



The Girl Next Door

By Cahner Cihak

ALL MY life I knew this girl, ever since I was little. We would swing, play tag, run around town like we owned it. I never thought it would end up the way it did. I remember her saying that once we would be best friends forever; today, we no longer speak. We went from sidekicks to complete opposites. The day I realized this fact happened like this:

I walked over to her house, and then noticed that all the windows were covered and the doors were locked. That was weird but I decided to knock anyway. When no one answered I tried the back door. The lock always came loose so, not thinking, I went in. Looking around there was no one in site, until I heard a thump upstairs. I ran up two flights of stairs to find my best friend lying in the corner, hands held around her knees, crying. My body went into shock, and I ran to her and lifted her head. Never in my life have I seen someone's eyes so dilated and red, with such fear in her eyes, and icy cold hands. Me being still so young, when she told me to leave, I did. To this day, I have never told about that day in her room, and every day is a regretful day. Maybe if I had she wouldn't be where she is today.

She lived just down the street, and each night I knew what was going on in that house. The relationship between mother and daughter is ruined, while

her father is too afraid to lose his little girl. When I walked into that house I saw blades, pill bottles, empty cigarette boxes, and leftover substances scattered on the table. I never wanted to tell anyone because I was too scared to rat out my best friend. I was always her shoulder to cry on whether she was high or sober, but her problems always seemed worse when she was not sober.

Hearing police sirens once or twice a month and listening to her tell me how it was not her fault the next day tore me up inside. I know she was the one suffering from drug abuse, but so was I. I watched my best friend turn into a complete wreck almost every night. One night—the night I remember best—was when she and I had a girl's day out. I had her promise me previously that there would be no drugs that day. She agreed, so of course I believed her. We went shopping, but throughout the entire day she would go missing. Asking me if I had a five dollar bill because she had seen a necklace that she liked or she wanted something from the vending machine. So I gave it to her but I never saw her go to a vending machine and it would be almost an hour before she returned. Each time she was a little different than before. I did not want to start any problems so I turned the other cheek. I started to get scared when she hid in

one of the photo booths and all I could hear was the sound of her nose, taking in more and more drugs. I started to feel bad because all I could think was that a day with her best friend came in second to a day with her pills.

Later that night I took her out to eat and silence filled the restaurant. It was almost like everyone in there knew just exactly what was going on. I was embarrassed by the entire thing, so I kept my head down and continued to eat the appetizer. Once we ordered our food, I noticed that her hands started to shake and she was very antsy. She excused herself to the bathroom, so I waited and waited and waited. I ate my entire meal and waited again. I wondered if she had left but never saw her walk out. I worked my way to the restroom and checked all the stalls. I found her in the handicapped stall, head laid on the toilet, body limp, and skin so pale and cold it matched the tiles on the floor. I remembered the first time I found her this way. Her purse spilled all over the floor, revealing her drugs. It was like her own personal pharmacy. I call 911 and reported her. She was taken to rehab and spent 9 months in the treatment center. Ever since that day we have not had more than a conversation. I wish I would have told someone the first time I saw her that way and put her health before my own weakness. If someone is your best friend, protect them by telling someone they have a problem, not by keeping their secret. If I had waited any longer I am almost certain she would have died that day in the restaurant bathroom. I would have never forgiven myself. Her struggle through life helped shape the way I live and look at my life today. I will always be there for her whether we are friends or sworn enemies, just as I will be there for anyone else who has a problem, because no one deserves to see what I saw, and no one deserves to feel what the girl next door felt. 🚫

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Cahner Cihak is a high school senior from South Dakota. 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.