

PREGNANT, ADDICTED, FIGHTING FOR A SOBER LIFE.

Linsey Crider can plot the moments that left her deeper than before. Recounting them, she doesn't bristle at the memory. They unfold with a lightness, a casual delivery of time and place. One begins at a gas station near her apartment in Jeffersonville, Indiana. As she filled her car's tank, a male high-school friend walked by. "Hey!" she said. It had been a few years since the two bumped into each other at cheerleading competitions. The invitation back to her apartment seemed natural, obvious. "Let's catch up!" she said, smiling a vibrant all-American grin — teeth lined snug and ruler-straight, a bit of Cheshire Cat curling the corners. That smile, her sky-blue eyes, hair so thick that bobby pins could go lost for days, usually blond but at this time dyed midnight black. If Crider weren't so bubbly, so outgoing, her looks might intimidate. "You still like to party?" he asked. "Yeah!" she said, an answer in its purest form, a gut-level truth.

He followed her to her apartment. They settled into white wood chairs at her white kitchen table, one of the pieces of furniture she inherited from her deceased mother. A vanity table still held a set of false eyelashes her mother wore during the chemo. So elegant, even as every blond strand and last pound faded. Doctors never did halt the 33-year-old's cancer. She died when Crider was 11 years old.

Her friend took out his kit. Every heroin user has one — a needle, cotton ball, belt. Crider wasn't scared. This made sense. Opanas were costing \$120 a pill, double what she used to pay. She had needed three of those pain pills to get through the day. Heroin's a 10- to 20-buck high. He tightened the brown leather belt around her arm. She wasn't scared. A bit nervous though. When she's nervous, she chuckles, a string of staccato laughs. She trusted him. He mixed the drug with water, slid the needle in a soaked cotton ball and let it sip.

She'd never considered heroin before. Another first. At 11, Crider's father and his friends handed her plastic cups of peach schnapps mixed with orange juice at an outdoor concert. She wasn't scared. Booze made people funny. She gulped the sweetness under a hot July sun. Metallica roared. Kid Rock yelled. Woozy, easy smiles drifted. In high school she picked up anti-anxiety meds, like Xanax — roughly staple-sized white bars. Smoked weed too. Her senior year remains the blurriest. At 18 years old she started working at Fourth Street

Live. Drinks every night, lines of cocaine. Pain pills had always made her sick. Then a friend introduced Opanas, teaching her how to shave and snort them.

Inside the apartment, one of Crider's veins floated to the surface. She couldn't watch, turning away. A television occupied the background. This is how it would go for a while — him shooting her up. She would do it herself once the wait for a middleman became too inefficient. The needle inserted with less of a prick, more of a pop. Heroin rushed into her bloodstream. Warmth traveled up her neck. The drug entered her brain, switching to morphine and binding to opioid receptors, tiny cells that cue her brain's pleasure center, which releases dopamine. Warmth groped her limbs. The only way she would ever be able to describe this moment: "Like God came down and touched me." A cop's anti-drug sermons from elementary school, her grandmother's despair ("I can't watch you like this, Linsey") — all of it dead sound. The warmth surged, a raw serenity.

Over the years, Crider would give birth to two girls. Maternal instinct, primal and fierce, would urge her to quit during the pregnancies. She would give up Opanas for several weeks with her first. Her insides would burn hot, reverse to cold. Diarrhea would alternate with vomiting. "I'm going to die; I see the light!" she would tell a friend. But the hook would then clench tighter. She'd go back. With the second baby she'd seek help. A judge would demand it.

Crider can't cite the something, the void, that drugs fix. Origins didn't matter back at that kitchen table with her old pal. It was normal. It was euphoric, though false.

Life plods, dips low and rebounds, at its best soaring to Everest-level highs. Emotions should follow. When it's all peaks, a slide awaits.

Over the railroad tracks that divide Shelby Park and Germantown, past a pack of weathered shotgun houses and up a steep driveway, stands Freedom House, a drug-treatment facility for pregnant women. It is the only place in Louisville that allows pregnant mothers in recovery to live with their other children. As such, a wait list of five to 15 names always lingers in the office. With six apartments split between two levels, the building is nondescript, a bulky brick box facing southeast, catching first glimpse of morning sun and the tail of summer storms.



Crider tends to her infant Brooklyn in her Freedom House apartment.

Inside it's clean and sparse — floors like those in school hallways, a cornbread-yellow staircase lined with framed newborn photos, dim lighting. When dryers purr, the smell of fresh laundry wafts throughout. The screechy sounds of mystery and crime shows often spill from apartments with doors left open. Coffee's shared from whichever pot is hot. So are answers on recovery worksheets: "What did you write for this answer? Start living for God, right?" Highlighters streak passages from *The Big Book* (the official Alcoholics Anonymous text) and a recovery bible.

Some nights a few women huddle in an apartment — one ear listening for waking babies, the other absorbing gossip, mostly boyfriend talk. They share the love punctured by fights, surmising that, yes, perhaps codependency's at play. Sometimes the entire building shakes, like a shiver up the spine. No one's sure why.

Addiction is no different in men and women. Drug use starts with a decision. But for about 15 percent of the population, with enough use, an arbitrary, invisible line into the chronic disease of addiction gets crossed. Various kinds of drugs — opioids or opiates (pain pills, heroin, morphine), benzodiazepines (anti-anxiety meds), alcohol — ignite the pleasure center in their own way. But they all work. Addiction embeds itself into the limbic system, the brain's center that controls emotions, behavior and motivation. Drug use becomes compulsive, beyond control, as necessary as blinking. Addiction hijacks the judgment parts of the brain — gray, wrinkled matter on top of the limbic system — that begin to heal only after months, if not years, of sobriety.

There are ways out. One: replacement drugs like methadone that plug the need to use coupled with behavioral therapy. Methadone, administered at clinics, costs about \$15 per day. For pregnant addicts, that route's recommended, per obstetric and gynecological guidelines. Stopping drug use entirely can result in miscarriage. But talk to addiction specialists and neonatal doctors and many swing more toward the second option — carefully weaning from the drug of choice, engaging in long-term treatment with the goal of abstinence. Babies exposed to methadone must withdraw from the drug upon delivery. Plus, ridding dependence on chemicals is healthier for families in the long run, some experts say. Mothers at Freedom House, a program run through Volunteers of America, often embrace number two.

Most women stay three to six months. Gauging success mostly comes down to one metric — the delivery of a drug-free baby, a mission with palpable urgency. Everyone knows about the epidemic: pill mills, overprescribing of pain and anxiety medication, sweeping addictions over the last decade. As a result, more women have used while pregnant. The statistics: A recent report by the Kentucky Injury and Prevention and Research Center cited 824 hospitalizations for infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome, or NAS, in 2012 — inconsolable babies suffering fevers, vomiting, cramping, seizures due to exposure to opiates in utero. Some babies just need swaddling and holding to endure. Others require weaning off of small doses of morphine. Eight hundred and twenty-four cases. That's up from 28 in 2000, 485 in 2010. It now costs roughly \$40 million to

treat these sick babies, up from \$4 million in 2005. Kosair Children's Hospital usually has 10 to 12 NAS babies at a time.

This isn't just a Kentucky problem. A wave of addiction to prescription pills and, more recently, heroin have swept the United States and spiked NAS cases, from Vermont to Florida to Washington state. In 2000, NAS affected about one per every 1,000 children born in the U.S. By 2009, the number had grown to more than three per every 1,000 babies. As one University of Louisville neonatologist stated, the problem just went "kaboom."

It's the second week of May and a light rain taps on Crider's second-story window. She watches Spike TV on her gray couch at Freedom House. The apartment squeezes kitchen and living area into one compact space. For a few more days, she will share it with another mother who recently gave birth to a chubby, healthy baby girl. Crider's roommate, who has been there about six months, is heading for a hotel, belongings packed in boxes and trash bags. Crider's light blond hair is pulled back in a ponytail. The 25-year-old's arms rest on top of her belly. During her first trimester, she abused heroin and prescription pills. No money left for food, her five-foot-six-inch frame sunk in rather than swelled with growing life. Now in her eighth month — the last four clean — she's shaped as expected.

Someone knocks and the knob turns. Twenty-eight-year-old Martha Williams peers in. Currently, seven women, three newborns and two toddlers live at Freedom House. Full, as usual. The women represent a mix of races and social classes. Two of them act inseparable, even dressing alike. Another keeps more to herself, hip-hop music playing behind her door. Williams just put her 22-month-old daughter, Kierra, nicknamed "Kiki," down for a nap. The toddler is a favorite at the house — with those brown doe eyes that mask the mischief and a crown of springy curls. Staff members dote on her, slipping a lollipop here, an extra hug there. When someone spots Kiki, exclamation points follow. "Kiki!"

"Want to do my hair?" asks Williams, who is also eight months pregnant. Crider pushes herself up, shuffling her pink fuzzy slippers to the kitchen table. She stretches gloves over her hands. A few inches up on her forearms she has matching star tattoos outlined in green and yellow. Impulse on a party night, she says. No significance. Same goes for the lilies and Greek lettering on her torso, the words "love" and "hate" on the nape of her neck and a tribal "tramp stamp" she says her dad helped her pick out at 16 years old.

Crider shakes two white bottles and gently brushes Williams' long brown hair. She presses lines of dark gel onto Williams' scalp. It's a Wednesday afternoon, the lone weekday with a stretch of free time. Women must attend Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings five times a week. The program builds in other requirements — morning meditation, group therapy, one-on-one counseling, nutrition and parenting classes, drug-refusal role-playing. Still, the in-between hours can drag. "If my daughter was here, I wouldn't get bored," Crider says.

"We'll be good here in about a month," Williams says, referring to the two little girls they will soon deliver.

Crider lost custody of her first child, Dallas, on Dec. 4, 2012. She was lying with her under the Christmas tree. Glittery glass ornaments: a wonder to infant eyes. Then, a

knock. "Sheriff. Open up." *Oh, shit*, she thought. Crider had attempted sobriety after her little girl, blond and blue-eyed just like Mom, was born. On a night out, her stepsister heard that Crider was asking around for heroin. Word spread to family. Someone called Child Protective Services. Crider failed one drug test. Then another.

"We have to take her," the CPS worker said, lifting Dallas from Crider's arms. The infant in soft-blue sweatpants and a white onesie didn't cry. Crider wept furiously, threatening to kill herself. "A natural reaction to someone taking your child," she says, remembering the day. She called Dallas' father. He had warned her this day would come. It's a difficult relationship they have — him watching the friendly beauty he was so drawn to spiral; her wanting to reunite as a family. Right now, terms are particularly thorny. "This

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isn't his baby," Crider says, pointing to her belly, letting out that nervous laugh. She met a man during an AA meeting last fall. Just friends, she thought. Then more. They used, things happened. "Birth control's the last thing you think about," Crider says. She was supposed to get an IUD after her first child, but all of her money went to drugs. "I had to pay \$200 for (the IUD). Screw that," she recalls thinking.

Crider massages the gel into Williams' hair, turning her gloves a tomato red. She pauses to rub a cramp in the left side of her belly with her forearm. "I'm hurting today," she sighs. When it's not false labor, it's a knuckle-sized elbow jabbing her ribs.

"Let's just have these babies, Linsey!" Williams says. This will be Williams' fourth — all girls. "It's weird when I tell people this is my fourth pregnancy. What you really don't know is, I've never been a parent before," she says. An aunt has custody of her first two children. Kiki has always lived with Williams.

"We're learning to be adults," Crider replies. "I always heard that the age you start using is when your maturity stops."

"So I'm like 13!" Williams says, laughing. She is blunt, funny. Her face is long, attractive, geometric — high cheekbones and a sharp chin buckled into a V. With Kiki, she was clean. Post-delivery, sore from a cesarean section, she accepted some prescription pain meds. "And it was over. Seriously, from that very first one. It was over. And ever since then," she says. During the first few months of her current pregnancy she smoked crack and shot up heroin, trying to convince herself that maybe she wasn't pregnant. *Just don't think about it.*

"See this?" Williams asks, pointing to her cheek, the skin dented and rough. "I used to just stick a needle in my face." She mimes sewing the cheek's pulp, back and forth. "It didn't hurt I was so high."

Heroin's the drug now in Louisville, Williams says. Kentucky's supply is mostly a product of Mexico. "When the pills ran out, man, the government and all that thought they were doing the country this big favor by taking Oxy and pain pills off the market," Williams says, addressing local and national efforts that stifled the flow of prescription meds and made them harder to dissolve and inject. "It just made it worse. We couldn't get that no more. We went to heroin. It was cheaper and easier? Fine. Then people started dying."

Williams says she had a cousin overdose in a Waffle House bathroom, leaving behind four kids. A family friend overdosed in a motel room. Another friend overdosed, she says, "his first time trying heroin." Her second daughter's father killed himself, she heard, because his addiction had gotten so out of control. All heroin, all within the last few

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years. Heroin's a gamble. Dealers can cut it with the pain med fentanyl for extra kick. It's never clear how much of what is in the bag. In Kentucky, Jefferson County had the highest number of heroin-overdose deaths last year — 105, three times higher than Fayette County (Lexington), which came in second. In 2013, heroin caused 32 percent of all Kentucky overdose deaths, up from about 20 percent in 2012. (According to a 2013 Trust for America's Health report, Kentucky had the third-highest drug-overdose mortality rate in the nation. A majority of those overdoses still come from abuse of prescription drugs.)

An ad on TV catches Crider's eye as she oozes more gel onto a fistful of Williams' hair. "I'm going to punch this guy in the face!" she yells.

"What guy?"

"The Passages Malibu guy!" On the screen, fountains, turquoise water and pretty women lifting weights introduce a slick eel of a man touting his drug-treatment center in California.

"Oh!" Williams yells. "Every time I see this commercial, I crack up!"

"I was an addict for 10 years. Now I'm not," Crider says, mocking the man on TV. "Get a couple's massage, do a yoga class, and you'll be good. . . . Weirdo. I've been to fancy rehabs."

"You get massages?"

"No. We had a personal chef though," Crider says.

"That's cool."

Crider's never been without. She describes her family as middle class. Her father worked long hours in management at the Colgate factory in Southern Indiana; her mother, who died in May 2000, was a nursing-home administrator. They divorced when she was three. As a child, Barbie dolls filled a basement playroom in her mom's split-level Jeffersonville home. At 16, Crider received a new yellow Volkswagen Beetle. She traveled the country with a competitive cheerleading team, wrestling all that hair into curlers, dousing teammates in glitter for pop. She'd tip a dish of

sparkle and blow. Crider was the tumbler — flips on repeat and fast-forward.

After Crider lost custody of her daughter, her family enrolled her in a lakeside treatment center in Wisconsin. The "fancy rehab." After 60 days, she was released with 180 strips of Suboxone, a drug that affects opioid receptors, easing withdrawal. She Googled how to shoot it. Something went wrong. Her face turned purple. Her chest closed. She scrambled to a neighbor's house, blacked out and woke to paramedics.

Crider thought she'd finally kicked addiction last summer after time in a facility in Elizabethtown. Her family felt confident too. She got a call-center job and moved to her grandmother's house in Jeffersonville, a cozy, brick ranch with endless family photos and a yippy Shih Tzu — Jackson, named for Michael Jackson, who died the day the pup arrived. "I'm happier than I've ever been," her grandma remembers Crider saying. A few months went by. Her father died in a motorcycle accident. As an only child, this death hit hard. Their relationship was strained, but close. Both parents gone, she felt alone. Soon Crider found out she was pregnant. She stopped going to work. She stayed out late. "I knew it was over," her grandmother says. Crider had kept one needle — a just-in-case — hidden in the closet, buried in a soft vest's pocket.

Crider twists Williams' drenched hair into a bun. This time, no secret stash, she says. She's wrung, tired. "Honestly, if I wanted to go get high I could go get high," she says. "But I don't want that. I don't want it anymore." When the women go to the grocery store or meetings in a van or by foot, passing details jump out — a liquor store with familiar faces, a boyfriend's car parked near an old drug house, a needle on the sidewalk. Triggers — that's the lingo. Take it day by day, find your higher power, no one said this would be easy — the learned reaction. For Crider, there's extra motivation. "I've got prison time hanging over my head," she says.

On Sunday, January 12 of this year, Crider awoke groggy. "Like there but not there," she says. A Xanax hangover. She was in a girlfriend's apartment in South Louisville. Morning hours were lost dissecting clutter on the floor and in drawers. They interrogated each other. That guy, he had brought 15 pills. Where were they? Then it struck. They had taken them all. Laughable, it seemed. But now what? Neither had money. How would they get more? Without it, withdrawal from Xanax would erupt: blurred vision, diarrhea, twitching muscles.

That guy. Crider's friend had stolen a debit card from him. *I know his pin number*, Crider remembers her friend saying. A plan: Go to an ATM. Crider walked around the corner, the buzz of I-264 over her shoulder. She walked past the gas pumps, opened the glass door to the Circle K market, doughnuts and muffins on her left, a chest of colorful ice cream glowing to her right, an animated polar bear pushing his "Polar Pop" from an opposite wall. The card slid in. She punched buttons. It didn't work.

Crider turned around, walking to the register. The clerk, a tall 30-something man with dark hair, may have picked up on cues — the unkempt hair, gaunt face, the there but not there.

"I need all the money out of the register," Crider said. "What?"

"I'm serious. I have a gun," she lied.

The cashier handed her money. But not enough.

"I need the rest of it," she demanded.

"No," he replied. She spotted a bathroom key on the counter. She grabbed the handle — a plastic pole — and hit him, the metal key jangling in distress. He fought back, ripping off her jacket. Crider ran out past a security camera, and, in a blink, it captured three clear images. One, head slightly turned. Two, eyes closed. Three, eyelids heavy but raised.

Outside, a car stopped. The woman from the apartment and the woman's boyfriend called to Crider, who slid into the backseat. Reality registered in pieces — *Did I just do that? I robbed someone. Did I?* Just two days before, Crider had tried to find a detox facility that would take her. She drove to one in Elizabethtown that turned her away. So did one in Louisville. Crider was four months pregnant. Most detox facilities won't admit pregnant women due to the risk of miscarriage.

Sirens wailed in the distance. Tomorrow, she told herself, she'd go to Jefferson Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center downtown, one of the only places in Louisville that detoxes pregnant women. The following morning she arrived at JADAC, a cavernous one-time government building with pleasant landscaping and long tinted windows. Dorms hold 80 detox beds, roughly 80 percent filled by opiate addicts, an increasing number of whom are white and younger than 35. In need of a \$250 copay, Crider called her stepmom. The two sat in a waiting area steeped in yellow. Crider eyed the cash. If there was a debate in her mind, she doesn't recall.

Crider reached for the money. Her stepmom, a sturdy, auburn-haired woman, yanked back. The two tumbled into a hallway. Crider, the cash in hand, bolted through one door, then the front door, her phone and purse abandoned on the plastic waiting-room chair. She went to a nearby McDonald's, borrowed a phone from a stranger and called a cab. By afternoon she was high at a house just around the corner from the same Circle K she'd robbed.

In Louisville newsrooms, the three security-camera photos popped into email inboxes. Producers plugged her into the evening news. "Tonight, Metro Police are looking for..."

Crider woke up to feel Brian Gentner, her ex-boyfriend and Dallas' dad, pulling on her feet. "Come on, we got to go," he said. (Gentner says Crider called him to get her. She doesn't remember.) She sat nodding off in the front seat. He headed back to JADAC. It was closed for the night. His phone rang. Frenzied text messages followed. Pictures of Crider had just aired. Her family called. "Take her to jail!"

"What the f--k did you do?" Gentner asked. "What are you thinking?"

Crider didn't want to go to jail. *I'll go to Cuba*, she thought. But running from police would be worse, a decision made on a slow ride to the downtown police precinct. They pulled over every few blocks, delaying the inevitable. He was reluctant. She dreaded the consequences. A detective instantly recognized Crider and booked her into jail, a chilly, grim capsule of a building.

Nearly all of the 280 women in the female wing have their own drug tales. About 30 live in a "detox" dorm, a corner unit with a sisterly, therapeutic vibe. Poetry and recovery-themed drawings cling to concrete blocks. Because Crider was pregnant, jail protocol forbade her from detoxing. She was put on a low dose of pain medication. Crider's



Crider at Baptist East Hospital the day after Brooklyn was born.



Martha Williams holds her infant Zoey at Freedom House.

dorm, like the entire jail, was overcrowded. She slept on the floor in a gray sleigh-like bin with a mattress and blanket. Inmates call these bins “the boats.” In sentencing, the judge agreed to five years probation as long as Crider committed to treatment. That’s how she ended up at Freedom House. If she messes up again, the judge said, prison awaits.

Williams works a butter knife on a lock, opening the plastic case protecting the air conditioner’s dial. It’s early June. “I’m burning up!” she says, relieved at the throaty exhale of cool air from vents. “I’m not myself today,” she says, a bit agitated. Staff recently caught her with a cell phone. No personal phones, no Facebook — those are the rules at Freedom House. Privileges, like weekend passes to visit her boyfriend, have been temporarily revoked. The term — boyfriend — cheapens their bond. He’s fathered Kiki and the little girl on the way. In their five years together, they’ve used, sobered up, relapsed, moved to Bullitt County, to Baltimore and back. He adores Williams and the children. Kiki runs in gleeful circles when he visits.

Kiki sits in her high chair, eating a hot dog, the ketchup dripping on a never-worn neon striped shirt. “Dude, what was I thinking?” Williams says, dabbing a wet cloth to the

new outfit. She lifts Kiki out with a grunt. Such maneuvers are difficult at this stage in pregnancy. “Stinky, go get your baby,” she says. Kiki’s feet clap to a wicker baby carriage festooned in red bows. The apartment is stocked with Freedom House furniture and toys — a pink castle, Mickey Mouse guitar and a green toddler-sized rocking chair.

Williams cleans plates, her belly leading the way in black leggings and a form-hugging pink tank top. Williams writes. She’s curious too. A friend in the house told her she’d make a good reporter. For now she writes letters to her addiction: “You’re sort of a stalker.” She writes letters to the children who don’t live with her: “. . . I wanted so much to be the very best mom in the world for you. . . . But I was very sick suffering from an illness that I was not really aware of. . . . I’m always thinking and wishing the best for you. . . . Love, Mom.” Signed in pink ink.

Williams opens a notebook to a song she’s titled “Show Me the Way.”

“Oh, man,” she sighs. Closing her hazel eyes, she sings:

“It’s way past midnight, and I’m wide awake. Still losing this fight to the demons inside. . . .” Williams has a beautiful voice, one built to hold a spiritual hymn. She’s been having nightmares about using. “I want to live my life,” she sings. “I want to be all right. So I bow my head and pray: God, show me the way. . . .”

The dreams never land in a specific place. Sometimes her boyfriend is there. A few weeks ago he relapsed and, she says, “disappeared” on her. Nightmares aren’t new for her. Typically they dredge up past trauma. When she was little, a boy at school sexually molested her. Closer to her teenage years, a neighbor did as well. She grew up mostly in Bullitt County. Her father was a heavy drinker. Addiction runs on her mom’s side too. Her parents had a rocky, sometimes violent, relationship.

When Williams talks about her struggles, she does so with clarity, packaged in declarations. Making berry muffins one afternoon, she says: “Somewhere along the line I got the impression that life is supposed to be easy. It’s not supposed to get hard. That’s not true. Life is hard. You just have to make the decision: I’m going to deal with these things and be as happy as I can be.”

Williams takes her life to paper when Kiki sleeps. As part of AA’s 12 steps, she must write every regret, mistake, fragments never spoken of. Accountability, that’s a big piece of recovery. She’ll have to read it aloud with her sponsor. In difficult moments, she leans on “her higher power” — the image isn’t that of a human God but the ocean, a forever horizon of blue calm.

Some women in Freedom House just want to stay clean to ensure a healthy baby. Williams doesn’t want to lose any more of her children. “My family’s already talking about who’s going to get Kierra if this doesn’t stop. No way. I’m not losing her for anybody,” she says. Not long ago, Williams would hole up with Kiki in the bathroom of a trailer home they were staying at in Bullitt County and get high for eight or nine hours at a time, her baby playing with bath toys or whining herself to sleep. One night, Williams smoked so much crack she could only breathe in tight gasps. Her boyfriend went for help. “And all I could think was, ‘Oh, if I could get more air I could get one more hit before he gets back,’” she says.

Williams voluntarily went into detox and waited for a spot to open at Freedom House. Residential treatment facilities like Freedom House that keep clients for several months tend to provide the most hope for long-term sobriety. According to a 2012 *Courier-Journal* article, 40 of Kentucky’s 301 treatment centers offer 24-hour residential care. Wait lists are long. Run on a roughly \$300,000 budget, Volunteers of America recently started fund-raising with the goal of adding 12 apartments to their program.

“Let’s go outside, Kiki,” Williams says, guiding her daughter down a set of stairs to the playground sandwiched between Freedom House and Volunteer of America’s large five-story drug-treatment facility for men. Under a shade tree, Kiki climbs onto a squeaky swing. A warm afternoon wind tosses wisps of hair into Williams’ face. “I feel strong. I have God,” she says. Her hands find her hips in a superhero stance. “I’m just determined, yo. There’s like no way I’m going back.”

Like all women here, Williams must redraw her social circles. Who will she live with once she leaves? Does this someone understand addiction? She wants to move back with her boyfriend, who has promised no more drugs. “We’re a family. He’s the father of my children. I want us to be together,” she says, pushing the swing. “You know, a lot of people like me who grew up in a crazy, dysfunctional family . . . you want family.”

Heather Pauline, Freedom House’s program manager, walks out for a smoke break. Tall and freckled, with curly hair, Pauline smiles, and the two start talking. “Oh, hey,” Williams starts. “Can I ask you a question?”

“I don’t know,” Pauline jokes, as she often does.

“What do I have to do . . .” Williams says, searching for words, “. . . because I was thinking, hoping, OK, this is what I’m hoping for, is, if I don’t have to, I don’t really want to have to stay a month and a half to two months after the baby is born.”

“Where you going?” Pauline asks softly, knowing the answer. “What happens if he gets high?”

“Yeah, I will leave him,” Williams says. “I have no problem with that.”

Williams has family she could live with. She’s close with her little sister, Hannah, also a recovering addict. But Hannah’s battling leukemia. Adding two kids to her home might be overwhelming. There’s her mom, maybe her brother.

“I mean, we’re not holding you hostage,” Pauline says. “I just want to make sure you keep your sobriety first, then those babies. (He’s) down on that list.”

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Brooklyn Renea Mitchell was born June 17. The day after, Crider gazes at the seven-pound-10-ounce baby — all squeaks and stretches, legs still scrunched from the womb. Brooklyn arrived on time, totally healthy, no signs of NAS. Had Crider abused drugs into her second and third trimesters she may not have been as lucky. NAS affects 60 to 80 percent of infants exposed to opiates in utero. Pre-term birth is also common. (Crider’s first child was also born healthy.) Brooklyn looks just like her dad — brown hair, oval face. Then Crider notices her daughter’s pinkies. Both are crooked, the top segments bent inward, just like hers. On a desk, pink roses and a soft teddy bear anchor a pastel “Baby Girl” balloon. In the corner, a green paperback recovery bible tops a stack of books.

Brooklyn’s father sits next to Crider on the hospital bed. They interact with stiff politeness, like seatmates on a plane. Romance no longer connects the two. Only their daughter. He’s quiet, enchanted by the bundle in pink ice cream cone pajamas he cradles on his forearms. Brooklyn attempts to open her eyes, just for an instant. Mom and Dad cheer her on. Crider loves being a mother. Still, she considered adoption with this pregnancy. Both of them were recovering addicts. But she decided against it. Once the nurses placed the warm infant on her chest, all felt right.

Crider’s mother suffered a miscarriage during her first pregnancy. When Crider arrived, her mom rejoiced, throwing herself into motherhood — videotaping dance classes, taking Crider to gymnastics lessons, having dinner on the table between 6 and 7 every night. “Linsey was her world,” Pat Muncy, Crider’s grandmother, recalls.

Once her mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, Crider helped feed her in the hospital. She watched her

mother shave her hair during chemo and spend the last few months in bed under a blanket covered in roses at their Jeffersonville home. Crider was horseback-riding with a neighbor one day and came home to family with red, swollen eyes. That's when she knew. Other than that, memories have evaporated. Grief doesn't surface. She can't explain it.

After her mother's death, Crider, an only child, moved in with her father at a place in Charlestown, Indiana, down a steep driveway, back in the woods. "A party house," Crider says. It often smelled of freshly cracked beer and whiskey.

Not long before the January robbery, Crider drove to her grandmother's home, panicked. "I need \$75 or else he's going to kill me," she said. Her grandmother had a rule: She'd give Crider money for food or gas. Not drugs. "Let them kill you," her grandmother said. "Because I can't see you like this anymore."

Her father lived a big life — Harleys, parties, a turn as a priest at an independent Catholic church. Everyone loved him. In private, the contrast surfaced. If he would drink too much, she says, his temper ignited. He'd wake her, throw stuff. As she adjusted to her dad's home and the loss of her mother, those middle-school years ached. Her anger hit odd targets, like the girl who told everyone at school Crider's mother died. She still resents her. By high school, though, the "party house" offered the gift of loose rules. She could do what she wanted. Crider's grandmother had wanted to care for her granddaughter, but the father's parental rights trumped hers.

Now, on the green couch near Crider's hospital bed, Muncy leans over and talks softly. The 68-year-old with tanned skin and small blue eyes is worried. That's what she does, what she has to do. She's the only close family Crider has left. She worries about how people will view Crider in this story. She worries that Crider answered "no" when a nurse asked if addiction has ever been a problem. (Because she's been clean for five months, the granddaughter says, why invite the judgment that comes with answering yes?) Muncy's pleased with Crider's stay at Freedom House, the progress. At night, Crider organizes study sessions. She helps a housemate who can't read well through *The Big Book*. All good signs, but, Muncy worries, the lows are still so fresh.

Not long before the January robbery, Crider drove to Muncy's home, panicked.

"I need \$75 or else he's going to kill me," she said. Muncy had a rule: She'd give Crider money for food or gas. Not drugs.

"Let them kill you," Muncy said. "Because I can't see you like this anymore." She followed Crider out the door and watched her drive away. "It broke my heart," Muncy says. She had raised three children with no major issues. Now she was lying awake at night wondering if her granddaughter would make it to 30. "I've realized, she's either going to make it, or she's not," Muncy whispers. A few feet away, Brooklyn squeaks through a yawn.

Just a few days before Crider gave birth, Williams delivered Zoey Ann Jewel Grace Taylor on Father's Day. With the baby fast asleep in pink polka-dot pajamas on a striped bouncy seat, Williams tucks a white blanket around her at Freedom House. "Holding her, she's just so perfect," she says. A full head of black hair, chubby cheeks and lips like a bow, Williams doesn't exaggerate. Zoey's one of 86 children born drug-free at Freedom House since it started 21 years ago. (A VOA spokesperson says the agency has only kept track of clean babies until recently. In the last two years two babies have had to withdraw from methadone.)

Williams almost didn't get to take Zoey home from the hospital. After delivery, a social worker arrived asking her about domestic violence, drug use. She said neither were a problem. "I didn't tell them anything because it was all in my chart," she says. Williams had been open with her OB/GYN about her addiction. This caused confusion. Adding to the stress, her file showed a positive drug test for cocaine two months ago. But this was a mistake. The test dated back two years. (Freedom House regularly drug-tests its clients and Williams never tested positive. "How do you screw something up that big?" Williams asks.)

Zoey got to come home. "God worked that out for us," Williams says. Her baby whimpers. The mother gently lifts Zoey, fingers bracing the neck. "You're so pretty," she coos. She lifts her shirt and places her to eat. It's the first child she's breastfed, the first for whom she's been clean enough to do so.

Williams' apartment is one of the brightest at the house. Her curtains open, summer sun lifts the room. It fits her mood today. She's proud that all she has taken is ibuprofen for pain. Zoey in her arms, she's happy. In a few minutes, Kiki, who's been staying with family, will rush through the door to meet her baby sister, grabbing her doll's baby bottles and blankets, eager to help. Life will be chaotic with two little ones, but for the first time in Williams' life, she feels equipped. "Just the fact that I'm able to do just the things that I've done, which is just the normal stuff — get up, be a mom, take care of my kids, make appointments on time, simple stuff, everyday stuff. I feel strong, and it's not something that's normal for me to do."

Crider pulls out two ears of corn from a black tote bag, running a knife down the cob as kernels tumble onto a white cutting board. She recently got accepted to culinary school at Sullivan University. When the call came, staff members cheered. Crider smiled, a bit stunned: "I've never followed through on anything in my life!" She often cooks for the house. This evening it's corn chowder. Over the weekend, she roasted a 15-pound turkey, a little out of season for mid-July. But cooking has become a hobby, her first in years, she realizes.

"Linsey," a voice from the office yells. "He's here." Crider walks into the afternoon heat. A balding sheriff's deputy with wraparound black sunglasses smiles as he greets her. "You're not in trouble, honey," he reassures her, handing her paperwork. "Good luck, dear." She slides the papers into a folder. What a mess, this past week. She throws bare cobs into a pot, adds water to make broth, and explains.

Brooklyn's father picked the baby up for a visit and did not return her. "I'm not bringing her back," Crider recalls

him saying on the phone. In family circuit court, his attorney filed a magazine-length packet annotating why Crider shouldn't have custody. Exhibit F listed every charge she'd ever faced — from traffic citations to January's robbery. Exhibit B held 12 pages of his clean drug tests since completing treatment in Texas. Exhibit G included pictures of the spacious home Brooklyn's father offered — a generous green lawn, a closet full of baby clothes neatly hung. Crider's residence was summarized as such: "not ideal for a newborn infant to be surrounded by women and other children with addiction and substance abuse problems."

The sheriff's paperwork now tucked in the folder formalizes a temporary shared-custody agreement worked out during a hearing. Mediation is set for this fall, when a judge will determine a long-term custody deal. Crider's legal bill could end up running a couple thousand dollars. Mary Rives, Crider's attorney, says her client is unique in that she can afford this. If she didn't have family money, Rives says, Crider couldn't have hired her. Brooklyn would still be with her father. "No doubt in my mind," Rives says, frustrated.

She works with addicts "all day every day." She witnesses their experience in the criminal-justice system. Women get caught using. Children are taken away. Upon entering treatment, mothers want to fight for some sort of custody or visitation but don't have the resources to do so. Without their children, sobriety seems pointless. "If you're a victim of domestic violence, you can call up Legal Aid and get a lawyer to represent you," she says. "If you're an addict, there's no one to call if you need help." It's often said addiction is the only criminalized disease. According to a 2009 report by CASAColumbia, an organization that researches addiction, for every dollar spent on addiction and substance abuse in Kentucky, 92 cents goes toward consequences while prevention and treatment gets seven cents. Nationwide, the disparity's more pronounced with only two cents targeting treatment. (In July, a Tennessee mom was charged with assault for using drugs while pregnant under a new state law.)

Crider knows she's lucky. Steam rises from her tall soup pot. She stirs, flips over a recipe card. Without a good lawyer, she could've been in prison right now. After the robbery, her family hired a well-respected criminal attorney. When they first met, he told her he'd worked out a deal: 30 days in jail, then five years probation for armed robbery. Crider resisted. "I've got to go see my daughter," she said. "I can't spend 30 days in jail. I'm pregnant." She went back to the jail and told her bunkmates the conversation. "You're the biggest moron in this place!" they said, laughing. Crider eventually accepted the deal.

The felony will remain on her record, but she says maybe that's a good thing. A blessing. So strange to classify it like that, she thinks. "I've never done the halfway-house thing. Every time I've gotten sober, my family has been there to be like, 'Yay! We're here to help you.' This time my family walked," she says. Before moving to Freedom House she'd never ridden the bus. Family helped pay her rent. "Now I'm pretty much homeless," she says. "I think I needed to be knocked off my pedestal and shown you can't have everything handed to you."

In mid-July Williams, in a T-shirt and black yoga pants, watches *Law & Order* as Zoey naps and Kiki climbs from table to couch. Kiki leaps into Williams' arms during a fire-alarm test. Williams walks to the staircase, yelling to the office, "She's traumatized. I'm gonna send you all the bill." Her humor's intact, but she's down, quite low. It's her first day back in Freedom House after a week at a hospital psych unit. "I guess I have post-partum," she says. "I am pretty depressed. My anxiety is, like, through the roof. I was having bad thoughts." Anticipating how that last remark might be interpreted, she quickly adds, "Of course, I would never. I just thought, 'Well, I need some help.'"

Her sister's leukemia has advanced. There's not really much else doctors can do. Plans to move in with her boyfriend have stalled — he's working at a restaurant as a cook, but the pay isn't great. They think they've found an apartment, but it won't be ready for a few weeks. Williams tucks her knees into her chest on the couch. She was supposed to be strong for her sister, for her family. She feels guilty for breaking, guilty for placing her two girls with her mom while she was in the hospital. Guilt festers for Williams and for many women in recovery. To hear children call a foster parent "Mom," to watch your own suffer through withdrawal — the guilt accumulates. Williams' second child spent weeks shaking and crying coming off OxyContin. "I'm sorry," Williams says she whispered to her.

A prayer helps recalibrate toward the light: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.* "Just keep praying, man. That's all I can do. If I do get crazy, I just got to not get high. I'll get through it. We'll get through it, Kiki," she says, hugging her daughter's delicate shoulders.

"Just keep praying, man. That's all I can do. If I do get crazy, I just got to not get high. I'll get through it. We'll get through it, Kiki," Williams says, hugging her daughter's delicate shoulders.

Crider's case manager is due to be buzzed into Freedom House's front door any minute to drive them to a pediatrician's appointment. When in JADAC, pregnant women receive a case manager to help them attend appointments and recovery meetings.

She leans over a Hello Kitty car seat. She tickles Brooklyn's belly, her fingernails coated with chipped red polish. "Is it funny that you didn't sleep at all?" Crider asks. It's a mild mid-July day, and Crider wears jeans and a tank top. She slips a bottled mocha Frappuccino in a pink diaper bag and clips a singing red bird onto Brooklyn's car seat. Behind her on the refrigerator, a pink "It's a Girl!" note from the hospital with Brooklyn's height and weight hangs next to a list of handwritten contacts, financial-aid workers for Sullivan University included. Family money will help pay for some of her tuition, but not all.

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Crider's in a sleepless haze, stressed out. Brooklyn had a fussy night. Crider is supposed to move out of Freedom House in a few weeks but can't find anyone who will rent to her. Twice she's found a place she liked — one in Crescent Hill, the other in Germantown. Then the landlord inspected her background and denied her application. "To hear, 'Due to the violent nature of your crime. . .'" she says, pausing. "I'm not a violent person. It was, like, drug-induced psychosis. I'm not that person. It's hard to have people tell you no because of who they think you are."

She's been approved for one place in Buechel. It's next to a dingy motel that deserves its own mug shot. "Shady," she says. Acting on suspicions, she looked up motel reviews. "Full of crackheads and prostitutes," one read. "Nightmare," another stated. Some women leave Freedom House and move to a Volunteers of America family shelter, which often has a wait list. Crider's not interested. At one time, VOA had an after-care program for Freedom House alums that helped them secure housing. Lean budgets forced it out.

Crider's looked into sober-living apartments. Those are often run by private agencies with preference given to clients who've

completed their treatment programs. A public-housing project in west Louisville reserves 74 apartments for sober living. But the drug scene thrives at that complex.

On the way to the doctor, Crider sits in the back with Brooklyn, windows down, breathing in the summer day. Her case manager asks if she's made it to her five AA meetings. "I've been busy!" Crider says. So many appointments with landlords, finalizing financial aid for school. Bundling a new life takes work. Life won't get less hectic, her case manager says, worried. "Maybe you need to start scheduling six meetings a week so you can make five," she says.

Crider feels stable. A few weeks ago she had arranged to meet Dallas and Dallas' father at Waterfront Park. She put on a long skirt, strappy sandals and a swipe of lip-gloss. She sat on a bench for an hour and a half, waiting. She watched kids screech like merry goblins through spray fountains. They never showed. Crider walked home — downtown to Germantown — however many miles that is for the sun to burn the outline of sandals onto feet. "Before, I would've cussed him out and went and got high," Crider says. "I cried. I called my

sponsor. She said, 'Shake it off. You have to deal with it. Nothing you can do.'"

Crider's luck changes. A Freedom House volunteer knew someone who knew a property manager who agreed to rent her an apartment. Something like that. It's an elegant space in the Highlands — dark wood, fireplace, a marble staircase (scuffed, but marble nonetheless) leading to her front door.

Another woman from Freedom House was approved for the apartment right above hers. The two squeal "Yay!" when they talk about it. "Me and her, it's fate," the woman says one early August night, motioning to Crider. "It's almost too good to be true. Maybe God wanted us to be together. Everyone's like, well, what if one of y'all starts using? And I say, well, we'll smack the other one around. Or, you know, just be there. What can you do?"

Pauline, Freedom House's program manager, hesitates when she hears the news. She used to work in a large detox facility in Indiana. People would meet, sober up for a few weeks, bond. They'd leave together, relapse

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together. Many would die together. If she named them she'd have "a list a mile long," she says, a bit haunted at the memory. But this is different. Crider will leave with nearly seven months of sobriety, her longest stretch ever. A solid foundation. If one of the women relapses, they've completed this journey before. They can do it again, Pauline hopes.

On a muggy Wednesday afternoon in early August, Crider and her grandma, Pat Muncy, run errands, checking out the new apartment to visualize where furniture will go. They bicker over where to park, whether fire alarms work.

"There's none in the bedroom," Muncy says.

"Go ahead, tell me what else is wrong," Crider responds.

"Linsey, I just want you and the babies to be safe."

Crider's hopeful that with her new place, Dallas, her now two-year-old, and Dallas' dad will stop by often. No more restricted visiting hours.

When Crider leaves Freedom House, another woman will replace her. Even with a wait list, it can take awhile to move someone in. Some women have already given birth. Others change their minds.

On a Thursday night, the eve of moving day, the women pack into a common room to fete Crider's departure. Soda, barbecue and a chocolate sheet cake line a card table. Crider's grandmother and stepmom are there.

One person who's not — Martha Williams. A few days ago, she got discharged from the program, having been caught with a cell phone for the fourth time. She ran out of chances. "It sucks," she says by phone. But she understands. "That's the policy." It was an awful day. Staff cried. Kiki cupped the chin of her favorite staff member, a sliver of a woman with wide eyes and a husky voice. "Don't cry," Kiki said. Williams is staying with her sister, whose cancer is in remission. She says she's keeping up with AA meetings, talking to her sponsor. Her boyfriend's back using "off and on." She's given him the ultimatum. "He's trying to get better here, but I told him I'm not doing this no more," Williams says. When it's nice out, she walks her girls to a nearby park. She passes a familiar house. It's where the father of her second daughter killed himself, fed up with his addiction. The past is a shadow's distance away, it seems.

Pauline stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Crider and hands her a graduation token.

"I'll add it to my collection," Crider jokes. The token passes from woman to woman, each telling Crider goodbye. "You're a leader," Pauline says. Crider is reminded to help others, become a sponsor. "That's part of the program — give back. Keep doing that and you'll make it." One young woman says she will miss Crider's cheer. "Your smile. (It's) so nice," the woman says. Another looks at Crider and says, "I love you. You hold me accountable." Crider's grandmother speaks. "I think I'm more proud of you than I've ever been," she says, before addressing the room: "She has a warm, kind heart. Just like my daughter. And I love her deeply."

Crider tries to wipe tears before they fall from her eyes and glide down her flushed cheeks. "This place saved my life. You took me out of a dark place," she says. "I love you all. This is harder than I thought."

At Freedom House, everyone knows one another's mess. It unites them, strengthens them. The outside won't be as forgiving.

"It feels good to cry," one woman says.

"We're supposed to have emotions!"

another says.

"Emotions? I haven't had those in 10 years!" blurts a third.

Finally, a joyful plea. "Cake! Cake! Cake!"

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