

# The Downward Spiral

*A candid survivor of drug addiction reveals how it feels to hit rock bottom—and to muster the strength to climb back up*

Written by CHRISTIANA LILLY

**I**t started with alcohol, but by the time she was a high school senior, Megan Leach was addicted to pills and a plethora of illegal drugs. Leach never thought she could get sober, but she did, and today is the business development representative in Florida at the Banyan Treatment Center. She's studying nutrition at Palm Beach State College and is working to become a registered dietician.

"I was 12 the first time I poured a bottle of chardonnay into a plastic Flanagan's cup, then proceeded to drink it all in one sitting. I stumbled into the kitchen table and thought, 'This is it. This is exactly what I was looking for.' It wasn't to be cool—it was to stop the hurt I couldn't put into words, that I couldn't verbalize to the therapist my parents sent me to."

Being in a home with an alcoholic mother, getting alcohol was easy. I learned that my head wouldn't hurt the next day if I took two Tylenols before I went to bed. In seventh grade, I discovered cough and cold medicine. If you take too much, you get this trippy feeling; I was high on them while taking the FCAT exam.

Taking pills felt clean. I didn't have to smoke anything, there was no bottle to leave behind after drinking. There was no evidence. I started going through people's medicine cabinets—I especially looked for bottles that said "may cause dizziness." I would try anything. I had no fear.

In high school, I hung out with older kids and got into party drugs. The first time I was offered cocaine, I didn't

hesitate. On weekends, I would stay at a friend's house and we would do ecstasy, mushrooms, cocaine. I don't remember my junior year of high school. I can't tell you one memory.

When I graduated from high school, I decided to stay at home and be with my boyfriend. We doctor-shopped, collecting prescriptions for painkillers. I'm a total statistic of the pill mill epidemic. I had a ledger with all the doctors and pharmacies.

When I found a new boyfriend, I started hanging out with his family, including the father of my niece. He set up a robbery on someone that we knew, but it went wrong—he ended up killing him. The cops were watching us, and one day I got pulled over. My license was suspended, no car insurance, there were guns in the car, I had pills on me, and there was a warrant out for my arrest.

Sitting in the back of the cop car, I knew I had hit bottom. Game over. That was August 2008.

I was 19 and in jail, staring at the clock knowing I had until 3 a.m. before I would start withdrawals. When I got to my court appearance the next morning, I felt like I was dying. Rather than do a year in prison, I took a plea deal for seven years of probation, 100 hours of community service, and a year of intense treatment. I had seven years to keep it together, and I did. I did relapse twice—recovery isn't easy—but today I work in recovery and I love watching people succeed, talking to kids about the dangers of drugs.

I've been sober since June 2014."

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