

Letting go

Drugs end close relationship

I began my senior year of high school without any friends I could call my own. I left for lunch alone every day, certain that everyone was watching me.

Then I noticed Amy (not her real name) walking toward the parking lot and took a chance. By the end of the half-hour, we were sworn lunch partners.

Amy and I shared a lot in the 12 months that followed: gossiping fifth hour, cruising and smoking during lunch hour, getting high and giggling on the bus to Grant. I taught Amy to drive a stick-shift on country roads during lunch.

One day that spring comes to mind, along with a memory of twist ice cream dried on my car door:

Amy and I both worked at McDonald's. We were taking a main after work; she was driving my car, and I was anxious as usual. Three times in a row I had to yell at her to avoid rear-ending somebody.

I flung open my door right there on B Street, ran around the back of the car and told her to get the hell out of the driver's seat. A block later my ice cream cone plastered itself to the door as I screeched to a stop. I guess by that point we were even copying each other's mistakes.

A nasty break-up that March triggered my fall into a painful depression. I was determined to fight it with the help of my friends. I told them all how I was feeling and begged for their support. I don't know whether they were scared by my candor or whether they just didn't give a damn; I watched them abandon me one by one.

Amy was the only one who stood by me. She nursed my confidence back to a point where I could be happy again.

I'm crying now.

I was home for a weekend this spring when I realized Amy had a problem.

She was driving my car, like old times, and I didn't even realize she was stoned until she gushed, "Oh, Kate, it

was so crazy! We smoked this fat-ass blunt, and then passed the steamroller and smoked another blunt..."

That night should have made me realize what was happening and take the initiative to rescue her.

Gone were the days when we got high only once in a while, as an exception. Smoking weed had become a daily routine for Amy; coke or meth was an occasion.

I contended that I didn't see how smoking pot could be that great when you did it every day. Amy tried to rationalize it with medical-type B.S., telling me that everybody gets a different high and that it just doesn't affect me enough to make me like it.

Amy was excited when I decided to move back home for the summer. She spoke of all the fun we would have and how it would be just like last summer. "And just wait till you meet Melissa! She's from Omaha, and she's so cool. You'll get along great."

Melissa was what Amy needed; she was a friend who had similar interests. Most importantly, she was on Amy's side of matters that were driving a wedge between us.

A Friday early in the summer:

I found Amy early in the evening, just returning from the lake with Melissa.

The three of us drove around, cranked up the stereo and wandered from party to party. We grabbed a beer when we could or took a couple hits if a joint was going around.

The night was good until somebody gave Amy 10 bucks to buy crank. She tracked down her supplier, a guy so disgusting I didn't want to be seen talking to him.

Amy threw in a 10, and they scored their stuff. They never even thought of splitting it with the guy whose money they'd taken.

A couple of weeks later I was at Amy's house. She showed me her most recent shoplifting score and told me about Mike, a guy she'd met in Lincoln and was crazy about.

She had called in sick to work, and

we were going to do something that night. Then the phone rang. There was a party in Lincoln, and Mike would be there.

Amy and Melissa left at 5 in the afternoon for a town four hours away, with the intention of getting drunk and stoned and driving home by 8 in the morning.

I never should have let her go. I told Amy that I would drive by work in the morning to see if she'd made it back. I tried to make her understand how worried I would be if she wasn't there.

I hardly slept that night, and by 8:30 a.m. I was at Mickey D's. She wasn't. I spent that day making phone calls to the highway patrol. I scouted Amy's house and the cruise route. Over and over I called the girl whose party they'd gone to.

Visions of Amy's funeral played in my head.

Amy showed up around 5, wearing my sunglasses and acting like nothing was the matter. That night I sat in the back while Amy and Melissa drove all over town looking for someone who would give them a free bowl.

We never hung out again. One night Amy ditched work to go to the fair. I was so worried about the direction her life was taking that I couldn't concentrate on my shift in the drive-through, and when my dad came

through, I ran out of the store to cry in his arms.

I decided to visit the Narcotics Anonymous office the next day and ask them what I could do. I broke down crying again when I told my mom about my plan. That's when I learned of Amy's greatest offense, one that far surpassed not calling me back or leaving me to cover her shift.

Amy had stolen a prescription pad from a clinic and forged a doctor's note for missing work. And she had signed my mother's name at the bottom. I told my mom, "Amy is my friend, and I love her. I have to help her."

I was not angry until I found out that the management thought I was in on it.



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

At McDonald's, we often joke that we're "going to lose it before the night is over." When I had to work with Amy for six hours, the joke got serious. I could feel the rage boiling inside of me, barely kept in check by worried looks from the manager. I promised that by the end of the night I would either start throwing punches or end up on the floor, giggling maniacally. Fortunately, I went with the latter.

In McDonald's terms, I lost it. The remaining weeks of the summer were more emotionally charged than anything I've experienced. The slightest glimpse of Amy or mention of her name set me off. I threw a bag of ketchup at a guy in the drive-through because he pointed at her car.

Instead of cleaning when I wasn't busy, I gazed out the window. Unable to comprehend the images in front of me, I closed my eyes and watched the confused bubbles of feeling that bounced against a blank screen in my mind.

I slowly forgave Amy, who had never realized why I was mad at her. It was easier to laugh and talk with her than to be hostile. I left town without saying goodbye, and we haven't spoken since.

I think of Amy often and try not to wonder if she's thinking of me. I don't know whether I'm writing this for Amy or for all of you. I'm not trying to tell anyone how to live.

Maybe I am trying to warn you that drugs can take over your life if you're not careful. Watch out for your friends and make sure they realize how important they are to you.

Amy, I know this column will find its way to you. You've taught me quite a lesson, one I wouldn't have missed missing out on. *Sister of my heart, I love you and wish you well.*

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Growing up, not out

Development could destroy fragile ecosystems



Lincoln is not unique in that it faces a critical turning point during the next five years, which will either direct it toward a prosperous, contained future, or one that is ravaged by the spoils of a cancerous growth.

In the beginning, the developing agencies in Lincoln (MEGA, Lincoln Public Schools, UNL, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) look for areas within the city's jurisdiction that are inexpensive to purchase and are easy to develop.

Some of these areas are fragile ecosystems like wetlands and prairies, and other areas consist of the most prime farmland in the vicinity. Neither is of much concern to greed-intoxicated suits with big play toys.

Since profits from agriculture have been ruined by the very industrialization that creates its grossly obscene production level, the farmland around Lincoln is very cheap and very ripe for development.

Next, when these prospective developers find a good piece of speculative property, a series of events occurs:

1) Go through the bureaucracy of

- working with the Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Department,
- 2) Amend the Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan for a "zone" change (which dictates what may or may not be built in an area),
- 3) Get approval of the zone change by the City Council and mayor, developing site plans for the development with regard to the new "zone" distinction,
- 4) Engineer around possibly dangerous situations (which are usually better to be avoided altogether),
- 5) Get approval of the site plans by the city council and mayor
- 6) And finally, finance the development.

This process can take three months to two years or more, depending on the amount of engineering involved to develop a safe plan, answer public concerns and begin the political/planning bureaucracy.

During this time, a lot of money is spent on lawyer fees, engineer consulting, land acquisition, etc.

But here's the inside scoop.

The main developing entities, the lawyers, the politicians, the media, the planners, the engineers... some of them sleep together in the same bed and do not pursue the benefit of the Lincoln "community."

Their "community" is defined as who can scratch whose back in order to make a quick buck for the elites

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involved.

It takes only a few rotten members to spoil the bunch. And if the bunch looks rotten to the people, then there can be serious trouble.

When I say some, I mean some, not all. Some of the politicians, media persons, planners and engineers have heartfelt convictions against the march of sprawl across Lincoln's farmland.

However, their job position may shackle their ability to refuse or reject ugly, irresponsible, disruptive development proposals. That's why they encourage the public to get involved at the beginning stages, not at the end.

What's interesting and maybe of more concern is how little the public knows about it.

When an insulated group determines the unattractive spread of Lincoln's girth, it moves from efficient and convenient to collusion with conflicting interests.

It's a fine line that one dare not cross.

Of course, the public is given notice

of public hearings, but those notices are quite small and are imbedded in the local paper.

The meeting times for public hearings often conflict with people's work schedules, because they are usually held at 1:30 in the afternoon. Only on special occasions do they hold meetings in the evenings.

Furthermore, the public's input at the time of public hearings comes too late anyway, because the process has moved too far along for people to influence any decisions.

Too much money has already been spent, too many deals have been made, too many legal problems will be incurred if the city does not allow the progress of the project.

Recently the Horizon Business Center abomination passed through the City Council (5-2 in favor) and was signed by Mayor Don Wesely.

For those that don't know, the Horizon Business Center will be on the west side of 14th Street near Pine Lake Road, directly abutting Wilderness

Park (save a thin 17-acre buffer strip). It will house warehouses, other light industry and business offices.

It will be a cornerstone of doom for Wilderness Park by adding a notch in the noose of a sensitive ecosystem habitat and beginning the paving of a tremendous water storage area.

Furthermore, the engineering plans that the City Council and the mayor signed were faulty, because the data used to calculate flood water flow did not reflect a fully urbanized scenario, which is what is expected for that area.

The Horizon plans didn't even take into account the near-future development that will be built on the east side of 14th Street in the same area that will increase the rate and amount of water-flow into the Horizon area.

As other developments strangle Wilderness Park, it will become the country's first throw-away park after being nationally recognized in the 1970s as an innovative method for flood retention and reintegrating wild areas near urban centers.

It's time that Lincoln grew up, because growing out is simply irresponsible in light of present concerns and interests of the general health, safety and welfare of the community.

We might get along for one more year, but when an emergency hits this town down the road, it will be far more difficult to recover the community's losses when the community has stretched itself too thin.

How long does it take for people to understand?

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