



## Distanced by Drugs

By Sarah Barthel

**“YOU NEED** to tell your mom.” These are the words of my best friend that run through my mind every time I reflect on how drastically my cousin’s life has transformed in the last several years. As drugs become more and more prevalent in today’s society, it is mandatory that awareness on the issue is increased.

My cousin Jordan was close in age to me, and I had a very strong relationship with him. He gradually became distant and would ditch my brother and I to go hang out with his friends. Coming home, he smelt different and I distinctly recall that the scent made me uncomfortable. I was around the age of ten at the time, and, although I did not know exactly what drugs smelt like, I was positive that Jordan had a scent to him that was not right. Scared and apprehensive, I kept my suspicions to myself and went on pretending like everything was normal.

One day as I was making a necklace out of hemp string, Jordan asked if he could buy the hemp from me. I had previously heard that this material could be smoked, so I immediately tensed up upon hearing his request. This was the point where I knew I had to tell somebody. I was too scared to bring up drugs

to my parents at the time, so I told my best friend. She observed Jordan with me. She too, noticed that his behavior was off and that he smelt strangely. She insisted that I tell my parents about it, saying that I may feel awkward, but it could potentially save his life. “He would be so upset with me if he knew I told on him though,” I told her, worried about ruining my relationship with him. She informed me that this was true, but once he got help, he would be so thankful that I did. Against my better judgment, I decided that I would continue to keep it to myself in an attempt to save myself from feeling uncomfortable talking about drugs with my parents. To this day, I regret that decision, and I frequently think about how different things could have turned out if I would have asked somebody for help that day.

Around one year later, Jordan was arrested for possession of marijuana. My stomach dropped as I listened to my mother explain to me the terrible effects drugs can have on you. “I could have prevented this,” I kept thinking to myself. Jordan stayed away from drugs for a while, or at least he had everybody convinced that was what he was doing. Not too much longer after that,

he got in trouble for dealing marijuana. After being released from the juvenile detention center, things only got worse. He was now into meth, burning abandoned buildings down for fun with his friends, and was now a father to be. He no longer had any interest in any of the things he did before. I hadn’t had a normal conversation with him since the first time he was caught with drugs. I knew things would never be the same.

Standing here today, I can truthfully say I would give anything to go back in time and inform my parents of my suspicions of Jordan and his drugs. Sure, he would have been absolutely furious with me at the time for ratting him out, but just as my friend told me many years ago, he’d be so thankful eventually. I’m sure that today, if I would have told, my cousin would be so grateful. He could have made something of his life. I’m aware that I am not to blame for my cousin’s poor choices; however, I believe that if there was a greater awareness for drug abuse, this problem could be avoided in the future. Kids should not feel uncomfortable talking to their parents about drugs and/or alcohol. They also need to be aware of the signs of drug use. Although I was suspicious of my cousin’s drug use, it was never positive. If I had known for sure that he had an addiction, I may have been more willing to bring the topic up to my parents.

Even though my cousin received the proper help he needed to recover, I still feel distant from him. It is clear that we will never be as close as we once were. I wish people would come to the realization that drug abuse has not only an impact on the user, but also on the people around them. When in doubt, do not hesitate to get help. It could save somebody’s life. 🙏

### ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

*Sarah Barthel is a recent high school graduate from Sioux Falls, SD. 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.*