

Opinion: Choices of adults make me sad

By Kathryn Reed

I looked around at the students – all sixth-graders – wondering how we got to this place. And I felt sad.

I didn't know the phrase "gateway drug" when I was their age. I could not have told a narcotics officer what drugs were dangerous. (I didn't even know what a narcotics officer was.) These kids could and did. They mentioned cocaine, meth and black tar heroin.

That, too, made me sad.

I'm not of the generation that didn't do drugs. I have my stories. I have my lessons.

I just wonder where we went wrong that life's dangers are robbing children of their youth, of their innocence, of what should be the time of their life when they shouldn't have to worry about all of these adult issues.

Maybe I'm naïve. I'm OK with that.

I just wonder how life got so out of hand that we have to have programs for sixth-graders about the dangers of drugs. I wonder how we got to the place where some of them, and even those who are younger, have felt peer pressure to try drugs.

I know life isn't easy. And I know some of these kids at 13 have experienced things I hope to never experience.

I grew up with a father who smoked cigarettes until I was in junior high. (They weren't called middle schools back then.) A friend and I took a few from his truck. I gagged. I still don't understand the allure of smoking.

I remember dad drank Manhattans. Plenty of hard alcohol was consumed on duplicate bridge nights. That was my exposure to drugs in my home.

I remember being offered pot in high school, telling one of my sisters and subsequently getting a lecture that left me scared. Big sisters are that way. They can be more convincing and threatening than parents.

Maybe at 46 I just wish the world were a little less dependent on drugs. The clean air of Tahoe, the natural beauty – they are intoxicating in their own right. There I go again – being naïve to think those things are enough.

When I choose to poison my body I do so with alcohol – usually wine. I don't have a problem with adults doing what they want as long as they don't endanger others.

Blame can be spread around as to why drugs are getting into young people's hands. But at some point we have to look in the mirror. What is our individual role in all of this? Did I drink in front of a young person when I shouldn't have? Did I laugh about a story about college that glamorized drug use? Did I unknowingly encourage dangerous, illegal behavior? Probably. Intentionally? No.

But I'm still responsible.

We all have choices. I just don't want mine to have unintended consequences.

I'm angry that as a society we have gotten to the point where middle school and elementary students need to be taught about the dangers of drugs. We, as a society, have failed them. If it weren't for adults and our behavior, children would not be into drugs.

That, too, makes me sad.

All the programs in the world are not going to stop the drug

problem. Adults need to take the blame and the responsibility.

The message of Drug Store Project is that we all have choices. As a community, especially the adults, shouldn't our choices be to allow kids to be kids, for them not to have "adult" concerns, and for each of us to lead a life that is worth emulating?

Go ahead and disagree with me. All you'll do is make me even sadder.