

Part 4: 'Our Give-A-Shitters Were Broken'

Jenna Clark and Summer Rae Mahlen were deep in the Kalispell meth scene, mainlining the drug and taking lucrative 'appointments' with Dick Dasen. But as their friend Angela once told them, there were huge sacrifices to be made.

by Hal Herring

It's a cold afternoon in December, still no snow. The neighborhoods of south Kalispell are gray and bleak, the elms and silver maples bare and trembling in the wind. It's raucous at Connie Guzman's house, even more than usual. Amy (her name has been changed for this story) is sitting in a big chair holding the tiniest of babies. Connie is tending to a pair of robust-looking twins, juggling some kitchen work, and

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monitoring the situation in the living room where her three grandchildren are suspiciously quiet. She pokes her head around the corner to check on them, and says, "Man, if I'm not the little old lady who lived in the shoe, I don't know who is!"

Three women come in from the backyard where they've gone for a quick smoke. The tiny baby belongs to Summer Rae Mahlen, a fairly tiny 20-year-old woman who would have to show a driver's license to buy cigarettes. The father of her baby has told her not to talk about her involvement with Dick Dasen, or with meth, but he's just been sent away to jail, so she's pretty much free to do as she pleases. Jenna Clark

has left her two children at home with the babysitter she uses while she's working her new job as clerk at a gas station. She has to be there in a couple hours, for the afternoon shift. Ryan K, the best friend of Connie's deceased daughter Angela, is a tall young woman with long black hair. She scoops up her twins without any apparent effort at all, and stands rocking them from side to side, grinning at them like an advertisement for youthful vigor.

Eighteen months ago, these three women were mainlining meth every

day and night, almost as hell-bent as Angela. Jenna and Summer were taking "appointments" with Dick Dasen whenever they needed cash, even though Angela had tried to keep them away from him. "Ange told us that if you went to Dick there were huge sacrifices to be made," Summer says. "She'd been in it long enough to know."

"For me, I just really needed that money," Jenna says, "I was struggling to pay the bills. I wanted to buy my own trailer, and have a place for my two kids, and I was messing with all that dope. I came home one time and he'd left a message for me on the answering machine, saying 'I think we can work something out....'" She pauses, grins with disgust, "And I remember the ladies down at WIC, telling us, 'oh, he's such a great man, he helps everybody so much' right about the same time."

"In this valley everybody's got money problems. I probably had less trouble like that," Summer says. "I had a closet I liked to stay in at Jenna's and another one at Ryan K's. I never slept, so I didn't really need a house. It's funny, when you first start doing meth, snorting it or smoking it, you're all high all the time. Then when you go to the IV, it's a different feeling—like being a zombie. You don't care about anything, you can't feel anything."

"I didn't want to feel what I was feeling then anyway," Jenna said. "My give-a-shitter was broken." She looks distracted for a second, and then says, not to anyone in particular, "All our give-a-shitters were broken. That's what it was."

Summer does not say that Angela introduced her to Dasen, a prominent businessman who is now awaiting trial on an array of charges relating to alleged sexual relationships with dozens of local women and girls. "I heard about Dick through my friends. There were lots and lots of girls seeing him. Sometimes four girls a day. I sent

my friends to him if they were broke. I saw him twelve times in December and January, for a thousand dollars each time. He just went down on me, we didn't ever have sex, even though he was always saying he wanted to. And he was always telling me how much he wanted to see me and my friends together, even though I'd keep telling him we just don't go that way."

"Oh yeah, he was always saying that," Jenna says. Then, in a mocking voice, "'Oh baby, I'd leave my wife for you in an instant. Don't think I wouldn't...' Isn't that what he told everybody?" Summer uses the same voice, closes her eyes "'Oh baby I wish I could take you to Brazil right now...I'd like to see you dressed in this or that...' It was part of the power, trying to make sure everybody wanted to be his number one girl..."

Another part of the power, Jenna and Summer said, was to stop payment on the checks. "You'd go to cash the check, and the bank teller would say there was no money in that account, and then you'd go call Dick and he'd be out of town."

Another part of the power, Jenna and Summer said, was to stop payment on the checks that were written to the women for sex. "You'd go to cash the check, and the bank teller would say there was no money in that account, and then you'd go call Dick, and he'd be out of town," Summer says, "and it would be right when you needed the money the most." And then they would wait, as long as it took, for him to call them back and tell them the money had been deposited to cover the check. "That's how I finally lost my trailer,"

Jenna said. "The money didn't come through in time, and they foreclosed on it."

There is little doubt that the flow of money, when it did come -- and it usually did, eventually -- was not the lifesaver that everyone imagined it would be. It seemed like just another trick, kind of like the meth they all bought with it, that seemed like it would make everything alright, but actually it just disappeared, wrecking your life in the process.

"I don't know of anybody who did anything positive with the money," Connie said. Thousands and thousands of dollars went into local keno and poker machines, hours and hours spent sitting, high on meth, staring at the blinking lights, smoking. "They could never tell any of their families where

they got all that money," Amy says, "So they could never give them any of it. But if they claimed they'd struck it big on the keno machines, then they had an explanation for some of it, anyway. That was the low, low budget way to launder Dasen's money." For the

first time that afternoon, everybody laughs, because what she said was so indisputable, and because there is an almost tangible feeling around that kitchen table, now that everybody is working jobs for such short pay, of all the money squandered on keno machines and pounds of brain-killing chemicals and boyfriends who didn't like where it came from but didn't mind spending it.

"Where did you get those?" Summer asks. "Oh, I have my ways," Amy

replies, laying out a stack of photos on the table, taken some drug-fueled night last year. Here is a boyfriend, his skin looking pale and thin as toilet paper, holding a syringe and getting ready to shoot up. Angela reclines glassy-eyed on a bed next to an impressive collection of weaponry -- pistols, high capacity magazines, an SKS assault rifle. There is a photo of Summer, passing by the camera and looking like a model, her hair much longer, and her face much younger in a way that is not exactly physical. And one of Deana Dimler, tall and lean, wearing scholarly glasses and a sober and challenging expression. Although the photos were almost certainly taken in the rush and excitement of meth, there is, present in them, that awful boredom of drugs, that lie that because your heart is pumping triple-speed and the room is filled with kaleidoscopes of color and emotion and desire, that something significant is actually happening, when in truth, nothing is. Another trick, perhaps the first in a string of them that leads to death.

But from Angela's death in a violent car accident last year came at least some glimmers of life. Jenna and Ryan K came to Connie because of Ange's death. Then Summer came in, "the little holdout" as Amy calls her. The girls ended up staying at Amy's house, since Connie had all she could handle with the grandchildren, and since Amy was already running a sort of informal halfway house for their circle of friends -- eight of them at that time who were trying to get away from the meth and other drugs. Amy cleaned the girls up and sweated out their addictions with them. Connie took the girls' stories and photocopied checks and went to the police. Some of the women were immediately charged with prostitution, as they suspected they would be, but they were off the dope, and very clearly, out on a limb.