

Don't be seduced into thinking that that which does not make a profit is without value.

INSIGHT

Seven experiences of a uniquely evil drug

Heroin addicts who are now undergoing treatment tell us their stories

THE NARC REPORT

with Jarrod Cronje



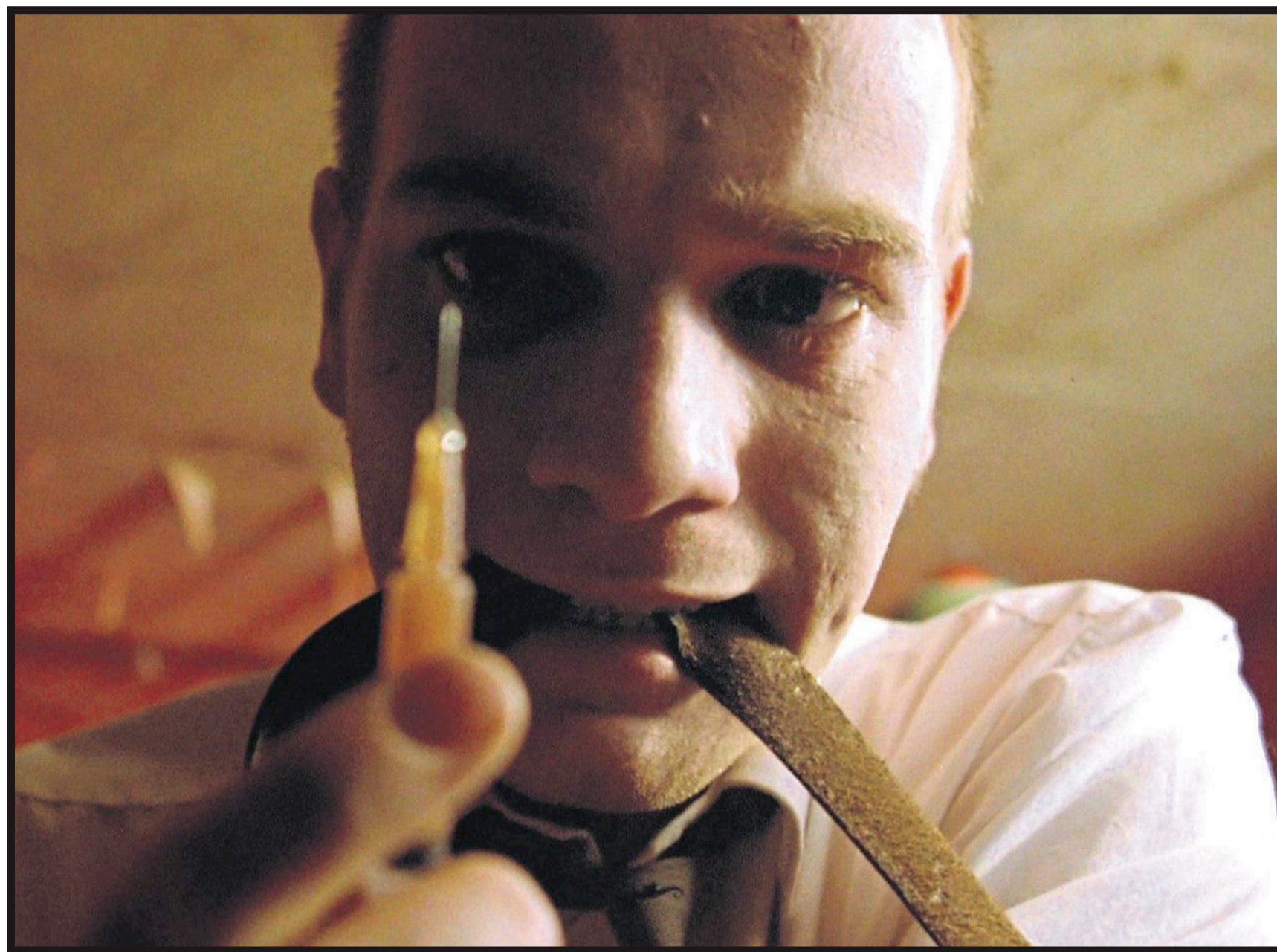
TODAY'S article is about the world's most deadly illegal street drug, heroin. Thankfully, I have not tried it and it almost feels as though anything I say will not do this topic enough justice, such is the nature of this uniquely evil drug. For those who have been there, you know of what I speak. So instead, I have asked seven recovering heroin addicts, currently in treatment at Harmony Retreat, to contribute a snapshot of their story.

They have all agreed to expose themselves here. It hasn't been easy for them. Draw strength from these seven brave and beautiful souls. This is as real as it gets.

"Dear Heroin. You promised me the world when we met. You were supposed to be the answer to my pain. But you ended up being the pain and caused everyone around me to hurt. Physical pain and emotional turmoil. You stole everything from me. If we were apart you made me sick, you made me beg, you made me depressed. You nearly cost me my life. If not for overdosing on you, I would try to take my life just to get away from you. You took the life and the light straight out of me. I will beat you, although every day is a struggle. Goodbye and good riddance!" Gareth (34).

"I have been grappling with the turmoil of heroin addiction for the past 10 years. At the age of 18, I was already abusing codeine, which is a synthetic derivative of morphine, and by the age of 20, I was using heroin in London. I was in my first rehab before my 21st birthday. I am now 29. The last 10 years of my life have been robbed from me, actually I robbed myself. The first time I used heroin it felt like everything would be okay, but very quickly everything fell apart, including my ambition, my vision and my life's purpose. My entire life was surrounded by the getting, using and maintaining of my addiction. Getting off heroin makes me feel alone, purposeless and powerless BUT through constant focus and development on myself, life is starting to fall back into place. Through recovery and the support and help of others, the light that was so dim and virtually out, is gradually getting brighter every day. Heroin robbed me at the very core. My foundation and character crumbled. I lost who I am and who I belong to, which apart from the intense physical addiction is the reason it's so difficult to stop. I can't wallow in the past anymore but I can remember these two questions: who am I? And whose am I? It's these two big questions that keep me focused on a new adventure, a re-creation of the new me." Stuart (29).

"Dear Heroin. You've been a part of my life for so long. I've tried to run away from you, hiding in so many ways and in so many places. But I always fell back into your sticky web where you happily accepted me and wrapped me in your misery, pain and emptiness. You became my God, my everything. I would even kill for you without thinking twice. You've taken everything from me. My self-worth, my life, my family, my friends. Good people around me died because of you. All I'm left with is a big black hole filled with emptiness. You've broken me into so many pieces that I can't even count them. Where are you to help me put myself back together? You were only there to take, never to give! I know if I don't kill my love for you and your love for me I'm going to die without question. What a way to die. You've taken me to the darkest, emptiest places. For what? That's



Ewan McGregor in a scene from *Trainspotting*. One recovering addict, currently in treatment at Harmony Retreat, explains what heroin addiction is like: 'Eventually, I cut everyone off and lost those I loved the most. Heroin became my life, my lover, my soulmate. I lived day to day in panic until the next hit. Panic, hit. Panic, hit. Panic, hit.' PHOTO: SUPPLIED

not love! Our love for each other has to end because you are going to kill me otherwise. I have to end this. I know you don't want to end this but I can't carry on. I have to turn around and walk away, my love, my God. I'm choosing a new God and that's the true and only God. It took me so long to realise it but I can feel in my heart it's the right thing to do. So heroin, I wish you well. I can't anymore. I have nothing left to give you and God is the only one who can put back what you've taken. So, my best friend and lover, good bye. I'm choosing a different way. I know it's not going to be easy but at the end, at least, it will be worth it — the complete opposite to you!" Rudy (35).

"Heroin will catch a hold of you and get you addicted so fast you won't even notice it. Once you are there you will do anything to get hold of it. It changes who you are. This monster called heroin creates a liar and a thief. You build up tolerance so you need more to feel the effect, then you need more and more just to feel normal! You get very sick; bone-crushing pain in your legs and back, hot and cold sweats, shakes, insomnia and cramps. Mentally and physically it becomes the fight of your life. You fight to stay alive. Heroin will become your first and only priority. It will run your life, then ruin your life. One day, hopefully, you will realise that you have a problem. You realise that you need serious professional help. I am so happy I have realised that now. It's great to be honest and loyal again. I feel strong and healthy again, accepted by people. There is such a beautiful life out there." Brian (34).

"I lived to use, and used to live. Heroin was my first true love but the most destructive relationship I ever stumbled into. When I first met heroin it was a life-changing experience — all my troubles, anxieties and fears melted away immediately. I felt reborn and was positive that this was the way I was supposed to feel. I felt complete in my room, tomb and womb. Eventually, I cut everyone off and lost those I loved the most. Heroin became my life, my lover, my soul mate. I lived day to day in panic until the next hit. Panic, hit. Panic, hit. All moral values that were once intrinsic to me were replaced by my ultimate love and desperate need for heroin. I have done things I am ashamed of. I have sold my body, stolen, stripped, allowed myself to be beaten, been arrested, spent time in jail, and the worst thing about it is that heroin numbed it all. I have struggled with heroin for over half of my life. The sad thing is that once the 'dragon' lured me into his lair, he fought for my soul. He still fights for me today. If you choose to meet him, he'll fight for you too." Sarah (34) (not her real name).

"I am a recovering heroin addict. I have been using drugs for 15 years. My heroin addiction was the end of my life as I knew it. I had nobody left beside me. I lost my friends, family and my son, everything that ever mattered to me. Heroin was my God. I did whatever I had to, just to get the next fix. It didn't matter who I stole from, lied to or manipulated. I had to have more, just to stop the pain from the withdrawals. Only once I ended up on the streets with nothing

but the clothes on my back, did I see I was in trouble. Only then, when all was gone, did I seek help." Zayne (26).

"Heroin was my everything and my best friend, so I thought ... I wanted that feeling it gave me in the beginning. Then that want became a need, and it took and took until there was nothing left. Heroin robbed me until I was a broken man. Shattered. Alone. No reason to live. I became a thief who didn't care about hurting others. I had to get my heroin, no matter what the cost was. I should have died or been locked up many times on account of the chaos I created with my friend, heroin. But today, I stand here, fighting for who I am. Fighting for my life back. It's going to be a long journey, but as long as I stand in God's truth and apply all the coping skills I am learning here at Harmony, I will overcome this. I will conquer. I will chase this friend, this foe, away." Adam (23).

There are very few heroin addicts who start out using heroin as their "gateway drug". All of the users above were poly-substance abusers, which means they have tried most drugs. But heroin sits at the pinnacle of their "scale", so to speak. Nothing is quite the same unless they

are using heroin. By this stage, addiction is entrenched and recovery is therefore very tough. Heroin is available everywhere. A "straw" of heroin can cost as little as R20 in Maritzburg. It's even on the streets here in Greytown. So don't be fooled. The new Whoonga/wunga/nyaope contains heroin too, but I'll talk about this drug in the coming weeks.

Do not be disheartened. I know all this information is hard to swallow and it's scary knowing that you and your family are exposed to these evils. But it is how we respond to it that matters. Change can happen for the better.

There is enough love to smother the fear, but it means we have to change the way we do things.

See you again in two weeks.

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• This article contains vital information on drug and alcohol abuse. It takes courage to confront these issues so I encourage you to take the time to read through this series carefully. What questions do you have? What problems are you facing? Are you a concerned parent? Are you a school in need of a drug prevention strategy? Do you need help? Break the denial and make contact with me.

Choose contentment over the futile pursuit of happiness

SIDNEY BLOCH

I WANT to share a personal view of what it is to be happy and how it differs from feeling content. Let me begin with a clinical story.

They met at a party and it was love at first sight. They married, and since they shared an eagerness to raise a family, Jennifer soon announced the news of her pregnancy. They called their baby Annie after Adam's late mother. They felt blessed. Every moment since their first encounter had been nothing but pleasurable. Everyone who knew them concurred that they were replete with happiness.

Tragically, it was not to endure. Their first setback occurred only days after Annie's birth. She was sleeping fitfully and her colic stubbornly persisted. Jennifer felt utterly demoralised as a new mother. Her mounting sense of guilt and melancholy led to her admission to a psychiatric ward (her first encounter with psychiatry). The fear of her harming Annie or herself spread through the family and circle of friends.

And then, quite shockingly, Jennifer met her death after jumping off a second-floor balcony. Her family and friends plunged into deep grief. The medical professionals who had looked after her were similarly bereft.

Having worked as a psychiatrist for over four decades and got to know many people of diverse backgrounds and with unique life stories, I have witnessed many a sad narrative, although suicide has mercifully been a rare event.

"... clinging to the fiction of being able to avoid suffering and enjoy a continuing state of pleasure is tantamount to self-deception."

These experiences, and a lifelong fascination with what makes people tick, have led me most reluctantly to the judgment that while we may savour happiness episodically, it will invariably be disrupted by unwelcome negative feelings. Still, most of humankind will continue to harbour the expectation of living happily and remain oblivious that this wishful fantasy is an unconscious way of warding off the threat of psychic pain.

Rather than confront and demoralise those who have sought my help, I have gently but honestly responded to their plaintive yearning ("all I want is just to be happy"), by highlighting an inherent human sentiment. Namely that clinging to the fiction of being able to avoid suffering and enjoy a continuing state of pleasure is tantamount to self-deception.

I have offered them the hope, but not a guarantee, that they have the potential to lead a more fulfilling life than hitherto by participating in a challenging, and at times even distressing process of self-exploration, the purpose of which is to enhance self-understanding and acceptance of the reality bound emotional state

I call contentment.

You may retort: "But you treat people who are miserable, pessimistic and self-deprecating, surely you must be hopelessly biased."

I would readily understand your reaction but suggest that all of us, not just those in treatment, crave happiness and are repeatedly frustrated by its elusiveness.

As the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud emphasised in his 1930 essay *Civilisation and Its Discontents* that we are much more vulnerable to unhappiness than its opposite. That's because we are constantly threatened by three forces: the fragility of our physical self, "doomed" by ageing and disease; the external world, with its potential to destroy us (through floods, fires, storms and earthquakes, for example); and our unpredictably complicated relationships with other people (regarded by Freud as the most painful source of unhappiness).

So, am I simply a misanthrope? I hope not but I am inclined to agree with Elbert Hubbard, the American artist and philosopher, who said: "Life is just one damn thing after another." Given the formidable obstacles to chasing

after happiness or promoting its sustainability, what options do human beings have? I have not come across any meaningful approach to this question.

So, I espouse the following: given that we have the means to distinguish between happiness and contentment, we can examine how they differ and, in so doing, identify an alternative to the futile pursuit of happiness.

Happiness, derived from the Norse word *hap*, means luck or chance; the phrase happy-go-lucky illustrates the association. Many Indo-European languages similarly conflate the feeling of happiness and luck. *Glück* in German, for instance, can be translated as either happiness or chance, while *εθλια*, the Greek word for happiness, is derived from *ef*, meaning good, and *tixi*, luck or chance.

Thus, a mother may have the good fortune to feel ecstatic when responding to her infant's playfulness, only to see it evaporate a couple of years later and be replaced by the features of autism. In the story I started this article with, Jennifer may have persevered had her baby slept peacefully and not been assailed by colicky pain

in her first few weeks of life.

Contentment is derived from the Latin *contentus* and usually translated as satisfied. No multiple meanings here to confuse us. In my view, feeling content refers to a deep-seated abiding acceptance of one's self and one's worth, together with a sense of self-fulfilment, meaning and purpose.

And, most critically, these assets are valued and nurtured whatever the circumstances, or even especially when they are distressing or depressing.

I have had the privilege of knowing men and women who suffered grievously as children in the ghettos and concentration camps of Nazi Europe but emerged from their nightmare to face the challenge of seeking strengths, emotional and spiritual, within themselves. With the passage of time, many succeeded in achieving a sense of deep-seated contentment.

What these survivors have clearly demonstrated is that accepting and respecting oneself, coupled with determining what is personally meaningful, stand a greater chance of accomplishment, even if never completed, than a relentless and futile pursuit of happiness. What's more, contentment has the potential to serve as a robust foundation upon which episodes of joy and pleasure can be experienced and cherished. — The Conversation.

(<https://theconversation.com/au>)
• Sidney Bloch is emeritus professor in psychiatry at the University of Melbourne.

Volunteer tourism 'needs regulation'

RAPID growth in the multi-billion dollar volunteer tourism industry has prompted calls for tighter controls with concerns over exposing vulnerable communities to unskilled foreign labour and dodgy operators exploiting foreigners for profit.

Voluntourism, which allows socially conscious holiday-makers to pay thousands of dollars to work in poor communities across South America, Asia and Africa, has become a boom sector of the global travel industry.

Estimates of its size vary widely. Nancy Gard McGehee, an expert on sustainable tourism at Virginia Tech in the U.S., said as many as 10 million volunteers a year are spending up to \$2 billion on the opportunity to travel with a purpose.

Carnival Corp., the world's largest cruise operator, this month announced a "social impact" cruise that allows travellers to take part in three days of volunteering.

But with no industry regulator, campaigners within the sector are concerned about the rising numbers of companies involved, with no mechanism to hold them to account for the work that they do.

"One of the challenges facing people wishing to volunteer responsibly is that there is no independent quality standard, no recognised regulatory body," said Simon Hare of British charity Globalteer.

"There are small local outfits as well as big corporations that see volunteering as a way of driving profits rather than as an integral part of a long-term strategy for communities with real needs. At best, this can make volunteering a waste of time and at worst it can actually be harmful."

Critics warn that the lack of oversight means volunteers can easily end up in parts of the world without the skills needed to help, can take away local jobs, and form bonds with children in need that are short-lived as they move on quickly.

In the wake of the April 25 earthquake in Nepal, the United Nations children's agency Unicef, said it became alarmed by reported cases of child trafficking, calling on orphanages and volunteer agencies to stop sending more willing workers.

"We would ask people to consider carefully the impact of volunteering or donating funds to post-earthquake Nepali children's homes in Kathmandu. Without realising it, such support may be indirectly harming children," Unicef said.

SEEKING FOREIGN FUNDS

Unicef said it has encountered the same problem in Cambodia, where there has been a rise in the number of unregistered childcare institutions that are kept afloat by the funds and influx of volunteer tourists.

"Many volunteers have absolutely no childcare skills and they're being asked to perform a duty of care for children who are vulnerable. In a developed country, that would not happen," said James Sutherland from Friends-International, a children's charity based in South-east Asia.

Australian academic Nichole Georgeou, co-author of *Looks Good on Your CV: the Sociology of Volunteering Recruitment in Higher Education*, said part of the problem is that the industry is consumer driven rather than driven by the needs of the local communities involved.

"There's this idea that is in-built in voluntourism that we in the West have the knowledge and the skills to make a difference, we have a right to make a difference," said Georgeou from the Australian Catholic University. "It doesn't even matter if we're unskilled, it's just the good will that matters because we're somehow bonding anyway."

A recent study by Britain's Leeds Metropolitan University, published in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, warned students considering a project for a gap year or holiday break that the most expensive trips are found to be the "least responsible".

Authors Victoria Smith and Xavier Font said volunteer tourism organisations need to take more responsibility. "These organisations have a responsibility to ensure their programmes have positive and not negative impacts, and they should offer financial transparency," said the study.

"This means proper needs assessments, appropriately recruited, matched and skilled volunteers working with locals with clear objectives, sustainable programme management and lasting impact and respect."

Some returning volunteers have expressed their concerns about the negative impact they might have had. "The kids [in the orphanage] were so used to seeing volunteers that they were barely paying attention to us," said Carla Salber, who volunteered in Cambodia with Projects Abroad, one of the largest voluntourism companies. "We felt betrayed."

Voluntourism proponents dispute the claim that the industry is doing more harm than good, citing numerous schools and homes that would not have been built without voluntourists and their funding.

Globalteer's Hare said it is a mistake to lump together good volunteering with bad volunteering and call it all "voluntourism". "This is a shame because there are organisations running really impactful volunteer programmes," he said.

"For volunteering to be effective, more focus needs to be on making sure it is done properly," he said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation.