

# your life

**“i got caught smuggling drugs”**

Life felt so boring that Jessica\*, 17, was willing to do anything for a thrill. But a “fun” favor for friends took her down a dangerous path. AS TOLD TO JANE BIANCHI



MAIN PHOTO: BRENDAN MOORE; HAIR AND MAKEUP: MICHELLE BENNETSON; STATISTICS SOURCE: U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

**L**ife in my small town in Arizona was okay but pretty dull. After school, I'd hang out in a local park, eat burgers at Jack in the Box, or cruise around in a friend's car. At 6 P.M., I'd have dinner with my mom, younger sister, and two older brothers, and then watch TV in my room or talk on the phone—the same thing every night. So when a boy who was in the ninth grade with me moved to my neighborhood and invited me to chill with him and his brothers, Josh\* and Jake\*, I felt like there was finally something new and interesting to do!

### A RISKY REQUEST

Josh and Jake were 24 and 26, and most people my age didn't hang out with older guys, so being around them made me feel really cool. They'd say things to me like, “You're our girl,” and “You're so down-to-earth.” Whenever I was upset about something—usually a fight with my mom—they'd listen and tell me everything would be okay. For months, I spent every day after school with them.

I never thought that I'd actually get caught. The next afternoon, I put on a loose baby-doll shirt over a tank top and jeans. Then their two friends picked me up and drove me across the border to their house in Mexico near the border. When we got there, the guys took out about a pound of marijuana, duct-taped it to my tank top, put a rolled-up shirt over it so it would look soft, and pulled my shirt over the lump. I was a little freaked out once I had the marijuana attached to me, but I also felt a burst of excitement. They told me, “Say you're pregnant and you came over to visit your grandma.” When we got in the car, it all started to feel real and I panicked. I thought, Oh,

**“I panicked. I thought, I can't believe I'm doing this!”**

### CROSSING THE LINE

When I got to the US border, I passed the first inspection officer without a problem. But on my way past the second officer, I don't know why, but she stopped me. I froze. She asked me to lift up my shirt. I was terrified! I couldn't believe I was getting caught!

**17 FYI**  
Last year, nearly 300 people under 18 were caught smuggling drugs across the US borders.



**a big surprise**  
Jessica hid this brick of marijuana under her clothes!

I had no idea what was going to happen to me. Not only had I disappointed my best friends, but I was also mad at myself for taking such a stupid risk. I kept thinking, You didn't need to do this. The guard, of course, immediately saw the drugs and led me in handcuffs to a holding area. It was so humiliating, and I was totally ashamed of what I'd done. The local cops arrived, put me in a squad car, and drove me through my neighborhood, saying, “You're not going to see this again anytime soon.” It was petrifying! Then they brought me back to the police station and called my mom, who screamed at me over the phone. I felt worthless. I was held in juvenile detention for two months (it was so disgusting—I even had to wear used underwear!). Then after I was convicted of smuggling drugs, I was sentenced to four months in prison. I spent every day thinking about how dumb I'd been. Now I have a felony on my record, which will make it way harder for me to get financial aid for college or a good job someday. The penalties were much worse than Josh and Jake made it sound. I feel betrayed by them—they weren't real friends! I've never spoken to them again, and they left town shortly after I got out of prison. I ruined my life for a crazy thrill. Driving around with my friends and hanging out at the park doesn't seem so boring anymore! **17**

\*Name changed and face hidden to protect her identity.