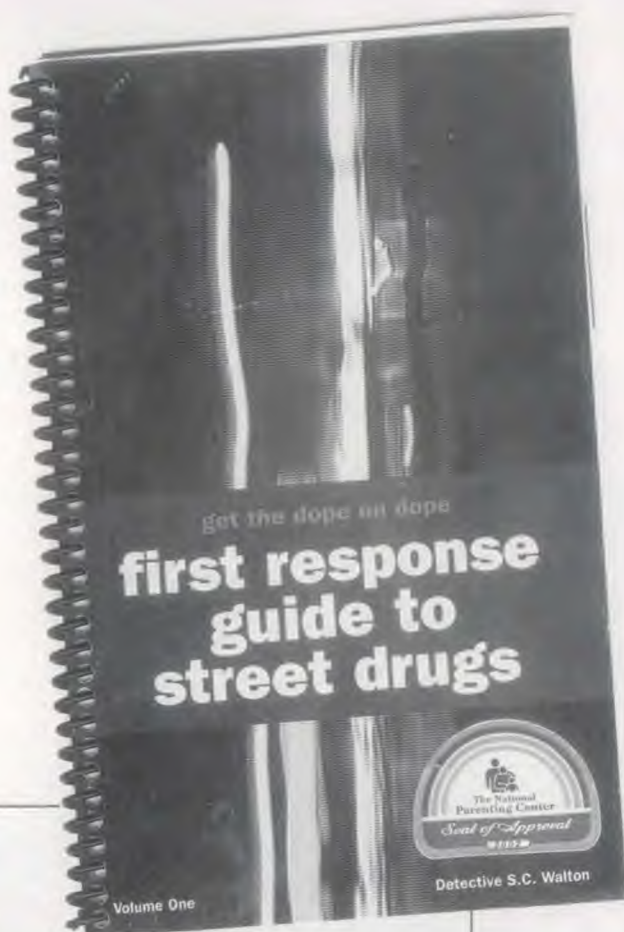
Detective Walton wrote the book for police, emergency medical technicians, fire departments, hospital employees, and other professionals who combat street drugs. But he wouldn't mind if you read it too.

Like a good drug cop, Detective Walton wants you to be prepared. Let's face it, the effects and risks of smoking cigarettes are common

knowledge, which is great, but when is the last time you saw a commercial informing you that smoking ice (crystal methamphetamine) can make you extremely violent and severely depressed? When it comes to drugs, we need to get the dope.

People who have accurate information respond differently to drugs. Detective Walton says, "I've noticed that if you give young people good information, then they make good decisions."

An expert on street drugs, Detective Walton has spent 24 years with the Calgary Police Service



Getting the Dope on Drugs

By Michele Deppe



one thing: your money.

Detective Walton says, "A drug trafficker is a very peculiar and particular animal who comes from somewhere and goes to somewhere." And there is significant danger if that trafficker is coming to you.

"You know a drug trafficker does not want to be your friend. They are links to organized crime, where drugs are manufactured in clandestine laboratories," cautions Detective Walton.

Detective Walton brings attention to "the cycle of abuse." Addiction and ruined health begin with the first use of any drug. People want to repeat that first high, but users eventually discover that that first high can never be duplicated, no matter how many drugs they try. After a person's first high, there is also the first "crash," and those undesirable symptoms and lousy feelings intensify with continued drug use.

During his career Detective Walton has seen many disturbing examples of how drugs can wreck lives, including a man who resorted to injecting drugs into his eyeballs, after his veins couldn't tolerate shooting up; and a very sad case of an 8-year-old crack addict. These real-life

tragedies usually aren't depicted on police shows, and warning information about drugs is seldom part of the script.

"I want to empower teens," concludes Detective Walton. "I want them to understand, 'This is your life. You get to make decisions.' A recent survey shows that 78 percent of kids said that they are concerned about street drugs. That's good; if only a small percentage of kids were worried about drugs then I'd be concerned, because that would tell me that they don't consider drugs a problem, and they are going to get tricked by them." ■

in Canada, where the drug culture is virtually the same as in the United States. He's published dozens of articles, and given more than 400 public talks about street drugs and other harmful substances, such as cleaning products, that are used to get high.

Detective Walton says, "When I wrote this book, I didn't really take a position on drugs; I didn't want to lecture anyone. I just presented the facts. However, when you present the facts about street drugs, most young people can draw their own conclusions. They usually decide that using drugs is not worth the risks."

People who want to try drugs don't stop to consider that they are choosing to become a criminal. Street drugs are illegal, and if you buy them or use them, you are breaking the law. Ironically, most people do realize that a drug dealer is after

For more information on Detective Walton's book, check out www.dopeondope.com. For online information, link to The Office of National Drug Control Policy, <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/index.html>

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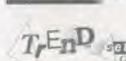
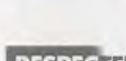
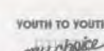
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MYTH VERSUS FACT

Myth or fact. Urban legend or true story. How can you tell which it is? I love getting a neat e-mail story that "really happened," but too often I'm disillusioned when I discover that it is just another urban legend. How many of you forwarded the e-mail "get money for every e-mail you send" to everyone you could think of because your e-mail was being tracked and you would get money for each one? The clincher that made it seem so believable was the testimony of the writer, saying how he hadn't believed it, but it was true! He did get money. But . . .

Then there was the story of the cat that got caught in a tree. When her owner couldn't reach her, he decided to attach a rope to the tree branch and then to his car and drive forward just enough to lower the branch. Unfortunately for the cat, the rope broke, sending the cat flying. The ending tells of a little girl wanting a cat, and her mother saying only if one were to drop in her lap—which it did. Isn't that a neat story? I love happy endings. But you guessed it—it's just another urban legend.

I'm sure that you've heard facts or stories relating to alcohol that your friends tell you are true. Stories such as: alcohol gives you energy. We know that this is a myth, because alcohol is a depressant, which slows down your ability to think, speak, and move—to mention just a few.

Another myth: a cold shower or a cup of coffee will sober up a drinker. Unfortunately too many drinkers believe that to be true, as they drink a few cups of coffee to sober them up and then get behind the wheel of their car to drive. Only time sobers the drinker. The only thing coffee does is make you a wide-awake drunk.

Then there's the myth that it's none of your business if your friend drinks too much. That one makes about as much sense as not telling your friend that the bridge is out or a train is coming. A true friend is someone who is there for you. Someone who is honest and wants to help you. Maybe the drinker would listen and get help before it's too late.

You often hear, I'm hurting only myself when I drink. That is another myth. For every drinker has family members who worry about them. In fact, each of the 14 million problem drinkers in the United States affects four other people. Of course, that number impacts more people when a drinker chooses to drink and drive, as alcohol use is implicated in nearly half of all fatal accidents.

So do your homework before you believe a story—search out the truth. It just might save your life.

Anita Jacobs



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Put teens in a position to Win!

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