

# THE DARK SHADOWS OF METH

BY KENYA GONZALEZ RAMOS

She hides in strange places, clean or dirty, where no one has a clue. She fills her friends with grief and lies that cut deep inside like a knife, making her move by putting her friends in tight situations which cause them to do things they never thought they would. Her goal is to take control and that is what she will do, once they fall into her trap. She is not hard to find; she gets around and fools anyone who gets too close. Changing people like no one would believe, shooting her poison through their hearts and souls. She misleads and separates people everyday; some students drop out of school to be near her presence. Her magic touch affects her beautiful friends, turning them ugly inside and out, making the rich poor, and the poor alone with her deadly dosage. With her as a friend there is no hope, nothing to gain; many have lost to her every game. Some work to get her, others lose their jobs; a few have died, and those she has contact with are destined to fall hard. Her name is Meth, a very dangerous drug that lurks nearby creating problems resulting from most people's lack of knowledge of what a strong effect the substances hold. *For a very long time the lives of many Clatsop County residents, both young and old, have been slowly spinning out of control caught in the clutches of meth's powerful addiction.*

Meth has been around for many years, though it is hard to figure out the precise day it was created. According to the Meth Education WebPage on the internet, in the year 1919 a Japanese scientist named A. Ogata was the first to manufacture Methamphetamine. Its use was becoming compelling, and not only that, it was not difficult to create. Later during 1939-1945, it was given to those who were serving in World War 2. It was not until the late 1960s that methamphetamine was produced as a pill and regulated, making it legal to own. The Meth WebPage also states that although the drug was legal, some biker gangs took advantage of its easy access and became vulnerable to addiction through frequent use. In the 1980s the pill became old news, being replaced by illegal production of meth in different forms, with the help of a federal government ingredient known as phenyl-2-propane. The article goes on to explain that in the 1990s it was easy to make the drug in Mexico because some of the ingredients to produce meth were not difficult to obtain nor were they banned. Mexican drug traffickers began to take action in Mexico as well as in California. It was not until 1995 that meth labs were built and operated in the United States. We have become more and more vulnerable to the abuse of methamphetamine because of the inexpensive illegal production and distribution, as well as easily accessible recipes through the internet which has caused widespread use.

In an article, "Methamphetamine: A National Response," John P. Walters, writing in *Police Chief* magazine, summarizes the U.S. National Household Survey on Drug Use & Health. He reports that an average of 12.3 million Americans, ages 12 and older, have tried methamphetamine at least once in their lives, and 1.3 million reported using meth in the past year.

Meth has been commonly introduced by many names, such as "ice," "glass," "Tina" and "Chalk." Strange names for this evil drug that is highly addictive and illegal — But what can it do? How is it made? Meth is made from some disgusting products which include chemicals stored in paint thinner, battery acid, and cat litter. On the Meth Toll WebPage on the internet, Angela D. Smith describes a substance called 'pseudoephedrine', which is an alkaloid of ephedrine produced by a plant that grows mainly in East Asia, as being highly addictive.

Pseudoephedrine, a morphine-like alkaloid, and caffeine play a strong role on the human body with their powerful taste. Many medications seem to have this alkaloid as a key ingredient, which many take advantage of to produce meth. Smith's article ("Ingredients in the Meth Trade Have Become Big Business," October 18, 2005) also states that some of the cold medicines and asthma relief medications carry this pseudoephedrine substance. These medications are known as List 1 chemicals, which are sold 'over the counter', making it easy to purchase to produce meth (despite recent attempts to make these medications unavailability without prescription). Pills that contain pseudoephedrine are mixed in with liquid cold medication creating powerful, toxic effects.

After speaking with Stephanie H. Potts, Family Nurse Practitioner at Coastal Family Health Center, I discovered that meth has the ability to cause violent behavior as well as hallucinations and delusions, which include the feeling of having bugs crawling around underneath one's skin. When this drug is taken, meth users may exhibit strange things such as rashes, dilated pupils, bad teeth, high blood pressure and poor hygiene. They start to feel as though they have lost a sense of reality; some experience nausea, diarrhea and loss of emotional feelings. Stephanie also brought to light that when taken for a long period of time, meth puts a huge strain on the user's internal organs. The result of this strain can be a cause of heart and kidney



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failure, as well as lung damage. The memory process slows down and hallucinations and paranoia may occur. Because of the lack of emotional balance, deep depression can set in. As in the case of any chronic drug use, death may result.

Kate Ramsayer, in an article in *The Daily Astorian* ("This is Your Brain on Meth," October 11, 2005), interviewed Dr. Brenda Smith, Chief of Emergency Medicine at Columbia Memorial Hospital, who was quoted as saying about meth addicts: "There is nothing the hospital can do to treat them, and the closest detoxification facilities are in Portland. Unfortunately, it is one of those drugs that it is not easy to get off of, and we don't really have many treatment resources in our community... We basically just have to deal with each case on an individual basis. But health care professionals have definitely seen a big impact of the drug."

After what Dr. Smith said in Kate's article, some would think many people would want to stop or perhaps never try meth. Sadly, there are many who continue using the drug, and many others who do not heed the warnings and become addicted before they know it.

In an interview with Pamela S. Christensen, Program Director at Life Works NW, I learned a great deal about what she does to help treat meth users. She views meth as the most dangerous drug available. I asked if it were easier for a younger person to quit using meth, and she replied, "I don't think being young or old has much to do with it... I think it is easier to quit if someone has only been eating or 'snorting' (sniffing) meth. Much harder to stop if someone has been smoking it or injecting it."

Pamela explained that Life Works has individual, group, family and couples counseling. She said that all therapies they use are cognitive/behavioral type; they also use a matrix model of treatment and Motivational Enhancement Therapy.

She says the youngest patient she has worked with was 14 years old, who started using meth at 13. The oldest patient she is working with is 58. The man started using meth when he was about 14 or 15 and is struggling with the addiction. Pamela is also working with a woman who has been clean for about seven months and is in the process of getting her child back. She mentioned that the felony program (which serves around 75 offenders) has an estimated 80%-90% of offenders in treatment due to meth. When I asked her about funding, she said, "We get a small amount of funding from the state to help pay... but it is a drop in the bucket compared to what we need."

As the drug moves through the shadows of meth users' lives, it steals their innocence and destroys their goals. Meth has torn families apart, changed lifestyles, and created criminal misbehavior. Amy R. Lewis, case manager at Coastal Family Health Center, shared her story about a friend who was on and off meth that illustrates this point well. She mentioned the fact that meth was an evil drug and that every time she heard that word (meth), she remembered her friend. Amy and her friend were excited because graduation from a program called Life in Transition

was getting closer and they both knew they had accomplished so much and were proud of each other. Everyone knew Amy's friend struggled from meth addiction, so knowing that she had followed all the steps needed to complete the program was a big deal. Many people went to support her and her friend on the big day, including her friend's baby daughter. Three days later, Amy said, her friend was arrested for meth possession, identity theft, vehicle theft and driving without a license and is now looking to serve six years in prison. Amy's friend gave in to her cravings, lost sight of herself and lost everything she had worked so hard to get, including her precious daughter.

Meth is not a city problem only; it also becomes a problem for small towns in America because it is inexpensive and easy to make. In a *Daily Astorian* article ("Sheriff's Office Offers a Checklist for Neighbors Wanting to Help Keep Track of Suspected Meth Activity," October 11, 2005), reporter Tom Bennett writes "...citizens' eyes and ears are critical to letting police know what's going on in local neighborhoods." He says that citizens themselves are one of the greatest means to putting a stop to meth production in Clatsop County and can pick up an awareness brochure from the Sheriff's office to learn new warning signs of possible drug production or dealing. However, police urge citizens not to confront persons suspected of drug activity but instead document information and report it.

Sandra Swain reported in another *Daily Astorian* article ("Law Makers Say War Chest is too Small," October 16, 2005) that Oregon legislators joined together to gain a \$5.5 million meth package to help curb the spreading drug problem. State Senator Betsy Johnson was quoted as saying that \$5.5 million was not nearly enough to combat the meth problem, that it only begins to address funding the judicial system and community policing. "...the bottom line is (that meth) is permeating all aspects of life," Johnson said.

I agree with Senator Johnson. There needs to be more money to make a change and state legislators need to start to realize that the meth problem is a serious problem that will not slowly fade away. In reality, meth abuse is something that will spread because of the tremendous impact it leaves on the people who are using it.

There are scary stories, movies, and even songs that tell the dangers of meth use, and yet many choose to ignore the messages that are being sent out. Statistics according to the White House WebPage on the internet demonstrate the number of users continue to rise, as does its manufacture. The drug has a strong hold and it seems to particularly affect young adults because they are vulnerable. People need to get educated and be aware of meth's dangers and learn to say "No!" They also need to help make a difference and make a change to better our community and help those who are slowly drowning in the clutches of meth's powerful addiction.

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