



# LOVE & ADDICTION

*Ricky Smith and  
Jill May struggle  
daily with an  
addiction to drugs  
that has affected  
their existence for  
over 30 years. But  
they are equally  
addicted to  
each other.*

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Jill May is seated in a store front, nodding in and out of consciousness while struggling to pack her crack pipe.





Ricky Smith and Jill May have been together over a decade in San Francisco's Tenderloin.

Jill May sits silently at the corner of Ellis and Leavenworth streets, just outside of an unusually nice apartment complex in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco. A maroon, marble textured

planter box that extends to the left of the entrance serves as May's seat as she rocks slowly back and forward, eyes halfway closed.

She fiddles with two small pieces of what appear to be crack cocaine in the right palm of her almost 50-year-old wrinkled hands. May drops one of the crumb sized pieces and suddenly becomes more alert. With very little coordination, she scrapes the ground unsuccessfully as the small crumb has mixed in with soil and dirt displaced from the planter box where she sits.

May is upset. She mumbles something and then moans in frustration, as she perhaps can not get high again today with only one small piece of her drug.

"Do you have a dollar?" she asks, eyes still halfway shut.

After another unsuccessful attempt at scraping the dirt, May picks up a small pink purse, clinches the hand that holds the remaining piece of crack into a fist and stands up. She heads west on Leavenworth Street.

Walking up the street, she meets up with her longtime boyfriend, Ricky Smith. Smith, a dark-skinned man with thinning, pepper-colored hair, greets May and the two talk quietly to each other.

"Excuse me one second," Smith says, turning his attention to his impatient girlfriend.

Smith reaches into the pocket of his red, white, and black colored San Francisco 49er jacket, gripping a white hand towel and a small glass pipe in his left hand. Smith then turns away from May who begins searching through her pink purse.

Smith and May have been on and off the streets because of their

addictions to various drugs that are not at all scarce in the Tenderloin. The two have a daughter together, and live in a neighborhood hotel through a city program that provides housing and very little cash monthly to chronically homeless individuals.

Smith is visibly eager to talk about his life in San Francisco. He turns away from May, who is preparing to get high in the doorway of an abandoned career development office, about 10 yards from where Smith stands.

The 53-year-old says he has had his share of "priors" regarding drug possession. He got his first possession charge at 42 and has been busted twelve additional times for the same thing.

Smith periodically looks back at May, who sits silently in the doorway loading a glass crack pipe.

"She's been down here for about 25 years. Her corner used to be Ellis and Leavenworth around '92," Smith says of May's years as a "working" girl.

"When I met her I had a red head chick with nice big boobs and everything. She was a hooker. She was dangerous. She was tough. But then I met [Jill]. She was flaky, you know."

The San Francisco Chronicle ran a story in December of 2004 profiling Smith's and May's experiences being chronically homeless. The article was part of a series about the programs that Smith and May benefit from. Smith, of course, praises the city's efforts in at least getting himself and May off the streets.

While reminiscing, Smith has a difficult time rationalizing his life on the streets given his background.

Smith says he comes from a good family. He is one of six children and is "the only one in this type of life." His mom took him to church every Sunday, he says.

Smith's life hasn't always been plagued by drug addiction and homelessness. Smith says he was ambitious as a kid. At eighteen, Smith worked at Jeffrey's, a clothing store on Market Street, "back when they were building BART in 1972." Smith recalls seeing a lot of pimps come in and out of Jeffrey's, which at the time sold suits typically worn by pimps and other "businessmen."

Smith worked that retail job for almost two years before he and a friend thought, "Well, we got the Cadillac, jewelry...we already got the clothes and shit. So then we started messing with the white chicks."

Smith remembers how he and his friend owned houses and even opened up their own clothing store on Ocean Avenue. It wasn't until Smith met May that he decided to reduce his "business" to just a few women.

"I went through 30 or 35 girls before I met her," Smith says, looking back at May, who still sits in the doorway, now twitching from the effects of crack.

"My momma always said, 'Whatever you do, be the best at it.' So when we was selling clothes, we was the best. And when we got out on the streets and started having girls, we was in the top ten of



having some of the baddest girls. When they would come out, they was the shit."

Smith's businesses deteriorated because of his long-time addiction to drugs. Having May around, also struggling with addiction, didn't help him to kick any of his own habits.

"I never thought I'd do heroine. I never thought it," he says, shaking his head in shame. But he persuaded May to stop using heroin by giving her an ultimatum.

Smith remembers not allowing his girls to use drugs. Once they were addicted, they would be sick and unable to work if they didn't have the drug "three times a day." Smith threatened to leave May if she didn't kick her heroin habit.

"She kicked it. Cold turkey. That was a terrible week, but after the second week you start feeling all cool."

But Smith's and May's addictions problems did not end there.

Smith says the emergence of crack in 1977 "was the downfall of a lot of people who had money," like he did.

Smith and May stay to themselves for the most part. But Smith admits that he is still occasionally booked and released for possession, adding that he's doing a lot better than he used to.

He looks at May, who is motionless and unresponsive, and excitedly explains how one of the officers at the neighborhood police station complimented him on his progress as he left their apartment that morning.

"I said, 'Well, yes, I'm in a methadone program and it helps you.

You use it only once a day and you're not shooting no dope or nothing like that.' And man that's cool too."

May doesn't respond to Smith, but suddenly stands to her feet, as if rising from the dead. She struggles not to drop her purse or her glass pipe. She then brushes herself off, and sways zombie-like in front of the abandoned office door, clenching her glass pipe with her left hand.

"Jill! Put that pipe away," Smith pleads, checking for bystanders. "She is out of pocket!"

May quickly complies, stuffing the pipe in her left jean pocket. She repositions the purse hanging from her right arm and hurries down Ellis Street.

"Jill, don't go past that corner," Smith commands.

"All right," May barks back, picking up her pace.

Smith has come to a resolve about his life. His addiction to heroin and crack has had a negative affect on his daily life. He says his addictions have never jeopardized his set of values.

"I've used heroin over damn near 10 years and I've never robbed anybody. When you are sick, you do certain things. You do things that you usually don't do. But I have a lot of pride from my mom. So...I'm blessed. And I love her."

Smith looks at May, who has made it to the end of the block.

He yells, turning to walk in her direction, "That's far enough, Jill!"

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*I've used Heroin over damn near 10 years  
and I've never robbed anybody.*



A homeless man sits in front of a liquor store on Leavenworth street in the Tenderloin.