

Some would argue that smoking marijuana is a choice---just like drinking---and that it is up to the user to use the product responsibly. I wish we lived in a world where everyone was responsible. The young woman who chose to use the product irresponsibly benefited from the lack of any laws to hold her responsible, but cost my brother-in-law his life and subjected my sister to unending grief and a three and a half year long wait for some kind of justice. There may have been other factors involved in her actions, but perhaps if there had been no THC in her blood, she would have been able to get her car under control. Ultimately she accepted a plea deal for manslaughter, but her public defender claimed, in court on the day of her sentencing, that he could have proven her innocent, despite investigation of the car accident which found her solely responsible for the death of my brother-in-law.

Rather than “demonizing” marijuana or suggesting that its use can be completely eradicated, the point we would like add to the discussion is this: with no laws in place to hold those irresponsible users accountable, another family may suffer the pain of seeing an impaired driver walk away to live a life unchanged by the choice she made. Only seven states have set legal guidelines which determine how much THC in the blood makes one dangerous behind the wheel. Studies are underway now to attempt to determine levels of impairment and how long that impairment lasts. A California company is developing a device which can accurately detect whether a person has smoked marijuana within the last two hours. Can we delay moving from decriminalization to legalization until this work provides us with the means to keep our roads safe? After prosecuting the case against the driver who killed my brother-in-law, States Attorney Davenport is using what he learned to train Connecticut police officers to recognize and collect evidence of impairment, but this is a problem that demands more unified attention.

In stating the case for legalization, New Haven columnist James Walker argued recently that “there are no real crystal balls and no one can see into the future. We don’t know what legalization is going to bring, we can only surmise.” My family’s experience is a kind of crystal ball. I believe that there are people who will use marijuana responsibly. But when people don’t, there must be clear consequences, just as there are for people who don’t use alcohol responsibly. I wish my brother-in-law hadn’t been killed by an impaired driver. I believe it would be irresponsible not to look at the data coming out of legal states as a sort of crystal ball, or at least as a way to do it better.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my viewpoint. We can’t help but have our personal experiences guide us, but I sincerely wish for more willingness to work together, to listen to each other, as we struggle with so many issues which are defining us as a nation.

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