



You're worth more than 60 bucks a gram...

by Yee Jee Tso

Cocaine is particularly insidious in that its abuse is hidden and permeates all walks of life. From the supermodel to the down and out crack user, this drug ensnares its victims with the allure of “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.” In a society that almost reveres its effects of increased alertness, confidence, and endurance, it’s all too possible for cocaine addiction to slip through the cracks and go unacknowledged. The following excerpts are from an interview with Sydney, an ex-cocaine addict.

WO: How old were you when you first tried cocaine and what was the situation surrounding it?

Sydney: I think 19, a friend of mine asked me if I wanted to try it, and after asking him a few questions about it, I decided...well, try anything once right? There’s a catch to that one, though.

WO: How long was it from your first time to becoming addicted to cocaine?

Sydney: It was really gradual for me, about 3 years. I’d just gotten out of a really abusive relationship, and I was sitting there feeling sorry for myself one day when I thought, “screw it, I’ll just get high.” That’s when I started doing it a lot.

WO: Where did you buy it?

Sydney: For the first while, we bought it on the street, a very dangerous situation because you’re dealing with

sketchy street dealers and you never know what you’re going to get. As I started to do it more, I found dealers higher and higher up the “ranks.” I got to know them and at least the quality was more assured.

WO: Describe how cocaine feels.

Sydney: It depends how you do it. Snorting it, you should just feel like something went up your nose and then it numbs your face, if it’s good coke. Depending on what it’s cut with it might sting a little. When it drips down your nasal passage into your throat it feels...annoying. I start to get pasties [dry mouth] and I need a drink, usually an alcoholic one. If you ingest it or put it in a drink like tonic water or beer, it will ruin the flavour of your drink with this crappy bitter taste, but you get a slower, more subtle high with less sketchiness, like a “body stone”.

WO: What do you mean by “sketchiness”?

Sydney: Coke wakes you up and gives you this...“borrowed energy.” But it will eventually make you anxious, thinking too much and feeling [bad] about yourself. That’s when you do more. That’s my nickname for it: “more.” “Let’s do some ‘more’, do you have any ‘more’?”

WO: You were talking about different ways of doing it?

Sydney: If you smoke it in a cigarette or a joint, you get this sweet, sickly sort of smell that overcomes your taste buds. It gives you a slightly dizzy high, I don’t really remember, it’s been a long time since I’ve done it that way and it was usually right after a line anyway. If you turn it into crack and smoke it, you get this immediate, intense rush kinda like you just held your breath too long or got up too fast. It can make you quite dizzy, which I hate, but for some reason when I was high it didn’t bother me as much. Then your brain starts motoring along and you feel good for five minutes, after which your eyes involuntarily start darting around the floor and every little speck of white dust or whatever looks like a crack rock and you wonder if you should smoke that too. Crack is the stupidest drug. The whole experience of smoking crack can only be described as “stupid.”

WO: Why did you decide to keep doing cocaine?

Sydney: Well I actually didn’t smoke crack that often. I never let myself learn how to “cook it up.” At that time I had easy access to the stuff and I figured if I learned how to turn it into crack it’d be all over. The stuff’s very addictive, you know.

WO: I’ve heard.

Sydney: As far as coke is concerned...well. Coke just takes over your mind. It’s a really tricky drug in that you start to rationalize yourself into thinking it’s okay. You become really good at making excuses for yourself, like “I could get a lot more done today if I just had a tiny little rail to get me going,” or “I haven’t done it since yesterday, I deserve to kick back and have a good time,” or “stock brokers do it, it must be okay.” Sounds ridiculous but you start to think that way.

All of a sudden you wake up one morning and you realize you’ve been making excuses for 2 years.

WO: Is that why you quit, you woke up one morning?

Sydney: I got woken up by a motor vehicle accident that almost killed me. I wasn’t driving, but I got seriously injured and I thought about it in the hospital, “I don’t want to die a cokehead.”

If you’re lucky you find out one day that you’re worth more than 60 bucks a gram. I was also lucky that the hospital had me on all sorts of painkillers and I slept through the worst of any withdrawal syndrome I might have had. Most

people who do coke every day and stop will go through something a little tougher than I did.

WO: Like what?

Sydney: It’s not like heroin where you throw up and your body falls apart. Your body falls apart when you’re doing it, but you can actually maintain a life if you really want to. And that’s almost worse. No, it’s more of a mental torture. You get depressed and moody and you want to sleep a lot. And it’s hard to control your own mind to stop thinking about it and stop finding situations where it’s okay, like going out to the bar or hanging out with people who do it.

There are people who are very successful financially who harbour a coke addiction. It’s easy to get caught up in the lifestyle and superficial glamour of it.

It requires a total lifestyle change, just like getting off any addictive drug. Now, I can have the stuff in front of me and not do any, but that’s not always possible for people. And I still break down once in a blue moon.

WO: Are there any health issues?

Sydney: Lots. You screw up your nose, you screw up your brain, you tend to not sleep and eat enough when you’re doing it so you lose weight and you get physically weak.

The big thing is your mind. People who do a lot of coke are irritable, moody; sometimes it’ll bring up aggressive or violent tendencies. These are generalities. There are loving cokeheads too but I think you’ll agree that sounds ridiculous.

WO: Are you worried you’re going to get addicted again?

Sydney: Well, again, I’m lucky. I have two things, a loving relationship and creative career that I love. I’d lose them both if I got addicted again, and I’m not about to let that happen.

When I was doing it every day, I didn’t realize it but everything that was important to me slowly took a back seat to getting high. I could do stuff, but there was no heart in it. And for a creative person, or anyone for that matter, it can feel like slow death, or “soul death.” But once a smoker always a smoker; I guess that applies to cocaine as well. If you’re going to do the stuff you better realize that it may affect you for the rest of your life.

WO: What can you do to quit cocaine then? Any advice?

Sydney: Stop for a minute and find something that you love. Stop thinking so fast, stop looking for the next “thing” whatever that is for you. Just stop for a second and realize there’s something special and great about you, and as much as you think it does, coke does not make it better.

Get away from everyone and everything – go someplace that your dealer won’t and just enjoy being you for a while.

The only way I know to stop doing coke is to love yourself.