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LifeLine
MANCHESTER
101-103 OLDHAM STREET, MANCHESTER, M4 1LW
TEL: 0161- 839 2054

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LIFELINE PUBLICATIONS PRESENT

The METHADONE DIARY

One woman's experience of methadone withdrawal

Day: 1

My name is Jan. I have just turned thirty three and have been on methadone for six months.
Before that I was a heroin user.

It was Sunday. I got up and looked at the bottle of green liquid on the kitchen work top. "No. Not another day". I hate this medicine. I can't enjoy sex when I have it. I'm constipated beyond belief and I'm lucky if I go to the toilet once a week. I don't laugh any more just cry when the medicine wears off. I picked up the bottle. I'd reduced myself over the last two weeks to 20ml a day. I got the measuring jug out to measure my 20ml. Then something inside me said, **"well if you're sick of it why don't you stop. Just kick the habit "?** I put the medicine and the measuring jug into a plastic bag and hid them in a secret pocket in my handbag. I was very quiet all day.

That night I lay on the settee with my boyfriend Frank. He was also on methadone. We'd got a habit together when someone local had started dealing a bit of smack. My legs were hurting a bit. I looked at him, his eyes 'pinned' from the meth, that sad look a person has when they are stoned. The mouth seems to turn downward at the corners. Methadone numbs all your physical and emotional feelings. When you laugh it is only half heartedly, when you say you feel sorry it comes from your mouth not from your heart. You try to imagine what other people feel like, but you just can't because you don't know how to anymore. Sex was another terrible thing. You acted it out most of the time, but when you're both feeling the same it's hard to see just how different you are from other people, so you think you're okay. We would still have orgasms but only when one dose of meth had worn off and you were able to catch one another feeling horny. That, for me, was the best thing about the meth, when it had worn off. I knew I didn't want to be like that for the rest of my life. Frank asked me what I was looking at. "Nothing" I told him "I just love you". I could feel my emotions stirring up. I was sad for the state we were in and angry with the guy for selling the gear to start with. Life seemed so confusing. My body was burning up and I had aches and pains in my toes, legs, arms and fingers. I could have some meth and that would take it away. "No", I thought, "I am not having that ever again". "What's wrong with you?" asked Frank. " I haven't taken my meth today. I've been telling you for weeks I hate the stuff. I've ballooned by a stone and a half and I have no confidence. I don't want it anymore, I want to be normal like everyone else". "Good girl", he told me "I'll look after you, because you know it will be hard".

Day: 4

That night I was ready for it. I knew from the last two days I wouldn't get much sleep so I got myself a video. Sure enough, 2.30am I was up again. Not to worry, this was what I had to go through if I wanted off it. The high temperature was still there and my hands and feet were hot. I was eating yoghurts and ice cream all the time to try to cool the burning in my throat. The shivers were amazing. You wouldn't believe your goose pimples could stand up so big. My breasts would hurt as they touched my clothes. It was a horrible sensation. It started with stomach cramps, now they were very sudden and I could feel my bowels move just as suddenly. I'd have to run to the toilet as if I had food poisoning. I did manage to nod off while wiggling my legs. The next thing I was waking up. I was having an orgasm, a big orgasm. This was at 7.15am. By 7.25am I'd had four more. I wasn't frightened. I knew these things would have to happen for my body to get right. I couldn't get back to sleep, so I decided to get up. I had to go to work that day. I work in a very busy chicken and chip shop from 11am till 7pm, three days a week. My shifts this week were Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I knew I could rest on my days off. The girls at work are a great bunch, always laughing and carrying on. A couple of them know what I do. The others don't, but have mentioned that I had changed a lot lately, but that was as far as it went. I didn't speak much to anyone that day. I couldn't be bothered, but I did manage to do my work without anyone noticing anything. I had the pains and shivers all day but managed to hold back the tears when I was feeling sorry for myself. I was glad when it was time to go home so that I could sit down and rest.

Day: 6

The pains seemed worse today shooting through my toes and fingers, even the bones in my face were beginning to hurt now. Each day seemed to be getting harder not easier. I began wondering how long things were

going to last and if I could carry on anymore. So I thought I would make myself a little chart of each day like you see the men doing on T.V. when they're in jail. I did five strokes for the past five days but only half a stroke for today because I hadn't really done it yet. My legs and arms ached as I walked up stairs. I cried all the way through getting ready for work thinking it can't go on much longer, not like this, it must get easier soon. At work I was very quiet again. I just got on with what I had to do. The girls were laughing at something. I joined in, but I couldn't control my laugh. It hurt but I couldn't stop. My eyes were streaming with tears. I told myself I was on the road to recovery. The laughter turned to real tears, but I couldn't let anyone see these tears or they'd think I was crazy. All the change of moods and feelings I was experiencing were all so scary, but what could I do? Only go with them if I wanted to be like everyone else.

I needed to talk to someone, so I decided to tell my friend Ruth. I was close to her. I just needed to hear someone say I was doing well. She wasn't at all surprised but she did give me all the encouragement I needed. "Come on, it will be worth it in the end, you'll see" she would say. Monday was my day for picking up my prescription for the methadone. I decided I'd better call the surgery and tell them what I was intending to do. The receptionist obviously knew more than I did. "No, Jan you can't just do it like that. It will be too sudden. You must come and see the doctor".

When I got to the doctors, I explained everything. He said I had a good attitude and asked what was the worst thing, my emotions, the pains or the sleepless nights. I couldn't pick one- they were all as bad as each other. He offered me something to help all three. At first I refused, God knows why. I think I felt that if I took anything I'd have failed - I was coping. I asked how long he thought this would last. Three weeks he said. My eyes nearly fell out of my head. Three weeks just seemed too long to be feeling like this, so I ended up with a prescription for sleeping pills.

I met Frank in town and we got the bus home. I sat on a seat next to the heater to keep warm and try to keep the shivers away. It was term time and the bus was very busy. On top of all that there were road-works, so the bus journey that would have normally taken 15 minutes was taking ages. I could feel myself getting too hot. I couldn't breath. I was starting to panic. I just wanted to get off the bus and run. I had to get moving. I knew I couldn't loose it on the bus and show myself up. Frank was trying to talk to me to keep me calm. I couldn't concentrate on listening to him, I just kept looking out of the window and taking deep breaths. I was scared, very scared. Our stop eventually came. I couldn't get off fast enough. It was great to be outside in the cold fresh air. "I can't do it Frank. This is as much as I can take. I need help". I picked up the phone and called a few friends who had been in similar positions but all they would say was "just take a few ml's of meth, you'll calm down. You're trying to do it all too fast". I hated them all. How could they tell me to take that stuff again. If I took it now then I would take it again tomorrow. I realised then that I was on my own. People cared but it had been my decision to do it this way and I had to get a grip of myself. I could phone a thousand people but it was down to me. I started to pace up and down with my head in my hands. I hated myself. That was the worst bit. I couldn't lash out and blame anyone because I'd done it all to myself. I could have pulled the house down with my bare hands. I had that much rage running through me I just wanted to pull off my legs. I took a bath to try to calm down but all I did was cry. I didn't want anyone to be there. I just wanted to sob my heart out. I had to get rid of all this anxiety. It took me about four hours to calm down. I was quite embarrassed about the way I'd behaved. I was exhausted. I was sure I'd sleep that night. We went to bed around 10.30pm. By 1.30am, there I was, wide awake again.

I got to the chemist about 9.30 am. He had my prescription ready. I'd been given sleeping pills but only fourteen. I was happy with that. At least I'd get to sleep at night. I had a few pounds to spend so I went into town. I thought I would treat myself for the horrible week I'd had but I found that when I got into town I couldn't even walk. I felt as if I wasn't there. I can't explain it but I just couldn't look round the shops. I had to get a taxi and get home fast. I needed Frank but he was at work. When I got home I couldn't believe it, workmen were working on my house, drilling holes into the walls. I got in and shut the door. I was a wreck. I just sat on the chair near the fire and sobbed my heart out. I just couldn't face the rest of the day. I took two of the sleeping pills the doctor had given me and lay on the settee with a quilt over me, burying my head under it to make the sound of the drilling go away. The next thing I knew it was 6.30pm. I must have slept soundly for about five hours. I still felt very drowsy and I was slurring my words but I had no pain or churning in my stomach for

the first time in a week. It was great. I just laid there all night and watched T.V. We laughed at how I'd slept through all the drilling. Frank was great, he did everything for me. All the house work and ironing etc, that's what I needed. I could never have done all that.

I had fourteen strokes on my chart now. I felt great. I wanted to go out for a drink at lunch time to see what it would be like to be out with people socialising. I hadn't been out drinking and mixing with people for about a year. I just wanted to know if I could handle it or maybe I just wanted to be out of the house. I don't know. Frank was off work, so I asked him if we could go to the pub for a drink at lunch time. He didn't agree. "No, I think you'll be rushing things. I think you should be taking things easy" he said. "Oh, is that right! you can't even try to stop the meth. Who do you think you are to advise me".
I'd snapped again. I was screaming abuse at him, throwing things around the house. "Come on", I shouted, "you do it. You stop taking your medicine and see if you want to sit in this fucking house every day". I ran down stairs, got his medicine and poured it down the sink. "Now we'll both stay in feeling mental". He wasn't nasty. He just watched as I fell on to the chair exhausted from my rage. I just cried and cried. Frank left me on my own for a while. I think that was the best thing to do. Eventually he told me to get myself ready, we would go out. We didn't speak much while I got dressed. I wanted to ask him to fasten my shoe lace because I couldn't bend down but I felt ashamed at being unable to do such a little thing. I had to make myself do it. In the pub things were pretty much the same as the last time I'd been in. You could see people surprised to see me and Frank out. We'd been away for so long, but everyone was nice and the lunch time went well. Frank was great. He held my hand all the while, this helped to reassure me. I am a pretty insecure person, something I never was in the past. As the lunchtime went on I could feel myself getting a bit tipsy. It felt so good. I was enjoying myself, so was Frank. Then came the big mistake. We went with the others to a restaurant for a bite to eat and carried on drinking all day.....

When I got up around 7am I started to remember what I'd done the night before and the fight with Frank. In a rage I'd got the scissors and cut some of Frank's clothes up and I'd tried to burn some of them on the cooker. I'd gone off my head. I felt like I was cracking up and I knew it was all because of the methadone. The pains didn't feel too bad just now but my nerves were shattered and my head wasn't much better. I rang the Drug Unit and spoke to a woman. She could obviously hear the state I was in and much to my surprise she did want to help. She seemed to care. I must have stayed on the phone for an hour or more but it helped. After I spoke to her I decided to phone Frank's doctor. I felt if we were to stay together we both had to do it now. I asked his doctor to reduce him from 50ml a day to 30ml a day straight away, as he was due his prescription that day. The doctor was very pleased with my request. We decided that Frank would do a week at 30ml and then 20ml, 10ml and 5ml. Now all I had to do was to tell Frank.

Frank came in and I started to tell him what I'd done with his doctor. I kept watching his face to see his reaction but thank God, he didn't mind. "That's okay. I can do it. I'm glad in a way. I don't really want to be on that forever". I was pleased but scared. I knew it was going to be hard but it was the only way out of this mess.

We went shopping, and as we walked around the supermarket something very strange started to happen. It was as if all the pains and anxiety hit me in a flash. I couldn't breath or walk - I was freaking out. I had to kneel on the floor. I was sweating and hyperventilating. It was horrible, I needed a doctor. I knew the sleeping pills I had filled myself with had worn off suddenly and all the withdrawals had come on full force. I got myself together and went to call the doctor.

As I looked round the house I could see the washing was piling up. I had to make myself drag it from the bedroom down to the washer. I even had to sit on the floor to push it into the washing machine. I cried all the time at the state I was in. How could I have let myself get so dependent on something? I was a disgrace. I was glad that I'd had the sense to get a sick note. I would never have been able to go to work. I knew now that I had stopped the methadone too suddenly, but I had come this far I couldn't go back now. All I could do was take each day as it came. I just kept thinking it couldn't get any harder. I managed till 8.30pm before I took two more pain killers. I made myself do the ironing. That wasn't too hard. All I had to do was stand up and move my arm. I was quite proud of myself when I'd done it. Frank got up around 8.00pm. He was working nights at the post office. I was having flashing thoughts of suicide so I was glad of the company. I kept telling myself these thoughts were part of it and that they were normal. I didn't tell anyone about them. I felt ashamed of such thoughts. Frank left for work at 11.00pm. I only had three sleeping pills left so I must have taken eleven of them in three days. I didn't care. I'd got through the days. I didn't care how I did it just as long as I did. I took two more that night and went to bed. I slept like a log.

I hadn't eaten a proper meal for over a week by now. No wonder I didn't have any energy. All I'd had was ice lollies or tinned fruit and cereals, anything that would cool my body down. My body was very heavy and mentally I was depressed. I hated everything. I found that when I was alone I could relax, but as soon as I had to speak to someone or think about going out and facing anyone I couldn't breath. I had to take deep breaths. I knew in my mind I'd moved on to a new stage and I also knew this was a good sign, but it was more frightening than the pains I felt. I could handle them. They were still there but this new feeling was strange. The thought of doing things scared me. My stomach would turn over as if something horrible was going to happen. I just kept telling myself it was just my feelings coming back. I hadn't had any real feelings for a long time.

7am. I got up. I felt okay - the pains were there shooting through my fingers and legs, but this was nothing compared with the last few weeks. I needed some shopping. I knew I had to go to town and I had to get the prescription from the doctors. I was still very weak but we needed food, so I got dressed very slowly, like I did everything. In the bathroom I accidentally caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I saw myself as I was for the first time. I couldn't believe it. The whites of my eyes were yellow and the skin around my eyes was yellow right down to my cheeks. I was a mess. I hated myself. I'd lost about a stone in weight, that was obvious. Even though the pains weren't as bad I looked and felt worse than I had before. I couldn't believe how long it was taking to go away. As I was going out of the door I realised my keys were not in my bag. I calmly started to look for them in all my coat pockets and all the places around the house where I might have left them. I went up and down the stairs twice. I could feel myself getting more and more angry. I had no patience at all. I knew I had to climb the stairs again. I looked at them. I couldn't. I had to make myself get mad to get back up the stairs. At the top I broke down again crying as I held my knee caps. It felt like they were going to fall out. I fell on the floor sobbing. I'd let myself get into this state for a set of keys. I was like an invalid on the floor. How long was it going to last? In the end I had to go to town and leave the door open. I didn't even care.

Saturday came, it was Bonfire night. A big row started between me and Frank. It died down just as fast as it

started, with just a few tears from me. We decided to go out together and both try our hardest to keep cool heads. Everything was going fine. It was a good atmosphere in the pub and we stayed friends all night. We just sat in a corner away from everyone. Then, all of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye I saw someone who was probably selling gear. I felt freezing. My goose pimples were standing up. I must admit I was craving for some as the night went on. I didn't say anything. I just took it for granted Frank was feeling the same as me. I suggested we get a bag to share. I don't know why. I just did. Much (very much) to my surprise Frank said "No way. We are going home for something to eat and bed". I knew he was right and I hated myself for even saying it. I thought about how long it had been since we'd had something. I had visions of myself overdosing if it was good gear. I didn't argue. We went home and I ate three meals. My appetite was back. I felt ashamed of what I'd said that night but I was grateful to Frank for not letting me do it.

The day went on pretty much the same as the others. I would try to do things like normal, but I didn't have the energy or the patience. I could handle the pains, they were fading slowly. It was the feelings of confusion in my head that was hard. Writing about it made me feel good and to read it made me see just how well I was doing. I began to think maybe I could write about it and let all the other people who were sick of taking methadone every day, that it was hard but it wasn't impossible to stop. I had nearly done it. I didn't think about drugs anymore. The methadone had seen to that. The fight had been so hard for me there was no way I could ever go back. I would never again have this strength and determination in my life. All I had to do now was get over the last stage, but I still didn't really know how long it was going to last. I had done twenty days. Good going eh? but I still hadn't beaten it. I was still very confused and weak. I felt lost. What was I going to with all the time I had? When you're stoned all you think about is being stoned. Well, I had to start changing my life and move in a different direction. This wasn't going to be easy but I could do it, slowly. I didn't feel like I wanted to rush out and get into things. I'd been through a hard time, even if it was my own fault.

I was on my fifth week now. I still felt strange at times but I'd been away quite a while. Five weeks isn't that long when you think of how long I'd been on the meth. I'd still get little panic attacks but nothing serious. One morning during the fifth week, I shot up to my sisters to talk. I could see she had her own problems. Mine weren't important anymore. While I was there one of the guys came in who took junk and meth. He'd been in jail over the weekend. He looked rough and he'd lost a lot of weight. My sister was obviously proud of me. She was telling him I was off the meth and doing alright. He turned to me and asked me "was it hard?" I could feel my lip trembling "Yes it was", I told him. "VERY". "How long have you done" he asked. "This is my fifth week I replied". "Nice one", he told me, "keep it up". Then he hit the nail on the head when he said, "I've heard of people kicking it but I haven't known anyone to actually stay off it, they usually go back eventually". I felt sick and scared. He was right. I knew that from the drug unit. Why wasn't there any advice or first hand proof that someone had done it?. Why couldn't anyone say to me, "well so and so has done it" or "a boy did it last year, it takes so long and you'll have to go through this and that". Nobody at the unit knew because nobody had ever gone back to tell them or maybe they had all gone back on to gear? I don't know. But his words stayed with me for days. As I went into my sixth week, I was feeling good and laughing with the girls at work just like I wanted to. Do I still have a problem? One day I realised it wasn't a problem it was just the memory of it all. It would always be there and it was the memory which was going to keep me away from drugs. Unfortunately, I hadn't been so successful with Frank. We had to split up, but I had got myself off the methadone and back into the real world. I can't waste time dwelling on it or feeling sorry about it. I've just got to get on with it.

There were times when I thought I'd have been better off dead, but I have done it and I'm grateful for the help I had. Good luck to anyone else who wants to try it. You've just got to remember:

..it's a fair fight just one to one (you and the methadone).