

# Gymslip junkies

## 'I went to school high on COKE'

AT JUST 15 LOUISE BARBER GOT HOOKED ON COCAINE, STEALING FROM HER PARENTS TO FEED HER HABIT. HERE SHE TELLS HER SHOCKING TALE OF TEEN ADDICTION  
BY **ANDREA THOMPSON**

**S**hivering in bed with the duvet pulled over her, Louise Barber was convinced she was going insane.

It was 9am on a Tuesday and the 15 year old was due at school. But she'd just spent her fourth night doing cocaine and, after 72 hours without sleep, she was feeling suicidal.

"I was so paranoid I couldn't even leave the house. I bolted my bedroom door and lay there shaking with hunger and exhaustion, trying to figure out a way to kill myself because I couldn't face another day," says Louise.

"The only thing that made me feel better was chopping up another three lines of cocaine. A few minutes later, I was out of it on the bed."

Louise, now 18, became addicted to cocaine three years ago after being encouraged to take the class A drug by three older boys she met at a friend's party in her hometown of Birmingham.

"I took it and it made me feel happy,

**'I STOLE £40,000 FROM MY PARENTS' BANK ACCOUNT'**

confident and chatty," she explains. "My grandmother had just died and I'd been feeling down, but the cocaine made me feel on top of the world."

She found herself craving more and by the age of 16, she was stealing from her family to fund her addiction.

"Mum used to shut herself in her bedroom for hours, sobbing and saying: 'What can

we do with her?' over and over again. I remember my dad crying and saying: 'Please, please, pull yourself together.' But although I knew I was hurting them, I couldn't stop," says Louise.

"Before I started taking cocaine, I was an A-grade student and had been in the top classes for everything. My parents became worried sick when I started missing lessons. They confronted me and I admitted I was taking cocaine.

"My dad started going into work late so he could drop me off at the school gates, but I'd walk in one entrance and out the other one as soon as he left. He took me to drug counselling, but after a few weeks, I refused to go any more. And as soon as I was able to, I dropped out of school."

Use of cocaine has spiralled to epidemic proportions in the UK, with the number of British teenagers using it now the highest in the developed world. A new report reveals the number of 16 and 17 year olds being treated for cocaine addiction has soared by 67 per cent in two years. According to recent figures, more than 1,000 children are arrested every year after being caught with drugs in school.

Behind the statistics there are thousands of tragic stories of families shattered by cocaine – once an expensive drug but now available for as little as £25 a gram or £1.50 a line.

Earlier this year, talented 21-year-old Manchester University student Jake Knowles hanged himself after admitting to bouts of depression and suicidal thoughts brought on by regular cocaine use.

"Cocaine changed his personality," said his heartbroken mother Suzanne. "He took drugs to have the confidence to party. What happened to Jake is proof of what cocaine can do to people's minds."

Like Jake, Louise underwent a drastic change in personality within a year of taking cocaine. When she wasn't high, she was plagued by paranoia and depressive fantasies about killing herself, and her

Louise's cocaine habit had a terrible effect on her family



