



“The night was moving on, the last bus to our estate had come and gone. Would it be another night that we would not know where our grandson was, whom he was with and what condition he was in?”

My wife and I had often spent sleepless nights in bed wondering how we had ended up in this situation, how we'd ended up looking after him and how much stress it had placed on our lives. Sometimes we would blame each other, or ourselves.

Really, we just wanted our grandson to be part of the family again, but without all the complex decisions that come with it. When he'd said he couldn't stand it at home anymore, what could we do? We knew things had come to blows with his stepfather, and until our daughter could sort that out, he couldn't go home. But we didn't realise it would be this hard. We'd already brought up our own kids and were looking forward to retirement, but all that had gone to pot for the moment.

My wife decided to ring him on his mobile. At times he resented us ringing. He thought we were checking on him, or tracking him down. Other times he didn't seem to mind. But when he was away for days on end, his phone would be flat and it was impossible to contact him anyway.

His phone was ringing, he answered and told my wife he had just got off the train and would be home soon, but his voice was slurring; he sounded substance-affected. If he came home straight away it would take him no more than half an hour.

After 40 minutes we began to wonder yet again. Had he met up with someone? It was dark and he was drunk. Lately he had been chroming as well. We rang again; this time he wasn't answering his phone.

He had to walk through a park to get home. Perhaps he had fallen and injured himself, or been bashed – it happens to chromers. Or just gone to sleep somewhere - he and his friends could and did sleep anywhere.

I decided to walk down our street toward the park and the station, taking a torch with me. One hundred metres into the park, my grandson sat on a bench. He sprayed paint into plastic bags he had collected at the fruit and veg section, placed the bag over his mouth and quickly inhaled the fumes until he was off his face. I cried as I watched him destroying himself. What had happened to young people to make them want to do this? What kind of society were we creating?

Impossible to reason with, determined to finish his can, I sat in the cold with him. Eventually I called my wife, to let her know what was happening. She wanted to join us at the park. I didn't feel it was safe for her to come, but she's a stubborn old thing. She marched down and tried to take the can off our grandson, but he, despite his substance abuse, was still very alert to efforts to take the can and very aggressive.

My wife and I had often had problems finding a common approach, particularly with 'in your face' situations. Fortunately on this occasion, we agreed we needed to call the police in, rather than face an escalated problem.

My wife walked back home and called the police, and then rejoined us. It seemed to take forever as we waited in the dark and the cold, our grandson continuing to chrome all the time, pacing and agitated. Several times my wife tried to take the can from him, but every time he grabbed the can and screamed at her to go away. I was concerned that he may become violent, or take off into the night, so I tried to discourage my wife. I told her to go home, but she wouldn't leave. Each time, though, he settled down and resumed his chroming.

I'm not sure how long we were there in the park. It seemed like forever. I hoped that every set of car lights that came past the park was the police, and they would help end the ordeal. Finally a vehicle stopped, but left its lights on, so I made my way up to the parking bay.

Thankfully, it was the police. After a brief discussion as to what the problem was, they accompanied me down to where my wife and grandson were still seated. My grandson was annoyed they came, as he has a very negative attitude to police in general, and he was even more annoyed when they took his paint can. He demanded his can back but was told they had the power to take it.

Reluctantly he accompanied the police back to their vehicle, where they gave him the option of walking home peacefully with us, or being taken to a hospital. Fortunately for us, our grandson's focus of anger on the way home and at home was at the police for taking his can. After a toasted sandwich and a drink, he was off to bed, paint and all! He fell asleep quickly; my wife and I lay in bed reliving each agonising moment.

As I reflect on the night, I am reminded yet again of all the other times decisions had to be made under difficult circumstances. That evening worked out well overall because both my wife and I, although distressed, remained calm and patient. I sought assistance from my wife and both of us sought help from police. The police were understanding and supportive. Both my wife and myself care for and love our grandson, and even though things get messy at times, ultimately we all sense the care we have for each other.

Things got worse in the months after this incident, with our grandson staying away from home, on the streets, and chomping and drinking alcohol daily. Right now, though, he's turned the corner. He was charged by police for an offence and is bailed to live at our home with conditions. This seems to have done the trick.

He helps at times around the house. He takes more pride in his appearance. He is even seeking work. His mum rings him a lot and he seems to be getting on better with her. It seems unfair that he's the one that has to move out, rather than that useless partner of hers. I often wonder what went so wrong for her that she ended up with that fool, and I know my wife feels so guilty about it all. It's placed a lot of stress on our marriage. But there's one thing I've learned in this game, and that is you can't make decisions for other people. You can only support them to make decisions for themselves.



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“He takes more pride in his appearance. He is even seeking work. Whilst things aren't back to normal, and I'm sure there will still be challenges, it is great to have him back as a family member.”



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