



# Continue to Say No

By Claire Parsons

**I**n a discussion in Government class, my classmates, the teacher and I debated the drinking age in the U.S. The teacher asked, "If it was lowered to 18 years old, would I have to worry about even younger kids binge drinking?" This question seemed funny to me, and I was taken aback by my reaction. I knew kids who had been binge drinking since middle school. I remember vividly a boy who I had grown up with telling me on the playground that all he wanted to do was go home and get drunk. We were 14. My sister first introduced me to marijuana before I was 13. Now, with the prevalence of Juuls and vapes and the legalization of marijuana, kids are starting earlier and earlier which leads to getting bored of the drugs they are used to and trying harder, more dangerous things. Acid and shrooms and molly are now commonplace in stories in the halls of high school.

I have participated in the use of marijuana and alcohol and I have felt the consequences of it. In the summer of my sophomore year I was at my grandparents house alone and I was feeling really low. Instead of reaching out to my family or friends I took a bottle of whiskey from their cabinet. Three hours later they found me unconscious and I was rushed to the hospital in an ambu-

lance. My blood alcohol content was .27. My grandparents were terrified, my parents were distraught and I was guilty for causing them pain. I felt so stupid for making that choice.

Still, I continued to drink when it was offered to me at celebrations, thinking it was harmless, and I continued smoking marijuana. It made me feel grown up. Responsible. (Ha!). My sister was an avid participant and I wanted to look up to her. I couldn't stop and look at my carelessness and the ways I was hindering my own potential. I was making myself distracted, tired, guilty, secretive, and thought I could only relax with the assistance of a substance. "It's just something people do," I thought to myself, "I'm not using it as much or as dangerously as some people."

Over the years I saw one of my best friends get consumed by marijuana. It was all she could look forward to and she would leave my friends and I while hanging out if she found out we weren't smoking. She pressured me into skipping school multiple times and her relationship with her parents plummeted. She never seemed genuine, just looking for her next buzz or fix. It felt gross. I started to distance myself from her. I turned down my dad when he offered me sips of alcoholic drinks.

I began to see the pointlessness in it, the piteousness that had made me turn toward it: a desire to fit in and feel older and a way to avoid my feelings and give myself an excuse not to think.

As this mulled in my mind I listened to the "harmless" stories of people getting trashed and losing their dignity with a new heart. They weren't funny. While standing in line for a concert four men behind me discussed how drunk they were, how much they had drunk the night before, and the night before, how they wished whatever they were smoking was stronger. They yelled and sang tunelessly and loudly behind me. I promised myself I never wanted to be like those louts. My friends told me about going to a concert too high and throwing up in the mosh pit. I promised myself I never wanted to be like them. I never want to think that is fun. I never want to be like the people who come home from work to a mindless night of drinking and forgetting about their day. I never want to be like my sister who thinks life is all a party.

I want to know who I am. To be in control of myself. Be able to trust myself. Know that I am responsible and capable and present. I never want to use substances again. I've never seen them do good, just poison myself and my friends and my family. The number of adults I know that go to AA meetings is absurd. And that's not their personal problem, it's society's problem, it's the problem alcohol causes—like the 88,000 deaths each year and liver disease. I know too many kids that drive high, too many that would pop a pill just because it's free. I will continue to say No to drugs and substances and be ashamed of my prior use and stupidity because there are too many people afraid to look at the numbers, the facts, and vilify themselves and society. 🙅

## ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Claire Parsons is a recent high school graduate from Montana. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.