

## A SLAVE TO MARIJUANA

I was the last person in my circle of friends to smoke dope. I was afraid it would lead to other drugs, so I stayed away from it until I was 15. I loved the way I felt when I finally tried it, and smoked it whenever anyone had it. After moving out on my own, I started buying it and before long I was smoking 24/7. Everyone in my life smoked dope. I felt everyone in the world SHOULD smoke dope. Everything I did, I did stoned.

After three years of daily smoking, I was able to acknowledge that I was an addict. All my friends smoked like me. Then I met someone who wasn't an addict, and we started a relationship. When that relationship ended I was off and running, smoking all day, every day. I thought true decadence was lighting up before I'd even gotten out of bed in the morning. After five years of that, I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. Every morning I woke up feeling tired and groggy. During the previous 15 years I did plenty of drinking and other drugs. I hated the way alcohol made me feel, with throwing up and blackouts and hangovers the next day. Until I got clean, it wasn't obvious to me that pot gave me hangovers too.

Pot has seriously affected my memory. It's not easy for me to remember how it was when I was stoned all day, every day. I knew that I couldn't function without pot. Though I'd quit drinking and driving long ago, I couldn't drive without pot. I'd get out of my car and think no one could smell the pot. I was also in big denial about pot being illegal. I don't remember ever really being scared about getting thrown in jail, which was in reality always a pos-

sibility. Another denial was the health consequences. I was a “health nut” who ate vegetarian and exercised regularly. My mother once confronted me, asking how I could smoke dope when I wanted to be healthy. My addiction couldn’t let in the truth that dope was worse for my lungs than tobacco would be if I smoked cigarettes.

In my job as a legal secretary, I just happened to work in a building where my boss and the two lawyers upstairs all smoked dope in their offices! It was heaven. If a client were going to come in, we’d smoke on the roof of the building. Luckily, my boss quit before I did, or else I’m not sure I could have stayed in that job after I quit smoking.

As I was approaching my 32nd birthday, I realized I’d been smoking dope half my life. I knew I didn’t want the next 16 years to be the same. That was the beginning of being willing to change. It was a definite miracle where grace happened.

When I tried to quit, it was really hard. I tried for a number of years and I couldn’t. I did everything it talks about in the book *Life with Hope*. I wouldn’t buy it or I’d promise to not smoke when home alone. When I didn’t buy it, I’d just go visit friends who I knew always had pot. I made a lot of promises to quit, and broke all of them. Every time I set myself up to quit on a certain date, I’d just smoke even more dope in anticipation of quitting. What was most insane about this behavior is that I wasn’t even getting high anymore. But I had to smoke to stop the craving. Oftentimes I would wonder if I’d smoked, and would have to see if there was a roach in the ashtray to know if I had or not. Since my throat hurt all the time, I started using a water pipe to smoke.

At the end I was just smoking to stop the craving. Even though smoking pot wasn't fun, I couldn't stop. I've heard that one of the meanings of the word addiction is slavery, and I was truly a slave to marijuana.

It was a nightmare and I must have scared myself enough to share with someone that I wanted to quit because someone told me about a twelve-step recovery program for drug addicts. At my first meeting, there was a cake and a woman sharing her story about being a junkie and a prostitute. I couldn't relate. I looked for, and found, all the differences between myself and the other people in the meeting, and decided the program wasn't for me.

I didn't have a lot of myths in my head like "it's not an addictive drug," or "it's a harmless herb" because I knew it wasn't. I knew I couldn't stop. Six months after my first meeting I dragged myself back to a second twelve-step meeting where I got the sense that I could do it with other people. That's what these people were doing in this meeting. They were helping each other and supporting each other to stay clean. I listened and I heard fellowship. I realized that, like them, I am an addict and, like them, I can't quit by myself. I need the help of others. I had a stash of dope in the trunk of my car I had bought for a friend. I pinched a little out of the bag the next day, and smoked it. That was the last time I ever smoked dope.

It was suggested I go to a twelve-step recovery program for alcoholics, which I did. It was a good place to learn the program, but I never quite felt like I belonged. But I kept going...to both kinds of twelve-step meetings. I quit seeing the friends I smoked with. I remember visiting one friend, and she supported me by not smoking in my

presence, but I realized we had nothing to talk about when there was no dope between us.

Going to meetings enabled me to make new friends who I could relate to. Lucky for me, when I was about 4 to 5 months sober, I was in a meeting when a man made an announcement about a new program for marijuana addicts. Once I began going to MA meetings, I was home. MA enabled me to feel like I belonged in the twelve-step recovery program for alcoholics as well. Addiction is addiction.

When I got clean, I didn't know a thing about discipline or letting go. One of the first slogans that I latched onto was "One Day at a Time." Though pot wasn't working and I knew I wanted to quit, I couldn't imagine living the rest of my life without pot. But I could do it one day at a time, and I did. Slowly the craving left me and it has not returned.

Right away, I knew the first part of the First Step was true for me: I am absolutely powerless over marijuana. But I didn't think my life was unmanageable because I had a job, a boyfriend, two cats, and an apartment. When I came to the Second Step, I had a hard time because I was scared and skeptical of the Higher Power stuff. I had given up on God when I found pot in high school. Pot had been my Higher Power. I knew I didn't believe in religion, but I couldn't understand the difference between spirituality and religion when I first got clean.

When I was a child, I was told that God saw all, was everywhere, and knew everything. Since I believed God was an old man in heaven, I knew that he couldn't be everywhere at one time. I believed that God looked in on me for a couple of seconds every month or two; there were just too many people for him to be concerned about me.

But I had to watch my thoughts and my actions just in case he was looking — God as Super Spy.

I wanted the peace I saw in the people in the meetings, and decided to try this Higher Power thing. I sat on my meditation bench (which I'd never used while getting stoned), and recited the first three Steps and the serenity prayer to the wall. I felt silly, but I did this every day. Eventually I began to feel the presence of a loving Higher Power that cared about me. This was very different from believing God was outside me and didn't have time for me.

It was a thrilling experience to start a relationship with a Higher Power that I felt cared for me. I spent the first four years of my recovery trying to figure out what my Higher Power is. I first imagined my Higher Power to be two oak trees holding up a hammock. I would lie in the hammock being held. Finally I gave up trying to figure out my Higher Power. What's been more important for me is coming to believe that Higher Power is everywhere, in everything, in all of life, in MY life.

The first time I did the Third Step I truly believed this was a one-shot deal. I thought I would make the decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of a Higher Power and I would be turned over for life. I didn't realize that, like staying clean, this was a one day at a time concept. Every day I need to turn my will and my life over to my Higher Power. Every day I need to make a commitment to stay clean and sober.

For most of my life I had been very hard on myself, always trying to make myself better. I never felt good enough. I believed if I just worked hard, I would be good enough and then all my problems would go away and everything

would be fine from then on. When I got to the program, I felt ready to do the Fourth Step right away so that I could hurry and “graduate.” While I was in the middle of it I got my first sponsor who made me start over with the First Step. At first I didn’t like that, but she helped me see that I needed to have my life in the care of a Higher Power before I went digging around inside myself. I worked on it for weeks and weeks. Luckily I went to a meeting where an old-timer said your Fourth Step shouldn’t take more than an hour. I went home and finished within an hour. Shortly thereafter I read it to my sponsor, which is highly recommended. I’ve heard someone say that sitting on your Fourth Step is like having a bomb in your desk.

One thing I’ve noticed is that the first time people do a Fourth Step it is NEVER fearless. There’s a lot of trepidation in this Step. I’ve seen people wait years to do their Fourth Step because they’re so afraid of what they’ll find. What I found was that I was just like everybody else. I was able to see how critical I was of myself and others, and how that hurt me. It helped me let go of a lot of guilt and shame and be more free in my life. I was able to quit thinking about things that used to gnaw at me. If anything ever came up that I remembered later, I would do another one. The first four years of my recovery I did a Fourth Step every year.

When you know you need to do a Fourth Step, but you can’t focus on it, write a list of all the people that bother you and write down your judgment about all these people. When you’re done take away their name and insert yours. I did this and it worked. It’s hard to swallow, but the things that bother me about other people are the things that bother me about myself.

It's suggested in the program that you get a sponsor to help you work the Steps. A sponsor is someone who has gone through the Steps and has something that you want. My first sponsor was the first person in my life that I felt didn't judge me, and who accepted and loved me unconditionally. At the end of every phone conversation she would tell me that she loved me. It felt weird. She helped me learn to trust people for the first time in a very long time.

Over the years I've come to believe that the Sixth and Seventh Steps are about learning to rely on my Higher Power to help me become aware of and remove my shortcomings. My second sponsor told me that she didn't believe you ever got rid of your character defects; you just recognize them sooner. With the Sixth and Seventh Steps I remember that I don't have to fix myself. Hooray! For all of my life before recovery and a lot of time in recovery I was always trying to make myself better so that I would be lovable and acceptable. The Sixth and Seventh Steps remind me that I am loved by my Higher Power no matter what I do or who I am.

The first part of the Eighth Step seemed like an easy thing to do because I'm good at making lists. I could make a list of the people I had harmed. The hard part is becoming willing to make the amends, but all this Step requires is that I pray for the willingness to be willing to make these amends. I've had mixed reactions when working the ninth Step. Most of the time I've been able to renew relationships or make them stronger by doing the ninth Step. Once I lost a friend when I made an amends for something I did that he wasn't aware I'd done. It's taken me several years to realize that that was a gift as well, because that relationship needed to end.

The Tenth Step is something I practice daily. Now that I've gotten rid of a lot of the wreckage of my past, if I do or say something that isn't right, I can feel it right away, and I don't want to carry it around. I make an amends as soon as possible. I've spent too much of my life feeling bad about myself to want to continue doing it another day.

I also practice the Eleventh Step every day. I pray for knowledge of my Higher Power's will for me, and for the power to carry that out. Meditation is something I practice daily. It has been very important in quieting the negative chatter in my mind, and increasing the volume of my gentle and kind inner voice. I rarely get my mind to stop thinking during meditation, but making the effort to sit quietly brings me a lot of peace.

I believe practicing these principles in all our affairs, in the Twelfth Step, is something that comes naturally from working the Steps. Carrying this message to other marijuana addicts is something that I do through service, sponsorship, and sharing my experience, strength, and hope in meetings. As I've heard recently, if you want to do service, but don't want to make a commitment, go to meetings. Attending meetings is doing service.

If you don't want to smoke pot again, I'm here to tell you that you don't ever have to. No matter what happens you don't have to pick up. I am deeply grateful that Marijuana Anonymous meetings exist, because this is where I feel most connected. I hear my Higher Power through other people. I can't do recovery alone. Learning to live one day at a time, life on life's terms, without pot, isn't always easy. But it's a LOT easier than being a slave to marijuana.