Chasing the High
A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF ONE YOUNG PERSON'S EXPERIENCE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE

plus:
• The latest information on substance abuse and its treatment
• Tips on managing daily life in recovery from substance abuse

KYLE KEEGAN With Howard B. Moss, M.D., and Beryl Lieff Benderly
Advance Acclaim for
Chasing the High

“Chasing the High is an excellent resource on substance abuse for adolescents and their families. Keegan’s personal story captures the experience of addiction and recovery in a compelling manner. The authors even make the neurobiology of addiction clear and accessible. It is difficult to find good resources about addictive drugs for adolescents and this book fills the gap.”

–Charles Dackis, M.D.,
Director, Charles O’Brien Center for Addiction Treatment,
University of Pennsylvania

“Chasing the High is honest and intense, yet also extremely informative. Kyle Keegan has written a brave cautionary tale that takes his readers deep inside the belly of addiction. This book speaks to anyone who has ever felt the deadly grip of drugs and alcohol take hold, but also to those who have watched someone they love disappear into a dark cloud of chemicals. Bravo to Kyle for having the courage to share his painful and inspiring story with the world.”

–Lynn Marie Smith, author of Rolling Away: My Agony with Ecstasy

“While the perils of addiction are often lost in detailed data, there remains a lacuna of information on the personal tolls of substance abuse. In Chasing the High we are given an intriguing and very personal snapshot of the initiation, maintenance, and subsequent battling of severe chemical dependency—intermixed with factual and useful information about addictions. Along with the author, we experience the tribulations of the addiction—from the crashes to the euphoria to the rehabilitation and optimism of experiencing life without drugs. Chasing the High provides a unique inside perspective on addiction that is often lost in academic texts.”

–Timothy E. Wilens, M.D.,
Massachusetts General Hospital & Harvard Medical School

“Chasing the High by Keegan and Moss is a wonderful first-hand account of a young person’s development of addiction. With powerful descriptions of the events that led to drug use, abuse, and addiction the authors succeed in weaving a primer on addiction within the developing saga. Engaging and easy to read, this book should be an enormous help for those individuals and families struggling with this disorder to understand addiction. Particularly poignant for this researcher is the repeated focus on the ‘dark side’ of addiction. The author states, ‘In fact, you’re taking drugs now not so much to feel good as to keep from feeling bad.’ The authors illustrate so clearly that seeking drugs to fill emotional holes creates even bigger emotional holes that in turn need to be filled. This phenomenon is the core feature of addiction.”

–George F. Koob, Ph.D.,
Professor, Committee on the Neurobiology of Addictive Disorders,
The Scripps Research Institute
The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands’ Adolescent Mental Health Initiative

Patrick E. Jamieson, Ph.D., series editor

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For young people

Mind Race: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience With Bipolar Disorder
Patrick E. Jamieson, Ph.D., with Moira A. Rynn, M.D.

Monochrome Days: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience With Depression
Cait Irwin, with Dwight L. Evans, M.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

What You Must Think of Me: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience With Social Anxiety Disorder
Emily Ford, with Michael Liebowitz, M.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

Next to Nothing: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience With an Eating Disorder
Carrie Arnold, with B. Timothy Walsh, M.D.

Me, Myself, and Them: A Firsthand Account of One Young Person’s Experience With Schizophrenia
Kurt Snyder, with Raquel E. Gur, M.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

The Thought That Counts: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager’s Experience With Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
Jared Douglas Kant, with Martin Franklin, Ph.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

Eight Stories Up: An Adolescent Chooses Hope Over Suicide
DeQuincy A. Lezine, Ph.D., with David Brent, M.D. (forthcoming, 2008)

For parents and other adults

If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder
Dwight L. Evans, M.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder
B. Timothy Walsh, M.D., and V. L. Cameron

If Your Adolescent Has an Anxiety Disorder
Edna B. Foa, Ph.D., and Linda Wasmer Andrews

If Your Adolescent Has Schizophrenia
Raquel E. Gur, M.D., Ph.D., and Ann Braden Johnson, Ph.D.
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Foreword

The Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (AMHI) was created by The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands to share with mental health professionals, parents, and adolescents the advances in treatment and prevention now available to adolescents with mental health disorders. The Initiative was made possible by the generosity and vision of Ambassadors Walter and Leonore Annenberg, and the project was administered through the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania in partnership with Oxford University Press.

The Initiative began in 2003 with the convening, in Philadelphia and New York, of seven scholarly commissions made up of over 150 leading psychiatrists and psychologists from around the country. Chaired by Drs. Edna B. Foa, Dwight L. Evans, B. Timothy Walsh, Martin E. P. Seligman, Raquel E. Gur, Charles P. O’Brien, and Herbert Hendin, these commissions were tasked with assessing the state of scientific research on the prevalent mental disorders whose onset occurs predominantly between the ages of 10 and 22. Their collective
findings now appear in a book for mental health professionals and policy makers titled *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders* (2005). As the first product of the Initiative, that book also identified a research agenda that would best advance our ability to prevent and treat these disorders, among them anxiety disorders, depression and bipolar disorder, eating disorders, substance abuse, and schizophrenia.

The second prong of the Initiative’s three-part effort is a series of smaller books for general readers. Some of the books are designed primarily for parents of adolescents with a specific mental health disorder. And some, including this one, are aimed at adolescents themselves who are struggling with a mental illness. All of the books draw their scientific information in part from the AMHI professional volume, presenting it in a manner that is accessible to general readers of different ages. The “teen books” also feature the real-life story of one young person who has struggled with—and now manages—a given mental illness. They serve as both a source of solid research about the illness and as a roadmap to recovery for afflicted young people. Thus they offer a unique combination of medical science and firsthand practical wisdom in an effort to inspire adolescents to take an active role in their own recovery.

We hope that you find this volume, as one of the fruits of the Initiative, to be helpful and enlightening.

Patrick Jamieson, Ph.D.
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Preface

W orking on this book has not been easy. I’ve had to plunge deep into the memories of my years of addiction, and into the troubling emotions that I felt back then. If you’re reading this book right now, chances are you already have some notion of the uncomfortable feelings that substance abuse can cause. I believe that this book can be helpful to you and to others who have faced the incredible challenge of addiction, so I’ve traveled back in time in order to relate to you my experiences with drugs—mostly heroin—and how I nearly lost my life to this devastating substance.

I started using alcohol and drugs in high school, and the sensations that they produced quickly carried me off to a place where I didn’t care about my friends, family, or my own future. I was soon living as a homeless junkie in California, far away from the place where I’d grown up and from those who cared about me. I was so in thrall to heroin that nothing else mattered; my life became so bad that I eventually began to contemplate suicide. I was miserable and couldn’t see any way out of the desperate situation I’d gotten myself into; death seemed to be the only solution.
As you can see, I was wrong about that. Today I’m clean, and it’s been two years since I’ve been dependent on heroin. I have an exciting and unusual job as a commercial diver, a family that loves and supports me, and a happy wife and baby. I have hobbies and interests that don’t involve drugs or alcohol. Finally, in my early thirties, with a lot of hard work and the appropriate treatment, I’ve been able to turn my life around, and I have no intention of going back.

If you gain nothing else from reading this book, know this: you can overcome an addiction. You may be having a difficult time, struggling with whether or not you have a substance abuse problem—or you may already know that you’re in trouble. If you’re willing to recognize that you need help, and accept help when it appears, then you have every chance of returning from the brink and reclaiming your life. As you’ll see, I was just about as close to losing my life to drugs as anyone ever can be, and I made it back. You can too. My modest hope is that this book, and the experiences and information it contains, can help you on your road to recovery.

The History Behind Chasing the High
The idea for this book was born in 2003, when seven scholarly commissions on adolescent mental health were convened by the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands. The psychiatrists and psychologists on these commissions were charged with examining the state of the science on mental disorders that strike teenagers and young adults. Several books on, or drawing from, the findings of these commissions followed, including the one you hold in your hands.

Howard B. Moss, M.D., was a member of the commission on substance use disorders, and he is also the medical adviser for this book. Dr. Moss is an addiction psychiatrist and
a professor of clinical psychiatry at the George Washington University School of Medicine. He also holds a post at the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, so he brings a wealth of experience and wisdom to these pages.

**What to Expect From This Book**

Dr. Moss and I have joined forces to create a book that is different from others on substance abuse in young people. Some books tell one person’s story of addiction, but offer little in the way of straightforward, reliable information on getting treatment and staying in recovery. Others focus on treatment and recovery alone, offering no personal perspective of what it’s really like to deal with drug abuse. This book, on the other hand, looks at substance abuse from both points of view. Intended primarily for young people, *Chasing the High* is my own firsthand account of addiction as well as a useful, easy-to-understand resource on substance abuse, treatment, and recovery. Each chapter is divided into two halves: The first describes my personal struggle with drugs, while the second looks at the science, medicine, and social trends of substance abuse, which affected not only me but other young people as well. In addition, because no two people experience substance abuse and drug addiction in exactly the same way, I thought it would be useful to give some different perspectives on the issue, so I have included the voices of other recovering addicts alongside my own story.

Before we get started, I should mention that although I discuss certain treatment options and medications, I don’t mean to recommend that you adopt any of the therapies that my care providers and I developed for me. The best course of treatment for you should be determined in collaboration with your own qualified doctors and therapists. Also, I want to offer the
admission that the events I’m about to describe occurred over
the course of many years, and during a lot of that time I wasn’t
exactly in my right mind. I’ve tried to relate my experiences as
accurately and completely as possible, and any omissions or
errors I may have made during this narrative are entirely un-
intentional.

I invite you to join me as I recount the often-harrowing
experiences that cost me nearly ten years of my life. You may
be feeling hopeless or helpless in the face of your drug use, and
confused as to how to proceed and what to expect. I’m here to
tell you that recovery is possible—probable, even—if you give
it your all. I hope that I might be able to offer some guidance
and help direct you toward a brighter future, where drugs
don’t control us or dictate the decisions we make.
Chasing the High
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