

One unlucky day in 1990, I dived into a river and did not land right. I broke my back, injured my spinal cord, and was paralyzed below the waist.

Muscles paralyzed by spinal cord injury (SCI) or multiple sclerosis (MS) suffer involuntary spasms and intractable pains. For spasms, doctors prescribe tranquilizers such as Dantrium and Valium. Some side effects: insomnia and addiction. For chronic pain, doctors prescribe narcotics such as codeine, morphine, and Demerol. Some side effects: sedation and addiction.

As a paraplegic from SCI, I sought alternatives. I soon learned that marijuana relaxes spasms more effectively than do tranquilizers and relieves pains more safely than do narcotics. And it is the only medication that treats both the spasms and the pains.

Both of my physicians approve of my medicinal use of marijuana. But here in Connecticut neither can legally prescribe it. So in 1996, I traveled to Holland, where medicinal marijuana is fully legal, and I now possess a Dutch M.D.'s prescription. Yet such marijuana potentially can cause one undesirable side effect: paranoia. Paranoia about arrest, court costs, criminal fines, prison sentences, and lifelong loss of civil rights.

Most paraplegics drop from the workforce, not because of jail time, but because of their disabilities and their debilitating drugs. Yet for the past 16 years, I've remained creative, independent, self-supporting, and employed full-time.

Plus this. One year after my injury, I began to ambulate with crutches and leg braces. While I still use a wheelchair at home and at work, I continue to walk everywhere else, including up stairs and down mountains. Else my legs involuntarily push out their braces, I must medicate my muscle spasms. Marijuana may not have promoted my recovery, but neither has it hindered it.

Patients suffering from serious illnesses or injuries should not be threatened with arrest for effectively treating their conditions. I urge my legislators to vote in support of Connecticut's medicinal marijuana bill.

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Mark Braunstein's Chronology of Marijuana & Paraplegia – 2007

1951 -- year of my birth (I am 55-years-old).

1973 -- in conjunction with a holistic vegetarian diet, I begin abstinence from all pharmaceutical drugs, even aspirin.

1990 (August) – I break my 17-year-long abstinence from pharmaceutical drugs, but only for two weeks, when I break my back, suffer spinal cord injury (SCI), and am paralyzed below the waist.

1991 (January) – I return to full-time employment. I also return to abstinence from pharmaceutical drugs.

1991 (June) – on the sidewalk to recovery, I begin to walk with crutches.

1994 (March) – NBC-TV's "I Witness Video" broadcasts on Sunday evening March 20 a 9-minute segment about my injury and recovery. Because they air only stories with happy endings, that must mean mine too has a happy ending.

1996 (June) – I obtain a prescription from an MD in Holland for medicinal marijuana to alleviate the spasms of SCI.

1997 (March) – I offer testimony to the Connecticut legislative Public Health Committee in support of a medicinal marijuana bill which indeed passed in the Public Health Committee.

2001 (March) – Again I offer testimony to the Connecticut legislative Public Health Committee.

2002 (July) – I lead a constituent's meeting with the Deputy District Director to U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, CT 2nd District, and for 45 minutes put a human face on the use of medicinal marijuana.

2003 (March) – I offer testimony to the Connecticut legislative Judiciary Committee in support of a medicinal marijuana bill which indeed passed in the Judiciary Committee.

2004 (March) – Again I offer testimony to the Connecticut legislative Judiciary Committee in support of a medicinal marijuana bill which indeed passed in the Judiciary Committee, as well as on the floor of the House.

2005 (March) – Again I offer testimony to the Connecticut legislative Judiciary Committee in support of a medicinal marijuana bill which indeed passed in the Judiciary Committee, as well as on the floor of the Senate.

2007 – now over 16 years post-injury, I remain employed full-time, remain financially independent, remain self-sufficient at home, remain creative and productive as a public speaker and book author and nature photographer, remain healthy and unencumbered of any medical complications usually associated with paraplegia, remain abstemious (except for three surgeries) of all pharmaceutical drugs (not even aspirin)... and this despite, or maybe because of, a 0.5 gram (or less! never more!) dose once every two or three days of **medicinal marijuana**.

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