

DON'T GET TRAPPED

BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN

One teenage girl who was imprisoned by drug addiction now knows what it means to be truly free.

One girl's curiosity about drugs and alcohol led to three years of drug use and broken relationships. She had gone looking for freedom but instead found herself caught in a destructive addiction.

Seventeen-year-old Becky* wasn't looking for trouble, she was looking for freedom—freedom to make her own decisions.

But just one afternoon sampling drugs led to a three-year roller coaster ride of serious drug use, time in a treatment facility, and broken family relationships. When Becky went looking for freedom, instead she found addiction and destruction.

Becky is now in her third phase of recovery and has begun to patch up the broken areas of her life. But it hasn't been easy.

Today, Becky talks openly about her experience in hopes that she can help others learn from her destructive habits. "Realize what you are giving up," she advises other teens. "Your beliefs, your morals, your whole life basically. Drugs take away your life, they really do."

The Word of Wisdom, which counsels members to refrain from alcohol, tobacco, hot drinks, and other harmful substances, may appear to limit a person's personal agency, but really the opposite is true.

As Doug LeCheminant of LDS Family Services points out, "One of the most

* Name has been changed

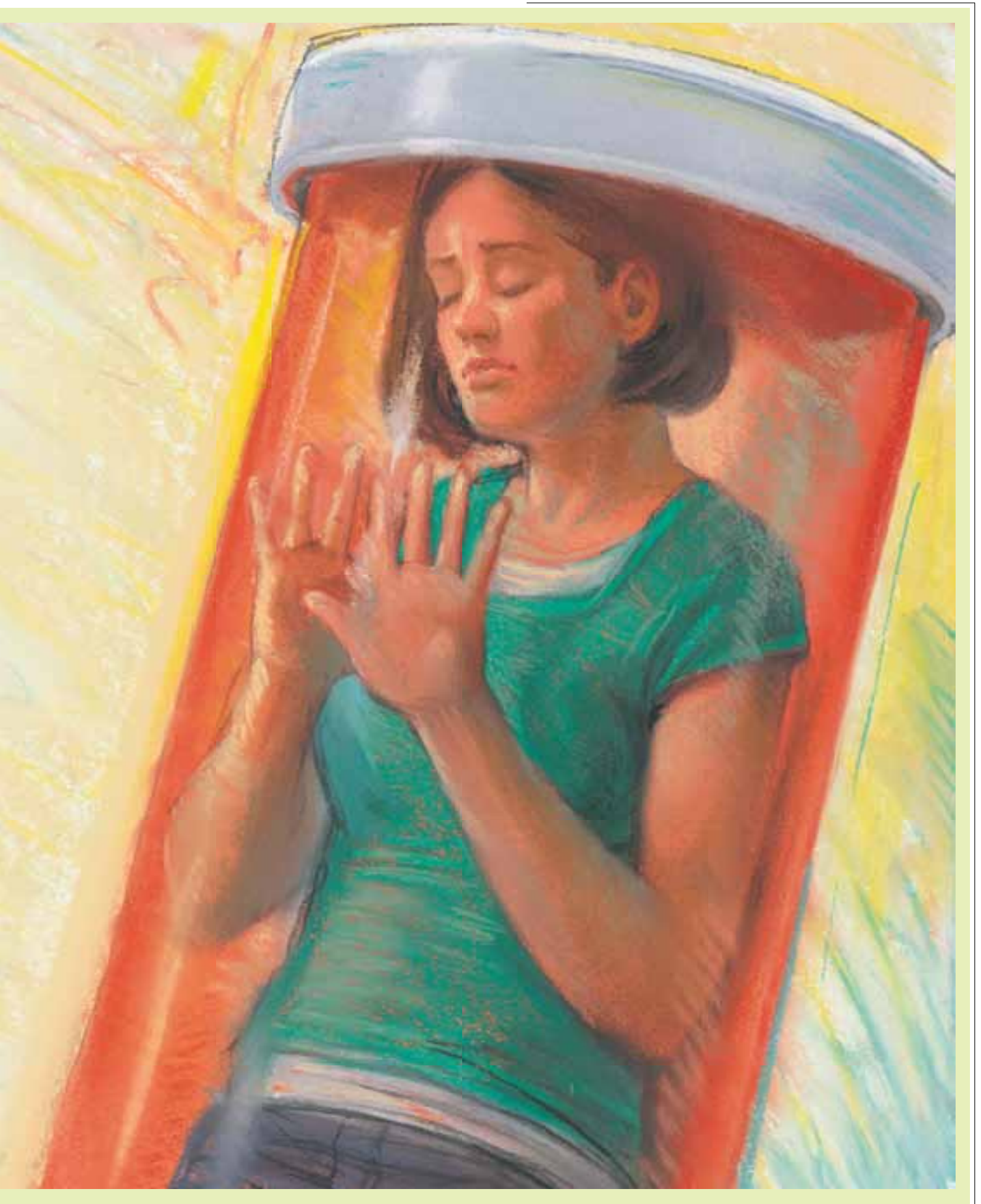
dangerous effects of alcohol and other substances is that they block the channel to the Holy Ghost." When you make the decision not to drink alcohol or use drugs, you are really saying, "I choose to keep the Spirit with me always." It is in this way that we have more freedom—freedom to feel the guidance of the Holy Ghost, freedom against deception, and freedom from addiction.

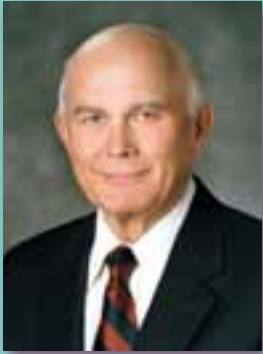
But understanding the damaging spiritual effects of drugs and alcohol is only the first step to keeping it out of your life. Today, no matter where you live, drug and alcohol use is growing more common among teenagers. But there are things you can do, everyday, to exercise your agency and live a life free from addiction.

Choose to Study Your Scriptures and Pray

People call it a "seminary answer," but those who practice it know that the best defense you will ever have against deception will be to create pathways of guidance for yourself through scripture study, prayer, and church attendance.

Through prayer and scripture study, you will feel renewed energy at each critical turn in your life. When you look at some of your





SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

The Holy Ghost will protect us against being deceived, but to realize that wonderful blessing we must always do the things necessary to retain that Spirit. . . . Specifically, we should avoid pornography, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and always, always avoid violations of the law of chastity. We must never take things into our bodies or do things with our bodies that drive away the Spirit of the Lord and leave us without our spiritual protection against deception.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Be Not Deceived,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 43.

friends and it seems like they are enjoying themselves without boundaries, prayer will help you to realize that you are not alone.

There are millions of people all over the world with your same standards, persevering just like you are. After earnestly studying your scriptures, pray to Heavenly Father and ask specifically for support in areas where you may need it.

Choose to Control Your Thoughts

Becky admits that her curiosity to experiment with drugs and alcohol partly began with negative thoughts about herself. “I didn’t think very highly of myself,” she says. “I thought I was a burden to everyone else in my life.”

Although it is normal to have negative thoughts once in awhile, it is what you decide to do about those feelings that will ultimately make the difference. Allowing those negative thoughts to reside will dampen your feelings of self-worth.

Today, Becky uses a method she learned at her treatment center to counter such thoughts. When you have a negative thought, you challenge that thought, and you say three good things about yourself. This is something anyone can do to avoid destructive feelings.

Also, try focusing on service. Serving others is one of the best ways to counter negative feelings. When you forget about yourself and serve others, something changes inside of you, and you feel really good. Above all, always remind yourself that you are a spirit son or daughter of our Heavenly Father, who knows and loves you.

Choose Good Activities

Find good, uplifting activities, and stick to them. How we choose to spend our time and whom we choose to spend our time with will have an enormous impact on the decisions we make.

Another factor that led Becky to her decision to use drugs was simply that she had too much time on her hands. She was bored, and so she grew curious. “Do something better with your time,” she says. “I wasn’t doing anything. I didn’t have any hobbies; I didn’t participate in any after-school clubs.”

The activities you decide to participate in will determine the people whom you generally associate with. Becky admits, “Your friends matter so much! If I hadn’t been friends with the people I was friends with, I probably would have never tried using drugs.”

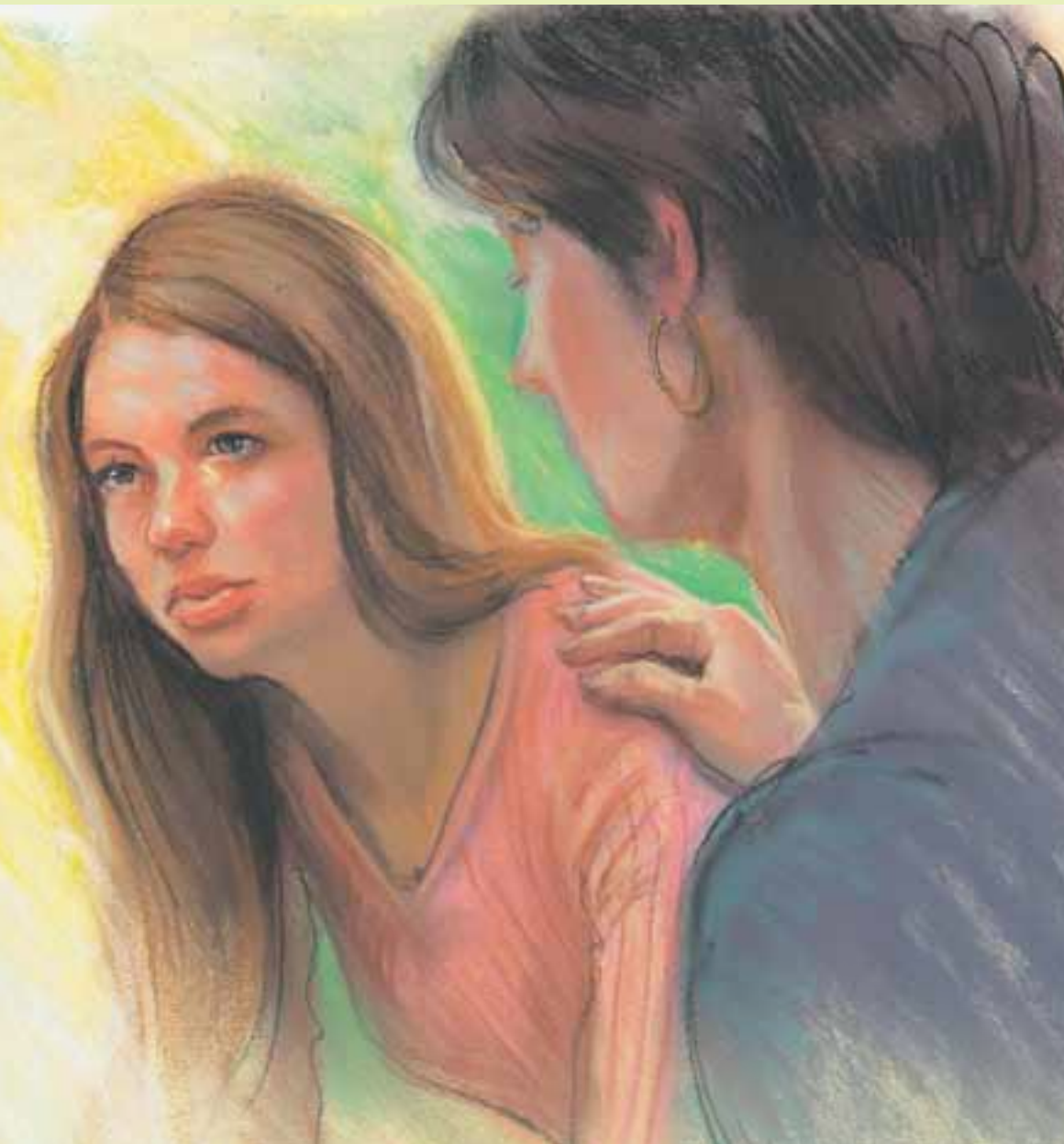
Attend church and Mutual activities, and work on goals for Personal Progress or Duty to God. If you are good at sports, become your best. If you enjoy art, create beauty. If there is a particular subject in school you enjoy, join a club and excel. You might even get a part-time job. There is always a way to participate in what you enjoy and create a full life for yourself.

Choose Now

It will make your decision that much easier if you decide right now how you will respond to someone who approaches you with drugs or alcohol. Remember, you are in control of your life, and you have the freedom to decide how much influence another person has over you.

Dr. Glen Hanson, director of the Utah Addiction Center and a senior adviser for the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health, advises teens to write down scenarios where it may be more difficult to resist peer pressure. Write these situations down and then stay away from them. “It’s like looking over the edge of a cliff,” he says. “You’ll never know if a piece of the cliff will break off or not. It is just best not to go there.”

It may also be helpful to write down your responses to different scenarios. Whether or



Addiction is a downward spiral, but parents, leaders, and others can offer support and help on the way up.

not you have already been confronted, try talking to a parent, sibling, or Church leader about their ideas. This will help you to feel more confident and capable if someone approaches you.

The Word of Wisdom was designed to grant us freedom. Although it may appear somewhat limiting, these “limitations” allow us to exercise true agency.

Can you imagine what it would be like to play a sports game without any rules? What if every time a person played soccer there were no rules to govern how the game should be played? It would be utter chaos,

no one would play their best, and no one would enjoy it.

It is the same with agency and the Word of Wisdom. The law offers you blessings (see D&C 89:18–20) and the freedom to feel the Spirit and, therefore, discover your true potential.

You always have a choice. Remember, the beautiful thing about the plan of salvation is that you always have the opportunity to exercise your agency regardless of the situation. You know what is best. Choose freedom. **NE**