

Greetings. My name is Rusty Carr. I live in Mount Airy, MD in legislative district 4. I'm 65 years old, retired, a medical patient since 2018 and a caregiver. This is my cannabis story.

I smoked cannabis occasionally in high school and became a daily smoker in college. I returned to occasional use after graduation and quit at age 25 due to the hassles of cannabis being illegal conflicting with a professional career in the Information Technology industry.

As an active skier, my knees suffered a lot of wear. After quitting cannabis, I began to experience chronic knee pain. I was on 800mg Motrin for years until I tried cortisone and then surgery. Surgery provided major relief, but the pain is always there and getting worse. Although I have a high tolerance for pain, there are secondary effects like loss of sleep. I also experience frequent muscle spasms at night and chronic muscle tension. I'm generally in good health, but I'm old enough for wear and tear.

In addition to my Information Technology career, I also taught skiing and snowboarding part time. After 21 years of teaching at the local resort Whitetail, I was given a random drug test. Because this test would have resulted in my termination had I used cannabis days prior to the test and regardless of whether I was impaired on the job, I quit. I pissed. I passed. Then I quit. We should not allow random testing for metabolites. I spent more money than I made at that job. Not everyone can afford to quit on principle. No one should have to.

After 30+ years of abstinence I restarted cannabis consumption in Jan 2018 after California legalized recreational use. I tried an edible while visiting there and experienced the most intense body relief I've ever felt. That was worth trying to repeat at home. My personal physician knows about my high pain tolerance. When I asked him to certify me for chronic pain, he thought I was joking. I told him I didn't need it for pain, that I intended to use it recreationally, but I also wanted to duplicate that earlier experience in California. So I received my Maryland medical card in May 2018 as a retirement present.

Cannabis began to change my life. I began to reliably get restful sleep. I lost weight. I drink a lot less alcohol. Strangely enough, it has lowered my pain tolerance, but it also has greatly reduced the tiredness that I experience from pain (damage from inflammation). Although cannabis can immediately relieve some problems, for my chronic pain the main benefit is relief from the symptoms of pain (e.g. inflammation). Cannabis has replaced the use of anti-inflammatory OTC like Naproxen Sodium. I've been a daily user since 2019. I use different strains, dosing, and consumption methods to achieve different goals. The Maryland requirement for testing terpenes has been a boon because I am able to understand what terpenes and levels of terpenes cause what effects. This makes it very easy to select new strains of cannabis flower to achieve desired effects.

In 2019, my mother's doctor stopped her Fentanyl patch prescription due to the opioid crisis. She has scoliosis. At one point her spine was so curved she had lost 6 inches of height. She'd been on the patch for years achieving relief without problems, but they cut her off because of "opioid policy". After trying several non-opioid pain medicines with no success, her doctors told her that her only options for relief were chiropractic and acupuncture treatments because no medical treatment options were available.

At that point we started having the "worth it" discussions. I talked her into trying cannabis. She couldn't smoke because she has COPD and she did not want to get high. I had to walk her through signing up and go with her to the dispensary to translate from dispensary-ese to senior-ese. We tried RSO oil, tinctures and topicals without much success. Meanwhile her condition worsened. We tried again a few months

later with CBD/THC tinctures. Those worked for months, but the CBD aggravated hiatal hernia problems. After finding and consulting with Dr. Frye, we were able to find a THC tincture formula that works.

My mom is now 91 and doing well, but dosing is still a moving target as we continue to experiment with various dosing combinations of cannabinoids for various ailments. I took the prospect of taking my mother's life into my untrained hands seriously. I knew cannabis could help, but I had to be sure. I did a ton of research. I went to the leaders of the medical cannabis community, a group called Patients Out of Time and started attending their seminars accredited for medical continuing education training. There's an annual cannabis science conference in Baltimore. I found Dr. Frye through her book "The Medical Marijuana Handbook. Now, just keeping up with the science is a part time job. As a caregiver, I've also had to learn old time pharmacy skills for making tinctures and baking skills for making edibles. As a caregiver I'm worried that my patient won't have access to her medicine if she needs to go into the hospital because her health care provider (Kaiser Permanente) does not recognize cannabis as medicine, per federal guidelines. But I found out that they can prescribe Dronabinol in the hospital. It's taken me years to get here and there have many hurdles to progress. These kinds of issues led me to cannabis activism. And now we at least have a bill for that.

I don't know if making cannabis legal at the state level will force Kaiser Permanente let my mom have her medicine, but it's a necessary step. Civics class says to get involved. So, I'm here trying to make legalization happen and I feel like "that guy" from the Die Hard movie. Maybe my perspective is unique, but there seems to be some obvious things that aren't being addressed. Somebody has to say something.

Part of doing my homework led me to the Reddit forum for Maryland Medical Cannabis patients (r/MDEnts). I'm into my third year of reporting on Maryland cannabis legislation and have developed a following among the 20,000 registered members of the sub forum. This social media platform also reports the ground level truth of what is happening from the patient and industry workers perspectives. In legislative parlance, they are the organization I represent. We just don't have any letterhead.

Part of doing my homework to help my mother was learning how to make my own concentrates, edibles and tinctures. As part of this learning process I purchased devices that might be considered illegal, but they are just basically specialized versions of common kitchen appliances that improve safety and reduce labor. Do you really need to lock me up for this? I've also had one rookie season of home grow as a protest for the season we should have had. It's surprisingly therapeutic.

That's part of my cannabis past. I want my cannabis future to include cultivation. I have a one-acre property located in an area that had a history of cannabis cultivation in the 1800s. I'd like to experiment growing cannabis (hemp) for fiber and soil remediation, but I'd consider running a charitable outdoor craft grow for veterans given the right regulatory conditions. But I have a problem living in hilly Mount Airy. I could make 15,000 grow space on my property that would allow cannabis to not be visible, but my neighbors would object to the screening far more than the sight of the cannabis. I don't expect that problem to be solved, but it doesn't hurt to ask. I'm ready to home grow for personal use (both to cut cost and to get the best quality medicine tailored for my needs) and sharing with friends, neighbors and veterans. And it would be nice if it was a tad easier to keep my mom alive for a few more years. That's my cannabis story. Let's make our green future successful! We can do better.