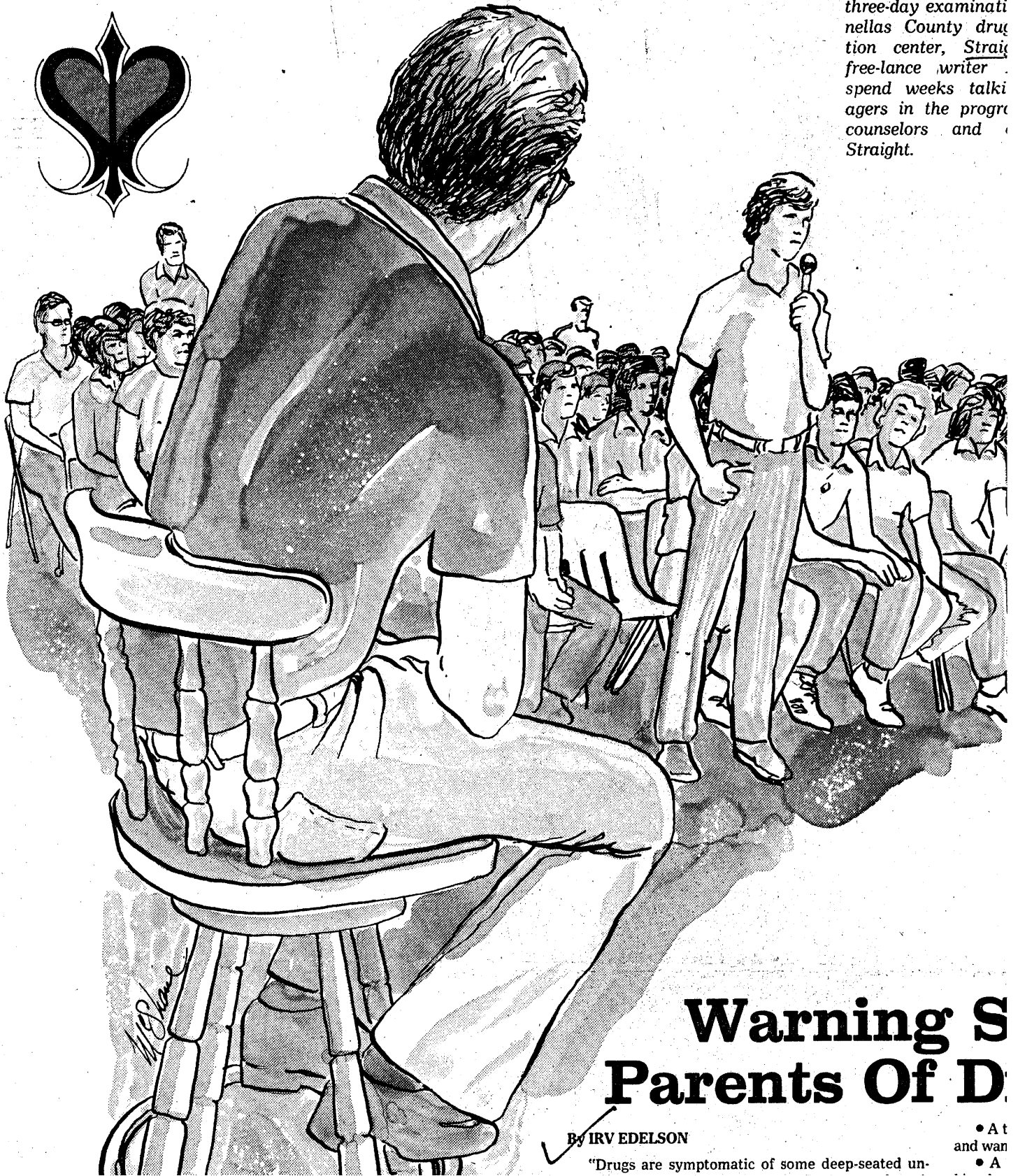


# With Support, Self-Re

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## Warning S Parents Of D

By IRV EDELSON

"Drugs are symptomatic of some deep-seated un-

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# Part IV

## Self-Respect Returned

Today the Tribune ends a three-day examination of the Pinellas County drug rehabilitation center, Straight, Tampa. Tampa free-lance writer Irv Edelson spend weeks talking to teenagers in the program, parents, counselors and officials of Straight.

By IRV EDELSON

A turned-around drug addict, who admits he was "brainwashed by my druggie friends" and is now using his personal knowledge of the drug scene to help straighten out other teen-agers, said the desire to gain acceptance is what turns most kids to drugs.

Now 20 and a junior college student, Charles (not his real name) has been a counselor at Straight Inc., a non-profit drug rehabilitation center in St. Petersburg, for more than a year.

Looking every bit the All-American boy, Charles is tall, sports a mod blow-dry hair style, has designer framed glasses, a firm jaw that makes his mouth look small and wears a blue V-neck T-shirt and blue jeans.

Charles provided insight into the drug culture — why teens take to drugs, their attitudes and actions while on drugs, why he feels the drug culture flourishes, the dangers it poses for the future and what parents can do to combat the problem.

The paraprofessional counselor also has high praise for Straight, tells how it works and why such a program offers the only way out for many drug abusers. following are questions put to Charles and his candid answers:

**Q.** How did you get started on drugs and what drug did you first take?

**A.** My first drug was pot. I was introduced to pot by a number of neighborhood friends when I was 10. I was assured by my friends that it wasn't going to hurt me, that it wasn't as harmful as it looked. I didn't get high the first time. I didn't know how to smoke it. I was very curious. I did get hold of more pot. I did get high. I liked it. It went from one joint to 10 joints and from 10 joints it went into bags and from then on it was more drugs. Initially, I had a friend that was into drugs. At first I didn't want to have anything to do with him. But I finally gave in and did it.

**Q.** Why did you keep on doing drugs?

**A.** I liked it. I wanted to go along with people who wanted to do the same

roll groups — people who did drugs — and wanted to be like them. Then I began to depend on pot. When I didn't have the drug I was very irritable, very angry. I was very dissatisfied with life. I was bored. I would spend hours upon hours sitting in my hangout, laughing at people, talking about nothing, talking about concerts, talking about cars, about drugs. I was just very desperate, very lonely at the time, for something.

**Q.** What effect did taking drugs have on the relations with your family?

**A.** I lived with my grandmother and my little brother at the time. It was just no relationship. I abused them both. I told my grandmother she was not my parent. I could do what the heck I pleased. It was copping out. It was slamming the door in her face, walking out on her, turning up the stereo full blast, locking myself in my room, getting her angry. I got into fights with my little brother. I was jealous of him. I would beat him up, punch him around. I hated the people who cared for me most and liked the people that didn't care for me. I thought that placement and authority was a bad thing. You know, I probably needed my butt whipped.

**Q.** Did you ever have any serious aftereffects from drugs?

**A.** I overdosed on alcohol and pot. I just blacked out. I was burned out. I was apathetic. I could not wake up in the morning. I procrastinated a lot. My throat got very torn up from smoking pot. I coughed up a lot of black mucus in the mornings. I lost a lot of weight. My appetite was very bad. I dropped from A's and B's to C's, D's and F's in school.

**Q.** What was the drug situation like in school?

**A.** I don't know about the dealing. I never dealt around school. It was there but it was secret. I think the majority kids at school (high school) had smol' pot. The only thing I could do to fit in was get high — during school before school started in the parking under the bleachers at football at basketball games and in the lots. At the time they had



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ing. That was a big mistake because it gave you lots of time to get between classes. I would go into classes, just lay my head on the desk and laugh at everybody who would try to do their work.

**Q.** Why do you think the drug culture flourishes?

**A.** I think it flourishes because it will take anybody. It's not just drugs. It's concerts, it's hangouts, it's black lights, it's culture, it's paraphernalia. It's many, many things. You look at the paraphernalia industry. It's making millions of dollars these days. You can buy papers and books at any convenience store.

Communication is much more advanced. Radios feed you a lot of information. The biggest thing for me is I was accepted. It didn't matter if I had good looks or not. I could be fat, small, short or thin. If I had drugs I was OK. I was cool. There's a lot of fantasy in the druggie culture, a lot of misconception.

I think it's the closest thing to becoming somebody without having to do a darn thing for yourself. You could be looked up to. You could have a lot of connections — a lot of so-called friends — and not have to be responsible. You don't have to be honest. It gives you justification to rebel. You can be rowdy. You can do anything with any girl because sex — premarital sex — is a very big part of it. The druggie culture just gives you a lot of freedom that you're not ready to handle.

**Q.** What do you think the drug culture is doing to our society?

**A.** As far as America goes, the quality (of life) is going down. It is affecting aptitude in school, our pride and the ability to deal with reality. As the drug culture grows — and it will because drugs are more accessible and much stronger today, and peer pressure is greater, too — many more problems will arise. Morals will go down more. Homosexuality is accepted. Premarital sex is accepted. Drugs are accepted.

You know it comes to a point where the majority is not right. The drug culture is going to hurt the youth because they have not learned to be responsible and independent. The majority of the kids that are on drugs these days are being supported by their parents. In time, they will have to grow up. They're going to have to face reality to exist.

**Q.** What do you foresee for the drug culture?

**A.** The drug culture can be likened to the style in fashions. It can go two ways. It can get worse or it can get better. But if it's to get better, there will have to be some drastic changes made in the areas of drug laws, prevention, drug programs and cultural art. Even though the cultures have somewhat changed over the last 20 years, drug use has increased, and alcohol (the problem) is worse than it ever was. I see it (drug abuse) here for a long time. It is going to take parents' uniting and being aware (to solve the problem). Society today is just now aware of what

**Q.** How would you advise parents to protect their children from drugs?

**A.** I think parents should love their children enough to discipline them. Parents should set the guidelines for their kids to follow. Show them discipline out of love and care. The family unit is a big thing. Getting involved with each other. Compromising. Earning trust and respecting each other has a lot to do with how a relationship will turn out.

Watch out for the kids. I think it's the parents' responsibility. A kid doesn't know what he wants. Know the kids he hangs around with. Watch his mannerisms. Is he open? Does he have a good attitude? Does he talk? Does he go to his room? Smell his clothes. Observe his table manners. Lots of parents feel guilty and let their kids do their own thing, which I think is wrong. That is copping out. I never wanted nice clothes and a car. What I wanted from my parents was love and care and their reassurance.

**Q.** When did the turning point come in your rehabilitation at Straight?

**A.** I'd say the turning point was a long process. I had conditioned myself to think so much of a certain way that it took a period of time just as great as being a druggie, to condition myself to pick a new way of life. I had to condition myself to think positively, to motivate myself to get involved, to talk about myself and to write about myself. (A written moral inventory is required of Straight teens each day, reviewing

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allenges and goals.) It took being on the program for about six to eight months before I did start to say, really say, "I want to change. I want to be straight, I want to stay straight."

**Q.** What do you think makes Straight work?

**A.** The biggest thing is the group. In no way do I think any kid can fully get himself together, including myself, on an individual basis. It took 250 kids and parents seeing me. Each person was watching me, listening to me. They could each pick up something else that one person could miss, two people, three people could miss.

You have a team of 20 in a small group. You do a lot of relating, a lot of talking. Staff demands a lot of honesty out of you. The group demands a lot of honesty. The peer pressure was good for me.

Another big thing is that Straight got me straight by demanding a lot of me. I remember being told I had a lot of potential, that I was a person who could help out a lot in the group. I suppose if people had showed me a lot of hate, and disciplined me with hate, that I wouldn't have gotten straight. I would have rebelled. I would have resented it.

**Q.** What part does self-esteem play in the program?

**A.** Straight is based on not what you want but what you deserve. Straight is based on phases and building. We talked about foundations and self-esteem. In the first phase we talked about self-opinion — getting involved with myself, thinking about me, taking care

of me, trusting myself enough to not run away. From there, Straight builds on family relationship and school and friendships. It was a pattern in which I was given back all the things, once I earned them back. It made me feel good when I was able to earn responsibilities.

The program is designed to enable students to earn privileges and responsibilities. It was a big thing for me to feel like, hey, they trust me to give me this privilege. The main thing is that I helped myself, that people cared. When everybody looked at me, they gave me support, patting me on the back, telling me that I can do it. Seeing my potential when I could not see it myself.

**Q.** How many staff members are there?

**A.** Four senior staff, four junior staff females, four junior staff fellows, two trainees and five executive staff members.

**Q.** How do you earn staff position and what do you do?

**A.** To be selected to staff, you have to complete all five phases of Straight and train with the group. I work in groups, relating, reaching out to people, talking about myself, being the example, the model. I work about 50 hours a week. I lead raps, confront kids, cope with the kids, do one-to-one with the kids.

**Q.** Does the paraprofessional communicate better with the new kids?

**A.** Yes. We relate to them. We are closer to their age. We were once right in their shoes. We know the ins and

outs of the cons, how to cut their stories. We know gener the druggie is like, the attitude basic overall things. We care those areas and trigger a lot. Attitude can tell us a lot, so physical appearance. What does do is to introduce him awareness of what it was like, I came from, what we had been how it felt, tell him what tools to change ourselves. Then we let it's his (or her) decision. Nobody can be forced into getting straight has to help himself.

**Q.** What does Straight mean

**A.** Straight is a lifestyle straight is a lifestyle. Straight myself. It's being what I always to be inside me from day one. is being taught the right things.

Straight represents a challenge beginning. I look at Straight as a to make my own decisions being influenced by anybody outside

Straight is just like growing wasting time. I think Straight had me back a lot of the awareness had lost. Straight gave me the deal with pressure. I had pressure the group, I had pressure from had pressure on me to do the things for myself.

And it was a challenge. I got late to myself and to others. Straight also introduced a lot of love to think that was what I always wanted, a sense of belonging, to feel a of love and care.