



'Scare tactics don't work with teens. I tell it as it is. Yes, you can have a good time on drugs, but you can have a bad time as well'

Georgie, 24

way, and as she grew up those differences loomed large in her head. 'I had brown hair, Mum was blond. She was thin and, in my mind, I was fat and ugly.'

As Georgie hit adolescence, Karen deliberately played down her own appearance. 'I wouldn't wear make-up or get my hair done; I wore tracksuits.' But by then, other factors were coming into play. When Georgie was ten, her parents' marriage broke down. At 13, she contracted the Epstein-Barr virus – an illness with similar symptoms to glandular fever – and had to have nine months off school. She fell behind in her work, missed her friends and emerged desperate to make up for lost time. She also determined that the best way to do this was to live with her father: 'Mum was adopting strict rules by then. I might be allowed out till 9pm, but she would insist on picking me up; Dad would get me into a nightclub and then leave me alone.'

Georgie was never under any illusions about her parents' attitude to drugs. 'Mum was totally anti. Dad told me he had experimented with drugs and that they were dangerous. But,' Georgie says, 'like a lot of 14-year-olds, I thought my parents were out to destroy me.' At school, the 'drugs kill' lecture went straight over her head. 'Those scare tactics don't work with teenagers, because they know it's not necessarily true. When I give my talks, I tell it as it is. Yes, you could die, but you probably won't. Yes, you can have a good time on drugs, but you can have a bad time on them as well. And by the time I was having a bad time, it was too late.'

Georgie's first line of cocaine was given to her at her father's home in London's Belgravia by an unnamed friend of his. Her father knew nothing about it, but did the fact that she was in her own living room make it seem more acceptable? 'Yes,' she concedes, 'but if I hadn't had it there, I would have found it elsewhere.' She developed an instant habit. 'Maybe six of us would buy a gram from someone in the pub on a Friday night – it was all very ordinary, like getting cigarettes. But after a year or so, I started using on Thursday and Saturday as well, and then it progressed to every day.'

With hindsight, Karen says, she knew about Georgie's drug-taking long before she acknowledged it. 'It is like when a lover starts being unfaithful – denial kicked in until her behaviour became so unreasonable that I had to face up to it.' She remembers reaching the point where she told Georgie she was not going to allow her to come down from her drug-fuelled highs at home. 'I had younger children to protect and they were being exposed to behaviour that they really shouldn't have seen. There was one moment, after Georgie had been using, when I insisted that she made her bed before she got in it. She refused, we had a fight and I made her leave. She slept outside in the rain, and that was the start of me saying no.'

You get a clear sense of what uncharted territory this was for a parent – and it was because so many friends came to them for advice, fearing their own children were using, that Georgie and Karen realised a couple of years ago that there was a need for their service (they have run workshops in several London schools and would like to expand beyond the capital). Karen is often asked in her sessions what signs parents should look for, and she highlights mood swings, lying, stealing, bunking off school and

changes in friendships. She remembers, too, that Georgie's appearance changed. 'She was always pretty, but she got into the goth thing, stopped being clean, didn't brush her hair.'

'I was really horrible and manipulative,' Georgie admits. She had no qualms about brow-beating her father into giving her money. 'I would say, "Dad, I need new trainers," and tell him that if I didn't have the ones I wanted, my world was going to end. And you start to make friends who are doing the same as you, because that way you can tell yourself you don't have a problem.'

At 16 and totally out of control, Georgie escaped her despairing parents by going to live with a wealthy boyfriend who had a cocaine habit worse than her own. Within months, she was spending £1,000 of his money a day on drugs. 'He would say, "Just take it out of my wallet,"' she recalls. On Georgie's 17th birthday, Karen received a call from the police. 'She was out of her head and they wanted me to collect her.' Something inside Karen flipped. 'I said, "No, let her sweat. Leave her in that cell." You go through the process of blaming everyone else, but I realised then that no one had held a gun to Georgie's head. It was her choice to live like that, but we didn't have to put up with it.'

Karen's tough-love stance was hard for the family. To protect her other children, Anthony, now 21, and Harriet, 15, Karen barred Georgie from the house for as long as she took drugs. 'Harriet adored Georgie, and she had to go to school not knowing whether her sister was alive or dead. Tony, too, would be on the phone, beside himself, in tears.'

'They loved me,' Georgie says, 'but they couldn't protect me and so they had to cut me off.' In the bleakest period of her addiction, Georgie twice overdosed on painkillers – both occasions were cries for help rather than suicide attempts, she says now. Finally, she picked up the phone to her mother. 'My hair was falling out, I was covered in spots, I didn't know myself any more. I told Mum that I would give anything to change my life. Within half an hour she was at the door, and by the end of that day she had checked me into the Priory.'

Georgie underwent three and a half months of intensive therapy, followed by further outpatient care. Today, her hair is long and lustrous, her complexion clear. For the past six years she has been in a relationship with Ian Pattullo, 34, a financial trader whom she met on a blind date. They have a one-year-old daughter, Madison, and homes in London and Barcelona. On the surface her life is once again enviable, but the teenagers she talks to are left in no doubt that her recovery has been – and remains – hard work. 'I'm better, but I'll never be cured,' she says. 'That addict voice is still in there and desperate to get out sometimes.' Despite attending regular meetings at Narcotics Anonymous, she has had several relapses following treatment. The last was two years ago and, in an instant, it obliterated the trust she had rebuilt with her family. That trust was regained only once Georgie was clean again. 'I've always believed in Georgie, even when I hated her,' says Karen. 'Even when our relationship has broken down, we both know that we love each other. But she knows that she has to be in recovery, otherwise we won't see her. That sounds harsh, but it is the only way to help Georgie help herself.'

For details of the workshops, go to richardsoncalder.co.uk