

## INTERVIEW WITH A HEROIN ADDICT

David: How did you first get into taking heroin?

Dot: Well there's two answers to that. The marijuana ran out and my uncle had been a junkie for twenty-five years. That made it a lot easier.

David: Did he introduce you to it?

Dot: No. As a matter-of-fact, he hit the person who first introduced me to it. And my uncle is very nonviolent. He was quite upset. I was living with my uncle and my grandmother at the time. His friends used to come over and get high with my uncle, up in his room. One of his friends took a liking to me and thought he'd do me a favor. He took me over to his house and turned me on, and I liked it. I went and got my girlfriend and took her over to somebody else's house and she got high too. We both really enjoyed it.

David: When you say he turned you on, what exactly did he do? Did he shoot it up for you?

Dot: Sure! I'm petrified of needles.

David: Have you ever shot up yourself?

Dot: Yes.

David: But the first few times he did it for you?

Dot: Yes. Usually I never did it myself because I am afraid of needles.

David: And you did like it the first time?

Dot: Yes.

David: Were you scared?

Dot: Petrified.

David: Petrified? What about when you introduced your friends? Were they ready to be introduced? Did you have to coerce them?

Dot: Junkies always think that they're the most hip people in the whole world and it is a cool thing to do. Everybody wanted to get high. They wanted to get turned on. Everybody was very excited. "Please, please."

David: So they asked you to turn them on?

Dot: Sure. I don't think that all the stories about the pushers on the street begging people to turn on are necessarily true. Maybe in some cases it is, but usually a junkie has enough dope for himself and he doesn't want to give any away to anybody.

David: Why did the guy want to turn you on?

Dot: He thought he was doing me a favor.

David: Did you ask him to?

Dot: No.

David: So it wasn't that you begged him?

Dot: No. I didn't beg him. I wanted to, but I would never have asked.

David: What made you want to? Was it watching your uncle?

Dot: I was wondering. All of my life I'd gotten lectures about the evils of drugs, the evils of heroin, the evils of marijuana; told that I shouldn't do it. Maybe that induced me to do it more than ever.

David: What kind of life did you uncle lead? Was it the kind of life that would turn you off, or was it exciting?

Dot: It didn't look exciting. I really respected my uncle. I always have. Even though he's really been down and out, in jail a lot of times.

David: But it wasn't that it looked like an exciting life?

Dot: No. It wasn't that it looked exciting. I just liked to get high. And I wanted to get high.

David: Once you took the first dose, were you hooked right then?

Dot: No. That's silly.

David: What happened? How long was it before you shot up again?

Dot: That same night. It sounds like I was. Maybe I was, now I come to think of it. But the next time after that was - I can't remember - but it wasn't long after that.

David: Did you consider yourself a junkie from the beginning?

Dot: Oh no! Nobody ever thinks that they're going to get hooked! My goodness no!

David: Was there a point at which you realized you were hooked?

Dot: I think I realized it a long time before I ever thought about it. I realized I was, but nobody ever consciously thought they were, even people that had been doing junk for a long time.

David: Why do you think they deny it?

Dot: Because you always think you can be on top of the drug, whether you can be or not. You say, "Oh no, I'm not going to get hooked. I can be on top of it. I can control it."

David: What do you mean "on top?"

Dot: Control, control yourself, control it.

David: In looking back, do you think that you were on top of it?

Dot: No. I couldn't have been. Or else I wouldn't have done a lot of things that I did.

David: Can you think why an addict maintains to himself or herself that he or she's on top of it?

Dot: Maybe it's got something to do with what I said before about junkies. They think that they're hip, and they're with it, and what they're doing is really cool. Maybe that's got something to do with it.

David: Did there come a point when you realized you weren't on top of it?

Dot: Yes. That's when I started screaming. I'd get high. You usually got high with people. And I'd start screaming and ranting and raving. "What am I doing to myself? What am I doing to myself?"

David: How did your friends react?

Dot: They threw me out. "Get her out of here."

David: Why do you think they threw you out?

Dot: Because I was verbalizing what they thought.

David: It was too threatening to them to have you verbalize it.

Dot: They didn't need me around to tell them what they already knew. They didn't want to hear it.

David: That's interesting. That implies that, when you're high on heroin, there's a certain way you're supposed to behave. There are some things you're allowed to do and some things you're not allowed to do.

Dot: Sure. There's nothing worse for a heroin addict than hanging around a speed freak.

David: Why is that?

Dot: Because a speed freak will sit there and talk and rant and rave and run around the room. That makes you nervous. It makes you sick. That's no good. They don't want people upsetting them.

David: Have you ever tried any other drugs besides heroin?

Dot: Sure

David: Speed?

Dot: Once. It was enough.

David: You didn't like speed. Why?

Dot: Well it makes you much crazier. It makes your teeth rot. You can feel your teeth rot. Really, you can feel your brain cells falling apart. I'm a nervous person as it is. I didn't need any more nervous energy.

David: So the effect of speed didn't fit with the kind of person you are.

Dot: Right!

David: What else have you tried?

Dot: All psychedelics. Except peyote.

David: How do you feel about those?

Dot: I remember when I first started taking psychedelics - I'm trying to think back. It was the hip thing to do. It was in Buffalo, New York, as a matter-of-fact. I don't think psychedelics really permanently damage you. I don't know. Nobody knows. But I think they have a tendency to make any warped behavior more warped.

David: Heroin gave you a pleasant feeling when you shot up. Were you running from another kind of feeling?

Dot: I had no idea what I was doing at all.

David: But it wasn't that you were trying to escape some kind of depression or misery.

Dot: Well, I was depressed. Because I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't want to work. I didn't know what I wanted to do. And it was something to do.

David: And the mood it induced put those worries to rest?

Dot: Sure! That's what heroin does.

David: Why don't you need it now?

Dot: Because I'm not depressed?

David: Are you asking me?

Dot: No. Maybe I am. I don't know. I don't need it now because I know how bad it is for me.

David: But the mood it induced, is there anything that gives you that mood now, or have you just lost that?

Dot: It's almost a euphoric mood. It takes away all your troubles. It cuts off this part of your head completely.

David: So you never get into that state now?

Dot: No. Not like that.

David: It's as if you've put that experience aside, given it up.

Dot: Well I haven't given it up because it's part of me. But I've given up the drug.

David: Why did you give up heroin?

Dot: It was a combination of things, rather than one thing. I realized that I was totally miserable. I wanted to go back to college, and I didn't like the way I was living.

David: What was wrong about the way you were living?

Dot: One week here, one week there. Staying with one person here, staying with somebody else here. I never knew what I was doing. Spending all my time getting high...

David: But that's supposed to be good?

Dot: It's good but it's not good. You think it's good at the time, but I realized it wasn't good.

David: Even at the time you realized that it wasn't?

Dot: Sure!

David: What were you so miserable about?

Dot: Spending all my time trying to get high. Your personality changes when you become a junkie. You become selfish, nasty. Any friends that you had, you lose. Even the friends you have who are junkies are not really friends. You'd beat your mother for a dime. You steal. It's just no way to live.

David: What kinds of things did you do as a result of being a junkie that you now look back on and say, "That was horrible?"

Dot: I turned a lot of people on. That's something I remember and do not feel good about. I stole from people, my family. Beat a lot of people for their money.

David: What does that mean?

Dot: That means they come to you and they say, "Would you get me some dope?" And you say, "Sure I'll get you some dope." And then you never give them the dope, or else you give them one-third.

David: So your life as a junkie was not very pleasant?

Dot: No. Not at all. I can remember so many horrible things. I remember one day my uncle came over. Because he'd been a junkie for so long it was very hard for him to hit a vein. And he would have to shoot up in his temple, or in his hand, or in his thigh. And one day he came over and had hit an artery instead of a vein. There was blood dripping all over, and we couldn't stop it. It was just spurting all over. Absolutely grotesque. And I remember one Thanksgiving, he came to dinner with one eye completely black because he had to get off in his temple. That's not a good way to live.

David: That made you scared for yourself?

Dot: It didn't make me scared so much as disgusted with myself. One of our friends OD'd one night. Everybody was mad at him because we thought that he'd taken more dope than he'd given us. He had got higher, and so that's when he OD'd. So we shot him up with a salt solution, we threw him in the shower, and we walked him around. Then we threw him down on the floor, and he was laying there, gurgling because he had his head back. We were really aggravated at him, so ten of us proceeded to kick him under the guise of trying to bring him around. When he woke up he had bruises all over his body and he didn't understand where they came from. We just laughed, while we were doing this. That's pretty grotesque.

David: And at the time you realized that it was grotesque?

Dot: Sure! Back here though. Because, like I said, heroin takes this part of your head off. So it wasn't really realizing it so much, as having it back in your subconscious somewhere. But knowing it's there.

David: You mention that, in looking back on it, you regret having introduced so many other people to heroin. Did that concern you at the time?

Dot: No.

David: You didn't feel guilty about it then?

Dot: No. Because, like I said, these people wanted it. Because it was the hip and cool thing to do. Actually they probably would have gotten turned on by somebody else anyway. But still, I regret that.

David: But eventually, for you, the whole life became so disgusting that you decided you had to quit.

Dot: Yes.

David: Was it easy to quit?

Dot: In some ways it was easy. And in other ways it wasn't easy. I was lucky. I had a place to go. I left town.

David: That makes it easier?

Dot: Sure! It makes it easy when you disassociate. The only way that a junkie can really get away from drugs is to totally disassociate himself from his former life. If you're still in the same town, and it's a small town, and you have to see these people every day, it's going to be very difficult to get away from the drug. But if you can leave and go 500 miles away, it's going to be a lot easier. I changed my life-style completely. I went back to college. I went out with football players who drank a lot of beer, which

is something that I'd never done before. I realized that I had to change my life completely. I went and lived with a family. I realized what I had to do.

David: What was difficult about it?

Dot: I still wanted the drug. My friends would call me. I remember one New Year's Eve. Some people called me, and I really wanted to get high. I could hear them all on the phone. They were all high.

David: Did they ever exert pressure on you to go back and take up heroin again?

Dot: I had a very close friend. She was a prostitute by then. I would come back and visit, and I remember explicitly one Easter, I wanted to see her, and it took me about fifteen hours to track her down. I went to where I knew she would be. She was working out of this nightclub. She said the only way you're going to see me is if you come to work with me. So I went to work with her. She went and did her thing, and then we went back to her apartment and it was so easy for me to fall right back into it.

David: She didn't have to pressure you to do it?

Dot: Oh no! She bought a bundle of dope and she said, "Do you want to get high?" And I said, "Sure I want to get high!" And I got greedy. I shot up once, and then about an hour later I shot up again. And then I did it again. I OD'd. That still wasn't the last time I ever did it. It's very easy to fall back into that sort of thing. Then I left. But then it got the point where, when I was in Buffalo, I hooked up with some people who were junkies, and I started doing junk up there too. Then I got really scared. I decided I really had to stop what I was doing. So I went and got involved in something that would totally consume all my time and all my energy.

David: What was that?

Dot: The movement! The revolution!

David: Which movement?

Dot: Which movement? I got involved with a radical print shop. That consumed all my energy - gave me something to put my energy into.

David: And you didn't need anything to take the place of drugs?

Dot: Well, it's very hard to remember that whole period. It's like a big fog in my brain. But the last time that I used drugs was in 1971.



David: If you meet some junkies now, do you have enough resistance to taking it? Or could you be seduced back into it again?

Dot: Well, I went to a wedding last summer, and after the wedding this guy was going to go out and get some cocaine and turn everybody on to cocaine. And he came back with heroin, and I started shaking. I left. I got up and I walked out. Everybody thought, "Boy, what's wrong with Dot? Here she has to get up and walk out." That's very uncool. But I can't even be around anything like that. It makes me very, very nervous. I'm not quite sure whether it makes me nervous because I'm going to do it, or because I don't want to do it. I don't know the answer to that.