

# GRAND TOUR

## *Bully Pulpit*

By Bruce W. Cook



Drugs are destroying America. More accurately, substance abuse in any form is undermining the strength and character of our society. This is an issue that is far bigger and more dangerous than we care to admit. The damage is happening in much the same way that termites eat away at the wood in the walls of our homes: a hidden problem that surfaces often only when it is far too late to correct the damage that has been done.

Attending a recent reunion of high school classmates, one constant theme of conversation centered on drug and alcohol abuse. “Did you know that “John” died of a cocaine overdose?” “Remember “Bill,” he died in prison while serving a sentence for smuggling hashish across the border from Pakistan.” The drug related stories of tragedy were endless. They were shared in free-flowing matter-of-fact conversation between the tales of love and romance, children, career advancement, and discussions of current events. “Do you think we should pull out of Iraq?,” was immediately followed by “Did you know that “Jim” was the largest meth dealer on the west coast?,” followed by “How are your children doing in college?” Based on the significance of drugs and alcohol in the lives of my classmates, and in America at large, I would presume that the kids in college are doing very well and are probably “high” on any given substance of choice or available stimulant of the moment on any day of the week. That’s another editorial all by itself.

The sexual and social revolution of the 1960s was, of course, the catalyst to the expansion of drug use in society. Producing alarming statistics on the proliferation of substance abuse is of no particular importance in attempting to find the solution to the problem. The statistics are horrible, we know that. Some experts expound that the statistics even underestimate actual use of drugs because so much remains clandestine. Substance abuse is not a problem that is exclusively a lifestyle choice for any one segment of society. It exists in places where you might be shocked, or maybe not. From the highest offices of our government, to the boardrooms of Fortune 500 corporations, the uppermost echelon of academic life, in scientific laboratories where everything from the latest cancer drugs to high tech weaponry is being developed, to the private offices of clergy, and at every level of the entertainment and communications world. Specific examples are unnecessary; these generalizations are ripped from the headlines—the latest one being a tragic lady named Anna Nicole whose death has dominated the media.

Consider this, while you are reading this editorial blasting substance abuse, perhaps a loved one is smoking a joint in another room. Maybe one of our children is dealing pills in the playground after school. A neighbor, that really nice man down the street, is the biggest cocaine dealer in town. From the schoolyard to the battlefield, drug use is also rampant in our military.


Further, it is so pervasive in the heartland of America, in small towns where the so-called American ideal thrives, that some wonder if the next generation of kids in places like Iowa will have enough motivation to plant a crop of corn. Methamphetamines are as common as aspirin on much of our Midwestern, all-American soil.

We are losing the so-called war against drugs. Perhaps it is because it is impossible to declare war on something that so many people seem to need or want so badly. Why? What has happened to our society that has fueled this avenue of escapism that has become a common factor in so many lives? We suffer from a national malaise that finds its root in a breakdown of faith, trust, and most of all hope. Hope for a better future. Hope for the realization of dreams and the unfolding of opportunity. We are living in a climate of excessive individualism. A “me first” mentality has infused society with the pursuit of selfish, greedy and obsessive behavior that sends a message that “anything goes as long as it works for me.”

This societal phenomenon has not developed in a vacuum. The void of faith and trust is the result of a barrage of serious abuses in government, religion, business, as well as a breakdown of personal interaction within the family.

To restore faith and trust in America we must each act with a sense of moral purpose and consider principles of justice and fairness in each and every action that we take each and every day. The smallest decision based on an unjust motive ripples through our towns and communities touching countless lives. When people have a strong faith in the righteousness of a fair and just societal path with their fellow man, the abuse of drugs will diminish exponentially.

The road to redemption is straight and uncomplicated, but not easy. Stopping substance abuse begins with loving and trusting family or personal relationships. If organized religion as we know it is to survive and have a positive impact on our society, our clergy must stand as role models. Business leaders cannot discount and destroy the morale of the working class for the sole purpose of achieving a greater bottom line for Wall Street investors. Americans must believe that their government really does care about their welfare, that politicians are honorable public servants—not liars.

When our personal and public lives reflect the pursuit of justice we claim to hold dear, when our actions stand for principles that not only enhance our individual lives but society as a whole, when we can offer hope once again to American citizens at any stage or plateau of life, then and only then will we see substance abuse decline as people realize that the world is more than just “all about me.” 

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