

SHARED THC STORIES FROM JOHNNY'S AMBASSADORS

Reprinted from johnnysambassadors.org/share

Your Stories About THC

Lisa R. – May 11, 2020

Our son triggered his illness using marijuana during his teen years. He did not know he had a genetic vulnerability to THC and it triggered bi-polar and schizophrenia. He had his first psychotic break going into his senior year in high school, that was in 2008. We have been on this journey with him now for 12 years. We are thrilled that he has now gained the most traction he has ever had in his battle. We will be celebrating 3 years without a relapse. Before that, he would relapse about every 2 years and even more frequently. His journey has been life threatening multiple times and he came very close to suicide (either intentionally or unintentionally) three times.

While we had to grieve the son we used to have, we have learned to love and appreciate our new son. He is my hero and we cherish every moment we have with him as we never know when it will be our last. We have learned a lot on this journey, and I am sharing some of my journal with you. I do want to respect his privacy, but I hope that our journey give strength to others. The laws need to change. Thank you for what you are doing.

September 11, 2012- Relapse

Watching our son slip away and succumb to the darkness of the valley of the shadow of insanity is terrifying for us, just think how much more terrifying it is for him. Like Charlie in Flowers for Algernon, during the last 18 months he has had the opportunity to realize his great potential, his gifts and talents only for them to be stolen away again. Those who love him struggle to keep him from falling over the cliff- gripping tighter as inch by inch he keeps slipping. Our heels digging into the ground plowing a trench as the weight of the illness pulls him further over the cliff toward the valley. His eyes have lost their brightness as he struggles to make meaning of what is happening to him. Our hands are burned by the rope as it slips a little more each day, our arms are cramped; our hearts are breaking.

Lord give us strength today to hang on, help our son to know he can trust us, his doctor and the medications. We pray that our voice, the doctor's voice and his dream of graduating from college will be a bright light in the darkness, like a foothold to give him strength to pull himself back to reality. In Jesus name, Amen.

Sally S. – September 2, 2020

A 2014 Open Letter to the Person Who Called Me a Failed Parent

I belong to the club no one wants to join. My son Andy died by suicide in March 2014 at age 31 in Arizona. I have since met other mothers enduring this life change and trying to heal as I am. I find we mothers feel and behave like all mothers – trying desperately to protect our young. We protect children we still have and others threatened by the same harm that took our children. Some of us behave like badgers – we are serious and a force to be reckoned with. Like disturbing a bees nest – we go to work to rebuild our lives honoring our children that left us far too young.

My son left a note that included these words "Marijuana killed my soul + ruined my brain." My son desperately tried to break his marijuana addiction in his last days. Whenever I hear and read the words that marijuana has never killed anyone, is harmless, is not addictive, my heart hurts.

My new friends in the club no one wants to join and I work to educate others, especially other young people and the medical profession. There is a strong relationship between marijuana use and psychosis and suicide. But a terrible thing can happen when we speak out. When we publish our stories, offered in efforts to protect and educate others, the comments that ensue in social media can be brutal.

We have been called liars. I have been named #Failed Parent. Commenters diagnose our children, usually with PTSD and mental illness and claim marijuana should not be blamed. Since he was a veteran, I have been told George Bush killed my son. I have been



told I killed my son.

I volunteer with an AZ organization that fights to educate young people about substance abuse. My organization has been criticized for taking advantage of me and my son and told they should be ashamed of doing that.

Who attacks well meaning parents and community service organizations working for public health? I am never approached personally, thank goodness. Attackers make it clear they support normalizing and commercializing drugs, claiming that will be safer for our children. I cannot understand that. Especially now that I look at that from the perspective of a mother missing her wonderful son who should still be here today.

Update 2020:

I am gratified to find in the year 2020 there are more parents willing to share their testimonies about the risks and harms of marijuana. There is more and better science confirming our experiences. But I am saddened that the media and legislators still seem to pardon the drug for the damage done to our families.

I am grateful to organizations like Johnny's Ambassadors that bring light to the issues and problems. I am just so sorry that my son Andy and Johnny Stack now know each other in Heaven rather than in life with us here on Earth. My Andy would have really enjoyed knowing Johnny. We miss our children every minute of every day.

Aubree A. – August 28, 2020

In 2014 when we lived in Colorado, my son celebrated the legalization of marijuana by writing 420, which is code for the marijuana holiday and a time promoted to smoke marijuana, on his clothes and arms. He was a boy scout and played baseball. He was loved by his teachers and friends and had a lot of support. He was in the 8th grade that year and we saw his behaviors changing, he was starting to self-harm. We thought he was upset about a breakup with a girlfriend and we did not know he was using marijuana edibles from the industry. He had access to these products in school and at his friends' homes. We got him into counseling and his school provided support too.

By his freshman year, he was getting in fights and skipping school. It was clear he was coming home stoned and he was arguing with us that marijuana is medicine, despite the education we provided him. In February 2015 he was irrational, paranoid, inconsolable, and he was repeating statements that did not make sense. That same night he was so violent to my younger son, that my younger son ran bare foot through the snow to get away from him. Then, He attempted to kill himself.

I woke up the next morning to see my son laying on the couch saying he did not want to go to baseball practice, and his bedroom was covered in vomit. We found the empty bottle of ibuprofen pills. He was hospitalized for 5 days in Parkview Medical Center. After he was discharged, he was still using marijuana and was still suicidal. I took him back to the ER and we were sent home. I will never forget the psych liaison couldn't understand why I was so upset and said to me, "It's just marijuana."

My son did not improve, and I took him back to the ER a few days later. The psych liaison said there were no beds available in our town of Pueblo, and eventually found one in Colorado Springs. He was hospitalized for another 5 more days.

When he was discharged again, he told me he was using dabs and he knew they were making him feel crazy, and that he was trying to quit. I had no clue what a dab was. He explained to me and said, "Dabs are strong marijuana, they're crack weed."

After educating myself, I could not believe that my community of Pueblo embraced these products and called "dabs" medicine. I volunteered my family for crisis intervention with the dept of social services because I couldn't find treatment for marijuana addiction.

At first, my son did get better but relapsed back to marijuana, then moved onto using meth and heroin. He was hospitalized in Denver for 3 months at a residential treatment program where he was given a lot of psych medications. He was a walking zombie. He was drooling and sleeping in the hallways.

I fought to get him off all medications and brought him home. We still had problems and my son kept running away, and eventually social services discharged us, because they said they could not help us anymore. Soon my son was relapsing again and started using marijuana, the drug that he thought was the safer drug. These beliefs are propagated from the marijuana industry. At this point he was on the streets for days, hanging around homeless people, begging for food and water in front of a gas station near our home. He even had a family harboring him and giving him marijuana.

I had walked away from my job because finding him treatment was my full-time job. I also couldn't trust him to be alone with my younger son because he had violent behaviors. At one point he showed up back at home and was vomiting all day and taking long hot showers. I took him to the ER and he only tested positive for marijuana.

Eventually, I found a treatment center in Utah and made plans to take him there. He accepted that he needed help and agreed to go, but the night before we were going to leave, I was told I could not bring him unless I had \$36,000.00. The treatment center explained to me that our private insurance would not reimburse them in a timely manner, and they had to keep their lights on, and their staff paid. I did not have the money, so within a week after he stopped vomiting about 7 times a day, he was back on the streets for days.

When he showed up back home, I called the police and social service said they could not help us anymore. By the grace of God, my friend was able to find a consultant and we were connected to a dual diagnosis treatment center in California. This was the beginning of our recovery. He was 16. This treatment facility understood the effects of marijuana.

I knew I would not bring my son back to Colorado and I found a wonderful recovery community in Houston Texas where host families opened their homes to him. He was part of an intensive outpatient program and a recovery community for 3 years and remain sober, but now the drug culture and addiction wins, and he is using again.

I knew it would not be good to bring him back to Colorado, so I moved my younger son and I to Houston in July 2018. I am currently the parent coordinator for the same recovery community my son was part of. My younger son who doesn't have a drug problem but has a lot of trauma is part of this recovery community too and even attends a recovery high school, Archway Academy. Yes, I send my sober son to a school with other kids recovering from drug addictions because they have support, accountability, and a culture of honesty, respect, and building healthy relationships. They learn real life coping skills. A skill we practice every day is setting strong loving boundaries, keeping our connection, and to remain hopeful that my older son will come back to his recovery. Even though I live near my son now, I miss him. I also miss my Colorado home, and my parents who still live there.

My marriage is ending as my husband also believed the marijuana lies. My husband started using marijuana as medicine. Marijuana harmed him, it did not help him, he now suffers from extreme depression and anxiety. Please listen to his testimony.

My neighborhood has more crime than ever. When you allow every home to grow marijuana, you turn every home into a potential drug house and fuel the black market.

A man named Brad Fowler was killed over a marijuana deal near my parents garage and 3 blocks away from my home on a Friday morning. We have never had a homicide that I knew of in my neighborhood before. We even had a shooting one Friday afternoon. I didn't let my family walk our dogs around the neighborhood after this shooting because it happened right in front of my home.

I tell my story throughout the country. I am horrified to see the marijuana industry gaining more power, impersonating medical professionals, and harming unborn children. It sad to know marijuana is a factor in the increase of teen suicides and drug use in Colorado. Now I represent a parent group called Moms Strong; we tell our stories to unmask the marijuana charade, and just this year I have been hired as the Asst. Director of a non-profit called Parents Opposed to Pot.

I also have been involved with documentaries with Smart Colorado and Drug Free Idaho. I'm sure you've seen Chronic State? In this documentary I say, "In order for the marijuana industry to grow or maintain their sales, they need more and future users. Those users are the children of our communities."

My parents still live in Colorado where they had to deal with an illegal marijuana grow next door to them. They do not have the resources to move, and they had to smell dead skunk all the time, even inside their home.

My son is now 20 years old. He told me he used marijuana again and freaked out. His friends didn't call for help that night. How many more assaults to his brain can he take before it's permanently broken? He encourages me to keep fighting for his generation and he is angry that many elected officials push the marijuana nightmare. He's scared that marijuana use is so prevalent with his friends, but they don't understand that it's a hard-dangerous drug. He encourages me to share his story. I won't stop advocating until the predatory marijuana industry stops poisoning our children.

I miss my home, and I want you to know that prior to marijuana legalization my family was never exposed to marijuana advertising, smells, or crime. It wasn't even a topic of conversations. But now Kindergarteners know what marijuana is and while they are playing, they act like they are smoking it.

Thank you,
Aubree Adams
soccer mom for kids in recovery
Momsstrong.org
#EveryBrain Matters

Alisha R. – September 3, 2020

Our oldest son began using marijuana at 15, he is now 23 and it has been a constant 8 year battle. He has spent his 17th, 19th, 20th, and 22nd birthdays in rehabs. Although he has used other drugs, his main drug of choice is marijuana. "Medical marijuana dabs" caused him to have his first psychotic break over a year ago which ended up in a wreckless driving incident that nearly lost the lives of several people including his own. He was taken to a psychiatric hospital and diagnosed with Bipolar 1 with Paranoia. A diagnosis he still has today. He has been prescribed Wellbutrin and Olanzapine. When he takes the medications consistently as directed, he maintains a job, works out, and is pleasant. However, he is paranoid about the medications. And he often goes back to marijuana over and over. The marijuana further feeds his paranoia. Just today, we learned that he stopped taking his meds earlier this week and used marijuana (in some form) yesterday. He called and asked me to bring him to our house (he has no car). He began by talking conspiracy theories for a few hours around current events. He fell a sleep for 30 minutes. When he woke up he was in a full-blown, suicidal rage. We managed to get him calm and agree to resuming his medications by the end of the night. We had the help of his cousin who used marijuana for 16 years and now is on the other side of it and so he gets it and is a calming influence on our son. Thankfully our younger son and my father who lives with us were both away for the day and so they did not witness our oldest son's F-bomb rage attack.

Ann C. – September 6, 2020

When my son Brant was seventeen years old, he had a devastating experience while smoking a large quantity of THC-marijuana. It led to a sudden, major psychotic break, emergency room care, hospitalization for nearly a week, and ultimately his suicide two weeks later.

Before this experience, my son was a bright, happy, healthy, and normal teenager, but after the psychosis began, his thinking became paranoid and hopeless. He insisted to the doctors in the hospitals and to me, his mother, that the marijuana he had smoked had permanently damaged his mind and even ruined him.

The public needs to be warned that the high-THC content of today's marijuana can cause extreme and unpredictable mental health effects in some individuals, especially in youth whose brains are still developing.

I believe that my son would still be alive today if he had never used marijuana. For more details about Brant's tragic story, and for the latest scientific research about the link between marijuana, psychosis and suicide, please read my new book, "Gone to Suicide." It can be purchased through Amazon or ordered wherever you buy your books.

Thank you,
Ann Clark

Joanna D. – September 11, 2020

You represent so many families, including mine, whose children have suffered the devastation of thc abuse. On Sept 19 we will gather to remember our sweet Joey. Gone too soon, he was barely 24 years old when he ended his struggle. My only comfort is knowing he no longer suffers. I can attest to the fact it's not only marijuana anymore. Joey dabbled. We had no idea how serious his addiction was. When we were told he "only" had thc in his system we were lead to believe it wasn't anything as serious as heroin and to be grateful his drug of choice was "only pot." It's no wonder he couldn't find the help he needed, the rehabs didn't/don't regard marijuana as a serious drug. Professionals insisted he had to be doing real drugs. That "just marijuana" doesn't cause violent behaviors, or induce psychosis. Or suicide. But why not? Pharmaceutical can cause these same problems, And yet pot can't? With potency as high as in the 90 percent. How can anyone not believe the effect this strength would have on the brain?

With legalization marching forward, and our youths at such great risk, I fear for their future. Living in a country that would rather profit over sales then spare the lives of innocent children being made to believe it's "just marijuana."

I am sorry we share such a similar story Laura. Thank you for all the work you are doing to educate, advocate, and for the lives your foundation will save. I support and applaud you.

Betty H. – September 6, 2020

My son found out he was going to be a dad on March 27, so he stopped "smoking weed," dabbing, and cigarettes that very same day. Withdrawals were so bad that by Tuesday he was having hallucinations and asked me to take him to Rivervalley after-hours facility. He begged them for help, and because of COVID I had to stay in the car. The Rivervalley nurse called me on speaker with my son and talked to me she said his tox report only showed marijuana and that he didn't present a danger to himself or to anyone else. Even though we begged she said unless there were other criteria met he would have to go home. He went home with me and that Saturday, 4 days later he took his own life. They could have helped and they chose not to. He was a 22-year-old begging for help. If he had been brought in by the police, they would have helped him. I'm so angry with the "system."

Elisabeth V. – October 29, 2020

My son started using cannabis in high school and usage increased a lot when he moved out and went to college. He had 4 psychotic manic episodes and ended up in the hospital 3 times. He was diagnosed with Bipolar 1 disorder and addiction. He went to jail twice and then ended up in prison for 3 years for selling drugs. When he got out 4 years ago, we thought he would be done with pot. But I recently learned he started smoking pot here and there when he got out and started using it almost daily this spring. His excuse being that he and his wife suffered a miscarriage in March. I noticed at the end of July that he started becoming manic. It turned into a full blown mania with spending sprees and sexual promiscuity. He moved to Florida and left his wife and basically bankrupted his business. As parents we are heart broken about all this. We feel helpless; we cannot do anything unless he's a harm to himself or others. It started with a wrong choice and now he is mentally ill...again. He refuses to come home (Indiana). My mom gave me a recent edition of "the Epoch times," and I read your article about Johnny. The website is wonderful and I've watched 2 of the podcasts. It is, by far, the most helpful and informative website that I've come across. Thank you.

Daryl B. – November 2, 2020

Hi Laura, I read you and your husband's article in the Epoch Times. I am a 60 year old man from Arizona, retired Probation Supervisor. I was a user 3 years ago. I was shared my wife's medical marijuana. I had a psychotic episode 3 years ago and could not figure out what happened until I read your article about your son. I am so sorry for your loss. I was using marijuana daily. My wife bought a vape from the medical pharmacy. The staff at the pharmacy told her to be careful with that particular vape. I smoked the vape for a week before my episode. I went on a camping trip and met some friends, and my episode started there with delusional behavior. I ended up driving around and entering people's homes for no reason. I drove home that evening 50 miles on highways and don't remember how I got there. I left my truck in the middle of the road close to our home. I heard I ran out of gas. When I arrived home my wife could see that I was delusional, and she took me to the hospital. I kept leaving the hospital and started roaming the streets. I also had multiple contacts with the police. This went on for the entire weekend. I worked in the mental health field so no psych hospitals would accept me. I eventually came to and stopped using the vape. I sunk into a deep depression and had thoughts of suicide. Eventually I leveled out under the guidance of a Psychologist. Today I live a normal life and run 7 wellness centers for the seriously mentality ill. Thank you for being brave enough to share your story, because now have some closure on my episode. If I can be of any help please let me know.

Doug K. – November 4, 2020

Dear Laura and John,

When I read the article about your son Johnny in The Epoch Times it was identical to my daughter, Abby, except she fortunately is still with us. I got chills reading and was emotional. I'm in Canada (Ontario) which legalized Marijuana in 2018 under our disingenuous hopeless Liberal government, who used it in the campaign to secure the young vote and use it as a tax grab. Anybody over the age of 19 can buy it in Ontario. As many of us know (or maybe our politicians don't) a person's frontal lobe or Cerebral Cortex which is basically the CEO of the brain and responsible for cognitive functions, emotions, problem solving etc isn't fully developed until age 25, so marijuana under 25 can be VERY dangerous! It's disgusting how many of our young people this is hurting! My daughter Abby (Abigael – Abs for short) was born one day after Johnny on February 8, 2000. In late 2018 and early 2019 she experimented with weed and found it helped her when she was having trouble falling asleep. It worked briefly, but she became dependent on it over time and it started to make her anxious and on and on. As a result, she was smoking every day and tried dabbing. In late May, she started to feel the effects and began to experience some odd thoughts, not quite herself. I noticed she was acting a bit goofy and told her to lay off the weed. She didn't! On June 13th, she came to talk to me and was NOT herself. She was acting very out of it and not making sense, I said "Ab you HAVE to stop smoking!" She said I know. The next night, she went out to a bar but before they even went in her boyfriend called me, scared, because she was so out of it. She was acting paranoid and delusional but kept saying she's not suicidal. God Bless her, she knew something was wrong. She said to her boyfriend, "Call my Dad." Those 3 words are so dear to me it meant she trusted me but was scared! When I went to get them, she was so whacked and out of touch with reality. I said, "What else are you on besides weed?" and she said nothing else. When we finally got her blood results (weeks later) all she had in her system was the THC. I was up all night with her, she kept calling me to come to her room and stay with her and she finally fell asleep at 6am. I really hoped she would sleep it off, but nope! She woke up at 10am the same, so on Father's Day, Sunday June 16th 2019 I took her to the emergency room, and the real nightmare began. I won't go in to every detail but the next four months after Father's Day were a complete nightmare. We were so frustrated with the system, and the doctors at the hospital were ZERO help and gave us no information and released her after 6 days. Abby's Mother and I were taking care of a 19-year-old, who was an adult and could conceivably go and do anything she wanted and had mostly lost touch with reality suffering brain damage. She was having conversations with Siri in her room and called the Police and asked if they were following her, every day for weeks she thought she was going to fall asleep and never wake up it was HEARTBREAKING!. Long long story short, Abby made it I give her all the credit. In December 2019, she wanted to go off her anti-psychotics, but her Psychiatrist wanted her to stay on for three more months. When we left the office, she told me they were messing with her head. The fear was she would relapse off the meds, she knew she wouldn't! She also told me that she stopped taking them cold turkey for 6 days so I made her promise me to keep taking them if I agreed to lower her dose to wean off. I made her promise me to take half a pill for one month, so I literally self-medicated her but it was better than cold turkey, I was alone with no help. She's been off ever since 100% recovery attending freshman year at University!

She no longer smokes anything God Bless her! PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW this tax grab is hurting our beautiful kids. Legalized Marijuana is something that is here to stay like it or not but the legal age for purchase MUST be raised to 25.

I applaud you and John's efforts I think you are making a difference I'm so proud of you!

Roger S. – November 25, 2020

Your story really hit home with my family. On January 6, 2020, we got the knock on the door from the police, who told us our son Justin had fallen from a crane over 15 stories high. We struggled over a year prior to try to get him some help, with little or no success. On Christmas Even 2019, he was taken to the hospital by police in an ambulance, because he was running out in traffic, taunting cars to run him over. Days later, he ended his own life because of high-potency marijuana. He was into the bud and the shatter and also did some LSD, which the toxicology report revealed. We felt helpless and tried many resources as we could, but he was unwilling to give up the marijuana and get help, which made it much more difficult. My son changed so much in the span of 12 months, from being an outgoing kid with a love for life, people, and hockey, to becoming a reclusive, paranoid person. He thought we, his parents, were trying to poison his food, so he stopped eating our meals. He abandoned school, hockey, and friends, and stayed away from home for days at a time. We had to report him as a missing person to police a few times, because we didn't know what else to do. Maybe his story will help other parents get the conversation going with their kids. I've heard many stories of kids losing their lives similar to mine this year, but your story really hit us in the heart. Please know you're not alone in your pain and struggles. All the best to you and your family.

Geoff R. – January 5, 2021

My son Daniel was a wonderful boy. Growing up, he was everything you can ask for in a child. Sadly, after my divorce it affected him, he started using marijuana sometime in 2018. We didn't find out about the THC oils until he had a breakdown. We got him into rehab, and he was seeing a counselor after that up until 2020. Then, we found out he was using again. On November 21, 2020, without notice and no note, he took his life. We are heartbroken and in deep anguish.

Sonia J. — January 26, 2021

My son was at a rehab in December after being admitted three times to a mental hospital for weed induced psychosis. Each time he was diagnosed as Bipolar and put on antipsychotics and mood stabilizers. Nobody on either side of my son's family is bipolar. The last time he was released after 7 days at mental hospital, he came medicated on two antipsychotics and Lithium. With a few hours he was in complete psychosis. He came home and immediately started dabbing. He became psychotic, delusional, and aggressive. I had to call the police to take him back to the hospital. While he was gone I searched his room top to bottom and found his collection of empty dab pens and a full pen he had on his bed. I called the hospital to inform them what I found. My son's psychosis was caused by WEED.... he's not Bipolar. He was transferred to a rehab two days later. The counselors at the rehab did not believe his psychosis was brought on by weed. I will be sending them all the information I find in this group. My son is now sober.... no weed, no antipsychotics. He does have major depression....started taking an antidepressant last week. The depression did hit hard.... he appears to be getting over that hump. He's home with me now... he has no desire to smoke weed. He's more in shock to look back now that he's living in reality instead of psychosis.

Bart B. — February 9, 2021

On August 14, 2018, my son, Kevin, died by suicide. He was 29 years old. Kevin suffered from depression and cannabis-induced psychosis, (a diagnosis in the DSM-5).

Kevin told my wife and me about his cannabis use at 15

He agreed to get help. Over the next 14 years, Kevin participated in many recovery programs. He experienced periods of health and happiness while in recovery. Unfortunately, after a while, he would go back to his drug of choice, high THC cannabis. As he increased his cannabis use we started witnessing psychotic behavior. (We learned, after Kevin's suicide, about cannabis-induced psychosis. We read about it on the Johnnysambassadors.org website.)

One of the last articulate things Kevin said to me was, "Cannabis has ruined my life."

About 15 months before Kevin passed away, my wife and I flew to Spain to walk the last 80 miles of the Camino pilgrimage. We were spiritually and emotionally exhausted! We made our way to Sarria, Spain, and stayed overnight. The next morning we started our eight-day journey to Santiago de Compostela. I anxiously asked God for guidance. I didn't feel or hear anything.

The next morning I repeated my request and again, all I heard was the wind rushing through the trees. The third day began like the first two, however, I LET GO of any expectation and focused my eyes and attention on my feet. That's when I heard, "STEP AWAY." I raised my head, looked around to find the source of the two words I heard, no one in sight. That's when I realized God had answered

my prayer. In my Al-Anon and Mar-Anon meetings I read and hear the sayings, “Detach with Love” and “Let Go, Let God,” now I know what those words mean.

After Kevin took his life I felt empty again.

It was as though God had stayed in Spain and I was on my own. I started drinking more, thinking I could fill the emptiness inside me. After realizing I was going in the wrong direction, thanks to my wife’s help, I started another 12-step program. My soul began to heal as I reached out for help.

My sponsor said something that changed my life. I don’t recall his exact words however, I do remember how his words made me feel. I had hope again. His message was: If you can’t find God, help others and God will find you.

God and Kevin are in my life again

I can’t see them but I feel their love every day.

Thanks to my wife, Anne Moss Rogers, and many others for encouraging me to dig deep and help myself and others. And thanks to my Higher Power for two words,

“STEP AWAY,” and for being there every step of THE WAY.

Marni M. — February 18, 2021

I recently joined your page because I have a nephew, who died by suicide last year. Today he would have been 22 years old. He was very troubled his whole life, but his first drug abuse was high-potency marijuana. His parents supported this use, and he was hospitalized many times. In the earlier discharge papers the diagnosis was ‘poly substance abuse induced psychosis’ among other things. Although true, the marijuana led to alcohol, meth, heroin, and basically anything he could get his hands on. I read your article in the Seattle Times and felt so relieved that SOMEONE made the connection. The psychosis appeared after marijuana, before the other substances began being abused. In addition, they medicated him with antipsychotic medication by injection, then released him back into the streets of Seattle multiple times. He never had a chance. His uncle and I played more of a role to help him more than anyone else. I blame myself for not being a better advocate for him. We would not let him stay with us because he was determined to be a danger to himself and others. He was obsessed with drugs and refused to abstain. We went to him to assist him in staying out of trouble and following his mental health requirements. We failed. Thank you for what you are doing. I read your page daily and am learning so much. I will help as much as I can.

Darla D. — March 16, 2021

“This could very well be my story. My son is just completing his treatment program thru CU ARTS program. If wanted, they come to your home and counsel you and the family twice a week for an hour and half, plus they have a bonus-based drug sobriety testing program. It has been successful for us going on 5 months of sobriety! <https://www.artstreatment.com> I was referred to the program by his pediatrician. I was at my wits end when I finally enrolled. I’ve been fighting this since he was 13 or 14 years old with no success and a variety of different interventions with no return on my very large investment. I was always wondering if I was going to wake up to a cold body most mornings. The fighting and the stress all of it all has been very difficult for our family. Finally getting the correct ADHD and depression diagnoses and dialing in on the right medication to help him sleep and feel better were also key. Kudos to you for creating such an amazing resource and turning your tragedy into something that will help countless people! He is now in the teen diversion program and has a paper due on the effects of THC. I will be recommending your online curriculum as a resource to the teen diversion program administrator with the town of Parker.”

Brandon R. — April 21, 2021

As I sit here in my cell and reflect on my teenage years, I think back to how weed was the norm in high school. I would literally smoke every single day, cut class to smoke, and miss family events to smoke. I quit things I loved doing to smoke a little bit of weed. I really didn’t care about myself or others around me, and honestly, I didn’t think I had a problem. Nobody admits they have a problem when they’re in that deep and I was tired of hearing it was a ‘gateway drug.’ I should have listened...

Once I got into dabbing THC, it led to acid, Molly, and eventually alcohol. Nothing else mattered at that time. My days were consumed with getting messed up to pass the time and hide the pain.

Since the age of 14, I’ve been in and out of the legal system. Help was in front of me the entire time, but I was too distracted to reach out for it. By the time I was ready to change, it was too late, and no rehab facility, therapist, or doctor was going to get me to do it. I hurt a lot of people, physically and emotionally. I destroyed relationships with family members and friends because of my substance

abuse. It all comes down to you WANTING TO CHANGE. My drug habits were so bad, I couldn't control my emotions and ended up getting arrested over and over again until I was 21 years old. Then I went to prison.

For me personally, I had to hit rock bottom. It was the only thing that was going to save my life. It didn't matter what my family and friends said. Either I was going to change, stay locked up, or even worse, 6 feet under.

What I'm trying to tell you is that people love and care about you, no matter how much you tell yourself otherwise. There is a positive outcome after all of this, but you have to be the one to make it HAPPEN. Don't listen to the negative influences you've surrounded yourself with. Drop those 'friends' of yours. They don't care. Let your loved ones help you. That is why they're there. You don't need THC or other substances to feel happy or relaxed. FACE your problems head on, because I promise you that you'll be 1000% stronger when you get to the other side.

Being in prison is not cool. I've met a lot of people here who are never going home, because of a split decision they made while out of control. You can end your life theoretically by doing something stupid while under the influence. You need to make a change before it's too late, because this is real; I've lived it.

To the parents who may be reading this, I can understand how hard it might be to watch your child turn into something they're not and have no idea how to help them or what to do. My best advice (and this is from what my parents did for me) is to seek professional help. If they need a rehab facility, take them. I think seeing a therapist regularly to help talk through some of the issues is very helpful. A mentor is also helpful, especially someone who has had similar experiences who can talk to your child honestly. My parents did all of this with me, and I can tell you from going through it, all of the support helped me become the man I am today.

Tammy H. — May 12, 2021

Our 18 year old son walked in the front door. We were surprised to see him. Our son always worked on Monday nights from 5:00-9:00 pm. I asked him, "What are you doing home? It's only 7:00." His response was, "I don't know." I said, "What do you mean you don't know? Didn't you go to work?" He said, "I don't know." I inquired, "Are you sick? Did they send you home from work sick?" He said, "I don't know." Turns out our son had vaped marijuana multiple times that day, including earlier at school, after school, and just before he walked in the front door. Our teenage son was experiencing cannabis induced psychosis (CIP) for the first time.

THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis, can cause psychosis which is a mental health condition that occurs when a person begins to lose touch with reality and may experience visual or auditory hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, or disorganized thinking. Our teenage son had vaped a lot of marijuana that day. He was experiencing mental confusion, auditory hallucinations, and delusions. He didn't know if he had been to work or not. He believed his lap top and the TV were directly speaking to him. Earlier that day at school he had heard music playing in the classroom when there actually wasn't any music playing. He was beginning to lose touch with reality as a result of vaping high potency THC.

Our journey officially began 14 months earlier when our son was given marijuana to try at a high school party in the fall of his junior year. He had just turned 17. We found out two weeks later when he didn't come home one Saturday night. We didn't know where he was. We frantically tried texting and calling him. He finally responded. He was high on marijuana and couldn't drive home so we picked him up. The next day we talked with him and told him that we didn't think he should use marijuana. He told us that it was too late because he "loved the way marijuana made him feel." After that conversation I called our pediatrician and he recommended a drug counselor whom our son saw reluctantly about 4 times. Our son agreed to only use marijuana occasionally on weekends with friends. He told us, "Everybody is using marijuana." Unfortunately, he quickly became addicted to marijuana and within months of trying it, he was vaping marijuana daily. Just a year after he started using marijuana he developed cannabis induced psychosis.

As a result of treating his cannabis induced psychosis, our son also became addicted to benzodiazepines which were prescribed to him to treat the nasty side effects from the antipsychotic medication prescribed to him to treat the psychosis. Later that same year he had a grand mal seizure and almost died. The neurologist attributed the seizure to benzodiazepine withdrawal. Luckily for us a nurse who was nearby at the time of the seizure rushed to his aid and cradled him in her arms. When the seizure ended our son's body went limp and his heart stopped. He was in cardiac arrest. The nurse performed CPR and saved his life. He was rushed by ambulance to an Emergency Room at a top Boston hospital. This happened on his 19th birthday. We almost lost him that day.

Before the cannabis induced psychosis, our son was an excellent student. He had been admitted to multiple universities and received scholarships. The cannabis induced psychosis interfered with his ability to concentrate on his high school work. His grades and attendance suffered after he experienced the cannabis induce psychosis half way through his senior year of high school. He ended up not starting college that fall as planned. He has a severe cannabis use disorder (CUD). By definition, a cannabis use disorder is the continued use of cannabis in spite of the serious distress or impairment it causes. As a result of his recent drug use, he has lost two jobs, was evicted from his apartment, his license was suspended, and he has lost friendships.

How has my son's marijuana use affected me? I have had many sleepless nights worrying about him. I worry if he will be able to overcome his cannabis use disorder? I worry if his cannabis induced psychosis will be permanent? I worry if he will be able to support himself financially? I love my son very much and I hope he will be able to conquer his marijuana addiction. Sadly, it has caused him and our family great harm.

Anonymous — May 12, 2021

I have a 17 year old who is struggling with marijuana/THC/vapes everything you mentioned. We did send our child to wilderness therapy and from there to a therapeutic boarding school. Eleven months later our child came home and is back to using. I had my husband join me on the zoom meeting. We live in SC and it's not legal YET. I pray hard every day our child will use the tools learned in treatment but I'm afraid as you said the withdrawal is worse than parents imagine. I truly appreciate you and what you are doing to educate and bring awareness for the sake of our children. I can't imagine the pain you have of losing your son. Without a doubt I know you are a wonderful person. God Bless.

Jahnu P. — May 18, 2021

We are a first generation immigrant family. We migrated to America for a brighter future for our children. We worked tirelessly so we could afford to move to a town with top notch public schools. It was all going according to plan until our eldest son got to high school. We notice his grades starting slipping. His attitude towards the family also started to change. Since he was our oldest child, we attribute the change to normal teenage behavior. However, by 11th grade, it had become obvious there was something very abnormal happening. He started to threaten to kill people. He started getting violent and destroying things around the house. Additionally, he'd find the smallest of reasons to skip school. As a family, we had placed the highest priority on education. I started to look all around for the answers. I reached out to friends and family, his school guidance counselor. Through the process, I learned how kids are innocently roped into drugs by consuming what appears to be candies, but laced with marijuana. My son has always been a very unassuming child. He tries hard to fit in. We suspect this path led him down to vaping. Our fears were confirmed when we found vaping pens and cartridges hidden in his backpack. When confronted, he would always make excuses that it did not belong to him. The harder we tried to separate him from hanging around with his friends and vaping marijuana, the more he started to rebel. We tried to control his afterschool activity, but he always figured out a way to stay after school for one reason or another. Several times after an argument, he'd leave the house in winter without proper clothing. He was willing to freeze to death but not give in. At that point, we had to ease up. We started to seek professional help. We got him to accompany us a few times but then subsequently refused to go. It's hard to force a 17 year old to do something against his will. We continue to preach about the dangers of marijuana use/vaping. The damage that is already done is hard to reverse. He continues to struggle along in academics and life in general. Our childhood dreams of him have been shattered. Additionally, this has caused severe distress within the family. My wife has developed anxiety as a result of this experience. This was a wake up call for us. We are immigrant, well educated, middle class, strict hindu, vegetarian, non alcohol consuming, never exposed to any type of drug use family. There are no stereotypes or bounds, this can happen to anybody.

Kim S. — May 20, 2021

Laura thank you for sharing your story. My son died by suicide May 21, 2020. He started by smoking Marijuana then moved on to dabs. I sent him away to rehab when he was 15 yrs old in effort to help and cure his drug addiction. It is a long story, but basically, rehab discharged him after he was no longer in an emergent phase, and I could not pay the ridiculous amount of money they required to keep him in treatment. When he came home, he eventually started using again. Due to his major depression/anxiety disorder and drug addiction, he had limited coping skills. One sad night he tragically chose to end his life. It will be a year this Friday. God's comfort and peace has brought me through this far and will continue. When I saw your post about marijuana/dabs, I knew I could relate immediately. And I also share in believing that it is God who is our comforter and healer. He will walk with us through this difficult journey.

Jules — May 23, 2021

Hi Laura, I am so very sorry for your loss. I am certain Johnny was an amazing young man. His story is so very similar to my son's, and they were born the same year. My son started using his junior year in high school when he was 15. He was young for his grade. By the time he went off to a UC he was smoking daily. This highly academic student began to lose the ability to focus, and his anxiety got out of control. We had our first indication of psychosis on Mother's Day 2020 when he was home during lock down. We took him to the ER and he was diagnosed with "cannabis use disorder." I did not understand at the time that this meant "your son is addicted." He got into an outpatient program through his UC and after a brief stint at sobriety, he relapsed. He subsequently had 5 more hospitalizations within a brief 3-month period. Luckily we got him into an inpatient rehab program for dual diagnosis since the medical community cannot untangle true underlying mental illness from CIP until the patient is 6 months sober. He was there for 2 months. He's now been sober for 8 months. His bipolar diagnosis has been revised to CIP. He attends MA regularly and is in therapy. He is ready to return to university this fall. BUT my God, this could have easily been a different ending. It still could be. Sobriety is something my son will have to remain actively committed to the rest of his life. Anyway, I want to thank you for sharing your story, for setting up a non-profit to spread awareness of CIP. Without awareness and education, this tragedy will play out across too many

families. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Jrre T. — May 20, 2021

I love your non profit and what it does, I read the article on your site about Johnny and all it did was remind me of myself. I was born July 1999. I went to cherry creek high school. My freshman year I was trying to fit in and stole eye drops from king soopers for these kids and that's when my curiosity all started. My friends Dad Todd Romero gave me free nuggets tickets a lot of times and one time I went to a game with 3 so called friends, I was 15, some of us were 16, the driver was 16 driving a newer Audi he got for his birthday. That day I had never smoked anything in my life, but on the way to that nuggets game, those kids decided to start dabbing while on I-25, I roll windows down and driver rolls them back up and locks them and they just get to hotboxing the car with dabs and I was forcibly high and didn't even enjoy my time at that nuggets game. Being young and stupid knowing what they did was wrong, I forgave them because they were the kids I wanted to fit in with but fast forward to my 18th, I go to relaxed clarity and 5min into my appointment I have my Medcard and the next 2 years of my life was spent just letting my friends use me for what I had and could get and I just feel sooo compelled to message you after reading johnnysambassadors because you're so right in everything you've typed. I'm now 21 and you don't even understand how bad I wish to start over and never had smoked weed. It's not just Dabs it's the flower also. From 15-18 before having my medcard, it was way more easier to access wax dabs shatter, and to get flower was way more harder. It was like you had to go to aurora or the hood to find flower and I know to this day it's still that way as my little brother goes to creek right now and tells me but anyways yeah I'm just so happy to see that there's a conversation around this type of stuff because I felt alone. What Johnny told you at dinner is what I wish to tell my parents but our relationship is sour anyways so it's never crossed my mind to but sorry to type so much I just am in love with your non profit and mission and wishing I could somehow get more involved because it does remind me of myself a lot except I'm still here. I'm so sorry for your loss, it's very complicated, I'd never say preventable because I don't see how or a way for my parents to ever save me.. I haven't been diagnosed with schizophrenia but I've been prescribed anti depressants and chose to not take them and tell myself I'm not sick.. but then after reading everything about Johnny, made me think if I might be the same. I'm sorry let me stop now but thanks again for fighting for the youth, I truly would've never, if I knew all information I know now.

Susan P. — May 20, 2021

I don't use marijuana, however in 2016 I voted to legalize marijuana in Massachusetts. I thought it was a "soft" drug. I thought it was a safer option for people than alcohol. Even for teenagers. I remember telling a friend who suspected her teenager was smoking marijuana that it was probably better than if he was drinking alcohol. After all, alcohol is known to be bad for health and to cause young people to make poor decisions such as risky behavior and driving while intoxicated. It can become a dependence. But marijuana, that just "chills you out" and is not addictive. I wish I had known then what I know now.

We live in a middle class suburban town. I'm a stay at home mom who along with my husband did my best to raise our children to make good choices, have decent values, and be contributing members of society. I wanted to be realistic with teaching the kids about drugs. I drilled it into them to never try a "hard drug" such as cocaine or heroin because it "only takes one time to ruin your life". I told them never take a pill or anything you don't know what it is and warned them that even though this is something a lot of youths might do it could be such a "grave decision". While I never allowed it or gave a message that it was okay, I also never spoke negatively about marijuana. I had the mindset of maybe if I only drilled the negativity of "horrible" drugs they might actually listen rather than the just "don't do drugs" and "all drugs are bad". Again, I wish I had known then what I know now.

Our oldest son who is kind, independent, and a very intelligent out of the box thinker had dreams to attend college and become an entrepreneur. His senior year started with him doing great in school, working a part time job, and planning to go off to college the next year. Near the end of his senior year he couldn't work and was barely able to attend school due to his sudden extreme anxiety and paranoid and delusional thinking. Fortunately, because it was so close to the end of the year and he had done well for most of the year, he managed to still graduate even with missing most of the last weeks of school and all of his finals. He did not however attend any senior events including graduation. He could barely leave the house at this point. We thought he had had a nervous breakdown. We didn't even know what psychosis was at this point. The search started to find him help, which was not easy because he was now an 18 year old who did not want help. I did find a psychiatrist who would talk to me even though his practice was booked solid and my son was an "adult" and the first thing he said was "does he smoke a lot of pot, because we are seeing a huge problem with teens who smoke that are becoming depressed and lacking all motivation". I did know that my son had used marijuana, I had caught him a few times, but I only thought it was occasional and part of the usual teenage experimentation. I still did not think it had anything to do with his "breakdown". We finally ended up at a major hospital in Boston and he was eventually diagnosed with psychosis and anxiety. At this time he was still not honest about his marijuana use and the doctors only casually mentioned that it could be a contributing factor. Because the connection was not made, he continued to use even with going on anti-psychotic meds because it made him feel better in the moment. Fast forward over two years with some ups and downs, med changes, trying to go away to college, and a doctor change we finally got to a place where we really understood the possible connection between his marijuana use and the psychosis. Once we understood this, our son opened up about how much, how long, and how early he starting using marijuana. Apparently, he had been using for over a year and had quickly moved from smoking it, to vaping it (no smell so easier to hide), to dabbing it (also easy to hide). The problem is the vaping, eating, and dabbing of marijuana can be at so high of a

concentrated level of THC it is nothing close to the amount in a plant one would smoke (and even today's plant concentration levels are way higher than they were 20-30 years ago). Research is showing that these higher concentrates correlate with a higher risk factor for developing cannabis induced psychosis. Again I wish I had known then what I know now.

Once our son was able to make these connections and be honest about his use, his hospital team was able to help him more. He quit using cannabis, has started working full time, and he is starting to see his anxiety improve. This took over two years because we did not make the connection. Now, unfortunately because he kept using for those two difficult years, it may be too late to reverse the effects. Research shows that the sooner one is treated for first episode psychosis the better the outcome. If left untreated and cannabis use continues, the cannabis induced psychosis can turn into full blown schizophrenia. Our son's doctors will take the next year or so and slowly wean him off the anti psychotic medication to see if it is too late for him or not. This only became an option once the doctors knew how much cannabis he had done (they now made the connection that this is likely cannabis induced psychosis) and once he was truly committed to not using anymore (they would not even consider reducing his anti-psychotic medication while using cannabis because of the connection with cannabis and psychosis). This risk of cannabis induced psychosis is not very well known to the public. The marketing of cannabis products that advertise it as safe and healing make it even more difficult to make the connection. I still believe people should make their own choices if they want to purchase and use products with THC. BUT, I believe that if we as a commonwealth are going to allow this it is our responsibility to make it known and clear the possible risks of doing so. Not just so people can decide if the risk is worth it, but also so that they can recognize if and when a negative side effect occurs. Again I wish I had known then what I know now.

Jim D. — May 25, 2021

We live in a small town in Massachusetts. I am married with three boys. One of my sons started using marijuana at age 13. At first he had a casual fascination with marijuana. By age 14 his use had progressed to daily and by age 16 it became evident that he now suffered from Cannabis Use Disorder. Clearly addicted to what we all thought was a non-addictive substance, he began increasing the potency of the cannabis he was using. "Dabs," "Wax" and "Shatter" were the terms he used to describe this new highly potent form of cannabis. With THC levels up to 80%, his use of this dangerous high potency marijuana increased to two to three times per day with disastrous consequences. One day (at age 18) he suddenly became paranoid and delusional. He lost touch with reality and had to be hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. Since that first episode he has been hospitalized 9 times including 4 psychiatric hospital stays. Police have been called to his residence 5 times to defuse a potentially violent episode of behavior. He has a record which includes Assault and Battery with a dangerous weapon and possession of a Class E Substance. Psychosis and paranoid delusions led him to self medicate using stronger drugs including Benzodiazepines, Opioids Cocaine and Ecstasy (Molly). Today I worry that it is too late for him to recover; that his mind is a lost cause. It may be easy for some, to judge us as parents; to blame us for not seeing the signs and symptoms. I think about this often and worry that I let my son down by not doing more. However, until you have lived this type of experience it is impossible to judge. And today, with odorless vaping cartridges delivering high potency THC and with the surge in edibles, parents have an obligation to become informed and to assist your child/loved one in gathering the facts on marijuana. This along with common sense legislation that will put significant consumer protection measures in place, will help mitigate the disastrous consequences of chronic and/or high potency cannabis use in our young adults.

Kathleen K. — May 26, 2021

I'm the mom of four children. Marijuana use has significantly affected the development of two of them. My children were raised in a two-parent home with limited screen time, lots of exposure to sports and outdoor activities. They were altar servers and belonged to our church youth group. They worked as soccer refs and at the local orchard and volunteered at local food pantries. They were far from perfect kids but we thought we were doing most things "right" and had discussed the perils of cigarette smoking and "drugs."

My two youngest boys, however, were just the right ages to "misunderstand" the 2012 law legalizing medical marijuana and to feel emboldened by the 2016 law allowing recreational use. They were both under 21 in 2016 but both had started using as young teens so once it was "legal" they most certainly believed they were included in this new legal freedom.

For one child, it's watching him continually fail college classes despite his achieving a near perfect score on his SATs, his having a photographic memory and being one of the top students each year until high school. He is functional in that he can hold a job but it is clear that he believes he needs marijuana to help with his anxiety. This jeopardizes his position on the track team, has led to job losses and a level of shame with each failure that draws him ever deeper into his dependency.

For my youngest child, his use cost him the vocational technical HS he longed to be at and the trade he hoped to be working at post HS. It helped to fuel a low-level drinking problem resulting in an additional dual diagnosis at age 15 (both alcoholism and marijuana disuse disorder) on top of his already diagnosed mental health disorders. Eventually, all of it resulted in a CHINS petition, a DA diversion contract and ultimately 2 years in DYS custody.

I have to say I'm blessed that neither of my boys ever developed psychosis from their marijuana use. But I'm angry and frustrated that I was one voice of accountability among a sea of voices stating that pot use was "okay" and that recreational use was "fine". It

is not “fine” or “okay” for adolescents’ period. It is not “okay” that my son attacked his brother while under the influence. It is not “fine” that my son struggles to hold down a job or face stressful situations with a clear mind. It is not “okay” that both my boys will forever experience changes to their developing brain due to their early use of marijuana. And it certainly is not “okay” that there were severely limited resources and supports in place to help me help them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has updated its guidance to include: “New research has also demonstrated that the adolescent brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex areas controlling judgment and decision-making, is not fully developed until the mid-20s, raising questions about how any substance use may affect the developing brain. Research has shown that the younger an adolescent begins using drugs, including marijuana, the more likely it is that drug dependence or addiction will develop in adulthood.” (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/135/3/584>).

Developmentally, we know that the “cause and effect” part of the brain is not fully developed till age 25. We knew this prior to passing the 2016 law. The 2016 law was crafted to match the drinking and smoking ages in part because of that knowledge. We have worked for years, as a society to curb teenage cigarette smoking and drinking. We have groups like SADD, MADD and we have created smoke free zones and increased education in schools on fact-based dangers of tobacco smoking. We ban advertising of cigarette smoking and drinking on teen focused media. The recreational law in 2016 passed without any of the teenage prevention strategies we know have worked for cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption. It’s time to change that. It’s time to be honest about the dangers to our teens and use the knowledge of our pediatricians and researchers to create public service messages and in school fact-based education on the dangers of adolescent marijuana use.

Tom V. — May 28, 2021

My name is Tom and I live in Deerfield which is a small town in Western Massachusetts. I spent my adolescent years growing up in impoverished Hispanic communities like the South Bronx in New York City, and then in Holyoke and Springfield, MA up until my late 20s. Today, I am an insurance industry consultant by trade, but more importantly I am a husband, a Dad to my one and only teenaged son, and until last year, I was a brother to one of my late mom’s five sons.

My older brother Carlos fell into the marijuana culture in his early teenaged years, and it stayed with him his entire life. It stifled his upward mobility in school, at work, and in his social and family life as it often does in our underserved inner city Hispanic communities where marijuana use rates among us often outpace those of any other race or ethnicity. His venture into marijuana also emboldened him to abuse alcohol and other drugs. Fast forward into my brother’s early 50’s and his body began to show early signs of breaking down. He was managing his conditions well enough to still be mobile and active in caring for others in their home as a Personal Care Attendant while under the care of his own local doctors. Then, in 2018 a marijuana shop opened in his home city of Northampton, MA. Influenced again by his friends and local budtenders, he suddenly stopped taking his prescribed medications in favor of “medical marijuana”. The first recreational shops on the east coast opened around Thanksgiving of 2018. My brother would be dead just a year and half later, at just 54.

When my younger brother and I cleaned out his apartment, we discovered that Carlos was storing away all of his prescribed medications, one of which prevented strokes. We found unopened prescription bottles and unopened CVS prescription bags still stapled shut, some from the very week he died. When I checked his phone to notify his friends, he had voicemails and text messages from CVS reminding him to pick up his prescriptions. None of which he intended to take because he believed marijuana would treat all of his ailments. Under his bed lay his CPAP machine, covered in dust from being ignored. Displacing his prescribed medications on his mantle and in his medicine cabinet were small bags and small plastic containers of loose marijuana as well as open cigarette boxes filled with marijuana joints.

The coroner’s report says he died of cardiac dysrhythmia. Cardiac dysrhythmia is what can occur when strong strains of marijuana are smoked or ingested as edibles. Something I’ve seen first-hand throughout my own social circles. According to emergency room doctors in our region, marijuana is known to cause adverse cardiac events like dysrhythmias. My state of Massachusetts is legislatively pro-marijuana but what happened to my brother was a combination of unsuspecting self-harm and negligence by state legislators and regulators failing to protect my brother from this predatory industry that thrives on uncapped marijuana potencies and marketing disinformation directly aimed at vulnerable populations, like mine. Like my brother.

This was my brother’s medicine cabinet the day we arrived to clean out his apartment.





Atorvastatin is a cholesterol medication that should not be taken with illicit or herbal drugs. My brother was on medications that controlled the rate his heart would beat, keeping his heart from beating too fast. Some medications are specifically designed to control the electrical rhythm of the heart, keeping it from becoming more irregular and chaotic. (Source Rxlist.com)

My brother believed in marijuana as medicine so much that he emptied all of his prescription medication containers in his cabinet, replacing their contents with loose marijuana flower.

Notice how my brother kept his smoking pipe in his medicine cabinet. Behind that you will see a tube of Triamcinolone Acetonide .1% cream. Its used for skin conditions like eczema, rash, etc . Drug interactions for this product warn against using immunosuppressives like Marijuana (Sources: Kaiserpermanente.org and Leafly.com)

My brother in his healthier years



Don't let what happened to my brother, happen to your brother, sister, daughter, or son. My Massachusetts legislators are too afraid to address the issue publicly. We need to vote them out. We need to demand that existing legislators tighten restrictions on cannabis sales, marketing, advertising, and use. Better yet, demand they take the stand of preventing the industry from entering our communities all together.

Denise C. — June 2, 2021

I share my family's story in hopes that no other family has to go through what we have experienced.

My daughter was a sweet, friendly, honor roll student and cross country athlete who loved to do charity work & help others. She was raised in a very loving family, she was very close to her younger twin sisters; she was a joy to all of us. She was admitted to all four of the competitive colleges she applied to and looked forward to a future career in Psychology or Social Work. We did talk about the dangers of drug use but with her quiet nature and being a health conscious athlete, it wasn't something I felt I had to worry about with her. She never caused me an ounce of trouble in High School.

In fall 2016, she entered her first semester of her Sophomore year at Lesley University. When I dropped her off at the dorm, the smell of marijuana wafting through the hallways was overwhelming. When I raised my concerns to her, suggesting maybe we should look into alternative housing options, she told me it's legal now in Massachusetts, harmless and all of the colleges are the same way and she wanted to room with her friends.

Not far into the fall semester, my daughter had her first hospitalization. She said she was feeling suicidal and mentally off but after a week in this facility she wanted to return to college. Within a short period of time, she then dropped out of school and moved in with a friend and began using THC products heavily.

In February, 2017 my daughter was admitted to Mclean Hospital suffering from another psychotic episode. At the time of her

admission, THC was the only substance found in her system. She was delusional, incoherent, and experiencing suicidal thoughts. She was diagnosed with PTSD from some unknown event even to her and we were told *over and over again* that THC could absolutely in no way be responsible for her condition. After four long months in the “short term” unit, she was released with prescriptions for heavy psychiatric drugs which took her years of painful withdrawal to come off of (Subutex, Gabapentin, Prazosin, Ativan and Cymbalta). She is still suffering today.

As the years have passed, I have connected with many other parents whose children have also experienced cannabis-induced psychosis. THC was the root of my daughter’s mental illness and her life has been inexplicably altered by the fact that it was not acknowledged/understood at the time.

It is my hope that this is now recognized in the medical community and with early intervention, family education and support, other young people would receive proper treatment and not leave facilities addicted and misdiagnosed.

This is becoming a very common problem with the legalization of marijuana and the prevalent societal view that it is a harmless substance. It is my hope that Mclean as an institution is now acknowledging this and providing patients and their families with the support and guidance they need to understand this condition and properly recover from it. My daughter came a long way and had a lot of success at a long-term care facility in CT (also not covered by insurance). Not long after, she eventually relapsed, ran away and cut off all contact from friends and family. We have tried for three years to reconnect and get her the help she needs. We send financial support and receive periodic updates from the people she lives with and continue to pray that she comes back to us. She isn’t the same person she was before she became involved with marijuana and neither are we. Her family is heartbroken.

When I see others sharing their stories that took place in the years after my daughter’s experience; I wish that I had been better informed by the medical community, that had I known the connection, that THC is NOT harmless, gotten her the appropriate care and been able to spread the word to other parents and spare them the same grief.

Janean Q — June 3, 2021

I am so sorry. This is so similar to my son’s story except his ended in suicide. He was never hospitalized bc he was so fiercely independent that we weren’t always aware of his psychotic episodes until after the fact. He was, on some level, aware that his brain wasn’t functioning properly. Yet he thought he was “Uber smart” while high. Sadly, he had been Uber smart before he started using and after 18 months he could no longer manage his own finances or hold a job. He also dropped out after his junior year of college. He no longer trusted us to help him. He was afraid of being “institutionalized” or being placed on meds. I am a nurse and his dad is an MD and still we couldn’t help our son. Meanwhile the industry has his siblings so brainwashed that, though they don’t use, they don’t believe that MJ was truly responsible for their brother’s demise. I find myself disconnecting at times from this campaign because I know people think I am just a crazy bereaved parent. Clearly it doesn’t affect everyone the same- but for the ones that fall prey, it is the worst slippery slope. I continue to share my story with other parents who will listen. If I can prevent one family the devastation that we have experienced, I believe my son will be honored. He never intended to die by suicide. He was full of life and love and ambition. He was altruistic, intelligent and the kindest person that I have ever known.

Sarah H – June 3, 2021

I have been wanting to post our story for a while and today is that day. Our story is a mirror of many of those before us. Days after our son turned 18, he had his first psychotic break. 2 months later his older brother had his first psychotic break. This was 2 years ago and it has been very difficult ever since. Both boys were using high Thc in the Forms of dab pens, wax, and edibles. We , like so many of you, knew nothing about this “new drug- I say new because it is not the same drug as it was years ago(as we all now know). I had been to many drug talks at our high school and never heard anything about what high thc was let alone the dangers that could occur. My husband and I found weed paraphernalia when our son was 17, confiscated it, but actually breathed a sigh of relief that it was only weed he was experimenting with!! Over the last 2 years, our younger son has had some successes but recently had his 4th hospitalization. His older brother just had his second. We have tried everything, therapy for them(which they never really liked) therapy for us, his parents, NAMI classes, and many online groups. After this past hospitalization we sent one son to PACE dual diagnosis and another to a mental health facility in eastern pa. We still have hope and pray that this will make the difference. One son has an addiction and the other has never stayed on medication long enough for us to know why the delusional thinking still exists. Both boys had delusion thinking, auditory hallucinations, and anxiety. We have no family history of any of this. We are a close big family, I’m a stay at home mom, my husband has worked from home for years, we eat dinner together every night, we have wonderful extended family,... I could have never, ever have believed this could happen to us- but it did. Weed is not legal recreational in our state but it is easy to get. In fact my son was even ordering weed and psychedelics on the dark web and paying for it with Bitcoin! I will pray for all of you and do whatever I can to help educate anyone who will listen.

Caroline S. — June 10, 2021

Our 25 year old son is essentially lost to us right now. He has been down a long dark road that started in early high school when he began to use marijuana. He has continued to use it, but has progressed to abusing alcohol, prescription drugs, street drugs of all

kinds, and has had a screen addiction for years as well.

He is bright, funny, sweet, musically talented and highly intelligent. He was brought up in a loving healthy home in which we shared values of love, service to others, and a deep faith. He had plans to pursue a medical career in order to do something significant towards helping others and make a real difference. He graduated from high school only due to a lot of support, encouragement, and push from his family and committed educators at his school, (despite the fact that his standardized test scores were the highest in his class.)

He planned to go to a good college but withdrew before classes started that fall. He later made another attempt at college but quickly flunked out.

He moved into his own apartment, was working, and the substance abuse accelerated. We counseled and encouraged him to make better choices and when he refused, we just hoped and prayed that with experience and maturity, he would grow out of this phase.

We were totally shocked and unprepared when he had a complete psychotic break over 3 years ago. He spent a month in a psychiatric hospital and came out with a diagnosis of bipolar 1 and psychosis. Since then he has vacillated between manic episodes where he has done crazy and sometimes harmful things to himself and others, and deep depression. He has been suicidal several times. He has had numerous hospitalizations, been to many treatment facilities, and run through many physicians, counselors and other mental health professionals, all of whom he has rejected as not helpful. At this time he is in a psychotic state much of the time, believes that he does not need help, and often does not allow us to be involved in his life much. He seems like a different person.

He is now in such a compromised state that he can no longer drive a car or hold a job. Our hearts are broken to see him so disturbed and so unreachable. Most of our conversations with him these days are not based in reality, yet as much as he needs help, hospitals will only keep him involuntarily when he is a danger to himself or others.

He has admitted that marijuana causes him to be “lazy and unmotivated”, which we could clearly see happening, but none of us had any idea it could cause psychosis! We also didn’t know that the THC levels in marijuana are now so much higher than they once were until we were educated by friends who have experienced this with their loved ones. We have read *Tell Your Children : The Truth About Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence* by Alex Berenson, and numerous articles and online resources, and our eyes are now opened to this painful reality. We’ve learned much that we wish we knew then and have to fight frustration and anger at the massive and misguided push to legalize, and even more so, to elevate the use of marijuana as a benign and helpful substance.

Susan W — June 12, 2021

When our son was in psychosis he would stop using THC but when he would recover he would go back to it. It’s taken 4 years of constantly standing with him through this and encouraging him to remain on his medications and refrain from THC. We have continued to tell him our home is his and it’s always open to him. At this time he is what we would say recovered – has a job, works out and is drug free and medication compliant. He continues to live with us for the support he needs so he can heal. We can see his brain continuing to heal from the damage high concentrate THC has caused. We are not sure if he will ever be the same son we once knew, but we see signs of recovery and our hearts will never stop hoping and loving him. We have had seasons of recovery and almost wellness and then a switch flips inside him and he turns back to THC and it’s a new season of hard work and prayers- and continuous supervision and support. We have worked from home to be there with him and had extended family stay too over the past 4 years while in psychosis. I’ve had many moments of crying so hard I couldn’t catch my breath and felt like we couldn’t go on anymore like this. This has been a long and hard journey. I wish I had known so much of this when our son first became ill. From the ER doctor who had no clue to the last psychologist we saw. We must educate and inform the public! We are down to 20 mg of Geodon in the mornings and he just went from 40 at night to 20. We are praying he doesn’t have any symptoms resurface. Right now he is working – his second week of full time work. We aren’t sure he can handle going back to school just now. One step at a time but for now he’s making progress and we pray and hope.

Anne H – June 16, 2021

Before going to work in a Massachusetts medical marijuana dispensary for a year and a half as a budtender, I was a mentally healthy physical therapist. I was passionate about the cannabis plant. I believed that not only was it natural, harmless, and non-addicting, but also that it was a beneficial medicine for the body and mind. I was experienced with marijuana. I thought that I knew marijuana.

After going to work for the marijuana industry and consuming its high THC products, I learned that commercialized, industrialized marijuana products are unnatural and extremely harmful. Since day one the marijuana industry, in its quest for billions of dollars, has been all about profit over health and lives.

My marijuana corporation’s CEO told us budtenders that its priority was to sell BHO (Butane Hash Oil) high THC concentrates (wax

and shatter), that were over 90% THC. We budtenders were told that high THC wax and shatter were a “more medicinal way to medicate”, compared to our flower that was 20-30% THC.

When the big day finally arrived, when my corporation achieved its prime directive of selling high THC wax and shatter, I bought a gram of shatter and a dab rig from the dispensary. I went over to a fellow budtender’s house after work in order to learn how to dab because I was an old school marijuana user. I was completely clueless about dabbing and intimidated by the unfamiliar blob of shatter, the dab rig and butane torch. After inhaling my first dab hit of 98% THC shatter, my mind was overpowered with an incredibly stupefying high. I kept saying “WHOA!” over and over again between coughing fits, because I could barely handle the dab hit effects.

I should have heeded the disconcerting effects that dabbing had upon my body and brain, but being under the influence of high THC made that impossible. I immediately became hooked on dabs. High potency THC concentrates became my main method of consumption. I became a great promoter of high potency THC concentrates.

At my budtender counter, I educated and upsold high THC concentrates to customers, which included 15 year olds. I parroted what my management told me to say, that high potency THC concentrates were a “more medicinal way to medicate”.

However I began to witness harms of high THC upon co-workers and customers, who started to demonstrate escalating psychological problems, aggression and explosive outbursts. Yet I was completely incapable of perceiving the harmful effects that high THC had upon me.

High THC caused me to develop a severe marijuana addiction, a Cannabis Use Disorder. I became what the marijuana industry values and creates: one of the 20% of heavy users who consumes 80% of its products. I eventually had all 11 out of 11 characteristics of Cannabis Use Disorder. I continued to use despite experiencing alarming symptoms. After dabbing, my eyes would roll up in the back of my head and I would pass out. I would remain unconscious for some time, come to and then dab again.

Even more disturbing, I experienced onset and escalation of Cannabis Induced Psychosis: paranoia, hallucinations, and vivid daydreams of committing violent acts. First I thought about vandalizing cars. Then I imagined beating people with a baseball bat, stabbing people with a knife then shooting people. My thoughts were so terrible and my self-hatred grew so great that I began to think of ways to commit suicide.

Friends told me to stop dabbing but I felt powerless to stop and continued to dab more and more. I was caught in a high THC death spiral but was fortunate to wake up to the harms before it was too late. I quit my job as a budtender, threw out my dab rig and stopped using marijuana.

However I was far from being out of the dark woods of high THC. I went through a painful detox, losing 15 pounds in a few weeks. I was not eating or sleeping. Despite my not consuming marijuana, my mental state went from bad to worse. I used to wonder why this happened until I found research. A study shows that increased metabolism with loss of weight results in a substantial release of THC from fat stores into the blood known as “THC re-intoxification”. After having dabbled up to a gram of shatter daily for almost a year, the tremendous amount of THC stored in my fat was released.

My Cannabis Induced Psychosis worsened substantially. It went into a whole new level of bizarre and scary. I was suddenly convinced that there was an Illuminati conspiracy using 4th dimension shapeshifting reptilians to manufacture poison marijuana to bring about an apocalypse and a New World Order. Since I was the sole human on the planet who knew about this dastardly plot to end humanity, 4th dimension shapeshifting reptilians were going to find and kill me in a most brutal manner.

I became completely terrified and incapacitated. I stopped speaking. I armed myself with 4 knives 24/7 but still did not feel safe. I thought that my phone was bugged, my friends’ entire house was full of hidden cameras, and their phones were bugged. I was afraid to go out in public and be around people, because I could encounter a person who was not really human, someone who was actually a 4th dimension shapeshifting reptilian out to kill me. I began plotting ways to kill my corporation’s upper management in order to save humanity.

My friends were extremely worried about me, as my mind was teetering on a precipice, and they believed it highly likely that I would either have a complete psychotic break or kill myself. Fortunately this did not happen, for as time passed and the months went by, my mental state slowly improved and I managed to recover my mental health. When I was finally able to perceive reality clearly, I felt greatly ashamed of the delusions that I had been utterly convinced of and how close I had come to harming others.

It took a heck of a long time, but the day arrived when I no longer felt shamed into silence by what high THC dabs did to my mind. I am just one of many harmed by the marijuana industry and its unnatural, harmful high THC products. I am fortunate to have been a middle aged woman with a fully developed frontal lobe, able to survive and be a voice for those who perished from high THC, such as

young Johnny Stack.

The greedy, callous marijuana industry should be shamed for its harmful ways, for the destruction it causes. If the marijuana industry continues to be at the reigns of regulation, acting with impunity for the carnage it produces, lives maimed and destroyed, the tragedy of high THC will intensify.

Sean K — June 17, 2021

I saw your sons story on the news about a month ago. First off, I am so deeply sorry for the loss of your son. I can't imagine the agony and the loss. I'm so, so sorry. Thank you for educating people, and especially young people on the dangers of dabbing. This is extremely important work that you are doing.

Our 18 year old sons' story is eerily similar to Johnny's. Before he became addicted to dabbing in the past six months, he was a very bright, loving, articulate, kind, intelligent, talented, considerate, polite and funny young man with a super bright future ahead of him. He has a mother and father who have adored him from day one, and two sisters who love him very much and many friends, unfortunately, many who dab high THC and use pot – in our state, perfectly legal, at least for those over 21.

He has never suffered any abuse from either his mother or father, or anyone else – except for what I would consider normal arguments between a teenager and his parents in his later teenage years. He has had some minor underlying anxiety during covid, and the past few years of HS, but nothing he was ever treated for and he never mentioned suicide before a few months ago when he started dabbing daily and heavily. Once he started dabbing high THC concentrates, his behavior very rapidly changed and became very, very disturbing. He turned into someone we don't even recognize at all.

We feel that he now has Cannabis Psychosis, Paranoia (the govt. has bugged my phone, people are spying on me) and even some Schizophrenic type symptoms – grandiose feelings, disorganized thinking, not making any sense, saying very odd things. His anger is through the roof, he punches himself in his face, punches holes in the walls of our house. He blames all of his problems on his mother and I and will take responsibility for nothing (YOU guys have a BIG problem, not me). Last night he told me he wishes me dead, wants me dead and hopes I soon will die. Before this, we had what I would describe as a loving and close relationship, not perfect though, but no relationship ever is.

He is now suicidal. The police have been called nine times to our house due to his threatening suicide – in just the past three months. He is now completely unrecognizable to us. His eyes look different, his mannerisms are different, he has lost a bunch of weight and his anger at us is off the charts, especially when we say no to his demands. Dabbing THC is legal in our state!

He has been on three 72 hour holds. The 3rd 72 hour hold resulted in transfer to a behavioral health and addiction hospital where he stayed for three nights. They recommended he go to a partial hospitalization program at a different behavioral health and addiction hospital closer to our house, 9-2pm five days per week. We think he needs full hospitalization for detox from this high THC dabbing. He is scared to death of any group type therapy or hospitalization, even partial hospitalization where he gets to live at home. He called the new hospital for a phone assessment and told them that he was fine, just suffering a little bit of anxiety and that their program wasn't right for him. His lying has been pathological and compulsive and continues to be.

About a month ago, he crashed his car by running a red light, multiple witnesses said he was doing over 100mph in a 45mph zone. He crashed into a woman's car at around 40mph, totaled his car and hers. He didn't check on the older woman he crashed into, he then left the scene of the accident, ran into a nearby store and assaulted two workers there, threw a ladder at one worker and grabbed the other man's eyeglasses after the man dropped them and he then broke them in half. He blames this all on hitting his head in the accident, not the THC. After his accident, I went through his car at the towing yard and found 3-4 empty containers of weed, two empty containers of dabbing THC wax, multiple vaping pens and a blowtorch on his seat. He denies being high when the accident occurred... I believe otherwise.

Over the past few weeks, when he asked to borrow one of our cars (I took him off of our insurance after his car was totaled as our insurance premium skyrocketed) and when I said no, he started violently punching himself in his face. He then tried to rip a heavy duty metal hangar for a bird feeder off our deck saying he would stab and beat himself in his head with it. Then he punched a hole in the wall of his bedroom and ripped up some things in his bedroom. All MY FAULT according to him. I made him do it because I wouldn't let him use one of our cars in his condition. It couldn't possibly be the high THC dabbing to blame.

He currently has a warrant out for his arrest for missing court dates for speeding tickets. All of these behaviors before dabbing would have been absolutely and undeniably unheard of for our son, as he has always been a polite, kind, compassionate, loving, considerate young man. We have never had any sort of problems like this with him before and never any involvement with the police.

We have kicked him out of the house six times over the past three months, letting him sleep at home on occasion, the last being three nights ago and the previous 4-5 nights before that. He stays up all night and is extremely angry at us, this is all our fault, banging on our door, volatile, screaming, crying, blaming us for everything, and more. We had to kick him out again as we can't live like that. It has gotten to the point that we are now concerned for our own safety, not knowing what he is capable of with his extreme behavior. On one occasion he ran out of the house, screaming at the top of his lungs at my wife "My Mom is a fucking psychotic bitch", over and over again. That tidbit is one of so many since he started dabbing high THC concentrates. All of this behavior would have been absolutely unheard of for our son, pre-dabbing.

After his car crash, I got into his iPhone and read through all of his texts. He had texted the word/action of Dabbing 80 times in the previous 10 weeks plus 45 times words like "bud, pot, weed". These were all things like "I'm dabbing with XXX at XXX Park", "come dab with me, I'm at XXX's house", "can I buy 2 grams of wax from you", "lets dab and then go skate", etc. He obviously had been driving high as a kite many times as many of his dabbing texts occurred in his car. In the hospital stays he has tested only positive for THC. His doctors and our psychologist and family friend who has a lot of experience with meth, suspected meth based on all of his behaviors. Based on his own texts, he had dabbled high concentrate THC 1.6 times per day, every day, seven days per week the previous 10 weeks. That's what his texts went back to as he had gotten a new phone.

He is now homeless, has no money, no job, no car and won't seek help because he doesn't have a problem. All of this would have been inconceivable to us pre-dabbing. The police tell us "Sorry, there is nothing we can do except another 72 hour hold". Dabbing high THC concentrate wax should be banned in CO. We are at our wits end with him, with no clue of what to do. Do we attempt to get him into some sort of interventionist type program involuntarily?

I feel like I am in a race and a battle to save his life, but it appears there is nothing I (we) can do. Everyone says to keep our distance and not give him any money, don't enable him, etc. We have been doing that but it is a dilemma as we love him so much and we want to save him and protect him from this poison that is ruining his life. We know it's the drug, the THC that is causing his erratic and very strange behavior as his behavior rapidly went downhill at the same time as he started dabbing THC. He often (daily) says how much he despises us, how we have abused him his whole life (all untrue and all delusions). I want to help him, protect him and save him from himself, yet I can't.

Everyone tells us to not give him money, they say he will use it for drugs – He says he will only use it for food, "he's starving to death and WE WON'T HELP HIM!". Nor should we give him a place to sleep as that is just enabling him – even our psychologist has been saying these things. My son says "I'm homeless because of YOU". I have told him that we will drive him to court dates, a job – if he gets one, and to treatment and that's it. That only makes him madder.

I have spent hundreds of hours and many sleepless nights researching dabbing THC and addiction in general. I have forwarded many, many scholarly medical research articles on the dangers of dabbing THC to our son, including the one about Johnny & his family, all to no avail.

Jo C – June 22, 2021

My son Joseph, I call him Joey, is my only son, and the youngest of three. He would be almost 29 years old. I am in the 57th month since he left this earth and I still wondering what might have saved him if circumstances had been different. I don't have the answer but this I know, without people willing to telling their story there would be very little hope for the families that are impacted by their children's substance addiction(s). It is through advocacy we are able to educate. And make families aware of what today's marijuana is really about. Joey started drinking alcohol fairly young, probably about age 14, and quickly moved onto pot. Over the next few years we started to notice behavioral changes that ultimately caused him to go into his first of many hospitalizations. My husband and I were of the peace era, we smoked pot. Pot was our drug of choice, as it was our son's. The thing about us is, we smoked it, we weren't dabbing, and high potency was, if we were really lucky, was maybe 20 percent, not the 90 + percentiles of today. Joey was admitted several times due to erratic, and eventually psychotic behaviors. The first two admissions he tested negative for everything except pot. Well how could that be ? How could his violent behaviors be driven by pot alone ? It was inconceivable to his dad and I. My husband and I said "but it's only marijuana" more times then I care to admit. We had no idea, for lack of a better word, how sophisticated marijuana had become. Nor how addicted our son was to it. Eventually Joey went on to use other substances but he openly admitted his drug of choice was pot. His quantitative levels were so off the charts that it took 58 days for him to test less then a trace. 58 days ! We tried everything. Rehabs. Tough love. Unconditional love. We cried. We fought. We begged. We even bribed. But nothing worked. He lost his soul to weed. He was making his own dabs and shatter, and selling it to support his habit. He was arrested for possession of felony status amounts, and the DA went after him hard. Now with a criminal record, student loans were off the table. Getting a job without a background check was getting harder, he couldn't travel out of the country to attend a family wedding, life got very serious very quickly for him, and it just became too much for him. So one early morning after a night of partying he washed down a handful of pills with a bottle of wine. Was it intentional? I won't ever know. He bought some munchie food only an hour before sending his best friend a picture of his fist full of pills along with a text that read Love You Rachel . He had a pizza in the oven that went uneaten. Regardless if his death was intentional, dead is dead and the living are left behind to navigate

gut wrenching, heart shattered child grief. I honestly don't think he cared if he woke up or not. At least not at that very moment. Maybe if he had woken the next day he might have thought well that was stupid of me. I don't doubt he probably escaped death more than once. Drugs have a way of making you not care about reality. And today's pot is definitely drug. Fast forward to the day he died. I had flown in to visit him and his sisters when I got the call that would forever changed my life. "Mama D, Joey is gone." "Gone where Jeromy? Gone to Colorado?" "No Mama D, he was found dead." My daughter had just pulled off the highway seconds before the phone rang. Why she pulled off was a God thing. Because when she heard the news, I was on speaker phone and she heard this horrible news at the same time I did. Her reaction so violent and agonizing I don't doubt we would have been in an accident. I couldn't help but thank God for this lifesaving favor. As much as I wanted to die,....how would I live without my child? But I am very grateful our tragic loss of Joey wasn't compounded by a car accident. I often wonder did God spare my son from suffering more harm and pain had he lived. I won't ever know. I just know my child was struggling and I know he didn't like what he had become. Truthfully there were many times it was hard to like him under the influence of drugs. Countless times I had to remind myself it's ok to hate the addiction but still love the addict. And he was that. Addicted to weed. Who knew this was possible? We were told it wasn't. It was Joey that told us he was. Proven to us after every rehab he would eventually circle right back to pot because he was, in his own words, an addict. He never connected the dots that the weed was a precursor to all of his other drug related decisions, and problems. What a catch-22. But it's only pot, right? NOT. He was cremated a week later. And I flew home with his remains in a 10 x 5 inch box. It sat on my lap the entire flight. I was a flight attendant and my son flew as my passenger several times. My son who loved to fly was going home with me in a way none of us expected. If I could ask him if he had any regrets I am sure he would have said "but mom it was only pot." His first love and it killed him. Yes, he was high on other substances the day he died as his peers are quick to remind me. But they fail to see pot as the devil in disguise. They are so conditioned to think it's benign. But how can anything that alters the brain chemistry be benign? Even under the disguise of gummies, brownies, candies, and coffee shots laced with thc, it is a powerful designer drug. Gone is yesterday's marijuana. And gone is my beautiful boy. He spent 10 years in hell fighting against what it did to him. I am angry and sad at the predatory industry that is targeting the youth with their omission as to how insidious today's marijuana is. I am angry with the politicians for signing legalization into law. But I am grateful for organizations like Johnny's Ambassador and Parents Opposed To Pot for their courage, and grass root movement to change the legalization direction. We must never give up. Our children and their children deserve better. Their lives matter. Love Matters.

Michelle L – June 22, 2021

My beautiful boy Trevor died 3 days before Johnny Stack died, 11/17/19, in his dorm room at Sonoma State University, after ingesting a "blue 30" street pill that was a lethal dose of 3 types of fentanyl. His unformed brain caused the neurons to search out a higher high after being introduced to cannabis at age 14.

My son became addicted to cannabis as a freshman in High School. When I discovered that my 14 year old son was using cannabis regularly, I learned all I could about the new marijuana. I learned that the pot my friends smoked in college was maybe 2-4% THC, and 6% if you were lucky to score Maui Wau. THC amounts in today's medical marijuana strains average around 25%, with some award-winning strains up to 35% THC, and Dabs up to 99% THC. This is not hippie grass. Marijuana affects brain plasticity and proper neural function in youth.

Our family did all we could to stop our son's addiction (a 14 year old brain gets hooked quickly). We sent him to rehab, where he was diagnosed with Cannabis Use Disorder. He came home, only to experience even greater addiction a year later, including finding multiple very fake IDs and cannabis club memberships, and having our home, vehicles, and even myself a punching bag for his drug-fueled rages when coming down from his high. He ended up attending six high schools including three rehabs before graduating from High School in 2019. And yes, the day after his 18th birthday, his first legal medical marijuana card appeared in the mailbox, despite his long-standing issues with drugs.

Since his death, I have been an outspoken advocate against youth use of marijuana – particularly the facts which led to Trevor's addiction and ultimate death.

- Potency. I encourage people to learn about the strength of today's marijuana – it is not "just pot".
- Biology. How the brain is not fully formed until age 25 in most young adults, and the likelihood for addiction increases to 1 in 6 for youth using marijuana when starting before the brain has reached adulthood.
- Gateway. Today's marijuana leads many young people in search of a higher high.
- Suicide. How marijuana use in young adults increases suicide ideation seven-fold (additionally, toxicology results in suicides show a 10% increase in marijuana since legalization in CO.)

I have nothing against medical marijuana use, and was made fully aware of its benefits as a breast cancer patient in 2019. I have nothing against responsible adults' use of marijuana.

I am appalled, however, with my local CA policymakers who equate support of Prop 64 with opening cannabis retail storefronts, and am currently part of a local advocacy group showing the harm of youth access to cannabis and the normalization that happens when a storefront goes in. One of our nearby towns, Sausalito CA, is the latest jurisdiction to consider breaking ranks with the rest of my

county and allowing a portal for the highly commercialized recreational cannabis industry in their community. I have to point out Sausalito's proximity to the Golden Gate Bridge and note that adolescents who use cannabis have a seven-fold increase in making suicide attempts. I have first-hand experience of the tie between cannabis use and suicidal ideation from sitting in 12-step and grief groups with parents whose children have been lured to Sausalito's International Orange icon. Another one of Trevor's cannabis-addicted friends was dialing Uber to order a call to take him to the Golden Gate Bridge, when Trevor intervened and "talked him off the ledge". In the first four years since legalization, Colorado coroners have seen a 10.5% increase in the prevalence of positive marijuana tests in toxicology reports, increasing from 11.8% at the onset of legalization in 2012 to 22.3% in 2016.

The latest marijuana statistics include:

- 30% of marijuana users have a use disorder.
- 9-17% of people who try marijuana will become addicted.
- And yes, marijuana is a gateway drug, especially for those with unformed brains, under age 25.

My son is more than a statistic. What tax revenue will be gained to make up for the price of my son? And that revenue increase will be at the cost of more people addicted to cannabis in my county. How do I know that? Because we have seen the same practices with the tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceutical industries. They profit from the suffering of others.

Personally, I have nothing to lose in this game except time. I already lost my oldest son to fentanyl poisoning caused by his addiction. I advocate against commercial retail cannabis because I know increased normalization and access will further hurt the youth of our county. Students themselves tell us how easy it is to get a fake ID or have someone go in a store to buy for them. Marin CA already has skyrocketing youth cannabis use numbers – and with a dispensary nearby, Marin teen cannabis use rates will just get worse. For the record: this isn't a "parenting problem" as some people would like to suggest to abdicate responsibility for our community's youth. I was the perennial room mom in my sons' classes. We had family dinners regularly. They had an allowance and had to earn money to buy any earthly goods they desired. Our family is not divorced, nor are our boys adopted. I spent a month recently writing thank-you cards for the literally hundreds of condolence cards and memorial donations we received, so many of them sharing how our family is such a cornerstone of our community. The thing is, parents can't fight this alone. We need policy that shows youth that we value their health and safety. We need local leaders that recognize the crisis we have in our county and take responsibility for their part. We need community that doesn't point fingers and parent-shame, but instead asks – what can we all do to make sure we don't lose more kids?

If your State or Community is considering changes to marijuana laws, I implore all involved to consider the good of your entire community's health over money. In our case, we need to decide what is best for all of our local community, since there are no gates to wall in the city of Sausalito, so whatever is decided will affect all of our county. Our kids (and many adults) are growing up with marijuana use being marketed, normalized, and pushed by the cannabis industry. Our minds naturally and powerfully say "illegal is bad, legal is good", and marijuana is no exception.

Trevor L — June 24, 2021

Letter of Accountability

Dear Mom and Dad, As you probably know, I am writing a Letter of Accountability to you. In this letter, I will talk about my past actions and what was going on for me. I know my using has affected you... **My using made me lose motivation for school also.** I would sometimes ditch class and get high with friends. This led to falling even further behind in school. I still wanted to succeed(sic) academically, but when I showed up to class I often wouldn't know what's going on and I'd leave. This made me feel inadequate and embarrassed. When I got in trouble for using and getting caught, I denied it so I could do it more. In these moments I felt mad that I was punished for it and only made me want to use more. After situations like this I often became angry. I felt like you were trying to stop me and punish me for my actions which made me feel ashamed and violated. I had a tunnel vision towards getting high as it's all I could think of. I tried gaining attention by self-destructive behaviors such as stealing your car, hitting myself and your property, saying depressing remarks and mean things towards you as well as more things. These events were in an act of rebellion and to gain attention to me as I felt inferior in most situations at home. I also recognize that I have problems with the law and I've gotten in trouble with the police on more than one occasion. An example of this is the incident that ended me up in Juvy and eventually going to (wilderness)... I already felt frustrated, powerless, and inferior. I then started arguing and my anger boiled over. I got up in your faces and yelled, threw my backpack at a wall, which made you call the police on me. I felt abandoned and broke the house phone and walked up the hill where the police were. I got in their faces and ended up at (a 5150) where they released me to Juvy. I felt like I was an outsider and I felt ashamed and abandoned. At this point I knew I needed help and agreed to get it. This is something I had a hard time with in the past. I was in denial of lots of things including my using and aspects of my at home life. I denied I had a problem with drugs and denied that they had an effect on the way I act. I also denied when I got in trouble. An example is when you'd find my drugs or smell it and I would say that I'm holding it for a friend, or that I wasn't doing anything. I tried to lie and deny to make you not as disappointed in me and also so I could keep doing what I was doing. This damaged our relationship and I always felt disappointed(sic) in myself.

When I used there was always a lack of honesty and communication because I felt like you would always fear the truth. This made me feel sad that I couldn't openly talk about everything. Often I'd hang out with friends and lie about my whereabouts. This made you guys scared, especially when I'd disappear(sic) for a couple days and you'd have no idea where I was. Not only did my actions affect you, but it also affected (my younger brother.) I am ashamed that I couldn't be there for him in the past, and that my actions likely hurt him...

When I couldn't provide for my using I started selling to gain extra money. I would sell to my friends so I could have a little extra pocket change to provide for my using. I got a natural high from selling and this fueled my self-esteem, and my self-image, making me feel better about myself. I loved the rush that drugs, and selling, gave me and I chased that high which led to stealing. I didn't do this to (sic) often but when I would I would steal from other kids to get the high, get what I wanted, and to boost my self-esteem. My morals and beliefs did not match up with my actions. I often felt bad about what I did/was doing. I felt haunted by the damage I caused to the family and your property... In the future I'd like to be able to communicate openly and assertively. Love you, Trevor

Sadie – June 27, 2021

Hi Mrs. Stack,

I first wanted to say that I know it's been a bit, but I'm so sorry for your loss. I don't know if you remember me or not, but I went to school with Johnny since I could remember (since first grade until graduating high school). When he passed I reached out to James and asked how you all were doing, since I went to school with James as well and always loved your family. James let me know that there would be a funeral for Johnny on December 9th, which was my 20th birthday. So when I let my mom know of this situation, we discussed it quite a bit before we agreed that writing a letter to Johnny and sharing it with you later would be the best option for all of us. I want you to know that when I first found out about Johnny's passing, I was wondering what I could do for his family first and foremost (since family was always so impactful to us from Wildcat to Rock Canyon). And that my wish on my 20th birthday was that you all would find comfort and peace in knowing how much of an impact your son had on so many lives. I just came across the letter I had been saving to send to you all, and went to your Facebook to send you this message only to find your daughter just got married. And I just know that Johnny would be so happy and proud of his family; every time I talked to him I always asked how you all were doing and he was always so ecstatic to tell me that you 4 were thriving and as happy as could be. 2 years ago I wrote this letter physically and since my handwriting is absolutely horrible, I typed it out because I want you to know how much Johnny was loved and cherished.

"Dear Johnny, You were always known to us as a little quiet, but since I can remember, I have always remembered you as a breath of fresh air. Whether it was elementary school when the little boys were all so reckless and immature, middle school when they really started becoming gross, or high school when they were still gross but now also breaking girl's hearts, you were always the sweetest. You never started trouble, you were kind and compassionate to all, and you always kept and proved my very high opinion of you. You always joked around with me in elementary school, and every time I passed you in the halls in middle/high school you'd say hi and had a conversation with me that left me feeling loved. Most recently, I would snapchat you and ask about your adorable puppy or you'd ask me how school was going. No matter what, I always felt uplifted whenever I got to have a conversation with you. And watching the video of your memorial I know that so many people felt this way and that you were so very loved. You touched so many people, and I promise to carry on that legacy that you left for so many. So, to the boy that will always hold my highest opinion, you will forever be loved and missed."

I know that it's much later on, but I hope you know that I've wanted to send this for quite some time to let you know that your son touched so many of us. And I want to thank you and Mr. Stack for raising such an incredible friend. He will always be remembered in the highest regards. I hope you all are doing amazing and know how proud Johnny would be that you all are carrying on his positivity.

Angie L – June 28, 2021

I wanted to give some parents Hope out there. A few months ago I joined this group feeling very concerned and worried about my 16-year-old son. Since joining we have turned a massive corner. He is no longer dabbing. He has returned to my happy child. And is being more respectful and grateful than ever. I feel like this crap is finally out of his system and my son has returned.

We sat him down with 6 weeks of school left and grounded him for 3 weeks. No friends at all. We told him the following:

He will be drug tested everyday for 6 weeks with an adult present. After that he will be randomly tested from now on throughout college. We dated every test and all of us were amazed at how long it took to get out of his system. It was a good thing for him to see.

If he does test positive we told him he will be sent immediately to an Inpatient facility for months and he will lose his car and we will remove him from his private school. He knows we are dead serious. We told him that our insurance covers it and we have already spoken to them regarding this.

We got him a licensed trauma counselor who is a body builder and is more like a mentor. Super amazing guy that works with him at

the gym and does his counseling there. He was a gift from God. I prayed for Him. He not your average counselor. I still search his phone and room whenever I get the urge or a gut feeling. He is now limited on who he can spend the night with if at all. We talked with some of his friends and said we absolutely will not tolerate him smoking this. We pray he continues to obey our rules. He has dramatically changed back to our sweet boy. It was very hard at first, but he finally understood we meant business and he finally complied. And here we are. No drugs and good behavior.

It took about 2 months to see a change. We were strict and followed through. With him being a minor we fully intend to let him know who's running this show...and it's not him. We told him that we view this as Dangerous as heroin and will not put up with it in the slightest. If he chooses to do it when we are no longer financially paying for anything that is his choice but until then he will accept our rules or suffer the consequences.

I hope this helps someone out there...we had a no tolerance policy...and we are seeing positive things now. Praying it continues.

Michelle P — July 14, 2021

Our son began using high potency THC products at the age of 14, during his freshman year of high school at a friend's house. He quickly spiraled out of control... he got in trouble at school and was expelled. He lost many friends and ended up dropping out of high school by his junior year. We ended up asking him to leave the family home because he was defiant, depressed, occasionally violent and unpredictable. We had to install locks on our bedroom and office doors to keep our possessions safe and to sleep well at night. His addiction lasted for over 4 years... he just turned 19 and spent his birthday at The Foundry. He was there for over 6 weeks. He returns home in a couple of days and we feel that we have our son back. He will continue out-patient therapy for some time and we know that his journey is far from over... but we have hope again. The pit in my stomach and my shattered heart are beginning to heal. I feel that other adults really need to understand what is at stake! I would love to help in any way that you need.

Lisa B. — July 20, 2021

Yet another similar story. Our son (20 as well) became psychotic after ingesting a 50 mg edible on his birthday (6/10) while he was also going through a dab cartridge every few days. He became increasingly paranoid and angry (180 degree turn from his usual gentle nature) to the point where he was so aggressive I had to leave my own house. The police were no help – going away was actually their suggestion and when I tried to come back he had decided that he owned the house and paid the mortgage (when he had just quit his job the week before because he thought all his co-workers were talking behind his back). The county health department was no help because he had to be the one to ask for help and he didn't think he had a problem. My best resources were found at treatment centers – talking to everyone I could about what was going on and it was through that I discovered intervention. We hired an interventionist to research a good treatment facility for him and went through the intervention process – it wasn't a smooth path, he ended up leaving the treatment facility the first night but fortunately because he was so disoriented in a new town he was hospitalized the next day on a 3 day psychiatric hold, followed by a 14 day hold where he is now. Progress on the meds is slow but we know he's safe and we have a 45 day treatment facility lined up for him after. This time I hope he stays.

Betsy — July 23, 2021

My son graduated high school in 2013, he didn't seem much different from the rest of his brothers except that he was hooked on hockey. He wanted to eventually play for the NHL. He and his father had a strategy on how to proceed. He would live at a junior hockey camp and continue with that until picked up by a college for their hockey team. It was the end of his first year in 2014 that we were first faced with the THC addiction.

We had a horrible summer ahead of us. We went to the emergency room after a week or so, I thought he might die. The doctor did blood work and said he was saturated with THC. Told us there was nothing they or anyone else could do. Hospitals wouldn't take patients like him as they were too much trouble. Our family doctor put him on an antipsychotic and checked his blood and urine every week for the rest of the summer. He got settled enough to take 2 jobs – not that he was ambitious – but we were forcing him.

Come the fall he and his father decided he could go back to Junior hockey. I was not at all wanting him to go but I really never expected that anyone would go through what he did and do it all over again. He would continue to go to his doctor once a month.

Same old same old nothing changed, he was a great hockey player even under the influence. 2015 is a blur for me. The fall of 2015 he changed teams and things got much worse, the coach didn't trust him so he never got played, by January of 2016 he was traded to a team that really needed him. He was fabulous in the beginning then down the hill he went. In spite of himself he got picked up by a college team and a good one.

2016 and 2017 were the worst years of our entire families life. He was delusional and every other mental condition you can think of. He was very angry, but he was up against his mother's unshakeable faith. My motto is NEVER NEVER NEVER give up.

I managed to get him to go to World Youth Day in Poland with me. He was violent but wanted to go, no drugs, which made for serious withdrawals. The absolute grace from God was that he would sleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. He says to this day that it was a very good experience. It did not change the insanity, he was dabbing at this point and supposed to be ready for college at the end of August. I couldn't get it out of my head that he couldn't play college hockey, so we went ahead and set him up at a reputable college. At our first meeting the college master and psychologist told incoming freshman parents that they preferred the students smoke pot rather than drink. The pot smokers were much less likely to get in trouble for being loud or hospitalized for being sick.

He was still psychotic, lasted 3 weeks and asked to be picked up.

We went to a few more doctors and realized that if the THC didn't stop his life was over. He went on some kind of medication, and we got him a good job with a man who knew how to handle him. He worked construction for almost a year and the mental fears and anger were back. I could never smell anything. He was always home by midnight or 1am.

Words from Jesus, they are legalizing the death of my children."

He told me one night that a friend of his had a great mix of liquid THC and he was going for more. I tried to stop him, and it got very messy, my husband, my middle son and I drove to our vacation home 2 hours away just to get away from him.

He ended up out of state on the highway out of gas. The police recognized his situation and took him to a hospital. His brother came up from Florida and took him back to Florida. His brother was very strict. Wouldn't give him ten cents. He went to an AA meeting just one. He and his brother fought, and he sent Justin out on the streets of Miami, no money no home. I had people all over the country praying for him. We tried to get him into several rehabs, but he would not cooperate. He finally got some medication to calm him enough to get himself a job. After a few months my son got transferred to San Francisco and couldn't take his brother. We got him back. He got a job in a restaurant and continued on the medication. His brother set him up with a good job in San Francisco so off he went. Made lots of money, after a few months he went to a pot festival and his mind was gone again. Brother beat him up and sent him on a plane to us only he stopped midway and decided he was no longer Paul but Jerome his middle name. When he didn't arrive on his flight, I had to tell the airport that he was mentally ill and could they look for him. I sent a picture.

They found him and hospitalized him. We could not find him as he was in a complex of hospitals that had 6 emergency rooms. We sat in one of the lobbies and kept asking people where he might be as the EMTs assured us that he was in the ambulance #14 and sent to the ER. Finally, a woman asked for his middle name and so it was he was there in another part of the hospital tied to a bed. They wouldn't let us see him as he was so angry, finally they gave him a shot of something to put him out for a good long time. He was transferred to another hospital. We didn't see him for at least a week. More craziness, he fooled the councilors at the hospital into thinking he had been diagnosed with mental conditions and would go home and be good as long as he kept up his shots of Abilify. That drug was the first good thing that happened. It wasn't good enough for us to take him home so much to his surprise and there's we told the hospital they could drop him at a homeless shelter. He went from there to the airport and then to LA, to become an actor.

After about a week he came home, so full of anger I threw him out with only his clothes. It goes on and on. He was living with a man who had already spent time in jail and could warn him about why he needed to go straight. He got a job and has been digging out ever since. We had moved to a different part of the country. This also helped as his friends were not able to take him in. He did not give up the pot right away. His cousin came for a visit and took him to hospitals and finally found a clinic he agreed to be supervised by. Back on shots of Abilify. He came home but it was still difficult. Between his cousin, the Abilify, his friend who turned out like a brother he is normal and has been for over a year. He has a very nice girlfriend, no drinking no drugs not even Abilify. He is preparing to run a Marathon this fall. Somewhere in all of this he read Alex Berenson's book, "Tell your children about Marijuana and mental illness," and when he put it down, he said, "I was only surprised by the murders."

Nothing surprises me anymore; he has a good life but who knows.

May God Bless all of you who read this, my husband and I pray the Rosary every morning, my husband has a special prayer to the Sacred heart of Jesus for him.

Many more things of a bizarre nature went on, but it would take a book, I am not ready for that.

Catherine W — July 26, 2021

My daughter has been using Stizzy heavily; it's 80% THC, and suffered cannabis induced psychosis. The last three months she has some level improvement but not much, and the day before yesterday, she decided to go out on her skateboard on a very busy street at midnight, and she was hit by a car. She's so lucky to be alive — she chipped her teeth, and she had a big gash on her head.

I believe the owner of Stizzy needs to be held accountable For the mini kids who are going to suffer brain damage because of his Vape pen and 80% concentrate that is out of this world too strong. Gone are the days of safe joint smoking. People like the owner of Stizzy have now made pot the most dangerous drug on the planet! I hope my friend an accident injury lawyer will pick up this case, because I feel the kids all over the nation and world are being brain-damaged unknowingly. I'm so sorry for your loss, and I'm so grateful for your foundation, and I will contribute just as soon as I possibly can.

J.T. — August 8, 2021

Thank you, Laura, for organizing this walk and making this happen so we can help educate others and effect change in legislation. My son had 2 psychotic episodes and is now 22. My husband and I are both MDs and we were completely unaware of the high dose THC available and the many terrible health consequences. We lived in town with easy access to illegal and/or high potency THC. Our son has withdrawn from college twice medically, and we fear his mind will never be the same. We are fortunate to have him with us, yet heartbroken about his illness and addiction. This walk is just what I needed to begin my journey of healing through advocacy, education, and prevention.

Beth D. — August 16, 2021

My son took his life on Aug. 7, 2021. He was 33 years old – had a Medical Marijuana Card and was using a lot from November 2020-June 2021. He was living at home and struggling with failed financial investment business (three engineering degrees – master's in mechanical engineering).

He was admitted to the hospital on the Baker Act on May 28, 2021 and diagnosed with Cannabis Induced Psychosis. He came home and seemed to be doing better, but he was depressed and down. There seemed to be hope, and we thought he was on the other side of all this. He started recreational pot at age 15 and felt it helped him preform – but knew he could not use to this degree – and after release was using occasionally and many days not at all. We talked about it, and he knew the dangers.

When he was admitted in May, he had 540 nanograms in his system (50 nanograms is a positive test for pot). He was very disciplined – avid cyclist – raced competitively. But was not doing any of the things he enjoyed and broke up with his girlfriend in February.

We would have never expected him to take his life at this point. He talked to us the last week about starting a blog – and getting the word out about the dangers. He was very talented – could do anything he set out to do – traveled the world. He opened an Ameritrade account on August 6 and was excited to do some trading for himself. We just don't know why he took his life at this point. We cannot say he was in an altered state – at least there were no signs like the terrible psychotic period in May. He was sober and looked healthy and not sure why. We would have expected it in April or May but not now.

The hospital nurse just moved back from Seattle and told me that they were seeing this a lot in Seattle. She said that the doctors hate this being called "Medical Marijuana" She said Florida has no idea what they are in for...

I would like to get involved and get the message out. I tell everyone I know here my concerns about the access and amount that you can get with the card – my son had 540 nanograms in his system when he was admitted. He was held for 9 days. The judge extended the order, because of his state and would not let him out until cleared. They gave him Abilify to treat the psychosis, but it took 9 days before he was clear. He had a flattened affect and finally started having appropriate emotions. He was released June 7, but he didn't to see a psychiatrist and weaned off the Abilify. He saw his doctor a few weeks ago and got a prescription for Ambien – he always had difficulty sleeping – even more so when using a lot of marijuana.

Shannon D. — August 19, 2021

I want to thank Laura so much for her book, it has been so relevant and helpful to me because my son has gone through a similar experience. I have been very naïve about the types of marijuana and THC levels, so Laura's book was a great help to me in terms of education on marijuana, the impacts on the young adult brain, and also an incredible help to me as a parent struggling with my 19 year old who was using marijuana at what I know realize were toxic levels of THC. I agree that more needs to be done to educate parents — I was one of the parents who thought "marijuana is not addictive," and my son just finished 28 days at a treatment center and is transitioning to another residential sober living center tomorrow. With information from Laura's book, I am much more informed about the impact of THC on mental health and on the brain development of young adults. I wish I had had this information 2 years ago. I agree that there is a great public mis-perception about marijuana.

Kathy — August 30, 2021

My son, age 23, is addicted to weed and gambling. He has been struggling for 5 years now. He moved home with me after being in and out of college at OSU. He suffered from severe anxiety and depression. Never leaving his bed. I didn't realize this until he finally flunked out of college and admitted to his depression. He moved home with me and got on anti-anxiety meds, but we thought it was "ok" for him to get his medical marijuana card as we "thought" weed was helping his anxiety. Fast forward a year and me getting more educated about the harmful effects of today's marijuana/dabbing, I changed my tune. Adam tried to work and after a week quit due to his high anxiety, vomiting, etc. I then realized he was an addict, and he agreed to get help. He has been with a treatment center as outpatient and weaned off the weed for about 40 days getting his levels from 1500 to 17. Last week, he admitted he never stopped gambling (he got a job as a package handler at FedEx) and has lost every cent he has earned. I also suspected he was using again, as I noticed a change in his personality. I contacted his counselor at the treatment center and sure enough, his THC level was back up to 980. I am devastated. He isn't combative, which I am thankful for. He thinks he is "ok," because he isn't dabbing or smoking the amount he use to; however, I pointed out that he is headed in that direction. He is supposed to start a class next week to continue in school, and I informed him he is paying for it until he can prove to stay clean and serious about school and being sober. Right now he is seeing a substance abuse counselor at a treatment center once a week and a gambling counselor once a week. I tried to get him to do "in-patient" but he refuses. I'm completely open to talking to anyone. After reading your book, I felt so connected to you and Johnny. So many things you wrote about I could relate to. THANK YOU for writing this book. I told my son about Johnny and how he started with anxiety and depression and moved to psychosis. He responded, "that is only one in a million cases, Mom!" I have a younger son who is 18 and to my knowledge doesn't drink or smoke but when trying to talk to him about today's marijuana, he also has a hard time believing it leads to mental illness. All I can do is try and keep educating them. I just wanted to tell my story and let you know how much your book meant to me and how sorry I am that you lost your precious son! He was beautiful!

Ad G. — September 2, 2021

I was a good student at school. I wasn't entirely great, but I understood that hard work would pay off. Sadly, I was to learn about work-life balance the hard way. At eighteen, I did a gap year (from England to Canada – in Banff). I had been practicing martial arts like t'ai chi for years already, so my party piece at weed parties was that I could hold my breath for a long time before expelling the smoke. I realized that I didn't need any kind of personality to gain acceptance in a group over there. I was a "globe-trotting stoner" and when I returned to the UK, I had no real character since these were commonplace qualities already. I'd also heard that cannabis could make you psychotic. Until this point, I was willing to stick with the martial arts and develop this "hyper-vigilance" that way over many decades. I underestimated the power of paranoia. I returned to the UK in 1996, attempting to study psychology, but my mind was askew. In 1999, I was first admitted to hospital – it was one of the bravest decisions for my Mum to raise the alarm with our GP and soon, I was on a mental health ward. For the next ten years or so, I was in and out of hospital. Each time I was admitted, I'd have a brief respite from the cannabis and my meds were upped. I'd be discharged and get high and be admitted again. Each time my meds were increased or tweaked again. Throughout these times, the cannabis was the wild card. I was hooked, but I didn't realise it – no matter how much my Mum (thoroughly researching cannabis and its effects on some) would try and convince me. Since, 2010, I've not been back into hospital and all signs are stable. I had a book published of my recollections of that time and I've also lectured and spoken at a good few universities and schools. Since Lockdown, I've started three podcasts showcasing my poetry and summaries (with spoilers) of movies and "Ad Gridley's The Geographer" – an audio version of the book.

Anonymous — September 14, 2021

I have two sons who have been adversely affected by marijuana use. My older son started using MJ in college. He had his first hospitalization in 2011 at the age of 20 due to a MJ induced psychosis. Long story short this over the years resulted in a bipolar diagnosis, turning his and our lives upside down. He was enrolled in VA Tech in the engineering program. Now he is able to work but its a low paying landscaping job. At times he has tried to go off his meds from the bipolar which most often has led to another hospitalization. My younger son at the age of 14 starting using marijuana. We did not know he was using. He was involved in our church's youth group band. At 18, he had his first hospitalization. He has a much worse diagnosis of schizophrenia. Between the two, I have lost count of the hospitalizations. Both live with my husband and I. I now have guardianship of my youngest. He is compliant with taking his meds but his life has been altered tremendously by drug use. He is unable to work and his quality of life is pitiful. My children exhibited no signs of mental illness until their use of MJ. It has ruined their lives and ours. Support has been scarce. People don't understand and grow weary of the journey that we are on. Even though I hate it for everyone of you who knows what this is like, I am thankful to have found a place where people understand. This has been a very long 10 years.

Robert B. — September 22, 2021

From Robert B., writing to two prominent podcasters on THC in athletics:

My daughter, Shana, who is 14, listened to some of your other podcasts earlier in the year and learned so much from you both, as she pursues her running dreams. You were even kind enough to respond to a few of her running questions, which I truly appreciated. However, her older brother nearly died, twice, from using today's high potency THC.

"Luckily" he got Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS) so bad a month ago (that was the 2nd time in 20 months – a stint in rehab was in between) that he swore off the use of THC in any form (vaping, smoking, dabbing) ever again. Chances are he will have slips, but hopefully not. He still idolizes the drug because insanely many in our national media and national politics are supporting and idolizing it as well, most likely focusing on possible economic reasons, reasons entirely divorced from health concerns!

The first time our son developed CHS, 20 months ago, an uneducated emergency room doctor told our son he probably just had a virus. He was ready to quit vaping THC just before, but the ignorance of the doctor about the harmful effects of today's THC lost us 20 months, and led to much more damage to our son's brain, heart and lungs than otherwise may have occurred, because he was able to say, "See, my illness is just a virus, not due to any poisonous effects of THC." (Wrong!) See the article below about CHS put out by Cedars-Sinai.

Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (CHS) is a condition that leads to repeated and severe bouts of vomiting....

Here was a healthy, sweet 13 year old boy, that college soccer scouts were already interested in, and who got straight A's in 7th grade, that then lost all interest in soccer and school during 8th grade, after he started to vape, smoke, and dab THC. He failed all his classes in 9th and half of 10 grade, before just recently starting to turn things around.

Please be part of the solution, and not part of the problem, when it comes to talking about the use of THC.

There is literally no good reason for anyone to put that poison into their system. No matter what their age.

I have CC'd Laura Stack on this email in case you ever want to reach out to her yourself for more information.

You two are a great pair, and are situated to really be a positive influence, not only to kids, but to runners of all ages. Before you ever say a kind word about THC again, or say that a ban on THC is bad for athletes, again, please read Laura Stack's recently published book, *The Dangerous Truth About Today's Marijuana*, subtitled Johnny Stack's Life and Death Story.

Nancy S. — October 11, 2021

This email is for Laura,

My son just got transferred into Mission for Michael's house in Dana Point CA yesterday. The last text message I received from him before he was picked up was "Help me momma help me I'm going to kill myself" at 4am then turned off the phone. He had sent me a pin drop of location, so I drove out Baldwin Park an hour away with my husband tracking him down. I phoned the police station and they had him. He turned off his phone after that awful text message, so I was in panic. Thank the Lord he called 911 and police picked him up issued the 5150 and sent him to Kaiser ER. I went to the ER but they would not let me in due to covid, and I had to wait outside. About 5 hours later he was transferred to BCH an acute hold center (72 hr. hold) for behavioral health that his stepmom arranged. Thankfully BCH held him long enough till we can send him to this new place for in house program treatment for about 45 days that BCH recommended which is the Mission for Michael home. This is his third episode.

On his second episode on the exact same day Johnny passed 11/20/19, I was picking up my son from Orange County Jail after they held him for 13 days. He fell asleep in someone's garage and was awoken by the police he did not know where he was. He was just sleeping. I recall he explained in jail that was listening to voices who told him where to drive following the GPS. I was so heartbroken, scared he would get hurt he is small person. I was the one who let him go that night he was acting so strange; my two stepsons were home (ages 16 & 15) and I think they were a little disturbed by his behavior he was cussing and laughing talking about nonsense. He was not right. At the time I didn't know what to do and asked him to drive to his place nearby he was renting a room at the time. Looking back, I'm disappointed in my decision that night. He could have hurt himself or someone else. I didn't understand the damage of concentrated THC can cause psychosis or what psychosis really was for that matter. After being held 13 days in jail, he came home to live with us, and was admitted into a 28-day outpatient program at Kaiser Permanente. I went to every court hearing fought as hard as I can to explain he was in psychosis his Dr. explained and provided the defense attorney and judge all she asked for. The defense for DA office would not drop the case due to mental illness and wanted to make an example of my son for the San Juan Capistrano community where his voices took him that night. His defense attorney was transferred due to Covid to other cases. We got a new public defense attorney who watched the video and noticed the garage where he was found was not attached to the home. That was a life changer for his case, all charges got dropped after that technicality, basically it was not considered theft and breaking and entering which is a felony. The legal process took over a year due to courts being closed for Covid.

While he lived with me, he completed the treatment, attending AA daily, took his antipsychotics, and was looking for work a little. He then met a girl that was an hour drive away and COVID hit. We were on a complete lockdown, and he wanted to see her going back and forth to San Diego an hour away. As the pandemic became more serious, I did not let him go back and forth between

homes it was too dangerous as we care for my elderly mom. I explained if you leave you cannot come back here, he left anyways nothing was going to come between him and his girlfriend. He did not agree became belligerent and got into an ugly argument with me and my husband his stepdad who had some words that caused a relationship issue. So, he left our home to live with the girl. When he had to leave after a short period he went back to his dad's home.

He was doing well for a about a year living with dad. I also thought he would never want to experience such a downfall again and loose his mind over his addiction. And meeting him at court and he was so scared he can go back to jail. This year we met for Mother's Day and he admitted to stopping taking the medication the antipsychotic! He said he is not smoking, and clear minded working hard for a promotion. He argued he did not like the side effect of the medication. I did not agree but he is an adult, and I cannot force the medication on him. Few months later dad started to notice he was coming home too late for anything good. My son started to talk about the military and how he does not want to live at his dad's home he wants independence. However, he couldn't even make the small minimal rent payment to dad that he agreed to pay. Then my son told me "I'm going to get into the military that will lead me into the FBI / CIA top clearance, so I become a spy". His only problem was his background two 5150's and his arrest.

He just turned 23 this September just 2 years older than Johnny. Reading this book is similar to our story except our son has two sets of parents because we are divorced, we both remarried. He bounced back and forth between both homes due to his ups and downs with the fresh starts again and again. The new rules that never get followed and the soft hearts of his parents who don't hold him accountable, and sorry to say we are ignorant for not testing him regularly. Both his dad and I gave him the benefit of the doubt he is the best liar I have ever met very skillful at it. I just couldn't believe he fell into psychosis again. Possible I was in denial.

Our son dyed his hair green and after his dad and I nagged to x it he dyed it crappy brown on Sept 22nd last month, when he face timed me at 10PM paranoid scared. He was so high he confessed to dabbing (waxing) with a strange new friend Sergio who looked like a total weirdo in Los Angeles Korea Town. I was leaving town the early next day and begged the friend on face time to let him sleep over, take his keys watch him till he can get home safely warned him he can fall into psychosis. Friend agreed, especially after I shared what can happen.

I spoke to my oldest son his eldest brother about what just happened, and he said let's wait till Monday when you return from your trip. He said he must be home because it was his birthday, and a lot of family was coming over so he would be busy and home safe with family that Saturday. Sunday is football day family game time, my son started to act up at the house. Dad and he got into a physical ght, and he grabbed some clothes took two bags and headed out on foot. He was harassing the Navy recruiter to get him joined where the recruiter almost had to file a restraining order on him. He intended to work in a high clearance position for the FBI or CIA and be a spy. Then he was on the street for one and half days when he sent me that awful text and got picked up.

I am praying to God to please help heal his brain. I will continue to read and research for the best of our son's life and wellbeing. I just completed the durable power of attorney with HIPA we will ask him to sign.

Thank you again for writing the book, I pray to God please help him and other young adults. I can only pray he is going to be ok and we help him as a family over his additions and live a healthy happy life. I am sharing my story so it can help others know the dangers of today's high concentrated Marijuana. I encouraged all parents to read it to help them understand what we are dealing with, it's not just earthy natural marijuana that many adults know of. There are so many ways THC can be consumed in a concentrated way right under our noses.

I just seen Johnny's video and I am so sorry you lost your beautiful precious baby boy so heart breaking (Hugging you)

Sincerely,
heartbroken mom

Kara — October 21, 2021

My son was a popular, good looking, smart, kind, athletic 19 year old when he came to me and said he was suicidal. I was in shock. I was devastated. He smoked pot in HS , and said it was making him paranoid and anxious. I took him to counseling, he started meditating, he quit smoking pot the next day and hasn't done it in over 2 years. I was lucky enough that he changed his life style on his own. I thank god every day that he made that choice. I KNOW it could have been a much different outcome. He had anxiety and thought pot helped him. It was doing the complete opposite. Again, i am not against marijuana for some, but it was making my son depressed and have suicidal thoughts. I just read your article in People magazine and it really hit hole. I never understood why he had a blow torch in his room. He was also "dabbing." I called him tonight to tell him about the article and he explained dabbing to me. I just wanted to reach out and tell you I am so sorry about your beautiful boy. I can't imagine your pain. I hope your story can help others. I have him tell young kids his view of how pot was making him a sad and depressed person. Lots of prayers for you and your family.

Kim — October 21, 2021

I'm so very sorry for your loss. My son is 26 and went to college in Colorado 5 years ago, while in college he unknowingly tried "synthetic" marijuana one time. This induced a lasting psychosis that he has battled ever since. He's not addicted to any drugs nor has he tried any drugs since that horrible night that landed him in the hospital hallucinating and convulsing for 2 solid days. The lasting psychosis has brought on depression and severe anxiety. He was a straight "A" student, physics grad from Colorado College and is from a close family that is very supportive. Marijuana ruined his life. It is the biggest sadness of my life. He fights every day to just be ok. His dreams are shattered, he's very suicidal. We've tried everything. I even took him to Mayo with no luck. Looking for help everyday.

Anne S. — October 21, 2021

I am a parent of a 17 year old young woman, who has been dabbing for approximately 18 months. This behavior became worse during the pandemic, and then my husband and I were able to intervene and the usage lessened but still continues. My question is how do you know when it becomes addictive? She is a high school senior and already positioned to attend Fort Lewis College in Durango next fall. I may sound relaxed about this situation but we have attempted to keep open communication about marijuana use and it's risks. We have found that managing this situation is far better than accusations and threats of involuntary treatment. At this point I do not know if she is addicted. She has trouble sleeping, anxiety and depression but was prone to these disturbances before admitting to marijuana usage. I would really welcome your advice. I just donated to Johnny's Ambassadors and ordered your book. Let me say how sorry I am that you have made this your life's mission due to the loss of your son. But, I am so grateful that you have. I have never felt near emotional paralysis as when I thought (and still do) I could lose my daughter to substance abuse. Thank you so much for taking the time to hear me.

Kris C. — October 21, 2021

I read your article in People Magazine and found it very relatable. Although my son is still alive it's a "crippled" life. My son started smoking marijuana at about 14 years old. I was completely unaware. I would often ask if they had run over a skunk; I had no idea it was weed. My son is now 40 years old. As far as I know, he has never stopped smoking. I don't know if he smokes the potent stuff you speak of in your article as, at least he has the courtesy, he doesn't smoke in front of me. Marijuana has ruined his life! He has never held a job for long and has lost several great employment opportunities due to bad drug tests. He currently lives with his wife and 2 children. He hasn't worked in 2 years; his last job lasting 1 day. He suffers from depression and anxiety and is very anti-social. I have tried for years to get him into see the doctor to get help but he won't go anymore. I HATE it when people say "oh, it's not addictive" or "it's harmless". How very wrong they are! Not sure why I wrote to you other than I totally agree with you. I now live in Oregon and believe Colorado has NOTHING on us!!! You can't go anywhere in the state and not smell weed! Thanks for listening....Kris

Kimber — October 23, 2021

I read your article in People magazine and was amazed and saddened at some of the similarities of our stories.

First, I am so sorry for the loss of your beautiful son, Johnny. What an amazing kid it looks like he was.

We lost our son too, also at the age of 19 to suicide in January of 2020. He had also been a heavy user of marijuana in the last few months of his life but had stopped the last month of his life. His anxiety came back with a vengeance when he stopped but at least he was himself again. When he was using marijuana, (his method of using was mostly blunts, not sure if he had tried dabbing or not) he was overly condent, disrespectful, risk taker that he had never been before. He was normally very sensitive to the ways others were feeling and very kind. In May of 2019, right before he was to graduate from high school, he had a serious depressive episode which led us to take him to the ER twice in a 7 day span for suicidal ideations. We spent the summer getting him into therapy and he started on medications. He did get better but then all of his friends went to college and we all decided it would be better for him to defer a year. Unfortunately, the friends he had still in town were mostly focused on using marijuana and he went right along with it. I know he had tried marijuana in high school but I don't believe was heavy user, but I still wonder if that had maybe triggered his major depressive episode along with being uncertain and anxious about the next steps in his life. He had been an athlete his whole life with basketball and soccer and when that ended along with high school, he seemed to have lost his identity.

Like you, on that last day of his life, I hadn't spoken with him. He had been anxious that week as several things had happened to make him feel worthless, but we had the wheels in motion to try a new therapist and look into other options. If I thought he was suicidal that day, I would've been there in a second. He didn't reach out like he had the previous year when he felt that way. The hope was completely gone.

Sonia — October 24, 2021

Dabbing during adolescence causes brain damage that can lead mental illness, dangerous behavior and suicide. My son started smoking weed in 9th and had his first psychotic episode soon after graduation. Since then, he's been hospitalized 3 times for Cannabis induced psychosis from dabbing. He was selected in high school to receive full ride scholarship to colleges. He chose to get a job to support his weed and drug addiction... he is now 22. Instead of sending my son off to college, we have spent the last 3 years dealing with police, jail, mental hospitals and rehab. He relapsed last month after being sober for 8 months. He wasn't hospitalized this time because i caught it in time, but he dabbled enough to trigger psychosis and three weeks of mania and defiance.

Marijuana pens are so easily accessible to our children, it makes it easy to escape/ avoid hurtful emotions by getting high in the comfort of their own bedrooms.

High potency marijuana, dabs, vaping was designed and marketed to target our children with the sole purpose destroying lives and families while making BIG prot!!!! The marijuana industry is 100% EVIL. They will stop at nothing. You will find support and encouragement here as we share personal experiences while desperately seeking answers most of the medical community is clueless about.

Kathleen — November 7, 2021

I am so happy to have found this supportive resource. My 25 year old son, Colin, is on an involuntary psych hold after a psychotic episode brought on by excessive dabbing. He has been using marijuana excessively on and off for five years. He graduated from the University of Illinois and had his first episode/break shortly after graduating and starting his first "real" job in 2019. Since then he was doing better, working, exercising etc. and then he spiraled out of control this summer. He had his second episode and assaulted my husband badly. He said his father was the devil and he was protecting me from him. Since July 11th our world has been psychosis, paranoia, and chaos. We hired an interventionist, sent him to rehab and he left after 8 days. He couldn't live with us due to the domestic battery charges. He left for Michigan and was in a shelter and getting high for the past two months. He got into some legal trouble there passing bad checks – he was not the mastermind but was conned- not that he shouldn't be held accountable. We bonded him out of jail 2 weeks ago and have now hit a new bottom. We were spending the night in a hotel after we bonded him out and he asked to use our car to grab a burger – we were on the fence when he asked, "don't you trust me"? So he took our car and took off stranding us in northern Michigan. We could track our car and asked the police to stop him and ask him to return. He gave chase, told the police to shoot and kill him, spent the night in a forest (30 degrees, no coat) and was eventually picked up the next day, taken to the hospital and then transferred down state, and has been on a hold. We live in Illinois and are trying to navigate a discharge plan etc. He is still in psychosis (my opinion) and I have no doubt he will get out and get high and we will be right back where we started. This was the first legal trouble he has been in – he is not suicidal but I now believe he has been in psychosis since the end of June. I appreciate having a place to share my story and to feel supported.

Kim H — November 13, 2021

Kevin T. Doohan II passed away on Monday, 08-03-20.

He had been suffering from CHS (Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome). This has been going on for the last 10-12 years. It's hard to remember for sure, but I want to say I think his daughter was a brand new baby, and she just turned 12 in May.

By the time this happened, Kevin had been sick, throwing up for about 4 or 5 days. We'd been trying to convince him to let us take him to the hospital and he kept refusing. Right now, I have a houseful of 19 other family members because we're supposed to leave today to go on a family lake house trip so everybody is here. His brothers, best friend, Gary, myself, all of us had gone in and talked to him to get him to agree to go but he continually said Nope, Not going, NO, etc... So through this constant vomiting, he's dehydrating himself. He's drinking uids, but he's not retaining any of it.

He doesn't like to go to the hospital because with this disease, and the vomiting, it's much less painful to drink something so that you have something to throw up than to have the dry-heaves. They've called this an abdominal migraine. When he's in the hospital, they won't let him have water or other things to drink. I told him they won't let him because he's getting the uids, anti-nausea meds, electrolytes, potassium, pain meds and whatever else that he needs thru the IV so he doesn't need the water. They know what you need and that's not part of it.

The other reason he doesn't like to go is because with this disease, the only actual relief they get from it/the pain is bathing or showering in really hot water. I guess it has something to do with temperature regulation. But I know it relieves the pain to have the hot water on his stomach. We've tried hot water bottles and heating pads in the past, but nothing works as well as the baths/showers. So, during his last few days (as is the same in every episode he'd had), he would vomit, then drink water, Gatorade, whatever. Then head for the bathtub, try to sleep (usually only successfully for a very short time).

As time went on, these episodes would get closer and closer to each other. It would get to the point to where he'd get out of the tub, doesn't even dry off, wrap the towel around him, dripping wet, walk into his room and literally, just fall over into his bed. His bed becomes sopping wet. A little while later, he starts drinking again, because he knows he's going to start heaving if he doesn't.

Then the process starts all over again. So, he goes back and forth, over and over with this vomiting, drinking, bathing, sleeping rotation. He becomes basically delirious from exhaustion and pain.

We discussed physically forcing him to go. We also all talked about maybe not giving him water, thinking that would possibly make him think ok, I have to go now, it's time. In prior years, he's always been able to get up and drag himself to the fridge to get whatever to drink. There were times when he'd ask for it because it was easier, but if he wanted it bad enough, he could get it himself. He could get himself to the bathroom, so he could get himself to get a drink. So our goal was to not make it easy for him because if it was easy, he would drag this out for many, many more days. At one point, the longest he did this in the past was almost 3 weeks and then FINALLY, he said OK, take me to the hospital. This time, when I told him that we were going to force him into the car, and he kept saying no, he said he'd just open the door and fall out because he's that adamant about not going to the hospital. I told him that we were going to call an ambulance. He said nope. It really would not do any good to do that because he knows he can refuse medical care.

At some point, after days of this, on Monday morning (Aug 3rd) about 1am, Gary and I saw him laying naked in the bathroom so we woke him up and told him he had to go back into his room. He did and I went in and sat next to him and asked if he was ready to go to the hospital. He said Nope. I pleaded with him again. He said no, no, no. I told him I didn't understand why, he said no. About 4am I checked on him, and asked again, he said no. About 9am Joe said he talked to him and no change. I think it was about 11:30am when I realized that I hadn't heard the shower in awhile so I was glad, thinking Awesome, he's sleeping FINALLY, he's improving and that's a good thing.

Shortly after that, I opened the door and just looked at him, and he looked like he was sleeping so I just thought cool and then closed the door. And then about 1pm or so, again, I still hadn't heard the shower and again I thought great, he's probably still sleeping, so again, I opened the door and he's still crashed. And, when he sleeps, he's an extremely deep sleeper and often doesn't move so when I opened the door the 2nd time and he hadn't moved, it didn't surprise me because that's Kevin.

So then, at 2:00, something, this trucking company came to deliver something quite large for Kevin, for his truck. I didn't know what it was. I knew there was a tow package coming but this was some huge drawer system he had ordered that the delivery guy wanted to know what to do with. So I took the packing slip and I thought he loves his truck, maybe if I try and talk to him about it, maybe it just might (hopefully) make him snap out of it a little and say ok, take me to the hospital, I want to check out this stuff for my truck, bla bla bla – was my hope anyway. So I went upstairs and got down on the floor. He was in the same position, which was on his stomach, his forehead was resting on his arm. I started talking to him and tried to wake him up and he wouldn't move or wake up. I tried harder and harder, he wouldn't move. He was cold and stiff and I couldn't turn him over. I started crying and screaming for help but everybody was downstairs and outside. I went halfway downstairs and screamed again. Joe heard me and came up. He was strong enough to turn him over and he started compressions while I called 911. I put them on speaker phone, they were on the way. All the blood had pooled into his face because he was face down. He was blue & purple. His lips were black. Gary had switched back and forth with Joe doing compressions and I could hear the air going in and out of his mouth. His arm was up in the air by his head and stiff (because he was resting his head on it while lying on his stomach). It wasn't doing any good. By the time that they got there, they said to stop compressions, that with the amount of blood pooling and rigamortis, it's been probably 4-7 hours. – which means – I'm sorry, this is really hard – that the couple of times that I thought he was sleeping, he was already gone.

They had police here, chaplains, coroners and I don't even remember who else. They had us leave the room and covered him up. I tried to get back in there to see him and they told me not yet, they were waiting for the crime unit. I asked why and they said because they didn't know what happened or how he had passed. I said I know exactly what happened, and I had to explain the story to every single one of them. Not one person had ever heard of CHS. There were at least 8 people here. So they said I could see him again right before they leave. Just a few of us wanted to see him before they took him away. He was in a body bag. But his arm was down and his coloring was actually quite a bit better. They said that they will be doing an autopsy due to the fact that he is so young. Also, they will probably do a tox screen, but that could take 2-3 months to get back, so they'll issue a death certificate that states "pending" for cause of death.

I was concerned over the years that he might end up with stomach, esophageal or throat cancer or something like that because of the trauma he was putting on his system from the violent vomiting. But I never thought this would happen. No, I take that back. I was afraid that this could happen, but didn't think it was near as likely as the cancer.

I, like I'm sure every other parent, thought this would never happen to me – that this happens to other families, or on TV. My heart hurts so bad, as does his brothers' & Gary's, and I know his dad's does as well. I don't wish this on any family. I wish it was a bad nightmare that I will still wake up from.

About 5 months later, we finally got the results of the autopsy. His death was ruled an accident. Autopsy findings: Complications of cannabis hyperemesis syndrome

- A. Clinical history of marijuana dependence
- B. Acute vomiting episode for one week duration
- C. Acute renal failure

Broken hearted,
Kim, Gary, & Family

Michelle — November 18, 2021

Trevor London Leopold, was a loving human being with a huge heart which he willingly shared with so many others. From an early age Trevor loved animals, his first word being duck and his first friend being his dog “goodgirl” Kirby, with a zoo of animals in his room throughout his childhood, including guinea pigs, rats, frogs raised from tadpoles, through current pets Bowzer and Maverick. All his life Trevor had a special bond with goats as well, earning his nickname Goat Boy. A Native American, not knowing his Goat Boy moniker, bestowed the Mountain Goat as his totem animal at a spirit animal ceremony, based upon his resilience and ability to progress up mountains surefootedly, cementing his Goat Boy nickname forever. As an elementary student, he was an avid rockhound, nature detective, and even a certified Audubon Junior Birdwatcher, able to identify over 150 local birds. He was an Indian Guide, Cub Scout and Boy Scout, played little league and a lifelong avid skier and later snowboarder, mostly with his brother and dad, braving the wildest snowstorms and steepest runs. Trevor enjoyed fishing along with his brother Parker, so much so that the family took to going fishing on many of their family vacations. Family trips with extended family often included fishing expeditions too. One of the Leopold family’s favorite sh that got away stories was reef fishing in Belize, only to see their catch get eaten off the line by a barracuda. He was fortunate to take advantage of the travels implied by his middle name London on many family vacations including Hawaii, Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, Puerto Rico, many Ace Hardware conventions throughout the US, and even his final vacation, to Paris and Italy. One of the family’s favorite vacations was hiking the narrows at Zion, and while a student in Utah, Michelle and Trevor spent a great Spring Break visiting Arches National Park and Canyonlands. But the perennial vacation favorite was time at the family cabin in Tahoe Donner, with sledding in front of the cabin with his brother Parker, cousins and many friends, catching crawdads at Donner Lake, and hikes with the dogs. Trevor’s biggest passion was skateboarding, as evidenced by his skater wardrobe, caps and hoodies. Trevor loved playing dice, board games and card games with his family, and cherished time with friends, and loved being with his cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Trevor’s all time favorite human being, however, was his brother Parker, who could be at the same time his worst enemy or best friend. All of the family agree that Trevor always was quick to say I Love You and gave great, real hugs. After getting accepted to four Cal State Universities, Trevor entered Sonoma State fall of 2019 as a Freshman, and was actively working on putting foundations and supports in his life to go forward on a higher path All of the wonderful blessings that he had, talent, friendships, positive outlook on life, and, most importantly, family, were sidelined by his decision to take a drug, most likely laced with fentanyl, after battling cannabis use disorder for several years, ending his life suddenly on Sunday November 17, 2019. This handsome, bright, and caring young man was taken from all of us much too soon, before being able to reach his infinite potential. The Leopold family can only hope that Trevor’s death will not be in vain, by sharing his struggles with others perhaps it will open up further communications and positive action among others suffering from situations including anxiety, addiction, and risky choices. We truly believe that Trevor’s death was accidental, and we only wish he was here to listen to everyone’s stories of how much so many loved him and what a difference he made in their lives.

Traci — November 29, 2021

Hi Laura – I hope this email finds you and your family well.

It’s so hard to believe the holidays are upon us.....a busy time for all.

I just want you to know my son’s PROGRESS....yes, progress.

As I look at this word and associate it to him, I feel an overwhelming amount of gratitude.

First – I thank you for the work you are doing in marijuana prevention – the energy you place into Johnny’s Ambassadors and the love you provide through this organization.

Second – I know that you have empowered me – and I thank you for this.

My son, Alex, will have his 35th birthday on November 24th. And – he has been THC and ALCOHOL FREE for four months. This is going to be a birthday to really celebrate!

He received a DUI in July, and was placed on probation – and has had to attend counseling and probation classes. He is tested weekly for THC, wears an alcohol ankle monitor, and has a breath analyzer, (IID), on his vehicle. And.....he’s changed.

I have had authentic conversations with him. Conversations in which he is not paranoid – conversations in which his mind does not

tell him that his mother is “out to get him” – conversations in which he knows there is “no one else in the room” other than he and his mother.....REAL and GENUINE conversations.

And – I believe – I know – this is because he does not have the THC in his system.
He even unblocked my phone number – so I can now call-text him.
I’m praying that after his probation has concluded – this “reborn” Alex will continue.

Together we are working to educate-enhance and change the structure of the marijuana industry.
Peace to you and your beautiful family this holiday season.

My heart is so grateful to you and everything you have done and continue to do, in marijuana prevention.
Love,
Traci

Stephanie C — December 6, 2021

I just wanted to thank you for what you are doing and I’m so sorry for the loss of your son. Our 17 year old, J., started vaping marijuana at the age of 15. He has been hospitalized with suicidal thoughts and severe self harm twice, and severe paranoia. He spent a year at a therapeutic boarding school, was home for 4 months and is now back at a long term residential treatment center. He has been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. It has been hell. Most people don’t think you can get addicted to marijuana but you can to this stuff and it changes adolescents brain chemistry. We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on his care and I don’t know what his future holds. I have had to accept the fact that he may take his life one day and I can’t do anything about it.

Kim B — December 6, 2021

Zachary was a sweet, active, and outgoing person. He survived ALL (childhood leukemia) as a child. He grew up in a Christian family and school. He played competitive ice hockey for over 10 years playing defense and loved to check his competitors. Zach graduated from Christian Valor High School. He always had anxiety and then it went to depression eventually. Zach went to college at Colorado university In Boulder and then everything changed. He started in a fraternity a mother’s worst nightmare. He said marijuana helped his anxiety. This gateway drug lead to dabbing, alcohol, cocaine, and then fentanyl.

Last year he overdosed at our home. We found him in time, and he survived only to be discharged and sent home. Due to Covid, drug rehabilitation was complicated, plus he was not really ready. He was on an antidepressant and then was addicted to Xanax and self medicated with dabbing all day.

He had a very toxic relationship with his father and girlfriend. After getting kicked out of college, he came back home and hung out with some bad old friends doing drugs. We lost him January 31, 2021 to a fentanyl overdose. We unconditionally love and miss him every day. He wanted to go into real estate. The last few years his mind was delusional, anxious, severely depressed. He bought a puppy. Her name is Rosie. This brought him so joy. She is with us now, and we are happy to have her.
Marijuana and dabbing are gateway legal drugs to kids. Plus social media makes getting drugs so easy for our children!

From a mom in the trenches — January 8, 2022

This challenge has already turned into a journey of winding ways. Every smile he shows on his face makes my heart leap and my mood elate but then on the hard days, when he is taken from me into a world of his own reality and his sweet affectionate loving self is gone my heart breaks and the fears rise again. I am told that I need to release, relax, not to make him too dependent, not to be fearful. Going down to his room and feeling his energy, so weird, so off, laughing to himself in his own fictional world and turning his back on me. I go upstairs and ask myself what to do. The first instinct is to run to something that will “make me feel good”. Go and look at different flooring colors, pick up the crochet, talk to a friend. Then I think of the words of Richard Rudd “embrace the fear”, “step into the pain”. That is the only way to release it. There are so many rules. “Don’t put labels on it”, “keep fighting”, don’t give up, be a mama bear. No, actually, don’t overwhelm him, don’t push it. Other people with good intentions try to help. Other passing acquaintances I say hi to them on my walk, looking at them talking and joking with their friends. Some days there are small wins, I come up with an idea for treatment, my hope rises, my optimism surges. Trying to use my intuition and then feel like my intuition has tricked me again because whatever remedy I find and pop into his mouth doesn’t seem to make a difference. Is it the antibiotics? Is it the antipsychotics? Is it the homeopathic remedy? Is it the supplement? Is it the energy healing? If only there was a magic potion I could pop into his mouth and this would all miraculously go away... I can dream of miracles. I do dream of miracles. How we will all look back on this in a year’s time when he is back to his sweet loving self again, back at school and living his young life to its fullest. This journey has introduced me to new friends on my path to heal him. Other women, mom’s who themselves are looking for solutions, asking themselves these hard questions of what to do. Each one of us with our own skill set and our own list of responsibilities that she has to carry out aside from the raging problem of caring for a

loved one who is mentally ill. The disappointment in the health system, the never ending bureaucracy of paper work, the skeptical know-it-all psychiatrists smug with their statistics on 19 year old males, so they can spit out a diagnosis in 10 minutes at. Blinkered into what they know, the divide between psychiatry, neurology and immunology. Thankful for my support system, my husband, his amazing siblings who will do anything for him. Feeling pride for them joining me in doctors appointments and asking difficult questions. But also feeling alone with a heavy burden on my shoulders because at the end of the day that umbilical cord, although now invisible, is still there. Every sigh he makes, I feel. Every tear he drops, I feel. I pray to god, to the archangels asking them to surround him with their love. Pray for them to heal him. I surround him with my love, make a deal with god that if he is cured I will do whatever I can do to help others in this situation. I will do so willingly and with my whole heart. There, I hope some of the pain has subsided, I hope that some of the fear has evaporated and I will continue on my quest to get him back to health.

Moira M — January 28, 2022

My son started using Marijuana at age 13. He took his own life age 30 in Dec, 2021.

He struggled with addiction, and with many interventions from his parents, he attended rehab in South Africa for a year, and a sober living house for 18 months. Many said, it is only marijuana, he cannot be addicted to that. But he was addicted as he was unable to give it up entirely, despite the adverse consequences.

He was very intelligent, charming, spoke several languages, worked and lived in Germany, South Africa and the UK. He worked in Sky-Diving, bars and short term hospitality scenarios. He had friends all over the world, and was a very privileged young man. A rule breaker and a person who was afraid of nothing.

He wanted so badly to stop smoking marijuana, and tried, again and again. Nearly 4 years ago, he told me that he was suicidal, because 'he had done something bad' and no one was talking to him. This led to more stories of paranoia, which we eventually realised were not normal.

He was hospitalized 3 times, first with psychosis, then the third time, with Cannabis Induced Psychosis, and was medicated with anti-psychotic meds. On leaving that hospital, we made him homeless, and he spent 6 months clean, in a homeless shelter, where he started working full time, volunteering and seemed to be recovering.

During the last weeks of his life, he became psychotic again, because he had relapsed, and was smoking marijuana plants. He claimed that he 'had done something terrible' and that 'everyone was trying to hurt him, or ruin his reputation'. He had changed his name, shut down all social media, removed himself from all friends, colleagues and families, and was totally isolated, except a bit with me, his mother.

He sent me a text on the day of his death, and the police and I rescued him, from his apartment. On attending A&E, he asked to leave to smoke a cigarette, and despite a manhunt for a vulnerable person, he was found later that day, having jumped under a train.

I only wish I had understood about the psychosis, much earlier, but given the state of our mental health services, and his absolute refusal to have any medication, therapy, support, mentors, etc, because they were all trying to kill him, I had accepted a year ago, that he would commit suicide.

What a thing to say, that there was nothing I could do. He was an adult, and despite his incapacity to understand that he was very ill indeed, we still could not force him, for longer than a few weeks, into hospital. I wonder whether if we had understood earlier, if we could have helped. I do not know.

It is so, so sad, that our beautiful children, are losing their minds and their lives, and there is little we can do, unless the person is willing.

Shannon D. – February 11, 2022

I want to thank Laura so much for her book, it has been so relevant and helpful to me because my son has gone through a similar experience. I have been very naïve about the types of marijuana and THC levels, so Laura's book was a great help to me in terms of education on marijuana, the impacts on the young adult brain, and also an incredible help to me as a parent struggling with my 19 year old who was using marijuana at what I know realize were toxic levels of THC. I agree that more needs to be done to educate parents — I was one of the parents who thought "marijuana is not addictive," and my son just finished 28 days at a treatment center and is transitioning to another residential sober living center tomorrow. With information from Laura's book, I am much more informed about the impact of THC on mental health and on the brain development of young adults. I wish I had had this information 2 years ago. I agree that there is a great public mis-perception about marijuana.

Beth C. — March 29, 2022

"Mom, I truly have no desire to use anymore." I held my breath hearing those words come from my son's mouth last week. A year ago our family was in turmoil because of his erratic behavior. Behavior that through this group I have learned was directly tied to his marijuana use-vaping, ingesting, who knows what else. Last summer his behavior became so bad we had to draw a hard line and told him to leave our home. He was 27 at the time, living at home because the anxiety of social isolation caused by the pandemic.

When we kicked him out he lived in his car-homeless for just over a week. After agreeing to rm terms we allowed him back into our home temporarily. Within 2 months he had secured a job in another state- intentionally choosing a state where marijuana is not yet legal.

Fast forward to today- he is working in a salaried position for an IT company. He has decided to complete his college education on his own and God willing will complete his degree in one year.

I am focusing on continuing to pray for him and hoping he has truly turned the corner. I am trying hard to focus on the strengths my son has shown- and where he is now rather than the fear that still resides in my heart that he will go back to using and who he was this time last year. I share this story to encourage you to never give up on your child. The child you know and love is there. Your consistent love- with clear boundaries can make a difference.

Allyx R. — March 30, 2022

February of 2021 I fell into a cannabis-induced psychosis. At the time I was 27 years old living in Florida alone in my new condo. I had began smoking in December of 2020 and slowly my close friends and family notice a change in my behavior and personality. I was manic, very hyper and doing things that were very abnormal. It took a few months before I fully went into Psychosis. For about 6 months I was having irrational thoughts and delusions. I actually hung myself over my balcony 24 stories in the air on Instagram Live. Everyone who cared about me was doing all they could and eventually I was hospitalized. At this time I was slowly coming out of the psychosis and recognized I had a lot of time missing. I "woke" out of the psychosis with tattoos and a crazy hairstyle. I didn't recognize myself anymore. Now, the hardest part is looking in the mirror and knowing that all of it was completely out of my control. I drove so many friends away because of my "crazy" behavior. People don't understand that marijuana is classified as a hallucinogen. When I was younger I remember hallucinating from smoking and with the higher THC levels, it is only getting worse for kids. I have since returned back to work and have so much love and support for those who are really here for me. Thank you!

Heather B — April 1, 2022

Our son Randy was a creative, handsome, humorous, loving, kind-hearted, and gentle soul. He had his struggles from a very young age with ADHD, low executive functioning, and a slow processing speed. However, he never failed because he was also blessed with several "workarounds" including fabulous memorization skills, and high verbal and written acuity. He was a hard worker, personable, and he had an extremely strong will. Because he struggled with impulsivity and focusing we had him psychologically tested to see how we could help him. He was tested 4 times between the ages of 4 and 16 years. Consistently he tested positive for ADHD, slow processing speed, low executive functioning skills, and mild dyslexia. When he was 16 and after he started smoking marijuana, they added that he was suffering from anxiety and depression as well. These were the first two of many horrible side effects today's marijuana has on the adolescent brain that Randy would eventually exhibit. Interestingly enough, Randy thought that "weed" saved his life, but it took his life in reality.

The first time we knew Randy smoked marijuana, he was 15 years old and with the neighbor boys who were 3 years older. He enjoyed it, was seeking acceptance/friendship, looked up to those boys, and liked getting high. After those young men left for college, he started smoking with other kids at his high school. It helped him t in and for a kid with an active brain, we think it temporarily brought a sense of relaxation. However, getting high had its consequences for Randy that he just couldn't see due to the misconceptions that marijuana is harmless, nonaddictive, and "natural".

After using marijuana from his sophomore year to his senior year, he suffered from anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, aggressive behavior, and delusions. Randy was diagnosed with Cannabis Use Disorder when he was 16. In the fall of his Junior year, he attended Wilderness Therapy. He attended 3 different high schools and graduated online. He had one 72 hour hold during his senior year after threatening to take his life because we would not allow him to smoke marijuana at home.

Randy desperately wanted to go to the University of Boulder. He loved to ski, and the mountains and he made it clear he thought college was a big party. We suggested that he attend community college close to home, in Minnesota, but he insisted on moving to Boulder. When there was a "will" with Randy, he would find a way. He moved to Boulder, got a job, his residency, and completed a year of community college all on his own. By the time he was 20, he started two companies – a web design company and a clothing line. We were very proud of him, yet very concerned since we knew he was still smoking marijuana. He

told us so and when he did come home, at times, he was irrational. After thinking about his drug usage while living with us, we knew that on days 3-5 without marijuana, he would be anxious, moody, aggressive, defiant, and difficult and he would exhibit that behavior during his visits.

As a huge proponent of marijuana got his medical marijuana card in Colorado which allowed him to access weed legally even though he was under 21. Although we did not want to admit it, after his passing, it was evident that he was selling to friends and others which is exactly what happens with "Medical Marijuana". So much for keeping it away from adolescents! We know that Randy went in phases with his drug use between 2018 and 2021 and that he experimented with other drugs like acid, molly, LSD, mushrooms, and Benzos. However, "weed" was his main thing. We talked a lot, and he was honest. He told me his first year in CO he became addicted to Benzos but got off of them himself. He told me all about marijuana because he wanted us to accept his use. At times, he shared that he was using less. During those times, he would communicate with us almost every day and then at times, he would have months of heavy use. With the heavy use, came less communication and distancing. Randy did not come home for the holidays in 2020. By late January 2021, it was apparent that he was going downhill. He suddenly quit his second job in the course of about 3 months. He shared with me that he thought the people he worked with were out to get him. He was paranoid. He had been struggling with his roommates since the summer of 2020 and really had it out for one of them and even threatened the roommate to the point that Randy was eventually evicted. He became delusional in his thinking. He thought he was going to become a huge Rapp artist, making tons of money. He was writing and recording music non-stop all while smoking weed regularly. He told us that he thought everyone was talking about him and in March of 2021 called us stating that the Mob was after him, that a music gang was after him and that we too, were in danger. Randy attempted to take his life during that episode by slitting his wrists. After that incident, he agreed that he needed help, but would only go to treatment if he could talk with the FBI. He was hearing voices that did not exist and thought that people were messing with his phone and computer. After spending 4 days in detox and then lasting one hour in treatment in Florida, he left and stated that he could do it on his own. We were devastated. At the time, we thought we were heartbroken... little did we know, that things would get worse.

Resourceful Randy made his way back to Colorado. Over the next 6 weeks, he was aggressive, verbally abusive, and still thought things that did not happen happened. He found a therapist and a psychiatrist. We knew it was a band-aid for a much larger problem and communicated with both of his caregivers. In April of 2021, he reported himself as suicidal and was put on an involuntary hold at Denver Health. When he called in on himself, he had a registered gun in his right pant pocket. Instead of confiscating the gun, the officer put it in his safe in his apartment even though he was threatening to kill himself. A court order from a judge is needed to take the gun out of a suicidal person's possession. Does that make any sense? The doctor wanted to do a 72-hour hold, but with no beds available, he sobered up and they released him. After this incident, he seemed much more mellow and happy but made it clear he would continue to smoke weed. After leaving treatment, one of his first jobs was guiding tours at a dispensary in Colorado. Remember, he thought marijuana treated his anxiety, depression, and PTSD. In June, he suffered more paranoia. For example, he thought that we should communicate via What's app because he was going to become so popular musically, that it might be "better and safer." The P.A. at the psychiatry office diagnosed him with psychosis (she said "resolved", I say she misdiagnosed), bipolar, PTSD, ADHD, Depression, and Anxiety. She prescribed Adderall because that is all he wanted to treat his ADHD. We knew he was not well, but at this point, we didn't know how damaged and hurting Randy was due to his marijuana use. After 3 weeks, he stated that the Adderall was helping him and that he was smoking less weed. During those last three weeks of his life, he was mellow, appreciative, loving, reactive, attended confession, and wanted to have a relationship with us. We talked and texted daily. The evening before he died, we talked on the phone. We knew he was sad. We knew he was overwhelmed with bills: from the hospital, for his corvette in need of major repairs, and from recording music. When we hung up the phone we never dreamed it would be the last time we would talk. We had no idea he was planning on taking his life. He did not threaten it and at approximately 12:36 am he sent us a text message that said, "My attitude with the music and everything has been way too self-righteous. I am done with the music. I'm quitting weed for good and want to surround myself with healthy and happy people. This has been too much for me and for you guys. I have been running from my past mistakes and I think it's time that I own up and start living a good life. Love you." Then at 1:09 pm, he sent the following, "I love you and am sorry for everything. I love dad and the same for him. I wish I would have been a better person." Randy shot himself at approximately 1:10 Am after googling images of Jesus 3 times and putting Jesus as his screen saver on his phone, writing, "Can I live for Jesus. Can I..." in his notes on his phone. He had his rosary and his open Bible with him. From what I have learned about CIP, I believe Randy had an acute Brain attack.

His autopsy report showed low blood alcohol levels and low levels of THC. We know he was trying to quit, but he was addicted to what is supposedly a harmless and beneficial plant – marijuana.

When we went to clean his apartment we found a couple of notes taped to the bathroom mirror. One was dated, 07/7/2021 and he had written, "57 days hard then home." He intended to record his music and then launch it at the Minnesota State Fair which is always in late August. We asked to come to visit him over the 4th of July and he said, "No, I am coming home at the end of August." He also had a post-it of, "If God brings you to it, God will bring you through it.", a saying I have had hanging in my office since 2011. He had a list of future goals – One was to "Give mom a hug". Oh how I wish, that could have happened.

Now, we do know what it means to have broken hearts. We, his dad, his three sisters, myself, and our extended family are all devastated. We will never be the same, our family will never be the same. We will never know all this bright soul could have accomplished. Over time and yet in an instant, we were robbed of our son, our innocence, and our naivety. We now know an ugliness that no one wants to be familiar with. We are angry with the misconceptions that surround this powerful drug. We miss our son, Randy dearly and will do our best to prevent another family from having to experience this type of loss. We are thankful for organizations that aim to share the misconceptions and deceit the marijuana industry perpetuates and that the government endorses all in the name of making money. We will do all we can to educate and spare others from losing someone they love to this horrible drug.

Moira M — April 4, 2022

My son took his own life as a result of Cannabis Induced Psychosis in December, 2021, with Persecutory Delusions, as he said 2 years ago 'I am going to kill myself, before 'they' kill me', and so it turned out.

He was taken to A&E after a suicide attempt, by the Police, and was allowed to 'step outside for a cigarette' by A&E staff, which led to his disappearance and death, the same day, I have been offered the opportunity to take a Civil Case against our Medical System, the Government run NHS, here in the UK. Before that, we are having a pre-Inquest Inquiry with the NHS as Witnesses, with the Coroner hopefully asking the question I want answered. My basic question is, he tried to take his life on an NHS Unit in a Psychiatric Hospital, and I wrote and warned both of his Psychiatrists that their non-treatment of him, would end up in Suicide, why on god's green earth, was he not treated? Why was my call to the Crisis Team 6 days before he died, dismissed as 'he is fine, and is discharged to his GP?' Part of the answer is that the multiple individuals who 'cared' for him, had no understanding of Psychosis, and in our Country, Drug Use, is not treated, because of years of underfunding, and 'Cannabis' use is barely noticed.

Ethan A. — April 19, 2022

My Experience with CIP

Growing up, I've always been an anxious kid. I'm not going to lie, my anxiety never stopped me from being a troublemaker despite the consequences. Although I was in the honor roll in middle school, high school was a different story. During my senior year, I had more absences than days I showed up. In fact, during our "most likely to" ceremony, I got voted as most likely to miss their own wedding. How embarrassing is that? What had changed between junior year and senior year? What happened to a B-average student that suddenly had one D and all F's? I didn't have perfect attendance by any means my first 3 years of high school, but I sure as hell wasn't ditching over 50 days of school like I did my senior year. What changed? I started smoking pot.

I don't remember the very first time I smoked, but I certainly remember the last. I was either 16 or 17 when I became curious of weed and its seemingly fun and therapeutic effects. It sounded perfect for me as a bored, anxious kid that just wanted some sort of coping tool. Albeit now I see it more as a weapon than a tool. I would smoke a bowl here and there out of a little purple pipe that my friends and I would pass around after school in my backyard, not a worry in the world. In time, the pipe became inadequate for our stoner needs. I had to upgrade to a 3-foot bong with perks and cool water filters on it. I prided myself on how clean I kept it, and all of my friends loved it. It was the bong. It would get you faded with one hit. It felt so harmless. Sometimes we would barricade ourselves in the egress window in the basement. You know, the little space that usually has a ladder that leads up to the outside? Yeah, that. We would place a disassembled door on top of it, use a blanket to cover up any cracks, and then shut ourselves inside and smoke. This would create a hot-boxing effect that exemplified the high. Moreover, we would lock ourselves in the car and do the same thing, although we resorted to the egress method because that stench would linger for weeks.

Now that you know the when and where, it's time to discuss the feeling. I was super giggly and curious every time I got high. I was more friendly, relaxed, and I even thought I was a better driver. You heard that right, a better driver, despite me rear ending my mom's car and almost getting in a rollover accident in my Mustang. Oh, and running several red lights. Oh, and speeding not caring about my surroundings. Yeah, I was definitely a better driver. In the beginning, the high felt like any stereotypical euphoria experience from drugs. The munchies, the giggles, even the occasional bad trip. I laugh when I hear people say "bad trip." You have no idea.

My green habit started to take a dark turn towards the end of senior year. Bud is expensive. When you gain a tolerance from flower, it becomes extra expensive when you have to buy more at each trip to your local drug dealer (this was right before it was legal). Working part time, I couldn't keep up with the cost. Neither could my best friend, Khari, who was living with me at the time. The solution was easy. Steal money, particularly from my mom. My poor, poor mom. She never knew. She would give me \$100 for groceries, and I would spend 60 towards what she intended and the rest on marijuana. She never noticed believe it or not. Just never brought home any receipts. This method worked for a while, but it wasn't enough for my friend Khari. More on that later. We would do anything for a quick high. In fact, when we couldn't locate a bong, we make-shifted one with an apple and a pen. That's how it went for months on end. Steal from mom, buy weed, smoke. Steal from mom, buy weed, smoke. When I look back,

there wasn't really much else to it. No ambitions, no plans, no goals besides who can out-smoke the other.

If I could pinpoint the moment where sh*t started to hit the fan, it was the day my sister's ex-boyfriend (ex for a very good reason), introduced me to a thing called dabbing. Dabbing, a.k.a. skunk, glass, wax, shatter, high-potent marijuana. A.k.a. my biggest regret in life. With quadruple the amount of THC, dabs are on a whole other ball game. The highs were more intense. I would get withdrawal headaches. I couldn't function without it. I couldn't sleep without it. But I loved it. The feeling was surreal at first, being numb and couch-locked with no worries in the world. Playing video games was more fun, going outside made everything seem so pleasant and beautiful. Then there were the times I would take such a big hit I would black out. Yeah, that definitely has to be good for your brain.

The process of dabbing is dangerous. My friends and I used two different methods. We of course used old glory, the 3-foot bong, but with a few modification. The glass piece where the weed is supposed to go got replaced by a metal contraption that you would heat up with a butane torch to melt the shatter and inhale it. The other method was via nectar collector. It was a hand-held, decorative piece of glass in which you would use the same torch to heat up the end of it and inhale like a straw. This was my favorite method, and because wax is so sticky, some of the residue left behind could be scraped off with a butter knife. That way, all you do is heat up the knife and smoke directly off of it to get a different kind of high. When I say different kind of high, it's like being wine drunk vs. hard liquor drunk. It was just different. No other way to explain it.

When you're dealing with temperatures upwards of 700 degrees, accidents are bound to happen. There are still burn marks on my carpet. My poor cat burnt his whiskers on the tip of the nectar collector, there's holes in window curtains from us attempting to mask the smell by blowing it out the window. One painful memory was when I was so high that I put my mouth on the wrong end, and you can use your imagination for the rest. My bottom lip is still scarred to this day.

By the time summer hit, things really started to go downhill. To be honest, the period I spent dabbing was very blurry with a few nightmarish clarities in between. However, I remember the day vividly where the highs didn't feel like the same giggly and fun experience anymore.

I was in our usual spot in the backyard at the side of the house, high as a kite under a beautiful blossoming tree with white pedals falling from it. "Ethan!" My mom yelled from upstairs. I quickly jolt up to my friends' confusion and run upstairs, only to find my mom was sleeping. She hadn't called my name. At the time I didn't think much of it. I was a little concerned, so I stopped smoking and went inside. As my friends were having a conversation, I was zoning out. My eyes were glazed and all I could hear was the sound of cat food being crunched and eaten. I had 4 cats, so I disregarded it like white noise, except this time it was much louder and more pronounced. I look over to the food bowl, and there wasn't a cat in sight. Little did I know I had back-to-back auditory hallucinations. Little did I know it was just the beginning.

It got stranger from there. I started taking considerable admiration and intrigue to inanimate objects. As I sit in the basement, there lay a green towel right next to me. But why is the towel green? Why is it that, in this precise moment in time, I have found interest in this towel? What could it mean? I had to get to the bottom of it. The next couple days I had the same fixation with a lighter. A white lighter. So now we have a green towel and a white lighter. The universe was trying to tell me something but I just couldn't figure out what it was. These two objects were trying to tell me something, sending me messages as I pull my hair out trying to discover what these two things had in common, trying to get the sense of everything. Khari egging me on saying I better get to the bottom of it, not knowing it was feeding my delusion. All those weird thoughts only happened when I was high, but it quickly becomes a problem when you start having those thoughts when you're not intoxicated.

Things between Khari and I were getting tense. I grew an immense amount of distrust in him for whatever reason. Turns out my intuition was correct. On a relatively calm night, Khari came home with Popeyes and was refusing to share it with me. No big deal, I'll just go grab something from upstairs. However, as I walked upstairs, my mom pulled me aside and showed me her bank statements. At first, I was nervous because I thought she finally caught up with my grocery money scheme but it turns out it was much, much worse. I started seeing Khari's name pop up a lot; turns out he's been using my mom's credit card for months without her knowing. Ended up stealing over \$4,000. To add salt to the wound, the last purchase was from Popeyes. He stole from my mom to buy chicken wings and didn't bother sharing with me. Ridiculous. Anyway, I run downstairs and calmly place the iPad with the bank statements in front of him. He starts scrolling through it ferociously, pulling at his hair and repeating "No, no, no!" under his breathe. I told him in a shockingly calm voice, "I think you should leave." Without saying a word, he reaches out to grab a bong and I smash it into pieces with a clean swing of a butane torch. He runs upstairs and gathers his belongings and leaves a rushed trail of clothes to his car. That would be the last time I saw him. I lost my best friend to this stupid drug and the desperation and disgust it brings out in people. Before I went on a rampage smashing all of my bongs and throwing away all my weed, I took one last hit from old reliable.

As I inhale the smoke to the sound of gargling bong water, I could feel a snap in my head. A literal switch like I have opened the gates of hell. My psychosis had officially begun. For the next two months I stayed clean but experienced the most fear I have ever

felt in my entire life. In between my psychosis I had moments of clarity, which I then used as an opportunity to document as much as I could in a notebook. Here's the very first excerpt:

"I load a bowl into my bong of white Urkle kush, a sativa strain. At first, I was fine. Then things went downhill real quick. Paranoia kicked in. I started questioning everything and everybody. I was having conversations in my head with people I knew. I was getting in arguments with them. I heard whispers and experienced overlapping thoughts. I was thinking about a thousand things at once and it was very overwhelming. I had a bunch of genius ideas, but I couldn't keep track of them. My mouth was dry and I had a blank gaze as rushes of emotions took over. My ears were ringing, and my mind wouldn't shut up. I grabbed my head trying to mute the sounds and thoughts in my brain. I felt like I was going crazy. I was bawling my eyes out."

The rambles continue page after page. My luck had it where I ended up working the next morning after D-day. I was unemployed in about a week because the voices in my head were too distracting for me to focus. The next month or so was filled with the combination of bizarre thoughts and dreams, and intense fear and anxiety. The best way I can describe what I was going through is from excerpts from my thought journal (or diary). I prefer thought journal, but to be honest, it's a diary.

8/16/2017

"...my thoughts were extra scary tonight. There's this name: "Clyde." It just keeps popping in my head, usually when I'm super paranoid or in my hyper-xated-fear-of-getting-schizophrenia mindset. Repetitive thoughts. There's a voice in my head repeating "you die" nonstop. I think I am experiencing thought blocking because I'm stopping mid-sentence. I pause when I write and my mind goes blank. When I was trying to sleep, random noises kept going off in my head. I'm so angry and scared and stressed. I can't even remember the thoughts I had that made me want to start this entry in the first place. It's just that... man why did I ever have to smoke weed..."

*Sometimes I get these weird images that ash in my head. It's usually of a scary face but I can't really make it out. And sometimes I imagine myself completely losing my sh*t, and that happens relatively often."*

8/17/2017

*"I'm so f*cking mad. This is not f*cking fair. I never asked for this bullsh*t. I just want it to stop! I can't even imagine what my life was like before smoking weed but I want to go back to that f*cking moment."*

8/18/2017

*"As we were approaching the front door, I noticed a towel sitting on a small wooden table on our front porch. But I didn't see it as a towel at first. I saw a pile of cat-pamphlets. I don't know how else to f*cking describe it. I know it sounds crazy and I know it's a possible hallucination. Just like that, my mood was ruined for the night."*

8/20/2017

"Last night was rough as I was trying to fall asleep. I was having a bunch of random, disconnected thoughts again. Some of them didn't even seem like my own... random phrases, exactly like surfing through a bunch of channels on TV. Next time it happens, I'll try to write them down but it's so hard to keep up. One thing to point out that really stresses me is that some of the thoughts aren't my own voice (my own internal monologue). Was it Clyde?" As a side note, you know you have a problem when you start naming the voices in your head.

8/22/2017

*"Today's pretty bad, specifically after my therapy session. My mind is just so overwhelmed. I'm so tired. So much confusion. Was I hallucinating that bug or was it a dream? Do I have multiple personalities because some nonsense keeps popping up in my head? Clyde, you're not f*cking real. I am Ethan Curtis Andrew. One person. One mind."*

The hallucinations were undeniably terrible. I never heard any voices externally, but just as noted in my journal, I did have thoughts that didn't feel like my own. In fact, although I couldn't audibly hear the voices, it was still one of my biggest triggers for my schizophrenia fear. The voices that lived inside my head were usually very hostile and would give me commands telling me to do something I didn't want to do. For example, one day when I was out checking the mail, my neighbor's golden doodle ran across the street to say "hello," but my mind had a different response. "Hurt the f*cking dog! It's dangerous!" my mind would exclaim. As an animal-lover this was obviously unsettling to me. I gently pet the good boy and let him run back to my neighbors, feeling heartbroken.

The voices I could talk myself out of using some awed form of introspection, because if I wasn't hearing anything, I wasn't going crazy. On the other hand, the visual hallucinations were an experience that I had trouble wrapping my head around and convincing myself things were OK. There was one hallucination that still gives me tremors to this day. You know that red balloon from Stephen King's IT? Well, when I was driving home from a friend's house during a cold August night, I looked in my rear-view mirror and saw a red balloon gliding across the street. I didn't think much of it until I tried to go to bed that same night. Was there

really a balloon? Why did that hallucination last longer than the ones I previously experienced? I needed answers. In only my boxers, I go outside at 2 in the morning desperately trying to find that red balloon. It was snowing hard, so I tried to look for lines in the snow that could've been caused by the string of a gliding balloon. I thought if I ended up finding it that means I wasn't going crazy. I probably circled around the block a dozen times. I never found the red balloon.

Then there was of course the stereotypical paranoia that is a hallmark feature of psychosis. I remember going to my local grocery store King Soopers in the earlier stages of my psychosis and going through self-checkout. As my receipt started to print, I was getting increasingly anxious that the lady next to me was going to steal my receipt. She knew something about me and needed the receipt as evidence against me. Whatever the hell that means. There would also be times where I'd take an extra-long route home to ensure that I was not being tailed by the car behind me. Not fun.

Believe it or not, the hallucinations and paranoia weren't even the worst part about psychosis for me. Sleep disturbances are not talked about enough when it comes to psychosis. There were these dreams; sick, vivid dreams. So detailed I sometimes couldn't distinguish between what was real and what wasn't. The plot of the dreams were usually simple, I'd be hanging out with my friends or running errands. However, when I woke up, I'd be confused if my dream actually happened. It got to the point where I'd be with my friends and ask "Do you remember that time we did this?" and they would all look at me puzzled. It was then I realized that it was a dream.

If that isn't horrifying enough, imagine psychosis nightmares. They were plentiful. To this day I have a hard time remembering my dreams, which is normal for the most part. However, there's one nightmare that I will never forget. The nightmare consisted of me in the fetal position beside my bed. I was just lying there, a lost soul in time. I walk over to a mirror on the wall and I notice I don't have eyes; the sockets are glued shut but I can still see myself in the reflection. Then a smile emerges and it keeps getting bigger. It runs from ear to ear and then the mouth opens revealing thousands of shark-like teeth. Then I woke up.

I also had my fair share of sleep paralysis, which is terrible even when you're not in a psychotic state of mind. I would occasionally experience an out-of-body phenomenon during the stages of just starting to wake up. It was almost like my soul was getting out of bed, but my body was lagging behind. I thought I reached the doorknob to exit my room, but it turns out I never got that far and was just lying on the floor, dazed and confused. Even at rest, psychosis was still affecting me.

As horrible as going through psychosis was, there were some diamonds in the rust. Mixed randomly in my thought journal are various poems, one of which I'd like to share:

*Nobody was born to hate
Our purpose is to love
Stop being so fixated on things
And take a look at the stars above.
The anxiety that causes me to choke
Only got worse because of the weed I used to smoke
I look back at it now with so much regret
The damage it caused to my mind
Sometimes all you need is to forgive and forget
So much fear about what the future holds
When in reality
You're in control on how it all unfolds
I get frustrated on how strange my mind can be
The pills that I take only do so much for me
Don't give up on life when times are tough
The future will be better
Even if you think you've had enough
For the sake of my future kids that I hope to influence
I can't do that if I stay under the influence
Sometimes goals feel so out of range
And they will be if you're not subject to change
For every step back I take
I take 2 steps forward
Sharing my thoughts
The pen is mightier than the sword*

September couldn't come fast enough. That was when the healing really started to take form. I started taking sh oil pills daily from a random psychosis-prevention study I read online, visiting my therapist regularly, but most importantly, staying abstinent.

The months ahead were still a little rocky, as I discovered new obsessions with death, religion, and the afterlife. Something I won't dive into but I'll leave it with this last poem I wrote in recovery called "Significantly Insignificant:"

*I look up at the stars and can't help but cry
Soaking up the beauty of the cosmos that will vanish the day I die
I get frustrated with the universe because of the reality that I have to face
Then the tears subside and
I thank the universe for life in the first place.*

Just like that, a chapter of my life was closed, at least for a while. I was unaware that the unanticipated sequel would occur almost 5 years down the road. I hadn't relapsed to marijuana use, but I seriously started questioning my mental health. I wasn't doing so hot, was having a lot of crying spells and mental breakdowns. I even thought I was seeing things again. I would look down and briefly confuse a jacket on the floor to be my dog, or a coat hanging on the wall to be a person. It's kind of hard to explain. My dreams were becoming increasingly more vivid. Was this it? Was I finally developing schizophrenia? I had no idea why I was so sensitive or scared. I started to reminisce on my past and how I ended up this way. Like I said before, I know I was always an anxious kid, but was I really this anxious? What events transcribed that led me to becoming such a fragile individual? The first thing that came to mind was my psychosis. Once it was over, I forced myself to move on from it and leave it in the past, but now that I was showing some pretty worrying signs, I decided to dive into research on what exactly did happen to me. Man, that was a bad idea in retrospect.

If you went through my search history a couple months ago, all you would see are searches consisting along the lines of:

"Will I get schizophrenia from smoking weed?"
"Cannabis-induced psychosis conversion rates to schizophrenia."
"Prognosis/outlook for CIP."
"Will I be okay after going through CIP?"
"Is my brain permanently damaged from THC?"
"What structural changes in the brain take place after smoking weed in adolescence?"
"CIP and schizophrenia suicide rate."
"How to forgive yourself"

I could keep going. My impulse to look into things and research got so bad that it was hindering my ability to work and maintain relationships. I was obsessed. The worst part? All the search answers to my questions were not good news. They kept confirming all my fears. Yes, I probably lost IQ points. Yes, I have a higher chance of schizophrenia. That last statement alone still brings chills to my core. I read somewhere that CIP has about a 50% conversion rate to chronic schizophrenia in people even without a history of mental illness. If that doesn't suck enough, the people who do develop schizophrenia because of cannabis use are much more likely to be treatment-adherent and have more paranoid, delusional symptoms. I didn't like my sanity being determined by a coin flip, especially since I had other risk factors present. 50 percent. An unbelievably high number that was ringing in my head nonstop. To me, it was a 50% chance I'd live, and a 50% chance I would end up killing myself. The thought became so encompassing and traumatic for me that I lost my job and had to be hospitalized voluntarily for a suicide attempt. I was driving home and kept having these impulses to slam into the car next to me or ram into a guard rail on the highway. The thoughts became so intrusive that I ended up just closing my eyes on the freeway. It was then I knew I needed help.

The hospital stay was awful. I couldn't sleep during the initial 72 hour hold because nurses kept coming in, bothering me with IVs and questions. The patient next door yelling at the top of her lungs for her husband hours on end didn't help, either. One of the many psychiatrists I spoke to kept reiterating how important it was to improve my quality of life. I'm not going to lie, that hit hard. Quality of life. Did I not have a good life? I loved my family, my friends, my girlfriend, but perhaps I didn't love the most important person- myself. Well, it's not that I didn't love myself, I just couldn't accept myself. Big difference there. I hated that I wasn't neurotypical, but I wanted to make sure I was ultimately safe. After the 72-hour hold, I was transferred to an inpatient program. I was roomed with a bunch of people way crazier than I was. We couldn't use our cell phones, but luckily there was a TV in a glass display case (so we don't strangle ourselves or each other with the HDMI cable) where we had free range access to Netflix. When I say free range, we got to choose what movies we wanted to watch, but the nurses didn't trust us with the remote – something I found rather hilarious. We had access to showers, but no extra clothes. I was stuck wearing the same underwear with the same hospital gown for a week straight. We had the worst prison-esc food you could imagine, which is why I spent most of my time there not eating. It was not a healing experience, so most of my stay at Hotel California was spent forcing myself to sleep. But my thoughts kept me awake. I had tried to convince myself that everything was going to be okay and to accept the fact that my life is going to change forever. I would be in and out of mental institutions while my friends and families are leading successful lives and getting married and having kids. I would be doomed to have a mediocre quality of life and be a burden to everyone around me. The voices in my head were back. To be clear, they weren't auditory hallucinations, they were internalized insults and fear-mongering thoughts that didn't seem like my own internal monologue. The nurses reassured me that I wasn't schizophrenic and

gave me some fast-acting anxiety medication to put me to sleep.

Anyway, that was the longest week ever. Shortly after being released, I started looking into articles again and spiraling myself out. Back to the hospital we go. I wish I was kidding. This time, it was an outpatient program that lasted a month, which really helped. I was diagnosed with major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (shocker), and obsessive-compulsive disorder. OCD really surprised me. It's not what you typically think of when you think OCD. I wasn't a germaphobe or incredibly organized, I just had obsessive thoughts and urges to look into things which was considered my compulsion. I had to satisfy that compulsion some way or another. The method I used to satisfy my urges was to look into articles and research various psychosis-related topics, despite how unproductive it was towards my mental health. As my therapist would say I was feeding my over-checker disorder, and my oh my, feeding it was expensive. Luckily, I had good insurance, because just that week stay costed about \$20,000. I still has to pay several thousand out of pocket. That's only the hospital bills. I went on some spending sprees myself as well. I was worried about having structural brain damage after all that time smoking weed, so I spent \$800 on an MRI. I was worried about my intelligence declining, so I spent \$500 on an IQ test. Dead serious.

In case you were wondering, the results of the MRI and IQ test had some head-scratching results. One of the neurologist's findings really struck me on the MRI. "A few small hemispheric foci of white matter T2 prolongation may be within the limits of normal for the patient's age or perhaps related to migraine headaches or other remote insult." To be fair, I have no idea what the hell most of that meant. However, "other remote insult" is intriguing. Remote insult? Could that be damage caused by smoking weed in the past? There's no way to know for sure because I don't have an MRI to compare before and after cannabis usage, so that's up in the air. Other than that, I was thankful to see my MRI was normal with "no acute findings." That was a breath of fresh air. As for my IQ test, my overall full-scale IQ was 128, according to the standardized WAIS 4th edition Adult IQ test. For those who don't know, this test subcategorizes IQ into 4 subsets, which are verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory, and processing speed. All but one category I scored above the 90th percentile. Why am I telling you this? Because the one category that I scored the lowest, in the 75th percentile, was in working memory, something that is proven to be negatively affected from cannabis consumption. Now, is this definitive truth that A caused B? Not necessarily, but it's hard not to contemplate the findings.

In my mission to prove that I was okay by taking all these reassuring tests, there came a cost. It caused emotional turmoil between my family and my girlfriend. The ridiculous spending, the constant phone calls when I needed reassurance, and the fear of leaving me alone with my thoughts and emotions all struck fear into the minds of my loved ones. I asked my sister to describe how she felt during those hellish couple of months. Here's what she said:

"I don't think the fear ever goes away. Fear that I'll get a call from his girlfriend in tears telling me she found him dead. I often run through scenarios about how I'd cope after he's gone. Going through speeches in my head that I would say during his funeral. 'He was my best friend...' things like that. That's how often the calls were. He would call me in tears telling me he isn't doing well, that he is hallucinating or that he looked up something online. The calls have become less frequent in the last few months, but I will never not have anxiety when I see that I've missed one of his calls. Sometimes I would call him back and he wouldn't answer right away, and my mind immediately goes to 'this is it. This is the missed call that I will regret for the rest of my life,' and then he would finally call me back. To this day I let out a breath of relief when I hear his voice. If I could go back in time and take back all of the drugs I introduced him to, I would. I believe this was my fault. I didn't protect him like a big sister should, and I will regret that forever. But I believe everything happens for a reason, that this needed to happen in order for him to tell his story and save someone else. Drug-induced psychosis is not something to take lightly. Save yourself the money, the trauma, the addiction, and what it does to your mind. I know it's cheesy, but say no to drugs. It's truly not worth it."

I put my loved ones through a state of agony and confusion because of my drastic shift in personality and mood. Why am I going into such dramatic detail? I want people to see the butterfly effect that smoking marijuana caused. I went from smoking flower to have fun and ease my anxiety to ending up in a psych ward after trying to kill myself on the freeway. The last time I dabbled was 5 years ago, and I'm still not in the clear! I can't help but think about how my life would've turned out if I was never introduced to that stupid plant! Maybe I would've finished my degree on time. Maybe I would have my mental health under control. Maybe my memory would be sharper, my thoughts less foggy. I have an amazing job now, but what about the rest of my career potential? I read a story from a case study of 6 individuals that went through CIP. Of the six, half of them developed schizophrenia, half of them didn't. Very similar results across the board on the subject. There goes that damn 50% again. On a positive note, the 3 that didn't go on to develop schizophrenia all had something in common. All 3 stayed abstinent ever since their index psychotic episode. However, just like me, they are still enduring struggles. In fact, one man's story really sent me emotionally spiraling. He had to quit his job after experiencing CIP, even while being fully recovered. He had to quit because his brain could no longer keep up with the mental demands his job required. In other words, he feels like he got dumber. How absolutely terrible.

A lot of you may think I was predisposed to have mental illness, and that may be true. But there's one thing I know for sure. Weed changed me. It made whatever I had going on worse. No one is 100% immune from developing a psychosis from

marijuana. The toll it takes on your mind, especially at such a young and vulnerable age is not worth it. The worst part is, there is some lasting damage even when you decide to quit. I don't know if the effects are reversible. I don't know if I'll ever experience psychosis again. I don't know what the future holds. What I know for damn certainty is I am never going near marijuana again. Don't get me wrong. I'm incredibly proud of the progress I've made, an important point for those who are still struggling with cannabis addiction. My thoughts are clearer now, I'm monitoring my stress levels, and I'm succeeding in all facets of life. I'm working full time as an IT professional, and plan on going back to school shortly. My relationships are rekindled, my brain is stabilized with the help of antidepressants and a low dose of antipsychotics to help with the intrusive thoughts. I see a therapist regularly to maintain my mental health, and I've stopped looking into articles about cannabis-induced psychosis and schizophrenia. I am leading a much more productive and meaningful life. It's a closed chapter now. Things will get better, and you'll notice remarkable improvements in every aspect of your life once you restrain from using. I've read too many heartbreaking stories about teens who have taken their lives because they assumed their brain would never bounce back. I am living proof that it does. Please don't give up.

I'm going to wrap things up, but remember Khari? He didn't develop psychosis that I'm aware of, but he dropped out of college and has been unemployed for years according to his ex-girlfriend. He also continues to rob and steal from his loved ones to buy more weed.

Another friend of mine, let's call him Q, asked me a rather troubling question the other day. Q had been an avid pot smoker since he was only 12 years old and has been using it daily ever since. At 21 years old, that's almost an entire decade of brain abuse. We're dining out and he leans over and asks me: "Do you ever have vivid dreams?"

Watch the interview Ethan did with Laura on 4/19/22

Jenny – May 7, 2022

Dear Laura,

Just want to write you a letter to thank you for all the good you are doing. Your response to my email and website helped me find a solution for my son Henry who is now at a Ozark Trails Academy in Missouri. For as much pain as you have endured your foundation is creating hope and direction for many of us living in "The Amsterdam of the Rockies". I dropped Henry off Monday and spent hours listening to your webinars on my long drive home. Since discovery your website I've listened to many and feel like I'm an expert on marijuana now as you do.

Henry started dabbing heavily his sophomore year. He quit after mixing it with another drug last August and started up again in November. In February Henry, his therapist and myself made a plan to try to get him off marijuana and it didn't work. It was actually Henry's idea. So, therefore, I was going into pot shops buying his pot. I can't begin to tell you what a failure of a mother I felt like going into those dispensaries but I was desperate and willing to try anything. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs and tell them what a horrible drug this was and what this was doing to my child. Now, looking back I think the process was a good way for him to open up to rehab and take responsibility for his addiction. I by no means think other parents should try this, however.

Henry could not sleep unless he got high. His anxiety and depression were through the roof. He stopped going to school, wouldn't keep a job, didn't care if he got his license, lost weight and his hygiene was very poor. I had been told by several therapists he needed a higher level of care. Henry begged me to let him have his last season of HS hockey and not take that away from him. His dream of playing Junior hockey was taken over by his need for his next high. End of January he broke his finger in a hockey game. Two weeks later he tore his ACL. The rehab I had picked out for him no longer could take him due to his injury and surgery. I had to start from square one. I went to Johnny's Ambassadors website and started going down the list. There I found "Parents Love Their Teens" and a wonderful woman named Brande Sue. She listened to my story and recommended and called several rehabs for me.

On the way to Missouri Henry was actually asking me to drive south an hour to get him his last high. Gawd! Did you know there aren't any pot shops after you leave Denver heading East. He was trying with all his might to find one and no luck! When we drove over the Kansas Missouri border he threw his dab pen out the window. I know he has a long road ahead. He will be there nine months to a year.

Just as I am passionate about informing parents about Dyslexia I now have a new passion for telling my story about marijuana. I do believe the schools had a place causing him shame and not telling us he was dyslexic. That was his first hit to his confidence. His Father abandoning him and I had the perfect storm. If I have learned anything and there is still much more to learn I would have spent more time with the things that went right rather than things that went wrong.

I know many kids up here in our community that are probably in the same boat as Henry, and feel, it's just a matter of time before this explodes. This pot is highly addictive.

You did good Laura. You did good. Thank you and God Bless.
Jenny

Elle W — May 29, 2022

My story starts in the winter of 2020. I was in my Freshman year of high school, and we were out because of Covid. All throughout my middle school years, if a friend had nicotine I would take a hit, just to know what it tasted like. In October of 2020, my grandfather died and my brother moved 8 hours away. I took these events harshly. I've had mental health issues since 4th grade, so no one in my family was surprised when I didn't leave my room for a week. That was when I started wanting to try something new, and dangerous. I felt an itching to do something. I found out which gas station didn't card kids, and out I went for a "walk." I got addicted to nicotine very quickly.

In December 2020 I met my current boyfriend. We started dating quickly after meeting and learned that both of us used. At that point, I had only gotten high from weed once. I had a job and was making decent money (to a 15-year-old) so I could fund my addiction. My boyfriend and I started using together almost every time we were together, which was every weekend. I quickly got addicted and found a friend at my school to use with (at this point we were half virtual half in person). We called each other our drug buds. (ironic, I know) We would use at school in the bathrooms, and go to work together and use there. We worked the same job and had many classes together, so we were constantly high. Every single paycheck would go towards drugs. The gas station previously mentioned, was a 3-minute walk from my job. At every lunch break, we would go up there and buy more nicotine or cigarettes, preparing for the next day.

In March of 2021, my boyfriend's best friend, who was my close friend too, passed away in a car crash. That hit us both really hard. Since that, I started to use every day, all day. There wasn't a moment that I wasn't high. I started to lose the friends that I'd had for 5 years and started to lose the relationship I had with my mom. We were always really close and understood each other. She had caught me twice at this point with just nicotine, which didn't stop me. I always had more stashed somewhere. After every class at school, I would meet up with my drug bud in a bathroom, and we would take a hit then go to class. (Adding a quick note: the time of these events is an estimate, as I do not remember this time in my life very well, and have put pieces together based off of what others have told me and little blips of memory.)

After some time, I started to skip classes altogether. My drug bud and I found all the places in the school where there weren't cameras and where people didn't go. First, it was the bathrooms, then certain stairwells, then the ceiling of the school over our stage. If there wasn't a camera, we were there. I would join my class from my Chromebook on zoom to get credit for attendance, even though I wasn't doing any homework. Before drugs, I was a straight-A student and would never take a B as a grade. Now I had C's and D's. My grades were most likely the first thing that triggered my parents to realize that something was wrong. But, I would sneak out, and sneak around my house, so that I wouldn't get caught again. I started using heavier stuff, higher THC %, acid, and I had a plan to get shrooms. My drug bud and I even broke into someone's cow farm looking for mushrooms in the pasture.

I started to scream and yell and argue with my mom whenever I was at her house (divorced parents). At my dad's, I would never leave my room or the basement where my PC was. I destroyed my relationship with them. My stepdad was in Florida doing construction on our future home, so it was just my mom and me at home. I would find any excuse to start an argument with her, just so I could feel that rush. I snuck out to buy drugs and to go to my boyfriend's house. I got caught once going to his house and didn't care at all. I just shrugged it off. I felt like I was on top of the world. I felt free, which now I know that I was chained to the drugs. I felt powerful, and that I could do anything I wanted. I was invincible. So I started to do things that could have ended my life.

Then one day, in May of 2021, a teacher came into the bathroom I was in, and caught a random student, my drug bud, and me. We were dragged to the principal's office and searched. The random classmate dumped her stuff with us and got out with just a slap on the wrist. My drug bud was sent to the emergency room because of how her vitals were showing, and I was intensely searched. I had a lot of drugs on me, and many different kinds. They put me on probation and had my parents pick me up from school. I thought my life was over. Over the next few weeks, I was going through withdrawal symptoms and extreme boredom. The police took my phone and went through it, telling my parents everything in it. I was furious. I continued to argue and scream at my mom, and ignore my dad. All I did all day was quite literally, stare at the ceiling of my room, for hours. I was then threatened with being sent to treatment. It wasn't the first time I was threatened with it, so I didn't take it seriously. Then, I got a date. June 28, 2021. I was going to be sent to a long term residential. I was so angry. I thought about refusing, but it was either treatment or juvie. at the time my thoughts were that I wanted juvie, now I am glad of where I was sent. The court ordered me to go to treatment, and threatened me with being taken by the police and also not being able to be in contact with my boyfriend. So, I got in the car and got driven to where I reside now. My father drove me down, and it was the worst I had felt in a long time. I showed up to treatment very angry.

I've now been here 11 months, and am graduating on June 9. Over my time here, I started off with planning on using as soon as I leave, to now not even wanting to look at marijuana. I had my struggles here, my mental health issues and my addiction. I have

done a lot of work during my time here. I still was unsure of if I was going to stay sober, when Kriya assigned me to read your book. I read it in 3 days, and wow. Like I said earlier in the email, it really hit me. I want to help as many people as I can with what I have learned. I didn't know some of the effects of smoking, even with Kriya teaching me a lot. Hearing the story of your son really moved me because I saw it in myself, and my friend who passed, it happened to him. I now have a plan for leaving treatment and going forward with my life. For the first time in a few years, I am actually looking forward to the future. My one year sober was May 21, 2022, and I was so incredibly proud of myself. I had never felt that proud in a long time.

I really wanted to write to you, to say thank you. And I can see how much you want to help others, and you helped one more. I am really sorry about what you had to go through, and you came out on the other side. Again, thank you so much. You have changed my life through your book.

Julie S — June 7, 2022

My 15 year old son Kaeden died by suicide in November 2021. He jumped 7 stories from a local parking garage. Two days prior to his death, he attended a party and ingested a crazy amount of THC from his peer's dab pen. In the course of an hour, per his friends' reports, he hit the dab pen 14-15 times, quickly began passing in and out, and was exhibiting behaviors that were completely unlike him; he was clearly out of his mind and in some sort of psychosis. He was talking to shelves in the closet, spitting at his friends, was highly belligerent, and he hit his friend. He was told to leave the party and one of his friends went with him. The police were called by a homeowner down the road from the party after Kaeden was passing in and out and vomiting on his lawn. The police called us at 10pm. Kaeden had been dropped off at the party at 9pm. Hospital drug screen showed THC and just a little bit of alcohol.

On Sunday, we let Kaeden rest, talked to him here and there, but gured he was likely still high and for sure still recovering. He was subdued and upset with himself, but generally appeared ok. We talked about returning to school on Monday and "facing the music", talked about how the chatter at school would settle down soon enough, etc. On Monday morning we dropped him off at school, but instead of going into the building, he walked to a nearby bus stop and went downtown.

Now, Kaeden had depression, and in April 2021 he was using marijuana and did have suicidal ideation. However, over the summer he got sober and just the day before the party he attended, he was talking about how good he felt and how proud he was to be sober. Kaeden was always the first one to help friends with suicidal ideation and tell them to push thru hard times, his best friend's brother had just died by suicide in March 2021, and we all talked frequently about what to do if anyone was feeling like harming themselves. So, for Kaeden to act so completely out of character and make the decision to end his life after the incident at that party, we really feel he still had to be under the influence of the THC psychosis. Why Kaeden even decided to use substances that night is on him, but the actions he took after that night, we believe were impacted by the THC.

Kaeden's 2 best friends are still using marijuana dab pens regularly, and his other best friend experienced a several days-long cannabis induced psychosis just last week after 2 bites- 2 BITES – of a brownie made with THC. Was Kaeden's death not enough for these kids to realize the dangers of THC???

People need to know, and understand, about the horrible impact of today's THC. TEENAGERS need to know and understand. Thank you for your work and advocacy, Laura and Johnny's Ambassadors

Linda W — June 7, 2022

My son, K, who is 20, has had two very serious cannabis-induced psychotic breaks in the last year and a half that were absolute hell. As K was growing up he played soccer, hockey, and tennis, and we all spent time together with family at the lake house every summer. He was never in trouble at school or had any trouble with the law. When he was in the 8th grade he joined the Sheriff's Cadets program and really seemed to enjoy that. He was actually looking at a possible law enforcement career. He seemed pretty happy. In High School things seemed to change. He began spending huge amounts of time online playing games. They seemed to suck him into his room and he became isolated. Looking back now, I see that he probably started smoking cannabis around his Sophomore year, and his grades really got bad during his Junior and Senior years. In his first semester of college, we thought he was a little depressed and maybe had anxiety. Then he totally unked out of all of his classes. Since he was living in the dorms, we hadn't realized he was NOT going to class, and smoking heavy amounts of cannabis. He moved back home as he was suspended from college because of grades. Then he somehow got a medical marijuana card. Things got super weird with him, and we didn't know why. We were arguing with him all the time regarding the way he was acting. His friends would call us and have to drive him home as he was acting really strangely. K left our house one night, and we thought he was staying with a friend. The next day, my husband passed him on the street on his way home from work. He was standing in front of the homeless shelter. He came home and told me, and I immediately drove down there and found him. He was completely out of his mind. He was delusional and talking about being sent there by God. He had been walking into businesses acting "weird" and walking into moving traf. He had 6 interactions with law enforcement in one day. K thought some of the homeless were his friends, and

they eventually stole his car and everything in it. It took over a week of calling the police, but we were finally able to get a hospital to keep him, fearing for his safety. It was extremely hard as he was over the age of 18. This was the first psychotic break, and we had to involuntarily commit him to the psychiatric hospital for three weeks. The psychiatrist told us it was Cannabis Induced Psychosis, and he should never smoke again or this would probably happen again. We couldn't believe that cannabis could do this to someone. We began to educate ourselves on this and do what we could to help him through it. Fast forward eight months. Thinking our son would NEVER smoke cannabis again, the second psychotic break came as a surprise, and it was way worse. After our older son told us K was smoking again, we told him to either move out or stop smoking. He packed up everything he had in his car (he only had had this car for a couple months after losing his last car), and he left town. He somehow allowed himself to become acquainted with a 48-year-old guy who had been in prison; a total thief. This man convinced K to drive down to California with him. Our son had enough money from a tax refund and his last check to leave town and head to California. He told us this is where he was on the rare occasions he answered his phone, but he wouldn't tell us for sure exactly where. From what we understand, he went to Seattle, Portland, and down to California. We were desperate, and I reported him as a missing person and tracked him on Snapchat. We didn't know if he was dead or alive. I spoke with law enforcement all through California and informed them of what was going on. Because I had him listed as a missing person, law enforcement would call anytime there was interaction. Since my son was in psychosis, he was very vulnerable and had no idea or insight about people or places. K was tased at a homeless camp, stayed in ANTIFA homeless camps, slept by a dumpster, and finally, the man he was traveling with stole his car with everything he owned in it. He would call intermittently but was so delusional he had no idea what was really going on. He was arrested in California for stealing a car (he thought it was his car), and spent the night in jail. He finally called but was so delusional we couldn't have a clear conversation. All I could do was pray law enforcement would get him to a hospital. Finally, a Sheriff's deputy called; K was on the side of the road trying to get into a casino. Because they saw he was reported missing, they called me. After pleading and explaining what was going on, he decided to have him involuntarily committed. Thank God. K stayed in a California psychiatric hospital for another three weeks, then my husband and I drove to CA to pick him up and bring him home. We recently discovered our son had started smoking cannabis again and is/was in psychosis again. We got him to a Dr. and on medication. He seems to know he has to stop. He is going through a treatment plan and we are holding him accountable. We know now our son has Cannabis Use Disorder and Cannabis Induced Psychosis and will continue to have psychotic breaks whenever he uses weed. WHO KNEW? This is the most God-awful thing I, or my family, has EVER gone through. My husband is an attorney, and I have a bail bond business, and worked in the court system for 14 years. We are not unfamiliar with the criminal world, but we had NO idea this could happen from smoking marijuana. We are still reeling from all of this. My son is lucky to be alive after his psychotic breaks and their results. We now have insight into what it has done to him and how this is happening all across the country to ALOT of kids. We are, as a family, getting professional help for his psychosis and his addiction to cannabis. My husband and I are taking the NAMI course and going to meetings. We are also changing the dynamics of our house to ensure we have the right boundaries in place so we can help our son. But the culture needs to be honest as well. Marijuana is NOT what everyone thinks it is. The public is being misled about weed, most likely because of the money others think it can generate for states. States/politicians need to ask themselves, "Is it worth it to allow this to happen to our kids?" Cannabis addiction and psychosis are real, and the potency of cannabis is so ipping out of control. If your family is experiencing what we have, don't be afraid to ask for help. L.W.

JohnnysAmbassadors.org

Laura@JohnnysAmbassadors.org • 303-471-7401

Johnny's Ambassadors, Inc. • 9948 Cottoncreek Dr., Suite 101 • Highlands Ranch, CO 80130