

## A FAMILY STORY, PART 1

### KEVIN AND KERRY'S STORY

*Mother and son describe Kevin's heroin and amphetamine addiction, and related activities, and how they impacted on Kevin and the family as a whole.*

#### 1. The slippery slide

**Kevin (son):** I grew up in a stable family with my Mum, Dad and sister. We always lived in the same house, in the same place. Even from a young age I was always into everything. If there was something there to break, I would break it. If there was something that everyone was scared of, I would do it first. I didn't really have any fear.

From when I was really little, I was always into sports. Football, basketball, cricket, tennis, but I was best at football. When I was 12 or 13 years old, I injured my knee and after that I couldn't play football at the level which I wanted. That really hit me hard, even at that age.

I had a couple of operations on my knee and afterwards I still couldn't play to the same level, or with the same kids again. I used to go and try to find things that would give me a bit of a rush, like abseiling and hiking. I think I was always looking for a high. If there was someone doing something, then I always wanted to know what it was like.

I started smoking ganja (cannabis) when I was 15. As soon as other drugs became available, I'd think 'give it a go', so pretty quickly I was taking mushrooms and speed. At this point, I was almost living a double life; my family life and my other life. I had lots of different groups of friends, and I would act in different ways with them. Some were into drugs, some weren't.

When I was sixteen years old, I started nicking cars. It wasn't so much about the money; it was just that I liked the buzz of it all. Most days, I would go out and pinch between 10 and 15 cars. If I saw one better and quicker than the one I was driving then I would take that one.

I had a partner with whom I would commit all my crime. Normally, we would do burglaries in the night. We would target shops, chemists and offices. I did do one house burglary, but I didn't like it. I could justify robbing businesses because it was all covered by insurance. During the day, we would choose the car that would best suit the job, and then the burglary would provide us with the money to buy drugs and do whatever we wanted.

Throughout this time, I was always smoking ganja. When I was doing the robberies, I would take downers, but that was mainly because we were getting them from the chemists we robbed.

The robberies and crime soon caught up with me and the police came knocking on my parents' door. I continued to get in trouble with the police and in the end my parents kicked me out of their house. I moved into my mate's house and I began to use more and more drugs.

It was around this time that smack (heroin) got introduced into my area. One day, I was around a mate's house and I tried smoking it. It was a feeling like I had never had before. I felt totally calm and safe, and like nothing could touch me. I remember thinking, 'This is the one I've been looking for.'

At that time, I was in a good job, earning good money for my age. At work, I would be smoking smack virtually every hour. My work was really suffering because I was working on a production line. Sometimes, I would just fall asleep and the whole thing would come to a stop. After about 7 - 8 months, the company made a lot of us redundant. I no longer had a regular flow of cash to buy smack.

Not long after, I phoned my dealer and found out that he had been busted. It was the day before my 19th birthday, and the first time that I had not been able to get hold of smack. I remember sitting there on my birthday watching the film *Trainspotting* for the first time, and realising that I was clucking (exhibiting symptoms of heroin withdrawal). I was becoming a slave to smack. I sat there and realised that there was more to life. From that day, I didn't use heroin for a number of years.

Soon after stopping using heroin, I got introduced to speed by a friend. At the time, I was very much into the clubbing scene and I was dealing in one of the big clubs. I was getting into a lot of trouble with gangs, the police and bouncers. I really just didn't care what I was doing. I had no fear of death and I would pick fights just for the fun of it.

After about six months, I injected speed for the first time. It didn't take long for injecting to become normal. The drugs were starting to take over, and I was thinking it was normal to be doing speed and loads of other drugs seven days a week. This continued for a couple of years.

I started to get more and more withdrawn from society. I tried to distance myself from the social world and began using speed on my own. I started to get really paranoid, convinced that people were out there to get me. Speed became more important to me than anything else in the world. I wasn't looking after myself at all.

It got to the stage where deep down I knew that this wasn't how life was meant to be. I knew that there was more to life. Christmas was coming up and my parents invited me around for dinner. On Christmas Eve, I woke up and decided that I wouldn't get any speed. For the next two days, I stopped myself from thinking about speed, and on the third day I was happy. I just didn't want to do it.

At the time, I was thinking, 'That's another drug that I've managed to beat.' I didn't understand what people meant when they said that drugs were hard to come off. I had done it so easily. I still thought that addiction

was completely physical, not mental, so that once you had stopped taking a particular drug (even if you were taking something else), then you had broken the addiction. This really wasn't true.

**Kerry (mother):** I'm 54 years old and I have lived in Cardiff all of my life. I've got two children, a son and a daughter, four lovely grandchildren, and I've been married to John for 34 years. My story is based around my son Kevin who had an addiction problem for many years. It's difficult for me to say when Kevin's drug problems started, as John and I weren't initially aware that the changes we were seeing in him were due to drugs.

I would say that we had an ordinary family life. John and I always worked very hard and as a result we often had good times, like family holidays. Both Kevin and my daughter Kate had a very full social life, always surrounded by loads of friends. They were always very active and took part in lots of sports and air cadets. I would say that they had happy, 'normal' childhoods. Kevin was always overactive. He was always in trouble for something, whether he was there or not! That was just Kevin.

It wasn't like things changed overnight with Kevin—it was a gradual process. We started to hear stories that when he left to go to air cadets, he'd taken a change of clothes and actually go off to do other things. He would then change back into his other clothes when he came back. I think he'd also started 'bunking off' in secondary school. I did notice that something strange was going on. For instance, he'd say he'd been in school, but then come home soaking wet as if he'd been out all day.

These little things started to add up. John and I were left with a really uneasy feeling—things just weren't right. It was like living with a yoyo. One minute he was just our normal son, but then other times there was an edge to him, like there was something going on, something very secretive about him.

When he was 16, Kevin was arrested for a wrongdoing. It was surreal. We had all these policemen turning up at the house telling us that our son had been doing all of these awful things. It was like the end of the world; we just didn't know what to do. At that time, our whole focus was on him getting in trouble with the police—we didn't for a moment think that drugs were involved. I knew that he smoked cigarettes, but that was the limit.

Apart from that visit from the police, Kevin was all right. He didn't appear any different to any teenager. He was a bit moody and un-cooperative at times, but then you could have put that down to his age. He was always talking about going to University and being sponsored by the air force. He talked like that, even though he was being a Jekyll and Hyde character—leading one life with us, and another with his friends. What we didn't know, was that he was getting deeper and deeper into this other world of crime.

A year or two after the first police incident, I found ganja in his room. It wasn't particularly well-hidden. It was in a drawer, but one I was likely to go in to put things away. Like many other people, I really didn't think that ganja was a problem. I've since come to think very differently about it—it was just a stepping-stone for Kevin.

Ganja was clearly a factor in Kevin's life. We found out later that the reason he had lost his Saturday job was that he'd been caught smoking ganja at the shop where he worked.

When Kevin was 18, he had a serious motorbike accident. I don't know if you'd call it luck, but it happened right outside the hospital where I worked. Coincidentally, it was the first time that I was working a day shift. Somebody came running in and said, 'Help, there's been an accident', so another nurse and I rushed outside to see what we could do. Immediately I saw his motorbike, I knew it was Kevin. He was lying in the middle of the road and was quite badly injured, although at this point I didn't know how badly.

When Kevin was in hospital, we found out that he was in trouble with the police again. My husband disowned him. It was a horrible time, because although he accepted that I had to support Kevin, he would not speak to him or see him. As far as John was concerned, Kevin was not welcome back into our home after he left hospital. As it happened, he did come home to us for a while, as he was so badly injured that John relented.

The accident happened as he was on his way home from work, so Kevin had his rucksack on him. When I got home, I emptied his rucksack and found some tablets in there. It wasn't as if I was looking for anything, I was just sorting and tidying, like mothers do. I remember thinking that it was strange as I recognised them as temazepam, or some sort of sleeping tablet. I thought, 'What the hell would he want with something like that?' It was probably the first time that I knew drugs were involved. My heart clenched and I thought, 'This is what it's all been about.'

It was really hard to deal with because Kevin was so badly injured, and we knew he had to have major surgery. That was paramount in my mind. There were times it would pop back into my mind, but I just pushed it away again. I don't know if you've ever felt the clutch of fear where your heart seems to contract? It's a horrible feeling, but that's the only way I can describe it. You tense up and your heart really feels like it's clenched up—you get a wave of perspiration or heat over you, and a feeling of panic.

I didn't say anything to my husband, as I didn't want to worry him. I thought I'd be able to deal with it on my own by talking to Kevin and offering support.

I didn't know what to think. It was the unknown that used to worry me the most, not knowing really what was going on. You sort of think the worst, but then you put it away as you don't want to have to think about it. Since there were no real other signs of drug use, I didn't think it was a major problem. I thought he'd just been dabbling. I couldn't understand why temazepam though, as all they did was put you to sleep. Maybe they mixed it with other things. I really was clueless about it.

The next few weeks were really difficult, with Kevin being unwell in hospital. I tried talking to him about it, but he would just explain it away. I would get half-truths. I'd sit there thinking, 'He's admitting this to me, so he must be telling me the truth now.' But he was only admitting part of it. It was very clever really.

I had experience of alcoholism with my mother, so I saw the damage that it can do, but I had no experience of drug use. Even in my teenage years, I'd never had any contact with drugs. If someone had put something in front of me, I wouldn't have known what it was or what to do with it. To me, alcohol addiction and drug addiction were very different things. I realise now that it all comes under the same umbrella.

The media stories used to scare me, as it made me see how much I didn't understand about drugs. I'd skim over the stories in the papers about ecstasy deaths and so on. I'd get very emotional about it, and start thinking about that poor person and their poor family and how they must be suffering. But I really, really didn't think it would happen to us, or that it was happening to us.

After the accident, we went through periods of Kevin living with us and then not living with us. It broke my heart when he didn't live with us. I was worrying about him every minute of the day, wondering whether he was dead or alive, and if he was in trouble.

As the years went on, Kevin had jobs and lost jobs. But no matter what he was doing, everybody who came across Kevin always said how nice he was. He was a gentleman and it was very hard to condemn him completely, because he always had this other side to him. I kept thinking, 'It's not all awful, he is lovely, really.'

When Kevin was about 18, he got into further trouble with the police and was told to leave our house again. He went to live with a friend. He had a building society account and passbook with a fair bit of money in there. By the time he came back to us a few months later, every penny was gone. We asked him at the time, 'What on earth have you been doing with this? What have you been spending your money on?' We still didn't have a clue that he was on drugs.

## **2. The depths of addiction**

**Kevin:** The worst thing about taking speed was that I learnt how to inject. Before, I had been too scared to inject heroin, but now I had no fear. Quickly, I turned back to smack, and before long I was injecting the drug.

At one point, I was living in my mate's house with him and his girlfriend. I was really bad at that stage, using smack, ganja, anything I could get. My mate used to help me out with money. One day, I was in the house by myself and I was clucking. I went around to my Mum's house and begged her for some money, but she knew why I wanted it and she wouldn't give it to me. I told her that I couldn't cope and that I needed something to make me feel better. But she knew it was never-ending, and that I would be back in the same place in 12 hours.

I was so low at that time that I desperately wanted to kill myself. I knew that my mate had a stack of money. I had never pinched off mates before, but I thought that the end would justify the means. So, I took £100, bought £100 of gear and injected the whole lot in one go. At that point, the most I had ever taken before was two £10 bags together. I still don't understand why it didn't kill me.

I had heard that when you OD (overdose) you just drift off. For me, it was really painful. It started off with my palms and soles of my feet really hurting with intense pins and needles. Very quickly this went to my temples, then it felt like my head was being crushed. Then I was gone.

I had left a note to my Mum and my mate to explain what had happened. When I woke up, I was gutted. I thought, 'What have I got to do to kill myself?' Not only was all the shit still there, but I'd tried to kill myself and stolen £100 off my mate.

From there, the only thing that I could think of to do was to go to the hospital. Not to get help, but to jump off the multi-storey car park. I went to the top of the car park and sat on one of the window ledges. I was still going in and out of consciousness. I kept on thinking, 'Wait until you fall unconscious and you'll fall off and die.' But I didn't. I sat for six hours on the window ledge, then realised that it wasn't happening. I realised I wasn't going to die up there.

The next morning, I went to Inroads, a local drug treatment outreach project. I knew I needed to do something, but I really didn't know what. At that point, I did really want to try to stay off the drugs. Inroads arranged for me to get a bed in a hostel and to see a GP. I was referred to the Cardiff Addiction Unit and was put on their waiting list to get a methadone script.

When I went to the doctors, he basically prescribed me anything I asked for. I was getting loads of Valium and DF's (dihydrocodeine<sup>1</sup>), using some for myself and just selling the rest. On top of that, I continued to use smack. My use just got heavier and heavier.

The hostel was in the centre of town, so I was much closer to drugs. I was finding it harder and harder to be the person I was before. The addiction was taking over. I knew from there it was downhill. The slope was getting steeper. It got really bad from there on because I thought, 'If I can't even kill myself, then I should just carry on with what I'm doing.' I just drifted along with life.

As I got further involved in the world of drugs, the part of me that would say, 'This is wrong' was being squashed. In that environment, with everyone around you using, the drugs take over your whole life and you take more and more risks. I hated what I was, and years went by before I could even look at myself in a mirror.

Physically, my body was deteriorating rapidly. It would take me hours to 'hit up' (inject) because most of my veins had collapsed. I'd inject all over my body, my arms, legs, hands, shoulders, fingers, thumbs, and neck. In the end, I had no veins left. My body was breaking down so quickly.

As I was so skinny, I would use deep veins, and because of this I would sometimes hit an artery. The first time I did that I was in agony; my arm blew up and there was no pulse. I thought I was going to lose my arm.

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<sup>1</sup> Dihydrocodeine is a semi-synthetic analogue of codeine, which is prescribed for pain relief.

Luckily, the feeling came back a couple of hours later. I knew that what I was doing was dodgy, and I knew that I could lose a limb, but not even that was as important as getting a hit.

The more smack that I had available, the more that I found I abused it. I found it really hard to keep anything for the morning, as all I could think about was the 'now'. I would even find myself waking up in the night, just to get a hit and go back to sleep. It had really taken over my life.

For about four years, I carried on living in the hostel and having my days controlled by heroin. I didn't have a job, so I was funding my drug use by 'blagging' money off my Mum and stealing. It started off with me just getting money off her. She would give me her bankcard and say I could take a certain amount, but I would always take more. She soon realised what I was using the money for, and then I would ask her for money so that I wouldn't have to commit crimes.

It soon progressed to where she would drive over to my place to give me money, and then I would get her to drive me to my dealers. She would wait around the corner. Soon, however, it went even further and she would sit in the car with me while we made a deal through the window. It got to the point where the dealers were even recognising my Mum. I had put her into such a difficult situation.

On one occasion, I was really ill with withdrawals. After she had taken me to a pick up, I started smoking openly in front of her. I didn't think anything of it, even though I could see it was tearing her up.

Towards the end, I didn't even worry about injecting in front of her. She used to cry and beg me to stop, but I didn't care at all. I was just using her.

When I was in my early twenties, I met a girl and moved from the hostel to live with her. She was using and I was using. That was a bad bit of my life. Since we were both using, it was really difficult to stop. If one of us wanted to stop, the other wouldn't. We would just pull each other back.

In 2003, I went to jail for a non-drug related crime that I hadn't committed. I was later found not guilty. When I first got charged, I got bail, but I soon realised that with the state that I was in there would be no way that I would be able to prove my innocence. So, I missed a court date on purpose, and confessed that I had no bail address so that they would put me in jail. I knew that in jail I could clean up. I was in jail from January 2003 until August 2003. I stayed off all drugs and totally sorted my head out—or so I thought.

When I came out of prison, I was feeling good, fit and healthy. I thought that as long as I stayed away from smack, I would be fine. The first day I got out, I was smoking ganja. The next day I was buying crack, and within a couple of days I was buying smack. I now realise that my mental processes hadn't changed. Although I wasn't physically using in jail, my mental addiction hadn't been dealt with.

I managed to hold down a job for a while, but soon I got caught using and was sacked. I had gotten back together with an ex-girlfriend whilst in prison, but when she found out that I was using again she also left. Soon after my Dad busted me and I was kicked out of home again. I was back in a repetitive cycle of self-destruction. It took about three and a half months for it all to fall apart again.

I moved into the Salvation Army on Christmas Eve. Whilst there, I stopped using crack and just used smack. It was weird because if I had £202 in my pocket, I would only view it as £2 because the rest was automatically for drugs. I would always work out how much money I had in drug value. Smack had taken over my life again.

After about nine months, I was kicked out of the Salvation Army for breaking the rules. I moved to the Huggard Centre, basically the worst place in Cardiff in which to be. I continued using more and more gear, and getting money off my Mum to fund it. Things got more and more out of control, until I finally decided that I needed help.

I had been on methadone before and it had made me really ill. The Cardiff Addiction Unit said that I could try Subutex (buprenorphine).<sup>2</sup> I had heard about Subutex whilst in prison, so I thought that I would give it a go. The first day was fine and I had no physical withdrawals. However, the Subutex gave me an emotional rollercoaster ride of highs and lows. Physically I was fine, but my head was in pieces. I had to stop taking the Subutex, but I knew I needed something to help me. I couldn't do it on my own. I wanted to avoid methadone<sup>3</sup> because of the serious withdrawals I had suffered in prison, so I gave Subutex another go.

Unfortunately, it still had the same effect on me and so I decided to go back to methadone. Since I was started on a low dose, I continued to use gear and crack on top. I was getting phenomenal amounts of money off my Mum, and my using was worse than ever. Looking back, it should have killed me. I knew I was in the cycle. It couldn't really get any worse and I was going to die soon. It was at that point, that I suppose I knew that I couldn't stop it. I had no control. I knew deep down that it was wrong, but I couldn't stop it.

**Kerry:** Over the years, things went further downhill. Kevin was living in and out of flats, bed-sits, and then eventually moving from one hostel to another. We would go for periods of time without hearing from him, before he would return to our lives, often bringing havoc with him.

I can't really remember how I found out that Kevin was taking heroin. I must have blocked it out. I think that I badgered him into admitting where the money was going and why everything cost so much. I must have really nagged. I don't think I came across any evidence. I don't think I'd have known what it looked like, or what someone did with it, or how somebody used it. I was very blinkered. I didn't want to know the mechanics of heroin use, but unfortunately I know all too well now.

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<sup>2</sup> Subutex is an opioid used to alleviate withdrawal from heroin.

<sup>3</sup> Methadone is another opioid used to alleviate withdrawal from heroin.

Eventually, we came across Kevin's injecting equipment. I was at work and John had gone home unexpectedly and found some needles prepared ready for use. Kevin was in the bathroom and John rang me to tell me what he'd found, and that he was kicking him out of the house, there and then. I was so angry with Kevin because he could have put my granddaughter at risk, as she used to come to the house to visit us. I felt so let down.

I have to say that when I first knew that he was injecting heroin I wanted to die. I just couldn't get my head around it. I didn't think you could get much worse than injecting heroin—I thought there was no turning back. I was worried about the health issues—hepatitis, HIV, AIDS, and everything like that. I didn't know how careful he was with needles. I thought it was the end; I felt absolutely petrified.

I didn't believe it. I didn't want to believe it, knowing that he was using needles in the squalor in which he was living. The worst thing was that I had no control over it, so I just couldn't bear to think about it. That was one of the worst moments of my life. It seemed to be the end, that he was already dead.

Kevin was back on the street once again. It was like a rollercoaster—he'd be kicked out, come back home, then something catastrophic would happen again and he'd be gone again. There were times when I didn't want him to live with us, but the thought of the alternative was unthinkable. It wasn't right that my son should live like that, or anybody's son. He just existed. Seeing him live like that when we lived so well, so comfortably, was awful. It was just immoral.

It really was like sticking a knife into a wound every time I saw Kevin, because of how he was, or how he was living. I felt very guilty, as I had brought him into the world. I felt that maybe he'd got it from me because of my mother having alcohol problems. However, I've never had problems with alcohol. In fact, I barely drink at all. John also felt guilty, because he felt that he didn't spend enough time with Kevin when the kids were growing up. He worked seven days a week for eighteen years to bring the money in. But it's too late to go back; you can't change anything in the past.

The drugs really did change everything about Kevin. From being a handsome, intelligent teenager, with everything ahead of him, Kevin changed, slowly but surely, into a skeleton of his former self. He was like a zombie. His health was awful and he looked dreadful, emaciated. As he grew older, I didn't think his life was worth living. He survived for drugs and used drugs to survive.

Deep down, I knew the old Kevin was still there, but he had changed and his attitude was terrible. He never frightened me like the stereotypical image of a threatening addict. Even when he was desperate for money, and I wouldn't or couldn't give him any, he'd never hurt me physically—maybe mentally, but never physically. It was so hard watching him decline and his life become embroiled into that sordid world.

Addiction affects your whole life. We'd always be waiting for a knock on the door to say that Kevin was dead. Whenever the phone rang, my heart would lurch. I'd have to change my ring tones regularly, because the

tunes became associated with Kevin calling asking for money or the fear of bad news. There are still some tunes I would never have back on my phone, because they remind me of the worst times.

My mind was always thinking about something it shouldn't have been. My concentration, memory, eating habits, and sleeping habits were appalling. Kevin's addiction just affected everything. I was always worrying, thinking of the next step—'Will he ring me tomorrow? Will he be in a fit state? Will he be ill? Alive?' These questions were always on my mind. I'd wake up in the night and they would be on my mind.

People use the term depression quite lightly, but I was really, really depressed, even suicidal at times. I was just in total despair. I remember thinking, 'How can I go on this way?' John was the same.

We'd go through cycles when either both of us would be good, or one of us would be down and we'd rub off on each other. I have to say that both of us have come very close to suicide, on a number of occasions. The only thing that stopped me though was thinking, 'How would Kevin manage if I wasn't there to pick up the pieces?' And I couldn't do that to my daughter and her family; that would be too cruel. So we just had to get on with it.

At that time, there was no planning for the future whatsoever. I've always been pretty keen on medical check-ups, never shied away from them. But it had got to the point where I stopped going. I thought, 'If I've got anything wrong with me, it can take me naturally and I won't do anything to stop it.' It was a strange attitude, but all I could think was that it wouldn't be like I killed myself if I died of natural causes. So, I wouldn't plan for the future because I thought, 'Well, I won't be here anyway.'

I bottled a lot up over the years. I didn't want to talk about it with anyone at first. When I did talk about it, it was with people who didn't understand and who never would. I think they thought they were making the right noises, but often I would come away feeling worse.

We had very mixed reactions from those who were close to us. A few good friends were very supportive, but they really had no idea what we were going through. More importantly though, they supported Kevin. They didn't keep in contact as such, but over the years they never lost their affection for him or their willingness to support him. They might have been misguided at times, because they didn't know how deep the problems were, but at least they were there or were trying to be there for us and him.

The way I coped changed over time. The problem was easier to deal with at first. It hadn't worn me down and I didn't know what was ahead. It was a gradual wearing down. It affected my relationship with John. It affected my relationship with everybody. I was being pulled in all sorts of directions. My family life really suffered. Kate and I argued a lot. She felt quite jealous, if that's the right word, of all the attention that I gave Kevin. I have always tried to explain to her that I would do the same for her if she needed me. If she needs me, I'm there. There is no difference, but she hasn't called upon me in the way that Kevin has.

I think Kate understands that today, now that she has her own children. She understands that feeling of a mother's love; there can be no comparison. I would do anything, if it were the right thing for my children. I've made mistakes with the way I went about doing things and I've realised that now, but I would always do anything I could to help.

We all seemed to cope with the situation in different ways. Kate was angry with Kevin for what he was doing to me, both financially and mentally. She could see that it was taking its toll on me and, although she still loved him, she was very angry. Kate was worried about Kevin of course, but she had a family of her own. Kate was quite worried about the impact Kevin was having on her daughter, as he kept coming in and out of her life. Kate really looked up to Kevin and really enjoyed his company, but it got to a certain point where she had to say, 'Enough is enough.'

It was also hard because John and I dealt with it all in different ways. John's safety net was to keep himself away from Kevin, although it didn't stop him worrying. It got to the point where we didn't come together to cope; we were in our separate boxes, trying to deal with it in our own ways. We nearly split up many times because of Kevin's addiction.

For many years, I was dealing with Kevin and his addiction by myself—and basically doing all the wrong things, I think. I withdrew from friends a lot and became very guarded with certain people. I didn't think that others would understand. I didn't want to put others in the position of discussing things with them and hearing their comments.

I have also had contact with people who were judgemental. I found myself gradually withdrawing away, or I'd go to social activities, but I wouldn't 'be there'. I'd go through the motions, because that was what was expected, but my mind would be somewhere else. Basically, my whole life was work, Kevin, a bit of home, and bed.

My work life suffered as well. Some of my colleagues were quite sympathetic at first, although that did alter later, but I know that they put up with a lot. I was very distracted or would take longer for lunch to see Kevin—but they appeared to understand and be compassionate about it.

However, there was a core group of people who tended to gossip about our situation. This made my work life terrible. It's a shame, because I would have enjoyed my job if I hadn't have had to deal with their reactions to Kevin's problems. Some people's attitudes really hurt me, and hit me in ways I never thought possible. I'm getting through and over that now, but I don't think my working life will ever be the same. I don't think I'll ever feel comfortable there, so it's a little bit of added pressure I could do without. But in the grand scheme of things, it's actually nothing.

I also got myself into real financial difficulties, because of the amount of money I was giving Kevin. At first, it was for appropriate, explainable reasons, but then it all changed. I was giving him money because I thought

it would stop him doing anything illegal to get the money for drugs. I didn't want him to get in even more trouble, or end up in prison.

I think if Kevin had gone to prison that wouldn't have been an end to his drug use. I think that drugs are so readily available in prisons that he would have carried on using. The one-time Kevin did go to prison, on a non-drug related charge, of which he was later acquitted, his dealer was actually in at the same time and still dealing.

Giving Kevin money got totally out of hand and I am still in a lot of debt now. I was so concerned that his life was already so awful that I didn't want him to have to get money for drugs by committing crime—robbing somebody, hurting somebody, doing terrible things really—I couldn't see that happen. I thought that if I could just give him enough money to stop that happening. So, in vain, I just kept on and on, trying to support him, trying to give him food or make sure that he was nourished, so at least I could do some good that way.

Looking back, I don't know how I managed, how I existed, because my mind was just continuously everywhere. I tried in any way I could to make life more bearable for him—to help him stop taking the drugs. He kept reassuring me that he was cutting down, that he had a plan. He used to have wonderful plans, and he'd draw up a schedule of coming off this and that.

Some of the times, it did actually happen and I would know that he was drug-free. I was optimistic about these times at first. I always clung on to, 'This is the time, it will be okay, and this time it will work.' I never fully believed it, but there was always that hope that things would go back on an even keel.

Then it would all go backwards again and with it came the realisation of knowing, 'Here we go again, into the madness.' We had fields in front of our house and one time I went out into the pouring rain and screamed. Wailed is probably a better word for it. I couldn't do it in front of the family, but I had to let it out somehow.

It was awful for John as well. He'd let his defences down to rebuild a relationship with Kevin, and then it would all be knocked down again. Then I would be back in the middle of it. I was leading a double life again; wife to John and mother to Kate on the one side, and mother to Kevin on the other. It was a completely different existence. I was torn, and all the time I was trying to hold down a full-time job in which you needed to concentrate and have your wits about you.

Eventually, the way that I dealt with his clean periods and relapses changed. At first, I used to help him plan how things were going to be different, and talk about the future and sort of discuss strategies with him about how he was going to stop using drugs. But, of course, it only ever happened on a very short, temporary basis. After numerous attempts, I started to lose my belief that Kevin would ever do it.

I think one of the problems was that the places Kevin was living were swamped with drugs and drug-users. How can an addict refuse when it's put in front of them? Even I understand that.

I realise now that there were many things that I shouldn't have done. I was a part of it, but at the time Kevin had conditioned me. I don't think I realised how bad it was, or how manipulative Kevin was. I could only see it as 'helping' him. He was in really poor health, and was walking miles and miles every day to get his drugs. It's really stupid when you think about it. I shouldn't have given him money or driven him to dealers, but at the time I couldn't see any other options. I would never in hindsight have done those things, and I hope to goodness I would never do them again.

I know now that I should have shared everything I knew about Kevin's using and lifestyle with John right from the beginning, instead of thinking that I could stop more people from getting hurt. I thought if I could deal with it. John would never have to know and it wouldn't hurt his relationship with Kevin. If I had shared what I knew and my feelings with John, it wouldn't have got so out of control on the financial side of things. I wouldn't have got so depressed and out of my mind with worry. So definitely, sharing right from the beginning would have been better.

I did actually have some counselling at work at one point, from occupational health. I had sessions with a lady whom I found most off-putting and unhelpful. I only had a couple of sessions, but I found her attitude quite judgemental. I was surprised that her attitude was so awful.