

ANTI-LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

WHY SAY NO?

Chris Nihmey



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JUST SAY NO

My name is Chris Nihmey. I am a mental health advocate, illness survivor, author, presenter, and teacher. I am the author of four books, my latest compilations centred on mental health, mental illness, hope, and healing. **“Two Sides To The Story: Living A Lie”**, my battle with mental illness, was released in 2013, published in the UK by Chipmunka Publishing, a prominent world-leading mental health publisher. My latest release, under the same publisher, is an illustrated picture book, **“Sally”**, released in 2016. It is a book that humanizes the homeless, giving them a voice, creating a change in attitude and stereotypes when it comes to the homeless, with the goal of providing acceptance and compassion for those who are alone. Both books continue to sell well in Chapters, Ottawa, and globally online. I am an activist on mental health and wellness, producing books with mental health and healing themes, and presenting to youth, organizations, and the general population, a message of help, hope, and healing. I am an occasional teacher as well, with students from kindergarten to high school. For more information on my books, my presentations, and my initiatives, please visit my website at chrisnihmey.com

As a mental health advocate and activist, I wrote this document to give Members of Parliament, all politicians, provincial and municipal, and our community, a more realistic, positive perspective on the law that is planned to be passed this spring of 2017: to legalize marijuana, also known as cannabis or pot. I speak for many who fear the obvious devastating effects that drugs have on our health, on our youth, and on our general population, as well as our safety as Canadian citizens. Please peruse this short, but impactful document. I have outlined many crucial issues and arguments that we need to fully consider before passing such a law. I urge you to think deeply about these issues before taking a stand in one direction or the other.

An advocate of mental health, and an activist fighting against the stigma of illness, I am taking a stand. I am strongly against the legalization of marijuana, a drug that has left many in hospitals, Narcotics Anonymous, addiction centres, on the streets, in prison, and yes, dead. It is time for our government, our legislators, and our society, to be made aware and educated on the endless negative side-effects of such a decision, before it proceeds forward. This decision will impact our communities, our society, for generations to come. As a survivor of well over a decade of suffering from three mental disorders, intensive therapy, and an excruciatingly difficult path to finding healing in my life, I know quite well the strength of the mind, and how it is affected. I stand by a simple, yet profound principle, I was taught so long ago in elementary school: “Say no to drugs.” Year after year, this message was reinforced, drilled into our heads, with examples of students and adults who had screwed up, literally destroying their whole well-being because of drug addictions that took over their lives: that all began with the experimentation of a mere puff. Regardless of our government’s initiative to change a law that has been with us since we became a country, my stance will remain the same; say no to drugs. It is a lesson we’ve taught our children since the beginning of time.

The evidence I present to you is not only reputable; it is irrefutable. It is now up to you, the individual, to see the right perspective and make a smart, informative decision when it comes to

this law. Times have most definitely changed as we enter 2017, but no matter how you look at it, drugs are, and have always been, bad for our minds, our bodies, our entire well-being. You can ask any child the same question we all were asked in elementary school. Out of the mouth of babes, they will agree wholeheartedly, and they should, that drugs are bad. Yet many fail to take this to heart and face the consequences. Drugs remain dangerous, no matter the drug. The only thing that seems to have changed is our attitude concerning drugs. For some reason, we've given in to the pleasures we seek, and the money we hope to make, rather than the minds we will destroy. It's time for all of us to take a stand. Will you?

This document demonstrates why drugs are bad, and just how bad they can be when someone walks down this treacherous path. The effects of a decision in favour of drug legalization will be disastrous. I have laid out concrete evidence as to why I hope our country should reverse its thinking when it comes to the legalization of the drug, marijuana.

Clear your head. Open your mind. Think about your life and the lives of your children, and your children's children. Ultimately, they are the ones who will be deeply affected by this law. You are beyond the ages of peer pressure and fitting in. Think about a lot of things before you lean one way or another. This decision Canada is making will impact the citizens of our country for generations, forever. Like a stone dropped in a pond, the ripple will reach further and further. How much further, I do not know, and I hope I never have to find out.

INTRODUCTION

I said, again, to the 8-year-old boy, "You can't say that! How can you declare yourself the greatest baseball player in the world? You can't hit the ball!" I said this after watching the kid swing countless times at a ball that just would not connect with his bat. As a 14 year-old, I thought I knew it all. I was old enough to babysit, I was old enough to take the city bus to school, I was old enough to walk to the store alone; so surely, I had the right to steer this boy in the "right" direction by berating him. Clearly he was going nowhere. I rested my chin on top of the fence between our yards. The boy looked at me again, "I AM the greatest baseball player in the world! Watch!" He swung, he missed, STRIKE ... again! It didn't take long for me to jump in this time. "Kid, just give it up! You can't do it! I can't let you continue with this. Why don't you try another sport like basketball, or swimming? Yah, swimming! You don't even need a ball!" It was then that I got the biggest slap in the face I'd ever received in my long life of 14 years. I never saw it coming. No, he didn't crack the ball into my face! He couldn't hit it! It was quite the opposite. Declaring his supremacy again, he swung and missed. STRIKE! I looked at him with a smug smile. Then, perspective took me and slammed me down. I balked again at his statement. He turned to me and placed the bat on his shoulder and said, "I am the greatest baseball player in the world!" I shook my head with an emphatic no, and he looked me in the eyes and said confidently, "I am the greatest PITCHER in the world!" I nearly fell over. Strike after strike, he most definitely proved he WAS the greatest baseball player in the world ... the greatest "pitcher"! In an instant, my world was rocked, my mouth was closed, and I learned one of life's greatest lessons. Perspective is everything. I bowed and took a loss. Thank God no one was else was around. That day changed me forever.

Perspective really is everything. I knew this now. We always need to take the right one. Will perspective change your life? Will it open your mind to making a wise, calculated decision for you and yours, or do the opposite? Think it through. It is the most important thing you'll ever do.

One year ago today. We now have an epidemic on our hands. All around us, throughout our home and native land, things have changed, but not for the better. It has been one year since the nationwide legalization of the drug, marijuana, often labelled as pot or cannabis. Society has taken a turn for the worst. Once thought of, and sought as a "recreational drug", it has become one of society's biggest problems. With the widespread use of marijuana since its legalization, what I feared is now happening. The question that begs to be answered: can we turn back the hands of time, or have we crossed a line of no return? What can we do from here? Have things gone too far to reverse the damages? We need a new course of action imminently if we are going to have any chance to gain control.

Crime has risen, traffic accidents are at an all-time high, society seems to be listless, asleep. No one is communicating effectively; and when they do, it is constant confrontation. Regardless of the age limit for smoking pot, our teenage youth are finding endless ways to "bend" the rules, now that pot is much easier to access. Parents have it in the house now, and how many have given their young ones a swig of beer, taste of wine, deeming it innocuous? The key word is accessibility. Like alcohol, youth are making poor choices when it comes to their health, and the suicide rate has risen in only one year. We are learning the hard way that depression and drugs don't mix. Drugs don't mix with anything, otherwise, our elders wouldn't have stressed with us that "drugs are bad". Regardless, this fact remains entirely true.

We are now fearing for our youth, for our future. Did we not, as a society, think of the repercussions before making marijuana legal? Many lives have been damaged already, and worse, many lives have been lost.

Our government and less than half of its people chose "yes", without considering the "how". How would the legalization of drugs affect our youth, our schools, our society? Our government seemed to fail to consider every possible consequence of opening a door that should not have been pried open.

As a teacher of bright young minds, I have learned the value of good, wholesome, positive morals and values. I was never taught, at school, or at home, that taking drugs was "good" for me. Drugs have always sat at the extreme opposite end. We knew that drugs were bad, and unhealthy for our minds, and that drugs could kill. Every child, no matter how old, or where they lived, was educated, was bestowed with the knowledge that drugs are bad. Why then, all of a sudden, after years of making smart, informative decisions, have we, as grown, intelligent adults, made a decision that will negatively affect generations? Our current law has kept our minds, and our children's minds alive and vibrant, not listless and lackadaisical, free to make well-thought decisions without the influence of substance abuse. As a society, have we not learned of the dangers from those who have used and abused drugs, including excessive alcohol abuse? How bad can this get? We are now on a path which compounds alcohol with another potent vice that

is equally dangerous (if not more) to our minds, our bodies, our steering wheels, our abused and battered, and abandoned children throughout Canada.

I have opened a door wide enough for each of us to come face-to-face with this issue. Read my reasoning and make a decision to say “no” to the legalization of marijuana. We must speak up before it really is too late, and we pass a law that will be detrimental. Below are multiple reasons, arguments against the legalization of marijuana. Open up your mind, your heart, and find the right perspective in this serious debate. Your decision matters in every way.

A. ALCOHOL, DRUGS & DRIVING IMPAIRMENT

Alcohol and driving should *never* mix. It is ridiculous that it is 2017, and this issue still plagues our streets. Should there be a choice? Wouldn't we be respecting life much more by passing a law that says, “*You drive, you don't drink, period!*” How hard is it for someone in your whole circle of friends or family to take the night off drinking? The next time you go out, someone new drives. Or can't you cab, or take public transit? There are many options. This worked well with my circle of friends. It's simple and it saves lives. Can we not control our urge to drink when we are driving? For those of you who have been impacted severely because of drinking and/or drugs, and driving, speak up. Share your testimony and change lives. Let's save lives.

If you want a poignant example of the dangers of drinking and driving, read the story of a teenager named, Jacqueline Saburido. Your opinions, your views, your perspective will change forever. With the legalization of marijuana, we will be facing many similar circumstances, whether one is driving under the influence of drinking or drugs. We are about to add a second vice that leads to the impairment of our minds. In 1999, in Austin, Texas, did 18-year-old Jacqueline really have a choice? No way. Who knew it could get this bad? When one person chooses poorly, another person ALWAYS experiences the repercussions. I warn you that the images are graphic and difficult to look at, but they prove my point.

The victim: a beautiful and vibrant teenage girl named Jacqueline Saburido



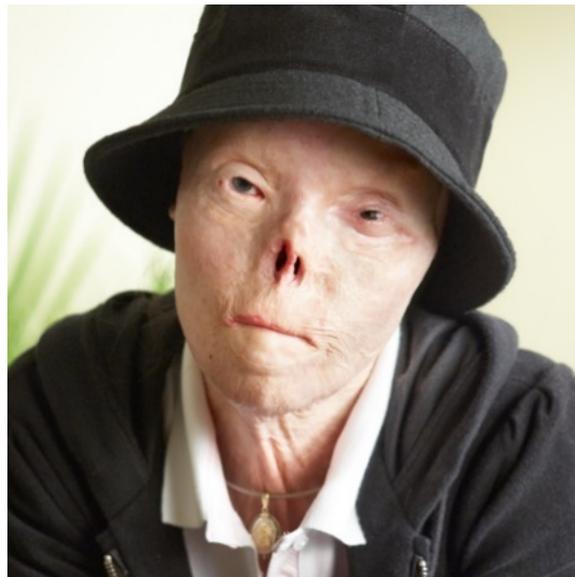
The guilty: a handsome teenage boy named Reggie Stephey



Two lives changed forever because of ...



The Result ...



They say a picture speaks a thousand words. Who knew that Reggie would leave drunk that night? Who knew that Jacqueline would be trapped in a flaming car for 45 seconds before being pulled out of the intense flames? Our roads are bad enough without impairment, and we are

considering adding a second substance, marijuana, to the mix. All it takes is one alcoholic beverage, one puff of a drug, one steering wheel, and a poor choice to drive while intoxicated, and life is never the same again, for you, and a poor unfortunate, innocent soul, or family, who happens to cross your path. **MADD** (*Mothers Against Drunk Driving*), has been fighting this battle since 1980, coming together collectively to attack a big problem on our cities' streets and highways. They have been preaching this same message for years. ***Everyday in Canada, an average of 4 driving deaths involve alcohol and/or drugs.*** "But it was only a few puffs, officer, I assure you." Do we want to open a door and create a bigger problem on our nation's roads and highways? It just doesn't make sense. If only we could all sit down with a mother or father of a deceased child, or even the person who drove inebriated. We would surely have a different perspective on things. We cannot wait and let a fatality become the reason that we "now" choose to walk, to assign a designated driver, or to take a cab or public transit. It is quite clear that we have many options to choose from. Be an excellent example of responsibility, if not for your own children, then surely someone else's. Choose wisely.

"We didn't start the fire." *Billy Joel, 1989.* Now, quite frankly, we are about to do so!

"Drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 years old account for most driver fatality cases. They also happen to be the group that contains the largest proportion of drinking driver fatalities (27.6%) and drug positive related fatalities (26.9%). – Drug Free Kids Canada

ZERO tolerance?

You be the judge.



B. THE REGULATIONS: LEGAL AGE OF MARIJUANA USAGE

Does age really matter in this debate? Open the avenue to legalizing pot, and be ready to open the door to a flood of youth users who, I guarantee, will be "experimenting". And yes, unfortunately, several will develop addictions to marijuana if they are genetically predisposed. It's in the genes; it's in our bloodlines. I am the unfortunate victim, through inheritance, of three mental disorders that kicked my butt all over the place for well over a decade. I didn't have a choice in the matter, and neither will those who become addicted. But, as a country, we do have a choice. Dammit, we do! I am the first to admit that I experimented with alcohol under the legal age of 19. The majority of us did. Why is that? Why did the decision sit well with me, even when I was not supposed to drink? It was surely the fact that my elders were drinking, some abusing, because all in all, it was "okay" to drink alcohol. It was L E G A L. Our parents were "allowed" to drink. Our teachers were allowed. Since our parents and other adults were "allowed" to drink, we thought lighter of it, and many of us experimented with alcohol before the legal age. This happened for two reasons. One, it was not "illegal", and two, our parents were doing it. We knew

we'd only receive a slap on the wrist if we were caught. We would never go to jail. In our minds, alcohol could not be that bad, because, after all, our role models were consuming it. Sip of wine, son? At that age, the consequences of a lifetime of addiction were not even on our minds.

If we pass this law and make drugs legal in Canada, I don't care if the age limit is 25, or 21, or even younger, millions of underage youth nationwide will be trying marijuana. Millions that otherwise would never try it. With drugs being illegal now, the majority of youth hesitate to even go near drugs or to experiment. They don't want to face the law, face criminal conviction, face jail time. Kids today, day after day, avoid experimenting because, quite simply, drugs are I L L E G A L. For this reason alone, most of their parents avoid it as well. If the government legalizes marijuana, we change the perspective of our youth when it comes to drugs. First marijuana, then what next? If society says it's "okay", AND mom and dad use it, why not me? It's worth the slap on the wrist. I'll go for it. Let's jump in the car and cruise. This will become the mentality, I guarantee it. If we legalize drugs, hesitation and apprehension to use and abuse goes out the window. We end up with a problem we will never solve.

C. THE OPTIMUM AGE OF 25

Here's the bottom line. Our parents and elders may choose to use and abuse marijuana once it is legalized, but it's our youth that I fear for the most. Scientists worldwide, in every hospital, and on every website, agree that *children's brains (especially the pre-frontal cortex) do not fully develop until the ripe old age of 25*. We continue to grow lifelong, but major development does not happen until we reach the mature age of 25. If we legalize drugs, making them "okay" for those over 25, or 21, or even younger, what we are essentially saying to our youth is that, like alcohol, since our role models use it, it can't be that bad. So, why not experiment? My parents do, my teachers do, my government does, etc..

It is then that those searching to make an almighty buck will take advantage of our youth. I've seen it already. By legalizing marijuana, the number of "experimenters" is sure to jump up to possibly 85-90%. As it is now, it might be 35-40%, since it is illegal. Pass the law, increase the problem, increase the addictions, increase the abuse of a new fad. We are opening up another opportunity for an individual to become an addict. Legalization will make drugs easier to find, possibly mom's and pop's dresser, and easier to say "yes" to affecting a life forever. If you double the opportunities of developing an addiction, you double the number of addicts. This decision cannot be taken lightly. I think it may already have been by some.

At any age, marijuana "will" stunt brain growth of the prefrontal cortex. The younger the age, the more it will stunt the brain from normal development. Just ask some of the men and woman you see in downtown alleyways, moving in and out of shelters from their early teens. Life is not easy when you're an addict. Addiction leads to abandonment, financial woes beyond anything you can imagine, a lifetime of Narcotics Anonymous, and solitary confinement, along with a sick and desolate mind. You are addicted, and without your fix, reality hits hard. The next drug takes you to a new place, an escape, but only for a little while. Meanwhile, your brain continues to deteriorate. Having spent over a decade trying to heal and get back on my feet again from severe

mental illness, I couldn't even imagine how hard this road would have been carrying an addiction as well. So many do. It is probable that many more will.

Academy Award winner "The Fighter" takes moviegoers through the true story of boxer Micky Ward, who is trying to make a comeback, while being trained by his brother, drug addict, Dicky Eklund. Christian Bale does a phenomenal performance at portraying his character. You'd think he was filmed actually using crack cocaine. A damaged drug addict, Dicky is trying to get his life back on track. I will never forget what Dicky says about being completely addicted to a drug.

"You smoke crack, you know, you feel so much lighter. You know, you feel young ... and then it fades and you gotta get high again, you know." – The Fighter

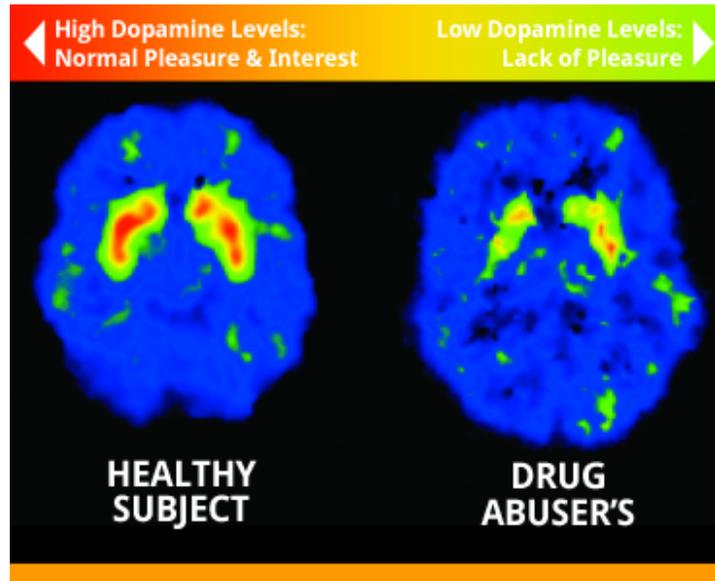
Life is not easy. Any drug creates an escape for the user, a temporary relief, but from there, intensity and consumption increases. With the legalization of marijuana, we stand atop a very slippery slope. Before the age of 25, we know that a brain has not reached its maturity. We rely on healthy choices for our bodies: good foods, exercise, sleep, etc.. If a brain is still trying to grow and reach maturity, how much more of an effect will drugs have on it? How much more would one be affected by substance abuse that directly targets areas of the brain that are trying to achieve normal and healthy growth? There are endless potential dangers to drug use. Young minds will be damaged as they explore and try to fit in with their peers and social crowd. But growing up in the 80's and 90's, there was one major difference. Drugs were illegal and there was no thought of changing these laws. Fortunately, I only had to deal with alcohol. Drugs were a mystery. Today, kids are meddling with prescription medications, and teenagers are dying. Now we want to add marijuana, another addictive substance to our medicine cabinets. It just doesn't make sense. (increase accessibility)

We want to loosen our laws and we think boundaries (regulations) are going to be an effective control. No, we need to smarten up and tighten our rules and laws when it comes to drug use. Drugs destroy. If you're not convinced, we will find out the hard way with legalization of marijuana. Regardless of the decision, I will be able to live with myself, and to sleep comfortably at night, having spoken up. Will you? Let's hope it doesn't come to this. I've already laid out the consequences of this action. Will you make an informed decision? Will you make the right decision?

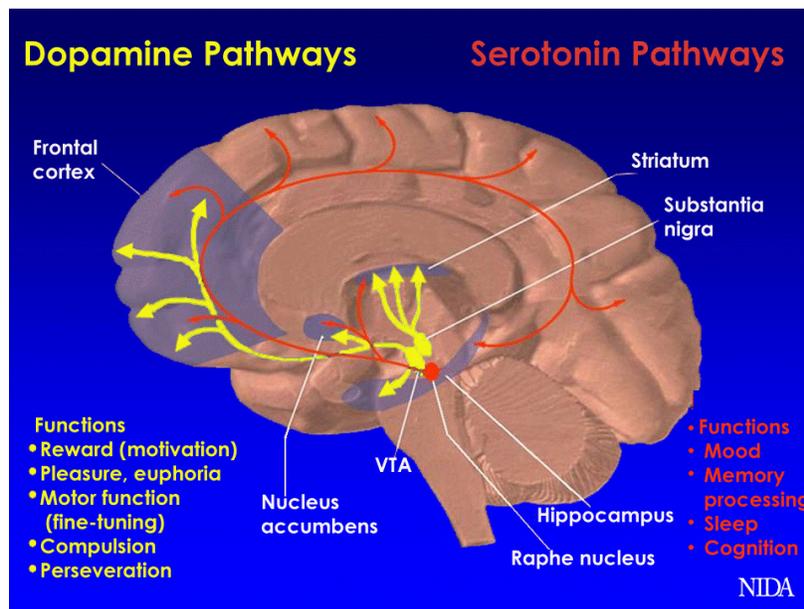
D. WHAT THE HECK IS DOPAMINE? CAN I GO WITHOUT IT?

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain that affects many of our functions such as, seeking rewards, being motivated, finding pleasure, and experiencing euphoria (which is why dopamine is so lacking in those diagnosed with depression). It also affects motor functioning, especially the fine motor skills, and helps us with things such as mood, memory processing, sleep, and cognition. In the Frontal Cortex, dopamine plays a dramatic role. What do drugs do to dopamine levels? They damage them. They take away the balance that keeps our brain fine-tuned and functioning properly, by eventually affecting all the levels. All of the above-mentioned benefits of dopamine are suddenly hindered. They are shaded by the drug. For someone who suffers from a mental illness, like I do, we can never afford to affect negatively our levels of dopamine. For us

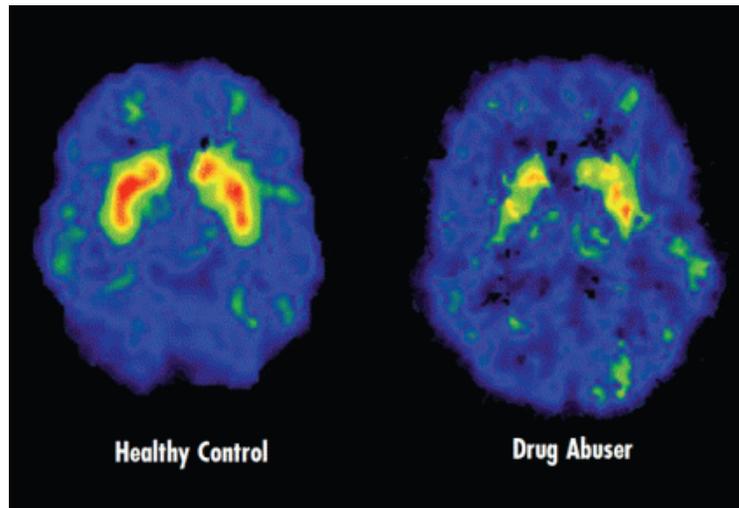
all, dopamine keeps us motivated, on task, and wanting to succeed. That is why so many cannabis users lack motivation, enthusiasm, and are lackadaisical, and listless in the things they do. Performance is adversely affected. I've met many users in the past and can concur that the majority were not driven, even though they wanted to be, were stuck in situations they detested, but could not change. Dopamine is essential. Without it, we lose hope.



Those using marijuana lack the motivation to succeed or feel positive about themselves. As you can see, we need dopamine, and lots of it. It is critical. Dopamine is drastically affected by drug use. Drugs destroy dopamine, and without dopamine, we destroy our brains.



E. DRUGS AND THE ENTIRE BRAIN



Above are the brains of two individuals. For years, scientists worldwide have compared the activity in the brains of drug users AND those who abstain. They have found consistent results between a drug user and one who says no. The drug abuser's brain is clearly affected by the drugs he or she is using. The activity in the brain on the left is clearly higher, more alert, and thus healthier in every way. Between the two, the person who says no has far more promise, with a healthier brain, and with health comes happiness. The brain on the right has been damaged by substance abuse, causing a lower level of activity due to decreases in dopamine, and other neurotransmitters. This triggers several mental illnesses, such as depression. Essentially, drugs kill our brains. We were told as children to "just say no." This has not changed. Are we legalizing drugs because they are all of a sudden good for us? No. This is a "make money" issue, it's an attitudinal issue, it is a "pleasure over prosper" issue that is changing our thinking. We are looking for an escape from the fears, the pressures, the darkness of society, without truly considering the consequences. We are looking for a way to mask our feelings, and keep our weaknesses hidden. That's why many addicts are also suffering from a mental illness. They look for an escape, a change in reality, and BAM, they inhibit their healing tenfold. Historically, through years and years of continual research on our brains, it is clear that *drugs kill our brains*, one cell at a time. Can we afford these losses? No. Those unfortunate members of Alcohol or Narcotics Anonymous, receiving a lifetime of intense, excruciating therapy, only wish they could go back to that exact moment when they said "yes", to change their decision. Through my volunteer work at Royal Ottawa Place, a residence affiliate of the The Royal Mental Health Centre, I have stared into the eyes of drug and alcohol addicts who may never recover. Their lives are damaged, some destroyed for life. No one wants this.

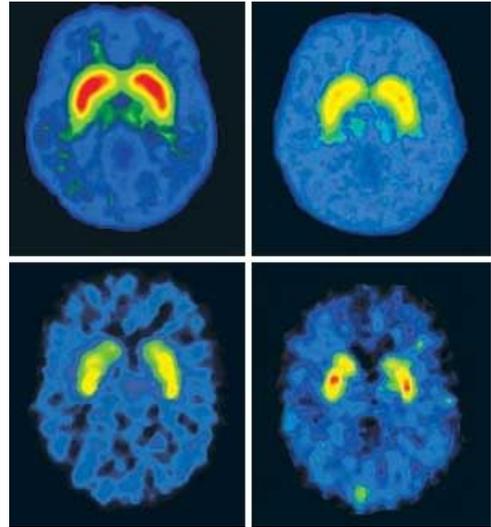
Can we reverse the harmful effects on our brain? The good news is yes. The bad news: it takes years of therapy, hard work, huge amounts of money, loss of friends and family who will turn the other way, pain and extreme agony of withdrawal, possible triggered mental illnesses, and facing a defeated, dishonoured, discouraged individual in the mirror each day. But yes, it can be

reversed. It's the longest and most arduous task one would ever have to take on. It takes a person down, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Is it worth saying yes in the first place?

No matter the age, no matter the dose, no matter the substance, brain images prove that **drugs kill our brains.**

Marijuana causes brain damage. "But I only do it socially." I'll say it again; marijuana causes brain damage. Marijuana clearly shrinks parts of your brain.

Australian research has found, quite clearly, that brain scans of the hippocampus (regulates memory and emotion) and the amygdala (critical role in fear and aggression) were also smaller in heavy users of marijuana, compared to nonusers. The big question is this. Are you an unfortunate soul who has a predisposed addiction to the substance? Do you really want to find this out through using of this drug?



F. MENTAL ILLNESS, ADDICTIONS, AND LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

I feel the need to reiterate a few points from above. Marijuana is a death wish for someone who suffers from a mental illness, especially depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. The last two mentioned have symptoms of psychosis, and drugs affect these disorders even more intensely, disrupting the dopamine system. Marijuana is like giving a mental illness sufferer the complete opposite of a medication that is meant to help them find healing. It is like a punch to the gut that knocks them over, and leads to demise. Without strong support around them, drugs can lead them to the streets or to suicide. Drugs and mental illness don't mix. They never have, yet illness sufferers often reach for marijuana to help "relieve" some of their negative thoughts. They only find themselves further behind once the high is lifted. Marijuana is a depressant. There are so many undiagnosed sufferers out there, especially on the street, who are abusing drugs to find a relief from the mental anguish they are experiencing. Only thing is, they are digging a deeper hole, and jumping in. The hole gets deeper with every puff or drug they consume. They are getting the opposite of help. They are getting hurt. Their sickness gets worse, as does their addiction. Passing this law makes it ok for us to use marijuana. But what about those who have yet to be diagnosed, or are actually suffering from mental illness? Their brains are already damaged by a mental illness. Now add the drug. Can you see the problem? 1 in 5 suffer from a mental illness. 20% of our population! We are handing them a drug that could destroy them, instead of handing them the medical prescription they so badly need.

In my journey from the worst days of my life, I took myriad steps to find hope and healing in my life. In 2001, I lay in the darkness of my parents' basement for well over two months. Two months! The worst experience of my life. I felt paralyzed. I didn't walk into the light for well

over a month. The only thing that entered my mind and body during those days was mom's chicken soup, and my lithium medication, having been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Lithium was a drug meant to lift me out of extreme depression. I wished at the time for a miraculous healing, but getting better was a long and arduous journey with many delays, setbacks, and figurative punches that nearly knocked me out for good. Healing was moment by moment, excruciating in every way, month by month, and year by year: over a decade of losing my life in every way. I had to regain a new life perspective. I had to find hope, faith, and healing. These would help me to carry on. Marijuana would not have allowed this to happen. It leads to performance impairment, decrease in brain functions, and a lack of will. Ultimately, this makes healing impossible.

As I've indicated already, 1 in 5 Canadians suffer from a mental illness, and/or an addiction. And we are considering legalizing marijuana? Marijuana will destroy someone who suffers from a mental illness and/or an addiction, especially those suffering from psychotic disorders. Marijuana will also destroy one who suffers from any type of hereditary addiction. Marijuana will also destroy the brain of a user, whether they are an addict or not. ***Drugs kill our brains.***

I can't express this any clearer: approximately 7.3 million Canadian sufferers will be gravely affected by the passing of this law. They will need doctors, medications, therapies of many kinds. They will need to find compassion and acceptance for themselves, and from others, and they will need to avoid complete isolation, or they will die. We are increasing the chances of a sufferer and/or addict receiving an inhibiting drug that will make healing impossible. This is what it comes down to. We are all responsible for the negative consequences if we decide to legalize marijuana. I want to see my son or daughter, or mom, or dad reach for an appropriate prescription, and not a toke that will inhibit their healing.

Legalize and realize; many drug takers use drugs to relieve the effects of a mental illness that was triggered long before. Relief should only come from a qualified doctor, prescribed medication, loving support, and treatment. We do not want drugs to become a permanent crutch for anyone. A brain will NEVER heal as long as an inappropriate drug is being consumed. Mixing marijuana with prescription drugs is a death sentence. This renders the prescription medication useless.

G. YOUR PASSPORT PLEASE?

Don't let the length of this section fool you. It is just as relevant. I love travelling. I haven't done it enough, having dealt with many years of illness. Travelling was not on my mind at the time. Surviving was. My dad surprised me a few months ago when he mentioned the following fact. Are Canadians aware, that if you have smoked pot, weed, marijuana, whatever you want to call it, you can be prevented access to the United States? It has not been legalized in the majority of the states. You can be stopped at the border and denied access to the US because you are a user, an abuser, or you've even experimented in the past. People are randomly pulled aside, and scrutinized to determine if they have consumed marijuana at any time in their past. Now, I assure you this. The level of testing and scrutinizing will be higher than present if marijuana is legalized in Canada. Think of all the beautiful places you can visit in the US. If you are going to be an

honest, true Canadian citizen, and you drive through the border, you will have to tell the crossing guards that you use/have used marijuana. Just preparing you. My integrity, my dignity, my reputation, and my credibility are worth far more.



H. UNDERGROUND MARKET

What is the real reason we are on the cusp of deciding to legalize marijuana? Can someone tell me? Why is it even necessary? No one has given me a reasonable answer to this question.

We can deny it all we want, and pretend the problem will not arise, but the bottom line is this: an addict will do anything to find the drug they need. A mental illness sufferer will look for an escape to their mental anguish, one that is far more affordable. A teenager will do everything to fit in with the crowd. Believe me. If an addiction develops, withdrawal is the most intense, excruciating experience an addict or sufferer must go through, and in a sick state of mind, this individual will do anything possible to ensure they have their next toke, or sniff, or injection. Who knows this the most? The Underground Market.

Let's not be naïve or childish here. The Underground Drug Market is alive and well. It is the hidden industry that none of us sees, but it affects every single one of us, every day of our lives, especially the vulnerable: addicts, sufferers, and our youth. It consumes many, as they lose everything they own, and all they've achieved. It begins with a simple "yes". That's how it all starts, and it can happen at the youngest of ages.

What the underground market knows is this; they have a winning product. They have a product that keeps on selling, day after day, year after year, because it hangs on addiction, and with addictions come withdrawal, one of the most powerful forces in our body. These thoughts and feelings literally destroy the body and brain. If drugs are legalized, we open a whole can of worms that will affect each of us, and especially our youth who are not educated enough yet to make informed decisions. They look up to us as role models. Many kids will look up to role models who smoke up and get high. Legalize pot, and we will head there. When our government, the leaders of our country, our citizen role models say yes, how can I, as a teacher, or a parent, persuade or convince our children to say no.

The underground market has a motto it follows. It is this: *why stop at marijuana?* There are other drugs out there that the market will do everything to get you hooked on, because after all, a high is a high, and when you are high, in time, you may want to get higher. This is a reality, and you have seen from my evidence the effect that drugs have on our brains, and will have on our society if we legalize marijuana.

Where do addictions start? How do they begin? The answer is anywhere, anytime. They begin at that high school party you attended, or that job you worked for, or among your aunts, uncles, or even parents. They begin because they are there, and this year, they will make their presence if legalization is passed. We are about to make them “okay”. The Underground Drug Market is ready to pounce and feed upon its prey. An addict, a user, a sufferer, or even a first time experimenter, may end up doing just about anything to reach another high, or a higher one. Believe it. Not every user will, but for 1 in 5, it will destroy them. Drugs have no favourites, they prey on our youth, on our addicted, on our sufferers, and they destroy. What a bright lure for the “behind the scene” dealers and marketers who will want to make their almighty buck. It’s an all out, “I don’t care” mentality. The drug industry is massive. Do we want our youth, our society, our country to be faced with a battle they cannot win?

Last, but not least, if anything can convince you of the dangers of legalization, maybe it will be this. The strength of marijuana in 2017 is much more potent than drugs that were taken during the Woodstock era. Higher potency, higher highs, higher likelihood of drug transference. That does not bode well for those inheriting an addiction or illness. What about drugs like opioids, such as fentanyl, which in many cases is mixed with other drugs, making it even more potent and deadly? We have heard the worst stories and statistics about many destructive drugs that are destroying lives in only the smallest of amounts. Is this a chance worth taking? If we make marijuana legal, we can’t deny that we open up that possibility.

IN CONCLUSION

I am an educator. I am a son, a brother, and an uncle. I’m on the front lines. As an occasional teacher, I have educated students from kindergarten up to grade 12 for the last 15 years, while also writing books. Throughout the years, even back to my childhood, I’ve seen the effects drugs have on us, and fortunately, I have not been impacted by them. In the schools, I watch teenagers enter school “high”, and leave school “high”. They find a way to hide it, to sneak it, to embezzle it, and to destroy their brains. Especially if their parents are users. These numbers will certainly increase if we legalize marijuana.

Think about our youth. They look up to us as their leaders, their coaches, their teachers, their parents. We are role models, like the great heroes of our proud country, such as Terry Fox. What would Terry do? Can you imagine Terry Fox endorsing pot legalization? Do we really want to take a step back? Do we really want our students attending acclaimed universities only to fall into a habit of smoking pot in smoke-filled dormitories because the law says its okay, because they believe it to be harmless, and because their own parents demonstrate that drugs are okay. This could ruin them. I’ve seen it happen, especially in my first year of university. I said “no” and became a proud graduate. Even then, smoke filled some dormitory rooms, but 80% of us were hesitant to try. Many of us avoided the temptation. It was illegal! Of those who used and abused, some fell off the map, leaving university. Drugs and school definitely don’t mix. Didn’t your teacher tell you this? Didn’t your parents? Then why isn’t our government doing so? Legalize marijuana, and that 80% of us who hesitated will become experimenters, and from there, for many, this road can lead to utter devastation. For others, the damage may not destroy, but it will definitely affect them adversely. Drugs kill brains.

I understand that our country, our beautiful country, Canada, is experiencing extreme debt. We are struggling financially. I get it. We need money, we want to create taxes, but with drugs? At what cost? What I don't get is why we need to pass a law that will make money for our country at the expense of our youth, and our society as a whole. We are willing to destroy our image, our potential, our reputation as a world leading country. A reputation we've held strong for 150 years. What message do we want to give our children? What message do we want to instill? We may increase our funding and pay down some of our debt, but at what cost? The stereotypes of marijuana alone are 100% true. We have all watched good men and women wasting away, puff after puff, complaining about a job and a life they hated, wanting more in their life, yet too stoned to ever be motivated to find success. They blew pay cheque after pay cheque, on more drugs and more drinking, which go so well hand-in-hand. Some of them would delve into more dangerous drugs like cocaine, to reach higher. Is this what we want for our children? These types of role models? I say a profound NO. I want my kids to look up to me as they do Terry Fox.

I don't want this for our youth, for my godson, my nephews, my cousins, my students! This is not a life I want for my country. Never. Ever. We all have to make a choice when it comes to our health. Legalization of marijuana leads to choices that go beyond the point of no return, where they scrounge to feed their fix, or eventually take their lives. Drugs are powerful, and like guns, they do kill. Drugs are strong enough that they will nudge someone down the wrong path.

It's NOT their fault. It is not the addict's fault, it is not the mental illness sufferer's fault. Someone had to draw the "short straw" in their family. It is no one's fault to be struck with addiction or illness. It is no one's fault, it is genetic. However, we have to take fault as a society if we **provide** the drug. We will be at fault for not providing a safe haven, a better environment for finding hope and healing. Passing this law and making marijuana readily available and easy to access, will clearly lead to more hurt for addicts, for sufferers, for "occasional users", for experimenters. Anyone. We are presenting many of our victims with a "can't win" scenario. They can't win. They are losing already. Isn't that enough? Shouldn't we be providing healing rather than harming?

I have presented you with the evidence, fool-proof arguments: the cold hard truth. I laid out the facts. Drugs kill, drugs eat at the brain, drugs compromise the brain, drugs hamper the brain and, ultimately, drugs kill the brain. Drugs do not allow someone to live to their full potential, to be able to contribute positively to society, with a healthy and productive mind. With drugs, we can never become the person we are destined to be. No matter what drug regulations are implemented as "safeguards", they cannot remove the dangerous effects marijuana has on the brain, and damage to society. With higher drug prevalence in our country, how can we be there for each other, with acceptance and compassion? With drugs, we feel alone. Drugs can turn a collective "us" into a solitary "I". With drugs, we are only in it for ourselves. We can't possibly think that a law like this will benefit society positively. This is not freedom. Freedom is about sharing, collaborating, and living the way we were destined to live. It's about healthy living, mind and body, keeping free of dangerous life-threatening toxins.

I say no. The legalization of marijuana in Canada should not be passed. We cannot make this a money grab. Our country may recover from some of our financial debt, but in making a decision to say "yes", we will lose the integrity of a country that has fought for liberty, freedom, and unity

for 150 years. Canada is my country, one I've been proud of my entire life. I am blessed to be in a country that has paved a path for me, and given me multitudes of opportunity to use my healthy mind to make smart informed decisions that contribute to the health and well-being of my country. My choices have always contributed, never inhibited this amazing country we live in. I've stated my case. You have now reached the fork in the road. Please make a decision that takes into account everything I've shared with you. This is your own decision. Please make the smart choice, the one that makes your home a place to be proud of. I want to be true to what I believe, and stand for, when I lift my head proudly to sing our National Anthem:

***God keep our land, glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee;***

For you Mom, who taught me when to say no.

INDEX OF WEBSITES

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