In the grip of the crack pipe

By Jim McGovern

"Jimmy" was already through next week's paycheck. His friend had forwarded him enough to keep the run going. I still had my MAC card and it wasn't tapped out yet. The guy next to me at a meeting had sold his truck for $300 to get more. The bruised woman passed out in my bathroom, a heroin needle in her arm, had been a normal housewife in Exton just two years ago.

I was a crack user. In fact, I was an alcoholic as well. Thank God I never graduated to heroin or suffered the agony involved in kicking it. But the pipe comes to wield an intense psychological attraction over its addicts, as I can tell you.

And what I know of addiction makes me very afraid of the rise in heroin use now being documented among young people and the middle class.

I can tell you that the talk about the recent re-explosion of heroin usage is accurate. It is cheaper than crack, and the high lasts much longer. Most but not all of the users, however, started with the pipe. It's horrible that so many people are doing it. Most disturbing are the "designer drugs" the kids are using. The designer drug known as "ecstasy" is generally a methamphetamine-based preparation, but a given ecstasy pill — so kids have told me — may contain heroin, cocaine, PCP, God knows what else. And in the teen clubs and raves, its use is rampant. There is even a visual code so you can tell who the dealer is: He wears Day-Glo outfits, and he is busy.



TIM BRINTON

I was one of many who bought into the "no physical addiction" jive regarding coke. That's just a quibble over a technical distinction. Cocaine artificially triggers the endorphins — the brain chemicals that give you the sensation of feeling good. And in this artificial release, they retard the ability of the human body to produce them naturally.

So if the usage has been chronic enough (and a day or two of pretty steady using is enough), you no longer have the physical capability to feel good.

But you *do* have the means to get back to that oh-so-happy state.

Or so you think. That's where the trap lies. There's nothing like that first hit. You never can quite get back to it again, but its devastating pleasure drives you to keep looking for it, calling with the ultimate siren-like lure. And I followed the call for years, roaming South Philly looking for a hit.

In *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Bill Wilson, cofounder of the movement, wrote, "At certain times, the alcoholic cannot bring to mind, with sufficient force, the devastation caused by that first drink." Wilson was aiming at the guy who would think for some reason that this time it would not get him.

For more than 20 years, I drank with that illusion. I didn't drink all the time — but when I did, it was acute. About 20 percent of the time, I'd black out. A little less than 10 percent of the time, I'd wake up in a jail cell or a gutter or a bed wet from my own urine.

Wilson's description not only fits my alcoholism but also exactly fits the type of crack addict I was — the type most of us crack addicts are pretty much. There is no illusion of control with the pipe. I know how every load ends: the "scitzin' " (periods of schizophrenic behavior), the crawling on the carpet cursing pieces of lint I thought might be fallen slivers of coke, the draining bank account, the "load" (the period of deep, continual addiction) lasting until all access to the substance was gone (i.e., until I was totally broke).

I knew all this, and yet back I went again and again. I was five years in recovery when the worst 10-month load of my life occurred — that was only two years ago. For the heroin addict, the same monumental illogic applies. He knows the devastating pain that will be involved with "kicking" — and yet he picks up again. And he kicks again — or else he keeps using until....

Point is, I've known way too many who went back out and ended up lifeless needle-in-arm heaps on a bathroom, hit-house or abandoned building floor. Way too many.

And so what is the answer? Well, in a chapter exactly titled "There Is a Solution," Wilson accurately describes that the alcoholic (or the addict) suffers from a "lack of power" when it comes to being able to make the decision not to pick up that first drink. (And we can extrapolate that to the first hit.) He tells us that power must come from a Higher Source. Eventually, he calls it God. Literally millions of alcoholics and addicts have followed his 12-step method of connecting with this Higher Power and recovering.

The incidence of recovery is, however, way down in contemporary 12-step programs. In today's secular age, the notion of a Higher Power seems passe. We look for drugs, counseling, behavior modification — anything to stay away from the dreaded G-word. And yet from where I sit, with this crack thing, this death-defying demon, never has there been more of a need for reliance on a power greater than oneself to survive. That certainly was the case with me.

Kids growing up in essentially godless households turn to the fun and freedom of "ecstasy" because they've learned that this world is all that matters. They turn on the tube and are inundated with looking and feeling good. I hope they somehow learn otherwise, before it is too late.

Jim McGovern is a writer and a student at the University of Pennsylvania.

Racial views in military reflect need for listening

By Clarence Page

Whites and minorities in uniform offer strikingly different views of race relations in the military, according to the largest survey of racial attitudes ever conducted within the armed forces.

Surprised? Since the military often is seen as a model of racial cooperation, many will be shocked by this report.

But I would bet that a similar survey of workers in just about any corporation or university in the country would produce similar results.

Across the country, I have found corporate and university professionals who are fearful to speak their minds about race. Whites, in many cases, fear being labeled "politically incorrect," while blacks fear that complaining about racism will hurt their careers.

Despite the military's record for equalizing opportunity, it has not achieved racial utopia. But, after centuries of segregation, it has done better than the rest of American society, particularly since the mid-1960s, and has offered some lessons for the civilian world.

In their 1996 book, *All That We Can Be*, a study of race relations in the Army, Charles Moskos and John S. Butler offer this as "lesson one" about the Army's race record: "Blacks and whites will not view race relations the same way. Blacks consistently take a dimmer view of racial matters than whites."

The same is true for blacks and whites in the civilian world. For example, the congressionally mandated survey of more than 40,000 service members found that three-quarters of all nonwhites in uniform complained that they had experienced racially offensive behavior. Fewer than half expressed confidence that complaints of discrimination are thoroughly investigated.

Whites took a generally positive view of race relations in the services.

That gap is not much different from the Washington Post-ABC News poll in 1997 that found 44 percent of blacks, but only 17 percent of whites, believed blacks faced "a lot" of discrimination in America.

Newspapers, for example, that have surveyed their own staffs (in keeping with our tradition as one of the most self-examining professions in America) have found a surprising number of blacks and whites who feel they are not getting a fair shake because of their race.

Examining race in a Pulitzer-winning 1993 report, the Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal found that its own black journalists saw the deck as stacked against them — even though their publisher was black. White staffers, by contrast, felt blacks and black issues received special treatment and consideration. The report found that racial anxiety among whites seemed even higher than it was among blacks.

Reached by telephone at Northwestern University, where he is a sociology professor and expert on military personnel matters, Moskos responded to the new study with a big "So what?" Racial attitudes in the military, he observed, are less important than racial performance. For one thing, racial attitudes of black and white soldiers were more favorable than those of Northwestern University freshmen, according to a study Moskos conducted several years ago.

For another, "the Army is one of the few institutions in American society where blacks routinely boss whites around," he said. "I would prefer a situation like the Army, say, with white racists and black leaders, than a university where there are no open racists and few black leaders."

The endurance of difference in racial attitudes in the military should serve as a warning sign to the rest of us. Beneath our surface tranquillity, a caldron of racial resentment boils. The best way for us to deal with it is openly and forthrightly.

We should all be as candid and self-examining as the military's new report appears to be. Liberals need to be less defensive about differences in racial attitudes, and conservatives need to be more willing to spend time and money to bring about true equality of opportunity.

Most of all, we need to lecture to each other across racial lines a little less and listen a little more.

Clarence Page is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

Romantic traditions can't hide the ugly legacy of the Romanovs

By Al Felzenberg

One need not have been a Bolshevik to have despised the Romanovs.

Since their execution 82 years ago, Czar Nicholas II and his wife, German-born princess (and granddaughter of Queen Victoria) and later Czarina Alexandra have been the subject of books, movies and exhibits (last spring's exhibit at Wilmington's First USA Riverfront Arts Center has departed for Mobile, Ala.). Romanticism, jewelry and Fabergé eggs! But save for Stalin and Hitler, it would be hard to conceive of a couple who did more to get this violent, war-torn century off on the wrong foot than this couple.

To varying degrees, we may lay at their door not only the two world wars that disfigured this century, but also its third scourge, the rise of Soviet-style communism.

Last year, Russian President Boris Yeltsin took time out from dismissing prime ministers and devaluing his currency to preside over a state funeral for the remains of Russia's last czar, Nicholas II; his consort wife Alexandra, and three of their five children. This was an odd triumph of sentiment over political reality. Why else would Yeltsin embrace a regime which (like his own) was plagued by incompetence, crony capitalism, corruption and ties of honor to Serbia?

Couples

Standout pairs who embody the 20th century

The story of Nicholas and Alexandra began with their coronation in 1896. Word spread that the royal duo would distribute souvenirs to favorites. Fifteen hundred of their subjects were trampled to death in the ensuing stampede. People called it Bloody Saturday. Nicholas demonstrated he felt the victims' pain by going to a ball.

Revolution broke out in 1905 when the czar's guards fired on a peaceful march to the Winter Palace on behalf of the starving masses. They called that one Bloody Sunday. Nicholas was not one for quiet, boring weekends.

The Romanovs received a wedding gift from the Jewish community of Kishinev. In return, Nicholas allowed his government to launch one of the bloodiest pogroms in history in that





very town. (Most of the civilized world, led by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, voiced outrage.)

If Nicholas encouraged the killing of Jews for sport, he likewise suppressed, for imperialism's sake, democratic yearnings for Poles, Ukrainians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and others unfortunate to live under his rule.

Nicholas hurt his kingdom most through his militaristic pretensions. His war with Japan went so badly that Roosevelt had to negotiate a settlement — in part to rescue Russia from humiliation. Roosevelt won the Nobel Prize, but the peace he brokered pushed Japan onto a militaristic course. Roosevelt's fifth cousin, FDR, would later feel its sting. (Thanks, Nicholas.)

To be sure, Nicholas had greater objectives than soothing Serbian feelings when he plunged his nation into a world war in 1915. His primary motive was to teach a lesson to his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, whom he had found "haughty" as a child. In this family spat, 1.7 million Russians were slaughtered and many more succumbed to starvation and disease.

Nicholas sealed his fate when he took direct command of the war. This alienated his high command and produced increased and needless casualties. Sensing an opportunity, the brat in Berlin smuggled back into Russia a troublesome intellectual who had been making Marxist mutterings about revolution. He went by the name of Lenin.

The last of the czars could not have failed so gloriously without help. He received plenty from his wife, who was also his primary political adviser and military strategist. She received her training at the hand of Rasputin, who had gotten into her good graces by soothing the suffering of her hemophiliac son, the heir to the Russian throne.

Nicholas and Alexandra seemed the only ones in their kingdom not to notice or care that Rasputin spent the rest of his time in drunken orgies. No Hollywood director could have produced a set so ripe for revolution — bloody, wasteful, leading to the murder of the czar, the czarina, their children, and the old Russia, allowing communism to take root for 72 years.

Any kind words? We could say that by most accounts they showed love for their family. But as history proves too often, wholesome family ties don't always make for good leaders. Rest in peace.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures on the American presidency.

Tomorrow: Acel Moore takes "The Urban Perspective"; "Alarms and Diversions" with David Boldt.

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