

design by CAROLINE MAY/in-depth editor

+15 million

people, in the U.S. alone, abuse prescription drugs, more than the combined number who reported abusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin.

60-70%

of teens say that home medicine cabinets are their source of drugs.

2,500

youth abuse a prescription pain reliever for the first time everyday in the U.S.

50%

of teens believe that prescription drugs are much safer than illegal street drugs.

598,542

of the 1.4 million drug-related emergency room admissions in 2005 were associated with abuse of pharmaceuticals alone or with other drugs.

45%

of overdose deaths are caused by depressants, opioids, and antidepressants.

statistics from www.drugfreeworld.org

One trip could be your last trip

Officials discuss reality of uneducated teen drug use

by **MOLLY CROUCH**
copy editor

He's seen this too many times before. The empty pill containers. The immobile, unresponsive teenage body.

He's done this too many times before. The chest compressions. Another round of reversal medications.

He's heard this too many times before. The weeping cries of a mother. The stony silence of a father.

Dr. Matt Young has been in emergency medicine for 19 years and has dealt with numerous cases of teenage overdoses. "It's a very disturbing scene for the

caregivers," Young said. "More importantly, it's very disturbing for the loved ones of the patient because most of the time they heard that they were going out to a party or into another room, and the next thing they know, the patient has been put on a ventilator. When young people die, it's just very tragic because the majority of the time, it could have been prevented."

Many teens hope for a quick trip, something that will calm them down or relieve their stress. In a survey collected by drugfreeworld.org, 50 percent of the teenagers believed that prescription drugs are safer than street drugs and that 60-70 percent received the medication from their own homes.

"With prescription drugs, the reason that so many people take these and abuse these is

because they can fit in a pocket and can be concealed," Young said. "You can put that in your pocket and sneak that in and take those at the most convenient time for the person trying to get that artificial high."

Texas and Arkansas now have a state Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) which gives individuals who are authorized under state law to receive the information for purposes of their profession. According to deadiversion.usdoj.gov, the program can "identify or prevent drug abuse

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One choice could be your last choice

by **MOLLY CROUCH**
copy editor

Will was a unique, bright young man, an honor student in the Gifted and Talented Program at Arkansas High.

Will was selected by his teachers to attend Boys' State his junior year.

Will was well-liked and stayed out of trouble during his high school career.

Will graduated in 2013 and chose to experiment with drugs.

Will Autrey was 18 years old when he died of a Tramadol overdose on April 25, 2014.

"I was just shocked," said Debbie Autrey, Will's mother. "A lot of people go through an experimental phase. Teens are going to try things. [With] the dangers in today's world, you may not make it out. My son made a choice. That's what it boils down to: his choices. Unfortunately, he was not one of the ones to make it. I know that if he was here today, he would take it all back for anything."

As a young boy, Will was not the typical child who loved to throw mud and run from girls with cooties. He took Taekwondo in elementary school, which led to his passion for Asian culture. During middle school, Will's serious nature and knowledge of politics captured the attention of his teachers.

"Will Autrey knew more about politics than anyone I've ever known; that was his passion," Debbie said. "When he was in middle school, I would get so mad because he would make me wait until 4 o'clock or 4:30. He would be in [his class] talking to all of his teachers. [They] would be circled around him, talking about politics."

Will soon outgrew Taekwondo, and his interests wandered outside of politics as he entered high school. Will liked to study Judaism and became even more fascinated with Asian culture and how other countries operated.

"I had no problems with Will in high school," Debbie said. "He was just a great kid. Part of the issue with him [was that] he was easily bored. He was one who liked to

dip his toe. You could tell him no, but he wanted to find out for himself."

Debbie noticed Will's charming personality progressively disappearing during July after he graduated up until the end of that year. As Will's once boy-like behavior morphed into an apparition of his former self, Debbie realized there was something wrong. Eventually, Will was asked to move out in late December.

"I confronted him, and, of course, [he said,] 'Mom, I'm not doing anything. Don't bring your work home,'" Debbie said. "He said he didn't want to leave, but it was tough love. Tough love does work. I believe I had my son three months longer than I would have had him had I not used tough love."



Will was back home and was doing great. Will was proud of his mom and held her hand and kissed her cheek at Central Mall. Will's behavior began to change. Will was experimenting again. Will was 24 days away from turning 19 when he died.

"In my generation, we would experiment with things, but people weren't dying," Debbie said. "Now the drugs that are out there, they're astounding. It has nothing to do with how you were raised. Will had a lot going for him. But it came to my home. I'm a statistic now."

Debbie also went through an experimental phase in her teenage and college years, but quickly grew out of it. With the rapid desensitization of drugs, many teenagers and young adults are not aware of how easily Will's mistake can happen.

"He was just experimenting, and he didn't make it out," Debbie said. "Why do some make it out and some don't? I don't know. He didn't want to die. He didn't mean to die. He didn't think he would die."

Debbie is a mother. Debbie has been a therapist at South Arkansas Youth Services for 25 years.

"It can get anybody at any time, any where, any place. Don't ever say it won't happen to you."
-Debbie Autrey

Mother copes with loss of son, hopes to spread awareness of drug dangers

Debbie was close with Will, and they traveled over the years to Mexico, Galveston, Disney World and St. Thomas.

Debbie bought Will a passport two months before he died.

Debbie did all of the right things and taught Will the dangers of drugs, but she still lost her son.

"I'll never be the same," Debbie said. "He was my only child. He died April 25, 2014. The last I knew of me, Debbie Autrey, the way I've always been, was on April 24, 2014. I'll never be that person again."

So now, Debbie hopes to honor Will's life; to make sure that he isn't defined by one decision; and to convince other young people they aren't immune to death.

"People say that it only happens to broken homes," Debbie said. "No, it struck my home. This tragedy came to my home. It can get anybody at any time, any where, any place. Don't ever say it won't happen to you. Don't ever say 'I won't be that stupid, I would never try that.' My son said the same thing, and it boils down to that choice. If you decide to make that choice, you're deciding to play Russian Roulette with your life."



REMEMBERING WILL
Debbie Autrey displays a photo of her son, Will, who died in April of last year.

photo by S. Vaughn

see video story on tigertimesonline.com