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Kevin O'Hara: Tales of youthful reefer madness



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A photo of the author, circa the days when he had experimented with marijuana.

PHOTO BY WILLIAM F. SAMOLIS

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By Kevin O'Hara

PITTSFIELD —When I spotted the recent Eagle photo of our dutiful mayor Linda Tyer at a pot shop opening, sniffing some primo weed like it was a scented candle, I figured it was high time to share a few reefer-related stories of my own. Stories that go back to the day when Mary Jane was a most dangerous mistress.

My first experience with the then "evil" weed was with my friend, Lester. It was during the time of Woodstock, but Les and I were nowhere near Yasgur's Farm, instead taking our ease atop an old French pillbox in Vietnam. Despite our grim surroundings, I found the experience rather pleasant, though it left me craving a stack of Oreo cookies.

Pie-eyed

A few years later, back in Pittsfield, I tried pot again when I accompanied my darling new bride Belita to her first holiday laboratory house party. During the festivities, a fellow guest sidled up to me with joint in hand, and invited me outside. Tired of hearing about bacteria that could wipe out the world, I foolishly followed, and returned to the gathering absolutely pie-eyed. Luckily, I was able to keep my giddiness in check, but as we were leaving the party, I saw a few doctors cracking up in my direction. I brushed it off, thinking it was pot's well-known side effect of paranoia. But when we got home, Belita instantly discovered the reason for their hilarity — I had buttoned my sport coat into the buttonholes of my overcoat. Oy!

But my most frightening adventure with cannabis occurred in the harvest days of 1975. On that crisp October morning, I'd just returned home to April Lane after dropping off Belita at work, when a knock came to our apartment door. It was Pete, my longhaired "wake and bake" neighbor, who asked if I'd drive him up to Vermont to score a bag of dope. Like a stooge I agreed, and we soon found ourselves motoring north in my flashy blue VW Karmann Ghia.

Just past Bennington, Pete directed me down a long rutted road that led to a ramshackle farmhouse. There he disappeared into an adjoining barn, only to reappear with a large black plastic bag slung over his shoulder. "Don't tell me that's all pot?" I gasped. "Yep, two pounds worth," he happily replied. Seeing my jaw drop, he added, "Don't worry, Kev, I'll take the rap if we get caught."

Sure, Pete, you'll "take the rap." Like the judge is going to take the word of a self-confessed chronic stoner. After all, it's my car under my control and command, and I'm fully cognizant of its illegal cargo. I'm clearly an accessory, if not the perpetrator. Add Interstate trafficking with a Schedule 1 controlled substance, and I'm looking at 7 to 10 years at Walpole, if caught. But things only got worse. Driving back up the rutted path, a jutting rock tore right through my muffler, which turned my pattering four-cylinder VW into a Harley Fatboy. I frantically jumped from the car to assess the damage, while my stoned-out passenger lazily rolled up a doobie and said, "C'mon, Kev, chill. You're freaking me out here."

Oh, really. I'm freaking him out? Here I am in the hinterlands of Vermont with a trunk load of dope inside my ear-splitting, skunk-stinking, hippie-looking car, and Mr. Longhair is telling me to chill. With my heart pounding like a snare drum, we finally reached Route 7 and navigated cautiously through Bennington toward home. Coming into Pownal, however, I spotted a state policeman standing by the road with his speed gun aimed directly at us like a Colt .45. Cringing behind the wheel as I slowed to just below the speed limit, I nodded friendly-like to the officer. Imagine my relief when he didn't flinch from my trumpeting tailpipe, but simply nodded back, as if Pete and I were innocent leaf-peepers enjoying a glorious day among the state's famous maples. Saints be praised and sinners saved!

When we arrived safely back at his digs, Pete handed me fifty bucks to repair my muffler. He then pulled out a scale and measured three one-ounce baggies from his enormous stash. The first ounce, he said, was for endangering my marriage, the second for risking my profession, and the third for jeopardizing my very existence. Three "lids" seemed like a lifetime supply to me. I certainly wasn't going to deal it, and having that much grass in the house was a major crime in those days. So that Christmas, I found the perfect way to play Santa. I rolled up two dozen joints the size of Havana cigars, and presented them to friends with a homemade card that read: "Toys for Tots but Buds for Buddies!"

Needless to say, we were invited to countless Christmas parties for years thereafter.

Kevin O'Hara is a longtime Eagle columnist. Visit his website at thedonkeyman.com.

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