



lifestyle. “I don’t think it’s as life-ruining as people make out,” Roman says. “It can damage your academic record, but some people are able to pocket their lives into productive bits and relaxing bits.”

UNSW was, at one time, responsible for producing some of Australia’s most prolific counter-culture and drug-affiliated media. Previous editors and writers at Tharunka included Richard Neville, Ian Davison, and Martin Sharp, who, in the early sixties, were responsible for several college pranks including kidnapping Bandstand host Brian Henderson, submitting articles about local brothels to the Sydney Morning Herald and others. Most notably, Neville and Sharp went on to found Oz Magazine, arguably one of the most influential counter-culture magazines in the world. Frank articles on drug use were often accompanied by travelogues and other pieces, notably a travel piece on Timothy Leary dropping acid in Algeria.

Grabbing a passerby in front of Blockhouse, however, shows how much times have indeed changed. When asked how many people he knew took drugs, this poor soul thought he knew no one. “I can’t even imagine smoking. Why would you do that to yourself?” he said. “I wouldn’t know where to buy it first, I don’t know what it would do to me, and I hear about these flashback things where if I smoke a joint I’ll immediately flash back and feel high again.” He drinks though, sometimes heavily, and while he has no problem associating with other heavy drinkers, he says the one person he knows who smokes pot is in his class and he doesn’t particularly get along with him. Sometimes he comes to class smelling of weed.

This same sentiment was echoed by numerous people Tharunka spoke to. Another student said whilst she wouldn’t want to be friends with either heavy drinkers or drug users, she thought drinking was more acceptable because it was legal. “You don’t get involved in all of the sort of criminal activity you do when you have to buy illegal drugs,” she told me. “I think that breaks people and it changes them and it makes things that aren’t acceptable acceptable in their minds and who knows what boundaries they are going to end up crossing later.”

Others are less sure. Tom’s friends start discussing where their favourite campus smoking spots are. “Sometimes I like to lay out in the sun, and if you can light up on the grass there, it’s so fucking



amazing.” They do worry, however, that they may be caught by one of their lecturers. “I have this slow burn fear,” says Tom. “I mean some of them probably smoke all the time, but I don’t necessarily feel like they would be terribly happy with me being there, then, smoking a joint before their class.” He says he knows at least one lecturer who would, however, love the idea of students being stoned in his class. At the end of the day, though, he says when he considers it, he doesn’t think anyone really gives a damn, he doesn’t think half the people who would give a damn know what he’s doing and the other half don’t really care about interfering with his life anyway. The others? Well, fuck them, he says.

Is drug use, then acceptable to other students? According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, over 33% of Australians have smoked marijuana, nearly 5% are addicted to painkillers, analgesics, tranquilisers or sleeping pills, 6% have tried meth-amphetamines, 6% have tried cocaine and 7% have taken hallucinogens. Research, however, in tertiary student use of drugs, is minimal. In America, this is not the case. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University regularly publishes survey results on drug use on campuses. It’s president, Joseph Califano, says the



situation on campuses is deteriorating, even after several campaigns aimed at reducing drug use amongst students. The abuse of prescription drugs and marijuana has increased dramatically, it’s latest report found, since the mid-1990’s. Cocaine use more than doubled between 1993 and 2005, and heroin use tripled.

The Yale Herald report found motivation for use was varied. Students spoke about ‘social anxiety’, because at places like Yale, where it is hard to stand out academically, it is easier to do so with drug use. Others have simply continued habits formed in high-school. As Tom had suggested was the case at UNSW, the Yale Herald spoke to one student who said that although drug use on campus was not acceptable, drugs were concentrated in certain social circles.

I pointed out to another smoker who agreed to be interviewed that some students had specifically mentioned illegality was their major problem with drugs like marijuana, as opposed to drinking. He said that since his last dealer had stopped selling, he’d switched to a product sold at several head shops around Sydney, which had a similar effect but was legal. Herbal smoke mixtures have begun to be sold around Australia, and he said there were many kinds available. “I’ve tried the middle one, purple haze, which is meant to make you relaxed, but encourage conversation, and the last one I tried, tropical infusion or something, was amazing,” he said. “I think that was meant to bake you out.” I asked if that’s what the product description was on the packet. He couldn’t remember. I guess it worked.

I questioned him on if he believed the herbal mixtures were popular. He thought they were. “Well, they’re always out, always running out. I’ve been three times and they’ve been sold out of a few flavours. There are other brands too I think, but they only had one and a quarter grams, so I don’t bother with that.” The minimum he said he’d buy would be seven grams. He’d prefer to be smoking real pot, but it’s more conspicuous. Would he smoke the herbal mixture on campus, I asked. Why not, he said, no-one would know.

The Yale Herald finished their report with a senior who thought a drug culture still exists. He spoke of eliciting crack from strangers. He said his story wasn’t particularly unique.

*\* Names have been changed to protect identities*