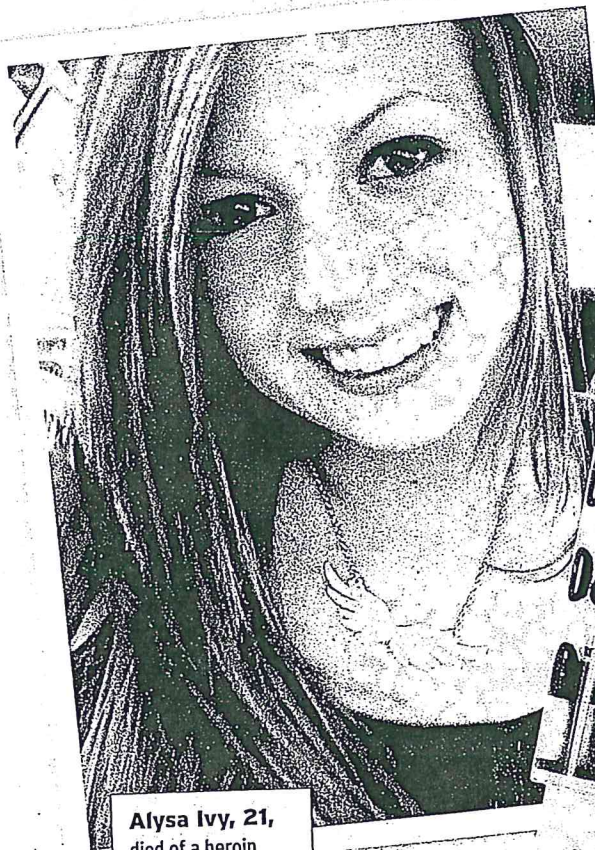


PORTRAIT OF A HEROIN VICTIM



Alys Ivy, 21,
died of a heroin
overdose last year.

**Alys Ivy's fatal overdose
at 21 has made her one of
the faces of a grim epidemic**

BY DEBORAH SONTAG

Karen Hale averts her eyes when she drives past the Super 8 motel in Hudson, Wisconsin, where her 21-year-old daughter, Alys Ivy, died of a heroin overdose last May. She's thought about asking if she could lie on the bed in Room 223, where Alys's body was found.

But Hale isn't ready—just as she's not ready to dismantle her daughter's bedroom, where an uncapped red lipstick sits on the dresser and a teddy bear on the bed.

"My son asked me not to make a shrine for her," she says. "But I don't know what to do with her room. I guess on some level I'm still waiting for her to come home."

When the actor Philip Seymour Hoffman died with a needle in his arm in New York in February, Hale thought first about his mother, then his children. Few understand the way addiction mangles families, she says. Perhaps it took Hoffman's death from a mixture of heroin and other drugs to "wake up America to all the no-names who passed away before him."

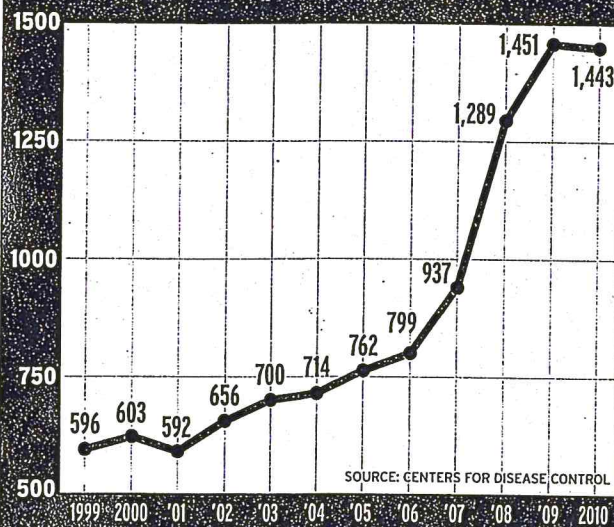
There have been many in recent years. The use of heroin in the U.S. has doubled since 2007. Almost all of it comes across the border from Mexico into the Southwest (see box, p. 10), and it has now wormed its way into many unsuspecting communities far from the border. Alys's death was believed to be the seventh fatal heroin overdose in eight

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U.S. Heroin Deaths Among 15- to 34-Year-Olds



months in Hudson, a town of 13,000 near Minneapolis.

According to Alysa's death certificate, a mix of drugs was to blame for her death. "Alysa was a heroin abuser, and her addiction to drugs killed her," says Patty Schachtner, the county medical examiner.

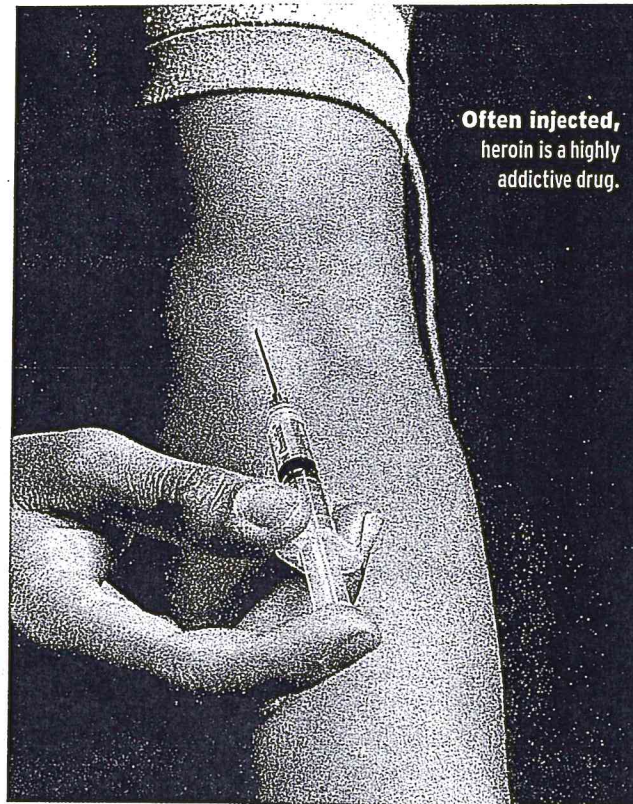
"It's a tight-knit community, and these kids all knew each other," Schachtner says of those who overdosed. "They were not what you might expect. They were not the faces of heroin addiction we see on television."

Heroin Deaths Triple

Nationally, those faces are getting younger. The most recent federal data show more than 19,000 opioid drug deaths in 2010, with 3,100 involving heroin and the rest painkillers. Eighty-eight percent of those who died from heroin were white, half were younger than 34, and almost a fifth were ages 15 to 24. Heroin deaths of teenagers and young adults tripled from 2000 to 2010.

And those statistics lag behind heroin's resurgence over the last few years, as crackdowns on pill mills have made painkillers harder to get and new formulations have made them harder to abuse. Painkillers remain a far larger problem, but the amount of heroin seized on the Mexican border more than tripled from 2008 to 2012, as Mexican traffickers moved much more heroin into the United States.

The problem is particularly severe in Vermont, where \$2 million worth of heroin is



Often injected, heroin is a highly addictive drug.

trafficked every week and there's been a sharp rise in overdoses and deaths. Governor Peter Shumlin says the state is in a "full-blown heroin crisis."

In Wisconsin, heroin seizures, arrests, and deaths have risen sharply. The first heroin fatality in Hudson occurred about three years ago, says Detective Sgt. Geoff Willems of the Hudson police, and "it was pretty surprising."

Phil Drewiske, 23, says he bears some responsibility for introducing heroin to the town. He started abusing painkillers stolen from his friend's grandfather's medicine cabinet at 13 and discovered heroin at 16, he says, "at a time when people portrayed it as a dirty drug for homeless people."

He would buy heroin from Mexican dealers in Minneapolis, who gave him a prepaid cellphone and "chirped" him when his order was ready, he says. He then sold it in Hudson.

"I was getting heroin for these people, and even if it wasn't their first time, it was close," says Drewiske, who embraced recovery in prison after five overdoses and a dozen failed treatment programs. "Being the one who enabled that is pretty humbling. You get a guilty conscience, even though they made a decision."

Drewiske was speaking in Hale's immaculate kitchen. Since her daughter's death, Hale has befriended Drewiske and some of her daughter's "user friends" in an effort to understand Alysa's "dark, secret world."

Her daughter's habit began "like most kids in this town, at the pad of a doctor," says Hale.



Celebrity Deaths:

Actors Philip Seymour Hoffman and Cory Monteith died of overdoses involving heroin.

After her high school graduation, Alysa had her wisdom teeth extracted, and the dentist prescribed OxyContin, a potent painkiller. An outgoing, free-spirited artist who found Hudson boring after a childhood in Dallas, Texas, Alysa developed an addiction, and moved on to heroin.

Heroin is derived from poppies. Ironically, it was first manufactured in 1898 by the Bayer pharmaceutical company as a treatment for tuberculosis and a remedy for morphine addiction. It turned out to be even more addictive—and deadly.

"It's highly addictive and extraordinarily difficult to kick," says Dawn Dearden of the Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A.). "People die from heroin withdrawal."

'Something Beyond Her Control'

Despite her addiction, Alysa was moderately functional in the outside world, holding down jobs at Walmart and Subway and maintaining a serious if stormy relationship with her boyfriend. At home, though, she constantly locked horns with her mother. (Her father died in 2008.)

"She screamed, lied to me constantly, and stole everything that wasn't locked up or nailed down—my jewelry, my TV, my

clothes, my pots and pans," Hale says. "It felt like such a violation, but what do you do? Do you call the police on your own child? She was always trying to stop it. She knew how deeply it was hurting me. She would leave me sweet little notes. But then she would disappear for days, crash a car, tell me she hated me.

"She was in the grip of something beyond her control, but I would get angry and I would feel shame," Hale adds. "My friends would be bragging to me about their kids' getting accepted to college, and what was I supposed to say? 'She only put one needle in her arm today?'"

Occasionally, Alysa would drop her guard. Once, Hale found her sobbing, arguing with her reflection in the bathroom mirror: "You are an addict! But I don't want to be an addict!"

Eventually, Hale did call the police, and her daughter was arrested on a charge of disorderly conduct. She had other encounters with the law too, and this got her help: a short stint in detox, courtesy of the county. But the government wouldn't pay for inpatient treatment, and Hale, who didn't have health insurance, couldn't afford to send her daughter an hour away to Hazelden, one of the best-known rehab programs in the country.

Still, after the detox, in early 2013, Alysa abstained from

Where America's Heroin Comes From

Drug cartels in Mexico and Colombia are getting rich from American junkies BY PATRICIA SMITH

Almost all the heroin in the U.S. is smuggled across the 2,000-mile-long U.S.-Mexico border by drug cartels, which pocket billions from the trade each year.

About 50 percent of the heroin sold in the U.S. is from poppies grown in Mexico and about 45 percent is grown in Colombia but enters through Mexico, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A.). Mexico is now the world's second-largest poppy grower—after Afghanistan, which supplies only 4 percent of heroin in the U.S.

Typically, smugglers hide the heroin in cars or trucks, concealing it in all sorts of false compartments—inside car batteries, car doors, or, in one case, hollowed-out art frames in shipping containers. It's transported along the nation's major highways to big-city hubs like Atlanta and Chicago (see map). There, the heroin is cut from kilo-size quantities into smaller bags that a large network of dealers distribute locally and move into the suburbs and small towns.

For a long time, the U.S. heroin market was divided between Mexican and Colombian drug dealers, according to the D.E.A. But about 10 years ago, the Mexican cartels began taking over by undercutting their competition: They lowered prices and used fewer additives to attract more customers.

"The heroin now is a much purer product, which makes it much more dangerous," says Dawn Dearden of the D.E.A. •



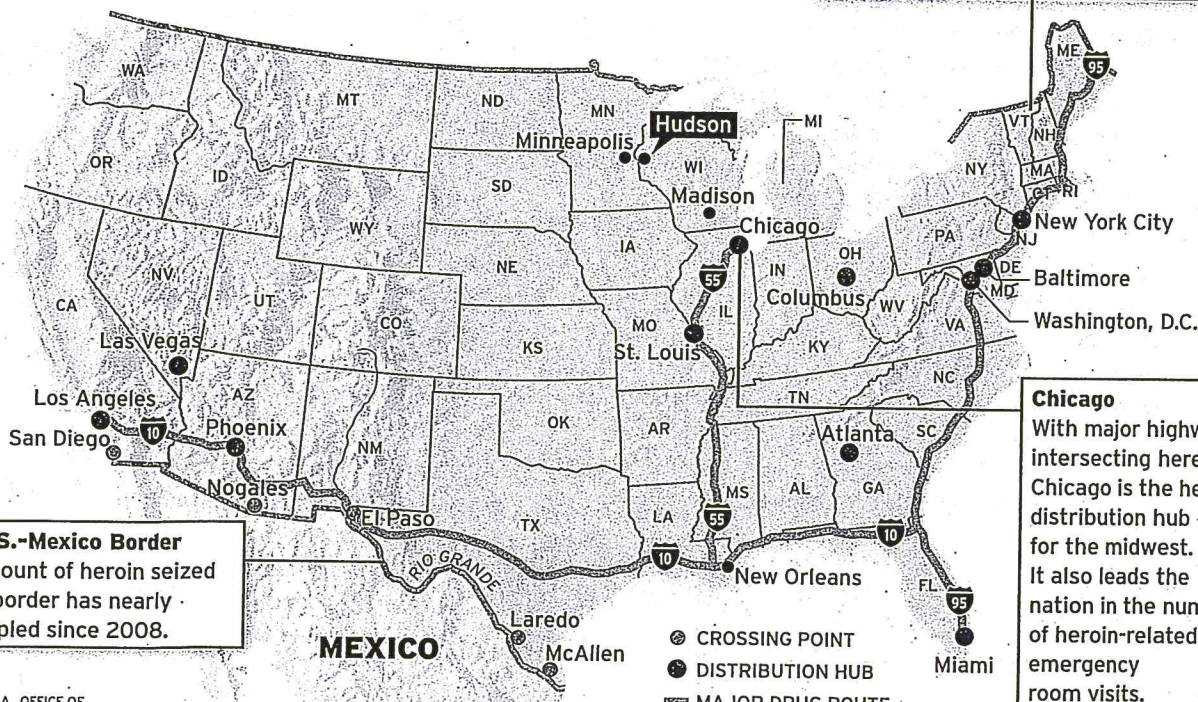
Poppies grown in the mountains near Acapulco, Mexico (top); Mexican soldiers carry boxes of seized drugs.

Following the Heroin Trail

Some of the major heroin smuggling routes and distribution centers in the U.S.

Vermont

A bag of heroin that sells for \$6 in New York can cost \$40 in Vermont, which helps explain why \$2 million worth of heroin is trafficked in the state every week.



The U.S.-Mexico Border

The amount of heroin seized at the border has nearly quadrupled since 2008.

SOURCES: D.E.A., OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY, THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chicago

With major highways intersecting here, Chicago is the heroin distribution hub for the midwest. It also leads the nation in the number of heroin-related emergency room visits.

heroin for 64 days. During that period, Hale was shuttling to Michigan to care for her ailing mother. In mid-May, she answered the phone there. Her son, Collin Ivy, said: "Mom, are you sitting down? You need to. It's bad, Mama. It's Alysa."

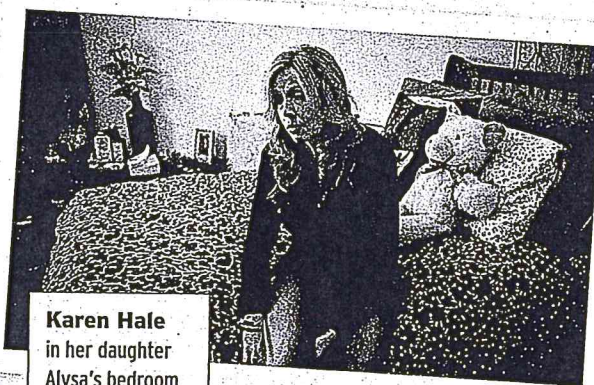
She'd been shooting up with other junkies at the Súper 8 motel. When she collapsed, no one called 911 because they feared being arrested. Instead they fled, leaving her alone in the motel room to die.

Becoming an Activist

Her death prompted her mother to begin a quest to understand Alysa's addiction. She grilled Alysa's friends and retraced her steps, even visiting underground "rig hubs," injection centers where addicts use clean needles and have access to naloxone, a medication for overdoses.

Gradually, Hale says, her fear and judgmental attitude about addiction have given way to compassion and activism. Never before political, she has now testified at the State Capitol in Madison, pushing strategies to help addicts. She's working for a Good Samaritan law that would grant limited immunity from drug prosecutions to those who call 911 or otherwise help an overdose victim.

She has also taken several young addicts under her wing, coaching them on how to reveal their problems to their parents, preaching to them about safe needles and naloxone, and giving them an ear.



Karen Hale
in her daughter
Alysa's bedroom

'What do you do? Do you call the police on your own child?'

"I will not give them money," Hale says. "I will not let them come to my home. If they are hungry, I will meet them at McDonald's. I'll take them to a clinic to be assessed, drive them to a treatment hospital."

"It soothes some of the guilt, fills some of the void," she says. "Basically, I wish there had been [someone like me] out there helping my daughter." •

Deborah Sontag is an investigative reporter for The New York Times. Additional reporting by Patricia Smith.