

*It creates a potent, long-lasting high—until the user crashes and, too often, literally burns. How meth quietly marched across the country and up the socioeconomic ladder—and the wreckage it leaves in its wake. As law enforcement fights a losing battle on the ground, officials ask: are the Feds doing all they can to contain this epidemic?*

**David J. Jefferson**

*With Hilary Shenfeld, Andrew Murr, Arian Campo-Flores, Sarah Childress, Catharine Skipp, Susannah Meadows, Dirk Johnson, Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Anne Underwood*

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Aug. 8, 2005 issue - The leafy Chicago suburb of Burr Ridge is the kind of place where people come to live the American dream in million-dollar homes on one-acre lots. Eight years ago Kimberly Fields and her husband, Todd, bought a ranch house here on a wooded lot beside a small lake, and before long they were parents, with two sons, a black Labrador and a Volvo in the drive. But somewhere along the way this blond mother with a college degree and a \$100,000-a-year job as a sales rep for Apria Healthcare found something that mattered more: methamphetamine. The crystalline white drug quickly seduces those who snort, smoke or inject it with a euphoric rush of confidence, hyperalertness and sexiness that lasts for hours on end. And then it starts destroying lives.

*Picture on right shows the effects of 3 1/2 years of Meth on a 38 year old female user. Besides the psychic toll, which can include paranoia and hallucinations, long term risks are stroke, liver damage, extreme weight loss plus increased exposure to HIV and hepatitis.*



Kimberly tried drug rehab but failed, and she couldn't care for her children, according to divorce papers filed by her husband, who moved out last year. She

was arrested three times for shoplifting—most recently, police say, for allegedly stealing over-the-counter cold pills containing pseudoephedrine, the key ingredient used in making meth. By the time cops came banging on her door with a search warrant on June 1, Kimberly, now 37, had turned her slice of suburbia into a meth lab, prosecutors allege, with the help of a man she'd met eight months earlier in an Indiana bar, Shawn Myers, 32. (Both Fields and Myers pleaded not guilty to possessing meth with an intent to distribute, though Kimberly told police that she is addicted to the drug.) Dressed in a pink T shirt printed with the words ALL STRESSED OUT, Kimberly looked about 45 pounds thinner than when police first booked her for shoplifting two years ago. Her leg bore a knee-to-ankle scar from a chemical burn, and police found anhydrous ammonia, also used in cooking meth, buried in a converted propane tank in her backyard. As officers led Kimberly away in handcuffs, her 6-year-old son Nicholas was "only concerned that his brother had his toys and diapers," recalls Detective Mike Barnes. Meanwhile, police evacuated 96 nearby homes, fearing the alleged meth lab might explode.