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YOUR SKIN
AND YOU KNOW
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PILLS-
THAT’S GONE.”



- RICH JONES ON OPIOID ADDICTION -

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COASTAL CRUST

Craving wood-fired pizza or housemade pasta? The restaurant plans to open at 1254 Pendleton St. in the Village of West Greenville in mid-July.

■ photo by WILL CROOKS

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Clemson grant will allow USC med students to study infectious diseases.

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SCCT'S NEW SEASON

SC Children's Theatre's 2019-2020 MainStage season takes audiences to Narnia, Italy, and beyond as SCCT moves into its new location in 2020.

■ story by MELODY CUENCA



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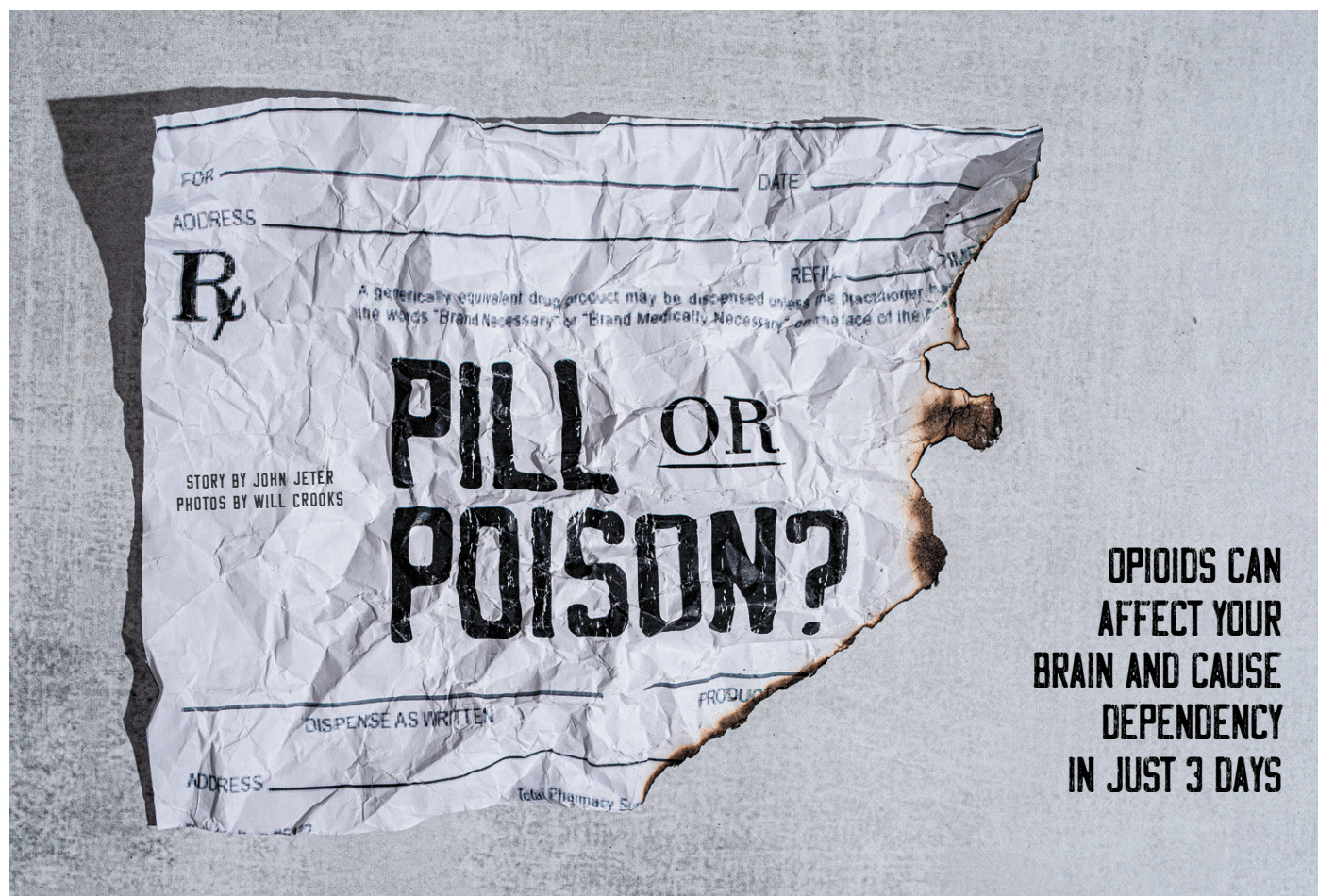
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Christmas Eve. Landon McNair was back home in Charlotte for six days from Greenville, including the family's weekend ski trip to the North Carolina mountains. He liked to sleep in. At around 11 that morning, his father went upstairs to check on him.

"I opened the door to a horrific sight," Steve McNair says, sitting across from his brother, Larry, at a local oyster bar, where he tears off a paper towel to wipe his eyes. "I found him dead on the floor, on his back, in a contorted position with his eyes open.

"He was gone. It was a pill. Street drug. It was disguised as a pharmaceutical drug."

Landon McNair, an Eagle Scout and star tennis player at Porter Ridge High School near Matthews, N.C., was 25 years old when he overdosed on opioids last December. He joined more than 70,000 other Americans who lost their lives to drug overdose, just 10,000 fewer deaths than from guns and car wrecks combined.

When he was 19, Landon was playing basketball in the family's driveway and came down on a long screw. The

gash in his left leg sent him to the hospital, where he was prescribed an opiate for pain. Soon, his prescription ran out. Not long afterward, he turned to the streets.

"What it does to emotional and physical pain is beyond compare," Rich Jones, 50, says of the pharmaceutical. "Then what happens, when it gets to next-level diabolical, you get sick when you don't have them"—like the "flu times 100."

"The only way I can describe it to you is like worms crawling underneath your skin, and you know if you get a hold of one of these pills, that's gone."

In 2013, Jones, himself a recovering alcohol and opioid



Landon McNair lost his life to opioids last Christmas Eve. He poses with his sister, Addison, 21.
Photo courtesy of the McNair family

Then he came home for Christmas, fell back in with the old crowd and into pills and heroin. Steve says they

**OPIOIDS CAN
AFFECT YOUR
BRAIN AND CAUSE
DEPENDENCY
IN JUST 3 DAYS**

abuser, opened FAVOR Greenville, where he's CEO/COO of the recovery center whose 29 staffers treat some 7,000 new patients a year, with 40,000 on its rolls, 10,000 of them family members.

Landon never made it to FAVOR, or Faces and Voices of Recovery, though he had been in and out of rehab. His last was a "sober-living environment," where residents must pass drug screenings and hold down jobs. Landon seemed to be thriving in Greenville, working for his father and uncle, Larry, in their real estate company.

found needles. “We gave him a little too much freedom.”

Blame for the crisis largely falls to OxyContin. Released in 1996, the opioid’s “one of the most successful pharmaceuticals of all time with worldwide sales totaling \$35 billion,” says a February 2018 paper from three University of Notre Dame researchers.

Before that, in the decade after 1991, opioid prescriptions tripled to 211 million.

In 2017, nearly 400,000 opioid prescriptions were dispensed in Greenville County, whose population barely tops 500,000. The same year here saw more than 130 deaths involving opioids, heroin and fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 times stronger than heroin, according to the paper and to statistics from the state’s just-plainkillers.com.

“Those are monster drugs that are being put into everything,” Jones says. “If you have a bag of heroin and you want to make it last longer, you get fentanyl,

which is very cheap.”

A source familiar with the “dark web” and requested anonymity for obvious reasons, says, “High-quality heroin has gone through the floor to fill in the gaps left by Oxy. I think it’s less than \$10 an armful these days. Even trash heroin is being kept in business by the massive amount of fentanyl analogs that are coming in from clandestine labs in China.”

One of those is carfentanyl, 100 times stronger than fentanyl. “Carfent, he says, “is so dangerous because you basically OD on something the size of like two sand grains.”

Now what?

“If I knew how to solve this crisis, our conversation would not be being held over the phone like this, we’d be sitting in some government office where we could hopefully execute that solution,” says Dr. Joshua Smith at Interventional Pain Management Associates in Greenville. “There’s no big solution, there’s no great

SHAY HOUSER

ENTREPRENEUR OF YOUTURN.NET

Two years ago, Shay Houser was in a hotel room with a loaded gun and “as much chemicals and booze as I could put into my body.” Now in recovery, Houser is helping others through the online platform youturn.net.



RICH JONES

CEO/COO OF FAVOR GREENVILLE

Rich Jones, a recovering alcoholic and opioid abuser, opened FAVOR Greenville in 2013. The recovery center has 29 staffers and treats about 7,000 new patients a year.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

South Carolina is not immune to the consequences of opioid misuse. Overdosing is at an epidemic level in our state. And while opioids can be a vital, life-changing tool for those living with chronic pain, these statistics highlight why they should only be used with extreme caution.

5 MILLION PAIN KILLER PRESCRIPTIONS

are filled every year in South Carolina – that's more than one for every person in our state.

1 IN 4 PEOPLE

who are prescribed opioids struggle with addiction.

4 IN 5 HEROIN USERS

started with prescription pain killers.

1 IN 4 TEENS

has misused or abused a prescription drug at least once.

IN 2015

the number of deaths from heroin and opioid overdoses surpassed the number of homicides.

IN 2016

550 deaths in South Carolina were prescription opioid overdoses. that's an increase of 18% from 2014.



one. It's a lot of things."

While physicians increasingly understand opioids' super-addictive properties—contrary to Big Pharma's insistence otherwise 15 years ago, hence the raft of recent lawsuits—educating healthcare professionals and the public about addiction itself is crucial, he says.

Enter Shay Houser, 50, one of Greenville's best-known entrepreneurs, with youturn.net, his fifth startup.

The weekend after Thanksgiving 2017, he sat in a hotel room with a loaded .38 and "as much chemicals and booze as I could put into my body."

The following year, he launched youturn.com, an online platform with nearly 150 videos in three educational modules primarily designed for family members and employers.

Because "25 percent of the workforce has a spouse or child that's struggling with addiction," he says he started youturn last year as a subscription service to teach employers how to identify substance abusers.

Elizabeth McKissick, 49, in recovery now for 13 years, co-chaired with her husband, James, the \$1.5 million fundraising campaign that opened FAVOR.

Jones, a youturn co-founder, serves as Chief Strategy Officer. McKissick is Vice President of Membership Experience.

"With the opioid crisis going on, people are dying, kids are dying, something different has to be done," she says. "The old model—wait until the addict hits bottom, wait until the you-know-what hits the fan and then deal with it in the office or when you've been told someone dies and then take notice—why not educate everybody about addiction and substance-use disorder and about what recovery is?"

As Larry McNair says of his nephew, "He didn't go to the hospital so he could get hooked on drugs, he went to the hospital because he needed to get his leg sewed up. You're not going to some crack house and risking your life to get it when you first get it, you're going to a doctor."

ELIZABETH MCKISSICK

VICE PRESIDENT OF MEMBERSHIP EXPERIENCE AT YOUTURN.NET

Elizabeth McKissick believes education is a key to breaking the deadly cycle of addiction. McKissick, who's been in recovery for 13 years, is the VP of membership experience for youturn.net.



COMMUNITY

STEVE GRANT

shares tragic, hope-filled true story in book "Don't Forget Me"

■ story by MELODY CUENCA | photo by WILL CROOKS



"It's a good story. It's an unfortunate story, but it's a very timely story," Steve Grant says. He felt his story needed to be heard so much so that he wrote a book titled "Don't Forget Me."

Grant exposes the gruesome truth of a parent's worst nightmare — the loss of not only one child but two — and a nasty disease that's ripping apart families.

"We have two boys who took two different paths to the same outcome," he says. His sons, Chris and Kelly Grant, both died of accidental drug overdoses within five years of each other.

"This disease now is a white middle-class disease," Grant says of addiction. "A lot of families are affected by it."

Oftentimes parents who lose children to addiction are paralyzed by shame, according to Grant. "We tell them in this book that the parents have nothing to be ashamed of, they have nothing to be guilty of, and they really didn't cause the problem," he says.

While stigma continues to exist around the issue, Grant views addiction as not simply a choice but rather as an illness.

"It's just like any other illness, it's like cancer, and you can treat cancer," he says. "If you're addicted, you're going to get treatment for the addiction."

Grant notes that his book "Don't Forget Me" is written from the perspective of a parent and doesn't discuss the politics of whether

er treatment works.

Although his sons both struggled with substance abuse and addiction, Grant felt none of the stigma some parents experience.

"I didn't feel guilty at all. I didn't feel any shame at all," he says. "And, I didn't really care what anybody thought of me. All I really cared about was helping my sons."

Grant speaks openly about his sons' deaths, saying that a lot of grief is based on guilt — something he doesn't have.

"I'm comfortable with my efforts to help them," he says. "Yes, I wish my second son would have gone to rehab. I offered it to him, but he wouldn't go."

His oldest son Chris went to rehab five times plus an expensive boarding school.

Kelly never went to rehab.

"Everything I read about that would happen to a family of someone with an addicted child just about happened," Grants says. "We almost went bankrupt, had lawyers all over the place, police, my marriage of 25 years dissolved because of it."

In 2012, Grant started Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation in Greenville to combat substance abuse and addiction. The foundation provides financial assistance to programs that treat teens and young adults.

"Don't Forget Me" is available for pre-order at Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and Books-A-Million. Learn more about the book at dontforgetmebook.com.



Tommy McAfee, Elizabeth McAfee, Jay McAfee and John McAfee

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