



# Alert, Aware and in the Moment

By Ruby McShane

I was surprised enough that I was able to see my favorite band, Radiohead, twice in the same year when previously I thought I would never see them in concert, but by the end of the concert, I was most shocked about experiencing my first encounter with drugs.

My dad and I had tickets from two different websites, so while my seat was on the second level, his was on the third level. The two of us share a similar taste in music and we go to concerts together frequently. However, this concert was my first time not sitting or standing next to him. I felt a strange excitement in the possibility of talking with other Radiohead fans about the band other than my dad since I don't know many other fans. At a concert there's something incredibly rewarding about being apart of such a large gathering of people who share a unified passion.

My seat was in the center of a group of friends, who I guessed were in their late 20s, whereas I was only 17. I spoke with the woman to my right, who introduced herself as Jen, briefly before the show and she and

her friends surrounding me seemed friendly, too. Radiohead came on stage and I was completely immersed in the performance until I smelled the intense, earthy stench of pot that I'd only smelled before on the streets of my city and initially believed I was smelling a skunk. The man next to me had lit up a joint and taken a big puff of it. He passed it across my face to Jen, who inhaled some of it. She passed it back to him and then he turned to me, holding it out like a sacred candle for me to receive.

My instinctive response was repulsion and, without hesitation, I shook my head and waved my hand to signal that I wasn't interested. I turned back to the stage, but had difficulty staying focused on the music in my attempt to process what had just happened. I wasn't sure if he thought I was 21 or if he simply didn't care about offering drugs to a minor. It felt surreal, like I was living in a scripted teen drama TV show. Pot was something I'd only heard kids at my high school talk about, I'd never seen it physically in front of me with the option to inhale it.

The closest I'd come to an experience like this has been overhearing girls in the school bathroom discuss getting drunk or high over the weekend at parties or listening to a student tell her friend about hiding her bong from her parents. These little secrets I overhear always remind me of the existence of fellow students who choose to escape reality by using drugs or alcohol, feeling the need to alter their experiences. However, they are not people I choose to spend my time with. I consider myself an artistic and creative person with a love of photography, alternative music, and my city's creative scene, however, just because I identify as a creative and non-conforming individual, it doesn't mean that I use drugs in order to be inspired. I feel inspired naturally, as I am driven by a passion for the arts and it is important to me how I express myself. I have headphones in constantly so I can listen to music when out and about, I dye my hair bright red, and I love to photograph found objects, but I don't use drugs to define myself.

The next day during lunch, I told my best friend about the concert incident. We both agreed that I did the right thing and expressed our disinterest in using substances such as cannabis. I believe that once you start relying on altering your state of mind with drugs or alcohol in order to have fun, you create a dependency that makes it harder to enjoy yourself without being under the influence. I wanted to enjoy the concert as it was, instead of using a substance to alter my experience. That is also how I choose to live my life: fully alert, aware and in the moment. 🙅

## ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Ruby McShane is a high school senior from Oregon. *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.