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Marijuana Photonovel, A Year Up in Smoke

M. Susan Jones

Western Kentucky University, susan.jones@wku.edu

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Marijuana Photonovel



A YEAR UP IN SMOKE

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Mrs. Michelle Black, Graduate Assistant, Western Ky. University
Shannon McFarland Jent, Nursing Student, Western Ky. University

Mr. Ron Tipton, FFA Advisor, Greenwood High School

Mrs. Janice Williams, Layout Design/Consultant

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PHOTONOVEL CHARACTERS:

Erin Allen

Dr. Sue Bryant

Mrs. Peggy Cowles

Peggy Howard

Mrs. Susan Jones

Greg Owens

Jonathan Rudolph

Eric Thomason

Arien Thornton

Kaelin Vernon

Pam White

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PROJECT DIRECTOR:

M. Susan Jones, MSN, RN

Western Kentucky University

CO-INVESTIGATOR:

Kathryn Luchock, PhD

University of Kentucky

INTRODUCTION

In a recent study, a group of adolescents identified the frequent use of marijuana as a specific health risk when completing the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Following this study, a select group of students at Greenwood High School reviewed facts about marijuana use. With guidance from a graduate student at Western Kentucky University and their FFA advisor, the students created a photonovel to address the problems associated with marijuana use.

The story contained in this photonovel is fictitious; however, the information presented in this photonovel represents the risks associated with marijuana use as perceived by the students. The main characters in this story are portrayed by students at Greenwood High School in Warren County, Kentucky, but the story could represent the situations at many rural high schools. These students share this message in the hopes of preventing tragic consequences resulting from marijuana use.

Also, contained within this photonovel are question and answer boxes with data excerpted from Marijuana: Facts for Teens, National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Setting:

A senior English class in a rural high school. There are only two weeks of classes left before graduation. Class has already started, and the students have been reading papers they had written at the first of the year about their plans and goals for their senior year.

Mrs. White: O.K. class. I think that everyone has read his or her paper. What does everyone think now that the year is almost over? Did you meet your goals? Did what you want and hope actually happen? I want you to answer these questions in a paper and turn it in next week. Now, before the bell rings, I'd like to read a paper written by Johnny Wilson at the beginning of the year.



(Johnny was a student at the high school before he was expelled for having marijuana at school.)

This is the first week of the last year of high school. I can't believe I am finally a senior. As much as I hate doing homework, I am looking forward to this year. I have so many plans for Carrie and me. (Carrie is my girlfriend.) I am also looking forward to basketball and baseball seasons, and I hope I play well enough to get a scholarship to college. I'm also working at a part-time job so I can buy a car.

Carrie and I have been going together for a year now. Carrie is great. I really love her a lot and we have so many plans for this year. We have already started talking about prom, even though it is months away. I can't wait for all the parties that we will go to together. I also will enjoy having her at all my basketball and baseball games. It really helps me knowing that she is there. Hopefully, when school is out, we can have another great summer together before college starts. Who knows, maybe we will end up at the same college. Wouldn't that be cool?

I play forward on the basketball team and 'Coach' says I have improved a lot since last year. I hope I can attend all the practices and games this year without getting hurt. If I do, I will not have missed a practice or a game since the beginning of high school. I also play baseball in the spring. I play second base. This year we should have a pretty good team and hopefully we can win the tournament. Between the two sports, I hope I do well enough to get a scholarship for college.

Speaking of college, I want to go to college to become an engineer. I really enjoy drafting class and hopefully I will do well at it. Besides, engineers make pretty good money and that's important to me.

I am working at the video store again this year. I have worked there since I was sixteen. They are flexible about my hours and they are cool about letting me off for school things and my basketball and baseball games. This summer I also mowed yards to earn some extra money. I almost have enough money to buy a car. I have been driving mom and dad's car but I sure don't want to keep driving that old station wagon. Every time I drive that car all my friends ask me if I am taking the family for ice cream. It's really embarrassing. Hopefully I can buy a car in the next few months so that I will have it the rest of the year for all the parties and school activities.

Well, that's about all of my plans that I can think of. I hope to have fun and enjoy the year. I am also looking forward to what the future will bring.

Mrs. White: I know that everyone knows what happened to Johnny. I wanted to read this so you could realize that all your plans and expectations could change if you choose to use drugs. I hope everyone will think about this. However, I do have some good news. When I talked to Johnny's parents about reading this paper, they told me Johnny is doing well in rehab and should be able to return to school next fall to finish his senior year

(Bell rings!)

Mrs. White: Don't forget about your papers.

Q: What is marijuana? Aren't there different kinds?

A: Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded flowers and leaves of the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*). You may hear marijuana called by street names such as pot, herb, weed, boom, Mary Jane, gangster, or chronic. There are more than 200 slang terms for marijuana.

Sinsemilla (*sin-seh-me-yah*; it's a Spanish word), hashish ("*hash*" for short), and hash oil are stronger forms of marijuana.

All forms of marijuana are mind-altering. This means they change how the brain works. They all contain THC (*delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol*), the main chemical in marijuana. But there are also 400 other chemicals in the marijuana plant.

Setting:

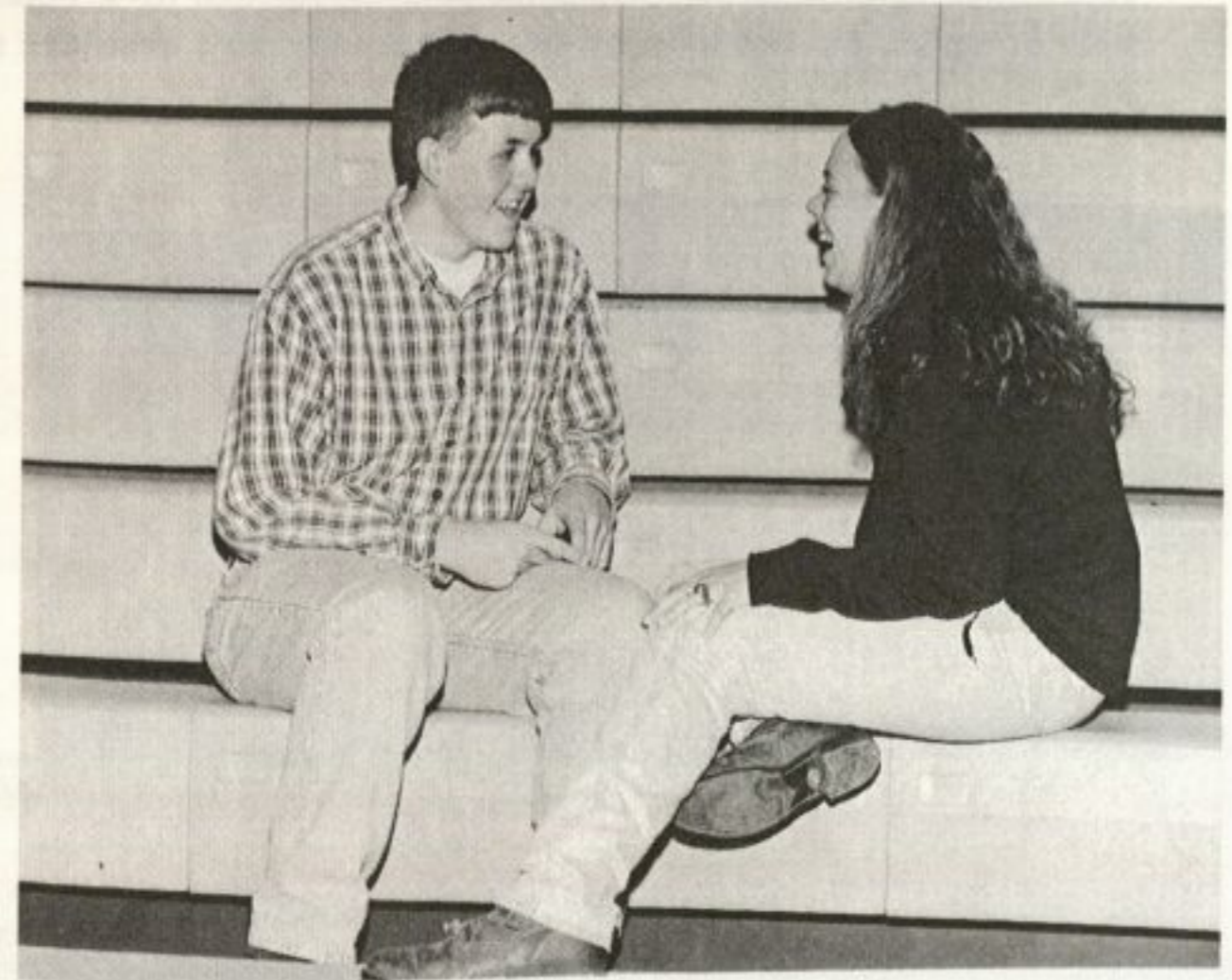
Later the same afternoon, at Chad's house. Chad is a student in Mrs. White's English class.

- Chad:** Man, I haven't thought about Johnny in awhile. Have you?
- Stacie:** No. I've been so busy that I haven't had time to think about anything but graduation, the party that night, and college applications. **Of all of our friends, I never thought Johnny would be the one not to graduate.** I mean, he always made good grades and never missed school.
- Carrie:** I blame the person who got Johnny hooked on drugs more than I blame Johnny. I'm sure it was one of his work friends, even though Johnny would never admit it.



Chad: Why do you say that?

Carrie: Well, at the first of the year, Johnny and I spent all of our free time together. We had so much fun going to parties and just hanging out.

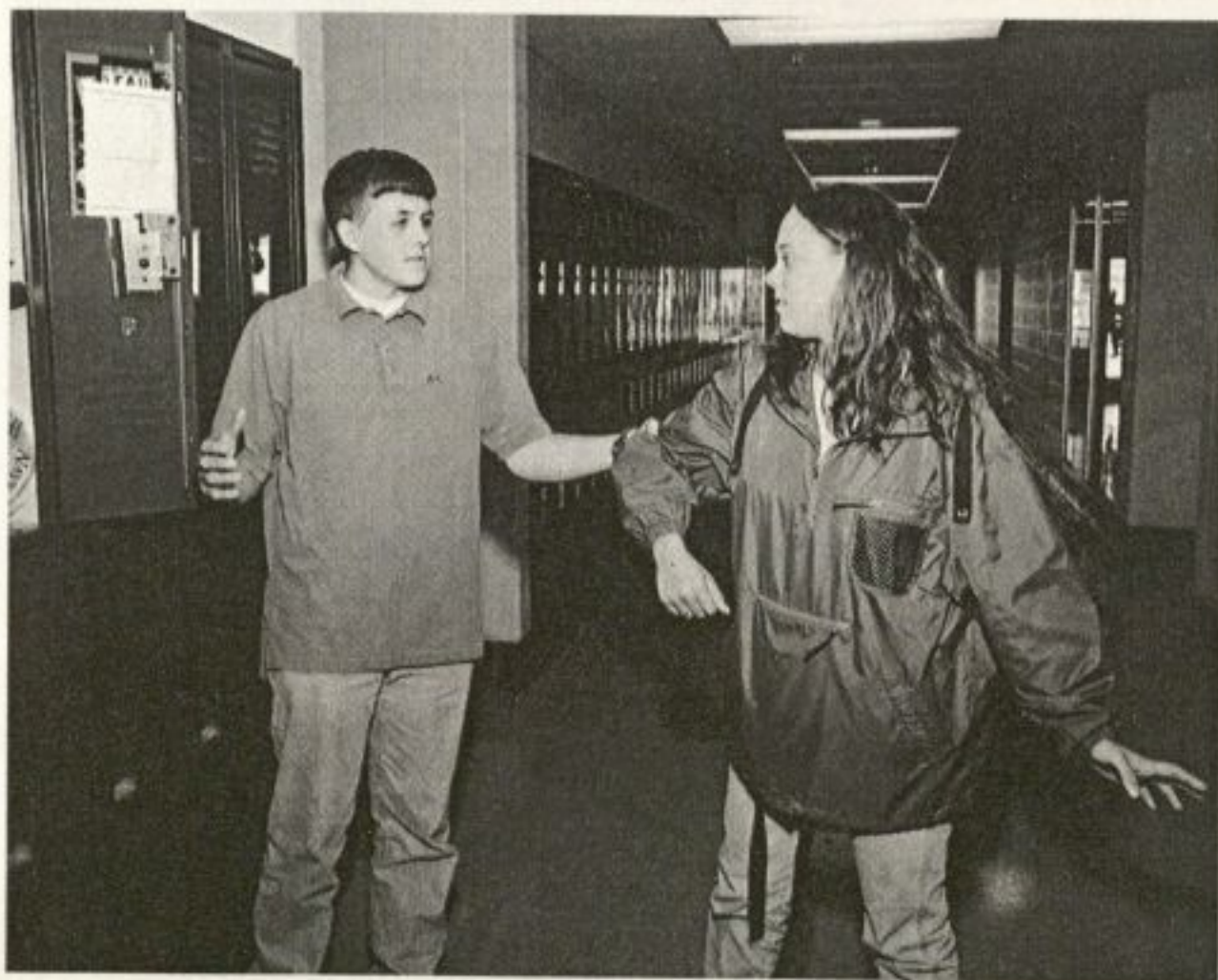


"Johnny, I'm so glad you're my boy friend--I've never had this much fun with anybody else."

Carrie: Then he gradually started wanting to hang out with his 'work friends' more than he wanted to be with me. That's when our troubles began. At first I didn't think that much about it, but after him standing me up three weekends in a row, I'd had enough. I tried to remain friends with him and we would talk every now and then, but I deserved a boyfriend that wasn't going to stand me up all the time.

Stacie: Yeah, I never thought you two would breakup. But I would have dumped him long before you did.

Carrie: It was hard because he kept telling me he loved me, but his actions sure didn't show it. **By the time we broke up, he wasn't even the same person.**



"You are not the same person I started dating. We're through!!"

Chad: Well, I was one of his 'work friends' and I don't smoke pot. But I did notice the difference at practice. At the first of the year, Johnny was always on time. Then gradually he started coming to practice late, if he showed up at all. **I remember one time he was so stoned he couldn't even keep up with where the ball was.** We all covered for him and blamed it on some cold medicine, but he was out there. It just kept getting worse. Its no wonder 'Coach' kicked him off the team. I mean the cold medicine story only works so many times.

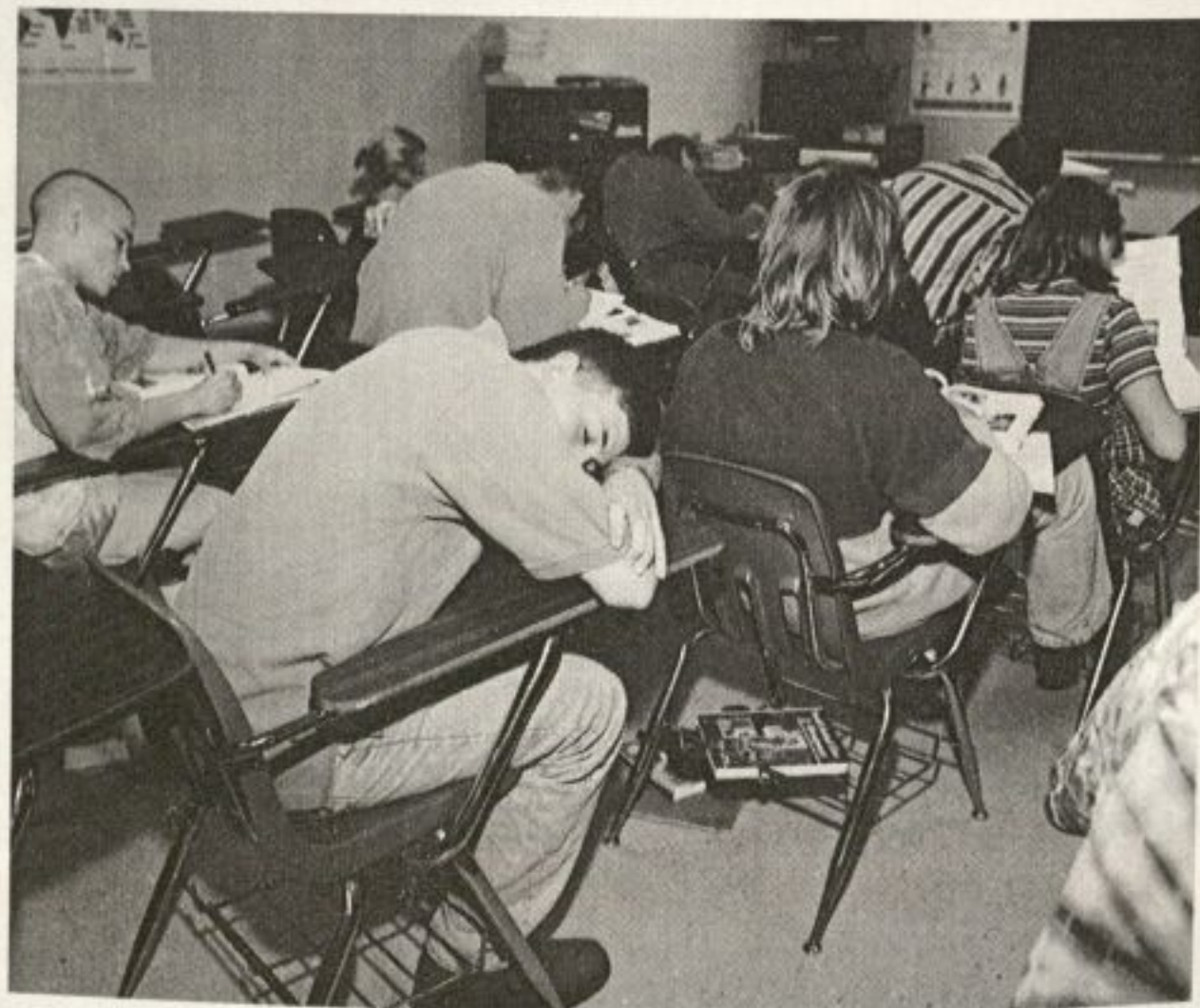


Q: Why do young people use marijuana?

A: There are many reasons why some children and young teens start using marijuana. Most young people use marijuana because they have friends or brothers and sisters who use marijuana and pressure them to try it. Some people use it because they see older people in the family using it. Other users may think it's cool to use marijuana because they hear about it in music and see it used in TV and movies.

But no matter how many shirts and caps you see printed with the marijuana leaf, or how many groups sing about it, you should know this fact: You don't have to use marijuana just because you think everybody else is doing it. Most teens (four out of five) do not use marijuana!

Stacie: Yeah, after he got kicked off the team, he started skipping classes. He was never at school anymore, and when he was he was always asleep. I can't believe his parents didn't notice. I mean, the school had to be sending letters to his house about him not being in class.



"There goes Johnny dozing off again--this time during a mid-term exam!"

Carrie: Well, I heard that Johnny got the letters and then had one of his friends call the school pretending to be his mom. His parents didn't know anything until Johnny got expelled.

Stacie: Yeah, I remember the day Mrs. Cowles kicked him out of school.



"I'm sorry about this Johnny, but we have a no drug policy here at school."

Chad: I heard that Johnny had spent almost all of his savings on pot and beer and food for all of his friends. I bet his parents couldn't believe it when they found out that all the money he had saved for a car was gone.



"How could you have spent all that money?"

Carrie: Yeah, they were pretty hot. They even quit letting him drive their car when they found out what was going on. After getting expelled and not having a car to drive, Johnny really tried to change. He called me and told me he was sorry for everything and that he was never going to smoke pot again. He told me his parents were trying to get him into another school and that he hoped that would give him a fresh start.



Stacie: Yeah, we saw how long that lasted. A week later, Johnny was caught by his parents getting stoned in his bedroom. Can you believe he did it in his own house? **He must have been desperate for a high.** I mean, no air freshener covers up that scent.

Carrie: I know. It was pretty stupid. He didn't leave his parents with any other choice but to put him in rehab.

Chad: I really hope it helps him. He had so much going for him and now he has nothing. Can you imagine?

Carrie: Maybe after graduation, we could go see him if his parents are cool with it.

Chad & Stacie: Yeah that's a good idea.

Carrie: Who knows, maybe he will be like he was before all this mess started.

Smoking marijuana can start out as a once in awhile thing. But it can easily take over your life. You don't realize the changes it makes because you are too busy getting stoned and eventually your goal is to remain high. It soon takes the place of all the other activities that were important to you. Don't let this happen to you.

Another important fact to consider is the effect smoking marijuana has on your body. Two marijuana cigarettes can do as much damage to the lungs as 20 tobacco cigarettes. Marijuana can also produce short-term memory loss and may lead to bronchitis and cancer of the lungs, mouth, and throat.

If you or anyone you know has a problem with marijuana, and would like to get help, talk to a teacher, parent, minister, or call a chemical dependent support group. In this area, you could call **Rivendell Behavioral Health Services (502-843-1199)**, **Lifeskills Day Treatment (502-782-8088)**, **LEAP (Let's Eliminate A Problem) (502-842-4991)**, or **Natural Helpers at Greenwood High School (502-842-3627)**. **Natural Helpers Sponsors at Greenwood High School are: Debbie Belcher, Jason Couch, Mary Hext, Jana Kirchner, Nate Quarcelino and Debbie Stracener.**

MARIJUANA FACTS/USE

- Marijuana is the number one illicit drug used among adolescents.
 - Two marijuana cigarettes do as much damage to the lungs as 20 tobacco cigarettes. This is related to the fact that marijuana smoke has ten times the amount of tar found in cigarettes and that marijuana smokers tend to hold their smoke in for a longer period of time. This leads to marijuana smokers' lungs being exposed to four times the amount of carbon monoxide and other toxins.
 - Approximately one of every six people in the federal prison system has been imprisoned primarily for marijuana offenses. Some of the sentence terms are life sentences and some fines are as much as 4 million dollars.
 - People who smoke marijuana are more likely to experiment later with other drugs.
 - Short-term memory loss may occur in people who smoke marijuana, especially in heavy smokers.
 - Smoking marijuana can lead to chronic bronchitis and may lead to cancer of the mouth, throat, and lungs.
 - Children under 17 who use pot are 85 times more likely to try cocaine.
 - Marijuana acts on the area in the brain that controls memory, balance, and the senses.
 - Marijuana use affects your school, work, and personal relationships.
 - Marijuana breaks down inhibitions, which may lead to irresponsible activities such as increased sexual activities.
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