

Marketing Pleasure

**How Addictive Drug Industries
Tell Big Lies to Make Big Profits**

Sue Rusche

**President and CEO, Retired
National Families in Action**

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0F8R7CRL1/ref=tmm_hrd_swatch_0#



Sue Rusche

ran National Families in Action for 46 years. NFIA helped lead the national parent movement which reduced marijuana use among adolescents and young adults by two-thirds between 1979 and 1992. She wrote the weekly e-newsletter, *The Marijuana Report*, during NFIA's last decade. The e-newsletter reported science about marijuana effects and showed how industry spun that information.

When NFIA closed in 2023, the University of California San Francisco acquired the organization's Drug Information Collection. UCSF is raising funds to digitize it.

In 2022, Ms. Rusche began writing and has just published *Marketing Pleasure: How Addictive Drug Industries Tell Big Lies to Make Big Profits*. It is available on [Amazon](#).

Once production expenses are met, 75 percent of proceeds from the sale of *Marketing Pleasure* will be donated to UCSF, to two national organizations, Smart Approaches to Marijuana and the Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions, and to her home state organization, Georgians for Responsible Marijuana Policy.

Insights from Marketing Pleasure

Insight One

Normally, the US Food and Drug Administration makes medicines available through a rigorous scientific-approval process.

But when governments legalize a drug for medical use, like marijuana or psychedelics, industries that make them deny harms and *increase* use to keep shareholders happy.

Public health scientists identify harms and *decrease* use to keep Americans healthy.

It's just that simple.

Insight Two

The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement forced Joe Camel to stop blowing smoke rings over Broadway from a Times Square billboard.

This year, the pot industry blew smoke from a gigantic joint over Broadway as a lead-up to the unofficial marijuana holiday celebrating pot at 4:20 pm on 4/20/25.

An industry spokesman told *Adweek*, "It's essential to normalize this plant."

For profits maybe, but not for our health or that of our kids.

Insight Three

Tobacco kills 480,000 a year; alcohol kills 178,000 a year; and opioids have killed more than 1 million Americans since FDA approved OxyContin in 1995. Once we understand

- that profit motives drive each industry that makes an addictive drug,
- that each one employs strategies from tobacco's playbook,
- and that each must exploit our biology to succeed,

we may finally be able to shift the responsibility for all those deaths from the exploited to the exploiters.

Insight Four

Google says an ounce of marijuana is the size of a small coconut and can produce about 60 joints.



Most states that have legalized marijuana allow possession of 2 to 3 ounces (120 or 180 joints).

New York allows households to grow *5 pounds of pot!* That amounts to:

1 ounce = 60 joints

1 pound = 16 ounces = 960 joints

5 pounds = 80 ounces = 4,800 joints

That's enough for enterprising households to start an underground business in a state that has legalized recreational marijuana.

Insight Five



I never understood why the two guys who invented e-cigarettes called Juul began by making e-joints called Pax.

Three years before introducing Juul, they sold 500,000 Paxes at \$249.99 each and made a pot of money.

A meta-analysis shows marijuana vaping increased sevenfold among US and Canadian teenagers, where the company marketed its products, between 2013 and 2020.

Insight Six

Scientists and doctors led the effort to legalize marijuana for medical use, right?

Wrong. A Santa Monica PR firm, Zimmerman and Markman, led that effort, first in California and then in other states.

Financed by three billionaires and hired by what would become the leading legalization advocacy organization, Drug Policy Alliance, the PR firm floated several ballot initiatives claiming that marijuana could cure cancer.

Ironically, scientists today are finding marijuana may *cause* cancer.

Endorsements for Marketing Pleasure

“You can’t say you know drug policy and how we got here without reading this book. Sue Rusche is a national treasure, and this book is a gift to the country desperate for answers.”

— Kevin Sabet, PhD, founder, president, and CEO, Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions and Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

“Marketing Pleasure...tells the gripping story of how billionaires and rich corporations lied about these drugs’ dangers, and how everyday heroes fought back against their greed and deceit. With tobacco, alcohol, and drugs each killing more than 100,000 Americans a year, the perils and the need for this historical guide have never been greater.”

— Jonathan P. Caulkins, PhD, H. Guyford Stever Professor of Operations Research and Public Policy, Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University, and coauthor of *Marijuana Legalization: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

“The indomitable Sue Rusche harnessed and united the national parent drug and alcohol prevention movement in the late ’70s with Southern charm and a pit bull’s tenacity. Look out Big Pharma, her new book, Marketing Pleasure directs that expertise to a ravaged public...This is a must-read for all.”

— Susan Kendall Newman, former executive director of the Scott Newman Foundation, social/political writer, producer, activist, and philanthropist.

MARKETING PLEASURE

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By

Sue Rusche

CONTENTS

Prologue	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 What Is Biological Capture?	11
Chapter 3 Biological Capture: The Biological Basis of Addiction	17
Chapter 4 Big Tobacco Developed Six Strategies to Capture Our Biology.....	31
Chapter 5 Wait. Alcohol Can Cause What?	65
Chapter 6 How Marijuana Hurts the Brain and Body.....	81
Chapter 7 Who Decides If a Drug Is Medicine?.....	99
Chapter 8 Three Billionaires Legalized Marijuana in Other Peoples' States	113
Chapter 9 Now More Billionaires Are Trying to Legalize All Drugs Everywhere	139
Chapter 10 The American Opioid Crisis.....	149
Chapter 11 What About Expungement?.....	173
Chapter 12 Will Harm Reduction Help?	181
Chapter 13 Vaping: Where It All Comes Together for Kids.....	201
Chapter 14 What's the Way Out?	221
Chapter 15 The Rest of NFIA's Story	231

Acknowledgments	243
Abbreviations.....	245
Bibliography	249
Endnotes.....	251
Sue Rusche Bio.....	307

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

Table 1. Elements of Our Brain’s Communication System.....	20
Table 2. Does Legalization Increase Use?	28
Table 3. Every State that Legalized Recreational Marijuana via Ballot Initiative Legalized Medical Marijuana First.....	132
Table 4. National Marijuana Trade Associations and PACs.....	134
Table 5. State Marijuana Trade Associations and PACs.....	135

FIGURES

Figure 1. Lifetime Marijuana Use, 1979 to 1992	7
Figure 2. Past-Month Marijuana Use, 1979 to 1992	8
Figure 3. Daily Marijuana Use, 1979 to 1992.....	8
Figure 4. The American Opioid Crisis	149
Figure 5. US Overdose Deaths by Sex, 1999–2022.....	163
Figure 6. US Overdose Deaths-Any Opioid by Sex, 1999–2022.....	164

PROLOGUE

“Dad died,” my brother Steve said as I picked up the phone. We were watching live coverage of that brave student facing down a tank in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square as other tanks shot at protesting students. I was having trouble integrating that emotional experience with this traumatizing news.

“What?” I stammered. “What happened to him?”

“Massive heart attack,” Steve replied.

“Our poor father,” I said, shocked. “I am so sorry.” We talked briefly about the logistical issues that surrounded the death of a parent who lived out of state.

“I’ll call Mom and be there tomorrow,” I told him as I said goodbye, turning to my husband and running a checklist through my mind to call our sons, book a flight to Tampa, rent a car, pack, call our executive VP Paula Kemp to let her know I’d be gone for a while, and get ready for this unexpected, sad trip.

Our parents smoked cigarettes for most of their lives. Our father called them “coffin nails.” Sheepishly, he would often recite a poem to us when we were kids—

Tobacco is a dirty weed. I like it.
It satisfies no normal need. I like it.
It makes you thin, it makes you lean,

It takes the hair right off your bean.
It's the worst darn stuff I've ever seen.
I like it!

—and then chuckle.

Nicotine killed everyone in my family except my middle brother, Steve, who also smoked. He had two open-heart surgeries before age forty and now has quit. Our younger brother, Mike, died at age sixty-two in 2015. He smoked all his life. Our mother also had open-heart surgery. A lifelong smoker, she quit after her surgery, but it was too late. She died of emphysema several years after our father died.

After her surgery, my mother begged me to end my addiction. I managed to do it in my early forties. I was traveling the country then for National Families in Action (NFIA), encouraging parents to prevent their kids from smoking pot—with a cigarette hanging out of my mouth. The absurdity of that picture convinced me it was truly time to quit. My husband, Harry, quit cold turkey when his doctor urged him to stop before repairing the abdominal aortal aneurism, the Triple-A, that saved his life. Fortunately, our kids learned an important lesson from their parents. They never took up smoking.

When my father died in 1989, I hadn't put it together yet. Although I lived through the unmasking of the tobacco industry's lies, the peeling away of layer after layer of greed and deceit, I was oblivious to it. I was focused on reducing marijuana use by children and teenagers and led an organization (NFIA) that devoted itself to that pursuit. We were thirty-three years away from the World Health Organization declaring in 2022 that there is no safe level of drinking, six years away from the approval of OxyContin by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1995, and seven years away from out-of-state billionaires' first success at legalizing marijuana for medical use in California in 1996.

Little did I know then that these established industries, including what would become an emerging pot industry in 1996, would replay tobacco's playbook, step by nefarious step.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why I Wrote This Book

We founded NFIA in late 1977 and closed it in early 2023. During its first fifteen years, NFIA helped lead a parent movement that became national almost overnight. As the organization's director, I spent most of my adult life learning from scientists about the science of addiction, the science revealing addictive drug harms, and how industries spin the science so we'll keep buying their drugs no matter how much they harm our health. We collected information on all these topics in hundreds of categories created by Emory University librarian volunteers. The University of California, San Francisco, acquired NFIA's Drug Information Collection the year before we closed, and that collection is being digitized now.

In the late 1970s, two Atlanta mothers began that national movement. One, Keith Schuchard, PhD, was responding to a backyard birthday party she and her husband gave for their oldest daughter, Ashley, who was turning thirteen. While cleaning up afterward, the Schuchards discovered that their twelve- and thirteen-year-old guests had been smoking marijuana, drinking high-proof alcohol,

and using other drugs, including PCP. Shocked at this behavior by children so young, the Schuchards called the partygoers' parents and invited them to a meeting at their home. They all continued to meet—sometimes with their children, who insisted that “everybody’s doing it,” and sometimes not. These parents formed the nation’s first Parent Peer Group. Such groups form around one’s own child and the parents of that child’s friends to protect their children from unhealthy behaviors like drug use.

The other mother, yours truly, knowing the Schuchards were going through this, was astonished by the overnight proliferation of drug paraphernalia sold at stores in Emory village. Managers said they carried bongos with tags boasting “The only thing wasted is you” at the record store, cocaine concert kits at Alexander’s Gift Shop, and an array of double-wide rolling papers at Kroger because “Emory students would not otherwise shop here.” A full-fledged head shop, owned by a nephew of a county commissioner, appeared less than a mile from the university. It sold items like pipes enabling nitrous oxide and marijuana to be inhaled simultaneously and Buzzbees, which looked like Frisbees but were reconfigured with a pipe embedded in the center so one could pack it with pot, cap it, light it, take a toke, and toss one to a friend. No wonder children thought “everybody’s doing it.”

Keith and I bought paraphernalia samples to show other parents what was being marketed in Emory village. We called it the “bong show.” In the *Atlanta Constitution*, we read about Stone Mountain parents who had negotiated with the owner of a record store not to include a head shop in a new shopping center being built. They had asked their state legislators for help in the negotiation. We attended a public meeting they called for the following Saturday, November 19, 1977. That day marked the beginning of Dekalb (later National) Families in Action. I was elected secretary. We outfitted the legislators with the “bong show,” and they got the nation’s first laws banning the sale of drug paraphernalia passed in Georgia two months later.

Thomas “Buddy” Gleaton, EeD, a professor in the Department of Education at Georgia State University, hosted an annual conference at the university on drug abuse. Keith met and persuaded him to focus the 1978 conference on the fledgling parent movement, at which we both spoke. Also speaking was the director of the US National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Robert DuPont, MD. Previously, Dr. DuPont had supported decriminalizing marijuana, but he had come to Atlanta prior to the conference to meet with the children of the Parent Peer Group. Shocked by their attitudes that drug use was normal for kids so young, he reversed his position on decriminalization and announced that at the conference. It was newsworthy when a federal government leader reversed an opinion of the current presidential administration, and the national press covered the conference. Calls flooded in from parents across the nation. It turned out that head shops luring children into drug use was not unique to Atlanta but was unfolding nationwide. After the conference, Keith and Buddy created the Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) at Georgia State.

To understand why the time was ripe for a parent movement, it is important to know that in 1962, less than 2 percent of the US population had ever tried an illicit drug.¹ Throughout the 1970s, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) persuaded eleven states to decriminalize marijuana. Decriminalization then meant reducing criminal penalties for possession of one ounce of marijuana from a misdemeanor to that of a traffic ticket subject to a fine of up to one hundred dollars. People assumed states would not decriminalize the drug unless it was safe to use. That explained the startling increases in use by all ages, especially children, throughout the 1970s to the highest levels in history by 1979.

The parent groups that had formed by 1980 attended that year’s PRIDE conference. One outcome was to create the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth (NFP) to represent our interests in Washington, DC. When the Reagan administration replaced the Carter administration, NFP’s staff began to educate

First Lady Nancy Reagan's staff about drug use among children. She attended the PRIDE conference the next year to show her support of the parent movement.

It helps to have a First Lady champion your cause. When I meet people who were teenagers in the 1980s, I am constantly amazed by the influence Mrs. Reagan and the parent movement had on them. They are crystal clear that children should not use any addictive drug.

In the 1980s, I wrote two columns a week that King Features syndicated to some one hundred newspapers across the country. I wrote them on Tuesdays and managed NFIA the other four days a week while our then COO, Paula Kemp, filled in for me on Tuesdays. Here's my favorite. It paints a picture of what was going on in the culture in the 1980s. King Features released it January 28, 1985.

Chocolate to Morphine—A Reply

Here's a letter Dr. Andrew Weil sent to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. It was forwarded on to me:

"In two recent columns ('The Drug Scene'), Sue Rusche has attacked the book *Chocolate to Morphine: Understanding Mind-Active Drugs*. I would like a chance to correct her misrepresentation of our work.

Ms. Rusche equates our book with publications like *High Times* magazine that openly advocates use of disapproved drugs, and she calls our viewpoint 'dangerous and irresponsible.' To support that prejudice, she quotes lines from *Chocolate to Morphine* out of context in an effort to make us appear to be minimizing dangers of jimsonweed and nitrous oxide.

Our book is unique in giving truly neutral, balanced information. We do not fail to point out possible risks of all mind-altering drugs; neither do we ignore their possible benefits and attractions. Ms. Rosen and I do not attempt

to tell young people that they should or should not use any drugs. We just give them the best information we can so that they can make their own decisions. Obviously, your columnist thinks that that is equivalent to telling kids to go ahead and experiment. That is her problem. The utility of *Chocolate to Morphine* is attested to by the growing numbers of parents, teachers, and counselors who have found it to promote real communication with youngsters.

Sorry, Ms. Rusche, but the facts in *Chocolate to Morphine* are the facts, not emotional positions. While you're at it, how about quoting some other facts from the book: that tobacco in the form of cigarettes is the most addictive drug known, for example, and its use is far more costly to our society than any problems involving nitrous oxide and jimsonweed."

Dear Dr. Weil:

The fact that drugs other than tobacco cause problems for fewer people does not make them safe.

I am fascinated by your effort to disassociate your book from *High Times* magazine when so much of the "truly neutral, balanced information" in *Chocolate to Morphine* is reworked material which first appeared in *High Times* under your byline. Either you wrote those articles yourself, Dr. Weil, or someone else did who looks just like you and uses your name.

Here's a list of just some of the articles you (or your clone) have written for *High Times* over the years: "A gourmet coca taster's tour of Peru: Stalking an ancient herbal high" (*High Times*, May 1976); White sugar: Is white sugar more dangerous than heroin?" (*High Times*, July 1977); "Flesh of the dead," *High Times*, May 1982; and that perennial favorite "Throwing up in Mexico: Women seem more accomplished at vomiting easily than men—perhaps they are more able

to abandon themselves to internal sensation?" (*High Times*, December–January, 1975).

You may call the opinions you have about drugs "facts" all you want, but that doesn't make it so. Anyone who tells kids, as you and Ms. Rosen do in *Chocolate to Morphine*, that the poison in jimsonweed "probably" won't hurt them even though doctors say it is dangerous is expressing an opinion, not a fact.

Anyone who tells kids the only intelligent way to breathe nitrous oxide is from balloons is expressing an opinion, not a fact.

And anyone who suggests that mind-altering drugs can have any benefits for children and teenagers is expressing an opinion, not a fact.

Here's another opinion, this one from Richard Hawley, director of University School, a boy's preparatory school in Cleveland, Ohio, who reviewed your book in the current newsletter of the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth: "*Chocolate to Morphine* suggests controllable, pleasurable use of substances which requires users to break laws, lie to their families, and endanger their lives, their work, and their sustaining relationships. Actual, assignable students of mine have, in the course of the past decade, responded to drugs in the manner prescribed by Dr. Weil and Ms. Rosen and have hurt themselves and their families badly; seven are dead."

WHAT DID THE PARENT MOVEMENT ACCOMPLISH?

Drug use peaked in 1979 at levels not seen before or since—three years after the parent movement began in Atlanta. Three surveys tracked addictive drug use among children since the early 1970s: Monitoring the Future (MTF), the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), and its predecessor, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). All track lifetime use

(which signals experimental use), past-year use, and past-month use (which can signal frequent use). However, only MTF tracks daily use, which can signal addiction.

Oregon became the first state to decriminalize marijuana in 1973, followed by Alaska, California, Maine, Colorado, and Ohio in 1975, Minnesota in 1976, Mississippi, New York, and North Carolina in 1977, and Nebraska in 1978.² Because the public perceived “decriminalization” to mean “legalization,” no more states decriminalized marijuana after Nebraska in 1978. More than two decades later, in 2001, Nevada became the twelfth state to decriminalize the drug.

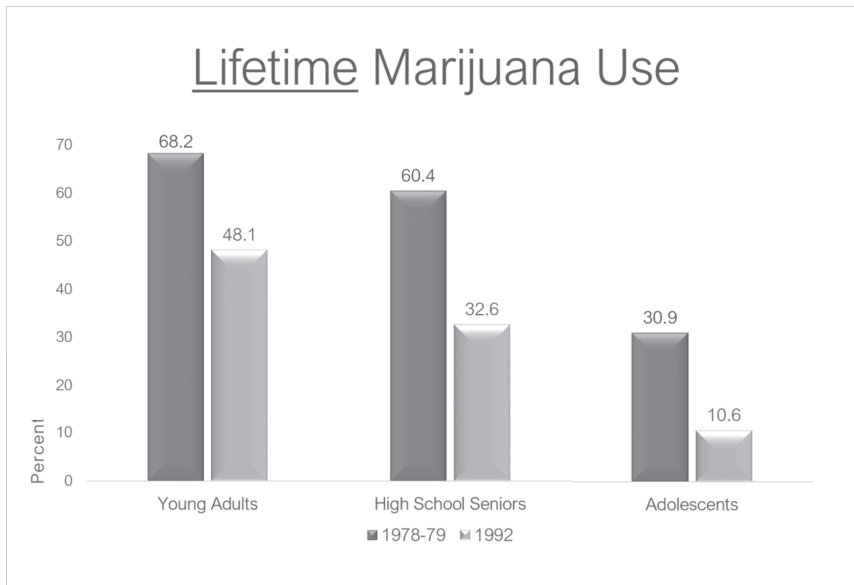


Figure 1. *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future*

As the parent movement gained strength and a First Lady to champion its cause, adolescents’ lifetime marijuana use dropped by nearly two-thirds, from 31 percent in 1979 to 11 percent in 1992, while high school seniors’ lifetime marijuana use was nearly cut in half, from 60 percent to 33 percent.

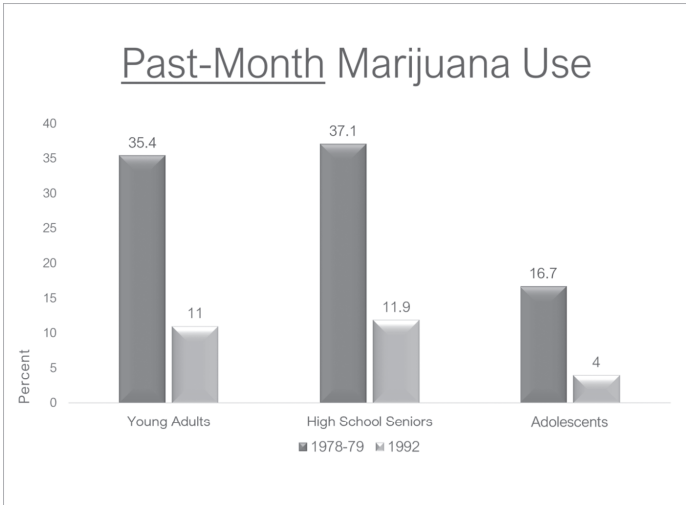


Figure 2. *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future*

Reductions in past-month marijuana use were even more remarkable. The parent movement drove 1979 levels down by more than two-thirds among young adults and high school seniors and by more than three-fourths among adolescents.

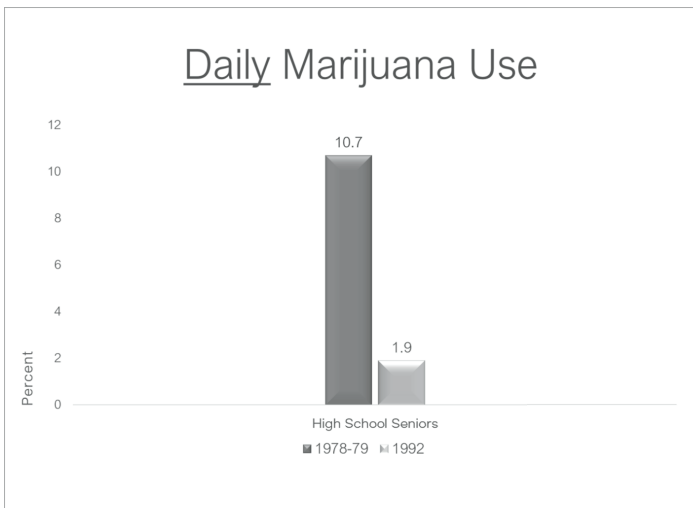


Figure 3. *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future*

Even more stunning, the parent movement drove high school seniors' daily marijuana use down by four-fifths, from 11 percent in 1979 to 2 percent in 1992.

As parents passed bans on drug paraphernalia in more states besides Georgia, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) drafted a model law for states to pass that would withstand constitutional challenges. The legal battle over these laws ended in 1982, when the US Supreme Court unanimously upheld the Illinois version of DEA's Model Drug Paraphernalia Law.³

It is easy to blame parents for everything that goes wrong in society. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, parents refused to be blamed for substance use among their children. They organized and fought back, recognizing that NORML and the drug paraphernalia industry were coming after their children. They reduced drug use from the highest levels in history among all ages to the lowest ever among children, adolescents, and young adults by stopping drug use before it started among those whose brains were still developing.

I wrote this book because I learned over forty-six years of running NFIA that it wasn't just NORML and the drug paraphernalia industry coming after our kids. It is *every commercial industry* that makes an addictive drug.

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ENDNOTES

Note: Many endnotes are from government sources. However, at this writing, many government websites have been taken down at the directive of the Trump administration, necessitating the use of archives or potentially barring access to these resources.

Note 2: I use periods to separate links from dates I accessed them. Be sure to eliminate the period when visiting a link.

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initiative data by state but lists only top donors who are usually billionaires. When possible, Ballotpedia links to the secretary of state's office, which provides information about donations from mere millionaires, very rich people, the marijuana industry, and everyday citizens. To my knowledge, NFIA was the only organization that collected detailed campaign finance data for marijuana initiatives between 1996 and 2000, and we did that in 2000, looking backward. At the time, we were unable to access all data from the relevant offices of secretaries of state because some did not collect it, others did not make historical information available to the public, and lack of time, given our other responsibilities.

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CHAPTER 14: WHAT’S THE WAY OUT?

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SUE RUSCHE BIO

Sue Rusche served as President and CEO of National Families in Action (NFIA) for 46 years. NFIA helped lead a national parent movement, credited with reducing past-month marijuana use by two-thirds and daily use by 80 percent among adolescents and young adults between 1979 and 1992. She wrote a newspaper column in the 1980s that was syndicated to newspapers across the nation by King Features. With



Wake Forest University's School of Medicine, NFIA co-founded the Addiction Studies Program for journalists and for the states which ran from 1999 to 2014. The program brought scientists who developed knowledge about addictive drug effects together with journalists and state leaders to help them understand the science that underlies addiction. In 2014, NFIA began publishing *The Marijuana Report*, a weekly e-newsletter that tracked the marijuana story unfolding across the nation, scientific studies of addictive drug harms, and industry spin denying there were any. In 2018, NFIA's Science Advisory Board of world-renowned scientists recorded 25 podcasts for the public about marijuana. When

NFIA closed in 2023, the Library Archives and Special Collections of University of California, San Francisco, acquired NFIA's Drug Information Collection, which will be digitized for the public. Now retired, she wrote *Marketing Pleasure: How Addictive Drug Industries Tell Big Lies to Make Big Profits* based on all that she learned over those 46 years.

Once expenses to produce this book have been met, a percent of the proceeds from its sale will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections of the University of California, San Francisco, to support the digitization of National Families in Action's Drug Information Collection. In addition, a percent of the proceeds from the sale of this book also will be donated to the Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions and to Georgians for Responsible Drug Policy.