

# MS SUFFERER

EXCLUSIVE

By AMANDA REVELL WALTON

**A MULTIPLE Sclerosis sufferer is spending her benefits on buying illegal drugs from street dealers – the only respite she gets from her disease.**

Her limbs stiff and aching, and trying to control the shakes racking her body, Michelle X forces herself to wrap up warmly and leave her house to buy cannabis, repeatedly breaking the law to try to live a normal, pain-free life.

The 46-year-old mum, who changed her surname to X as part of her campaign to highlight the plight of MS sufferers, faces symptoms including pain, muscle spasms, numbness, fatigue and problems with mobility, balance and vision.

Her only escape from the horrendous effects of the degenerative disease is through cannabis.

Without it she would be wheelchair-bound and in agony.

*Michelle says: "I have been forced into a world I would not normally have been involved with – and now I even have a criminal record."*

She had only just married her childhood sweetheart, Mark Galsworthy, when she was first diagnosed with MS. She was 21.

She says: "I was shocked. I was very active. I did a lot of horse riding, I rode motorbikes and worked full-time as a manageress for a big haulage company."

Michelle was pumped with steroids but spells of crippling immobility forced her to use crutches and sometimes left her wheelchair bound.

## 'The drug stopped the agonising spasms'

Not long after the bombshell of her diagnosis, Michelle's GP suggested that if she and her husband wanted a family, they should think about having a child within the next three years.

She says: "He explained if there was an increase in the MS, it would be too debilitating for me to have a baby and I wouldn't physically be able to bring up a family."

Michelle eventually had a pain-free pregnancy and gave birth by emergency Caesarean to daughter Samantha-Jane on November 24, 1991. But after the birth, Michelle's MS symptoms came back with a vengeance.

She says: "I'd had a nine-month break from pain then, literally overnight, the pains, spasms and shaking came back."

Michelle decided not to have any more children. It was a decision which created a rift in her marriage and the couple split when their daughter was six.

Michelle became a qualified aerobics instructor but was then diagnosed with Secondary Progressive MS, which neurologists describe as "a sustained build-up of disability".

She took part in various different clinical trials and it was during this time that she heard about the effectiveness of cannabis.

She says: "I'd tried cannabis once before with a friend. We'd smoked and laughed and smoked... and then I threw up, went to bed and slept. I decided it wasn't for me."

"When I found they were testing a new drug containing cannabis, I thought I'd look into it more."

Michelle had decided not to take any more steroids as not only did they cause her weight to balloon – at one stage up to 16½st – but she also believed them to be "a false fix" with limited success.

She says: "I started to try cannabis first thing in the morning when

the pain was the worst. It was unbelievable. I didn't seize up or get any agonising, shooting spasms or shakes and I felt so much more relaxed."

Over time Michelle learnt the street lingo for the drug – weed, grass, green, bush. She says: "I smoke a type which is better for my symptoms. You get to know what kind it is by the taste."

But with the joy of finding a substance which helped ease the often excruciating pain of her debilitating disease also came the danger of having to go out and buy an illegal Class B drug.

Michelle, who also has a three-year-old grandson, says: "I ended up having so many different experiences of buying from dealers."

"One time I was really desperate so I just went to a pub, stood with



## WHAT IS MS?

MS is an inflammatory disease in which the insulating covers of nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord are damaged.

This damage disrupts the ability of the nervous system to communicate, resulting in problems with muscle movement, balance and vision.

Last year Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne's TV presenter son Jack, left, revealed he was a sufferer.



# I am forced to spend my benefits on street drugs to battle MS

## Says MICHELLE X



BIKER CHICK . . . Michelle used to ride



WEDDING BELLS . . . with third hubby Jon

the smokers and asked them, 'Do you know anyone who has any marijuana?'

"Another time I went to score from a couple and they told me they didn't have any cannabis but they had cocaine and E. It made me realise prohibition can push people towards harder drugs."

Michelle, who had a brief rebound marriage which lasted just 28 days, decided to try to grow her own cannabis plants – not only so she would not have to buy from strangers on the street but also because it was more cost-effective.

She started growing it in a tent in a coal shed in her back garden. She would dry out the leaves of the plants and either add them to her food or inhale them through an electronic vaporiser.

When her beloved

mum Patricia was diagnosed with cancer, Michelle gave her cannabis to help with the side-effects of the chemotherapy.

Michelle says: "She said it was amazing. It really helped her cope with the treatment."

**In March police raided her home**

The only problem was her mum lived in Spain. Michelle recalls: "That Spanish deal ended up being one of the scariest I have ever had to do."

"I'd talked to a few locals and was told to drive to a little ghetto where there were concrete houses the size of sheds."

"I gave one of the women there the money and she disappeared

and came back and gave me the stuff. I couldn't wait to get out of there. It was a world I'd never seen or experienced before."

In 2009 Michelle met and married her third husband, Jon Liddle. But after just three years they parted and Michelle believes her MS and her need to use cannabis had put a strain on the marriage.

"Jon could see what cannabis did for me and was happy to give me the cash to go and buy it – but not to grow it at home."

"I'd often run out and so my health was very up and down but he refused point blank to let me grow my own."

After the marriage ended, Michelle took out a £1,000 loan, bought all of the necessary equipment, including lights, extractor fans and coverings, and

expanded production in her shed. It gave her a constant supply.

In March this year, however, police raided her home in Abingdon, Oxon.

Michelle says: "It was soul destroying seeing them take everything."

"I did a taped interview with them and told them the truth. I had nothing to hide."

Michelle pleaded not guilty to cultivation and possession of a controlled Class B drug and asked to be tried in front of a jury.

But the day before her Crown Court appearance, the police rang Michelle and asked if she would accept a caution.

Family pressure convinced her to agree and the court case was dropped.

But without her own cannabis

crop, Michelle had to go back to buying from street dealers – at a cost of £20 a day.

This means she is having to spend £600 of her £800 monthly sickness benefit on the drug.

She explains: "I am paying top price because I can only buy it in small amounts in case it is taken off me by the police again."

"I feel very strongly about being honest about how I live my life and the benefits of cannabis for MS sufferers. The system needs to be changed."

"I changed my surname to X so that I have no last name."

"I want to show I am standing for everyone with MS. I am not unique – and neither is the way I chose to treat my condition."



## WHERE DOES LAW STAND?

CANNABIS is a Class B drug and being found with it in your possession can result in a prison sentence of five years.

But police also have the option of issuing a warning or an on-the-spot fine of £90.

Supplying or producing cannabis carries a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. Over the years a number of police divisions have tried taking a softer approach to possession by simply confiscating the drug rather than prosecuting.

## WHAT DO DOCS SAY?

SUN doctor Carol Cooper, right, says: "Some MS patients have found cannabis useful for shaking and muscle spasms, which can be very disabling. The drug also improves the effect of strong painkillers like morphine."

"But there's a downside. Cannabis is illegal so growing your own and getting supplies from others is risky because you don't know the strength of what it is you are buying."

