

I have a beautiful, charming talented son who could charm the pigeons from the trees and sell ice to Eskimos. Then when he was about 14 he began to smoke cannabis with friends from school. At the time I was not overly concerned, talked to him about it and he was at a boarding school with a very strict drug policy, which he had to sign up to in order to remain at the school. This included random urine tests. He sailed through his GCSEs and entered the sixth form for his A levels and began to get into trouble again, my husband and I flew back from overseas several times to intercede with the school. In the holidays he would spend all day in bed or go out and return smelling of tobacco but by now he was non communicative and increasingly difficult. He was also physically a powerful young man, tall and quite fit as he managed to represent his school in first teams for all the traditional sports. Maybe this is why none of really saw the signs. He failed his A levels, lost his University place and came home and continued in much the same as William until he had a massive row with his father and ran away from home. Six weeks later the mother of one of his school friends called me to tell me he was living with them. Eventually he returned but it was on his terms, love me or I am leaving again, which we tolerated hoping he would "grow out of it". Two years later he seemed to have turned his life around, got himself a place at University by himself. There he met a wonderful young woman who loved and supported him through his studies and he emerged with a credibly 2:1 closely missing a first. However once back in London he became a different person, he finished his relationship and began drinking heavily and smoking cannabis, and I think he may even have progressed onto harder drugs, although he continued to hold a job down. He became immersed in the City culture and would go out on a Thursday drinking, drugging and smoking until the early hours. He had been living in a flat with ex-school friends but asked to come home to save money so he could purchase his own property to which we agreed on the condition he saved his money. We think that he was probably evicted for his appalling behaviour and drug habit. At this point he was earning more than I do. He began to complain of stomach pains, had serious headaches, joint pains, and his Thursday sessions became Thursday and Friday, then Saturday, Sunday and so-on. He brought strangers home and we never knew who might be in our house. My husband is a doctor and we began taking all our possessions to bed with us, and locking ourselves in, if we went out in the evening he took his case or put his prescription pads in his jacket pocket. We began staying in all the time as we were frightened of who he might bring home or what might happen if we were not there. He changed his job, stating he was bored and managed to get an even better paid one and a manager who was amazing. We offered everything to him, rehab, medical, pastoral care, counseling, support but to no avail and his behavior deteriorated until we could not understand why he had not been fired, and we still do not understand this aspect. Finally he became verbally abusive to me accusing me of terrible things and I was frightened for my physical safety. That last weekend he was at my computer (why as he had his own I do not know) and spilled Vodka and Red Bull over it. This was the last straw and we had to ask him to leave. We told him we loved him but that we could not live with him anymore. We offered to help him purchase something or assist with deposits and /or rent. He left very early the next morning taking only an overnight bag with him. I spent the next couple of weeks trying to find him I even walked around London looking at anyone in doorways or sleeping rough in case it was him. He has not gone quite as far down the road as William, but I have no doubt that cannabis changed his personality for ever and that he is an addict. Apparently he is clean at the moment and holding down a job and sharing a flat with another cannabis smoking ex-school friend, so I expect that the cycle will begin again. Meanwhile like Debra my heart is broken and a day does not pass when I do not grieve for my son, I miss him so much but like her have to accept that he may never find his way home again. He might as well be dead, but I have no grave to grieve at and I live everyday with the knowledge that he blames me and that I may never see him again and I am so very very sad. I do not understand how our political leaders can be so short sighted as to legalise cannabis when there has been many many research studies that

confirm that it causes personality changes. I do not do the "if only" because I honestly do not think I could have done anything differently, but what a waste. I still wish he would come home.