HIGH ON CHRISTMAS
Young mother kicks chaos of heroin for her son

Sixth in a six-part series

BY NICHOLAS READ
DAILY SPECIAL

like any new mother, 25-year-old Christy Cobban
loves to bounce her six-month-old son, Jaredd,
on her knee. He laughs, giggles and plays with
her toys, and she is entranced. No matter the
conversation or who's in
the room, there's always
a piece of her that's fixed on him.

On her living room floor are wrapped Christmas presents for Cobban's large family — presents she's been buying all year because an
addiction to heroin has made her
spend every dime she earns. "I can't afford to buy toys. But her family has
been good to her and, she says, and
she wants to do good to them. Fortunately this Christmas — Jaredd's first, her first in their new home — and only the second when she hasn't been shooting, or thinking about shooting,
heroin.

On first meeting, it's a stunning realisation. You wouldn't guess to look at Cobban that she could have had such a past. She is petite, serene, persuasive and well-spoken — in no way your typical heroin addict.

There are two reasons for this. The first is, she says, her case worker, Pam Fairfield, an outreach worker for the Portland Hotel Society, is that there's no such creature as your typical heroin addict.

"They come in all shapes, ages and sizes," she says. "We have all kinds of clients whom you'd never know were addicts."

The second is that Cobban, who is now taki
g particular care of herself, Jaredd and the two-bedroom subsidized apartment they share on Vancouver's east side, hasn't had to suffer the many indignities of living on the street.

Thanks to the continuing support of her par
ents, Gordon and his wife, Helen, and Laura Clayton and her husband, Brian, friends and
various institutions, she has always had a roof
over her head. Even when she was stealing, lying and shooting up every day.

"It's a short sentence, was the way she
was clean and free, and she intends to stay that way. She says this with almost matter-of-fact modal
easy, as if everyone climbed this kind of Tree
est every day.

"I know how to do it to be a better person," she says. "I don't want to live my life in chaos any more. I don't long for that chaos anymore."

Fairfield is also as certain as she can be that Cobban will succeed. "There are some women who make it," she says. "We've seen it happen for sure. But it's rare."

"It's still one of the best mothers I've ever seen. She has finished as a mother, and she's finished as a person."

And she's determined to demonstrate that this Christmas by providing Jaredd with a big family celebration — the first of what she hopes will be many.

It wasn't always so. Cobban did her first drugs as a teenager. She went to rave parties and did them recreationally, but it was no big deal, she says. They didn't have any lasting effect.

It wasn't until she was 21 and met a boyfriend she declines to name — an addict himself — that she got into trouble.

"He told me if you use it once, it's not well done," Cobban says. "So at first, she was careful not to use it more than once a week.

The one thing that she never liked was, Yes, she did get high the first few times, but it always made her sick, and the thought that she might get addicted scared her.

So she continued to do it — and her own innocence, not her boyfriend's. She finds this hard to explain — why exactly what it was that made her want to continue — but she is careful throughout this interview not to name the other for what happened to her. It was entirely her own doing, she says.

"It's not clear to me why she's been successful getting clean. 'In our

HEARTFELT TALE

Christmas is a time of hope, giving and celebration. The Vancouver Sun has put together six heartwarming stories for the season that illustrate these themes.

□ Monday, Dec. 18: A ticked-off cat visiting horses to a busy Christmas.
□ Tuesday, Dec. 19: A supportive place for dying animals during their last days.
□ Wednesday, Dec. 20: Christmas becomes a vital religious festival for churches.

□ Tuesday, Dec. 21: The winter solstice means different things to different faiths.
□ Friday, Dec. 22: Students and teachers are beginning their communities.
□ TODAY: A special mother and child celebrate Christmas in Vancouver.

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