

FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users



ice

No. 38 Spring 2014

INSIDE

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If you have any original articles, poems or artwork that you would like to see in the Flipside you may submit them to:

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EDITORIAL

Flipside is only one in a series of publications, conferences and TV programs that have focused on crystal meth or ice this year. While some talk of epidemic, others caution that it is instead a media panic. The truth, as in many other contested issues, is probably somewhere in the middle.

According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013 the ice use in Australia has more than doubled between 2010 and 2013. Use of other forms of methamphetamine (powder and base) has significantly decreased in the same period, so it would appear that more methamphetamine users have opted for ice as their drug of choice. The increase in ice use is particularly evident in rural areas and amongst the indigenous Australians.

This situation has not gone unnoticed within the community. Indeed, ice related community initiatives are meeting an overwhelming response in Victoria. Over 2,000 people have attended the two metropolitan and five regional community forums on ice held by SHARC's Family Drug Help in 2014. Some of these forums had so many attendees that there was not enough space in the venue. A local community initiative "Project Ice Mildura" is also finding a responsive audience. A Facebook based Victoria's community group "The Ice Melt Down Project" has rapidly grown in popularity and currently counts over 5,000 likes. All these initiatives are a clear demonstration that there is a need for education, information and support within the community.

In the last few months the pre-election Victorian Coalition Government had announced various funding packages to tackle the ice problem through law enforcement, prevention, education, harm reduction programs and treatment. However, treatment options for methamphetamine dependence are still limited and there is no pharmacological replacement. Counselling remains the main form of treatment available.

There are many severe health risks associated with ice use: brain damage, stroke, heart attack, psychosis, mental illness, death. In addition, there is the harm from the stigma reinforced by a certain type of media stories.

The stories in this issue are written by ex-users, current users and family members. We hope that these stories will give a human face to ice use. Some of them are very confronting. They address a broad range of questions. Possibly the most urgent questions are how to limit harms from ice use, but also how to support those that have chosen recovery. Opportunities for education, employment and a meaningful life are at least as important as pharmacological treatment.

We thank all our contributors for sharing their stories.

The vicious comedown

I started using ice intravenously (IV) near the end of my active addiction, and thankfully not for very long. My experience was very different to the reports I hear now days. It was very expensive, a point costing nearly as much as a gram of speed, and it was hard to get.

At the time I was using speed daily and shutting down after about 7 days with the use of heavy downers or heroin to sleep for up to 2 days. The ice would change the high, reset me and I would use it for those couple of days to keep going instead of sleeping 3 weekends out of 4, meaning I was only sleeping once a month.

It took away the scatter from the end of week speed sleep deprivation, but the comedown was vicious. My bones would ache and my teeth would loosen, my muscles would spasm, and I would feel so so black. I could never last a full comedown of ice, I had to take heroin to take away the hurt or a lot of speed to carry me back to my happy place.

I was a long term IV drug user, and it scared me. There was never a question of ice being the new "it drug". When I was on it, I was invincible, I was powerful, I had no negative thoughts, nothing mattered. It was like the heroin brain mixed with the rush of the speed life, I had found the ultimate drug. Thankfully, it was not so readily available back then.

I have been off ice now for more than 8 years and I still carry some troubling symptoms which it raised. I have lost the ability to read analog clocks or do simple mathematics. I can't stop moving my feet if I am awake. I was told the problems were caused by the ice recrystallizing in my brain causing tiny punctures in my grey matter. Thankfully I have found new ways to live through the grace of God and 12 step fellowship, and I never have to use it again.

Angel



Faces of meth

My friends and I would look at the 'faces of meth' images on Google and laugh self-righteously about the cratered state these people had created for themselves. I never understood how someone could look in the mirror each day and watch their reflection degenerate and deform rapidly and not do anything to stop it. I wondered why they weren't investing in Botox or microdermabrasion, they just consistently withered away until their mug shot hit 100 likes on Facebook.

I remembered this 5 years later as I was getting finger prints scanned at the back of the police station, just another record of my addiction. Next to the trophies of track marks, suspended sentences, shredded connections and severed dreams.

I caught a reflection of myself in the tinted glass of the interview room, yeah I understood my rights, but I didn't understand how my face had aged. It was like a face of death, it had become a face of meth.

The crystals bubbled away hypnotically; they lit up the small space in front of me, like a molten star in a midnight sky, the smoke danced to the flicker of the flame.

Breath in, hold... hold... hold.

It was the release, the grand escape from life, the mask of brilliance, of innate creativity, the elevation of the senses... yes you are truly living. The glass pipe I held tightly to my lips whispered brilliant tales of brute strength and divine power, it breathed glory.

But that is the short-lived tale of ice; the full-length version isn't premiered when I inhale the divine vapor. I have to watch that episode in the tears of my family, in the scabs on my body, in the ribs that jut out of my chest, in the rage that consumes me wholly and in the cracked paint of the concrete cell. The real story is portrayed in the straight lines of scar tissue upon my wrists, in the sweat-soiled linen, in the dust on drawn blinds; it's in the desperate yearning for just one more.

Ice was like my straight jacket, it held me tight, wrapped me up in its illusion of grandeur. It imprisoned me further and further into the confines of my own skin, into the dark alleys of venomous thought. Ice kept me tied up in the deception of freedom, in the justification of my demise, it kept me strapped in to the ride of elation, over the mounds of shame, blame, bruises and broken crockery.

No one knows where the story ends, or whether it's a sequel to The Neverending Story, another spinning reel of irrational footage that never ends. Perhaps it ends when the glittering shards cease whispering my name, perhaps it's finished when the smoke stops dancing and lies dormant and lifeless in its glass cylinder, perhaps it ends when my flesh deteriorates beyond the breath of life.

Or maybe the grand finale is when I see my reflection in the tinted glass of the police interview room and examine this face, the one of death, the one worthy of 100 likes on Facebook, the face of meth.

Anonymous

The Meth Mole Burning In Hell

When you hear that Ice tears families apart.

BELIEVE ME!

That strong family bond your family once encountered has gone and won't return.

BELIEVE ME!

Your loved one is now a stranger to you and your family and will never return.

BELIEVE ME!

The Meth Mole is now your loved one's new family and I tell you now she does not return them home safely.

BELIEVE ME!

The Meth Mole is the biggest thief you will ever come across.

BELIEVE ME!

She's greedy and needy and her main aim is to ruin your world.

She's the Meth Mole that you never want to meet, do not cross her, but hey she's in your family now eating you all alive.

BELIEVE ME!

Unless you have tens of thousands of dollars for rehab fees don't even open your wallet to help save your loved one's from the Meth Mole as she loves money and will take your last dollar.

BELIEVE ME!

At the end of the day the Meth Mole will win.

BELIEVE ME!

She's the strongest mole you will ever meet. Don't challenge her because her meanings are so powerful you will never beat her.

BELIEVE ME!

So she now has your loved one's chained up in her cell, there's no breaking free so don't even attempt to break her chains as they are locked and loaded, you will not succeed.

BELIEVE ME!

The Meth Mole is extremely jealous, she "WILL NOT" allow you to interact with your children, mum, dad, brothers, sisters, cousins, best friends, uncles or aunts.

She won't even let you go to work.

BELIEVE ME!

However if you do continue to work she will make it difficult for you to function, resulting in dismissal. Just what she wants.

BELIEVE ME!

She even doesn't like you to eat food! She's a Mole.

Fluids such as water or alcohol, she even makes you stop that.

WHAT A BITCH!

The Meth Mole loves to keep you awake 24/7. She hates it when you sleep because she isn't getting any attention as she wants to stay awake with you playing mind madness games.

Remembering it's her game and you play it her way! As you signed up for this when you first ignited her flame.

BELIEVE ME!

She's crystal and her love is unconditional and very loyal, you respect her and only her.

BELIEVE ME!

She chews on your brain and body muscle and makes you look as skinny as can be.

BELIEVE ME!

The Meth Mole loves sugar, whilst playing her game you must sprinkle her with it. So you do this and bow to your master because remember she's the boss!

Lollies, chocolate, ice-cream, icy poles, cakes, biscuits, basically anything sweet she will allow you to eat because remembering it's a sweet puff of a life.

BELIEVE ME!

The game must come to an end and death is her plan as she moves to the next family for richer or poorer.

BELIEVE ME!

So say goodbye to your loved one the very first sign of you knowing they are rolling the dice with the Mole as you will not win.

BELIEVE ME!

It's a hell of a ride so sit tight and wait for the homicide or the suicide fright!!!!

BELIEVE ME!

And here I was thinking.....

"THERE'S STILL TIME TO SAVE THEIR SOULS".....

*written by a family member standing on the side line, drowning in this horrific game. Year after year as more family members join the game.

Now you know why the Meth Mole's a Bitch!

Don't watch the game it will leave you breathless and penniless.

F.M.L.

F.T.W.

Facing up my choices

I started using ice at the age of 15. It all went downhill pretty quickly after that, I was lying, stealing and cheating from everyone and anyone to get what I had to. I used and abused everyone around me who I could. I started getting into trouble with the police for a range of crimes to support my habit. I lost several jobs due to being cooked at work or not turning up. I then got a job at a pub/club and I started using all the time because I could get away with it.

By the time I was 17 I had experienced 2 drug induced psychoses, weighed 58 kg and was injecting ice. I was missing family arrangements, was doing more crime and was using a lot of drugs. While I was using ice I was also self-medicating with Xanax and other benzos. I started eating Xanax all the time and I was eating them just as much as I was using ice.

My mental health had deteriorated hugely. I would turn on my mates thinking they had stolen drugs or money off me. I was very paranoid, I didn't trust anybody. I hated myself so much that I hated everything else in it. I detoxed from drugs a few times, but that was only really to have a breather and to have a break from it. But most times I'd end up hitting the drugs a lot harder.

I picked up my heroin habit at 18, I loved the feeling it gave me, just that numbness and not being able to feel anything. But I liked being awake as well, so I decided to mix the two of them. I would use both at the same time, sometimes in the same fit.

When I was 19 as a result from my drug use I committed some pretty serious offences. I had a few mates go inside because of drug use and addiction, but never wanted to believe or think that it would happen to me.

I don't regret the choices I have made in my life, because I wouldn't be the person I am today.

Jack



APSU believes that people who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by service users for service users and has an active member base. We invite you to join us in having a say. APSU membership is free, confidential and open to anyone interested in voicing their opinions and ideas on the issues facing service users today. We need your help to give us all a fair go. To become a member please fill out the form below and post to: **140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163** or fax to: **03 9572 3498** or go to: www.apsuonline.org.au to register online.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I wish to become a member of APSU and I would like to:

- Receive the quarterly APSU FLIPSIDE magazine
 Be sent information on how to become involved

I am a: Service user Service provider Family member Other

How did you find out about APSU? _____

Language spoken at home: _____

Cultural identity: _____

Age: 16-25 25-35 36-45 46-65 over 65

Other issues: Physical disability Mental health Visual Hearing
 Speech Acquired brain injury

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Suburb: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

A bad day

I have heaps of great awesome positive days. Then bam, I'm done. And it's frustrating and hard. I'm doing it on my own by choice, and being in active recovery, I have slipped up, but essentially have over a year clean. But my God it's hard and it hurts physically, mentally and emotionally.

My support network essentially crumbled in the space of a few weeks back in August. Now it's tough, but I know I'm tougher!

It's just hard, and I'm a sooky la la who has meltdowns and tantrums and so much teenage angst built up it's not funny...

This was written on one of those bad days:

I'm sick of being broke, I'm sick of being fat and I'm sick of being bored! Tried so hard to "do the right thing" and blah blah blah but guess what, still can't get a fucking job! Still sitting in the same spot I was 6 months ago when I decided to "change my life" even after trying numerous times to get a job, ANY JOB! Maybe the reason so many people use and sell meth is because Australia is fucking expensive and hard to live in! Unless you're already well off to begin with you're kind of screwed, especially if you also come from a family with no money and addiction! And unless you have experience or qualifications, you have little to no hope of getting a job here in Perth! At least when I was selling I wasn't paying rent, always had an income, freezer so full I couldn't close it and all the luxuries most others have! And I wasn't 70kg with nothing to do all day!!! And if I hear 1 more person say "pray and everything will fall into place" I will stab them in the eye with a fork.

Anonymous



It takes away who you are

I'm a 21 year old male living roughly 15 train stations away from the Melbourne CBD. I come from a middle class family and had all the material things a 21 year old wants. I was kicking goals in my apprenticeship with an awesome car and was in a relationship with the girl that I loved. I thought things couldn't get any better.

What I did find out is that things could get a lot worse and they did, fast.

I'd always drank excessive amounts of alcohol due to problems with socialising, it helped me make new friends and people like me. Then ice became the next new trend going around throughout a lot of friends I had, so I unfortunately tried it.

Within a short period of time I was hooked, I became addicted to ice and it also gave me horrible obsessions like gambling. Ice didn't only take all the good things away from me, it made me destroy them. My loving family got a restraining order on me due to how much I had changed and how violent I had become. I lost my job, car and girlfriend.

It wasn't as if I had just lost these things. I had put myself, my family, my girlfriend and others through so much suffering. Ice made me a different person, it made me physically abuse my family and their belongings, and sexually abuse the girl I was in love with. I hated myself so much due to my actions and the only way to escape these horrible feelings was to use more, or suicide. Suicide was an option for a long time and I came very close to death on many occasions. This came with admissions to the psych ward and hospital.

Ice doesn't take just material things from you, it takes away who you are, your life and all of your time. During my using a cousin of mine committed suicide and it was possibly also drug related. Ice took away the time I had to grieve over my cousin's death, the time I had to feel natural and healthy feelings to grieve were taken away from me and masked by drug use, time I will never get back.

My life had become so terrible, I just wanted to help other people. Not only the people directly related to drug use, but indirectly help others families and partners because of what I had done.

I had tried creating anonymous blogs on the internet throughout my using to try and help others. I could never achieve the things I wanted to because of my ice use and what comes with it would always get in the way. Thanks to recovery and being clean I can achieve things I've always wanted to. I am clean now living in a recovery environment and my life is better than it has been for years.

This is not all of my story, it is merely 500 words of some terrible things that go on during people's lives due to ice use. The thing that I find the scariest is that it can happen to anybody.

Anonymous

When ice comes to stay...

I have been around drugs pretty much all my life. One of my parents suffered from addiction and there is a lot of addiction in my family. Most of my friends use some sort of drug at some time, and my partner for life has, like myself, spent over 20 years being an intravenous (IV) drug user.

In my professional life I work in the health care system and have strived to gain formal education regarding addiction. I endeavour to stay on top of drug trends and understand their patterns and how addiction develops. So one would assume that I would have managed to gain quite a bit of knowledge regarding drugs, drug use and addicts. Yet nothing could prepare me for ice and the effect it would have on those close to me.

As IV drug using parents we have attempted to be honest and open with our son. We have tried to educate him against drug use and, I guess, to save him from going through the sort of drama that is inevitable once involved. None of this helped our son in the end. Like a lot of young guys of his age he likes to have a drink and the odd smoke of pot. These things we could handle and didn't seem to be too much of a problem. Whether they led on to him trying ice I cannot say, all I do know is that it is everywhere.

At first we probably didn't even notice the effects, but the changes soon became obvious and frightening. A son who was once honest, reliable and a good friend to others started to disappear, as the ice addict was getting through. A son who was on track and kicking goals started to falter. A son who had had the world at his feet was suddenly looking like losing it all. And above all else a son that we love more than life itself was becoming very unlovable. The massive anger was hard to understand and pretty frightening. Anything set it off, the wrong sort of look, the wrong question. All ability to reason was gone. Thought patterns are all out of kilter, weight is falling off him, and he's horrible to be around. Suddenly its gone from "Oh I hope he's home soon to get a good sleep" to "I hope he doesn't come home because I don't know what to do with him!"

The toll along the way has been enormous. Two mates in the psych ward. Loss of a long term relationship with girlfriend. Got very close to losing his wonderful job. Health effects that we really have no idea of what the long term problems may be. Police intervention. Not to mention the odd friendships.

Now that he's managed to gain back some control we can only support him while we stand back and hope he's strong enough to make the right choice. Like a lot of parents out there all I can do while I wait is educate myself, get some support and most important of all learn to get along with my own life and not stop to try and go on my son's journey with him. Even though I would love to take this from him this is his life and he has to find his own way. Being ready when he needs us is our goal while we wait.....

Anonymous

My methamphetamines

Years ago I tried speed and thought that it was the best rush one could have. At the time I was hooked on heroin but I was soon to decide that heroin wasn't to be my drug of choice. When possible, I used drugs via IV. Some time after being addicted to "upper-drugs" (as opposed to "downer-drugs" like heroin) I felt better in myself and with that, I had nothing more to do with heroin.

It wasn't long after being addicted to speed that I found the drug ice (methamphetamine). It was completely different as it gave me a feeling that no-one could beat me and my sexual drive was lifted beyond anything I've experienced before. My behaviour towards others was that of being undefeated and stronger.

The ice was, and unfortunately still is, a big part of my life, as was the heroin. Then at times I thought that I'd had too much ice and also thought I needed to come down, so I thought maybe if I had some heroin I would have a chance to come down because I knew that I needed to sleep. However I didn't know taking a shot of smack (heroin) was not going to bring me down but it had the adverse effect. It actually put me back up to the high point where I wanted to come down from.

Then there's the other side to this vicious drug. The relationship issues it creates. But then, I feel there had to be underlying problems within that relationship before the ice came along. It acted/acts as a fuel to the fire. Not

really helping with it at all. Things are said to one and other.

I myself personally have never really got what they call the "twitches". Whereas my girlfriend tends to fiddle with her fingers, tapping them profusely on the corner of the coffee table in front of her. At one point she was never stopping from touching her chin every few seconds. I can always tell when she is on ice because her train of thought is that of how she acts when just talking to her.

The sexual part of our relationship is very much non-existent, with or without the ice due to the condition of our commitment to each other. When we have the ice it doesn't turn me into a weirdo or think so negatively about people, places etc.etc... I know that when I am on the ice I tend to think more clearly, clearer than usual, it's easier for me to talk and stay on point of topic/subject. The physical part of it has quite a lot to do with it. It's not always all about whether or not one's pupils have dilated or not but simply looking at the person's limbs, head and joints like their knees and their elbows seem dislocated but still safely attached.

The aftermath of the use of ice can be devastating. I refer to the people whom have committed some unbelievable crimes either while still high on the drug or perhaps when "coming down". This is the other part of ice usage that can be very dangerous for others and the users themselves.

I have gone through the withdrawal process many times and it doesn't feel the best. Everyone experiences withdrawal from ice differently due to

the way their own body processes the chemicals, but I have been on methadone for quite some time and I find that taking methadone while high makes it a heap different. It feels as though I'm withdrawing from not taking the methadone and coming down from the ice, doing both things at the same time triggers restlessness of my arms and legs and my brain sometimes feel as though it's about to explode.

Ice is very deadly, it'd be wise not to use it where possible.

Anonymous



Married to ice

Let me start by saying that I was not the user of this drug. I also want to say up front that ice destroyed any possibility of our family before it even grew into one.

In the summer of 2012 I met my future husband. We were set up on a blind date, and immediately began seeing each other daily from that point on. I was completely and totally infatuated with him, and he with I. After a few short months, he asked me to move in with him. After all, I was there every day anyways, so I did.

At this point in time he was a daily pot smoker. I don't, and never really did smoke pot, but I don't really have anything against this either. He also used other harder drugs recreationally, but hid it from me. Once, he had come home saying that he was mugged. I later found out, he had stopped to purchase ice on his way home, spending all the money he had... things I should have taken more seriously, I now realize. We lived in harmony for a while, so long as I didn't try to have any opinions about anything, or demand that he had a job, or clean up after himself, or spend any time with me, and so on... The relationship was completely one sided, I now realise.

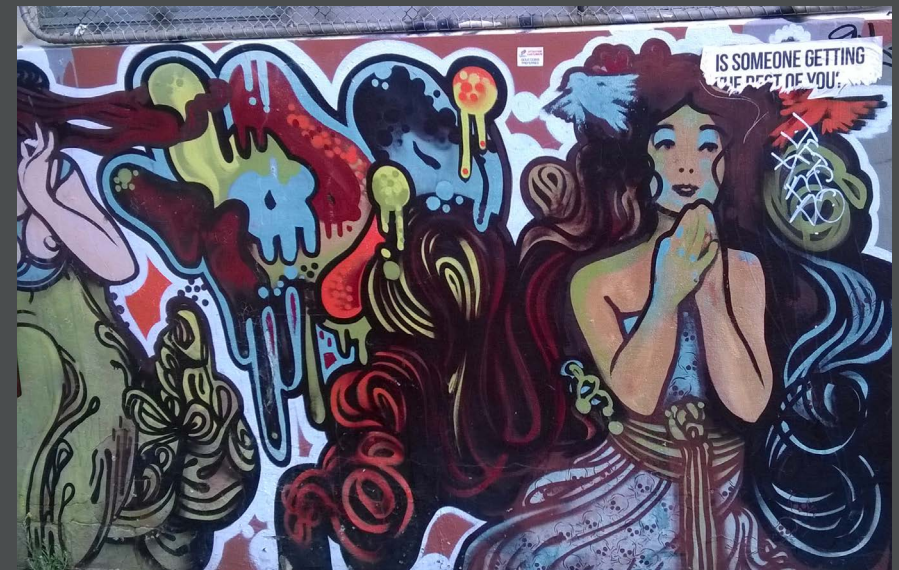
Among this were other warning signs such as infidelity, inability to hold a job, inability to reason, or "care" about anything, he stayed up all night all the time. Friends of his were constantly coming and going, and it seemed as though his social life was much more important than anything else. I then became pregnant with our daughter. He asked me to marry him immediately. I thought my dreams were coming true!

His behavior became increasingly more alarming though, he was staying up for days without sleeping. He was moody. He still could not hold a job and he was draining our bank account every time I put a cent into it. One day, I decided to thoroughly search our home. I found in an overnight bag shoved up on the very top shelf of the linen closet some "things". I really am a square I guess. I didn't know what I was looking at. There was a piece of foil, a baggie with some residue in the bottom of it, and a drinking straw that had been cut to fairly short length. I confronted him with what I found. He finally confessed to this being the remnants of ice use.

He promised that he was only using recreationally... well, this quickly changed if there was any truth to it to begin with. I guess once I discovered his secret, he felt like it was OK to use it around me. After all, the cat was out of the bag. He began using it constantly. Every moment of every day he was using it. I could hardly get him out of the garage where he was now confidently smoking it. Pretty soon,

shady characters were consistently parading in and out of my house. Many of whom I had never seen, nor did I think they were his "friends".

We received a tax refund that was close to \$5000 that year. He spent every dime of it almost before it had time to hit the bank account. I was devastated. I then came home once to pass my big screen TV being driven away from our house in someone's truck! Our computer was gone. My camera, our video recorder, my stereo, his x-box and games, our DVDs, anything that would get him a buck at Cash Converters was disappearing steadily.

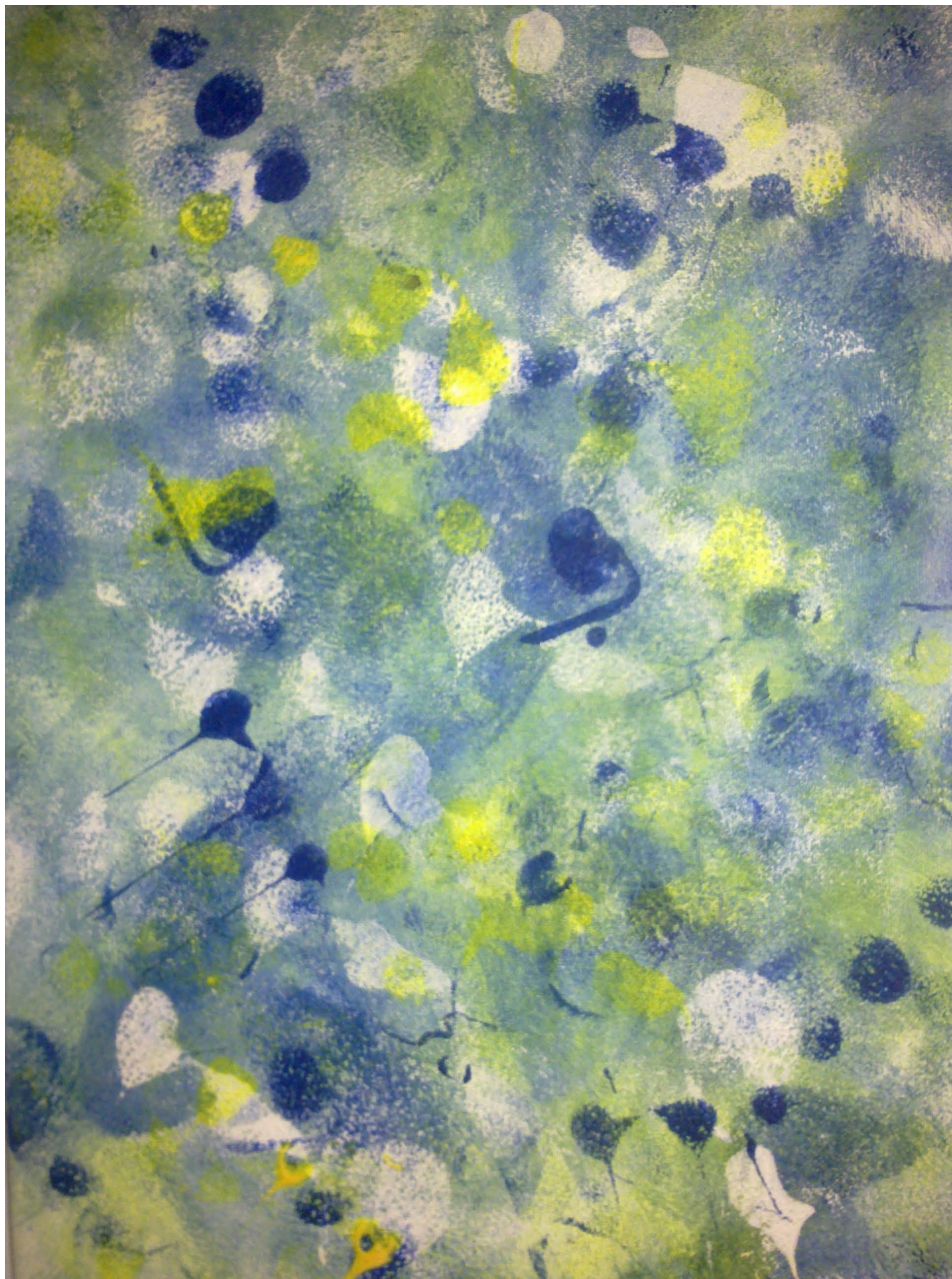


That was it. The last straw. My daughter and I moved out. I gathered up some things and went to stay with my cousin who lived in a tiny apartment, but in the same town. I still went by the house nearly everyday to refresh our clothes supply, and say hi to him. I was soooo sad, and I had hoped that our leaving would WAKE HIM UP! It didn't. He didn't care.

Well, 5 days later, I get a call. He's been arrested, and I need to come pick the car up, or they'll put it in impound. He was stopped on a normal traffic violation, but, as it turns out... he has an outstanding warrant from his dealing days back in 2009.

And that... was that. He was gone. I am thankful and ever appreciative that he was arrested that day. It took him going away for good... and I could BREATHE again.

Anonymous



Meadow Mist by Becc



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Self Help Addiction Resource Centre