



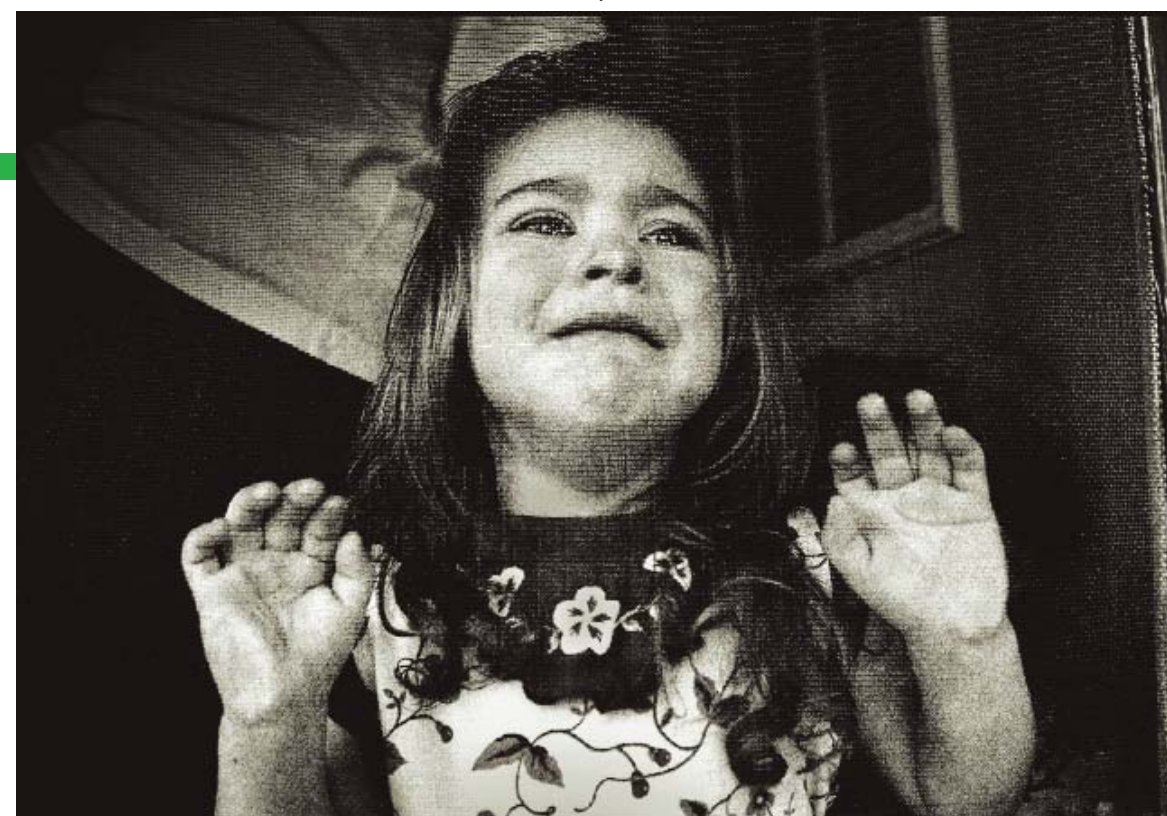
FEATURES

FOR ONE NORTH IDAHO WOMAN,  
THE CHOICE IS CLEAR: LOSE YOUR  
CHILDREN IF YOU KEEP USING  
METHAMPHETAMINE.

TRY AS SHE MIGHT TO QUIT, THE DRUG STILL BECKONS.

# motherhood + addiction

Story by Angie Gaddy\_Photos by Kathy Plonka



ALEXUS CRIES AT THE SCREEN DOOR FOR HER MOTHER. "MY MOMMY. MY MOMMY. MY MOMMY." AMBER STOPPED BY HER MOTHER'S HOUSE FOR ABOUT A HALF AN HOUR AFTER SOCIAL WORKERS SAID SHE COULD HAVE HER DAUGHTERS EVERY OTHER WEEKEND. AMBER LEFT AGAIN TO HANG OUT WITH HER FRIENDS IN OSBURN. "THIS WILL DO SOMETHING TO HER THE REST OF HER LIFE," SAID ALEXUS' GRANDMOTHER, CINDY ROBERTS.

**a**mber Phipps rushed from her first-story apartment to the brown '79 Camaro in the parking lot.

Her 4-month-old and 23-month-old daughters bounced in her arms. If she could get out of her apartment without the cops seeing, she would be fine.

Things were unraveling.

Four days earlier, the cops told her they were searching for her boyfriend. If he was staying with her, she'd be arrested, too.

They probably knew about her dealing methamphetamine. Maybe they knew she'd learned to cook dope, and that she had danced nude for money.

On that warm afternoon in May 1999, police banged on her door looking for her boyfriend. He hid. She lied.

The rest was a blur.

Police pulled the Camaro over as Phipps headed to her mother's home. They found

drugs -- a snort tube, a film canister with white powdery residue and a folded piece of aluminum foil.

Police handcuffed her. Social workers took her crying daughters.

Later, when police searched her apartment, they found a metal pipe next to the bed and her 39-year-old boyfriend hiding in a cabinet with drugs on him.

She was charged with child injury and drug possession.

Social workers told her the kids would stay in the system for a year. She had to shape up or she'd lose them for good. Get a job. Stop using. Find new friends.

Phipps blamed them. It was the state's fault. She never started using until social workers took her girls away.

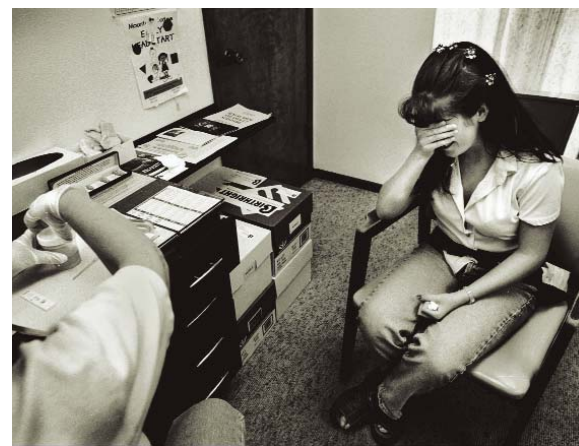
As her two daughters moved through three foster homes before landing with her mother, Phipps kept doing drugs.

She remembers May 25, 1999. Not so much because she lost her kids that day, but because she had to leave the Camaro by the side of the road.

"It's crazy," Phipps says. "The things I do to have a normal life."



PHIPPS' MOTHER CONFRONTS HER DURING A RARE VISIT HOME. "I WON'T HAVE YOU COMING IN AND OUT LIKE THIS, IT'S HARD ON THE KIDS, YOUR KIDS," SHE SAYS. PHIPPS' DAUGHTER ALEXUS SITS NEARBY.



OPPOSITE PAGE:

(LEFT) AMBER HANGS OUT IN OSBURN WITH HER "NORMAL FRIENDS," THE ONES WHO DON'T USE METHAMPHETAMINE. WHEN SHE DOESN'T USE METH, SHE SMOKES POT. (RIGHT) "I'M JUST GOING TO CLOSE MY EYES, I'M SO SCARED, JIM IS GOING TO KILL ME," PHIPPS SAYS AS SHE WAITS FOR THE RESULTS OF HER PREGNANCY TEST. "I HAD MY HEART SET ON BEING PREGNANT," SHE SAID AFTER THE RESULT OF THE TEST WAS NEGATIVE.

# “I don’t care”

Amber Renee Phipps. Also known as case numbers 99-04243, 99-05743, 99-10040. Also known to the cops as trouble.

At 19, Phipps barely passes for driving age.

She's smoked cocaine, dropped acid, smoked pot. When she shot up heroin with a boyfriend, it just made her sick.

Meth was different.

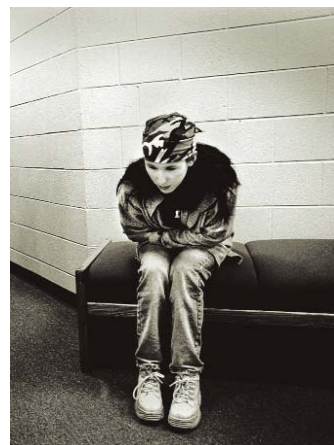
"I don't care when I do meth. I hate to say that," Phipps says. "But I know deep in my heart I'm not bad."

With crank, she stayed high longer. She partied all night. She had money from selling drugs and dated Martin Schorzman, the man police viewed as one of the most violent meth makers around. She got respect.

At 5-foot-3 and 94 pounds, her body is thin and pale and stretched from the birth of her two daughters.

And although her teeth are slowly starting to fall out and she has no job or home, it doesn't matter.

"Losing one of their kids is not a threat to meth users," says Michelle Britton, regional director of Idaho Health and Welfare, whose office oversees 240 children in foster care. Half are there because of meth.



AMBER SITS OUTSIDE THE COURTROOM AFTER SEEING HER BOYFRIEND WHO HAD A COURT APPEARANCE STEMMING FROM CHARGES INCLUDING POSSESSION OF METHAMPHETAMINE.

AFTER BEING GONE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, AMBER OFTEN COMES HOME FOR A FEW DAYS TO SEE HER KIDS AND TO CATCH UP ON MUCH NEEDED REST. WHEN SHE LEAVES SHE RARELY SAYS GOODBYE. SHE JUST SNEAKS OUT THE BACK DOOR.

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