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DEATH...

JUST ONE CLICK AWAY

by **GUY ARSENEAU**



It is a mantra-like statement inherently part of the American lexicon and consciousness: “I made him an offer he couldn’t refuse.” For individuals in the drug trade, this observation, made famous in the novel and motion picture, *The Godfather*, is a temptation that is too lucrative to ignore. For an investment of \$6,000 to purchase a drug press that can produce up to 170,000 pills per minute, drug dealers can earn millions of dollars on an annual basis.

Manufactured and imported primarily from China, these machines are entering the United States in record numbers. According to Cheryl Paris, Assistant Port Director at Los Angeles International Airport, “Every 7.8 seconds a new counterfeit pill press is processed at the port.” Currently, United States Customs and Border Protection personnel are seizing pill presses at a rate 19 times higher than in 2011—the same year that the extremely dangerous drug Fentanyl exploded onto the American drug scene; a narcotic that is especially dangerous because it is 25 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine.

Contrary to popular belief, and in direct opposition to the middle class thinking of white, polite American suburbanites, “the drug epidemic” is not a problem that is “out there” and confined to minority members of poverty-stricken inner city ghettos. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, fully a quarter of American high school seniors have used a prescription opioid. Even more troubling, half of all young people who are addicted to heroin started their recreational drug use by abusing prescription painkillers. The result of this type of misuse is readily apparent in figures showing that prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone and hydrocodone were involved in 24% of reported drug overdoses in 2015.

These alarming figures served as a catalyst for a strong yet incomplete response from several states around the nation. Currently, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and Maine have passed legislation limiting opioid prescriptions to a seven-day period; New Jersey has an even lower threshold of five days. These restrictions do not apply to individuals

suffering severe and chronic pain from such diseases as cancer.

As the last half century has so dramatically and tragically demonstrated, drug abuse is no respecter of fame, talent or wealth. Lenny Bruce, Judy Garland, Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley, John Belushi, Jimmy Hendrix, River Phoenix, Whitney Houston, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Michael Jackson, Jim Morrison and Prince all succumbed to the ravages of narcotic abuse. Destroying lives and eating through vast fortunes, drug abuse leaves its victims alone, penniless and uncared for.

The American drug crisis now takes on a new and even more sinister role in the culture with the growing advent of online shopping; an opportunity that allows for drug purchases from virtually anywhere in the world. The perpetrators of these egregious business dealings may well surprise and even enrage consumers. While drug dealing often conjures up images of low-level street punks in hoodies and sneakers surreptitiously providing illegal drugs on the wrong side of town, the exact opposite is often the case. The horned rimmed geeks of Silicon Valley often have no scruples when it comes to the drug trade. In 2011, Google, the internet industry leader among search engines, paid a fine of \$500,000,000 for illegally advertising prescription drugs from Canada online. Curiously enough, Google refused to accept illicit narcotic advertisements originating from other countries. Internet savvy drug dealers are quick and perversely clever when it comes to exploiting a desire for drugs among the public.

Walgreens, based in Chicago, Illinois and operating as the second largest drug store chain in America, has also been victimized by drug dealers. Founded over a century ago in 1901 and with over 8,000 stores throughout the United States, this well respected American business is also a focal point for drug pushers. Using sophisticated designs and slick graphics with photo images of men and women dressed in professional clinical garb, a casual glance at this pseudo website raises no alarms among viewers. Far

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too often potential clients believe they can obtain all of their pharmaceutical needs conveniently and online from this internet site. What most people miss, however, is a subtle variation in the website address. The bogus site uses Walgreens-Store.com. In reality, the store's legitimate website address is Walgreens.com.

The proliferation of drug abuse and ever-growing easier access to narcotics continues to worsen on a daily basis. Exacerbating this situation, FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg told CNN media personality and medical correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta, "These products often have none of the needed medications in them, while others contain too much." This is a situation tantamount to playing Russian roulette with a hypodermic needle.

A new dimension to the drug problem is the growing number of untraceable and foreign-based online outlets that are outside the legal jurisdiction of the United States. Numerous companies, relying on the internet, offer drugs online. In many cases a company will request a client's name, address, phone number and email address; they also want access to a customer's

VISA or MASTERCARD account. To the surprise of clients, these business concerns call customers from United States based relay phone centers the day after placing an order and inform them they do not accept VISA or MASTERCARD for payment, even though credit card numbers and access codes have been provided to them. Often located in Middle Eastern countries such as Pakistan, they insist on payment by money order or a MoneyGram. The result is that customers pay exorbitant rates for drugs that are of questionable value at best and their credit card information becomes readily accessible to counterfeiters. In this way, these "pharmacy outlets" cash in on a customer's desperation twice by the purchase of dangerous and uncertified drugs and then become targets for having their credit cards hacked by individuals in foreign countries. In a world of technology, drug abusers must remember their lives can end with a click of a button that leads to www.DeathOnline.com.

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Drug abuse: Destroying lives and eating through vast fortunes.