

on and off: the ex-addict



by H.J. Cummins

Torrey began sniffing glue when he was 12-years-old.

A candy store owner in his Brooklyn, N.Y. neighborhood sold 10-cent tubes of glue to him and his friends for \$3, he said.

His 11-year-old brother got it free, he said, by threatening to tell the police about the store.

Glue gave way to pills, marijuana and hashish for Torrey. By 15, he was using opium and shooting heroin.

"The opium was so pure. It came in chunks. You could smoke it, eat it, put it on the tip of your nose and you'd probably get high it was so good," he said.

His whole life quickly became centered around drugs, he said.

"All I wanted to do was get high,"

Torrey had been a member of the Imperial Lords, a Brooklyn gang, he said.

"Then the gang just broke up. We used to fight other gangs. All of a sudden all of us were doing heroin and we needed each other."

His brother quit high school as a freshman but Torrey stayed in.

"I gave up sports, gave up a lot of girls. I got kicked out for dealing pills. But I graduated because my lawyers fought it," he said.

And he's glad he stayed, he said, because it made college possible. Torrey is an ex-heroin addict, a freshman at the University of Nebraska-Omaha (UNO), and a graduate of the drug rehabilitation program at the Omaha Veterans Hospital.

He's 23 and married now. His wife is expecting a baby in May. He supports his family with scholarship money his 18 months in the Air Force has given him. And he's looking for a

part-time job.

He plans to stay in Omaha, he said.

"I'd like to live here or in Colorado. I miss New York, but it's much easier to get along out here. If I went back, I'd just pick up where I left off and end up dead or in jail, like my friends."

Although he said he doesn't believe the theory "once a drug addict, always a drug addict," he also said:

"If someone handed me a bag of heroin, I couldn't say for sure I wouldn't shoot it. I get the feeling sometimes to get high, mainly when I'm relaxed and it's nice outside. Then I remember the hassles and I know it's not worth it."

"The main thing is to stay out of the whole damn scene. It's hard to forget the high. It's easier to forget the pain."

He laughs in amazement at what he calls his "life in the street" during his drug using and dealing years.

Getting drugs was never a problem, he said. He used to write his own prescriptions or get pills from a drug store clerk whom he fronted for (sold pills at a commission), he said.

He started selling drugs when he was 14, Torrey said. Profits grew to \$500 a day, he said, which he needed to re-invest in drugs and feed his \$150-a-day heroin habit.

"It's called a 'dealer's habit' but dealers don't last too long at that rate," he said. **"You're too high, you get careless. That's when you get caught."**

He pulled some burglaries, too, he said.

"I was good at them but I tried to stay away from them. They're too dangerous. Once I made \$20,000 on a burglary," he said.

By the time he was 15, he said, he'd made enough money to buy a bakery. He said he sold drugs and fake draft cards in the bakery's back room.