

## LAURA MERSEREAU ESSAY CONTEST

Drug and alcohol abuse is rampant in Oregon. It has no preference between rich or poor, black or white. A demon to both the young and the old. It is like a tornado that starts out small and sucks everyone in. Not just the user, but everyone around them. Destroying and hurting the innocent along the way. Found in both good neighborhoods and bad. It can affect any family, I know because it affected mine.

I strongly believe that peer pressure is the main reason students try their first drink or drug. Teens are insecure and want to fit in and be accepted. They think that taking drugs and drinking is “cool” and a lot of “fun” to do on weekends, that it helps them have a good time. We are also at an age where we are trying to be independent, we are breaking away from our parents and testing our boundaries. So being rebellious and doing things against our parents can be exciting. It is a fact that most kids were given their first alcohol or drugs by someone they trusted or admired, often a close friend or relative. Not a creepy drug dealer we were taught to be afraid of that hides behind the school. The first friend to offer me drugs was not one I would ever have expected. The doctor I met at a rehab visit explained to us that sometimes the ones closest to you can be the most toxic.

The media glorifies drug and alcohol abuse. Television, the internet and magazines constantly feature so called “celebrities” who were arrested for drugs or drunk driving. Unfortunately in our society these well known people gain more fame and popularity from it instead of being chastised. We seem to have it backwards in who our role models are, rewarding the losers and not the winners.

We need to end the Hollywood glamorization of spa type rehabs in Malibu and Beverly Hills catering to the beautiful rich and famous. We need to show addiction for what it really is, and what real everyday addicts look like, before and after. Having teens tour a downtown rehab center would be a sobering wake up for most. It certainly frightened and disgusted me when I visited a relative a few years ago in one. There were no Brad Pitts laying in the sun there. Instead I saw broken worn out people with bad skin, horrible teeth, chain smoking and drinking a lot of coffee which to me seemed to replace one addiction with another. They were either jittery or spaced out and all looked decades older than they actually were. Most would leave there and end up back within a few months time, that is if they didn't die of an overdose first.

My personal anti-drug has always been my friends doing drugs. I have seen the negative effect it has on their lives. Several of my friends who were doing great in school started out with “just” Marijuana, “it’s natural and not addicting” they professed. In a few short months they gradually increased their consumption from once in a while to every week. Soon after they graduated to alcohol, street drugs even prescription pills from their parents medicine cabinets, whatever they could find. I saw my friends’ personalities change and their grades fall. I saw them barely making it through school while being high. It is only a matter of time before they will be expelled from school. Their parents are suspicious of everything they do, and they have lost the respect of their siblings. Teens that were once their friends are afraid to be associated with them. They are oblivious to what’s going on around them, or maybe they just don’t care.

I have a great time being me and do not need chemicals inside my body to help me have a good time. I want to wake up and remember every single thing I did the day before. The trust and respect from my family and friends mean more to me than anything else in the world, and I am not willing to jeopardize all of that for the sake of alcohol or drugs. Keeping my body, mind and spirit healthy is important. I keep my body active with riding horses, golf and swimming. I keep my mind busy with books, playing guitar and talking to friends. My spirit is filled by volunteering in my neighborhood, playing guitar at Church and having a strong belief in God. My best advice and biggest weapon of all in winning the war on drugs is to never, ever underestimate the power of prayer!

The way I try to prevent other people from using drugs is by following my mantra from Gandhi “ Be the change you want to see in the world .“ Discussing with other students the negative side effects drugs can have on you. I share my families struggle and pain dealing with relatives who have lost the battle, and the long road of those that have it now under control. If I help to promote a healthy and sober life, more teens will realize the beauty of life without drugs. All we need to do is make a stand and let the ugly truth about drug use be known. I am constantly telling my friends that do not do drugs that they have so much more integrity by not giving into what is popular. Boosting their confidence giving them the strength to say no even for just a day. They say there is strength in numbers so if all anti-drug teens bond together and say NO more kids would not be embarrassed to join the cause. Making not taking drugs the “cool” choice- The future is ours.

I was honored to make Laura’s pledge online and have printed it out promising to share it’s message with my friends and family.

This essay is going to be about how drugs affect the community, the most challenging factor, and why I choose not to use and steps to keep others from using. I noticed this scholarship opportunity because drugs have greatly impacted my life. I grew up with out a father because of drugs. My freshman year he had a massive heart attack at 41. Now I'm losing my 19-year-old brother to the same drug problem. Now that I'm a senior I'm going to do something about it.

I live in Estacada and attend Estacada High School. Many teens use drugs in Estacada for many different reasons. Some because of boredom, peer pressure, or having a hard time and they think drugs can help. This affects our community in many ways. As a freshman I had almost 300 classmates, now I have 171. Some of those students moved but most of them dropped out. I have lost many friends to drugs. Having so many students using drugs make parents worry more about their children. Parents cant even let there children play at the park with out a fear of them getting offered drugs. Not only that but people that use drugs are weird when they're using. People on drugs do stupid things and parents are afraid of that. It isn't fair that children can't play with there friends because of someone else's mistake.

I think for most people who use drugs the most challenging influence and factor is peer pressure. That is how the how path gets set; by using one time because your friends says it's cool. I think most drug users started at a young age because of peer pressure. Now they cant stop using. Also being an addict is somewhat genetic. People with the "addict gene" are more likely to get addicted the first time they use. That makes it more challenging to quit. That's were most addicts get stuck is trying to quit. I understand its

not as easy as just saying, "I quit." It takes hard work, determination, and motivation to quit. Without either of those you will stay on the wrong path a ruin not only your life but your families also.

I don't use drugs for many reasons. I know I have a great future for myself. I know I'm capable of doing great things for myself and other's why ruin that? My biggest reason for not using is my dad. My family has struggled my whole life to barely make ends met. My mom has worked nights and sleep's days, goes to work sick to support 4 children on her own. No one should have to do that. Now dealing with my brother. My sophomore year my brother was put in a rehab program and he ran away. Today I watch him struggle to fix his problems and I worry about him. I can't imagine how my mom feels. I couldn't use drugs and do the same thing my dad and brother did to her. A step I can take to help teens not use is just by not using myself. I can show my friends you can have good time without getting high. Also at my school I'm a mentor to freshman so I can just be a good example for them. I could teach my little brother the impact of drugs so he can take what he know and shares it with his friends. If high school student can keep up this cycle we could have a drug free environment.

I think drugs are a horrible thing and have devastating affects. Families get broken apart, teens throw their life away, and it hurt's everyone. Drugs have impacted my community and life greatly. I also relies there is challenging factors and influences. I've learned to just stay away from drugs and keep my little brother from it. Trying to keep students away is my next step.

Thank you for this opportunity,