

KIDS AT WAR

THE BATTLE OF ADDICTION

JACOB HILL

Kids at War

Kids

At

War

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Kids at War

In Memory of Friends that Died too Young...

A.B. (drug overdose)	A.M. (drug overdose)
M.B. (alcohol related)	T.S. (alcohol related)
P.H. (drug overdose)	J.A. (drug overdose)
G.W. (suicide)	"Hassle" (drug overdose)
M.W. (suicide)	S.R. (suicide)
"Battery" (drug related)	M.M. (drug overdose)
"Casual" (drug overdose)	"Select" (alcohol related)
"Caps" (drug overdose)	A.T. (drug overdose)
L.F. (suicide)	D.N. (drug related)
A.K. (drug related)	H.P. (drug related)
M.H. (drug overdose)	T.S. (suicide)
B.C. (suicide)	"Aster" (drug overdose)

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Foreword

Kids at War tells the compelling story of Jacob Hill and his battle to grow up. Jacob takes us inside his world when he was a teenager trapped in the despair and hopelessness of drug addiction. His reality is similar to so many others who finally reach a point where they would rather die than live. The good news is that Jacob discovered the way out of his addiction at Teen Challenge and now has a whole new view on life—one filled with hope and one that is drug-free. I highly recommend this book to both teens and parents.

Dave Batty

C.O.O., Global Teen Challenge

Kids at War

Dedicated to

My beautiful wife Melissa and three fantastic kids, Caleb, Ethan and Tiffany.

Thank you so much for helping make my life more amazing than I ever thought life could be.

The Beginning;

(start here)

I am sitting at a desk/cubicle with a built in lamp on the wall in front of me. There is a partition either side, offering a little privacy from the men seated around me. The sky blue paint has obviously been applied numerous times over the years.

I wonder - if I cut into the desk will I be able to work out its age by counting its coats, like the rings of a tree trunk?

The paint is doing its best to cover up generations of graffiti. Some can still be seen. A gang name and "Rick was here 03" scrawled in biro are still visible, although faded and a little smudged, apparently due to a failed attempt to remove them.

A cross that had been etched deep into the wooden desktop is still brazenly on display, valiantly resisting the many coats of paint that have attempted to mask it.

As a boy, I swore I would never touch a cigarette, or drink, much less use drugs let alone become a heroin addict and need to be in rehab!

I had no idea that a drug rehab would have classrooms with workbooks – I'm not exactly sure what I thought it

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would be like, more like a holiday camp where you can sleep as much as you like... certainly not this.

On the desk in front of me is a black ballpoint BIC pen, a worn old Bible, a lined piece of foolscap paper and a workbook I'm filling out titled, "Project 301 I'm Here"...

Project 301 I'm Here

25/5/03

NAME: *Jacob Hill*

1. Why am I here?

I came here to rehabilitate from drug addiction.

2. A little bit about myself

A little bit about myself - I am hanging like a dog, I would like to shoot myself in the arm or the head. I need to get away. Away from myself. I want drugs.

3. What are my thoughts now that I have been here a few days?

My thoughts now I have been here a few days - @\$?# U! I do not believe I have finished physically withdrawing from the numerous narcotics that frequent my body. I have not been able to think. I would like to abuse you for asking me these questions, ~~but I won't~~. I feel completely + utterly aimless + lost so @\$?# U

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I have been sick from withdrawing for a few days now... the last time I slept was three nights ago, the first night that I got here - I slept through to midday. My shoulder is killing me.

The night before I came here I badly hurt it in a fight with one of my crew, one of my friends, a man I love like my own brother. He has been one of my best friends for years. He knows that I need help, he knows that we all need it, but he still isn't too happy with me walking away...

The drugs in my system that have kept my senses numb for so many years are wearing off... my stomach has been cramping, sending searing pain through my entire body and lightning bolts of electricity to my brain.

My bones feel like chalk and I am so cold.

At times all I can do is curl into a ball until the intense waves of pain subside.

I keep breaking into these hot and cold sweats, the poisons flushing from my system as my body slowly detoxifies.

The sleepless nights seem to last forever... longing for the sun to rise but finding no relief when it does...

"How did I get here?!!!" I begin to ponder with my head buried in my hands, which does little to stop it swimming. I am feeling a strange sense of, not so much despair, but helplessness; there is an almost freeing weightlessness

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accompanying the sensation. Just maybe it is all over... just maybe.

I know the first thing that will have to go will be my reputation. I am not a quitter – never have been, yet here I am quitting... walking away... away from drugs, and away from the crew I love.

The questions on the page in front of me turn from asking about me to asking about what I think of God.

A lifetime ago, I believed there was a God... this same God on the paper in front of me... I used to go to Sunday School every week when I was little.

It really seems like a whole different life ago... looking back, the man I have become, sitting at this desk, seems removed to an impossible degree from the happy, energetic boy with the cheeky smile that my Mum once knew.

I can see the mess that I have made of my life, but the despair and regret that I know I should be feeling is just theoretical. I genuinely don't care. I just don't seem to have the capacity to experience these emotions. I haven't felt *anything* for a long, long time.

The life that I have been living isn't living at all – just existing, without hope, one day at a time, never daring to look forward to tomorrow, and certainly never looking back to regret yesterday.

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I can't break the promise I made to myself – never to be hurt or disappointed again. This means not loving and not hoping. I have known for a few years now that a life without love, without hope, is not a life at all – merely an existence.

Again, my thoughts trail back to the question, "*How did my life get to this?*" Again, out of the reflex to defend and protect myself from emotional pain, I automatically shut down my mind, subconsciously forbidding it the opportunity to entertain the question that may expose any memory, any emotion that might inflict pain.

Over the coming year, I would have to re-live my past, feel my pain and face my deepest fears.

This is my story.



Jacob aged twelve & twenty one

Chapter 1

Payback!

“That’s them!” I heard over the screeching tyres.

This was payback!

Less than an hour ago we had the upper hand with a couple of brothers – now the tables were turned...

Three car loads of boys rocked up on us with four or five guys pouring out of each car - they were all well older than our fourteen years.

The first car load had grabbed Paul and another circle had formed around me. One of the boys had taken a pitch fork from a nearby garden and started beating Paul with it. There was nothing I could do. I had problems of my own.

I was being rushed by a blonde haired guy who looked about seventeen or eighteen – he wasn’t the biggest of the group but he looked mean.

I took a couple of hits and gave a couple but mostly I just tried to keep the guy close – if I could keep him close enough he wouldn’t have the room to swing and couldn’t

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land any big hits – this meant that I couldn't either - but that didn't matter, I was in a fight I couldn't win.

Even if I could beat this bigger, older boy, the second it looked like I was getting on top of him the others were going to jump in and bash me.

I was fighting for my life.

I knew it was only a matter of time before the others jumped in anyway. I resisted the helpless feeling that tried to overwhelm me.

“Keep your feet”, I continued to silently instruct myself, forcing myself to remain calm – now was not the time to panic.

“Keep your feet – or you're a dead man”, the advice that my big brother had always given me was echoing through my thoughts. He knew how mob mentality worked.

I could see it playing out from the corner of my eye - the angry, violent mob that had surrounded Paul was still beating his lifeless body. His only movements were the jolts from their repeated kicks and the hits of the boy who was still beating into him with the pitchfork... that would be me too, if I went down...

Suddenly I heard shouting, in an instant the group around me scattered, the cars roaring off with a couple of the boys retreating on foot.

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I was left standing alone; Paul was lying on the ground motionless...

The shouting had come from a man wearing a blue singlet, blue stubby shorts and rubber, double-plugger thongs. He held a baseball bat in his hands. He lived in the house whose front verge had become the battle ground.

Slowly Paul started to move.

Moaning, he brought himself upright enough to sit cross legged. Holding his face in his hands, he slowly shook his head to regain composure.

Our rescuer (still brandishing his baseball bat) made his way over to us to make sure that we were ok and then told us that we'd better be moving along.

I tentatively laughed as we walked home to my Dad's place. As we walked I cracked jokes with forced bravado, trying to cheer Paul up, knowing that things could have been a lot worse.

I also knew that until we got off the street we weren't safe.

I managed to get a bit of a smile out of Paul's bleeding and now swollen face, the purple was starting to come through in the bruising. His whole body was covered in sets of four parallel gouges, puncture marks and bruises, left by the four prongs of the pitchfork.

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It would have taken just one hit or thrust from that pitchfork in the wrong place and Paul could have been instantly killed or seriously injured. That we were both able to walk away from that fight, being outnumbered like that, by guys who meant business, was a miracle.

Last I heard of Paul, he was just getting out of prison after doing two years for armed robbery.

By fourteen years of age this sort of thing had become a regular part of my life, but things had not always been like this...

We were the picture perfect family, two parents, three kids complete with a dog, cat, canaries and some pet chickens to collect fresh eggs from each morning. We even trooped along to church every Sunday morning.



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My Dad really enjoyed getting involved with his sons. Shonn, the oldest, me in the middle – a year younger and Isaac, who even though he was three years younger than me did his level best to keep up with us in everything - he generally succeeded too.

Most weekends Dad took us out surfing, skate boarding or fishing. We often went camping as a family. He watched our hockey games every Saturday. When we joined “King’s Commando’s” (a sort of “Scouts” kids’ group), Dad became one of the leaders and taught us to tie knots, light campfires and took us on even more camping trips.

He was my hero.

In my first couple of years of school, I could not concentrate. I felt like my teachers were always picking on me. I felt so helpless, it seemed that no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn’t work as fast as the other kids – I was constantly made to stay in at lunch and recess to complete my unfinished work. I hated school.

By the time I was in year three I began to be able to focus a little better, though it was still a constant battle, I became a good student when I applied myself, which Dad always made sure I did. By the end of year four I won the class award for academic excellence.

As hard as I had to work at getting good grades in the classroom, when it came to sport it was a different story. I

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loved it. I soon established myself as the fastest kid in my grade.

I went on to win the “Champion Boy” award for each age group in all my primary school’s faction athletics carnivals, and was captain of the school hockey team.

Apart from the usual ups and down of life, things went along smoothly until I was twelve years old...



The Three Hill Boys: Shonn -Age Thirteen, Jacob -Age Twelve, Isaac -Age Nine

chapter 2

Shattered Dreams

My older brother Shonn was given a position in a hockey talent identification program at a high school a few suburbs away. When it was time for me to start high school I was also accepted into the program.

I was so excited, even though it meant that I was going to leave all my friends and needed to catch two buses to get to school each day. I was on the way to achieving my dream of playing hockey for Australia. I was going to win an Olympic gold medal!

Mum was really keen for us to get into this program because she thought that we would have better opportunities at this school than at our local high school.

What she didn't know was that the school we were headed to had the worst reputation for drugs of any school in Western Australia.

Then my world came crashing to the ground.

Mum told Shonn, Isaac and me that she and Dad were separating.

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My parents had always argued, but they had *always* made up. I couldn't see why this couldn't just be sorted out like all the other times.

I told my Mum how I felt. She told Shonn and me that the reason she didn't want to be with my Dad any more was because he had been unfaithful to her.

Dad moved out.

I saw his cheating on my Mum as a decision to abandon all of us. I felt really rejected by the idea that my Dad didn't want us boys. At my core, I subconsciously thought I was of no value to him and consequently of no value at all.

I grew very angry with him for destroying our family.

During school sport one day in my first year of high school, we were doing hurdles when I felt a massive jolt of pain to my right knee. I fell to the ground. My Mum was called and she took me to the doctor.

He said there was a disease in my knees that had to do with my teenage growth spurts. He described it as "literally a dis-ease" and that I would just have to put up with it because the pain was not going to go away until I stopped growing.

I was not going to be able to play serious sport anymore.

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I couldn't believe it. Didn't he know that I was going to play hockey for Australia? Didn't he know that I was going to win an Olympic gold medal?

When my parents separated Shonn began to hang out with some boys who were smoking pot, doing graffiti and carrying knives. Sometimes they would let me hang out with them. They taught me how to spray paint and use a butterfly knife and to turn a lock blade pocket knife into a flick knife.

When I stopped playing hockey I started to hang out with Shonn's mates a lot, spray painting graffiti and carrying a knife.

I had grown up going to church every Sunday for as long as I could remember, I believed that there was a God who loved us and protected us from bad things. But now I was seeing bad things happening to me and my family and God had done nothing to stop it.

One Sunday morning, when I was thirteen, I was with Isaac walking through the church on our way to Sunday school. One of the little kids from Isaac's class started being smart to Isaac. In a flash I pulled my blade just to show him not to mess with us.

He ducked back around the corner almost as fast as I pulled my blade and nothing more was said. But I had this sinking feeling in the bottom of my stomach that he was going to dob. Mum was going to bust me.

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I decided that I had to avoid going to Sunday school for as long as possible – to let any backlash blow over. I was able to avoid going for a few weeks but eventually I ran out of excuses.

I slowly got ready for church. I ignored the argument that had developed in another part of the house. There always seemed to be an argument on Sunday mornings before church, and besides Shonn had been fighting with Mum a lot lately.

Suddenly the relative peace that I could normally maintain by living inside my own head, deep in thought, away from whatever else was going on outside, was shattered by a very flustered Shonn who was red in the face and looking like he was on the verge of tears, bursting into my deep thought and asking that I talk to Mum and tell her we didn't want to go to church that morning.

I normally really enjoyed going to church. I liked the singing and the Sunday school classes, and I particularly liked the pastors' daughter. But, I also understood that not going to church anymore would mean an extra day to my weekend - and I wouldn't have to get in trouble for pulling my knife on that stupid kid.

I agreed to go and talk to Mum.

"Mum," I started, "thank you for bringing us up, taking us to church, teaching us good morals and values, but we

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don't believe in your God and the God that they teach us about at your church..."

I paused for dramatic effect, anticipating her response to my next statement.

"...we can keep coming along to your church, but I don't see the point, all they are going to do is keep talking about this God of yours that we don't believe in."

Mum moved forward to say something but decided against it. Instead, without a word she turned on her heels and, with her head down, and her arms inside her heavy, fawn coloured, woollen overcoat, folded tightly, as if she was holding herself, she hurriedly walked out to the car.

I think that she was crying, her head and shoulders where slightly bouncing as though heaving from sobbing, but apart from the gravel of the driveway crunching under each step I could not hear any noise.

I felt a sharp stab in my stomach as she walked away. I quickly buried the regret, but I was not able to cheerfully celebrate with my brothers at the news of no more Sunday morning church services.

Mum was never the same after that. She was angry a lot. Her whole countenance seemed to harden. She became quite abrupt in her mannerisms, her once positive and encouraging attitude becoming rather negative toward just about everything.

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My brothers and I were not the only ones who had had our lives pulled out from underneath us. Whether as children we didn't have the capacity to look past our own hurt, or whether we were just selfish, we didn't appreciate the pain, rejection and anger that Mum must have been experiencing when my Dad left.

The more things at home deteriorated, the more I found comfort hanging with my older brother and his mates. By now they were all smoking pot every day and smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol on a regular basis.

He and his mates had started a graffiti crew called "K.A.W." We made up different meanings for the letters like "Kids Attack Westrail" (our local rail service), "Kan Art Work", "Krazy Aerosol Warriors", "Kriminals At Work" and "Kill At Will". But the name that we would best become known by around our city was "Kids At War".

Shonn liked rap music. This meant that I liked rap music. In a high school world that was divided into three categories; Surfs, Bogans (heavy metal fans) and Rappers, we were Rappers. We dressed in baggy pants and wore our hats backward.

Some of the boys from my year had also started to smoke weed. One or two of the surfies would occasionally give me a bit of a stir because I didn't. These weren't boys that I hung out with too much, so on the surface they didn't really bother me, but it did start me thinking.

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We listened to gangster rap. Our favourite rappers were N.W.A., Snoop Doggy Dog and Cypress Hill (I even named my dog Cypress because my last name is Hill).

There were other groups and artists too. One of these groups had a song that I really liked. In this song, after they had rapped about being in a gun fight and picking up some girls, there was a line “...*when you smoke (weed) like I smoke, then you’re high like every day...*” This line got me thinking.

I already knew that I wanted to be like the guys from the music, who were always talking about hurting people and doing drugs. I already carried a knife and I was not afraid to use it but I had never tried drugs. I didn’t even want to, but I did want to fit in.

It wasn’t that the boys I hung out with ever directly pressured me to try pot, but I felt like a bit of a fraud running around with them, trying to fit in and seem as tough as them, but always saying ‘no thanks’ when the bong or joint was passed my way.

That was until I was one day in English class when I was thirteen. One of the surfy kids was again quizzing me about why I didn’t smoke weed, even though my brother and all our mates did. He said that he thought that all rappers smoked. I didn’t have an answer.

I had a long hard think about his question. I could not find an answer.

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I didn't have any sporting aspirations any more, I did not care about my school work at all, I knew that they were important to my Dad so I had just stopped doing it, I was failing almost every class.

A lot of my teachers genuinely cared about me and bent over backwards to try and help me to pass my classes. They tried to get me to reach out to the school counsellor when they could see that my life outside of school was in turmoil.

Ever since I had stopped going to church my interest in religion and doing the right thing had become less and less important until it was not something that I even thought about any more.



Jacob: Age Thirteen

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During that afternoon's class I made the decision that when all the boys were having a session at the bus stop after school I would try marijuana.

The end of school bell went and I walked across the oval on my way to the bus stop with a new confidence. After today I was properly going to be one of the boys. I was really going to be like the rappers we idolised by imitating the way they dressed, talked and by trying to live the way they claimed to live their lives in their music – we knew that they were only studio gangsters, but we wanted to be the real thing.

I got to the bus stop as a group of boys were just beginning a session. A friend of mine who was a couple of years older than the others seemed to be in control of the pot. He obliged, and with my older brother and his mates looking on I tried drugs for the first time.

Shonn said that I didn't inhale properly, but I didn't care. As far as I was concerned I had done it. I don't know how stoned I was, probably not very, but as I sat, packed tightly onto the back seat of the bus amongst the other boys I had smoked with and joined in the chorus of a Snoop Dog song, for the first time that I could remember I felt like I really fitted in.

At last I had found the acceptance I had been looking for, and it felt good.

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A couple of years later that friend who gave me my first cone died of a heroin overdose. Our families had been friends for as long as I could remember.

He had only just celebrated his twentieth birthday.

Later that night I smoked some more weed. As we rode our bikes around the street, I felt free for the first time since my parents had separated.

All the things that I had learnt in Drug Ed. about the dangers of doing drugs seemed to completely contradict what I was now experiencing. Those teachers had no idea of what they were talking about. What I knew for sure was that drugs made me feel good.

I had not felt good for a very long time and now if I could just stay high, I would never have to feel the way I had been again. Everything would be ok.

That night, the very first day that I tried marijuana with my friends, I decided that I wanted to keep using drugs, and I wanted to use them all the time.

Shonn and I began smoking pot together every day before school and each night after school.

One night, not long after the day I had tried my first cone, Shonn decided that he didn't want Isaac to look like an idiot when the kids he hung around started to do drugs. He wanted to teach him how to smoke pot properly. I was not happy with him doing this, I didn't know why Isaac had to learn now, I'm not sure if it was that he was so

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embarrassed that I “bum sucked” my first cone in front of his friends or if it was just that Shonn would have liked to have had somebody he looked up to teach him how it was done instead of having to learn in front of all his mates.

I started to say ‘No’ but Shonn gave me a look that told me to keep out of it. I was pretty stoned and I was not going to upset my source of consistent, free weed. So I just did nothing. Shonn took him out the back and packed him a cone filled with tea leaves and showed him how to smoke a bong. Isaac was 9 years old.

It was not long before Isaac was stealing our pot and smoking with one of his mates in his primary school. He first got caught trying to sell some pot at school when he was 10 years old.

Chapter 3

Stoner

As Year Nine got into full swing I started to get a reputation as a bit of a “stoner”.

I started to hang out with the older boys more and more. They all treated me like a little brother, looking out for me and teaching me the ways of the drug life. “Respect” seemed to me like the most important thing that I needed to know. The basic code of “Respect”, as it is called, is knowing where you and everybody else fit in the pecking order and treating everybody accordingly. That is it.

Where you fit depends on how tough you are and who you know.

You can’t beat somebody up or rip them off if they’re higher on the tree than you but if they are lower than you, you can do whatever you like to them.

I lived by this code.

I learnt early how to “stand over” people, drug dealers in particular.

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I was smoking more than I could afford to buy with my pocket money so I began to sell “sticks” (twenty five dollars’ worth of marijuana). For every four sticks I sold I would get one for free.

I started smoking cigarettes, too. I thought being a smoker was cool and looked very grown up. I started drinking alcohol. At first I couldn’t stand the taste so I drank spirits mixed with soft drink to make it sweeter, until one day after school I “chucked in” for a carton of beer. Until now I had never really drank beer; I had tried it and hated it, but this particular day the boys wanted to drink beer - and if I wanted to get drunk with them I was going to have to drink it too.

I had one sip. It tasted so awful I decided I didn’t want to get drunk *that* badly – they could keep the money I chipped in too. But I could not get out of it so easily. Shonn was not going to be embarrassed by his little brother being soft so he and a couple of his mates, who thought it was funny and probably also thought it was their duty to turn this boy into a man, told me that I had to drink up.

In the early days of trying to keep up with the older guys, I often overdid it, binging until I would make myself sick. On more than a few occasions I wrote myself off on a large scale. There was an entire day that I spent lying on my mate’s back lawn being sick until I ended up vomiting my stomach lining out. There were yellow burnt patches all over his dad’s lawn from the different places where I had been lying and vomiting.

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Another night I smoked some weed that I didn't know had been laced with heroin. I spent the whole night slipping in and out of consciousness, sweating profusely and turning different shades of grey and green, being carried from house to house as we moved around the neighbourhood.

I began to experiment with other drugs too, trying acid and speed.

The person who first got me really interested in acid was a year eleven boy named Sparky. He was new to our school and he was completely different from all the other guys I knew that did drugs.

Most of the older druggos I looked up to were quite mean and were always showing how tough they were, but Sparky didn't seem to care what anybody thought of him. He had a mostly shaved head with only three long dread locks for a fringe. Some days he would catch the bus with us, other days he would ride his blue "chopper" bicycle with its long handles. He wore a blue open-faced motorcycle helmet and aviator goggles.

He didn't look tough but all of the older guys were scared to get on the wrong side of him because the guys he was friends with were supposed to be hard-core, big-time dealers.

A few people had told me about acid and I knew that Shonn had started to use it. Some of the girls in my year had started to use it too; they told me how great it was, but everybody warned about having a "bad trip".

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Apparently they were terrifying and sometimes people who had a bad trip never came back and ended up in mental institutions.

This was enough to put me off the idea, though I was still a little intrigued. One day Sparky caught my bus when he was on acid. He seemed normal enough but apparently because he had just taken it, it hadn't "kicked in" yet. While we were walking from the bus stop to school Sparky suddenly jumped up and got really excited before bending down to investigate two beetles that he insisted were racing, I laughed.

"Tripping" looked like fun - and Sparky assured me that if I wore a badge or a sticker, that would keep me safe from having a bad trip.

The first time I tried acid I was sure to wear a sticker and I had a pretty good time, I went to a poker night for a mate's fourteenth birthday. There were about ten of us; most of the boys were having a drink, some were smoking pot.

The boys started watching a porno which I was not into, so I went out to the park behind his house and tripped out by myself for a bit, letting the drug play games with my mind, and trying to decide if the people I could see surrounding the park were really there or if they were just hallucinations.

They were in fact trees and barricades which were in place to stop cars getting onto the oval.

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It was supposed to be a sleep over, but I couldn't sleep. The next day, my Dad picked me up and I felt horrible. I hadn't slept, and my skin was greasy with a couple of big pimples that had broken out trying to expel the poison through my pores.

The "comedown" off acid is horrible, and as I "came down" I got flashes of acute common sense – a voice in my head, my voice, kept trying to tell me that I needed to stop doing drugs, that my life would end up a mess if I didn't change the way I was living.

I decided that that was what I had to do. I needed to stop taking drugs, start applying myself at school and try to make something of my life.

Later on that day I told Shonn how I was feeling, that I didn't like acid and I didn't want to do drugs any more. He asked me if I got that thought while I was coming down from the acid. I told him that I did and he said "Yeah that's normal, just don't listen to that bit."

I was encouraged by this and just kept on living my life the same way. I ended up taking over a hundred 'trips' throughout high school.

While I was on acid I would do some stupid things and think it was the funniest thing in the world.

One night while we were tripping, we decided to turn off some traffic lights (one of the boys knew how to do this). We retreated to a sand-bunker to watch.

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Cars were naively cruising through the intersection, but in the darkness they couldn't see that it was a cross-road. A couple of times cars whizzed through at the same time, narrowly missing each other.

After a while of laughing our heads off at the near misses in our drug induced haze, we got bored, so we tried to re-set the lights but we couldn't get them back to normal so we had to leave them flashing amber. We called the traffic light fault number and hung around to watch them being fixed.

My first experience with speed was at school. I was thirteen.

I was given some "dexys" (dexamphetamine) from an ADD kid in the year above me. I had five of the little white anti-hyperactivity tablets and they produced a reaction in me that was anything but "anti-hyperactive".

I was so hyper that I was running on top of the desks in my science class in my enthusiasm to find out how my experiment was going; finding out what grows faster - beans sprouted in the dark, (the cupboard) or beans sprouted in the sunlight, (a bench by a window).

I wildly grabbed the Petri-dishes containing the sopping wet cotton buds that had the germinating bean seeds hidden inside, turning them upside down to see which one had my group's name written on the masking tape underneath. I ignored the satisfying, squelchy "plop" that the wads of cottonwool and little green shoots of other

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students' successful experiments made as they fell to the floor. I continued to rummage through the cupboard until I found mine, not caring that I had ruined everyone else's work.

After class the teacher told a friend of mine that it was great to see me getting involved.



Jacob in Science Class

I guess it might have been an improvement from the way I normally was in her class. I had once had to sit with my desk pushed up against her desk for a whole term after I lit up the gas port connected to the Bunsen burner (there was no Bunsen burner attached at the time) - I had no idea that the flame jetting out sideways was going to be so big!

On a few occasions I had smoked pot in her class when she had turned her back or left the room and when we

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had to go outside for experiments. When she wondered what the funny smell was, we would assure her that it was just the experiment we were doing.

Her comment on my report card read “Jacob is often tired in class...” That was because her class was first in the morning so she would often get me at my most stoned.

I had stolen a bunch of “late” passes which enabled me to stroll in to school at whatever time I felt like, and this meant I was late to a lot of classes and enabled me to have extended pot smoking sessions until well after the bell. I would coat myself in aerosol deodorant to mask the smell, I would even spray it into my mouth if I had to see the deputy principal or was feeling particularly paranoid.

One girl brought a bottle of alcohol to school most mornings. She would take a little bit out of all of her parents’ bottles of spirits and make “rocket fuel” and mix it with a bit of soft drink or cordial to take the edge off. The soft drink didn’t do a lot to make it taste any better.

Some mornings I would ask her to fill up my drink bottle and I would then take it into class, not saying anything to anybody about it, and just sip away at it for the morning, slowly getting drunk.

I started doing lines of speed on my desk in class, hidden behind my foolscap folder. I wasn’t the only one who played up in class, I found out later that Shonn used to go into a secret room through one of the classroom cupboards and shoot up heroin.

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As drug use and the lifestyle connected with it became more and more commonplace in my life, I was not overly shocked when I discovered that my older brother had started to inject drugs.

I began to go to parties every weekend. They were a lot like the ones depicted in movies and advertisements that are trying to make a moral or health point and about the pitfalls of teenage drug and alcohol abuse - the sort you are warned about as a child - with lots of drinking, drugs, fights and sex.

When there were fights at these parties, most of the time nobody would stop them. It was normal for the person who was losing to keep getting kicked long after they were on the ground and not fighting back.

In my first few fights I couldn't even bring myself to punch somebody in the face. But the boys I hung out with fought with the rules of the street – there were no rules and no mercy. After a little while I forced myself to go against every shred of decency I had left. It wasn't too long before I became numb to extreme violence like fighting with weapons and kicking people on the ground.

It was also common for the house where the party was being held to be trashed, with empty bottles and cigarette butts left everywhere and broken glass in the street. Occasionally the houses themselves would be smashed up, with fences, doors, windows and walls being smashed and things like parents' jewellery, computers, televisions and video players being stolen from the

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house. Often these parties would be held by kids whose parents were away on holiday or just away for the weekend or out for the evening.

It was normal for the police to come and try to break up our parties.



Jacob at Party

One of these parties wasn't supposed to be a party at all, just five or six fifteen year old mates having a birthday drink while the rest of his family went out for dinner. When we heard about it, we told everybody about the "open house" party, which meant that about one hundred and fifty teenagers gate crashed. I bumped into friends I hadn't seen in ages - kids from the other side of Perth.

As the number of party goers increased the boy whose house it was, who at first was feeling quite popular that so many people had come to his birthday, began to get nervous especially as the evening wore on and his parents were due home.

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He tried to get people to leave. Nobody paid him any attention, even his friends were trying to keep the party going. He was becoming desperate, and began verbally abusing people and trying to physically remove them. This was not taken well by some people who turned on him, trashing his house, putting holes through walls and doors. He and a couple of his friends who had tried to help him retreated into the house locking themselves in a back room.

His family came home while some people were out the front of the house, holding the back wheels of a car up so it could do burnouts. The car's tyres wore through and the shredded steel radials were making sparks as they began digging holes in the bitumen.

His Dad threatened us but this was ignored, as we continued partying like he wasn't there. He warned us that he'd called the police.

We took the nearing sirens as our cue to leave and as I was leaving, casually walking along the footpath, I passed one of the boys from my year at school. He was trying to remove a picket from the front fence so he could go back and sort out the dad.

He said the dad had pushed him and taken a swing at him. I knew this boy, he was a big Islander, and someone that I didn't like my chances at beating in a fight.

Not only was he big but he was crazy too, I did not doubt for one second that he meant what he said. I helped him

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by kicking and pulling at the pickets but I became absorbed with the new task of completely tearing apart the front fence and didn't notice him leaving.

As I stepped back to admire my handy work, blue and red flashing lights snapped me out of the drug crazed zone I was in. I looked up to see my friend turning the corner into the driveway, brandishing his fence picket, heading straight back into the house.

I also saw police cars coming down the street from both directions. There wasn't anybody else out on the street by now so I sprinted into the park across the road and quickly vanished into the darkness.

The parties kept getting more and more wild. It became quite normal for there to be over one hundred kids at these "house parties". Sometimes there would even be two or three hundred people.

There were often lifetimes of shame and regret in the wake of these parties. People did things they would never do if they had been sober, and things they would have to live with the guilt of for the rest of their lives.

Chapter Four

Busted!

My parents had sold the house that we grew up in and Dad had bought a house in the same neighbourhood, just a few blocks away, while Mum and us boys moved into a little three bedroom, one bathroom, town house that we rented. It was a couple of suburbs closer to our school.

Our new place was just down the road from a park that had a concrete skate bowl and a couple of basketball hoops, and right across the street from a school that also had basketball courts. Almost every day we would smoke some weed and skate in the street or at the park and play ball at the school. After it got dark, a lot of our nights were spent doing graffiti.

Hanging out with my big brother, who accepted me and treated me as his friend and equal, was the best thing that I had ever experienced. I honestly preferred this to the drugs. I loved the fact that at last we had something in common again. For so long it had seemed like he had grown up and left me behind.

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Jacob and Shonn: Year 11

That was when things were going well.

A lot of the time they weren't.

On the days that I didn't smoke or if my "high" had worn out, I was not very happy and I became moody and quite aggressive toward everybody. My family copped the brunt of my mood swings. It was not uncommon for me to verbally abuse Mum, swearing at her and saying whatever I could think of to hurt her.

When things were not going well we three boys had no problem using the violence that we used on the street on each other.

One night while Shonn and I were sharing a room, Shonn couldn't sleep so he was making sure that I couldn't sleep either. He kept making annoying noises, and after I

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would tell him to be quiet, he would wait until I was just about asleep again then he would do it again. This went on for over an hour until I was so worked up that I decided that if he did it again I was going to jump up and start punching him.

Sure enough just as I was trailing off to sleep, thinking that he'd given up, a loud high pitched "whoop" came from across the room. In a flash I was out of bed, running across the pitch black bedroom to where I knew that Shonn's bed was.

Winding up, I drilled home my first punch knowing that this might be the only hit that I was going to get in. I felt the satisfying crack of face against my fist, ever so slightly softened by the skin of both my knuckles and Shonn's face.

I kept winding back and punching into the darkness, I kept feeling my fists finding their intended target. Suddenly I felt a burning as my left temple was struck, then again as my nose and mouth were both hit in a single blow, and then my right eye. I didn't stop swinging though, and my punches were still finding their mark.

Then suddenly our room was lit up. Mum had heard the noise and had come to see what was happening. We stopped fighting to see Shonn's bed covered in blood.

As things at home got worse the chaos and violence increased.

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And things at home kept getting worse - Mum was out with my Dad... again; he had come over and they had gone for a walk.

They were trying to see if they could make another go of their marriage.

I was arguing about it with Shonn. I was not happy about them being together but Shonn really wanted things to go back to how they were. I had no intention of letting Dad hurt Mum – or us, anymore. Shonn was telling me to stay out of it.

The argument was about to come to blows. This inevitably meant that I was going to cop a flogging.

In the last year, Shonn had had a growth spurt; he was close to six feet tall, almost as tall as our Dad.

All three of us boys would grow about that size – we all looked the same too, three peas in a pod people said, all young versions of our Dad. We had his height, good looks and dark hair, and we inherited our Mum's hazel eyes and olive skin. My brothers always had girls chasing them, and I'm told that they were after me a bit too, but I never noticed – my focus was squarely on getting as high as I could, as often as I could.

As far as physically growing into men, Shonn was leading the way and was a lot bigger and stronger than me.

On this particular day I was not in the mood to get beaten up. As the argument escalated into violence, I ran, trying

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to get away from him, until he cornered me in the bathroom. I saw a bottle of bleach on the bathroom counter and grabbed it and held it over a pile of Shonn's clothes that were still on the floor from his last shower. I threatened to pour the bleach over his clothes if he came any closer.

These weren't just any old clothes.

The whole time we had been growing up we didn't have much money and had *never* had any "cool" clothes – we just couldn't afford them. Mum did most of our clothes shopping at the "Good Sammy's" and the "Salvo's". She had even made our clothes herself on a lot of occasions.

But when Shonn began to get teased at school for wearing old clothes, she decided that she didn't want us to live like that anymore. After they sold the house, she took us shopping and bought us new "Nike Air" shoes and some brand name clothes.

In the pile on the bathroom floor were most of those clothes that she had bought Shonn.

Shonn ignored my threat and came at me. So I tipped as much of the bleach as I could over his "Mossimo" shirt and "Jag" jeans before he got to me.

He rushed at me, swinging punches to my face, I retreated further as I absorbed his blows, falling into the shower, I covered my face with my hands as I curled into a ball and continued to take the blows. By this time I was crying, not really because of the beating – I had taken

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plenty of those, they're part of the territory of being a younger brother – I was crying mostly because I was sick of everything.

I was sick of my parents trying to work it out. I was sick of failing at school, I wanted my knees back. I didn't even remember what it felt like to be happy. I always felt so confused, I wanted everything to be good again, to go back to the way it was, but at the same time I didn't, because I hated my Dad and didn't want him in my life.

Eventually Shonn stopped hitting me and after a while I moved from the bathroom and sat down in the lounge joining Isaac who had been sitting down there watching television while the fighting was going on.

Shonn soon came in and sat down too.

When Mum came home, Dad was with her. She told us that "Pepper", our little black, brown and silver Silky Terrier, had just been run over on the main road near the park.

Still shaken from fighting with Shonn and a lot more shaken at the fact that Mum had just been out with Dad, I only managed a grunt, barely lifting my eyes from the telly, though I did notice a plastic bag in Mum's hand that I was hoping did not contain the dog. Shonn and Isaac's lack of response was almost identical to mine.

Mum stepped inside the lounge room and put the plastic bag on the coffee table (it did contain the dog),

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interrupting my view of the television. She demanded our attention, which she now had.

I began to abuse her, telling her to get the dog out of the way of the television. I went on to tell her that she was insane and asked her what she thought she was doing.

She said she was concerned that we were just blocking out the fact that our dog had just died.

I probably was. I blocked out most things after that. Curled up in the corner of the shower, being beaten by my brother, was the last time I cried for almost five years. I was thirteen.

I made the decision that day that I was not going to let anybody hurt me ever again. Not Shonn, not losing a pet, not my Mum and definitely not my Dad.

As I hardened my heart, I bottled up all my pain and anger inside. I would then burst out in a rage at seemingly minor, unrelated annoyances.

* * *

On top of all the stress and the normal pressures of raising teenagers, Mum was a woman having to teach a fourteen year old, a thirteen year old and a ten year old boy, all of whom were very hurt and angry, to become men.

She was also in her last year of university, studying to become a high school drama and English teacher.

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Mum knew that things weren't right and realised we needed help. She organised some family counselling.

When she told us that we were going for counselling Shonn and I flatly refused to go and Isaac just agreed with whatever we said, but somehow Mum convinced us to come along.

One morning instead of going to school Mum, Shonn, Isaac and myself all piled into our Kombi van and went along to family counselling. Before we left home, Shonn and I smoked a lot of pot.

We were so stoned that we couldn't help just laughing at anything, nothing and everything.

The counselling centre had brown bricks and there were pine trees all around. There was a distinctive, fresh smell that I could not decide was welcoming or offensive – like hospital clean smell.

We were ushered into a large room that had five or six armchairs that didn't match and which had been arranged into a rough circle. One of the walls had a two-way mirror that spanned the entire wall. It started at about waist height and went all the way to the ceiling; and there was a camera mounted on the ceiling in a corner of the room.

The counsellor was in her late thirties, thin with brown hair. I can't remember much more about her appearance and, paranoid because of the weed I had just smoked, I avoided eye contact with her as much as I could. There

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was another lady with her. She was younger and fairly unassuming; she seemed to look up to the first counsellor. They began by explaining that the younger one was going to be sitting on the other side of the mirror operating the camera, and that at the end of our session the two of them would sit down in the counselling room and talk about us and whatever we spoke about.

While they were doing this, we were to go into the other room and watch them through the two way mirror; they said that we could even use the camera if we wanted to.

The counsellor took the seat that was closest to the camera and asked us to sit so that the camera could see us. She tried to talk about things with all of us, but Shonn and I were a mess. We kept laughing uncontrollably and wouldn't answer any of her questions.

Mum bravely soldiered on. She really wanted to get her family together. But eventually even she had to admit defeat when the session was cut short with the counsellor deciding that we "...were too nervous, just getting used to a new experience...", though she assured Mum that she was sure we would be fine next time.

While in the observation room we did our best to wreck all the equipment and played with the camera, zooming in and focusing on the inside of the therapists' noses, while they tried to make some sense of the session that had just taken place.

There never was a next time.

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It wasn't long before things got unbearable at home between Shonn and Mum, so Shonn moved in with Dad. He was fifteen.

I could ride my mountain bike to their place in about half an hour and would go over there to visit Shonn and smoke weed. My Dad went out all the time so we would almost always have the whole house to ourselves. Often I would spend the night there and catch the bus to school with Shonn in the morning.

One night we were expecting Dad to come home late, Shonn and I had been smoking pot in his bedroom. Shonn had set up his cupboard so he could easily just shut its door to conceal any obvious signs of drug use. We were really stoned, so stoned that we stopped being cautious, listening for Dad coming home.

We didn't hear his car pull into the driveway, or his keys rattling in the front door and we didn't hear him walking across the creaky old wooden floorboards toward Shonn's bedroom at the back of the house.

Suddenly there was a knock at the bedroom door! Dad at first obliged the initial request to "Wait a second!", but a second was all he waited before he attempted to come in. Shonn jumped to the door while Dad was half way through it, and tried to close it on him. I froze, thinking that we were busted - I figured the game was already up. Shonn was not going to give up, just laying down without a fight, and signalled for me to close the cupboard door.

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I managed to get everything inside and closed the cupboard before Dad pushed his way past Shonn, but there was still smoke in the air.

My Dad used to be a bit of a hippy in his younger days) instantly recognised the distinct odour of the cannabis smoke that still hung thickly in the air, “Are you boys smoking dope?!!!” he exploded, making more of a statement than asking a question.

Even Shonn had to concede at this point, the haze of marijuana smoke still clouding the room, along with its crisp odour, and our bloodshot eyes explained more than any denial could have.

“You’re coming with me!” Dad boomed, glaring at me. His eyes conveyed every bit of the disappointment he felt, I didn’t care that I had let him down – if anything I was glad. “I’ll deal with you when I get back”, he warned Shonn.

Dad took me home and told Mum what had happened.

I had slipped into my bedroom, telling myself that I didn’t care that I was going to be in trouble. I didn’t have to try too hard to convince myself. I was glad that I had upset Dad but I hadn’t wanted Mum to find out. I didn’t want to hurt her.

A short time after Dad left, Mum called me into her room. I had anticipated this and I found the prospect of being stoned off my head and talking to my Mum about smoking pot so hilarious that I started to laugh.

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I brought myself under control, or at least I thought I had, before walking into her room but after seeing how serious she was, I lost it.

Uncontrollable laughter came up from deep in my belly. I tried to make it look like I was crying, burying my head in my hands, trying to make sobbing noises, I thought I was doing a convincing job, but Mum would have none of it.

“Don’t you dare stand there and laugh in my face!” she commanded me, only speaking slightly louder than normal but with great force and authority, though there was a slight tremble in her voice that betrayed her controlled tone.

I could see that she felt there was not much she could do for me anymore. I was going to have to make decisions for myself that would determine where my life was going to end up.

I was now in control of my own life.

Or so I thought...

My parents had one last idea that they thought might give us a bit of a shake up and hopefully show us the pitfalls of drug use.

The following morning they marched both Shonn and myself into the Belmont Police Station and told them that they had caught us smoking pot. I thought it was a bit of a novelty and enjoyed being treated as a “criminal”; it made me feel cool and tough.

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As I looked around the station I soaked in the experience.

Shonn and I laughed as we looked at the “Wanted” photos, trying to see if we knew anybody – we thought one of them might have been a boy we went to primary school with.

Shonn nudged me indicating to look over the counter.

I salivated when I saw two huge bags of cannabis on the counter that were both as the size of stuffed pillow cases. Shonn moved closer, seeing if there was any way he could steal some.

We, along with Mum and Dad, were taken into a large room that had a long table and a lot of chairs. I think it was the policemen’s lunchroom. There were graphic pictures of different publicity campaigns on the walls like “Speed Kills” and “Don’t Drink and Drive”.

I don’t remember a word that the policeman said to us - whatever it was it obviously had no impact.

The policeman told my parents that they couldn’t do anything to us without evidence. Mum and Dad were really disappointed that the police didn’t do anything to give us more of a shakeup. I think they felt like they had wasted their time, though I’m pretty sure that they were at least satisfied within themselves that they had tried to do something.

Shonn got pretty bitter toward them for trying to get us busted by the police, but I just thought it was funny and

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even thought “Good on ‘em for at least having a go at trying to help us!”.

We feigned being ashamed as we were dropped off at school. We dutifully walked into the school, toward the deputy principal’s office, to sign in late. As soon as Mum and Dad were out of sight we doubled back and disappeared into the vacant lot over the road from the school.

The previous night when Dad returned to his house, he demanded that Shonn give him the rest of our pot, which he then flushed down the toilet. But Shonn had only given him a bit of what was left.

We proceeded to smoke the rest of it before heading back into school, stoned off our heads, and put my stolen “Late Passes” to work and go about our day of getting educated.

Chapter 5

Hopeless

The bell for first class had already gone. Jason and I were just sitting down for a session in the vacant lot across the road from the staff car park. Jason was in the year above me.

“Thank God you’re still here Jacob.” Although he said it with a laugh, there was a undertone of genuineness. Most of our crew were from his year and had dropped out of school.

Jason was from a successful family. He used to go to a private school but when his dad promised him that he could have anything that he wanted for his fifteenth birthday Jason told him that he wanted to go to the public school where his mates were.

We both got a lot more stoned than we normally did before school. “There is no way that I am going to learn anything while I’m this ripped”, I laughed.

As we walked the short journey to class Jason reflected a little despairingly that we were wasting our education.

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I replied “We aren’t going to need one. We will be dead before we turn twenty-one.”

That idea seemed to satisfy him.

At the end of the year I was expelled from school.

My Mum got a job north of the river so we moved nearer to her work. My new school was our local high school, and I started on the same day that Isaac, my little brother, started his first day of high school. My older brother Shonn was also returning to school after having a year off – he was going to be in the same year as me.

As we stood surveying our new school, I coughed dryly - my lungs still burning from the weed that Shonn and I had just smoked.

I looked down at Isaac, who seemed anxious. I absorbed the intense sensation that came over me at the thought of starting a new school with fifteen hundred new kids, a pump of adrenaline shot through my system and my nerves were harnessed into excitement. I began to feel on top of the world.

A deep confidence came over me as I surveyed our new frontier, our new playground, “You see this school Isaac?” I asked matter of factly.

“Yeah...” he mumbled, looking up at me, somewhat bemused by my question, “It’s yours” I said with an authority that was not given but taken. “Do whatever you

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want!" I told him, giving him the license to enjoy the same freedom that I had enjoyed at my old school.

We fitted into our new school easily. We quickly made friends with the "cool group" because of our ability to get drugs.



Jacob While in High School

I continued to experiment with different drugs, it didn't matter what we learnt in 'Drug Ed.' I kept trying everything that I was offered.

I jumped whenever the opportunity to try something new came along.

I tried 'magic mushrooms' – a hallucinogenic toadstool, when I was offered.

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It didn't even matter that we were specifically learning about the dangers of ecstasy in school at the time I was first offered some. I didn't think twice before swallowing it.

That night I was hanging out at Mick's house - we hung out there a lot because we thought his Dad was 'cool'; he let us drink and smoke dope at his house.

Two years later Mick and a group of my old classmates were walking home from a party. Mick dropped some money on the road and as he was bending over to pick it up, a car came around a corner; the driver didn't see him and ran him over. He died in the arms of one of the boys.

His Dad's reasoning behind letting us drink and smoke at his house was "They are going to do it anyway, I'd rather them do it in a safe environment.", but I can't help wonder if his Dad regretted ever letting him drink and smoke weed from such a young age.

As the year passed Shonn and I defended Isaac's right to be a little punk, and he definitely seemed to enjoy being "untouchable".

On one occasion a year eleven boy had been picking on Isaac's mates, pushing them around and saying horrible things about their families. Isaac went to stick up for them and he got pushed around too. He told Shonn and me about it that night at home.

Shonn and I bashed a couple of guys for Isaac – he would always stick up for his mates when the bigger kids

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would pick on them. He would usually be the last little kid they ever picked on.

Older kids weren't the only people at school Isaac had amnesty from.

On a few occasions I set his teachers straight too.

One time while I was walking down the hall I looked into a classroom that I knew Isaac was in. I saw Isaac's teacher, Mr Johnson, the head of the science department, a tall, heavy set man, getting right in Isaac's face. I'm not sure what Isaac had done to annoy him but the teacher had his nose about an inch from Isaac's and was yelling full blast at him. He began poking him, striking him on the chest with his finger. With each poke Isaac's little body jolted as he tried to stand his ground.

This particular teacher had been trying to get me to do some detention for over a week before this. I had walked out in the middle of an assembly and had been told that I had to report to him for detention for it.

"I'll report to him at lunch time." I thought to myself.

As lunchtime rolled around I promptly presented myself to the office of the science department and asked for the teacher I wanted to see.

"Ah Mr Hill..." he said with a look of glee coming across his face, the same look a small child gets when the cat it loves to torment comes into the room. I pulled the door shut behind me as I walked directly to him, passing the

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chair that was intended for visitors. He was a little taken back.

“You teach my little brother Isaac.” I told him.

A quizzical look crept across his face.

“I saw you pushing him around in class this morning...” my gaze was steady and my voice even, “...if you ever lay a finger on him again I’ll kill you.” My voice was monotone. “You have no idea who you are [bleeping] with, please do not make the mistake of testing me. I promise you, that if you even raise your voice at him again, you are a dead man.”

Tiny beads of sweat formed on his face as its colour drained leaving him looking clammy and pasty white. He didn’t say a word as I turned and walked out of his office.

I never did do the detention.

I began really struggling to get out of bed in the mornings. I didn’t mind too much if I knew there was some weed for me to wake up to but failing that I just didn’t see the point.

Mum tried everything to get me up so I would get to school on time, but every time she woke me I would verbally abuse her. Most of the time I would not even remember doing it.

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One morning Mum even poured a bucket of cold water on me. I went berserk, but then I just rolled onto a dry section of my bed and went back to sleep.

Eventually she gave up trying.

I was expelled from that school too.

This time I didn't go to another one.

I didn't have any perspective of the long term, bigger picture of life, or even an awareness of immediate necessities.

A week or so after I was expelled I told Mum that I was going to the deli. I bumped into a friend, got side-tracked and went somewhere with him, I didn't make it home that night. I didn't think to call and tell Mum.

I kept bumping into people and kept staying out.

Eventually, one morning about a week later, I realised that I hadn't spoken to Mum since I had told her that I was getting something from the deli. I sheepishly made my way home.

When I got home there was a heap of boys over, both of my brothers had friends sleep the night and Mum was cooking them all breakfast. I quietly slipped in amongst them all.

Mum didn't say a word and I just continued on as if nothing had happened.

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* * *

I started to hang out with the boys from north of the river a bit more. I made some good friends.

Out of all the guys I became best friends with Alex.

We often hung out at Ryan's house, he lived a few houses up from Alex. As much as I tried, I didn't like Ryan. I thought he tried too hard to be tough and he looked so goofy, with his big, black, woollen Ugg-boots and messy long hair that always looked like he had just gotten out of bed. But for some reason Alex, liked the guy.

Ryan's parents worked away, up north, for ten weeks at a time - and their house had a pool table. This made it the perfect pad to hang out at and sell drugs from.

One of the problems with selling drugs is that people try to rob you...

One night we were hanging at Ryan's, the night started like any other, we were shooting some pool and partying a bit until we ran out of drugs, Alex went out to get another ounce of weed.

By the time we heard him return through the back door we were all chilling in the front lounge room playing "Need for Speed" on the PlayStation.

We looked up as Alex was pushed through the lounge room door - he was being held tight from behind by a

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man who was wearing a black balaclava and was holding a knife that was pressed to his throat...

We burst out laughing.

The masked man was whispering into Alex's ear.

'He wants drugs.' Alex repeated the whispered instructions to us in a tone that insinuated that he had no idea why the man was asking us for them.

We kept laughing.

We didn't have any drugs. Alex was supposed to be bringing them with him, he had left about half an hour earlier to get another ounce and it seemed as though he had no intention whatsoever of handing them over to this robber.

We followed Alex's lead, "We've smoked it all" we laughed.

As we continued laughing the man began to press the blade harder into Alex's throat.

I saw that although my fifteen year old friend was keeping it together, his eyes looked genuinely terrified, his face, usually a dark olive complexion had lost all colour and had become a pasty grey, contrasting sharply with his shiny, jet black ponytail.

He kept saying to the man 'They don't have any drugs'. We gradually repressed our hysterical laughter into stifled giggles.

Kids at War

Amongst all the laughing and commotion, I was constantly looking for a chance to jump the guy.

I sized up the situation; I was sitting about half a meter from my friend. He was lean and stood just over six foot tall. His attacker was slightly shorter, but more solid than Alex – about the same size as me.

My eyes fixed firmly on the blade of the large, black handled kitchen knife, looking to see if it left Alex's throat for even a split second, but Alex's assailant was getting increasingly frustrated and pushed the knife harder against his throat, deeply indenting the skin. Alex had his hands on the man's wrist trying to relieve the pressure, which only seemed to make him push harder.

I decided that there was no chance to get to them without Alex's throat being slit.

We told him a few more times that we didn't have any drugs – that was the truth – we certainly didn't have any drugs and there was none in the house before he dragged Alex into the house. The robber was holding the drugs and didn't know it.

After a little while the man realised that he was not getting anything and left, dragging Alex outside with him then fled leaving Alex in the backyard.

When Alex came back in he produced his bag of weed and we started smoking again.

Kids at War

Over time, a lot of the guys who had quit school alongside me began getting jobs, starting apprenticeships and going to TAFE to learn trades.

I didn't want a job and I was already well into my apprenticeship of being a gang member, selling drugs, stealing and getting as high as I could as often as I could.

Things were going well as far as I was concerned; our crew was strong, we had a good flow of clients and I had all the drugs that I could want.



Jacob with two other members of K.A.W.

My older brother Shonn had been doing a lot of heroin, too much in fact, and had developed quite a habit.

He had learned a trick called “doctor shopping” - going to different doctors and asking them for help to quit heroin. They would give him prescriptions for Valium and sleeping pills and other drugs that you can get high on.

Kids at War

I had tried it out, going to a doctor and telling him a story about trying to get off heroin and asked him for Valium. He obliged and gave me a 'script' for Valium.

Then he started to talk to me about quitting using drugs. He was very convincing – and I really wanted to do what he was saying but by this point there was no way that I could stop using. I was addicted.

chapter six

The Next Level

I was getting bored of just drinking, smoking weed, popping pills, snorting speed and doing acid.

It was time for me to take things to the next level.

I called Steven up and asked him to get us some speed, I told him that I wanted to get a bag and I wanted to inject it.

He was keen to try injecting too, so he called his dealer, a family friend a little older than us that he'd grown up with. As usual he sold Steven the speed on the specific proviso that he was not going to inject it. Steve promised him that he wouldn't.

Neither of us knew how to inject but we knew somebody who would be able to help us. Daniel was somebody that we knew was an intravenous drug addict. He was a nice enough bloke, but – like most drug addicts – nobody trusted him as far as they could throw him.

Kids at War

I didn't pay much attention to the process but it wasn't long before Daniel was asking, 'Who wants to go first?' Steven and I looked at each other for a moment before Steven volunteered. Daniel injected Steven and I watched, for the first time I saw somebody being injected with drugs in real life.

I was genuinely surprised that he didn't die or overdose or anything even remotely negative. Daniel had warned us that we wouldn't feel much because there was not much speed there, besides it was going to have to be divided three ways because he wanted a 'taste' too for doing us this favour. I went next and although the needle hurt a little I didn't die or overdose or anything like that either. In fact, I didn't feel any great high, but I did feel pretty tough for having 'shot up'.

Once again I decided that everything that we learned in Drug Ed. was wrong.

Now I wanted to try heroin.

A few days later I asked a friend who I knew used heroin to get me some.

Tony had been using heroin since he was thirteen. He knew some dealers so I gave him \$50 and he bought me a 'packet' and we went to an old abandoned house.

The entrance was through a large hole in one of the asbestos walls right beside the front door. The floor was littered with used syringes and spoons and other

Kids at War

intravenous litter, evidence that this was a well-used 'shooting gallery'.

I gave back to Tony the tiny paper envelope that he had given to me earlier. It was less than a centimetre square and had evidently been cut from a glossy magazine. This time I paid close attention to how it was all done.

I watched as he dissolved the heroin in water and drew it into the needle, then taking my arm he "did me up".

Slowly a warm feeling came over me. I didn't feel 'off my head' just warm and nice, Tony said that I should have the rest of the packet but I insisted that he have it.

I started to do heroin quite a bit after that.

I was sixteen years old.

Pretty soon I was addicted to heroin and began selling it.

I hadn't been selling long when I realised that I had everything that I wanted out of life. As much drugs as I could use and respect from people on the street.

Deep down I wanted to get married, have a family, a dog and a house with a white picket fence, but there was no way I was going to bring a kid into my world of drugs, crime and death.

Besides, I figured that any woman who would have me, would have to have serious emotional or mental health issues and I did not want to go out with anybody like that.

Kids at War

What would be the point anyway? Marriage only ended in pain and divorce from what I could see. And you needed a job to buy a house and I most certainly did not want one of those! Working five days a week so you could enjoy two?! I could never understand how people did it.

Ever since my first cone at thirteen years of age, all I ever wanted was to have as much drugs as I wanted. I had that and I still was not happy. And to make things exponentially worse - I was a heroin addict.

All I could see for my future was drug addiction. "Once a junkie always a junkie", I knew that's how it went. I knew too many people who had been addicted to heroin for decades – since they were my age.

I was certain that I was doomed to be a junkie for the rest of my life and everything that comes with it; prison, mental institutions and methadone. Until I inevitably died from an overdose, murder, disease or even worse, as a lonely old man.

I really wanted to go back to church, back to God, but I had gone too far, there was no coming back from here.

I didn't want this life that I had chosen, I felt totally hopeless, I could only see one way out of it.

I begged God to forgive me for what I knew I would be putting my family through.

Then I attempted suicide. I injected the rest of the heroin that I had to sell, and then to make sure, I pulled out my

Kids at War

knife and slashed my wrist and neck, trying to cut the veins.

I lay down on my bed waiting to die. My blood flowed over my body and onto my bed. I lay there just waiting. After about twenty minutes I realised that I had not done enough to kill myself.

I failed.

All of a sudden it seemed almost as though I had woken from a dream, I didn't want to die any more. I felt quite foolish for what I had done. I knew that I needed medical attention, so sheepishly I called for an ambulance.

I was committed to a psychiatric institution. I had previously been admitted there for a drug related nervous breakdown, but this time I was put into a locked ward and told I would be spending the next month there.

In a locked ward you have no freedom at all. Throughout the day the whole group is moved from section to section periodically.

You can't go back to your room whenever you want and all visitors are thoroughly searched before and after visits – which are held in a locked room.

We weren't allowed to have our own cigarette lighters; there was a lighter on a wall outside, similar to a car lighter and you were supposed to hold a button until it glowed then push your cigarette up against it. It didn't work very well and most of the time the patients went to

Kids at War

one of the nurses who all carried a lighter or matches, even if they didn't smoke, and they would light it for you.

The people in this ward varied from the obviously crazy to the seemingly normal, while some were completely out of it from strong medication.

A slightly overweight man in his mid-fifties constantly ran slow laps around the courtyard. There was one Aboriginal boy aged about seventeen who would take leaves and branches from the single gum tree in the courtyard and make a headdress and chant and dance around waving branches in some sort of ceremony.

He was always trying to start a fight with another patient, a massive guy who I assume was a biker, because of his black leather jacket, motorcycle boots and black jeans, not to mention the "Harley Davidson Motorcycles" t-shirts he always wore.

It didn't take me long to pick when a fight between them was about to erupt.

I quite enjoyed it when it happened. I thought it was funny and it broke up the monotony.

The young guy was very slight and could not do any real damage to the biker, who did not want any part of the fight, but there would be only so much of the punches, kicks and hits with chairs that he could take before lashing back.

Kids at War

When I saw that they were about to start fighting I would quietly pull up a chair and sit down and wait to watch the fight.

After I had been there for a few days, a man came in covered in scratches and was very badly sunburnt. He had been lost out in the mangroves up in far northern Western Australia for over two weeks.

I asked him about being lost and if he had been concerned about the man-eating saltwater crocodiles that live in those mangroves. He replied that he didn't need to worry about the crocs because they were his friends; he said that he hadn't been lost, he had just been spending some time visiting his crocodile friends.

The next day a guy about my age, who I had sort of become friends with, came and asked me if I wanted to see something funny. I followed him to the common room where there was a public phone.

The "crocodile man" was on the phone to his mother, crying, telling her that he wasn't crazy and this was all a big mistake.

The boy who had befriended me started whispering to the crocodile man at a volume that the person on the other end of the phone would have not been able to hear, "You're crazy... you're never going to get out of here... they are going to keep you here forever..."

The "crocodile man" started getting hysterical, screaming to his Mum, "Now they're telling me that I'm crazy and

Kids at War

never going to leave here, they are saying that they're going to keep me here forever!", not explaining that there were other patients standing next to him whispering.

The person at the other end of the phone had no way of knowing that he was really hearing people saying this stuff. She would have thought he was paranoid and even crazier than the poor bloke was already.

The thought of this tore me apart with hilarity and I lost it, tears streaming down my face as I stifled my laughter. A staff member arrived on the scene and we melted away, leaving her to deal with the now hysterical man.

I heard loud, desperate shouting as we walked off.

The next time I saw the "crocodile man" he looked like a zombie, stooped over and moving slowly, a string of drool hanging from the corner of his mouth.

He must have resisted the nurses when they tried to calm him, and they would have jabbed him with a needle full of the tranquiliser they used on hostile patients.

I regularly saw patients who had flipped out walking around like a zombie for a few days before the effects of the tranquiliser wore off. Once I saw them grab a guy because he was asking to play his guitar; he was a zombie for a few days after that.

A few weeks before I went to hospital Mum had asked me to choose between doing drugs and her and living at her house, I told her that I chose drugs.

Kids at War

When I was released from hospital I found that Mum had moved all my things into my Dads place – she had kicked me out.

Dad lived only a few train stations away from Shonn.

I began to spend a lot of time with Shonn who had also been using a lot of heroin. He became one of the main people that I would “get on” heroin with. Then his girlfriend wanted him to quit so he went to a clinic, and did a “rapid detox”, getting all the heroin flushed from his system. He had been given some pills that blocked the receptors in his brain from feeling the effects of heroin. The doctor had also given him heaps and heaps of different sorts of pills to get high on instead of heroin.

On top of all the pills he had been given, he began using speed everyday instead of heroin.

After Shonn stopped using heroin I would go and score my heroin fix each morning, then go around to Shonn’s place and do speed with him and his girlfriend, then she would go to work and Shonn and I would go to the beach and drink all day.

After a while Shonn became concerned about how much heroin I was using and recommended that I go to see his doctor too.

I thought why not? I’ll give heroin a break for a while and get high on pills for close to free instead.

Kids at War

I booked in to see the doctor and was told to come to his clinic in the morning. I was told not to use heroin that morning.

Shonn was supposed to go with me to the clinic because I didn't know where it was. We met up and headed to the clinic, but on the way my body started to react to not having heroin first thing in the morning.

One of the first withdrawal symptoms of heroin is diarrhoea, and I got this symptom very suddenly and very strongly. I looked around for a public toilet and bolted to the first one that I saw – I didn't make it.

It took me a while to clean myself up. After I left the bathroom I couldn't find my brother anywhere.

I didn't know where the clinic was. I thought about just forgetting the whole thing and going on with the rest of my day but I called Janice, a family friend who lived nearby. She did volunteer work at the detox clinic. Janice met me and showed me where the clinic was, then left to go about her day.

I don't remember much, I was in a pretty bad way with withdrawals by this point. All I can remember was lying on a mat on the floor, before passing out – I must have been given some medication.

I came to for a moment at one point. I heard screaming and saw a young man, a little older than me, writhing in agony on a mat on the floor on the other side of the

Kids at War

room. There was a girl sitting with him holding him – I guessed it was his girlfriend.

I looked around; there was nobody with me. I was alone. I drifted back into unconsciousness.

I woke up late in the afternoon and a nurse came and took me into the doctor's office. He gave me a bag full of pills and sent me on my way.

My summer was cut short when I broke both of my feet. I broke the first one jumping from Shonn's balcony.

He warned me that I would break my leg if I tried. I disagreed. He was right. I broke my other foot a couple of weeks later jumping a fence.

All the speed I had been doing had made my bones weak.

Later that summer I got a call from Alex telling me that Ryan had just died of a morphine overdose – “Good, the [bleepin' bleep]. Too bad I didn't get to do it myself.” I answered.

I had had a fight with Ryan a couple of weeks before. Even though I had two broken feet, I had started it because I didn't like the way he had looked at me. He broke my nose.

I told him that he was a dead man. I planned to kill him once I was mobile again.

Kids at War

That was the last time I saw Ryan; they were my last words to him.

Alex told me that he had gone over to Ryan's place and Ryan was really out of it. Alex sat on the couch next to him and they started to watch a movie.

He heard Ryan snoring and thought that he had just "nodded off". After a while he realised that something was wrong and tried to wake him, but he wouldn't wake. He rang an ambulance but it was too late.

"Anyway, that wasn't why I was calling you," Alex continued. "I took the rest of his morphine and I was wondering if you wanted to get on?"

I was around his house directly.

A couple of years earlier it was me who had given Ryan his first shot.

Kids at War



Chapter 7

Overdose

Soon after this I moved into my own place with my little brother Isaac.

Isaac was fifteen and I was eighteen. I knew that I was not going to be a parent to Isaac, but I did try to help him find his way in life.

I set some ground rules;

- *No shooting up (for him – I was allowed to).*
- *He had to share his drugs with me if he was going to do them around me (I didn't have to share with him but I would try to).*
- *His friends would have to share their drugs with me if they wanted to come inside our house.*

I taught Isaac everything I knew about life.

I taught him that you don't talk too much, unless you have something worthwhile to say - especially if you were younger than everybody else.

Kids at War

I taught him that reputation and respect were everything. People had to know that you were not to be crossed. If you have to stab them or use a bat to establish that respect, then so be it.



Isaac and Jacob

I taught him that you do not go down in a street fight – bad things happen to people who are on the ground in street fights.

I taught him that in a street fight, never let an opponent get back up when you knock them down. This meant making sure they were unable to get back up, usually by kicking them until they stopped moving (this also helped send the message that you were not to be crossed – bad things would happen to people if they did).

Kids at War

You would have to fight less often if you fought like this.

Above all I taught him not to trust anyone.

That was everything I knew about life.

The years would show that Isaac learned these lessons well. He became an accomplished street fighter who thought nothing of stabbing somebody or taking a bat to his opponent.

It wasn't long before I found out that Isaac was using needles. I didn't do anything except demand that he share his gear with me.

He was not happy about it but I told him that that was the only reason I would let him do it, and if I ever stopped using drugs he wouldn't be able to do it at all.

I wasn't happy about it either. I knew where heroin took you.

I hated that my little brother had followed in my footsteps.

I was sick of "the Game" - the gang life. I wanted out.

I wanted to start a normal life, get a job and only do drugs on weekends. I knew that I didn't want a manual labour job. I figured that I needed to get an education so I could get a good job, so I decided that I was going to go back to high school.

Kids at War

Isaac thought he might as well go to school too. He was only fifteen and was supposed to have been going anyway.

We both signed up - although to different schools. Isaac joined a school for kids who didn't fit into normal high schools and I signed into an adult school.

I liked school. I was good at answering the questions that were asked in class but I was not good at doing the homework.

I was able to stay reasonably straight for the day classes (sometimes I would get side-tracked at lunchtime by the bar at the university next door to my school). After school was a different story, though. I would spend the evenings making up for the drugs I had missed out on during the day. This was not conducive to high quality homework or assignments.

I kept pressing on until one Friday night Alex called me up; he had loads of drugs and there was a party around the corner from his place. I was there directly.

We spent the night partying, smoking weed, drinking, popping pills and shooting morphine. At the end of the night, after the party had wound down, the guys that I was staying with wanted to crash. I wanted to keep partying, but instead I had a final shot of morphine and turned in for the night.

I crashed on a couch in Alex's lounge room while his girlfriend's best mate crashed on another.

Kids at War

I woke up in hospital.

There were tubes and cords coming out of my body from everywhere – and I mean EVERYWHERE!!! I saw a childhood friend in the room, the same one who had taken me to the detox clinic. Bewildered, I drifted back into unconsciousness.



Jacob in a Seven Day Coma

I'm not sure how long it was before I regained consciousness.

Being in hospital after such a big night was no big deal, I figured I must have just “gone over” (overdosed).

“Be cool,” I told myself “let’s find out how much they know before we give anything away that we don’t need to...”

My Dad walked into the hospital room. “Just keep cool.” I reminded myself, I was spinning out hard by now – my

Kids at War

Dad lived on the other side of the country – how long had I been out for? It felt like I had just woken from the night before... “Be cool” I silently instructed myself, forcing myself to keep calm, gathering my thoughts, trying to make sense of what was going on.

“I went to bed on the couch at Alex’s... I’ve apparently overdosed... then what?... Keep cool...”

Slowly different doctors started coming into the room to see me. At first they asked me some elementary questions like, what was my name? “Jacob.” Did I know where I was? “Hospital.” I replied, still making sure that I didn’t give anything away.

I told them that I wanted to go now. They told me that I was not going to be able to walk for a while. I laughed rudely and hopped out of bed.

My feet touched the cold floor and immediately my knees gave way. I collapsed, falling flat on my face. I can still clearly remember the sharp “slap” noise my body made as it crashed into the grey linoleum covered cement floor.

My legs offered no resistance whatsoever to my body’s weight.

As I was helped back to my bed a wave of reality hit me – I realised that something serious had happened.

I wanted to know, but I didn’t want to ask because I didn’t want to let them know that I didn’t know what had

Kids at War

happened; I didn't want to give them any information that they didn't already have.

I lay in my bed, tubes hanging out everywhere, silently observing everybody as they hovered about my bed.

"I've never seen anybody so calm after waking up from a coma," I heard a few people stating.

Somebody told me that they had to pump my stomach and all this black stuff came out, and that at the time of the blood toxicology report, the drug test, they described me as "a human pharmacy".

A few hospital people were coming in to see me and just shaking their heads and walking off with a disbelieving look on their faces not saying a word. The few who spoke when they came in were saying things like "You have somebody Up There looking out for you." These people would also and walk off shaking their heads with a baffled look on their faces.

Slowly I pieced together what had happened.

I had been sleeping on the couch, which I already knew, when I started to snore. There was a girl who was on another couch in the lounge room who couldn't sleep because I was snoring so loud.

She tried to wake me but I wouldn't wake up.

She went and got Alex out of bed to wake me.

Kids at War

Alex instantly recognised the noise I was making – the exact same noise that Ryan was making when he died a year before. He wasn't going to make this same mistake twice.

Alex called for an ambulance. By the time they got to me I was dead. They revived me but I was in a very bad way and not expected to make it alive to the hospital.

Alex called Isaac.

Isaac called mum.

Mum called the hospital.

I had arrived at the hospital alive – just.

The hospital told Mum to hurry and come in. They told her that I was dying and that although I was in a coma and this was going to be her only opportunity for her to see me before I died.

Mum or Isaac called my Dad in Canberra. It was my older brother Shonn's twenty first birthday, he had joined my Dad, moving east - they were just about to celebrate when he got the call. They put the cake back into the fridge.

Dad flew to Perth.

By the time he got to Perth I was past the worst – I had already been in the coma for a few days but had stabilised.

Kids at War

A few days after Dad got to Perth I woke up from the coma.

I was in a coma for seven days total – nearest I could figure.

Later that day I was moved out of the Intensive Care Unit and into an open ward and then into a private room.

Eventually I was alone.

An Asian man in a white doctor's coat came to my room. He introduced himself as the head of the section that had been working on me for the week that I had been in the coma.

He asked me if I knew how close I had come to dying and how lucky I was to be alive?

I stared back blankly at him. I really didn't care. I didn't care if I lived or died – if I did have a preference, I would have chosen to be dead.

I was actually a little annoyed at Alex for saving my life.

The doctor told me that nobody at that hospital had ever had a blood oxygen level as low as I had for as long I did and lived, and that included those who had been brain damaged from lack of oxygen to the brain.

He said that it was a miracle that I was alive and that somebody "Up There" was looking out for me.

These hospital staff kept saying that.

Kids at War

I maintained my disinterested stare.

If there was anybody “Up There” he sure as hell didn’t care about someone like me.

Although she sat by my bed for the whole week that I was unconscious, I can only remember Mum visiting me twice after I woke up.

The last time was after a counsellor had spoken to me; she thought that I had been trying to commit suicide because of the amount of drugs in my system. I told her that I was just doing what I did most nights.

She told me that I had a drug problem, “No I don’t”, I retorted, proudly laughing, “Everybody else has the problem. I like doing drugs!”

I think that she told Mum what I had said, maybe she didn’t, but Mum came in looking really disappointed almost straight after the counsellor left. I don’t remember what she said. I knew that I should have been feeling bad, but I didn’t.

I tried so hard to feel bad but I just didn’t feel anything.

I wasn’t allowed to leave the hospital until I was able to breathe properly, besides I had learnt to walk again.

It took two weeks.

After I left the hospital, nothing changed in my life.

I was nineteen years old.

Chapter 8

I Quit

Isaac moved over east with my Dad and after a couple of years of living by myself I moved into a nice two storey place with Steven.

I knew it wasn't a smart move to live with Steven. He was crazy, always in trouble with the police, and he hung out with some guys that I didn't really like – but he was my mate and he was a lot of fun.

On the day I moved in, Steven ducked out for a pack of smokes. He came home carrying, along with the packet of cigarettes, a quilt cover full of electrical equipment from a house he broke into on his way back from the service station.

I had been living with Steven for about a week and a half when I had a big night and spent my rent money on ecstasy. I didn't normally do much "e" but there was a bit of a party at our house. In fact, it seemed like there was a bit of a party at our house most nights.

That day I had taken my usual drugs. I was crushing up and injecting the pills that I was being prescribed to supplement my heroin use, and taking two weeks supply

Kids at War

of Valium most days as well as smoking weed and having a few beers.

I didn't usually use the ice that we sold, but when there were people around it made it a bit easier for me to get along with them.

Most of Steve's friends wanted me to like them and were constantly 'shouting' me hits of ice from the crack pipe. That evening I was obliging and had that as well as periodically shooting up ice in the bathroom with Steve.



The Boys Over at Jacob's Place

A guy came around with a bag of "pills" (ecstasy) and everybody was having one. I really wanted one but the only money I had was for the rent which was due the next day. I thought "its only fifty bucks – I'll have no trouble hustling that up tomorrow..." and bought one.

Kids at War

Somebody came up with the idea of riding my body-board down the stairs, they put a mattress on the wall at the bottom of the stairway and one of the boys sat down on the board and tobogganed down, crashing heavily into the mattress at decent speed.

Another couple of guys had a turn before someone suggested standing up on the board and riding down – nobody was game enough to do it.

“Give me a go!” I said, rising from my seat in the lounge where I had been observing with partial interest. My head was swimming as the ecstasy was kicking in. I had injected half of it, immediately feeling its effects, and swallowed the other half. The wave from the second half was starting to hit me.

I staggered heavily to the stairwell, and tried to climb the stairs – I couldn’t get past the first step. I asked one of the guys to help me up the stairs, but we didn’t get far, and another boy hurried to help out. When we climbed to the top stair I confidently positioned the board, the same way I had positioned my skate board a thousand times at the top of a half pipe before dropping in.

Instinctively I leant into the board pushing down hard with my front foot, pumping for more speed, I flew down and crashed heavily into the spring mattress; my body was extremely fluid as I bounced back toward the sharp corner of the banister.

Kids at War

It seemed like the whole world slowed down and became silent (I had experienced this sensation a few times before, during fights and near-death experiences), as I watched the handrail getting closer and closer to my head. Its sharp corner was going to strike my temple.

Powerlessly I realised that this was most likely going to kill me.

I was ok with it. I had wanted to die for a few years by now and had daily taken large quantities of drug cocktails that were potentially fatal, hoping to “accidentally” overdose. I had long since stopped looking before crossing the road, hoping that a truck would run me over.

I calmly waited for the impact. Out of the corner of my eye I watched the pointed corner getting closer and closer, then I watched as my head crashed into... a hand?!

Real time snapped back in and the noise was turned back on again, Max, who had conveniently spent a year at the Australian Institute of Sport playing baseball, had caught my head in his hand!

All the boys were shocked and were looking a little pale and asking if I was ok.

“Whoa!!!” I laughed grabbing the board, the adrenaline kicking in enabled me to make the trip back up the stairs unaided – “you ready to cover me again Max?!” I called as I dropped in surfing my way down the stairs again.

Kids at War

The next day the rent was due.

I hadn't asked my Mum for money since I had moved out of home at the age of seventeen, but for some reason that morning I decided not to go out and steal, sell or hustle to get the fifty dollars. I went and asked my Mum.

I hadn't slept from the night before and went to her work, a private high school, and asked her.

She told me off for coming to her work looking so bad, but she agreed to put the fifty dollars that I was short for my rent into the bank account of the real-estate agent (there was no way that she was going to give me, a drug addict, the cash to deposit it myself), in return for me doing a couple of hours work cleaning up the drama department storeroom.

Then she told me that she did not want to talk to me again until I was in a residential drug rehabilitation program.

I told her that I would go.

What I didn't tell her was that I thought it would be a waste of time. In fact, from what I had seen and had been told from the old school addicts, I was under the definite impression that "Once a junkie – always a junkie". But I figured that I would go and dry out, get my tolerance down and for a while everything would be cheap again.

Kids at War

I also figured that if I gave it my best shot, Mum would have to get over the fact that I was never going to get better and she would just have to accept me the way I was.

I made an appointment to see a drug counsellor at the main drug rehabilitation agency in Perth.

I told her that I wanted to go to the rehab farm just outside of the city.

She told me that before going into the farm I would need to detox, because the amount of drugs I would be coming off would be dangerous to quit “cold turkey”.

I understood.

What I didn't understand was why they wouldn't let me detox in the medically supervised, residential clinic that was part of the counselling centre. Instead I was told that I had to detox at home.

If I could have stopped using drugs at home, I wouldn't have needed to ask these people for help. I explained this to the lady, telling her that there were so many drugs going through my place every day that I couldn't think of a worse possible place for me to try and detox – and I had nowhere else to go.

She said that there was nothing that she could do except book another appointment for the same time next week.

As I left for home, I hit rock bottom.

Kids at War

I wanted out of the drug life. I knew that I couldn't do it alone – I had tried a couple of times before. I could hear the death sentence "Once a junkie - always a junkie" ringing in my ears, over and over again it tolled like a church bell at midday reminding me of my hopeless situation.

In anguish, I looked up as if to pray, but I didn't see any God. I levelled my gaze and steeled myself. Getting better was becoming really important to me now.

Even though I still didn't really believe that I could be "fixed", there was a strange drive in me to keep pursuing this, it felt like there was there was an urgency to it.

As I continued to the city train station I walked past the hospital I had been admitted to so many times, I became worried that I might die before I got help – I knew that I didn't want to die anymore.

The next week I went back to the clinic. I didn't really know why I was bothering but on the other hand I didn't know what else to do. I even had a pocket full of drugs that I was waiting until after my appointment to use.

The counsellor was different to the one I had the previous week.

"Where is the other lady?" I asked suspiciously.

"She is not well today, so they called me in." The new counsellor replied with all the confidence of a substitute teacher.

Kids at War

“Great.” I thought sarcastically, groaning and rolling my eyes with very little subtlety.

“Don’t worry about it” I told her, “I’ll just come back next week”.

“You’re here now, let’s see if there’s anything I can do to help.”

“No harm in talking to her for a little bit” I thought, “maybe she can get me into the residential detox clinic, then the other rehabs will be able to take me”.

I told her my dilemma.

She asked me how much drugs I had been using.

I told her that I was using a lot less than I actually was – maybe they would let me straight in... I knew I could handle going cold turkey from anything. I had done it plenty of times before.

“Do you smoke?” She asked.

I recognised her tone, this was the same tone that the other counsellor had used when she asked how much drugs I had been using, right before she told me that it disqualified me from entering the program I was trying to get in.

“No” I told her – I figured that I wasn’t really lying, I was down to about half a pack a day, besides I wanted to quit anyway. If I couldn’t smoke at the rehab, that would be a bonus.

Kids at War

“I think that Teen Challenge would be good for you...”

She didn't get to finish her sentence.

The mention of “Teen Challenge” triggered a memory that came flooding back.

Three years before, I was sitting in the back row of a giant auditorium at the “Drug Summit” which Mum had attended for work. The auditorium was just around the corner of my little apartment in Victoria Park so she had invited me along. For some strange reason I had agreed to go.

At least a thousand people were there. Doctors, policemen and politicians had talked. There was also a girl who had spoken. She said that she had been using up to four hundred dollars' worth of heroin a day, and had gone to Teen Challenge and had got better.

Now she reckoned that she was not an addict any more.

We had sat at the back of the auditorium and I began bagging her out, telling Mum, that if she had been using four hundred dollars' worth of “smack” a day, she was getting severely ripped off.

I didn't believe her – I had never heard of anybody getting clean from heroin. I figured that it was one of two things - either she had never been a proper addict, or she was still using on the sly. “Bull [bleep]!”, I venomously spat, at a volume that those seated near me could easily hear, “Once a junkie - always a junkie!”

Kids at War

While telling her story, she said that Teen Challenge was a God place. She reckoned that God had helped her get clean!

“Are you a Christian? Are you trying to push God on me?” I retorted angrily, reacting to the counsellor’s suggestion of going to Teen Challenge.

The thought of God brought out a bitterness in my reply that I realised was not warranted. As a boy He hadn’t done the wrong thing by me. I had walked away from Him.

The words had scarcely left my mouth when I realised that I was going to need a miracle to get clean.

As much as I wanted to get out of “The Game”, this life of gangs, crime and drugs, I loved it. I loved the violence, the excitement, the crime and I loved getting high. This life was all I knew – any remnant of a different life was hardly even a faint, distant memory by now.

There had been no prospect for anything else for years now. I had made my choice. When I chose to go down this road I knew it was a one way street.

I didn’t listen to the older addicts who had told me I would regret the life I would be choosing if I started using drugs – advice I had since given many times, mostly to people who didn’t listen either.

Kids at War

It must have only been a fraction of a second but in that time I prayed to the God of my childhood – the same God that the Teen Challenge girl had spoken about.

“God” I silently prayed, “if you’re really there, and if you really are God, if you still want anything to do with me, you can make me not want to do drugs any more. If you do this, I will live for you for the rest of my life. But if you don’t, then I will know that you aren’t real and there is no reason for me to even live – all bets are off, I am going to go out with a bang, I will go so hard that the world had better watch out!”

“No, no...” The startled counsellor replied to my accusations, cutting in as I finished my silent prayer, “we’ll find you somewhere else.”

“I want the God place!” I said firmly

She looked a little confused, then said “No, I don’t think that’s the place for you”.

“I want the God place.” I said evenly and firmly, using all my years of experience in intimidation.

“No...” she started to say

“GIVE ME THE GOD PLACE!!!” I said a little less evenly and a little more firmly, as my composure uncharacteristically started to waver.

“Ok, ok, let me see what we can do” she conceded.

Kids at War

She went on to tell me that at Teen Challenge sometimes when people finished the program they stayed on as workers there. I thought that I'd like to do that.

I don't really remember much of the next two months. I must have told my Mum that I wanted to go to Teen Challenge because somehow, I got an appointment for an interview.

The two months on the waiting list didn't seem like long, just about the perfect amount of time for me to get used to the idea that my life as I knew it was over and would never be the same again.

One of the boys I knew was at Teen Challenge but he left right before I got there. He had only done part of the program and had decided that he was all better. I found out later that it was his place that I took at the Centre.

I heard that he moved into my old room at Steve's place.

We literally traded places. He died of an overdose a year later.

Chapter 9

Rehab

At twenty-one years of age I got on a bus and headed to drug rehab.

Esperance is a ten hour bus trip from Perth, and even though I hadn't slept the night before and had had a shot of morphine and some sleeping tablets before getting on the bus I stayed awake for the whole trip.

I was having my last cigarette once we arrived in Esperance and was approached by a lady who asked to borrow my lighter. "Keep it," I said.

All things going well I was not going to need it again – you're not allowed to smoke at Teen Challenge. It was a one year course and after a year of not smoking, there was no way that I was going to take it up again.

That was the last cigarette that I ever had.

I was picked up by a guy who looked the same age as me - twenty-one years old. He told me that he was going to be my "mentor", sort of like my counsellor.

I snickered internally, "Look at this church boy they've given to help me... what could he know?" We got talking as we drove out of town to the farm where Grace Academy was situated.

Kids at War

The guy told me that he had been a heroin addict and had done the Teen Challenge program. I spun out. For the first time I genuinely believed that there was hope for me.

To look at him now, I would never have guessed that this guy had ever touched a drug harder than Panadol.

We drove for almost half an hour until we arrived at a gravel driveway and drove for another few minutes until I saw the lights of buildings.

We pulled up outside a building that looked like an old house, where I was taken inside. I was told to leave my bags and empty my pockets. I was searched and told that my bags would also be searched. I didn't see the point – why would somebody bring drugs along to rehab?

I was shown to the dinner hall that had about fifty people in it, they stopped eating and turned to look at me – all at the same time. I lowered my eyes and looked for an empty seat.

The only spare seat in the whole room was at a table of all girls.

When I sat down they all started talking at once – I couldn't make out what any particular individual was saying but I got the impression that I'd done something wrong. There was muffled laughter coming from the rest of the room.

Kids at War

A staff member, who looked just like everybody else in the place, told me that guys were not allowed to sit with the girls. I pointed out that there was no other seat available. Somebody got me a seat and I squeezed in at a guys' table.

After dinner I was allocated a buddy and shown to my room. My suitcase and back pack were waiting for me inside.

I made my bed and went straight to sleep.

At what seemed to be the crack of dawn, somebody knocked on my door telling me that I needed to get up, I told them that they needed to shut my door and [bleep] off or I was going to cut their [bleeping] throat.

I continued to sleep until I was woken and told that lunch was being served.

That would be my last sleep in – and full night's sleep for that matter, for a very, very long time.

The next night, it took me all night to get to sleep, and it was just starting to get light when I eventually dozed off.

I hadn't gone to sleep without drugs for such a long time that I couldn't fall asleep without them.

I needed to go to the doctor's on my first day. I had popped my shoulder out in a fight the night before I left Perth. I asked him for anti-inflammatory medication, with no narcotics in them and I refused to ask him for sleeping

Kids at War

tablets. Sleeping pills and painkillers were among the plethora of things that I had become addicted to – I wanted to be drug free at any cost.

The second morning there was, again, a knock at my door, and again I flew off the handle, shouting abuse at the staff member who was on ‘wake up’ duty, but I didn’t go back to sleep.

I became aware that this was a defining moment; this could be the turning point in my life.

I needed to decide what I wanted. Did I want to keep sleeping the days away, like I had been for so many years? Or did I want to get on with my life?

I dragged myself out of bed and into the shower. There was no hot water left, but in spite of the bitterly cold winters morning, I didn’t care.

After breakfast, was “chapel” – it was like a little church service, the people sang songs and then one of the students got up and spoke.

Kids at War



Stain Glass Window in Roof of “Grace Chapel Esperance”, the Chapel at the Teen Challenge W.A. Centre

I was not in a place to deal with loud music, I was starting to detox which was never pretty. I sat up the back of the chapel, willing the music team to shut up.

I was staring hard at the singers trying to get the message across. When I did make eye contact I did my best to let them know that I wanted to inflict as much pain on them as was humanly possible at this moment. They looked away quickly, but didn't lower their voices.

As the first couple of days went on and the drugs left my system I got worse physically with withdrawal symptoms. I was cramping up badly and sweating – cold sweats; I couldn't get warm, and I couldn't sleep.

I spent as much time as possible staying away from people - in my room or in the indoor basketball court shooting hoops alone. Occasionally a cheery red-haired guy called Scott would come and shoot hoops with me.

Kids at War

I didn't mind because he didn't want to talk and he had a decent jump shot.

Scott and the other boys called the house where we stayed "home".

I vowed I never would – this was not home, this was rehab.

They had all made their bedrooms cosy, building shelves and putting pictures and posters on their walls. I promised myself that I was never going to do that either. I wasn't going to get connected to a place that I was just going to leave at some point.

All I had in my room was a bare desk and a window that I kept covered with the curtain – outside that window was a clothesline and beyond that, a paddock filled with dirt!

No plants, no wheat, not even any grass!

I felt depressed every time I looked out that window.

Prior to going to Teen Challenge everything I knew about farming came from reading "Footrot Flats" comics. I had no idea that you needed to plough a field and make it look bare like that before you planted stuff in it.

Kids at War



Jacob: Six Weeks after Arriving at Teen Challenge

Over my time at Teen Challenge I learnt a lot about myself and about life from watching the paddocks getting stripped bare, as they were ploughed and sown, before slowly growing a crop and producing something useful for harvesting .

That was a pretty accurate picture of what happened to me over my time as a Teen Challenge student.

After a few days of being excused from the compulsory activities because I was too sick from detoxing, I was introduced to “work period”.

My first work assignment was digging tree stumps out from around the lake.

My attitude was less than compliant, to say the least. I was still cramping up from the withdrawals, my bones felt like chalk and I was still getting bad hot and cold sweats.

Kids at War

On top of this I still hadn't been sleeping, I was feeling pretty miserable most of the time and the last thing I felt like doing was physical labour.

"If they are going to make *me* do work," I declared to myself, "I am going to make *them* regret it!"

I dutifully dug out the stump that I was assigned and then proceeded to turn the hole left behind into a booby trap so that when the old four wheel drive ute that was being used to collect the stumps drove over it, the hole would cave in. I was unsure what damage it would do to the Ute but it would certainly give the driver a scare.



Jacob at Work Period – Drenching Sheep

I was also introduced to class - the other main part of my day. I was given a booth that was to be my work station for the rest of my time at Teen Challenge.

In class we had to answer questions on why we did the things we did, why we felt the way we felt and write down

Kids at War

what we wanted out of life. Lots of the questions were somehow related to God.

The questions got me thinking, "What did I want from life?"

Since I was thirteen, all I wanted to be was a gang member people wouldn't mess with and high all the time.

Years ago I had once told my Mum that I didn't have any ambition apart from that. She told me that if I aimed low enough I was sure to achieve my goal.

I had tried to do things my way for so long and I had done everything that I thought would bring me happiness and nothing had worked. All of the drugs and respect hadn't brought me happiness. In the long run it had only made my life worse.

The questions would occasionally ask what I had been asking myself since I arrived, "Did I want to try and do life a different way?" "Did I want to do life God's way?"

After a few days of contemplating this question I decided that it was what I wanted, but I couldn't bring myself to do what the question on my class work asked me.

"Did I want to let Jesus become the leader of my life?"

I was hesitant to let go of the right to live my life how I wanted, to be able to do what I wanted, when I wanted with no regard for the consequences or for other people. I

Kids at War

knew that if I was living life with Jesus He wouldn't be cool with me being like that.

As much as I didn't want to let go of doing things my way in my life, I knew that my way had only brought me a lot of pain and not much to show for it. Somewhere deep down inside me I knew that this was the right thing to do.

It was a hard decision and I was not going to make it lightly. I had never done things half way, so if I was going to live for Jesus and become a Christian I was going to do it the very best that I could.

For about two days I had left the worksheet that asked this question untouched on my desk. During the three hours of class each day I didn't do much else except look at it and try to decide what I was going to do. I knew that it meant that my life was going to be a lot different and I was probably going to be a lot nicer person.

Coming from the world of gangs, crime, violence and drugs, being a nice person is not a good way to be - but if I was going to start a whole new life...

Eventually I decided that I had nothing to lose.

I made the decision that I was going to let Jesus be the leader of my life and I was not going to live the way that I had been any more. I was going to try and live my life the way that He did, and the way that He asks us to.

Kids at War



Jacob being Baptised

After making this choice my life seemed to make a lot more sense. I was still in rehab, I was still physically hanging out for drugs, but I didn't *want* to do them anymore. I seemed to have less trouble being calm when the boys were irritating me – before this I had charged into the dining room threatening to throw one of the boys through the window because he complained about me having a shower too early in the morning.

I still spent a lot of time in my room and alone in the gym shooting baskets but during this time I began to talk to God and ask him to show himself to me. I still was not sleeping so I spent the nights reading books about different people who, with God's help, did amazing things with their lives. I spent hour upon hour through the nights reading the Bible trying to understand what it was all about, learning about God and what he has done for us

Kids at War

and how he wants us to live and why he wants us to live like this. I still hated work period but I spent the time asking guys who had been Christians for a while different questions that I had, or when I was working alone I would spend the time talking with God, just like I would talk with the guys.

The first time that I knew beyond any doubt that God was real, and that He was doing a miracle inside me, fixing me up, was dessert night – dessert night was a special night, we had it twice a week and when you live as simply as they do at Teen Challenge you really learn to appreciate the simple things in life. Dessert is one of those simple things.

I was wearing a jacket that had crude stitching in one of the sleeves. I had sown up holes that one of my crew had made during a fight we were in, when he - wearing this jacket, had stabbed a guy over a dozen times.

I was sitting by the fire watching the room buzzing with life as everybody was enjoying their ice cream and cake. I hadn't yet reached the place where I was so grateful for the little things that I got excited about dessert, but I did enjoy watching how happy all the people were.

Suddenly a wave of feeling swept over me. I wasn't sure what it was, it was a feeling that I couldn't identify.

At first I felt a little freaked out and tried to shake it off. It came back almost immediately, something inside me eased my nerves and seemed to tell me without words

Kids at War

“Don’t worry, its ok.” For some reason I decided to trust the “feeling voice” and I relaxed as the wave returned.

I realised that these feelings were actually pleasant. The waves began to intensify. Slowly I began to recognise these feelings.

They were feelings that I had not felt since I was a small boy. Joy was the first feeling I recognised and immediately realised that it was accompanied by other feelings that I remembered, peace, contentment and security. It was almost as if they were all the same thing. They were certainly distinguishable individually, yet not separate.

It was more than just feeling good and happy. This joy and peace seemed to come from deep inside and didn’t seem to have anything to do with outside circumstance.

I can only describe it as like the joy and peace that children have when the world is still a good place and they don’t yet know that bad things can happen. The contentment felt like the contentment a child has when they are blissfully unaware of all the things they don’t have.

Only these feelings were stronger, because I did know that the world could be a horrible place and I was well aware of the limitations of my body, intelligence and finances.

These facts no longer mattered any more, and it wasn’t like being on drugs where these things didn’t matter

Kids at War

because you just block them out and ignore them. The circumstances were still very real but they just no longer had anything to do with the way that I felt within myself.

For the rest of the night I was on cloud nine.

Although the intensity of the feelings subsided, to this day, no matter what difficulties have come my way – and I have since experienced severe tragedy and trials – a true sense of this joy, peace, contentment and security, that I first felt that night are always with me.

When I had been at Teen Challenge for two weeks and still felt so horrible that all I wanted to do was to leave and get high, though I knew that that was not the solution and that somehow being here was, a guy who was to become a close friend, and seemed to understand how I felt came up to me and compassionately told me, “Hang in there mate. This is a good place; I’ve had the best times of my life here.”

I raised my eyebrows and turned away... “You mustn’t have got out much ...” I muttered to myself, “...you also must be quite mad.” I walked away feeling sorry for the poor guy.

Over the next few years I often found myself repeating the very thing he’d said to me to new guys.

Kids at War



The “TC” (Teen Challenge) Men

It really is a fantastic place and I had so many brilliant times.

I rekindled my passion for sport, surfing, fishing, and even remembered that I liked doing other stuff like canoeing, rock climbing, spear fishing, cycling and camping, things I hadn't done since I was a kid.

It was once again in sport that I found my niche. We played organised games of sport twice a week. I eagerly looked forward to these games of basketball, soccer, football, volleyball, cricket and badminton amongst other sports.

My knees had almost fully recovered and I was able to give it my all – I felt alive again. Often I would overdo it and my mentor had to teach me to not be so competitive all the time!

Kids at War

During one of the men's camps, we went white water canoeing, rock climbing and did a bunch of other cool stuff, it was during this time that I learnt I could have better fun off drugs than when I was on them.

The day we spent paddling down rapids, sharing my canoe with one of my new friends, sometimes shooting through the white water sections successfully, other times capsizing, was the day that I believed for the first time that I really could live the rest of my life without drugs.

During my time in the program I was the happiest that I ever remembered being.

chapter 10

Freedom & Success

After graduating the Teen Challenge program I did an internship at the centre. During this time I was invited to become a full time staff member at Teen Challenge, Grace Academy.

I wasn't sure that I was going to be capable enough.

I felt that God was leading me to take this step of faith, so I set my doubts aside and took the plunge. I made the commitment and for the next two years served as a Teen Challenge mentor.

These two years were, up until that point, the best time of my life - they were also the most challenging (prior to this my time as a Teen Challenge student was both the best and most challenging time of my life). Over that time I had a variety of different responsibilities; I ran the kitchen (making sure that there were 50 meals three times a day); I was given thousands of dollars at a time to do the grocery shopping each week.

I was then designated medical officer – this involved organising doctor's appointments for the students and managing their medication (my knowledge of drugs was a big help with this), and I was also promoted to duty supervisor for the men's program.

Kids at War

It was hard to believe that somebody who was once so untrustworthy would be trusted with so much. I saw that the Teen Challenge management genuinely believed that somebody could be fully transformed by God's grace.

As my second year on staff was drawing to its end, I again felt God directing me. I clearly felt God say "It's time." He didn't say what it was time for – He didn't need to, I knew what He was talking about. It was time for me to leave Teen Challenge.

As sad as I was to be leaving what had become my home (I had been there for over three and a half years), I was excited to see what life would be like living in the "Freedom and Success" that by God's grace I knew was now mine.

During the next year I began dating and then married my beautiful wife Melissa.

I had met Mel in Teen Challenge. She is also a graduate T.C. student and was a staff member while I was a student, though I didn't really get to know her until I was doing my internship.

She left the centre after working as a mentor for two years, one week before I started on staff. After a short time back in Perth, she was again employed by Teen Challenge at the city office, working with girls who wanted to go to the centre and also helping them to adjust back into the community when they left.

Kids at War

Before any romantic feelings developed I had admired Melissa as a strong woman and a terrific leader with a soft gentle spirit (as well as her gorgeous looks).

I kept in contact with Mel when she left, and we caught up regularly when I was on holidays in Perth. I really liked her but I knew that it was not the right time for me to be getting into a relationship. I still needed to learn to live free and successful by myself for a while.

I was so sure that she was going to get “snapped up” by the time that I would be ready for a relationship that I gave up the idea we would be together and settled for being a friend to her.

I regularly prayed for her, asking God if He could please give her the best man that he had (deep down I hoped that I would be that man, but didn't like my chances). During our time as friends she taught me a lot about how a woman should be treated.



Kids at War

On Christmas day 2006 I told her how I felt and we were married a year later.

At the time of writing this revised version, we have just celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary and have two sons, Caleb and Ethan, who are learning to become men and a daughter, Tiffany, that I haven't learned to say "no" to yet.

In 2008, after working in a couple of labouring jobs I was asked to join the team as a pastor of the church we were attending.



Ps Jacob Preaching at Grace Church

After a few years Melissa and I were asked to become the senior pastors which has been a tremendous experience!

Kids at War

We are daily seeing lives changed and impacted by the gospel and the love of Jesus. It is a privilege to see God still doing the miracles we were accustomed to seeing among drug addicts with people from all walks of life Perth.

Over my time at Teen Challenge I rebuilt my relationships with my family. I am now in regular contact with them all.

My Dad has remarried and has a beautiful daughter.



On Holiday in N.S.W. Visiting Dad

In late September 2008, after countless overdoses, a broken neck and a lengthy, serious criminal record, my younger brother Isaac entered Grace Academy and began the Teen Challenge program.

He completed the program in December 2009 and was offered a position as a mentor, helping other young men

Kids at War

who, like he did, need somebody to walk alongside them, while they too journey toward “Freedom and Success”.

He is now married, owns his own home and has a young son.

After twenty-three years of addiction my older brother Shonn completed the Teen Challenge program and also has a son and owns his own home with his partner.

Mum has also remarried and has moved from their small farm in rural Tasmania back to Perth to be nearer to their Grandchildren.

Mum once disappointedly said to me, “If you aim low enough, you’re guaranteed to reach your goal”.

I have since raised the bar.

Now my goal is to help people discover their purpose in life and empower them to fulfil their destiny.



Jacob has sharing his story and the “Say No to Drugs” message with students

Kids at War

My goal is to help protect young people from the *lie* that if they don't try everything, they are missing out, and tell them the *truth* – that ultimate life is only found in walking in relationship with God, through Jesus Christ.

My goal is to let drug addicts know that there is a way out.

My goal is to help those who have lost all hope to realise that life is worth living.

My goal is to encourage parents whose children are throwing their lives away not to give up praying for them.

My goal is to let people know that they are special and are made by a God who loves them and has a special plan for their life.

My Goal is to teach everybody that they too can live a life of “Freedom and Success”.

By God's grace I will achieve my goal!

Writing this book is something that I have done to pay forward the good deeds that so many have done for me to both save my life, and to allow me to live a life I never dreamed possible.

If you have been impacted by my story, I have a favour to ask, “Please pass this book on to keep paying it forward.”

Jacob

Kids at War

DRUG HELP LINES

QUEENSLAND: TEEN CHALLENGE

(07) 3422 1500

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: TEEN CHALLENGE

1800 771 777

VICTORIA: TEEN CHALLENGE

(03) 5852 3777

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: TEEN CHALLENGE

(08) 9246 5777

TASMANIA: TEEN CHALLENGE

(03) 6288 1188

NORTHERN TERRITORY: TEEN CHALLENGE

(08) 8952 4496

NEW SOUTH WALES: ONE80 TC

1800 679 657

THERE IS HOPE.



At thirteen, Jacob was an 'A' student, on a sport scholarship until his world changed when his parents divorced and he was injured. He fell in with the wrong crowd and spiralled into drug addiction. After surviving the battle of addiction, Jacob is living proof that there is always hope!

"...so touched to see how your life has been transformed and the way you are walking out your destiny."

John Bevere, Best-Selling Author & Speaker

" I didn't put it down once from start to finish... I was mesmerised."

Anna Meares, Olympic Gold Medalist

"Your story is truly inspirational."

Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia 2007 – 2013

JACOB HILL lives in Perth, Western Australia, with his wife Melissa and three children.

Jacob is the senior pastor of Grace Church, a thriving church in Perth's northern suburbs. He is passionate about living life to it's fullest, and helping others to do the same.

