

The Gazette

— PART 3 —

TEEN: COLORADO VOTERS WERE DUPED INTO LEGALIZING RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

“The weed, not alcohol or tobacco, came first, and the more I used, the more I drank, and the more pills I eventually popped. That doesn’t happen to everyone who uses weed, but it happens to enough of us. It’s a gateway.” — Kaleb, 19, a former addict

While Kaleb blames himself for getting high the first time, he also recognizes that he was a 14-year-old who believed his friend’s parents when they said marijuana wasn’t addictive and was safer to use than alcohol. The couple had medical marijuana cards and diverted their stash to their son and his friends, Kaleb said.

His experience is consistent with research conducted by Dr. Christian Thurstone, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Colorado, and his colleagues: 74 percent of Denver teens in substance treatment and 18 percent of Denver teens not in substance treatment reported getting the drug from people with a state-issued license.

When he turned 18, Kaleb wasted no time getting a “red card” — and dealing the drug. He found plenty of customers at schools. ...

To land the state’s permission to use weed, Kaleb said he headed to a Colorado Springs business that sold medical marijuana evaluations for \$65. He fabricated a story about hurting his knee while playing football at school — a sport he’d never played at school. The doctor Kaleb briefly met diagnosed him with tendinitis and recommended what essentially became an unlimited supply of marijuana, hash oil and THC-infused foods and drinks.

By then, Kaleb knew where to find coupons and special offers of pot freebies and paraphernalia in the free glossy magazines that were always stacked in local convenience stores.

Though the state permits medical marijuana users to designate only one “caregiver,” or supplier of the drug, Kaleb said he maintained “memberships” at 12-15 dispensaries at a time.

Fueled by constant buy-2-grams-get-1-free specials, Kaleb quickly amassed a cannabis stash. Each day he dealt to other kids, he said, he typically cleared \$1,083 in profit — much of which fed his own drug habit, which had advanced from smoking marijuana to consuming hash oil. The oil, which can be vaporized or infused into foods and drinks, typically starts at 85 percent THC. That’s about 40 times the potency of the weed of Woodstock, which was around 2 percent THC. Even 1 ounce of the oil can impair hundreds of people. Kaleb said he consumed hash oil five to eight times a day just to feel normal.

“It’s the crack of marijuana,” he said.

Use of hash oil is a relatively new and increasingly popular trend that can cause severe reactions, such as panic and psychosis, Thurstone said. Kaleb said he saw those reactions in friends.

Kaleb's newfound drive to take a stand against cannabis in all its forms is fueled in part by anger he says he's determined to channel to spare other people — especially youths — the problems he experienced. His use of hash oil really did him in, he said — but not so much that he didn't notice the adults in his life who essentially shrugged their shoulders about his marijuana use.

There were the traffic stops, when waves of pungent pot smoke billowed from his car and into the faces of police officers who said nothing when Kaleb produced his red card. There were the teachers who winked and joked about how he'd obviously "had a really nice lunch" when he returned to their classrooms so stoned he'd just put his head on his desk. There were the parents of friends who liked toking with high schoolers.

And then there were Kaleb's parents, who, after years of pleading and efforts to find him treatment, finally asked him to leave their home a couple of months before his high school graduation. Chief among their fears was that he would be a harmful influence on his younger brother.

"That was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life, but I know it's what had to be done to save his life and to protect the rest of our family," said Lisa Taylor, Kaleb's mother. **"What really gets me about this entire issue is that our country is rushing to legalize a drug under the guise of helping the very sick and the dying and the ruse that everyone agrees kids have no business using marijuana. But the truth is that we're just clearing the way for more kids to become addicts."**

About a year after being forced to strike out on his own, Kaleb decided to fight for his sobriety.

"I was losing my family and losing my motivation," he said. "I was seeing people a lot older than me using weed and working in the same low-level jobs as me and being perfectly content. I just saw where my future was heading, and it scared me. I texted my mom for help." ■

OPPOSE the Decriminalization of Marijuana SB 753 & HB 218



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