

I went through college life in the early 80s with people around me smoking cannabis and seemingly okay. I tried it once but to be honest I did not like the feeling I got from it - all woozy and sleepy - not my idea of having a fun time at a party. I had no thoughts either positive or negative about it - it was your choice if you wanted it or not. Years later, I never knew I would be in a situation where my life had disintegrated into a living nightmare. When I met my partner 10 years ago, he was very kind and caring. He would maybe have a few drinks at the weekend and was usually easygoing with everyone. Trevor had joined the army aged 16 and had had seen his fair share.....two tours of Northern Ireland where he was injured following an assault on his patrol. He was airlifted out but after two of his mates were killed. A year later and recovered he then followed behind the marines at Goose Green in the Falklands. I met up with him 15 years later. He had been through several jobs and travelled overseas but there was a restlessness about him - he felt more settled away from the crowds and enjoyed walking in the mountains, etc to keep him calm. Sometimes he suffered nightmares which were flashbacks to what he had seen and dealt with. In many ways, his reactions were not different to those who had served during other wars. Generally, life was good and happy. One evening at a party, someone offered him some cannabis - he was 38 at the time - never having tried it and previously having dismissed it - he thought - Why not? At first, I had no worries as he occasionally had a smoke at the weekend at his friend's house; but as time went on.....he changed. Being at his friends and smoking cannabis became his priority at the weekend. He would say he would be back in a couple of hours - but never returned until the early hours of the morning. We had a son by this time and I was becoming concerned. We talked but he didn't think it was a problem. He would leave it out for a week or so but then he would meet up with "friends" not our mutual friends but new ones he had made.....some were dealers and others were involved in thieving and selling stolen goods. Life became hard, the jobs were lost through him not being able to get up and function at work, the debts mounted. Trevor's days started with a joint - now skunk and ended the same way. I didn't get much sleep as he often stayed up late and wanted some company. I was up early to drop our son at nursery before I went to work and my mood became grumpier as I became exhausted. Any discussion would transform into a heated argument and he became more and more aggressive verbally. Within a few months, he was insisting that I had to be seeing someone else as I was no longer interested in him.....I was so stressed and exhausted it was the very last thing on my mind.....I wanted everything back to how it was and I could not see how to turn it round. Soon he was checking my phone, accompanying me to drop our son at nursery and then following me to work. Later when I came home, he would say that he saw how men were looking at me and that he heard them saying things about me as we passed. He was checking the house to find where I had hidden my personal phone that I thought he didn't know about.....By this time, I was confused and scared and his aggressive behaviour was becoming unreasonable. One day he stepped over the line and assaulted me - punching, kicking, pulling my hair out and holding me down so that I could not leave the house. The following day, I managed to pack a few things and my son, fled to my parents and went to the police station to report him. When they arrested him, they said that the smell of skunk was overpowering and they had to leave him for several hours before questioning. He was convicted of assault and had to undergo an anger management course as part of his probation. In order to attend the course - he had to be drug free. Two and a half years later.....he is still drug free and has completed his course and probation. We went through family mediation so he could keep contact with our son.....if he had not had a strong bond with our son - he probably would not have made it. There were times he wanted to walk away and lose himself with his skunky friends and it was a hard process to go through. He now lives nearby in the next town, holds down a steady job and sees our son regularly. I can see him now as the man I met all those years ago, although his face has aged greatly. Someone said that it was because he had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that he had his melt down. However, before taking cannabis, he had managed very well for 15 years and knew when he was getting stressed

and that he needed to deal with it. His de-stresser was to go walking in the hills, camping and generally getting away from it all - something he now takes pleasure in doing again. He now shares that time with our son. Cannabis can be so destructive - everyone needs to be clear on what it can do to you and the differences between the cannabis smoked in the "hippy" times and the modern day skunk which is so potent.