

Transcript

(school bell)

(students walking and talking in hallway)

(music)

FBI Director James Comey: Hi, I'm Jim Comey. I'm the director of the FBI.

Acting DEA Administrator Chuck Rosenberg: I'm Chuck Rosenberg. I run the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Comey: We're talking to you today because we are facing a crisis, a crisis that is killing far too many people—prescription drug and heroin abuse.

Rosenberg: Each year more than 46,000 people die from a drug overdose. That's more people than die from car accidents or from gun violence, and half of those 46,000 deaths are related to opioid abuse.

Comey: We thought the best approach would be to let you hear the truth. No filter. No censors. Just the straight facts from people who have lived with the hard consequences of opioid abuse. You're going to watch unscripted interviews that include some raw emotion and some profanity. You are going to witness real tragedy and learn what happens when drugs take hold of real people and don't let go. You will see that those whose lives are taken over by drug addiction are often kids from stable homes with strong families—good people who had great childhoods, were given everything they wanted, and had everything going for them. But they took one wrong turn and they were hooked. And once you're hooked, it is so very hard to get off these drugs and the spiral down is so quick.

Rosenberg: After you watch this film, we want you to talk about it. We want you to talk to your parents, to your relatives, to your friends, to your brothers and sisters. If you know somebody who is using drugs or even thinking about using drugs, say something.

Comey: You are going to see that once the addiction starts it is often too late. By telling somebody, you could be saving a life.

(music)

Julia: I didn't care. I didn't think about it. I just did it. Once we started getting high, it was done.

Trish: She was 17 years old and the only way I knew about it is because she was arrested.

Sarah: Started smoking pot around 18. And I was always offered prescription drugs and I never would take them. Then I was in a car accident.

Katrina: I was running down in the middle of the night to get some water and I fell down the stairs, landed on my back on the wooden floor.

Cory: It started for me with pot and, ah, just progressed into, um, hell, basically.

Melissa: Weed didn't do it for me. But definitely weed started it all for me.

Matt: It was definitely something I didn't see until it was too late. I had no clue what I was getting myself into, so.

(fast-paced music)

Overlapping Voices: **Sarah:** I started taking three at a time, and then I was taking four at a time. And then I started taking...; **Katrina:** ...I became addicted that day...; **Julia:** ...When you're getting high it's not just a drug...; **Matt:** ...you're hooked...; **Cory:** ...\$500 going to dope...; **Trish:** ...and she was a convicted felon at the age of 18...; **Melissa:** ...I had maggots in my leg...; **Sarah:** ...I turned to prostitution...; **Matt:** ...stealing from my family...; **Julia:** ...married mother of three, and I'm stripping...; **Cory:** ...it'll take you to hell and back...; **Katrina:**...it's not just a little pill...; **Trish:**...takes control of you...; **Julia:** ...started using heroin...; **Melissa:** ...the same heroin that just killed me...; **Katrina:** ...you can't go back and say I'm sorry...; **Trish:**...and it will win...; **Melissa:** ...it will get you...; **Sarah:** ...her sister found her...; **Matt:** ...died in her sleep...; **Trish:** ...my daughter...; **Julia:** ...she was dead.

Matt: Being addicted to opiates is like chasing a dragon. You're constantly seeking that first high. But what's going to happen if you actually catch it?

(music)

Matt: Come from a great family. You know, always had what I wanted. Um, never had a curfew. I could sleep over at my friend's house whenever. I could have done anything. They would have paid for me to go to any kind of school, stuff like that. And, any kind a...they paid for guitar lessons.

Sarah: I grew up, ah, with my dad. My mom wasn't in my life though. Um, he pretty much was mom and dad throughout the whole life. He would tutor me for at least an hour. On the weekends we would go out. We would go camping. We would go out on the boats. We always had something planned.

Trish: She started in gymnastics when she was, like, a toddler and she was a cheerleader through, um, middle schools, high schools, and she was also a competitive cheerleader. She started competing probably in seventh grade. She was a very good student, she, um, was in AP classes, AB honor roll.

Katrina: Worked myself up through the years, um, with minimal college to, ah, a position. I worked as a corporate account executive. Was making about an average of \$122,000 a year. Things were pretty, pretty good. Financially, we were secure. Kids were happy. We were, we had no real issues.

Julia: Dad was military; mom was Korean. Everyone I grew up with was the same way. Everyone's parents was military and Korean parents, Korean mom. No, I did martial arts, ballet, gymnastics. Did all kinds of stuff. I did piano lessons. I was a honor roll student. Always went to school. I was, like, 3.43 grade-point average.

Cory: I had a great childhood, um, great family. We did a lot of camping. Um, a lot of fun stuff. Going to the beach, camping at the beach. Very active in scouting. Boy Scouts, and something my father, me and him, did together, you know. A couple days, ah, before my 18th birthday, I actually got my Eagle Scout, which was a big accomplishment for me.

Melissa: I met my first husband when I was very young. I was 13, and then we got married at 17, so I got to grow up pretty quick. I was 22 years old and that's when everything started. I got pregnant with my youngest daughter. Once I had her they gave me OxyContin. That was the pain medicine. And from then on that's when my addiction started.

Dr. Deeni Bassam: A friend offers you something at a party or at home. Or you're having a bad day, and, and, ah, ya, ya need something to pick you up so somebody hands you a pill and says, "Here this'll, this'll help you feel better." That's how this problem always starts.

Matt: I was at a concert and I was 15 at the time. And I was drinking a beer so I got a possession of alcohol charge. And I got put on probation, so, and I couldn't smoke pot anymore, so I started to panic and then somebody approached me and said, "Well here, try this." And it was a OxyContin 80.

Katrina: So I was hobbling in to work and a young lady that worked there used to be a pharmaceutical sales rep, and she had some samples of things. And she said, "Katrina, have you gone to the doctor for this yet?" And I said, "No." So she said, "Well, I have these things. Take one. Not more than that. Go home and take one." Ya know, and I had a habit every night where I would go home and have a glass of wine. So I went home that night and I took what she gave me. But instead of taking one I took two because I didn't even know what they were. And, took the two, had my glass of wine, and all of a sudden it just triggered something in my brain and it...I would, I would say I became addicted that day.

Trish: I think the new friends had a really, really big impact on, ya know, when she got to that fork in the road—you go left or you go right. And I think at that point, the friends helped pick the road that she chose. "This sounds really appealing. I'm gonna try that." But, I guess what most people and most kids don't understand is, you know, when you try something you're not trying it. It's your new path.

Cory: I just like the, I just like the feeling of certain things being high. It wasn't, ah, it wasn't like, um, ah, "I'm depressed so I'm going to take this to make me feel better." It was kind of like, "I'm feeling good I'm gonna try this to see if I can feel even more better."

Sarah: I started taking three at a time. And then I was taking four at a time. And then I started taking like six at a time, and then I went from taking 'em orally to shooting 'em. And that was the end.

Melissa: I went back to the doctor a couple times and got him to refill the medicine to the amount that he couldn't refill it anymore, so then I started buying OxyContin off the street. Um, from there, um, I, Oxycontin started to be more expensive and harder to find. A girlfriend of mine introduced me to heroin. I could get a whole lot more for a whole lot less. And then once I shot up the heroin that was it from there. My addiction took off, and my daughter was seven months old when I became, ah, physically addicted to heroin intravenously.

(music)

Special Agent Andrew Lenhart: I never hesitate to ask them all which drugs they've tried. And they'll typically say, "I tried, started off with marijuana, uh. Tried cocaine. I've tried oxycodone." And I ask them of all the drugs they've ever tried what's the most addictive drug? And without a doubt, 100% of the time they'll say, "The most addictive drug is oxycodone."

Cory: You know the drugs, you know took, feel like they took my mind over and made me do things that I'd, you know, normally brought up not to do, you know. And, ah, it just turned me into, ah, a monster.

Matt: You know I just went into my medicine cabinet and my buddy is like, "Oh, hey these will get you high. Let, let's do some." So I was like, "OK, ya know, you talked me into it. They're right here. I don't have to pay anything. Sure." It doesn't even have to be a drug dealer; it could be right in your house and the next thing you know you're, you're hooked.

Sarah: My friends in the beginning were the friends that didn't do anything and then I met the crowd that did do stuff. You are who you hang out with. That is for sure.

Trish: These kids go into it as, "I'm just going to go to a party, and, hey, they're doing this over here. Let me, you know, I want to fit in. Let me do it a little bit." And it's the devil. It, it gets you. It's, you know, it's that temptation. "Hey, this is a fun party over here." Mm-mm; it'll suck the life out of you.

Katrina: All I wanted to do if it had been in front of my face was do it. It's not just a little pill, you know. Respect the power of that, you know, of that pill. It's, it's, ah, just because it's a prescription it is every bit as deadly and every bit as addictive.

Melissa: I worked at a daycare taking care of other people's kids. Um, I drove the daycare bus. I had to take their children to school. But before I could drive their kids to school, I was in the bathroom of the daycare crushing up pills, snorting 'em, so I could go about my day.

Julia: The whole time you're sitting there saying you're not a (expletive) addict, you're not addicted. Guess what? You (expletive) are. 'Cause why are you taking that hit saying, "Na, dude, I can quit when I want." You know, you're, you're addicted. People, like, "I only smoke weed; I'm not addicted. It's natural." (Expletive) whatever. Tell yourself whatever. "Oh, it's legal now." Oh (expletive) off. You know, whatever.

Dr. Bassam: First time somebody uses an opiate drug, the euphoria that they get is, is, is something that they continue to search for and seek for. So, while you could do that in the beginning by just chewing on the drug, over time you can't get that high anymore, and so now you have to take it up to the next level. And nobody sets out, ah, thinking that they are going to end up being a needle user. But every one of those needle users will tell you that, ah, they couldn't get the high anymore doing it the way they were doing.

Melissa: Heroin became my best friend. Um, heroin became the love of my life. I put heroin before my family. I put heroin before my children, and I thought that I couldn't do nothing in life anymore without heroin.

Katrina: There is absolutely no difference between, in my mind, a heroin addict and a pill addict. We both will do anything to get it—break the law, do whatever. You're both addicted. You both go through the withdrawals. You both, go, it, it, it's the exact, exact same thing.

Julia: It's everywhere. It's in your (expletive) cabinet somewhere. Could be in your grandparents' cabinet. Could be, your friend's mom's cabinet. It (expletive) could be anywhere. That's pills, but, well...heroin could be in a drawer somewhere. Who knows. It's, it's all the same (expletive). One's just prescribed to you and one you (expletive) go cop on the street.

Sarah: There's no way to say no with the opiates. It's hard. Real hard. I can tell myself "no, no, no," but my body, as soon as you think about it, you get anxiety, your palms start to sweat. You know, your mental, your mental ignores your physical part of it.

Trish: I am very angry. And one of the things I am most angry about, and I tell her all the time, is that, "that drug was so much more important to you than me. And I am the one that can help you. I'm the one that helps you. I'm the one that supports you. I'm the one that will always be there for you. You need something? I'm going to be the one to take care of it for you. But something that literally destroyed everything good within you was so much more appealing," wanted that so much more than anything I could offer her, and I'm angry. I am angry about that.

Deborah Taylor (Phoenix House): The progression of addiction and the behavior that, that comes with it is, is pretty, um, standard, regardless of where you're born, how much money you have, um, how old you are, what your race is, what your nationality is. You can be the smartest person in the world—the minute that chemical hits your bloodstream, you lose control of what it does in your body. You can't control it. Nobody can control it, I don't care who you are. You, you, it's not controllable.

Melissa: I lived in, um, crack-houses. Uh, and it's almost like something you see on TV, an abandoned building with, um, drug paraphernalia everywhere. Might be a, a piss-stained mattress, and God knows what else is on it. Um, there was actually a place in the city that we were at and, um, a lady had overdosed in the bathtub. She died. She was still in the bathtub. We'll just find another room in the house. And that's what my day consisted of. It became my full time job. The needle was my boss. A very demanding boss.

Julia: Your whole day revolves around it. You go to sleep doing it; you wake up doing it. You know what I mean? It's like some people smoke after every meal they have. No, you're doing a (expletive) shot.

Sarah: It's a never ending vicious cycle. It's the same thing over, and over, and over. You wake up, all you want to do is find out how you gonna get something. How you gonna get it.

Matt: You know, it's kind of stupid if you think about it 'cause I'm wasting all this money, stealing from my family and my friends, just to do a drug and fall asleep, ya know. And I wake up sick so, I'm like, "crap, now I got to do it all over again," ya know. You're still chasing that first high. So, you know, in order to be high you got to at least be normal. And to get there you got to at least do enough just to where you're not sick anymore so.

Cory: Well, usually if I had stuff a day before, I would always save a bag for the morning times so when I wake up I could get well. And I call it that because in the end I wasn't using to get high anymore; I was using to stay well, so I wasn't sick. Ya know, I not even getting high, I'm just trying to, uh, you know, to be able to get up out of bed. You know, my head was always in my lap, ya know. I feel like I missed a couple years of my life because there's a lot that, there's just a fog, black fog, 'cause, ya know, I really wasn't there, ya know.

Katrina: My addiction level was so bad that I couldn't even function without 40 pills a day. I was ill. Like literally every four hours the chills started setting in. And, I would wake up and I would be, I woke up sick. And that's the way it went all day long.

(music)

Dr. Bassam: How do you know you're an addict? It's when you, when you're doing something that you know is not good for you, that's harming you, but you can't help yourself. When your, when your, when your relationships are starting to fall apart around you, and you don't care. And the only thing that's on your mind is about how to get the substance and how to get to the next high—you're an addict. You can't maintain an opiate addiction and a normal life for very long.

Cory: I felt like after that first year of using it I caught, I actually got physically addicted to where I actually need it to even to wake up and get out of bed, start moving around, take a shower. And that's when I started, um, you know, stealing from my family, friends, you know. Whatever money I had in my pocket was all going to it. If I got a \$500 pay check, \$500 going to dope.

Julia: 'Cause you always tell yourself, whenever you are using drugs, and especially it's like a super addictive one, "Ahhh, I'm not, I'm not addicted." Mother-(expletive) you're addicted. You know what I mean. You're (expletive) addicted. You're in denial. You know, you might not be addicted at that point in time. But you're going to keep (expletive) using, and, um, a month later or two months later you're (expletive) addicted.

Melissa: At one point my husband said he would stop giving me, putting gas in the van, so I could drive the distance to the city to get my drugs. And I said, "Well, I'll show you. I'm going to move to the city." I said, "I don't need my van. And I don't need gas money 'cause the dope dealers are going to be living right here with me." And that's what I did. I ran away from home.

Katrina: You will be high and put yourself in situations that you will get hurt. Someone will take advantage of you. You know, could be knocked out; it's gonna happen. You're gonna get hurt.

Matt: Some people who have money and they don't have to steal for it, and then you meet other people who, you know, just pawn their family's TV, and just come and get high and then deal with the consequences later.

Trish: She stole checks from her grandmother and signed 'em. She stole my debit card. If it wasn't nailed down it was in a pawn shop. She spent \$800 a week. My daughter, who had, you know, everything handed to her, you know could have gone anywhere in the world, very book smart, you know, very motivated, worked at a strip club. My little girl degraded herself just to get that.

Sarah: Women turn to prostitution, which I've done myself. Um, guys will steal. They'll rob you right in front of you. I've seen guys take guns out on dealers and steal and rob everything from 'em, not even worrying about if they get shot or end up in jail.

Julia: People get (expletive) raped. People, people get killed over stupid (expletive), you know. It's, people don't, now I can say it's just a drug. But like when you're getting high it's not just a drug, you know. It's some (expletive).

(music)

Agent Lenhart: Best thing that can happen to someone who is addicted to oxycodone is that they can be arrested. That's the best thing. The best thing, that they can be arrested and go to jail. Everything other than that is worse. It's gonna end in a bad way.

Matt: You're gonna get caught eventually, so. I just didn't think it was going to be me. I would just think, you know, that they must have screwed over the wrong person, you know. They got caught because they weren't careful enough.

Trish: She was pulled over. They searched the car, and she had a quantity of pills. At that point she was smoking them so there was some type of a pipe device, and so she was arrested, and she was a convicted felon at the age of 18.

Julia: I have four kids. My youngest son will be 1 this month. I've been locked up for frickin' eight months. First time I came to jail, first time I got locked up this year, he was two weeks old, you know. Haven't, don't even know my kid. Uh, my other three are in foster care right now. Never, I never thought any of this would ever happen to me. The only thing I care about is my kids. Like my kids are suffering. It's not me. I give two, two (expletive) if I'm suffering. Oh yeah it sucks, but it's like my kids, they didn't do anything in this. My parents, you know they got to come visit me though, uh, I don't even get, ah, through a (expletive) window. I get through a (expletive) camera—a little camcorder. That sucks.

Sarah: It's not worth it. Losing your freedom sucks. You have somebody tell you when to get up, when to shower, when you eat, what you eat. And you have to worry about the other people that are in here, that are in here for, you know, life, and they don't care about you.

Katrina: I was supposed to go to court November 2011, and the judge was supposed to let me go. He gave me the maximum, which ended up being 23 months—two years—instead of the 10 months. And at the time I was so angry. In retrospect, I'm very thankful because I would have, ah, I know for 100% certainty, I would have gone right back out and done it again.

Melissa: I got kicked out of my house and I met your neighborhood friendly drug dealers who were like, "Oh you can crash on this couch." And, ah, you know, of course they would give me stuff here and there, but it was never enough for me to even enjoy it so that made me run fake prescriptions.

Julia: You don't think about anything. You don't think about anybody you're hurting. You don't think about before and after. You don't think (expletive) seven (expletive) dudes in all black are (expletive) running up in your (expletive) house. You don't think you are going to be on the (expletive) news. You don't think...anything. You don't think any of that (expletive).

(music)

Dr. Bassam: Every generation seems to have their drug of choice. Unfortunately this generation seems to have found prescription opiates as that drug of choice. And even more unfortunately, the consequences of those drugs are far more devastating than anything else we've seen in the past. Chemically and physiologically speaking there is very little difference between oxycodone, morphine, and heroin. It's just that one comes in a prescription bottle and another one comes in a, in a plastic bag.

Matt: In the beginning, I would always try and get pills because you know what you're getting, you know. You know it's always going to be the same thing. And then, eventually that just got too expensive, you know. So then you'd go for heroin because it's cheaper, but you take that risk of getting really good stuff and overdosing or getting fake stuff or just stuff that isn't good enough to even get you well.

Cory: A lot of my friends were trying heroin, you know, to ki-, to get the same high from the OxyContin, and it's cheaper, and so, I'd, of course I got into it, and, um, it just, yeah, it just grabbed me, grabbed me, you know.

Trish: I can tell you this, that I think she was able to access heroin, more heroin easily than the pills. When she was using one or she was using the other, she was the same horrible, difficult person.

Sarah: I always said that I would never touch heroin ever in my life, and it was prescription drugs that led me to try heroin. Prescription drugs are the same thing. It's an opiate. You can get four shots for the price of one pill. And it's a dirty drug, 'cause you never know what you're gonna get. People can cut it with something that can kill you, you know. That's how most people overdose, is that it is cut with something bad.

Melissa: Um, the doctor asked me, he said, um, "Where you getting your heroin from?" Where, ya know, I thought, "I will never tell you who I'm getting it from." He said, "I don't want to know from who." He said, "I want to know from where." And he said, "Well let me tell you what you're shooting up." He said, "You're shooting her-, scrambled heroin. And it, they, they are using meat tenderizer as a cutting agent." And it's not like you know a bag of heroin comes with ingredients on the back. And, course you trust your drug dealer, that he's gonna just, you know, keep you coming back to him. But he claims he didn't know either. That's how he got it. But, yeah, so, it eats everything away underneath.

Julia: Uh, in here (expletive) they shoot up meat (expletive) tenderizer, and they have like big, blue, black marks. I'm like, "What the (expletive) is that." "Oh that's meat tenderizer." "You've got a few of them. What do you mean, you didn't learn?" Ya, no. You don't learn 'cause you're trying to get high. It doesn't matter.

Matt: A lot of my friends, um, have had abscesses, and like it, a staph infection which turns into MRSA or, you know, Hep-C. You know, if that's your only needle, that's your only needle, so you're gonna use it again.

Melissa: At one point, I had an, um, abscess in my leg that was so bad, um, it, I had staph infection. My leg was like four times its normal size. Um, when the doctors cut my leg open to clean it out, um, I had maggots in my leg. They were eating the rot, the infection. That wasn't enough for me to quit. Um, as I was admitted to the hospital, they gave me a pic line which is a, an IV line. Um, I had the dope dealer come into the hospital and shooting heroin into my IV line. I have contracted, um, Hepatitis-C from sharing needles with people that I don't know who. I've shot up toilet water because I didn't want to spend any money to go buy a bottle of water, so we would stop at public restrooms and use toilet water to mix with it to shoot it up. Rain water on the side of the road and suck it up in the needle and shoot our dope. I didn't care what it was going to do to me later on. Just, I wanted what it, the feeling of it right then and there.

(music)

Deborah Taylor: Withdrawal for the individuals that are taking the heroin that's available now looks like extraordinary, um, physical, um, muscular pain, and very few people can actually manage it.

Julia: Like you know how when your whole body hurts when you have the flu. And, like, just, it's like 15 times worse than that. Opiates, you're getting sick. I don't know who the (expletive) you think you are. If you think you're (expletive) stronger than some (expletive) dope 'cause you're not. You know what I mean? Your body's gonna give in. Your mind is gonna give in. Your (expletive) judgement's gonna give in. You're gonna (expletive) bow. And, ah, that just the (expletive) way it is. That's the (expletive) way it is. That (expletive) withdrawal is a (expletive).

Matt: You feel like you just want to die when you're going through that. At that point you're willing to do anything to get that next high so you can just feel normal.

Trish: I mean, I remember her in her room crying and just busting her room up screaming at me, "Just get me a little. Just get me a little, so I can stop." No. No.

Sarah: Feels like your skin's crawling and you can't sit still. And you just, you'll do anything to make it stop.

Julia: You can't move. You constantly sneeze. Your (expletive) whole body (expletive) aches. It (expletive) hurts. (Expletive) people are crapping on themselves. People are puking on themselves. People are doing both at the same time. You, you would probably rather be dead than have to actually go through a withdrawal.

Katrina: It was horrific. I was, ah, sitting on the toilet, diarrhea, vomiting on the floor, so weak I couldn't even, couldn't even move. I'd just lay there, like. I didn't want to eat, drink, nothing.

Cory: It's just something that I never, ah, ever want to experience again. It is the worst feeling ever. And I wouldn't even, um, I wouldn't wish that feeling upon my worst enemy. That's how bad it is.

(music)

Rebecca Wood (Medicolegal Death Investigator): Every day I come to work knowing that somebody died. And more times than not we have at least one, ah, prescription drug or, ah, other substance abuse case. Your friends, your family will find you dead and then what happens? And then that is the image they get stuck with for the rest of their lives.

Melissa: I've lost several friends to, um, heroin and prescription pill overdose.

Matt: I know two people on a personal level that had died from it.

Julia: You know, one time my friend, she got out of here. She (expletive) got high. She wasn't even out six days; she was dead.

Sarah: One of my friends, she took her normal dose and OD'ed. Her sister found her with a needle in her arm, in her room, which was not good.

Melissa: Ah, the day that I overdosed, um, I was having a hard time finding a vein, and a girlfriend of mine said, "Well just go in your neck; you have your jugular vein." And I said, "OK." It didn't let me push all the heroin in and instantly it killed me. When the ambulance got there, they, um, they gave me a shot of Narcan and I was nonresponsive to the Narcan, which is adrenaline, and that's to, you know, jump start your heart. And they, it didn't work. Um, so they had to use the defibrillator and that's where they shock your heart back. They got a pulse, um. They got me to the hospital. I was still kind of in and out of it. Um, but when I

came to I unhooked the IV to the-, from the pole, and unhooked all these little things they had on me, and I went and walked right out and got in my van. And I showed up to the, to the dope dealer with the gown on. These things stuck all over me. The IV in my arm. And he sold me heroin, the same heroin that just killed me. I utilized the IV a couple times before I turned it back in. I have nowhere really to shoot so that was a freebee.

Katrina: So everything came to a head, I was writing a prescriptions and full on with my addiction, and I ended up, ah, getting caught and going to jail. And while I was in jail, my daughter got involved with some friends. From what I understand, her friends were all doing prescription pills. I had no idea, I didn't even know it's a problem. I just thought it was my problem. And, um, she said, "Mom, you don't have any right to talk look at you, look where you are." I said, "But, Kirstyn, you saw where it put me. I can't imagine you would do the very same thing that I did." I was like how, you know, it just didn't make sense.

Kirstyn (recording): My mom, I would go to the doctor's office every time with her. I told her I'd go in for her. And usually it works because she'll go in for me and ask for my prescriptions, and they give it to her. And so I went in there and I asked, and, um, next thing you know, she got arrested and she called me saying that I had a warrant for me. I said why would you make me go in and do that, like, to your own daughter, knowing that she can get caught and get in trouble. And she said that she was sorry because she didn't realize how bad her addiction was.

Family friend's voice (recording): You need help, Kirstyn.

Katrina: When I talked to her, she didn't even say goodbye. She must have nodded off the phone because I heard like, "ahhhhhh." And that was it. It was, um, Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon, um, I was in the jail and they came down and, and told me they needed to see me. And I went up and, um, because her father and I were both arrested for the same thing we're both there so I saw him coming. And the detectives came and told us that she, you know, what had happened. An apparent overdose and that she was, um, initially they said she'd passed, and then they said she was in ICU, struggling for life. And they wanted me to, uh, you know, talk to the doctor. The doctor recommended I disconnect all life support and I refused. And then, um, they had seven resuscitation efforts, I guess, and eventually you know that morning she passed away, so. At her funeral, most all the kids were high. Death is real. And I will say, 'cause I remember being that teenager too, so I know, it's like, they'll mock it. But it's real. And once, I mean, I think I'm still in shock. Like I, it, it, it is a hard-, I don't even know how to put it into words. Um, maybe that's why I am able to deal with it, 'cause it is so mind numbing. That someone you love that much, she was my first love. Someone you love that much, you can lose like that. And you can't go back and say "I'm sorry," or set a better example, or talk 'em out of it, you know. And I know she didn't want to go. I know that's not what she wanted. I know that, um, she had, you know all these things she wanted to do, and I know that, um, as they resuscitated her through the night that was her way of clinging to life, you know. But it was, it was too much.

Trish: I love my children more than anything in the world. I will walk through fire for them. And I know a lot of parents feel that way. But you can't feel that way. You have to understand what you are dealing with is not your child. I put my own child in jail to stop her from this. And that's not an easy decision to make. It's not a fun decision. Nobody wants to know that their, you know, their little girl is sitting in jail. But she was seven months clean—eating healthy, getting her rest, no drugs. My, my son, my nephew, my mother, and I went to get her, and she came out and just, she was healthy. Everything was great. Everything was great. There were no problems, no fighting, no talking about, "You know mom I'm feeling, I'm feeling funny, you know I need to go to a meeting." Nothing, everything was just that little girl at 16 before all this stuff started. That's who she was. And then just, um, she, uh, asked to go to the store to get a pack of cigarettes. And she came home, said, "Oh, you know, mom, I'm sorry I was late, you know, they didn't have my cigarettes I had to go to another gas station." Okay, you know, and things fine, so I'm cooking dinner and I'm like, "You want to help me cook." She's like, "No, I don't want to help you cook." You know, she, "I'm gonna go in my room and watch TV." You know, and she was so bubbly, you know, like, like nothing, nothing was wrong. And she went upstairs, and it was maybe 40 minutes. I was cooking dinner. Dinner was done. And I'm hollering for the kids. My son and nephew come down, and Cierra doesn't come down. I'm like, "she fell asleep or something." So I go upstairs, and I'm knocking, and knocking, and knocking on the door and there is no answer. I open that door, and my little girl is on the floor dead.

Voice (recording): Yeah.

(child laughing and playing)

Trish: And I remember when I pushed on her chest I heard that last breath. I heard the "hhhhhaaa." I was in my kitchen cooking dinner and that happened seventeen steps up and I had no idea. No idea that when she left this house that was gonna happen. And I spend my Sundays looking at a gray headstone in a patch of grass. I will be spending my Christmases there, her birthdays there, all my holidays because she took that wrong turn.

Cory: My girlfriend Cierra, you know, she, ah, she passed away a year ago this month and, uh, from heroin. And, ya know, that's a constant big reminder in my head that, ah, you know, if, if I even pick this stuff up once it's gonna kill me, ya know. And,

ah, there's not a day that goes by that I don't think about her and, ah, ya know, not a morning I wake up and don't wish that she was laying next to me, beside me, you know. She was my best friend. We went to high school together, um. Oh, I'm sorry. I met her in, uh, in high school. I'm sorry. I just miss her a lot. I wish she was still here with me.

Trish: Cierra came home on February 12. Cierra died February 18. But she got out, still calling her, still calling her. It's that powerful that you could spend seven months clean, clean and being educated on nothing but how to beat it, how bad it is for you, you know, all this, and you last six days.

(music)

Katrina: The spiral down is so fast. You know, it doesn't take much. And, I lost everything. I lost my daughter, first and foremost, but I lost pictures, every material possession I had. I had never been in trouble in my life. I'm now a felon at 41 years old. So all that work I did, you know, all those dreams I had, you know, it's like I'm starting over again with a huge weight on my shoulders. You know, all for a pill.

Sarah: My dad doesn't even trust me anymore which is hard because my dad's always trusted me my whole life. I've never had my dad look at me with disappointment before I did this. I'm, I'm a criminal, I'm an addict, that's how everybody will always perceive me. Listen to what they say—say no. Just say no. And you're not uncool for saying no. You're more cool for saying no, I think. I wish I could have said no. If I could go back and do it all over I would definitely go back and say no.

Matt: I didn't feel like I was physically hooked, but that's because I never gave it a chance to stop. You know, I didn't really learn how to enjoy life without drugs. As much as I wanted to quit, I was too scared to ask for help. I don't want to freak my parents out by telling them I'm hooked on some hardcore drug. It didn't kill me like everyone's gonna, you know, everyone told me.

Melissa: It's not worth it. And, it will get you. You're no different than anybody else. It will, it will destroy your life. You will end up in a jail, you'll end up dead, or you'll be in some crazy institution for the rest of your life. And that's serious and that's for real. And it took me coming, and, to jail and being incarcerated. And it took me missing my mom's funeral, missing my children grow up. It's taken all of this because nobody in their right mind would turn their back on their dying mom, for a drug. I want to be that loving and caring mom that my mom was to me, to my girls. I don't want them to hate me, to resent me. I don't want them to be embarrassed by me anymore.

Julia: If you wanna fail the rest of your life, if you want to be in and out of jail, if you want to possibly lose everything that (expletive) matters to you, go ahead, go get high. Go ahead. If, ah, you want, ah, be happy, you want, ah, frickin' get married. Like every good part of my life, I wasn't getting high. You know, every good part of my life, I was-, and, and any drug addict will tell you that. If you wanna be a flunky, go ahead and get high. Go ahead and do it. But, uh, I've been there, done that, and I wouldn't recommend it.

Trish: Cierra did not take life for granted until she started using. It is much stronger than you. And it will win. It will win, because this doesn't just affect you. It affects everybody in your family for the rest of their lives. That we're the ones stuck here missing you. And there's help out there; you gotta take it. Don't think you can do it alone 'cause you can't. And your parents aren't the enemy. They just want the best for you.

Cory: It's something I'm gonna deal with for the rest of my life. Um, you know, to be honest, I actually just, ah, ah, relapsed about a month ago and, ah, used for about a month and I have a week, I had a week clean on Wednesday. And, you know, that's something that just shows how, just how powerful this disease is. For me to lose somebody a year ago, not even a year gone by, and I'm already using again. That's how powerful this stuff is. And, ah, I'm just gonna try my best to stick with it 'cause I know it will kill me and, ah, you know, just, something I got to work at every day. It'll take you to hell and back and if you're lucky, you know, you'll make it back. You know, it's just not worth it at all. You know, if, if I would, if I could go back, if I knew what I knew now about this, and if I could go back I, I would do it all different. Starting with that first pill—I wouldn't touch it.

(music)

Part II Introduction

Sarah: Started smoking pot around 18. And, ah, I was always offered prescription drugs, and I never would take them. Then I was in a car accident.

Katrina: Just because it's a prescription it is every bit as deadly, and every bit as addictive.

Cory: Feel like it took my mind over and made me do things that I, you know, normally brought up not to do.

Melissa: My daughter was seven months old when I became physically addicted to heroin.

Matt: You're gonna get caught eventually so, I just didn't think it was gonna be me.

Dr. Bassam: You can't maintain an opiate addiction and a normal life for very long.

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