

# Melissa

## Look at Me

I'm twenty-three years old. I was born in Cincinnati and grew up in Tempe. I'm white with some Irish, English, and German. I'm five feet three inches tall and weigh 130 pounds. I have dark hair, shoulder length, brown eyes, and freckles. I have a nice smile.

## My Family

There were three kids, and my sister Jeanie was very, very difficult. She would make problems out of nothing and make it hard for everyone. If she didn't have attention on her all of the time, then she'd call the cops or she'd run away.

My parents got a divorce when I was about ten. I moved down here [Tucson] with my mom. My dad stayed in Tempe. He's an engineer and works a lot. I don't have much contact with him anymore. He was abusive when I was little. He favored my other two sisters. He doesn't like me because I look like my mom, and I remind him of her. He would hit my mom, and he'd hit us and yell at us. He'd hit my sisters, too.

My mom is very quiet. She's a lot like me. She takes care of other people mostly. She's a genealogist. She's had it pretty rough because of the divorce—moving down here with three girls and not having enough money to make ends meet all of the time. Right now, she's at home taking care of my stepdad's father. She remarried about nine years ago.

As a child I loved my mom and my sister May. Like me and May are best friends. She's three or four years older than me. We're a lot alike. Sometimes people will think that we are twins. My mother would take us out—play with us. I remember when I was little, she'd always go swimming and play with me in the pool. My mom taught me different things.

## My Stepdad

I lived in the house with them. I like my stepdad. He's really nice. It's a little weird sometimes because he's black and we're white. Some people will look at us weird, you know, or when we go out. I don't care, I really love him.

He's worked for Macintosh for over twenty-five years. When people in China have problems with their computers, they'll call him. He's a director of problems, an engineer. He was our neighbor living down the street from us. I used to always go over and play at his house. He'd show me how to make things with beads and stuff like that.

## School

I liked elementary school. I went to a good school in Tempe. I had a lot of friends. My mom baby-sat, so I always had my friends over after school. I was in Girl Scouts. My middle sister [Jeanie], she's older than me, but she's not the oldest one, she started giving a lot of problems. She has autism

and, well, I started noticing in the second or third grade, she'd always try to beat on me or scare my friends away, get me in trouble everywhere I went.

In middle school is when I started doing drugs. I moved down here when I was starting fifth grade. I went to Rio Vista. The kids down here were a lot different, and I didn't really fit in. So, then I went to La Cima Middle School. I started doing drugs at the end of sixth grade with my sister May. The first drug I ever did was meth. Then I got caught with weed at school and got arrested for that.

I was a good student at first, but I started not wanting to be in school. I didn't like my teachers. I didn't do too good down here. I was kind of rebelling against not being with my dad, not having my friends around.

I started high school at Amphi, but I didn't like the students. They were mean. There were different races, and kids hung out in different groups. I wasn't from here, and I didn't know how to get along with them. I just didn't fit in. They were always making fun of me because I was white—always speaking Spanish, and I didn't know Spanish. It was just really, getting in fights all of the time. They would always try to start fights with me, but I'd never fight.

When I was a freshman, this one girl threw a rock at me. It hit my arm and fractured my elbow. I wouldn't fight her, and so she got mad. I was talking crap to her. She walked away and came back with a river rock. I was sitting on the curb waiting for my mom to pick me up. It was a big rock that she threw.

I went to a bunch of different schools—Project More, the Edge Charter School. Then I went back to Amphi. I think it would have been better if the classes were smaller and if the teachers were more helpful and paid more attention, and it wasn't so segregated, I guess.

My mother knew I was unhappy. I'd come home crying that I ditched school all of the time. She knew but couldn't do anything about it. She'd been in there so many times to see the principal. He pretty much said there was nothing he could do. I needed to stay out of their way.

### **My Sophomore Year**

The bigger school [Amphi] wasn't working. I ended up going to a charter school, an alternative school—San Joaquin. It pretty much had all of the outcasts of Amphi, so it was fun.

One of my friends was Skeet. I met him at Amphi. I saw him around, and I talked to him sometime, but I didn't know him that well. He ended up dropping out, and I met up with him again. It was when I was going to go register for school at San Joaquin. I talked him into going to school with me. We became really good friends. I had a friend named Becky and a few other good friends. We'd all hang out. We usually got high on meth or weed.

My teachers there were really, really good and supportive. I liked my teachers a lot. My favorite teachers were Mr. Michaels and Mrs. Bauer. He was the math teacher and helped me a lot. When I'd get stuck on something, he wouldn't make me wait until the end of class to ask him a question. He'd stop, come over, and explain everything step by step until I understood how to do the problem. He'd teach me several ways to get the same answer. Mrs. Bauer was my focus teacher—she'd always encourage me, especially when I felt I was slipping. She would find some kind of work I would like. If I didn't like the chemistry part, she'd find some other kind of science—I liked earth science.

I'd meet with Mrs. Bauer twice a week for an hour at a time. We'd go over all the

work I did. She made sure I understood everything and that I had my work in and was meeting the requirements to stay at the school. Mrs. Bauer was upset when I dropped out in my junior year. She said that I was so close. I was doing so good. If I had any kind of problem, I'd go to her and she'd figure it all out for me. If I had a problem with my schedule, she changed it to where it worked for me.

I moved in with Skeet and lived with him for a while. We'd stay up all night and do homework. We did extra-credit work and even though we were high, we got a lot done. I lived in his parents' house. My mother didn't mind so much that I moved out. But she didn't like that I moved in with Skeet's parents. She thought it was a burden on them. I was only seventeen, and after me and Pete broke up and I wanted to come home, she wouldn't let me. I guess she was enjoying the house to herself—finally after getting three girls out.

### **Dropping Out**

Although I liked San Joaquin, my next boyfriend, Jeremy, didn't like me going to school. He didn't like me having friends. I was eighteen. He was about twenty. Sometimes he'd steal my car before I had to go to school. Other times he'd go up there with me, but on the way up he'd fight with me. We'd end up pulling over because I couldn't drive while he was hitting on me. By the time we were done fighting, I figured I couldn't go to school all beat-up looking, so I would just go home. After having so many unexcused absences, I got kicked out. I was embarrassed to go back. He didn't graduate, and he didn't have a job. We were selling drugs. We lived with Liz for a while, and then we went from place to place. We had our own apartment for about a month.

Once I got kicked out of San Joaquin, they would not let me back in. I just got so many chances to be absent. The first time it happened, the school was so far away that the buses couldn't get there. I couldn't get a ride. It was hard to get to school. I lived seven or eight miles away from the school, and the bus stop was 1-½ miles from the school. I'd have to walk, and I wasn't going to. I think that if the school had given me one more chance, I would have realized that I shouldn't be with this guy. I was too embarrassed, too ashamed, to go back.

My mother was really upset because she helped me a lot in trying to find a school that I liked. This was, like, just perfect for me. I was doing so good—getting good grades, getting along with my teachers. I just loved that school! Once she knew that I wasn't going anymore, she was really upset, really sad.

I met Jeremy when I was fifteen. We were running around together. Then he went to prison for stealing cars and getting caught with drugs, and he got out three years later. I was working at a Chevron convenience store, and he came into the store. I left with him and never went back. I quit. My mother didn't like him. We'd always get into trouble together. Whenever he came around, I'd ignore my mom and stay out. I started stealing from her, like, money or whatever to go out and get high.

### **Getting My GED**

Being twenty-two and not having a high school diploma, I didn't even try to look for another job. I'll tell you about my job in a minute. I wanted to do forensics, but, having a felony, I don't think I can. I wanted to work in an FBI lab, but I know they won't allow felons in there. But then I wanted to do archeology, something along the science line.

I got my GED. Actually, I'm on probation, and part of my plea bargain was to get my GED. I put it off for so long because I was scared. I didn't know how I was going to manage my time. I didn't want to fail again. I didn't want to get expelled. I went to the LEARN program on Grant Road and met my teachers. They made me feel comfortable, so I went there. I always liked school, I always did. Once I got there, a lot of things I learned in school came back to me. It took me about three months to finish. I'm hoping to start school and maybe finish at the U of A.

### **Making Money**

I've had about ten or twelve jobs. I was fifteen when I got my first job. I lied about my age and worked at a Dairy Queen. Then I got caught stealing money. The owner caught me with a bunch of money to the side of the register. Then, when she went over the tape, she saw a bunch of stuff that was cancelled like somebody changed their mind. She didn't have it on camera, so she couldn't prove it. She couldn't do anything.

I'd give the money to Jeremy because he drank and wanted drugs and this and that while I was at work. I was just trying to make him happy. Jeremy didn't ask me to take the money, but he'd want to borrow money off me, and I didn't have any, so I'd steal it to give it to him. For a while I felt I could make him happy and he'd stay with me and he'd love me. No, he always cheated on me. Lied to me. He was bad.

After that I had to wait until I was sixteen and worked at Viewpoint Research in the mall doing interviews. That didn't last too long because I didn't like it. I'm shy, and I didn't like approaching people. I didn't work for a while after that. I started selling drugs.

I got a job at the Sweet Shop—it was like a Dairy Queen but different. I did good there. I really loved that job. I was like the manager, but I was too young. So I was the shift leader. I pretty much ran the store. The owner let me hire people, fire people, do all of the stocking and all the ordering. I have worked at Circle K, Chevron, and Texaco convenience stores.

### **My Job**

I've been at a job at a repair shop for five years, off and on. I was high all of the time except for the last year that I've been clean. I stole from Carol too, and she knew it. I don't know why she didn't fire me. The first week I was there she made me a signer on the account. I could sign checks, so I went to Wal-Mart and Target and every place almost every night. I just wrote out checks. Right now she's paying off a bankruptcy, and I'm sure that I had something to do with that.

Carol thinks of me like a daughter. She had a mom, a sister, and a brother but no kids. She never said anything about the checks. When she said she was getting a lawyer, I quit. When I tried to come back, she didn't want me to really come back, but she let me come back anyway. The mechanics said, "What did you do?" Carol and the bookkeeper told them about all of the checks they got back. I don't know why she kept on taking me back but she did.

### **Drugs and the Law**

I was thirteen and charged with possession of marijuana. I got it from my sister's friend. He gave it to me when he gave me the meth. I was high on meth. It made me feel really happy and hyper. I was scared because I didn't understand what was going on. I didn't really understand what drugs were. I

knew that drugs were bad, but I didn't know what they did to me. It just made me go and talk to everyone. He knew I had to go to school. He was trying to get me to go to sleep. He told me that if I smoked weed, I'd be able to go to sleep.

I took the weed to school. I didn't know what to do with it. I'd never seen weed before. I took it to school to give it to my friend. He always said he smoked weed. He ended up trying to sell it in the snack-bar line, and he got caught with it and said he got it from me. I admitted to it, so I got charged with possession. The principal came and pulled me out of class, and they had the cops there already.

My mom was out of town. She was in Tempe dealing with the court and stuff with my dad. She was upset. I think she felt guilty in some way. She wasn't really mad at me. She didn't punish me. She helped me the best that she could. She brought me to my court appearance. I got diversion for that and community service. She found community service work for me. I worked at the Pima County Fair cleaning—it was more fun than anything, though. I got to see them put together the rides, and they had judges for the cheesecake contest. I groomed the animals. I had to do fifty hours of community service.

I started going to school high in the seventh grade. I was twelve when I was in the sixth grade; thirteen in seventh grade. I used meth at home, and I started meeting people at school who did it and did coke. I did coke sometimes but didn't like it. So I would do meth, and I got them into meth. At first I'd get it from my older sister May. Then I started stealing money to buy it. I met the guy she was getting it from, and she's still using.

May started using, I guess, when we lived in Tempe. She must have been ten or eleven. She started really young with our neighbor. I didn't even know. I had no idea.

I knew her friends were mean, and she got mood swings and stuff. I didn't know, maybe, it was her period or something. I didn't understand anything.

I started using meth and drinking. That was more important to me than being at school. I'd be up for the longest was for a week and a half. I don't know what I did, but I'd be out running around constantly. Then I'd sleep for days straight. I'd get up to get a drink or go to the bathroom. I was fifteen, and I realized that I had a problem with drugs.

My sister was doing drugs right along with me. I guess my mom didn't really know. I asked her that recently. She said that she didn't know. She'd find drugs once in a while, and we'd say, "That's hers. It's not mine." To get the money to buy drugs, I either stole it or I sold drugs.

I've used meth, coke, weed, alcohol, acid, mushroom, and heroin.

### **More Drugs**

For a while, I'd go to Phoenix and pick up a quarter- or half-pound at a time. This was when I was seventeen and in school. That got old because it started to feel bad with the guy out there I was getting it from—money problems and drug problems. The meth was bad or the money was short, he would say. Once it got to that point, I didn't want to get involved. I knew what could happen. He had guns, and he had knives. I've known people who'd gotten killed or beat up. I didn't want to go there.

### **Bigger Troubles**

"I'm on probation right now. I met B.J. in Tucson when he came to buy dope, and I ended up going to Lordsburg with him. I was twenty. I was selling drugs a lot like, a

lot. Me and B.J. had too much traffic. I'd get the meth in Tucson and take it to Lordsburg. I sold a very large quantity of meth, and Flavio, B.J.'s friend got busted with it. I guess not even two weeks later the place where I was living got raided. They found maybe an ounce and a half of meth—not too much. They found a lot of money—like \$26,000. We both went to jail, me and B.J.

Once you meet one person who uses, it's easy to meet everyone. The one thing they have in common is dope. When you know you have something in common with somebody, it's easy when drugs control you like that, and I think meth controls people. They don't care. They'll just go and talk to anyone. It's really easy. Either you're trying to buy it off of them, or they're trying to buy it off of you.

### **Jail in Lordsburg**

When the house got raided, I figured I was young and I was a girl and I didn't have any other charges in New Mexico. When I was eighteen, they gave me a slap on the wrist and sent me home to my mom. That didn't happen this time. I spent three months in jail in Lordsburg. Then when I got out, or when I went to court, my full sentence was going to be three years in prison. I signed a plea bargain and had a county attorney. He got me a plea bargain for two and a half years on probation, a year in rehab, and a bunch of other things. I had to get my GED and make donations to D.A.R.E. and pay fees to the courts and the Department of Corrections.

Jail was horrible. Lordsburg is so small that they had only one cell for the girls, which had two beds in it—one on top and one on the bottom—and that's it. All the guys were in the back, and I guess the guys had more like a normal jail. The girls' cell was like the holding room. Not too many girls went to jail, I guess. I was alone most

of the time. They moved me to Deming for a couple of weeks because I got caught with dope in the room.

They brought in another girl who got arrested. She was in for maybe three days and when she came in she brought in dope. Once she left, I got caught with it in the room. They sent me to Deming for a couple of weeks. From Deming they brought me back. At one point there was three of us, and one had to sleep on the floor, but she was only there for a couple of days. Most of the time I was by myself.

It was cold, and it was snowing. They gave me a little heater. When they raided the house, they wouldn't let me get dressed. So I just put on a shirt and whatever pants I could find. I didn't have a bra or underwear. It sucked! It was embarrassing. After a while my mom sent money, and the guy who I was with down there, his mom sent me money. B.J.'s kids had some of the money that we had saved up. They'd give me money, and that was hard taking money from his kids. I was able to buy white boxers and a white tee shirt and a bra.

My mom wasn't able to visit me. I was two and a half hours away. She'd have to drive five hours to see me for fifteen to twenty minutes. I didn't ever get to see my mom or my sisters. B.J.'s mom and daughter and brother would all come visit me. My friends from Lordsburg would come visit me. They sent B.J. to prison. He's in Albuquerque. It was his third time being arrested for selling drugs.

The guards would always say, "Why are you doing this? You're so young. You're smart. Why are you doing this to yourself?" I'd say, "As soon as I get out, I'm not going to smoke a cigarette. I'm never going to do this crap again. I'm just going to go home, and everything is going to be good."

That lasted about two or three weeks, and then I saw my old friends. They said, "Oh, you're out. Here smoke a ball. I got to using

an eight-ball a day, and that's about three and a half grams. I started out smoking a ball or two, and that would last me all day, maybe every other day or on the weekends. When I got arrested, I was doing a lot, lot more.

### **Sentencing and Probation**

I think the justice system should make rehab an option more than just prison. Since I was sent to rehab, my whole life has changed. My whole perception of drugs has changed. I'm sure that it did a lot more for me than sitting in prison is doing for B.J.

I got two and a half years. If I violate my probation—I'm on Interstate Compact—I could go back to prison in Lordsburg or in New Mexico and do my whole three years. I should be off of probation any day now. I've been doing really good. I haven't violated anything. My first officer, he was really tough, but he helped, too, when I needed him. My probation officer now, she's okay. She doesn't really work for what I need done as much as he did. She's new and getting me by.

The worst part of being on probation now is paying the fines. Back then it was having to do everything that someone else wanted me to do. If they told me to jump, I had to jump or else I could be off to prison. I didn't like the intimidation and having to listen to someone else.

Probation has been beneficial. I've turned my whole live around. I'm not using anymore. I got my GED, which is something that's been really important to me. I just was never able to get out and do it. I never had the ambition.

### **Treatment**

I'm at The Haven. It's a very structured,

three-month in-patient program with a lot of rules. They taught me about addiction. They have anger management classes, groups about depression and abuse—anything that could have led up to the disease of addiction is discussed. I've been in their transitional program for the last year. I pretty much do what I do. I work. Hopefully, I'll go to school in January. I go to support-group meetings—NA [Narcotics Anonymous], AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], and CA [Cocaine Anonymous].

There are four women in the transitional house. It's a three-bedroom house, but two are sharing a room. We buy our own groceries, do our own cooking and cleaning. If there was a slip, the woman would be staffed by all of the staff. They'd go over what happened and see what they wanted to do. Either the person would get kicked out or she would have to take relapse prevention classes or like me when I got to transitional, I slipped and I drank. I ended up admitting to it. They staffed me and made me call my probation officer. I was put on restriction for two weeks—couldn't leave except to look for a job or go to work or a meeting. I had to start my "clean date" over again.

If the person lies and continues using, she's gone. I've run into old friends, and I talk to my sister still. She's the one I used with every day. I have a lot of tools that they taught me from The Haven. I don't stick around if something triggers me. I have to walk away, and I can call my sponsor any time. My sponsor is like my best friend in the program. She taught me how to do the steps, the twelve steps. I met her through the meetings.

I'm getting a year on August 20, 2005. I've been off meth since May 3, 2004, but like I said, I slipped when I got out. August 20 of last year I drank. It's been a year now. I only drank a couple of sips of my friend's beer. I didn't even get drunk, but in the program that would be a relapse. I drank a

lot when I was fourteen and fifteen—tequila and vodka. After I turned sixteen, I didn't drink much.

### **Turning Points**

My parents fought a lot. My dad drank. My dad and my mom got in a fight, and he hit her in front of me and my sisters. He hurt her pretty bad. She didn't go to the hospital. She gathered us all up and took us to her room and made him leave.

Another turning point: when my mom married my stepdad. He's a really good role model. He's very understanding, very

loving. I feel like I could tell him anything. Probation was a turning point, obviously.

### **Thinking about Dropping Out?**

Hang in there. Don't drop out. Life is too important to leave your education behind. You can't get anywhere without an education. You'll probably regret it. I know I did. I regretted it for a long time.

If think you have a drug problem, talk to someone about it. I think you'll know if you have a problem because you just feel it. You have this aching where you have to get higher and higher. Get help right away.