

# listen

CELEBRATING *POSITIVE* CHOICES

December 2006

## THE HAPPY PILLS

**CYBER  
REALITY:**  
Opting Out  
of Real Life

**LEGAL**  
Doesn't Always  
Mean Safe

**UNDERCOVER  
AGENT**



20 **Danielle  
Fisher**

Holds a  
**WORLD RECORD**  
on seven continents





# Features

**The Happy Pills 4**

Travis said they were happy pills. That's what he *said*.

**Smoke Circles 6**

Tobacco companies target teens for addiction. Are you smart enough to keep away from their traps?

**Heading Straight for the Top: Danielle Fisher 8**

See how this teen used climbing to overcome ADHD and earn a world record as the youngest person in history to climb the highest mountain on each of the seven continents.

**Party Hearty (and Safe) 12**

If you wonder how you're going to stay safe as the team parties start to rock, help is at hand.

**The Choking Game Quiz 15**

How much do you *really* know about this deadly game?

**DigiRoom 62 16**

Temper flares in the DigiRoom. Will things get out of control?

**Legal Doesn't Always Mean Safe 18**

Prescription medicines may be legal, but when they're abused they're definitely not safe.

**Prime Times: Undercover Agent 20**

Jessica is trying to buy tobacco from a salesclerk. Again. It's her job. Find out why.

**Virtual Reality: Opting Out of Real Life 22**

My sister was losing her family, friends, and life. She was virtually disappearing. Online. Lots more kids are like her.

**On a Roll 24**

Looking for a wheel good time? Try skating. It's easy, fun, and growing in popularity, 'specially the extreme kind.

**Not You, Too! 28**

When our mother was dying of lung cancer my brother started smoking. How could he?



# Departments

**Pee-yew 3**

In which Max and I smell something stinky.

**Good for You 11**

The humble soybean plays a starring role in nutrition.

**I'm Listening 14**

"I have a ton of people to shop for this holiday season and no money. Help!"

**What's Up With That? 27**

"My boyfriend told me that if I drank Red Bull with my beer I wouldn't get drunk so quickly. Is he right?"

**Graffiti 30**

Here's where you tell us what's on your mind.

**Coming Next Month 31**

Everything you want to know about next month's issue but were afraid to ask.





EDITOR  
Céleste Perrino-Walker

DESIGNER  
Bill Kirstein

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR  
Jocelyn Fay

VP PERIODICALS  
Richard Tooley

SALES DIRECTOR  
Ron Clark

## EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Hans Diehl, Dr.H.Sc., M.P.H.

Winston Ferris, M.A.

Allan Handysides, M.B., B.Ch.

Gary Hopkins

Peter N. Landless, M.B., B.Ch.

Stoy Proctor, M.P.H.

Francis A. Soper, Litt.D.

DeWitt Williams, Ph.D.



Member of the  
Partnership  
for a Drug-Free  
America



## Pee-yew

Max and I like to walk. We walk at least four miles every day. That's a lotta miles, so we've got a couple routes we like and mix them up so we don't get bored. One of our routes takes us past a certain house, and for several evenings in a row, every time we walked past that house we could smell a nasty, unmistakable odor coming from the open door.

You may think of several things when I say "nasty and unmistakable." For example, you might think of garbage or the bottom of a certain someone's gym bag. You might conjure up images of a dead animal or rotting vegetables, or even the penetrating stench of skunk.

But this was far, far worse. This was pot. Marijuana, if you want to get technical about it. I remember that smell from my infamous bus rides before the anonymous letter (see my editorial, "The Fine Art of Narcing," February 2006). Only this time there's not much I can do except hold my breath and walk on by. Poor Max can't even do that and he's got a big nose.

Whenever I smell pot as I walk by that house I think, How sad. How sad that someone in there doesn't have anything better to do than sit in the dark and smoke pot. How sad they don't have a life, an exciting, thrilling, can't-wait-to-be-lived life. I wish I could go into that house, drag them out into the sunshine, and show them all the wonderful things there are to do that make life an adventure every day.

I can't feel too sorry for them because, after all, it is their choice to sit in the dark and smoke pot rather than to be outside Rollerblading, gardening, skydiving, or just sitting in a chair trying to figure out what shapes they can see in the clouds. It does make me very grateful about the positive choices that I make, though. And I hope you appreciate all the positive choices you make. I hope you can see how sad it is, how limiting, to be addicted to drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Don't sit in the shadows missing out on life. Get out there and live it!

Until next time, have fun, be cool, and make good choices,

Céleste Perrino-Walker  
Editor

Max and I  
holding our  
breath.





"He probably

**I SPLASHED COLD WATER ON MY FACE THREE TIMES.**

"Wake up," I whispered to my reflection in the mirror.

"What's up, Raymond?" A voice echoed in the empty bathroom.

"You OK, man?"

I turned to see this guy Travis. I'd seen him around school a couple of times.

I answered, "I'll be cool. I'm just worn out."

He nodded and went about his business. About a minute later, he walked up to the sink next to me.

"You know," he said, "I might be able to help you out."

He looked over his shoulder at the door. Then he handed me a Tic Tac case with five white pills inside.

I didn't say anything.

"That's X, baby," he said, "I call them little happy pills. You look all tired and beat down. These can definitely take care of that."

I held up the case and studied the pills. Little emblems were imprinted on each one. I shook my head no.

"That's not me," I told him.



# The Happy Pills

By Jason Phillips



# thought it was candy."

He waited a few seconds before taking the case back. "Your loss, man."

He turned to leave. My mind raced. With football and everything, I was running out of gas quickly. I had everybody counting on me for a bunch of different reasons. Maybe I could use the pills. I stopped Travis as he reached the door.



I was jumpy the rest of the morning. Just having the pills in my jacket pocket made me nervous. I thought about throwing them away, but I kept them just in case.

During lunch I sat with my girlfriend, Katelin, and some friends. I couldn't buy lunch, since I had given my \$20 to Travis. I just sat there staring, half asleep.

Kate nudged my arm. She waved her hand in my face.

"What?" I asked with attitude.

"What planet are you on?"

I gave her a blank look.

"Am I talking to myself?"

"We're studying for midterms tonight. I heard you."

"Get there right after practice. You can't afford another low grade."

"I got it," I told her.

We finished practice a bit early, so I decided to go home. I knew my little brother Troy would be at our neighbors' until Mom came home, so the house would be peaceful.

As soon as I stepped in the door, I set my watch alarm. I tossed my jacket on the back of the couch, dropped my bag, and plopped into the reclining chair. I was out in minutes. When I woke up, my watch was beeping. The front door was open. My jacket had fallen off the couch and the Tic Tac case had fallen out. I thought nothing of it. I headed upstairs and put the pills in my top drawer.

When I got to Kate's, she was sitting on the porch. When she saw me, she sprang up and rushed down the front steps.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Your mom just called. Something happened to Troy. He passed out or fainted or something. They had to take him to the emergency room."

A huge lump formed in my throat. My eyes began to water up.

Kate's mom came home an hour and a half later. Waiting with that lump made it feel more like a day and a half. She drove me to the hospital.

Mom was in the waiting area when I walked in. I rushed up and hugged her tight.

"Is he OK?" I asked.

"He will be," she said.

"What happened?"

"I'm not sure exactly, but the doctor said there was some kind of drug in his system. He said his body temperature was dangerously high and he was dehydrated. I'll deal with all that later. I'm just glad he's OK."

Her words hit me like a sledgehammer. I immediately knew what happened. I knew why the door was open. The lump in my throat grew larger than before.

"He took it from my jacket," I mumbled.

A puzzled look came over her face.

"The drug they found in his system, it was ecstasy. He probably thought it was candy."

The look on her face quickly changed from puzzled to angry. "What in the world are you doing with drugs in your jacket?"

"I don't know. They were a back up, a back up plan. I didn't mean for Troy. . ."

I started to cry. I cried until the doctor came and told us we could go to see him.

The next day at school, I turned the four pills over to the principal. I also pointed out Travis as the kid who sold them to me. I was expelled for 10 school days. I was kicked off the football team. And I failed the world history midterm that I never studied for.

I couldn't believe how miserable five "happy pills" had made me.



# Smoke

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES . . .  
AND YOUR HAIR . . . AND YOUR  
CLOTHES . . . AND YOUR CAR . . .  
AND YOUR . . .

BY MARK N. LARDAS

**T**he good news first: teens are getting smarter.

How can we tell? Smoking statistics. Teen smoking, which peaked in the mid-1990s, has been dropping for the past 10 years. In 1996 nearly half of eighth graders had tried cigarettes. By 2006 it was only 26 percent—a little over one in four. Since smoking is dumb, teens must be getting smarter.

Now the bad news: teens are getting smarter less quickly. The drop in the number of teens smoking has been getting smaller and smaller over the past five years. Between 2004 and 2005 the rate of teen smoking dropped only 2 percent.

Two new types of cigarettes—kreteks and bidis—may be why. These imports from Indonesia and India hit the United States in the late nineties, and have been getting teens, especially younger teens in seventh and eighth grade, started with tobacco. Since both deliver much more nicotine than conventional cigarettes, once you start on them, you get hooked—bad.

Kreteks (called “kree-tecks”) are a cigarette that combines cloves and tobacco. Most are about 60 percent tobacco, with ground cloves, clove oil, and other additives making up the rest of the smoke. They come from Indonesia.

Bidis (called “bee-dees”) come from India. They are handrolled, and often tied at the ends. They are wrapped in a tendu or temburni leaf, and filled with dust and flakes from cheap, dark tobacco. To cover the harsh tobacco taste, bidis are flavored with chocolate, vanilla, cinnamon, licorice, or—for those wanting a trendy foreign flavor—mango. Bidis made for export to the United States add flavors popular with the bubble gum crowd: cherry, strawberry, and grape.

Not only do kreteks and bidis taste like candy, they are cheaper than standard cigarettes. That makes sense. They are smaller than standard smokes, and made with the cheapest tobacco that can be found. Even the labor to make them is cheap. In India, the women who roll them get 80 cents a day for 12 hours work. (They have to make 1,000 a day to get that much money.) In Asia, only the poor use them. Anyone who can afford it smokes something better.

The makers of kreteks often tout them as a “safe” alternative to regular



# Cigarettes

cigarettes. After all, they contain less tobacco. They also lack a filter and tend to go out easily. You have to really suck on them to keep them lit. With just half the tobacco, you get three times the carbon monoxide and nicotine of a regular cigarette. Throw in the effects of inhaling burned clove oil (which does a job on the lungs of anyone with asthma) and you have 20 times the chance of lung problems. Real safe alternative.

Bidis are no better. The tendu and temburni leaf wrapper burns badly, so you have to suck on them, too. Typically, you have to puff on that unfiltered bidi three times as many times as you would on a standard cancer stick. Because of the tobacco used, bidis not only deliver three times the nicotine as a standard cigarette, you get five times the tar.

You can see the attractions that kreteks and bidis have to teens— young and stupid ones. They taste like candy, so you can indulge in what you think is an adult habit while still satisfying a child's sweet tooth. They come from some place far away and exotic, so you can show everyone else how worldly you are. You are not poisoning yourself with American products. No, you use imported, Asian products instead. How cool!

You cannot beat bidis for being edgy, either. After all, they look like joints—you can make others think

you are being real naughty by smoking marijuana, instead of plain old tobacco. What with the perfumes and flavorings they add to bidis, the smoke even stinks as badly as pot. Bidis and kreteks have everything that a 13-year-old needs to think they are being adult.

It is worth stepping back before you light one up and looking at what you are doing. No one starts smoking as an adult. If you have gotten to age 21 without getting hooked on tobacco, you are not going to smoke. In fact, the older and more "adult" people get, the more likely they are to quit smoking. So starting to smoke is not a way of signaling that you are an adult. It is a way of letting everyone know you have not grown up.

Bidis and kreteks are designed to appeal to kids, not older teens. They take aim straight at a child's craving for candy. One doctor described them as training wheels for smokers. Who needs training wheels? Not grown-ups.

Take a pass on bidis and kreteks. Join the smart teens, and do what adults do—don't start the vicious circle of smoking in the first place.





# Heading Straight for the Top

By Christina Couch

Photos of Danielle provided by the author  
Mt Rainier: Jupiter Images

In elementary school Danielle Fisher began struggling with her grades. By high school it had become a full-fledged battle, and when college rolled around, this Washington State University student's grades were so low that after her first year she had to get special permission in order to return. Taking some time off, Danielle eventually found her solution, the secret that would earn her better grades, inner peace, and international recognition: Danielle Fisher got serious about getting high.

Danielle's lofty accomplishments, scaling more than 120,000 feet in her short-lived career, have earned her a world record as the

youngest person in history to climb the highest mountain on each of the seven continents. McKinley, Kilimanjaro, Vinson—if it's big, rocky, and dangerous, chances are this fiery redhead has already dominated it on her way to success. "I enjoy the whole part of climbing, even all of the struggles," she comments, "but when you make it to the top, that's just huge."

Danielle's ascent to the top hasn't always been a smooth one. Diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the sixth grade, Danielle spent years searching for the right therapy that would allow her to concentrate on simple tasks. "[ADHD] makes it





“I went after  
my passion and I  
succeeded.”





really hard for me to focus on things like homework and taking out the trash, doing chores," she says. "It's so hard for some people to understand how debilitating ADHD is in that way. It's just hard. You can have every good intention. You can want it and you still can't make yourself do those mundane things."

Bouncing from medicine to medicine, tutor to tutor, Danielle continued to watch her grades plummet, as well as her confidence. "When I was diagnosed, I thought I would be cured with medication, but I didn't notice a difference," she recounts. "The thing is, you often don't feel a difference; it's the people around you who notice a difference, who realize that it's easier to talk to you, to get along with you. . . . It was kind of difficult getting diagnosed, thinking everything was going to be better, and feeling just the same."

It was, in fact, a feeling that would teach Danielle to channel her physical and mental energies. While training for her school's cross-country team, she decided to go on a recreational climbing trip through the Cascades with her father, an avid mountain climber. "The first time I did it, we climbed a few peaks and I hated it. Then we climbed Mount Baker, then Mount Adams, and I still hated it," Danielle remembers. "Then, by the end of summer, we decided to climb Mount Rainier. It was the hardest mountain I had ever climbed."

While summiting Rainier, Danielle noticed that her attitude began to change, as did her attention span. "You have so much adrenaline going through your system," she says. "When you reach the top, it feels wonderful because

you succeeded in a goal that you've set out to do. You didn't turn back. You didn't think about turning back." From there Danielle was addicted to the rock, taking on bigger, badder challenges including Mount Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Southern Hemisphere, standing at an astounding 22,841 feet above sea level. With every mountain conquered, Danielle slowly learned to use her passion for climbing as a way to improve her ability to concentrate. "You don't ever have any



problems in the mountains, because your brain is kept excited," Danielle states. "I have a passion for [climbing] and because of the need to focus, I'm able to focus."

After tackling Mount Aconcagua at 17, Danielle learned that the youngest person to finish the Seven Summits had done so at the age of 23, leaving her just five years to plan, train, and raise funds for six major trips—all while finishing up high school, applying to colleges, and preparing for her freshman year. Putting her dreams on hold, she headed off to Washington State University for a rocky freshman year. She comments, "My first year was horrible. I went down to a 2.0 [grade point average], which meant that I was deficient and I had to be reinstated at school. That's how difficult it was." Barely passing, Danielle took a year off of school to

collect herself and fulfill her climbing goals. Taking out a loan from her parents and raising \$30,000 on her own, Danielle spent the next year finding sponsors and summiting cliffs in exotic locations. She used her climbing experiences to practice focusing her attention for longer periods of time. By the next fall she was ready for Washington State, a brand new year, and the mother lode of climbs: Mount Everest.

Returning to school with more confidence, concrete goals, and a few new tricks up her sleeve, Danielle set her sights on the future and began making the grades she always wanted. "I've been able to focus this year because I was essentially practicing being able to focus when [I was] climbing. I can concentrate. I can make myself sit down and do my homework this year," she says. "I'm still a freshman in college, and I'm getting better grades than I've ever gotten in my life."

After battling with herself for so long, Danielle claims that the two-month-long Everest climb she made the following summer was a breeze by comparison. She credits her success to her unstoppable determination, parental support, and her clean lifestyle. "Drugs and climbing don't mix. I abstain from any substance besides my medication," she says. "I also try to stay in shape throughout the year."

Just because she holds the world record, don't think you've heard the last of Danielle Fisher. Currently pursuing a degree in material science engineering, she plans on climbing Pakistan's Gasherbrum 1 (26,470 feet) and Gasherbrum 2 (26,360) this coming summer. She continues to raise funds as well as ADHD awareness. "I went after my passion and I succeeded," she says with happiness and pride. "It just feels so great to make it."





# GOOD FOR YOU

## The Mighty Soybean

By Richard G. Edison

**F**or 5,000 years the people of Asia have known something Western nations are just beginning to discover—the soybean is an amazing food! This lowly bean is packed with nutrition, is inexpensive, is easy to cook, and can be prepared in a huge variety of ways.

Here are some exciting facts about this mighty bean:

High in fiber, packed with protein, the soybean is also very low in carbohydrates.

Important vitamins and minerals, like calcium, magnesium, riboflavin, thiamine, and iron are present in abundance in the soybean.

Soybeans have been shown to lower LDL, the bad cholesterol in your blood, and help prevent heart disease. This may be part of the reason Asians tend to have fewer heart problems than people in the rest of the world.

- People who eat soybeans instead of meat may have stronger bones because less calcium is lost.

- Soy provides the only complete protein in the vegetable family.

There are three forms of soybeans:

- **Green:** Also called edamame, these fresh, immature soybeans have a sweet, mild flavor. Sold in and out

of the pod, they are great over salads or in soup or rice dishes.

- **Yellow:** Sold dried or canned, they come in either yellow or white. The dried ones need to be soaked before cooking.

- **Black:** Harder to find, but worth the search, these beans are milder in flavor than the yellow ones and are easier to digest.

- Soy beans are easy to prepare and can be served in all sorts of neat ways. Here are some easy ideas to try:

- Mix them into seasoned cooked rice.

- Throw a handful of green ones into a salad.

- Add them to your favorite chili recipe.

- Add them to your favorite canned soup.

- Toss some into stir-fry.

- Use soy milk instead of regular milk on your cereal or granola.

- Soybeans can be made to mimic other protein sources. You can buy soy hot dogs; soy sandwich meats like chicken, turkey, beef, and ham; and soy hamburgers. These meat substitutes are, as my father says, “delicious, nutritious, and they even taste good!”

Other varieties of soy products you can find in stores are:

- **Tofu:** Made from soy milk curds, tofu is shaped into cakes and can be used in soups, made into a spread, or substituted for cheese or meat in your favorite sandwich.

- **Soy sauce:** Made from fermented soybeans and flour, soy sauce adds a salty flavor to food dishes.

- **Miso:** Popular as a breakfast drink in Japan, miso is a high-protein paste that tastes similar to soy sauce.

- **Soybean sprouts:** A terrific addition to salads or stir-fry, sprouts are a great source of vitamins A, B, and C.

The soybean—tasty, nutritious, heart-healthy, and a great source of fiber. Who would have believed such a simple bean could be packed with so many good things? Add it to your diet today. You’ll be glad you did!

By Richard Edison,  
PA-C (Physician Assistant-  
Nationally Certified)







# Party Hearty (and Safe)



BY LIZ FUNK

**C**ONGRATS! The results of last week's varsity tryouts were posted outside the high school gym, and you made the cut! You're totally psyched to have everyone's eyes on you as you score the winning point for the game, but it might be less fun if you are worried because you took the *Listen* magazine Drug-free Pledge and still want to celebrate your victory with the team after the game. No one's





sport (which is a very healthy choice to make)?

No one!

But what if you are the only one who has the desire to steer clear of substance abuse? You might feel a little awkward or alone, but odds are, you aren't. Studies have shown that many students who play sports are also high achievers in their schools and communities. Subsequently, they may not be interested in partying either; in fact, they might even be relieved if you speak up! A lot of times teams end up drinking and doing drugs to celebrate not because they need to replace their physical high with a chemical high after their sports endorphins wear off, but maybe because they can't think of anything else to do.

So get creative! Ask your parents if you can have some kids over after the game to rent DVDs and hang out. If your parents aren't into the idea, get in touch with the student government at your school and see if they'd be interested in planning a dance or big party (big clean party with chaperones and adults present) in the gym after the big game. If they charge a fee to get in, maybe they could use the profits to defray the cost of treating the team to dinner after the next big game. Is there a family-owned restaurant in town? Sometimes managers will give discounts to sports teams and groups over 10 people who come in to eat together. (If you explain in advance that you are trying to find healthy entertainment alternatives for the team, the manager may be even more willing to give you an even bigger price break, or at least may be more likely to give you one at all.)

If you don't want to be in charge of initiating or organizing these activities, talk to your team captain. He or she should hear you out (that's part of the job as leader of a team), and hopefully he or she will be willing to address the team and think of alternatives. If you don't feel comfortable talking to another kid, see

what your coach has to say. Most of the time coaches keep removed from what their players do to celebrate, short of telling them not to do anything that would affect their game. But perhaps if you talk to your coach, he or she may have some insight about activities to do, or take some initiative to create some activities.

Speaking of games, there are more than mental and physical problems associated with drinking and drug use. The legality of underage partying is always a factor in the sports scene situation. Surprise guests are usually present at sports team house parties, but when those guests are the police, the surprises they bring are even less pleasant than those from the rest of the uninvited partyers. It's always important to have a ride home if you end up unexpectedly at a keg party, but it's never a good thing when your ride is in the back of a police car—and odds are, if you aren't going home to disappointed and angry parents, you are being hauled to the police station . . . and in big t-r-o-u-b-l-e. Even worse, if your teammates are using fake IDs to enter bars after games, you are talking astronomical trouble. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, use of forged identification has come to be regarded as a very serious crime. Possession of a fake ID by a minor can be charged as a felony, punishable with fines and even jail time!

If you've talked to your teammates, your coach, and your student government association, and there seem to be no alternatives to the partying, then it might be time to talk to your parents and think of other "Listen pledge-friendly" activities that will allow you to have fun, get exercise, and meet people without putting you in danger.

But odds are, if you set a good example for your teammates and make smart choices about not using drugs and alcohol, others will follow your courageous lead.

going to deny it: the high school sport social scene doesn't always promote healthy choices for teens.

Movies and television show football and basketball teams throwing huge parties on the weekends where there are drinking and drugs; we hear about local parties in home room. But who says that alcohol and drugs are to stop you from meeting new people, making new friends, and getting exercise in playing a school





By Dallas Woodburn

Dear Dallas,

I feel like I'm in a deep rut. I go to high school with the same people I've known since kindergarten. We always do the same things on the weekends. I want some adventure! I know enough not to turn to alcohol or drugs, but how can I spice up my humdrum life?

— Midteen Crisis

Dear Midteen,

You're right, drugs and alcohol are *not* a good way to "spice up your life." I too went to high school with many of the same people I had been with since our elementary school days. However, while I had a main group of friends, there were still other people in my classes I knew by name but really didn't *know* very well beyond that. I'm betting there are people like this in your life too.

Sit down with new people at lunch. Invite them to join your group of friends for movie night—or, better yet, get some new ideas by asking what they like to do for fun on the weekends. Also, joining groups such as the art club, drama department, or sports teams are

great ways to meet new people and forge new friendships. Take a ballroom dance class even though you feel like you have two left feet, volunteer with a cause you care about, join a club—or start a club yourself! What's stopping you? Only you!

Dear Dallas,

I am majorly stressed out. I have a ton of people to shop for this holiday season. The only problem is, I don't have much money. Help!

— I Need Santa's Elves

Dear I Need,

Take a deep breath and remember that while giving is a huge part of what the holidays are about, "gifts" do not always need to be material possessions. Think about your unique talents and creative ways you can use them to benefit your friends and family. Framed photographs, artistic sketches and paintings, poems, flowers from

your garden, and mix CDs are all thoughtful presents—that don't break your budget. And if you aren't stressed out, you will be happier and more fun to be with, which is the best present of all!



## It's Your Turn . . .

Dear Dallas,

I was late for curfew, and my parents grounded me for a week. But there's the big school winter bash this weekend, and I already promised my girlfriend I would go with her and help her set up decorations. I can't bail now, but I don't want to get in trouble with my parents. What should I do?

— Morally Confused

*Readers, now it's your turn to give advice. Should Morally:*

- (a) Explain the situation to his parents and ask for a reprieve from curfew for the night, with a promise to make it up some other way.
- (b) Sneak out and go to the party, (and risk getting into more

trouble if he's caught!), or (c) Stay at home and disappoint his girlfriend?

Cast your vote at [www.listenmagazine.org/imlistening](http://www.listenmagazine.org/imlistening) and see how your advice stacks up against that of other *Listen* readers. You can see results from past polls here too.



# ALL CHOKED UP



Have you ever played the word game hangman? You get 10 chances to guess the correct word before you hang yourself. With the choking game you get only one chance.

DO YOU KNOW THE RISKS OF PLAYING THE CHOKING GAME?  
TAKE THE FOLLOWING QUIZ TO SEE.

- 1. T F** The choking (tying a rope, tie, or cloth around the neck), fainting (placing friends in a headlock), passing out (inhaling and exhaling heavily, then squeezing the lungs), or tingling game is played in my school and at my friends' homes. I won't be considered cool if I don't participate with my friends.
- 2. T F** The choking game is a safe buzz.
- 3. T F** I can't be arrested for participating in the choking game because it's not illegal.
- 4. T F** Signs my friends may be playing the choking game are bloodshot eyes, marks on their necks, headaches, and irritability.
- 5. T F** Last year about 500 kids died from playing the choking game.
- 6. T F** Cutting off oxygen isn't dangerous because I don't feel different afterwards.
- 7. T F** Trying the choking game one time isn't harmful.
- 8. T F** If I think my friends are endangering themselves by playing the choking game, I should mind my own business and not tell anyone.
- 9. T F** The first defense against the choking game is knowledge.
- 10. T F** Only kids who drink, do drugs, or are depressed play the choking game.

- 1. False.** Death is uncool. Playing the choking, fainting, passing out, or tingling game can kill you, making you very uncool. If you're alive and healthy, you're part of a very cool group.
- 2. False.** If you survive the loss of oxygen, it can affect speech function, learning abilities, and the ability to control your own body for the rest of your life.
- 3. True.** It's not illegal, but within one minute of participating in the game you can lose consciousness. Within as little as two to four minutes you can die.
- 4. True.** These are all signs that a friend is playing this deadly game.
- 5. True.** According to an estimate there were 500 deaths last year between the ages of 9 and 14, both boys and girls.
- 6. False.** You may not feel anything right away, but over time you could cause yourself brain damage, a coma, or ultimately death.
- 7. False.** It takes only one time for a mistake to be made when tying anything around your neck. One slip and you could die.
- 8. False.** Tell any adult who will listen. Go to your parents, a teacher, a counselor, anyone. You could save your friends' lives by telling someone.
- 9. True.** Knowing the facts will help you make sound decisions and keep smart kids from risking their happy lives for a temporary high. Knowledge is the best medicine for saving lives.
- 10. False.** Almost every child who died was happy, outgoing, friendly, and sober when playing the game.



# DigiRoom 62

By Dallas Woodburn  
Illustration: Zach Baldus

**Mr. Emerich:**

In this Life Skills 101 class, we're going to play a computer game called DigiRoom 62.

You will each take on a virtual personality, and your character will interact with your classmates' characters in different situations. You will have to make tough decisions and learn from the consequences.



Today we're continuing with our virtual party!

**MarkModem:**  
kev, pass me a beer. i need sumthin 2 take the edge off, man.



**VirtuKev:**  
how many drinks have u had already?

**MarkModem:**  
chill out, dude, i'm fine.

u saw how sick dan got earlier—he could have died!



no, i think u've had e-nuff.







**CompuChris:**  
DUDE!

i saw you hitting  
on gemma—she's MY  
girlfriend!



**MarkModem:**  
y would she want  
to be with u . . .

when she  
can have ME?

stop it, guyz,  
calm down!

instant message

**TeacherEmrich:** Good job breaking up the fight, Kevin and Daniel. Fortunately this is a game, but in real life this alcohol-induced fight could escalate into serious violence. However, even in this game your actions have consequences: Mark and Chris, you both get Fs for this assignment. Next time, make smart decisions!

**Next Issue:**  
Our characters  
encounter other  
consequences  
of drinking.



by Loma G. Davies Silcott

Photo by: Alden J. Ho Photography

# Legal Doesn't Always Mean Safe



**F**or the first time, our national study finds that today's teens are more likely to have abused a prescription painkiller to get high than they are to have experimented with a variety of illegal drugs," states Partnership for a Drug-Free America chairman Roy Bostock. He continues, "In other words, Generation Rx [prescription] has arrived."

The main legal drugs of choice have one thing in common: their origin can be traced back to the opium poppy or one of its synthetic (artificial) forms. Among teens OxyContin is often the abuse drug of choice. It is referred to as



"Oxy," "OC," "hillbilly heroin," and "killer." It is a semisynthetic (partly artificial), highly addictive opiate agonist (pain reliever) prescribed for those with long-lasting pain and for terminal cancer patients.

Brian\* was prescribed a relatively low dose of OxyContin after major back surgery. The doctor told him it was not addictive and he could stop its use without any withdrawal symptoms. Wrong! Brian describes the physical withdrawal symptoms as "four times worse than the worst case of flu you can imagine."

Since it is extremely addictive, sadly some abusers are so desperate for a fix that they steal a patient's supply and substitute aspirin or some other similar-looking drug. In one case a woman in the end stages of cancer suddenly found maximum strength OxyContin wasn't relieving her pain. When she told her doctor, he said to bring the pills to his office. She emptied the bottle on his desk, and he saw that the pills had been replaced with regular aspirin! The OxyContin addict who ripped off this dying woman and left her to suffer was her own daughter.

As with any other narcotic drug, long-term OxyContin use can lead to physical dependence. Long-term

according to the Medicaid charts, to the tenth." And he knows there just aren't that many people having the kind of pain OxyContin was designed to relieve.

Another abused legal drug, Darvocet, is structurally related to the synthetic narcotic methadone. The medical journal *Clinical Pharmacology* claims its "most prominent effect . . . may be its addictive quality." Its side effects include dizziness, nausea,

vomiting, hallucinations, kidney and liver problems,

and weakness.

In addition Demerol, used to relieve severe pain, is another narcotic analgesic (pain reliever). Those who repeatedly use it develop a tolerance (need more to get the same effect), which creates both a physical and a mental dependence.

Another commonly abused painkiller, Vicodin, is a derivative of opium. As it is highly addictive, with prolonged use its effects become more and more damaging to the user. These effects include blurred vision, hallucinations, and severe confusion. Its withdrawal symptoms are similar to the pain it was relieving. Some include muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, and panic.

in Kentucky, a spot previously held by OxyContin.

Methadone is especially dangerous to those wanting a high because it doesn't have an intense high and abusers either take dangerously high levels and/or mix it with other drugs. This creates a potentially fatal reaction. Dr. Burton, an emergency medicine specialist in Maine, states, "They might mix it with either beer or some other drug. They take it thinking it's just like any other drug and will give them a buzz, and they end up either dead or deeply unconscious."

Whether legal or illegal, when abused, drugs can ruin or end your life. While it may seem cool to party with your friends, in the long run it will cause immeasurable pain to you and those who love you.

Yes, your friends may make fun of you if you don't party with them, but in the end you will be the winner. Jolene\* joined the army to get away from the drug lifestyle of her friends and family. A few years later she returned home and stated, "All my friends are either dead, in jail, or pregnant."

She then returned to the army and never looked back.

\*Name has been changed.



## GENERATION R X HAS ARRIVED

usage can cause severe respiratory depression and death. Withdrawal symptoms include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps, and involuntary leg movements.

"In terms of abuse," Greg Laham, owner of Sullivan's Pharmacy in Roslindale, Massachusetts, says, "I've never seen anything remotely close to what's happening now with OxyContin. In the space of the last two years, this drug has gone from the thirty-fifth prescribed drug,

While methadone (another synthetic opiate) has been used for years to enable heroin addicts to function without having the withdrawal and cravings associated with stopping heroin use, it is now becoming widely abused with alarming results.

It is causing an increase in deaths. "Out of no place came methadone," says James McDonough, from the Florida Office of Drug Control. "It is now the fastest rising killer drug." This is confirmed by officials in Kentucky, who state that it has taken over as the number one abused drug





# PRIME REAL PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE TIMES

By Joyce Anne Munn

Photos provided by the author



## UNDERCOVER Agent

**T**he woman at the checkout stand looked at the young girl and shook her head. "No," she said. "I won't sell you these cigarettes. You're not old enough to purchase tobacco products."

Several people standing nearby added their agreement. The woman in line behind her said, "You ought to know better."

Jessica just nodded as she quietly put away her ID. Why would a young teenager be trying to buy cigarettes anyway? Did she really think she would get away with it?

Many boys and girls think it is cool to do anything adults do. Some may decide to try smoking to please a friend or be part of the crowd. Others may just want to see how tobacco tastes or to perhaps try to get by with something that is not allowed.

Jessica, however, had a totally different reason for attempting to buy a pack of those forbidden items. She was simply doing her job. That's right! She was working undercover. She's employed by the tobacco board in her state. Her assignment was to see if a store

clerk would sell her cigarettes. It is against the law for anyone under 18 to purchase tobacco products.

Jessica is a homeschooler, so her hours are flexible. She's able to go to stores at various hours throughout the day. She's had this job for a couple of years and believes it is very important. She hates seeing young people or adults smoke.

Jessica, or any young person employed in this way, must follow certain rules. Casual clothes that a teenager would normally wear are required. She can't wear makeup either. Cosmetics often make a girl





What happens to someone who does sell a tobacco product to a minor? The actual punishment sometimes depends on the attitude of the person involved. The store usually has to pay a fine of \$100 to \$250. If a third offense happens, the store's license to sell tobacco is removed.

Why does Jessica do this? She doesn't have any great ambition to be a detective, but she says, "Smoking is one of the nastiest things you can do." She believes her job might keep some young person from becoming addicted to nicotine. She's very aware of the health problems related to smoking. She also knows about the dangers of secondhand smoke and is deeply saddened to see parents lighting up around their children.

Jessica advises kids never to start in the first place. If people try to get you to smoke, she believes, they are not good friends. She firmly states, "Lots of cool people don't smoke. I never have and never will."



look older, and that is considered deceptive. Absolutely no cheating or lying in order to confuse the store employees are allowed. If a clerk asks her age, she must answer honestly or show ID if it is requested.

If she recognizes anyone in the store, she needs to leave immediately and not make a purchase. It's important that no one be aware of what she is doing. She goes to small convenience stores, gas stations, large discount chains—just about any place cigarettes are sold. She is never assigned to go into a location that could be dangerous.

She also carries a small camera and takes a picture of the person selling the tobacco product. A job like this does have some risk, so a state agent always goes into the store either just ahead of her or soon after, before she starts to check

out. If she is able to make a purchase, the agent takes over immediately. Jessica then returns to the car and fills out the necessary papers.

About one out of every 10 or 12 people will sell to her. Why would someone do this? From her personal experience, Jessica believes that most of the time it is carelessness. A person asks for ID and then may figure her age incorrectly or just barely glance at it. In one case, though, a man checked her age and even commented about her being too young to smoke or purchase cigarettes. As she started to leave the building, he called her back to make the sale. She said she could hardly keep from telling him what a dumb mistake he was making. However, she was also very upset that he would deliberately do something he knew to be both illegal and harmful.





# Virtual

## Opting Out of Real Life

By Michelle Lewis

**C**ASSIE'S\* old IBM laptop sits on the mattress beside her, buddy list spanning the screen, keeping tabs on friends, enemies, and near-strangers. Tangled red hair spills across the keyboard as she dozes, head resting inches from a high-speed, always-on connection to her online world. A burst of sound wakes her, and she swiftly answers another IM. It's 3:00 a.m., but she doesn't care.

Since she quit high school, jobs rapidly slip through her slim, dexterous fingers, and she often naps during the day. Previous employers cite unreliability, depression, and attitude problems. Her family wearily deals with her nocturnal hours, lack of household contribution, dishonesty, and general instability.

### A Growing Problem

My sister's story represents those of a growing number of high school and college students who live in an online world of their own creation. Cassie and other Internet-addicted teens withdraw mentally, emotionally, and even physically, losing themselves in cyberspace while losing their family and friends in the process.

Cassie and I had been close since we were kids, but her erratic and hurtful behavior made her impossible to live with. Internet addiction disorder, or IAD, like other addiction disorders, usually hits family and friends the hardest. Addicts' online world takes precedence over the real world, alienating everyone around them. My sister preferred her online activities and chat buddies to spending time with me and her other true friends.

More than 11 percent of teens suffer from IAD, according to a study presented at the American Psychiatric Association. Seventy-five percent of Internet addicts also suffer from relationship problems, including Cassie.

### Defining Internet Addiction Disorder

The Center for Online and Internet Addiction defines IAD as, "any online-related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones, and one's work environment."

Sound familiar? IAD shares many similarities with substance abuse. Virtual-addiction.com describes the pattern of Internet addiction: "The pattern of addiction is caused by a complex interaction of the removal of discomfort, relief of stress, and the

increase of pleasure. The pleasurable experiences are repeated despite the negative consequences. Often there is the experience of guilt and shame after engaging in the addictive behavior (Internet use); this shame and guilt can serve as a trigger for further abuse of the Internet as a means to cope with the discomfort hence producing a repetitive Internet abuse cycle."

The signs and symptoms of IAD are nearly identical to those of drug and alcohol addiction. Is your friend forgetting homework, missing evening or weekend activities to stay online, skipping work or school, or avoiding family and friends? These behaviors all signal a problem.

The center notes, "It is not the actual time spent online that determines if you have a problem, but rather how that time you spend impacts your life." Other symptoms of IAD include:

1. Compulsive use of the Internet.
2. Preoccupation with being online (thinking about previous online activity or anticipating the next online session.)
3. Lying or hiding the extent or nature of online behavior.
4. Inability to control or curb online behavior, including moodiness, depression, and irritability when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use.

### Breaking the Cycle

So what can you do for a friend



# Reality

lost in cyberspace? Start by talking to them. Cassie didn't believe she had any friends off-line. She struggled with depression and used the Internet as a mood booster, as many addicts do. Akin to nicotine cravings, Internet addicts need their computer fix—or they become snappy and irritable. But the knowledge that someone cared enough to patiently break down her social barriers helped Cassie to begin addressing the emotional problems at the heart of her addiction.

Next, encourage your friend to get involved in an off-line hobby, something that requires interaction with other people. Ask your friend to join an athletic team or school club with you. Grab some friends and go bowling or skating. Help them build healthy relationships and establish activities outside the online world. As with over-coming alcohol and

tobacco abuse, your friend will need support from trusted friends and adults.

Unlike drugs and alcohol, it may not be something they can quit “cold turkey”—the Internet is useful and sometimes necessary for school and work. For any other online activities, such as games and chatting, offer to help your friend set up a strict accountability schedule. You could offer to call your friend to keep him or her accountable at night, on the weekend, or at another time when they are most likely to abuse the Internet.

In Cassie's situation, her parents took away the laptop and shut off their Internet access at night to

help limit her usage. Another good suggestion is to place the computer in a family room, den, or other high-traffic area for supervision and accountability. Urge your friend to talk with their parents, a school counselor, or a psychologist familiar with IAD and work out a personal schedule and guidelines for online activities.

In this way, rather than a destructive escape—a cyber reality pulling your friend away from healthy relationships and the real world—when used appropriately and in moderation, the Internet can become the helpful tool it was meant to be.

—\*Name has been changed.







# On

By Nicole Feliciano


**G**etting your hands on a cool set of wheels may be easier than you think. Rather than obsessing about an expensive car, many teens are fulfilling their need for speed on roller skates.

Not only is roller skating a blast, it also burns 300-600 calories per hour (depending on your weight and how fast you skate). With movies and videos featuring roller skating, you may believe this is a new trend. In fact, roller skates have been around since 1760, when a Belgian inventor thought up a clever way to add wheels to footwear.

According to the Roller Skating Association International, 10.8 million people are using quad skates (traditional four-wheeled skates in a two-by-two formation) and another 29 million folks are using in-line skates—that's nearly 320 million wheels in motion each year!

Rector McIntyre has been coaching teens in roller skating for 27 years at the Rollerama rink in Schenectady, New York. "Competitive skaters are very athletic,"





says McIntyre. "Skating practice teaches teens discipline and they learn to achieve things through hard work." McIntyre feels skating offers teens a healthy alternative to smoking and drinking.

Christopher Johnson, 13, is one of McIntyre's prize athletes. Johnson competes in solo and team dance competitions at the national level. The dance competitions look similar to Olympic ice dancing; only replace the ice skates with quad roller skates. Most weekends Johnson puts in about six hours of skating practice. During the week this student-athlete focuses on schoolwork and music

and ultimately to skate at the world competition. Johnson's amassed more than 35 skating medals since he started competing.

The sport has given Johnson a chance to travel around the country and meet other teens involved in the sport. He's been to Florida and Nebraska, and next year he'll head to Fresno, California, for nationals. Johnson tells teens who are just learning the sport not to get frustrated at the beginning. When asked about falling Johnson says, "It's not that bad; falling down is how you learn."

# Roll

*Teens are fulfilling their need for speed on roller skates.*



(he's an honor roll student and member of the jazz ensemble at school) with a little weight lifting mixed in to keep in shape for his weekend workouts.

Johnson aspires to win a gold medal at the U.S.A. Roller Sports (USARS) national championships

If competition isn't your thing and you just want to skate for fun, perhaps you want to check out a local roller rink. Skating is a fun way to connect with other teens, and it won't cost you a bundle of money. For about \$10 you can rent a pair of skates and enjoy a skate session.



Beginning skaters might benefit from a lesson before heading out on the rink; try to hook up with a friend who skates or sign up for a group lesson. As you get more interested in the sport, you may want to get your own skates. A midrange set of quad skates averages about \$250. The key to quad skating, like many other sports, is practice, practice, practice. The more you skate, the better you'll get. Visit the USARS site, [www.usarollersports.org](http://www.usarollersports.org), for ideas about skating in your neighborhood.

Teens are welcome at Empire rink ([www.empirerollerskating.com](http://www.empirerollerskating.com)), in Brooklyn, New York, on any day of the week, but Friday is special—parents and young kids have to stay home. Each Friday evening Empire Roller Skating Center welcomes neighborhood teens for a teen skate from 8:00 p.m. until midnight. On an average Friday, 1,000 teens will turn up to skate and listen to the fresh tunes supplied by a live DJ.

For teens, like Latoya Peters, the rink's "the place" to chill on Friday nights. When I stopped by, 14-year-old Peters was enjoying the pumping music and was eager to get out onto the rink with her friends and start skating. Skating at Empire is a workout—16 laps around the rink equals a mile. Don't worry, though; in the center of the rink there's an area to chat with friends or catch your breath on a bench. Neon palm trees decorate the center oasis for a funky effect.

Varian Gatewood, 17, is a student and part-time skate guard at Empire. Gatewood spoke about the rush he gets while skating. "I put on these eight wheels and the music just gets to me; the adrenaline starts pumping."

As a skate guard, Gatewood gives beginning skaters tips and makes sure that everyone is skating safely, but mostly he encourages teens to enjoy themselves. Gatewood believes skating is great for teens and says, "You can have a good time without getting into trouble." Empire's

owner, Mike Feiger, and his team work closely with parents in the community to assure them that their teens are safe and supervised at his rink.

If you like the idea of skating but long to get outside while on your wheels, in-line skating may be just the thing for you. Places like New York's Chelsea Piers offer in-line skaters the chance to perform tricks at the skate park, join a roller hockey team, or simply get basic skate instruction.

According to Bill Gordon, the park's general manager, the facility hosts 600,000 kids every year. And it's not just boys thrashing around on wheels—more and more girls are getting involved in in-line sports. Gordon says skaters tend to be "a little crazy—you've got to be willing to get hurt. If you're self-conscious about hitting the ground, this isn't the sport for you." He says, "In-line skaters must be willing to take risks."

Gordon sees the trend going

away from recreational in-line skating toward teens wanting to tackle sliding on rails and jumping obstacles. Since spills are the norm for these daredevils, helmets and pads are a must. For novices, Gordon suggests lessons or skate camp. He says, "Instruction is everything. This isn't like bowling; you need to know what you're doing before you get on your skates."

All the thrills of in-line skating come pretty cheap. At Chelsea Piers it's \$14 for a day pass and another \$14 for skates and safety gear rental. Once you're addicted to the sport, a decent set of in-line skates will set you back about \$100.

There are limitless options for freewheeling fun: roller basketball, roller soccer, and wind skating to name a few (visit [www.skatelog.com](http://www.skatelog.com) for a list of 30 different types of skating). Skating can be social or solitary. You can skate for power, grace, and/or speed. Whatever your aim, why not give this sport a spin?



## Simple Quad Skating Instructions

- Make sure your skates fit snugly, but not uncomfortably.
- Once you're laced up, bend your knees.
- Balance your weight evenly between your feet.
- Keep your head up.
- Pick a spot on the wall ahead of you.
- Smile, focus on the spot, and push off.
- Perform a "step and roll" motion with each foot.
- Get comfortable falling—it happens to everyone.

## Skate Maintenance and Safety

- Keep bearings and wheels dry and clean.
- Rotate your wheels every couple of months to prevent uneven wear.
- Check laces and buckles for damage.
- Replace brake pads when worn down.





Rachel  
Bishop



Curt  
VanderWaal



# What's up with that?

Please send questions to: [whatsup@listenmagazine.org](mailto:whatsup@listenmagazine.org).

**My boyfriend told me that if I drank Red Bull with my beer I wouldn't get drunk so quickly. Is he right?**  
—Sandy

Sandy, more and more teens are mixing energy drinks with alcohol, but they are only fooling themselves into thinking they are getting drunk more slowly. Because energy drinks are a stimulant, drinkers often feel less drunk because the caffeine and herb supplements keep them from feeling tired and realizing how drunk they are. But ironically, people who drink energy drinks and alcohol often end up drinking more than usual because the unpleasant taste of alcohol is masked and they don't feel the effects of the alcohol as quickly as they normally would. Worse yet, the next morning's hangover is worse than usual because caffeine and alcohol both dehydrate the body, thereby kicking up the effects of the hangover. So your boyfriend is half right—you will feel less drunk, but you may actually become even more drunk in the process. Bottom line—alcohol is still alcohol . . . don't get fooled into thinking you can outsmart its dangers.

No, not weird at all, Jordan. Because of media hype and lots of dramatic stories, many teens have the feeling that everyone's done drugs at some point. But that is simply not true—more than 50 percent of high school seniors have *never* tried *any* sort of illegal drug in their lifetime, including marijuana. And if you drop marijuana from the picture, almost three quarters of high school seniors have never tried an illegal drug. Unfortunately, if a person thinks that everyone else is doing it, he is more likely to try drugs too. So it's important for you to know that you and your friends aren't weird, Jordan—you are actually in the majority because you haven't tried drugs. Keep hanging out with these friends—you all sound like a pretty smart bunch.

**My friends and I haven't tried drugs, but the way some people talk it seems like everyone's doing it. Are we weird?**  
—Jordan

**My grandma's doctor gave her some Oxy-Contin for her cancer pain, but it made her sick so she stopped taking it. My older brother took some of the pills. It's a prescription, so it's not like he's doing weed or meth, right?**  
—Jimmy

You're right, Jimmy, a lot of teens in the U.S. believe that prescription drugs are less harmful than illegal drugs—they're prescribed by doctors to millions of people, so they can't be that dangerous, right? To a point, they are right when the prescription is taken as prescribed by a doctor. However, most teens use prescriptions only to relax or get some sort of a high. But although these drugs are legal, they're still drugs and can be just as harmful and addictive as many illegal drugs. And prescription meds can cause bad reactions and side effects that should be monitored by a doctor. So while they are often as close as the family medicine cabinet, we would strongly suggest that you and your brother stay clear of them.



# NOT YOU TOO!

By Ericka Pate

My brother and I didn't recognize our mother anymore. She was attached to a bunch of wires and tubes, some in her nose and some in her arms. She was emaciated, pale, and nearing complete baldness. Her skin was translucent, covered with thin purplish blue lines. Her sunken eyes reflected the tremendous pain her body was experiencing. She was also exhausted by the constant vomiting. Our mother had lung cancer. Our mother was dying.

She smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. On many occasions my brother and I watched in dismay as our free-spirited mother pulled a bag of marijuana out of her purse and rolled up the weeds into a piece

of quick-burn paper. I often wondered where she got the money for her nasty habits. Our small family was constantly in financial crisis. We had been evicted from more than one apartment for failing to pay the rent. When times were desperate we couldn't afford a telephone, heat, or even a loaf of bread. Nonetheless, our mother never went a single day without her cigarettes or her marijuana.

I tried not to blame my mother. She didn't ask to be inflicted with a terminal disease. I didn't want her to die. I loved her more than I loved anyone, but I hated her, too. I wanted to scream at her, tell her she should have taken better care of herself. I felt out of control.

When my brother and I were children, we used to hide her cigarettes and drugs. We were skilled at

discovering where she kept her stash, in the nightstand by her bed and the cabinet above the stove. We both despised the smell of smoke and hoped our intervention would deter her. It never did.

"Anna! Tyler! Where are my cigarettes?" Mom demanded. "I'm the adult. You're the children. You're not going to decide what I do with my body!"

"Can't you try to quit? Can't you go to one of those classes?" Tyler or I would plead.

"I will quit when I'm ready to quit. Now get off my back and give me my cigarettes!"

Arguments with our mother went on in similar fashion for the remainder of our childhood. We both gave up trying to convince her to change her destructive ways. And we learned to ignore the physical





signs of our mother's slow decline.

Tyler and I went to visit our mother in the hospital. She had become too weak from the chemotherapy to rest peacefully at home. I sat next to her, held her bony hand in mine, and sobbed uncontrollably. Tyler exited the room in a rush, unable to deal with the heavy emotions.

I searched for Tyler around the hospital floor devoted to cancer patients. The nurse informed me that he'd headed outside for some fresh air. His back was toward me as I approached him in the parking lot.

"Tyler. Are you OK? I . . ." Before I could finish my sentence, he turned to me and blew a colossal puff of gray smoke out of his mouth. I was devastated.

"What are you doing? Our mother is in there, dying of lung

cancer, and you're out here smoking!"

"Relax. It's just a cigarette. It's not like I'm smoking a joint," Tyler responded.

"Just a cigarette? Are you kidding me? How long have you been smoking?"

"I'm an adult, Anna. I don't need you running my life."

I had little desire to run my brother's life. He was right. He was an adult. But the thought of losing another family member to cancer made me sick to my stomach. I didn't know how to talk to my brother.

Our beloved mother died on an ordinary Tuesday. We were told she passed away in her sleep, alone and unaware of her transition into death. She was only 54 years old. I had to bury my mother knowing that her death could have been pre-

vented. It wasn't fair.

A few weeks after our mother's funeral, I drove to my brother's house on a mission. I stood on his porch, took a deep breath, and rang the doorbell. When he opened the front door, I handed him a bag overflowing with pamphlets about smoking cessation programs and cancer facts. And with all the love in my heart, I said to him, "Don't be another statistic. Your life is worth more than a cigarette. It would break my heart for you to end up like Mom."

Tyler promised he would make an effort to quit. We both know it won't be easy for him. He will probably fail several times, but at least he is on the right path.



# graffiti

Illustrations: Art Explosion Image Library



## Blue

By Maxwell Okunola

Blue flies in the skies,  
And always cries.  
Blue is in the ocean,  
And always shows emotion.  
Blue is the Smurf on a TV show,  
And the blueberry that always will grow.  
Blue is a pen that writes so bold,  
One that every person holds.  
Blue is a tiny jingle bell,  
Blue is a shiny pearly shell.  
So next time you hear the word *blue*,  
Don't take it for granted; it could be you,  
too.



## This is my . . .

By Sierra Hill

This is my life to have and to hold.  
This is my head for me to control.  
This is my dream to never let go.  
This is my body for me to know.  
This is my eye to watch everything closely.  
This is my ear to listen carefully.  
This is me for those who do not know.  
And for those who think otherwise,  
This is my life, and it I will control.



## Loneliness

By Courtney Grace

I got mad at my friend one day,  
Then she quit talking to me.  
We stopped laughing at each other's jokes.  
I have no one to hang out with after school,  
Or on the weekends,  
Or ever.  
I am  
Lonely.

## Happiness

By Maxwell Okunola

Happiness is what makes a person laugh;  
It is the positive emotion that every person should have.  
Happiness is a deep feeling within your soul;  
It is the feeling when you get a present for Christmas and not just coal.  
Happiness is when you experience your birthday;  
It is something that money just cannot pay.  
Happiness is not something that people can see;  
It is something you have to feel and be.  
Happiness is the feeling when your mom tucks you in bed;  
It is not anger or the color red.  
Happiness is something nobody can take away,  
So be happy every single day.

To have your poetry, essay, or letter considered for this spot, mail it to: Editor, *Listen Magazine*, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740 or send it by e-mail to [editor@listenmagazine.org](mailto:editor@listenmagazine.org).



# The LISTEN Pledge

"Readers are leaders"

Thank you for reading  
Listen magazine.

Listen to others  
and they will listen to  
you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Don't miss the good stuff!

**LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?** Get one year of  
**Listen** for **US\$26.95** (nine issues). Choose one of the  
following options and subscribe today.

1. Online at [www.listenmagazine.org](http://www.listenmagazine.org)
2. Toll-free at 1-800-548-8700
3. Send in the information below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Endorse check or money order and mail to:

LISTEN, P.O. Box 859, Hagerstown, MD 21741.

Please add US\$7.00 for addresses outside the U.S.A.

## Subscribe NOW!

# US\$26.95

## WHAT'S NEXT

### Dwight Howard: The New Old School

The NBA's number one draft pick, chosen by the Orlando Magic, who hoped he would fill the impressive basketball shoes of Shaquille O'Neal, talks straight about life, drugs, and video games.

### Teens Dot-com

Ever wanted to create your own home on the Web? We'll tell you how to get started.

### Beef: The Heavy Truth About Steroids

Got game? Rob, Chris, and Taylor did. Until they tried to improve it with steroids.

### Brain Drain

If you think any changes to your brain caused by drugs are temporary you'd be wrong. Drugs can change your brain permanently, and the rest of your life along with it.

### Living History Aboard the Lexington

Ever wondered what it would be like to be in the Navy, living aboard ship? You can! We'll take you aboard the U.S.S. Lexington for a sleepover. Then you can go yourself!



"In 14 years of modeling,  
this is my favorite shot of myself."



*Christy Turlington considers quitting smoking her biggest success.  
One of her biggest regrets is that she ever started.*

