

Dawn Hagerman
Cedar Rapids, IA Franklin Middle School

Dear Ellen,

In one summer, I disregarded everything I was used too, in an attempt to make my life “better”. You see, I was just an ordinary teenage girl getting prepared to go into the eighth grade, when I took a drastic turn for the worse.

I was caught in a tug of war between my everyday life and the life of the person I was creating deep inside, dwelling on the drugs and the people I thought really cared for me. I lied, I cheated, I snuck out, and I did everything in my power to get hold of the drug just to feed my craving, but it wasn't an addiction in my eyes. Wasn't Bree doing something much more horrible compared to marijuana? I was only using marijuana which isn't any better, but I didn't see it like that then. Meth versus marijuana? What one was really worse? My drug wasn't nearly as costly, and I thought not nearly as addiction but I was proven wrong...horribly wrong.

From then on, things only got worse. I was too busy making the wrong choices to see what was really going on right in front of me. I never ever thought about what I was doing to myself. I had to seriously sit down and say to myself, “How is her story and different than mine?” I have told the same lies; put myself in the same places, by hanging out with people that pressured me to drink and to get high once again. That was not one of my better choices, and neither was it for Bree.

Why did I do something like this you might be asking? I did it because I pretty much said “Hey, I'm not happy with my life so what the hell can a little drug do to make it any worse?” Wow, I was wrong! Starting drugs to make my life better? What was I thinking? The only thing it did was make things a million times worse when my real friends, who did care, told someone that they were worried about me. You would think I would have been mad at them for ratting me out, but no, I was thrilled. Being confronted was like being backhanded across the face on a cold windy day, and yet there was also a sense of relief. Though I might not show my friends as often as I should I am more than grateful for them. Thank heaven and hell for true friends.

Toward the end of the book I had the scary thought, what if that happened to me? What if I hadn't stopped? What if I'd continued on the path I was on? What if I never really realized my problem? Would I have wound up like Bree, or would I have achieved the “perfecting” in life I was longing for.

I don't know what is more frightening, reading Bree's story and realizing this happens to 100 times more people in the world than it should, or realizing it could have been me. I could have been one of those people. I am in such fear that one day you won't be able to walk down the street with out finding a place like “The Avenue” and it isn't only adults. It will be adolescents that are just getting younger and younger trying to act older and older.

Yours truly,

Dawn Hagerman

"Copyright (c) The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Used by permission.