

A Smoke Signals Sampler

In late summer Scribner will publish *Smoke Signals* by Martin A. Lee, a truly PC (as in pro-cannabis) writer and organizer. Lee is also co-editor of O'Shaughnessy's. His best-known book, *Acid Dreams*, was subtitled "a social history of LSD." The new one is "a social history of marijuana — medical, recreational, and scientific."

Some excerpts follow.

- A key aspect of cannabis as a social phenomenon has been its boundary-crossing quality, how it leapt like a flame from one culture to another. So did jazz. The music and the weed were fellow travelers, so to speak, joined at the juncture of hip. Even after the onset of federal prohibition, when viper lyrics were distinctly out of favor, contraband cannabis could be procured at jazz clubs such as Minton's Playhouse on 118th Street in New York City. That was where the great saxophonist Lester ("Prez") Young gave Jack Kerouac, the fledgling writer, his first taste of marijuana in 1945. It would prove to be a seminal, flame-leaping moment.

Kerouac and his cohorts got high together in small groups, much like the bohemian writers who congregated at the Hashish Eaters club in mid-nineteenth century Paris. The beats were conscious of their link to this great stoned lineage of European artists, which included the Dadaists, Surrealists, Symbolists and others who defied convention. Kerouac's cabal loved the associational fluidity engendered by cannabis, how it loosened the powers of analogy and unleashed the spoken word. They stayed up all night smoking fat marijuana bombers, listening to jazz, reciting poetry and confiding their deepest secrets, their hopes and fears, in protracted, stoned rap sessions.

Marijuana was a truth drug, of sorts, for the beats. As beat poet Allen Ginsberg recalled: "All that we knew was that we were making sense to each other, you know talking from heart to heart, and that everybody else around us was talking like some kind of strange, lunar robots in business suits."

- On August 28, 1964, the day Bob Dylan lit up and handed the Beatles their first joint in a New York City hotel room, Dr. Raphael Mechoulam was working intently in his laboratory at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The young Israeli chemist and his research partner, Yechiel Gaoni, would soon become the first scientists to fully isolate and synthesize delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, marijuana's principal psychoactive component.

Mechoulam's groundbreaking research was subsidized by the U.S. National Institutes for Health (NIH), which had suddenly become desirous of more objective information about the herb. As the use of marijuana soared among middle class youth, officialdom started to get anxious, especially when the sons and daughters of prominent politicians were caught smoking it.

Queried by members of Congress as to whether pot caused brain damage, the NIH scurried to gather basic scientific data. But hard science was difficult to come by in large part due to the stubborn refusal of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics to sanction laboratory research. For a long time, the illegality of cannabis acted as a deterrent to research in the United States.

From a scientific perspective, the riddle of THC was not easy to unravel. The small number of researchers who studied cannabis over the years found the herb difficult to work with because many of its 421 distinct compounds are "lipophilic" (soluble in fat but not in water), which means they can't be separated and scrutinized without sophisticated equipment. Scientists would eventually ascertain that at least 100 of

these lipophilic compounds —known as "cannabinoids"— are unique to the marijuana plant. In addition to the cannabinoids, a term coined by Mechoulam, marijuana contains various alkaloids, flavonoids and terpenoids (essential aromatic oils).

The isolation and synthesis of THC would prove to be a highly significant event in the history of psychopharmacology. Mechoulam, then 34, announced his discovery in a letter to the editor of the Journal of the American Chemical Society on July 20, 1965. Although he didn't realize it at the time, Mechoulam had lit a slow-burning fuse that would detonate a revolution in medical science.

- "Hoover University," located at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia, specialized in teaching spooks how to penetrate left-wing networks in the 1960s. Students who attended this elite FBI academy were instructed not to wash for several days in order to project the appropriate counterculture image when they approached radical groups. The more astute spies recognized that if they insinuated themselves into the radical wing of the antiwar movement, they might be expected to share a joint now and then with their newfound comrades.

Smoking marijuana during an undercover assignment "required a much higher degree of training than merely smoking a cigarette," acknowledged former FBI agent Cril Payne, who wrote about his time as an undercover leftie. During breaks between lectures on the New Left, drug abuse and FBI procedure, Payne and several G-men would sneak away to get stoned. "We were definitely a happy group as we floated over to the dining hall," Payne recalled. "Just as we had suspected, the food did taste better, especially the second helpings." Payne could hardly keep from laughing as he watched his classmates "systematically appropriate ever-increasing portions of the official Bureau stash."

Payne fooled his surveillance targets by posing as a pot dealer. This way he could easily explain how he was able to support himself without a regular job and why he split the scene for brief interludes. "And since there was a certain aura of mystery and intrigue surrounding marijuana dealers, many of whom were viewed as modern day folk heroes, I wouldn't be expected to divulge extensive information about myself," Payne later explained. The fact that he supplied, rolled, and smoked reefer further enhanced his credibility as a dealer and a counterculture radical. "My undercover experiences brought me to the point where I considered marijuana use a normal social occurrence," said Payne, who confided that he found the altered state of awareness brought on by cannabis to be "both pleasurable and relaxing." He eventually left the FBI disillusioned with the suits who ran the Bureau and somewhat sympathetic to the earnest young radicals he consorted with during his days and nights undercover.

- When Carolyn ("Mountain Girl") Garcia, the matriarch of the Grateful Dead, started cultivating marijuana in her backyard in the early 1970s, making money wasn't part of the homegrown equation. For Mountain Girl and her husband, Jerry Garcia, cannabis was always more sacrament than commodity. Their home in Marin



County, just north of San Francisco, attracted a steady stream of visitors and world travelers, including some who brought

marijuana seeds from exotic places. Mountain Girl, the daughter of a botanist, had a way with plants in general and cannabis in particular. She planted a few pot seeds from Vietnam in a secluded spot in her outdoor garden and by summer's end the Dead and their extended family were getting blitzed on MG's "Marble Buddha" weed. It was stronger than any pot they had smoked. "Two hits of this stuff and you were gone, you'd turn into a marble Buddha," said Mountain Girl.

Mountain Girl shared her growing techniques with other eager gardeners. "I had a whole circle of friends who were doing it . . . this whole group of women growers who started in Mendicino," she recalled. As more would-be pot growers turned to her for advice, Mountain Girl put her thoughts down on paper. *Primo Plant*, the first cannabis cultivation handbook written by a woman, included homespun tips on composting, ground preparation, greenhouses, soil mixes, pruning and cultivating a deeper relationship with one's plants. She felt that a grower's personal vibe became part of the plant's vibe. "Thai farmers pray and meditate in their gardens," MG noted.

One of Mountain Girl's infamous associates from the psychedelic Sixties had his own ideas about how to augment a marijuana crop. Augustus Owsley Stanley III, the legendary underground chemist who produced some 12 million doses of LSD before running afoul of the law, also got into growing reefer. He studied Rudolph Steiner's writings on biodynamic gardening and applied them in a rather idiosyncratic way to marijuana horticulture. Owsley maintained the herb grew better if you made love in your pot patch.

Cannabis cultivators had something else in mind when they spoke of "sexing the plants," a practice that entailed identifying and uprooting all the males to prevent the female marijuana plants from being pollinated. The sexually frustrated females produce bigger flower clusters with more sticky, aromatic resin in an attempt to catch pollen that never arrives. Known as sinsemilla (Spanish for "without seeds"), the unfertilized females buds, oozing psychoactive THC and other phytocannabinoids,

are the most prized part of the marijuana crop.

This ancient method of cultivating potent, seedless reefer was rediscovered and resurrected by American horticulturists in the 1970s.

Sexing the plants was simple — all you needed to know was what the male and female flowers looked like in their earliest stages. Mountain Girl wrote about it. So did Mel Frank and Ed Rosenthal in *The Marijuana Grower's Guide*. Cannabis, a hearty, adaptable plant that almost anyone could grow, also lent itself to sophisticated breeding and cultivation techniques, such as cloning and crossing strains, which were explained scientifically in Robert Connell Clarke's *Marijuana Botany*. These books would influence an up-and-coming generation of ganja gardeners who quickly picked up on the rule —if you want great stuff, snuff the males.

- Cheerful, feisty and legally blind, Elvy Musikka was the third person approved for the Compassionate Investigative New Drug program, the second glaucoma patient to qualify, and the first woman to get prescription pot from Uncle Sam. Born with congenital cataracts, she credited cannabis with partially restoring and preserving her sight in one eye after several botched surgeries. "If you smoke or eat marijuana, your whole system gets so much better," said Musikka, who became a federal patient in 1988 shortly after a Florida judge declared her innocent of marijuana charges on the grounds of medical necessity. (She had been busted for growing a few plants in her backyard.)

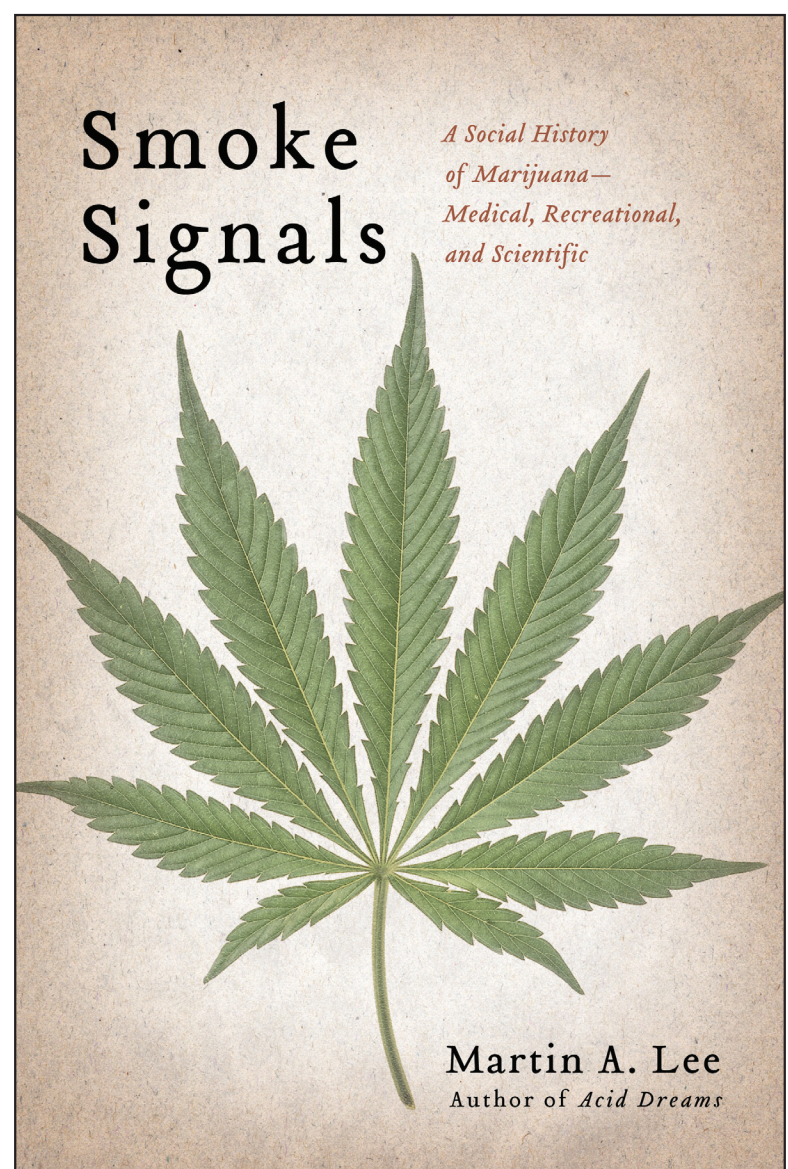
Musikka felt compelled to speak out for people in need of medicinal cannabis. She had the time of her life touring the country with the Cannabis Action Network (CAN) in the early 1990s. "Those kids were wonderful. They worked their little fannies off — that's for sure," Musikka reminisced. "They

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CAROLYN GARCIA

photo by John Hamm



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were determined to put everything aside and go out and educate people. They had the same idea as I did. We've got to tell people! If people knew the truth, they would not keep this prohibition."

Elvy was a walking, talking repudiation of the official fiction that cannabis had no therapeutic benefit.

Musikka gave CAN instant credibility. She was a walking, talking repudiation of the official fiction that cannabis had no therapeutic benefit. Her very existence exposed the knotted lie at the heart of marijuana prohibition. "The medicinal aspect was crucial —that's what the press wanted," said CAN founder Debby Goldsberry. "And we had Elvy. It seemed like everywhere we went Elvy appeared on the front page of the newspaper the next day. She toured with us constantly for several years. She lived in the van with us. It was like having your grandmother along."

There was no generation gap on this caravan. They were all united by their devotion to cannabis. "It's a holy weed. I thank God for it every day of my life," said Musikka. Whereas some medical marijuana advo-

cates were squeamish about conflating recreational and therapeutic consumption, Elvy didn't mince words: "It's a very positive, mind-altering experience. It enhances creativity . . . I enjoy the high."

• Cannabis-smoking was not uncommon among world class athletes —soccer stars, swimmers, skiers, boxers, football and baseball players, the gamut— who found marijuana, a pain-management and stress-reducing medicine, to be well suited for the injurious lifestyle of an athlete.

"Marijuana culture is widely accepted and is not something looked down upon," according to Rebagliati.

Canadian Ross Rebagliati, the first snowboarder to win Olympic gold, was almost stripped of his medal after he tested positive for marijuana in 1998. He said he had inhaled secondhand pot smoke at a party. Within extreme winter sports circles "marijuana culture is widely accepted and is not something looked down upon," according to Rebagliati.

In bygone days, a marijuana bust might have torpedoed a promising athletic career. But this was '98 —year of "the Dude," the pot-smoking slacker played by Jeff Bridges in The Big Lebowski. Throughout the wide world of sports and celebrity entertainment, it was indisputable —the Weed, like the Dude, abides.



ELVY MUSIKKA WITH NIDAWANNA



ROSS REBAGLIATI WITH GOLD MEDAL

Look for author Martin A. Lee at the Smoke Signals booth...



POSTER BY CORY AND CATSKA ENCH

"Be there or be in DARE." —W.T.