Rodney Dangerfield’s Lifelong Romance With Marijuana

By Joan Dangerfield

The comedian’s widow gave this talk at the Patients Out of Time conference on cannabis therapies in Santa Barbara April 7.

If Rodney were here today he would say something brilliant. He would probably open with a marijuana joke. He’d say, “I tell ya, that marijuana really has an effect on you. The other day I smoked a half joint and I got so hungry, I ate the other half.”

Rodney had a fantastically unique mind. Few people knew he was a mathematical genius, but everyone knew he was hilarious. His humor was a razor thrust into social hypocrisy and the little injustices of life. He wrote “killers” and made the world laugh.

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Another thing that was not widely known about Rodney is that he endured quite a bit of personal suffering in his life. He was heartbreakingly neglected in many ways. Rodney embodied that experience. Like “the tears of a clown,” and in many ways, he created his remarkable mind also created certain psychological challenges. Acute anxiety and manic depression were congenital issues that plagued Rodney’s life.

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To give you an idea of how his anxiety would manifest itself, Rodney couldn’t sit still. In Caddyshack, his character, Al Cervic, is constantly fidgeting like he’s about to burst out of his skin. The truth is, this was no act. Rodney was under duress. He felt Chevy Chase was talking too slowly and it got on his nerves. Rodney’s impatience would come out through his body. The pace of the whole world was too slow for him until he found marijuana.

Rodney first lit up back in 1942

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Rodney wanted to title the book “My Lifelong Romance with Marijuana.” I was sure then that Rodney would be arrested. So I looked for, and found, Dr. David Bearman here in Santa Barbara. Dr. Bearman examined Rodney and obtained records from Rodney’s other doctors for review. In addition to his anxiety and depression, at the time Rodney’s medical conditions included constant pain from the congenital fusion of his spine, an inoperable dislocated shoulder and rotator-cuff tear and arthritis. Rodney wasn’t able to take traditional pain medications because of their interactions with his blood-thinning medication, Coumadin. We were elated a few days after that initial visit with Dr. Bearman when Rodney’s medicinal use was approved. Rodney showed the approval letter to everyone and carried miniature versions in his pockets. Ever the worried wife, I included a copy of the letter in the memory box of his casket in case the feds were waiting for him at the Pearly Gates.

Even though Rodney endured numerous health challenges over the years, including aneurysms, heart surgeries and a brain bypass, he remained active and vital during his last incredible year. He swam regularly, went on a multi-city press tour to promote his best-selling book (the publisher made him change the title to “It’s Not Easy Bein’ Me”), recorded an album of love songs called “Romero Rodney,” and wrote countless new jokes.

After all those years of pot smoking, his memory and his joke-writing ability did not suffer and his lungs were okay. He was as sharp as ever.

Even moments after brain surgery Rodney didn’t miss a beat. Rodney’s doctor came to his bedside after he was taken off the respirator. He said, “Rodney, are you coughing up much?” And Rodney said, “Last week, five-hundred and a brain bypass, he remained active and vital during his last incredible year. He swam regularly, went on a multi-city press tour to promote his best-selling book (the publisher made him change the title to “It’s Not Easy Bein’ Me”), recorded an album of love songs called “Romero Rodney,” and wrote countless new jokes.

Some of you may be aware that 4:20 is a symbolic time of day for many marijuana enthusiasts. About a year after Rodney’s brain surgery, he had heart surgery and due to complications his life ended... Coincidentally, or perhaps meaningfully, at 4:20 p.m. EST.

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Types of Humor

HUMOR, WIT, SATIRE, SARCASM, INVENTIVE, IRONY, CYNICISM AND THE SARDONIC —TYPES OF HUMOR CATEGORIZED IN “MODERN ENGLISH USAGE” BY H.W. Fowler. Oxford University Press published Fowler’s dictionary/guide in 1926. Please forgive the funky scan —did you ever read anything more brilliant than this little matrix? And yet none of the categories define Rodney Dangerfield’s thing. Sardonic comes close, but his audience was us, the people.