

MAGAZINE SECONDS

SECONDS #48, 1998 • interview by George Petros

A Brief History of **HIGH TIMES** *Magazine*



HIGH TIMES — *the name says it all. Sparkling champagne during Prohibition, sparkling Cocaine during The Me Generation, sparking up blunts today in the Hip Hop Nation — from the beginning of time our pleasures have been defined by intoxication ritual and its attendant transcendental rhetoric. In 1974 a guy named Tom Forçade decided to combine the two — and so he founded High Times. Intended to be a drug paraphernalia trade mag (with plenty of helpful articles) aimed at Head Shop owners, it quickly mutated into an underground Drug Culture mag with almost paradoxical “mainstream” distribution and world-class investigative credibility — attributes that continue to gain strength.*

High Times today is a slick monthly sitting prominently on most of America’s newsstands. It’s treated almost like a porno mag — a testament to the crazy, mixed-up situation that has arisen from the blundering Marijuana prohibition: cops busted for dealing; politicians laundering drug profits; grandmothers busted for cooking with Hemp seeds; alcohol cartels financing anti-drug campaigns; terminal patients at war with beauracrats; illegal sting operations in foreign countries conducted by agencies implicated in the importation and sales of Cocaine and Heroin — it’s just plain nuts!



“I’m afraid this country is becoming something like Nazi Germany was in the Thirties when it comes to drugs. There might have to be refugees from this.”

SECONDS: *I see High Times started with seasonal issues —*

HOLMSTROM: It started as a quarterly magazine. They wanted to make it a trade magazine for paraphernalia. Tom Forçade had been the director of the Underground Press Syndicate and he had the distribution contacts. They printed ten thousand copies and they sold out immediately. They printed another ten thousand and those sold out immediately. Then they printed another ten thousand and those sold out. They printed fifty thousand copies of the second issue and those sold out immediately. The peak was when they put a Marijuana plant on the cover. That was the highest selling issue in the history of the magazine — and it wasn’t even on newsstands. Just through the underground, they were selling close to a million copies per issue.

SECONDS: *Tell us about Tom Forçade.*

HOLMSTROM: Tom Forçade was the founder of *High Times*. He was involved with the Yippies and the White Panther Party, he was allegedly in the Weatherman and he founded the Zippies, a countermovement against the Yippies when the Yippies supported George McGovern in ’72.

SECONDS: *Did the Zippies come about during the convention?*

HOLMSTROM: Yes. Zeitgeist International Party. They were dedicated to keeping the resistance against the war. One of things that turned people against Tom was that he would advocate violence. Like I said, he was allegedly a member of the Weatherman.

SECONDS: *Where was he from?*

HOLMSTROM: Arizona. He left there and

published a Hippie magazine, *Orpheus*, out of a school bus. Then he moved to New York and started a commune called The Free Ranger Tribe and ran the Underground Press Syndicate. He thought of the idea for *High Times* when he was hiding out in Florida on bomb charges. He was arrested for trying to blow up a candidate during the Miami convention — because he was stage managing a Rock musical called *Eat The Rich* and they found smoke bombs in his truck. I heard a great story about how Jane Fonda was upset during that convention because her and Tom Hayden were giving an important speech and Forçade was playing this loud music. He pissed everybody off — and for all the right reasons.

SECONDS: *Where did the money come from to start the magazine? The lore is that he made it in smuggling —*

HOLMSTROM: He was a smuggler, that’s well-known and documented. Nobody knows where the money came from — nobody would ask that. He also ran a speakeasy at the time — or a smokeasy, as he called it.

SECONDS: *Where was this?*

HOLMSTROM: I don’t know exactly, but there was a story about it in one of the early issues. People would knock on the door, be escorted into a room, given a menu; it would be weighed out in front of them and they’d leave. He was very proud of these kind of things — he loved Marijuana and the more Marijuana he could get involved in, the better he liked it. As far as how the magazine was founded, it doesn’t take much money to print ten thousand copies of an underground mag.

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They sold thirty thousand copies of the first issue and then people were lined up to take out ads — I don't think he had to put in money after that. It's a success story like *Playboy*, where Hugh Hefner raised five thousand dollars and that's all he ever needed.

SECONDS: *What was the early reaction to High Times?*

HOLMSTROM: I know I didn't like it at the time. I thought it was late and passé, but obviously it wasn't. It got good press in *Time* and *Newsweek*. The tone of the country back then was that they were going to decriminalize Marijuana. Nixon had just been through Watergate — the Shafer Commission report had come out and people knew that Marijuana wasn't a dangerous drug. The feeling around the country was it would be legal eventually.

SECONDS: *What happened? Did Cocaine ruin Pot's credibility?*

HOLMSTROM: That's part of it, but it's also when the family movement started. From what I understand, some woman walked into a record store and her fifteen-year-old son was off looking at these Star Wars-type devices and the sales help at the store explained these were bong. She was horrified the record store would be selling bong and started writing letters to congressmen. That's the surface story but since the anti-drug movement is funded by certain forces in government and business, it's hard to believe, since bong had been for sale for so long. Everybody knows Hippie boutiques became very popular around '67. One of the reasons they became popular is they were selling pipes and paraphernalia. In fact, *High Times* was launched at a boutique show. The boutique shows were pretty much paraphernalia shows; they weren't really about just clothing.

SECONDS: *What were some of the business interests that opposed Pot?*

HOLMSTROM: If you get a list of who

supports Partnership For A Drug Free America, you've got everybody in the book. Everybody puts out a nice public image by putting down drugs. No company's going to support *High Times*.

SECONDS: *When I look at the literature of the D.A.R.E program, its sponsors include Coors and Anheiser-Busch. That's kind of ironic, isn't it?*

HOLMSTROM: By the late Sixties-early Seventies, their sales were way down because of Marijuana use. Throughout the Seventies, people were staying home, smoking Pot, watching TV and not going to bars. The club scene was almost dead. People were cocooning.

SECONDS: *What was happening in America when High Times came out in 1974?*

HOLMSTROM: I was going to School Of Visual Arts at

the time, so I wasn't paying attention.

SECONDS: *So you didn't have a sense that society was about to evolve into a drug-friendly state?*

HOLMSTROM: New York is a bad example because they'd just passed the Rockefeller laws. If you were caught with drugs you were facing a very long prison term. I was clean at the time, and anti-drug.

SECONDS: *Isn't Governor Pataki currently giving automatic probation to anybody who's a non-violent drug offender —*

HOLMSTROM: Not to Deadheads; just to Coke dealers who are politically connected.

SECONDS: *You just mentioned Deadheads and Cocaine dealers. Where the average American might view the drug culture as one thing, what you're implying is that it's segmented.*

HOLMSTROM: Oh yeah. I think *High Times* got into trouble when they started putting Cocaine coverage in the magazine. The natural following of this magazine was always Hippies and Deadheads and they rejected Cocaine culture, which was more attached to Disco culture.



Tom Forçade

“If you were caught with drugs you were facing a very long prison term.”

SECONDS: *The way we understand the history is that High Times hit its nadir in the early Eighties —*

HOLMSTROM: Things definitely fell apart once Tom died. There was factionalism and disagreement over the direction the magazine should take. It wasn't the same magazine. Tom held everything together and it became a downward spiral once he was gone. Between 1981 and 1985, it was a Cocaine magazine.

SECONDS: *How would you characterize the next period in its history?*

HOLMSTROM: It went back to being a Pot magazine. The magazine was close to being broke in 1985 but from 1986 on, the renaissance began.

SECONDS: *That's when you came in —*

HOLMSTROM: Steve Hager, myself and John Howell were the three people who started to turn it around.

SECONDS: *Were you a Pot lover or was this just a great editorial gig?*

HOLMSTROM: Hagar talked me into it. He said, “We kicked Cocaine out forever.” I would not have worked for the magazine otherwise. Steve said he was going to revive *High Times* and bring it back to the glory days. He laid out a plan and it sounded good to me but I was nervous because *High Times* had been stiffing freelancers for many years. While it was a Coke magazine, it was not paying people. In the Seventies, if you worked for *High Times* it enhanced your reputation with people in the magazine industry. In the middle Eighties, if you worked for it, it was more embarrassing than working for a pornography magazine. Steve said he was going to turn it around and he did.

SECONDS: *How did you kick Coke out?*

HOLMSTROM: It happened before my time but from what I've heard, everybody agreed. Nobody had any great love for it and the stories about freebasing and Crack made it obvious that it was not a recreational drug, that it belonged in a category with Heroin.

SECONDS: *What's High Times' relationship with law enforcement?*

HOLMSTROM: It's very weird. They use the Trans-High Market Quotations in the

course of their business. They try to keep up on the latest technical advances; they read the grow books — whatever they can to get an edge on busting our readers. A certain kind of law enforcement official hates what we represent — even if they smoke Pot!

SECONDS: *What about Operation Green Merchant?*

HOLMSTROM: There's been a number of police actions against the magazine. It goes from starting the family movement to try and discredit us, to passing legislation in the Seventies, to outlawing bongos and bong advertising and drug literature —

SECONDS: *Is this state legislation?*

HOLMSTROM: Yes, state by state. Then the D.E.A. once took classified ads telling people how to set up a Meth cooker and then they were busting the people who answered the ad. It looked really bad for the magazine because it looked like we had something to do with it. But the High Times ad people didn't know it was the D.E.A. behind the ads; they were using some kind of front.

SECONDS: *Do you have a relationship with the D.E.A.?*

HOLMSTROM: If they do something, we'll report on it. With Operation Green Merchant, they busted a bunch of stores in 1989 that were advertising in High Times. Peter Gorman [*High Times* executive editor at the time] called them up and they jokingly answered the phone, “What, you guys are still in business?” But they'll do interviews with us. We've interviewed former D.E.A. agents who understand that we're one of the few magazines in the country that have told the truth about what's been going on all these years. Not all D.E.A. agents tow the party line. A lot of ex-police and ex-D.E.A. want to talk to us about what they know about the corruption and the damage the drug war's doing.

SECONDS: *Ever had a snitch here?*

HOLMSTROM: Forçade said he thought he had one in the mailroom in the Seventies. He said when he was running his different groups in the Sixties, you could always tell which ones they were. He'd just give them all the shitwork to do and it wouldn't be long before they'd quit. There was one informer

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called Chic Eder and he was one of the things that lead to Tom's suicide. This guy Chic Eder, who I think even wrote something for *High Times* and was a close associate of Albert Goldman, was involved in smuggling adventures and turned out to be a snitch. Tom found this out right before he died.

SECONDS: *Is it because of this guy that Goldman's book on smuggling never got published?*

HOLMSTROM: No.

There was just no interest. That's when the pendulum started swinging. Goldman did an article on smuggling for New York magazine making it sound like a romantic adventure.

During the post-Woodstock honeymoon period, Marijuana was romantic.

SECONDS: *But again, Cocaine came along and ruined it.*

HOLMSTROM: Cocaine itself wasn't discredited until the mid-Eighties. The White House scandal had a lot to do with it. Did you see that *High Times* cover with Jimmy Carter and a Coke spoon? That incident did a lot of damage.

SECONDS: *Peter Bourne doing Coke at a disco —*

HOLMSTROM: At a NORML party, I believe. Apparently somebody asked Keith Stroup, the head of NORML at the time, if Peter Bourne was using Cocaine at a NORML party and he didn't deny it. That did irreparable harm. Just a few weeks before, there was federal legislation that would have decriminalized Marijuana. This is where everything shifted. Carter was on the record saying Marijuana should be decriminalized. Decriminalization bills were passing all over the country.

SECONDS: *Including Alaska, right?*

HOLMSTROM: That wasn't a bill, that was a Supreme Court decision of some kind on States' Rights. I don't think they ever had a ballot proposition.

SECONDS: *They repealed it by vote.*

HOLMSTROM: But that didn't hold up in court. You can't pass a ballot initiative that will overturn a court decision. See, Alaska

did not want to join the union, so when they did join they put in their statehood claims that they would keep their state constitution. This is why even though thirty-three states have passed medical Marijuana bills, nobody can get legalized medical Marijuana in any state, because Federal law supersedes State law — not so in Alaska. The Supreme Court decision, the Raven decision it was called, which made Marijuana decriminalized was tied to the very strong language about the right

to privacy in Alaska. The law was that you could legally possess an ounce to four ounces in your home in Alaska. But if you were caught in a car, you're busted. It's a very strange animal up there. For instance, drug testing has been overturned by a Canadian court as an invasion of privacy. Decriminalization of Marijuana in Germany began because of a court decision where a judge said Cannabis is no more harmful than alcohol or tobacco and so it shouldn't be illegal.

SECONDS: *Is decriminalization in our future?*

HOLMSTROM: I'm afraid this country is becoming something like Nazi Germany was in the Thirties when it comes to drugs. There might have to be refugees from this.

SECONDS: *Tell us about medical Marijuana.*

HOLMSTROM: We've got articles about medical Marijuana dating back to the first issue. We followed Robert Randall's fight to get legal Marijuana from the government in 1981. The medical thing's been going on for twenty-five years. In 1988 Francis Young, who was the D.E.A.'s administrative law judge, weighed all the evidence



“Not all D.E.A. agents tow the party line.”

presented by NORML and the other side and said Marijuana is “one of the safest therapeutically active substances known to man,” that it’s safer than aspirin, and he recommended that it be made available for medicine. It wasn’t binding and the D.E.A. arbitrarily overruled his decision. There are some revolutionary things going on. We have something on the website about Marijuana preventing brain damage, because they discovered these brain receptors. It’s good for fighting Alzheimer’s. The D.E.A. has been hanging onto this idea that Marijuana has no medical use. The current classification makes it more deadly than Heroin and Cocaine.

Both of those substances have medical use. People think because states have passed medical bills that it’s available to patients. It’s only been given to eight people through a government program that’s now been closed for ten years.

SECONDS: *What about those forty acres in Mississippi where they raise the stuff? They gave you this freeze-dried ditchweed and say, “Look, this doesn’t do anything.”*

HOLMSTROM: That’s how they do it. But there are medical studies being conducted in other countries. The prohibitionists are scared to death of medical Marijuana. They’re trying to prove that the only reason anybody wants to make it legal for medicine is because people want to use it for recreation purposes. When I first came here, that’s what I thought. Then we started hearing from AIDS patients who were using it to sustain life and I was blown away. The more you learn about this plant, the more respectful you become of it. The most useful plant on the Earth is the one that the government’s trying to stop.

SECONDS: *That’s where its industrial foes enter and it’s not just the Hippies versus the cops anymore. Now it’s the cotton industry*

and the petroleum industry —

HOLMSTROM: I don’t know if they’re trying to stop it or not. The funny thing is, if they did grow it for Hemp, the Hemp

pollen would degrade all the good quality Cannabis.

SECONDS: *Tell us about Hemp. Why did it become illegal?*

HOLMSTROM: Hemp is probably the oldest cultivated plant on the Earth. Harry Anslinger, a bureaucrat involved in alcohol prohibition, started beating the drums against Marijuana use. There was anti-Marijuana literature and anti-Cannabis literature before. I don’t go along with the theory that it was all industrial espionage. I’d say

temperance societies had a lot to do with it and racism had the most to do with it. Mexicans and Blacks were smoking it and it was associated with Jazz and that’s the reason it was made illegal. If you read the stories about the people who were passing laws against Marijuana, it was obviously a racist White Supremacist attitude. People want to believe Harry Anslinger’s uncle, Andrew Mellon, made it illegal because Hemp was some big threat, but Hemp was not made illegal by the Marijuana Stamp Tax Act. The Hemp industries all gave testimony at the hearings and even Anslinger admitted Hemp had many uses. He said it makes the strongest clothes on the face of the Earth. The feeling about Cannabis was that it was the poor man’s wine. As industrialization took over our society and more people became middle class and aspired to be upper class, they looked down on anything peasant-based. Anybody who had a spinning jenny in their house would grow Hemp and make clothing out of it. Nobody wanted to wear Hemp clothing; it was cheap, they wanted cotton. When the cotton gin was invented, Hemp cultivation started to decrease in



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importance. A cotton shirt would cost much more than a Hemp shirt but when cotton became cheaper more people wanted to buy the cotton shirt. It's like Cocaine in the Seventies. You used to have to spend a lot of money on Coke and when it became cheaper, everybody wanted to buy it and people stopped buying Pot.

SECONDS: *How could mere social disdain lead to prohibition?*

HOLMSTROM: It's part of it, though. Look at the way people look down on Hippies and Pot smoking now. The social stigma surrounding Marijuana is very strong. It's a very strong cultural bias. Why Marijuana is illegal is the million dollar question. Nobody knows. We scratch our heads all day around here trying to figure out why. Why is the most useful plant on Earth being outlawed?

SECONDS: *Does Pot grow everywhere?*

HOLMSTROM: Pot has always grown all over the world. It's grown more widely than any other plant, except for regular grass. It's grown in the Arctic Circle —

SECONDS: *As a kid, I always thought of Pot as a tropical plant.*

HOLMSTROM: Allegedly, Cannabis comes from the Himalayas and that's a very cold area and very high up. The THC, from what I've been told, is the plant's protection from ultraviolet light and ultraviolet light is much more concentrated at those high altitudes. That's one of the reasons Nepalese Hash is so good — they

have very good Marijuana in high-altitude areas. That could be why the Marijuana in Australia is very potent. There's a hole in the ozone layer there and more ultraviolet radiation. We did a great story I took flack for: "Growing Pot On The Moon."

People thought we were bullshitting but it's absolutely true. If you grow Cannabis under simulated extraterrestrial conditions, you'll be getting pure sunlight without any filtration from an atmosphere. The Cannabis plant gets zapped with so much ultraviolet light, the plant just frosts with all the THC.

SECONDS: *What impact has High Times had in twenty-five years of publishing?*

HOLMSTROM: The most valuable thing High Times has done is keep the voice of protest going for twenty-five years. For a few years there in the Eighties, *High Times* was the only voice of protest against the Drug War. During the "Just Say No" years it was very fashionable to beat the drums about how we should get tough on drugs. *High Times* was the only voice against that madness. Now in the Nineties, people are waking up to the fact that it was a sham. I hope enough people realize this before it's too late and our laws have been changed and our constitution is gutted and what was once a great democratic republic is turned into what Nazi Germany was in 1936. ●●●





“While everyone in America was smoking Pot and listening to REO Speedwagon, the political roots of everything were being dismantled. Pretty soon what you have is just a lot of silly Potheads.”

SECONDS: *What is your position at High Times?*

HAGER: I'm Editorial Director of the magazine and I'm the producer of the Cannabis Cup, and the World Hemp Expo Extravaganja.

SECONDS: *What was your reaction when your first saw High Times?*

HAGER: I thought it was dumb. It struck me as a commercialization of Hippie culture. See, I didn't really read the magazine, I just looked at it. Once I read it I realized the people working for the magazine were top-notch journalists doing good work. At that time in my life, I wasn't doing drugs. I smoked Pot and then I quit because I got busted. I was the first person arrested for LSD in Illinois and I bailed on the whole thing. I was like, "You mean I'm going to go to jail for the rest of my life?" I was only fifteen years old and they terrorized me. I was in a room where somebody sold it and they said I had knowledge of it. It was only because I was running an underground newspaper called *The Tin Whistle* that they arrested me. It went out to four high schools in Illinois.

SECONDS: *What town were you in?*

HAGER: Champaign-Urbana, which is a university town. I was hooked up with the whole underground newspaper community. Tom Forcade was working in New York with an organization called the Underground Press Syndicate and they'd send us their stories. The university had an alternative paper called *The Walrus* and they gave us space in their office for *The Tin Whistle*. I saw the way the government was working to destroy everything. People'd get on the microphones at rallies and try to incite the

crowd into violence —

SECONDS: *People planted there by the government?*

HAGER: Yeah. That's the Cointelpro in action. That's the group that Hoover set up to destroy AIM [American Indian Movement], the Black Panthers, the Yippies — there was a whole division of the F.B.I. whose job it was to infiltrate and destroy the alternative movements. While everyone in America was smoking Pot and listening to REO Speedwagon, the political roots of everything were being dismantled. Pretty soon what you have is just a lot of silly Potheads.

SECONDS: *Once the fear of being sent over to Vietnam was gone, maybe folks didn't care so much about other issues —*

HAGER: But once you took Acid, you realized you could construct an entirely different world view and it's just as right as the one you were supposed to live in. LSD blew everybody's perceptions wide open, but economically, you couldn't do anything with that knowledge. All the Left-wing people at universities lost their jobs. If you were at IBM and they saw you were taking LSD, you lost their job.

SECONDS: *If corporate America and the government is running the show, how is it that this pro-Pot magazine took off?*

HAGER: Because everybody wanted to know about Pot. States were gradually introducing decriminalization laws and things were getting better as far as Marijuana goes. Everybody wanted to smoke it and be a connoisseur.

SECONDS: *Tell me about the government putting pressure on High Times.*

HAGER: They would harass the advertisers, all the paraphernalia industry — bongs, pipe

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manufactures, rolling papers. They passed laws that they could advertise anywhere but *High Times*. If you look an old issue of *High Times* from '76 to '78, it's all ads from the paraphernalia industry.

SECONDS: *Who was it that harassed the advertisers?*

HAGER: While they were decriminalizing Marijuana that created a backlash of Right-wing people that wanted to criminalize it even more. It's a struggle; every time you make progress with Marijuana there's a hysterical group of people within the Government that start fighting that progress.



SECONDS: *Coke and Heroin?*

HAGER: Little bits of everything. Larry Sloman was the editor-in-chief when they were doing a lot of Cocaine centerfolds. If you look at the centerfolds, that's going to tell you what the staff's into. My feeling was Coke was played out and there were too many casualties. It didn't have a culture — Marijuana has a culture. There's no Bob Marley of Cocaine, you know? We take Cocaine out of the magazine and start focusing on Marijuana and circulation starts booming. People start running back to the magazine; they're very happy with the magazine all of a sudden. We start to encourage people to grow their own Marijuana instead of buying it at outrageous prices. We're very successful and issues start jumping off the newsstand because people want this information. We start to have a lot of ads from people selling equipment to help people grow. In 1989, the D.E.A. launches Operation Green Merchant, an attempt to

put *High Times* out of business. What they do is go into the offices of the cultivation equipment advertisers and seize all their computers and equipment. They gave them their stuff back and said, "If you continue to advertise in *High Times*, we'll be back." So ninety percent of them drop out of the magazine. The D.E.A. told them that growing equipment was not illegal but the fact that they were advertising the equipment in *High Times* meant that they were engaging in a criminal conspiracy. Our attorneys got the whole thing thrown out. We built up a huge advertising base of cultivation equipment and the D.E.A. launched an operation to remove those ads from the magazine, just like they removed the paraphernalia ads. Newspapers from around the country all rallied to *High Times'* aid and said how terrible it was that the government was violating freedom of the press. The government's PR effort was backfiring and we were getting positive publicity. I had a platform to talk about Hemp and medical Marijuana, which is stuff I didn't know about when I came to the magazine. We steered away from being a cultivation magazine, towards a political activist magazine with information about Hemp and medical Marijuana.

SECONDS: *Was there any deals struck between the D.E.A. and High Times?*

HAGER: No, we would never make concessions to the D.E.A..

SECONDS: *Where do police fit into this?*

HAGER: They don't want to arrest people for Pot; they're sick of it. But it's a milk run for the cops too — it's easy to bust Potheads. They don't have to worry about being shot.

SECONDS: *But what I am asking is if the government ever tried to plant anybody in the High Times offices?*

HAGER: They planted informers around Tom. They didn't work at *High Times*, they were all outlaw smugglers that befriended Tom. Half the people selling Coke could be talking to the D.E.A., you don't know. That world is a hallway of mirrors. But we're journalists working as activists. There aren't many D.E.A. agents that can walk in and have a conversation with me and convince me they're honest people espousing countercultural views.

“Half the people selling Coke could be talking to the D.E.A., you don’t know. That world is a hallway of mirrors.”

SECONDS: *How much does the liquor industry contribute to the war on drugs?*

HAGER: A lot. Then they donate money to the Partnership For A Drug Free America. The brains behind Partnership For A Drug Free America is the Johnson & Johnson Foundation — pharmaceuticals. They’re much more concerned about this than the Alcohol industry is. Alcohol and Tobacco know they will lose a lot of money if Marijuana’s legal — but the pharmaceutical industry will lose billions.

SECONDS: *Why is the pharmaceutical industry threatened?*

HAGER: Because their industry is based on synthetics. If you make a synthetic, you own the rights to it forever and you get a royalty.

SECONDS: *Why don’t they make synthetic Marijuana?*

HAGER: They did; it’s called Marinol. They do. Nobody wants it but you can get a Marinol prescription from a doctor. Pot’s better. If the natural plants were available to people, you wouldn’t go to a pharmacy to get something, you’d go to your garden and get what you want. They want to sever our connection to natural plants and medicine. They want to make sure you get all your medicine in pill-form synthetics. The war on drugs is an artificial, architected system that demonizes a certain class of people. Heroin addicts can live, hold jobs, and be productive members of society and so can Cocaine addicts. What makes these people marginal is they’re demonized. The pharmaceutical companies don’t want the natural plants, so they’re made illegal — and then you can make ten times as much money on them. The whole system’s calibrated to make the most amount of money and also conveniently scapegoat a large class of people. You can manipulate opinions by blaming everything on those lousy drug addicts. We’re like the Commies now.

SECONDS: *Nobody in power ever says they want a sober society; they only want a*

“drug-free” society.

HAGER: The thing about alcohol is it makes people violent and it’s very convenient to have a large class of violent people if you want to go to war. Those people can be led around by the nose. Drunks at football games can be manipulated like puppets. Potheads are individualistic. It’s like trying to herd a bunch of kittens.

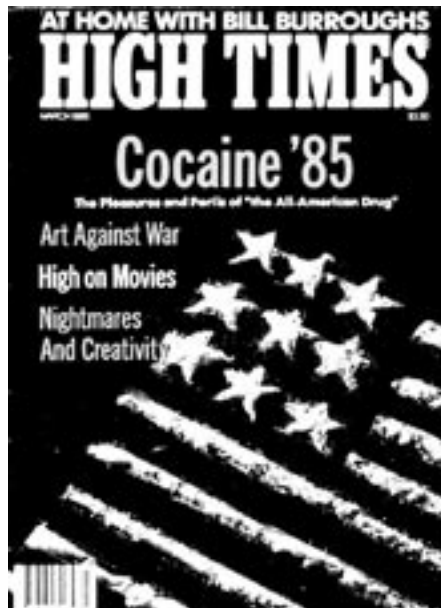
SECONDS: *If there’s any hope for Pot’s legalization, I think it’s going to come from a militant Black community. That’s the only thing the government’s still afraid of.*

HAGER: The war on drugs has destroyed the Black community. They’re all in jail. You think these people are going to come out of jail rehabilitated? They’re going to come out with lots of hostility, lots of contacts with criminal elements — when they come out of jail they’re professionals. You’ve taken a fifteen-year-old kid and made him into a hardened psychopath killer by putting him in jail for five years for Crack Cocaine. But this whole thing’s

going to turn around. The last time I did an interview was during Operation Green Merchant. I told them how people were going to be wearing clothes made out of Hemp and they acted like I was the a dreamer Pothead out of my mind, laughing at me. Now there’s a hemp store in every town in America. Cotton is tremendously bad on the environment. Half of the chemicals used in agriculture are used on cotton. There’s no chemicals needed for Hemp.

SECONDS: *When celebrities like Woody Harrelson advocate this stuff, doesn’t that enlighten people a little bit?*

HAGER: If you take the two million people in jail — eighty percent of them for drug violations — those people must have ten relatives each that know the whole system sucks. Then you take all the people who smoke Pot and know that it’s not that harmful and that alcohol and tobacco are far worse. Then you take all the people with



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AIDS, glaucoma, epilepsy and add those numbers together, and over half the country is being touched by this issue. I think you're going to wake up one day and Marijuana will be legal.

SECONDS: *Why is there not a violent reaction against the war on drugs?*

HAGER: I don't think armed revolution works in America. We don't have the manpower or gunpower to consider it as a possibility. Once you start preaching armed revolution, you're Number One on the F.B.I. hotlist. They'll bring the gunrunners in to sell you the guns and two weeks later they'll come in and shoot everybody. They love to see progressive activist movements get armed. That's a license for them to shoot you on sight. I don't want anything to do with armed revolution. Too many chuckleheads.

SECONDS: *What was the state of High Times when you came in in 1986?*

HAGER: No staff; it's like an empty shell. Sloman had left and gone on to National Lampoon. John Howell is the only person there and he hires me. John has a two-thousand dollar budget per issue and no staff. They're just trying to fill the pages anyway they can. I start going through the filing cabinets, which are trashed. The magazine wasn't being managed well. If you've been running a magazine for ten years, you should have enormous resources you've built up but there was nothing there and the whole thing was completely demoralized. Nobody thought the magazine was going to go on much longer. I was hired and I had all this energy and I didn't know any of the past history. I wasn't even a big Pothead, I just thought, "A national magazine with national distribution, let's see what we can do with this." I went through the files and found all these unopened manuscripts that had been mailed in — nobody even opened them! I started going through this stuff and found five or six really good stories. One of them was written by Peter Gorman and he ended up becoming executive editor. I had just finished a book called *Art After Midnight*, all about the East Side art scene and the crossover taking place between art and music. I had met John Holmstrom while I was doing that and I got him to work on the magazine. I made all these contacts with artists like Kenny Scharf and I took everything I pulled together and stuffed the

magazine with it. Then I discovered Pot. I wasn't a big Pothead, but once I got onto the medical, Hemp and environmental issues — everyday I'd find an unbelievable piece of information. The first American flag was made out of Hemp. The War Of 1812 was fought over Hemp. Hemp can stop glaucoma — I never knew this stuff! We got the Psychedelic Bus and went around organizing demonstrations, started a group called the Freedom Fighters — and we turned this issue into a national issue. That's why people like Woody Harrelson are walking around on TV talking about Hemp. Without *High Times* doing that, nothing would have happened. We put Holland on the Marijuana map. The Cup brought the consciousness to everybody that Holland was the place where they could breed seeds. The quality of Marijuana is much better now as a result of the fact that we hold the Cannabis Cup there.

SECONDS: *At what point were Black people brought into the mix?*

HAGER: Bob Marley, Cypress Hill — Black covers always did really well for us. Blacks don't have that many choices on the newsstands, so when they see a magazine that isn't it a Black magazine put a Black on the cover, they're fascinated by it because they don't see it very often.

SECONDS: *So how do they fit into the equation for drug legalization?*

HAGER: Their kids are being exterminated. Inside the prison system, there are Blacks who understand what's going on and desperately want to change the situation. It's cultural genocide. It's an emergency and something needs to be done right away. Half the teenagers in the community are going to jail. Imagine if you went to the suburbs, to a bunch of White high schools, and rounded up half the kids in junior high and said, "You're going to jail." The penalties are much greater in the inner city because of the Crack bullshit. If you're living in the ghetto, you're trapped — and sometimes the only escape is drugs.

SECONDS: *Is being a Pot smoker in America like being a Jew in Nazi Germany?*

HAGER: I would say being Pot cultivator is. If you're caught cultivating Marijuana, they will take your home, take your business, take your vehicles, and put you in jail for mandatory minimum and make money off you while you slave labor for them. Is that the equivalent of being a Jew in



“Our viewpoint is that small-scale home cultivation of Marijuana would help keep the black market from becoming the monster that it is.”

SECONDS: *What is your position at High Times?*

SIMONEK: I'm the Cultivation Editor. I'm in charge of the horticultural section.

SECONDS: *So law enforcement would be the interested in you —*

SIMONEK: I've never been contacted, knock on wood.

SECONDS: *Are the cops eventually going to show up here?*

SIMONEK: I think if they showed up here it would be the biggest publicity push we could ever have. If they want to raid here and rifle my pockets for a dime bag, it would certainly help the sales of my book.

SECONDS: *Would a raid hurt the economics of the magazine?*

SIMONEK: There's nothing they could get. It's a can of worms because it goes down to the First Amendment — freedom of press. We do not enclose joints in the magazine.

SECONDS: *But aren't you involved in a conspiracy to inform people how to break the law? Is it advocacy or instruction?*

SIMONEK: Our viewpoint is that small-scale home cultivation of Marijuana would help keep the black market from becoming the monster that it is.

SECONDS: *How has Marijuana changed over the decades?*

SIMONEK: It's gone from an import business to a national business. We don't see the Jamaican imports, and the Maui Wowie and the Colombian imports — it's there but it's low-grade stuff. What you see now is more of a connoisseur-grade Marijuana that is grown secretly indoors here in the United States. We have domestic farmers flooding the market and beating out the imports.

SECONDS: *How about the Marijuana itself? How has it changed botanically?*

SIMONEK: What you had was a lot of strains that were genetically cultivated in the western part of the United States. That was the epicenter of where the strains came from —

SECONDS: *Why there?*

SIMONEK: In the Sixties, that's where you had a large amount of your Hippie Cannabis farmers. The climate is good for it and there's lots of woods for outdoor farming. They traveled north from San Francisco all the way up to Vancouver — it's basically decriminalized in Canada now. So they developed the strains over a decade or two and then Holland caught onto it. A lot of the strains that are popular in Holland, things like “Skunk #1” and “Northern Lights” are really imports from Northern California. That's why there's a similarity to a lot of Dutch strains. It's even difficult for me to tell them apart because they have same basic building blocks. They want those Indica indoor breeding strains, as opposed to the equatorial Sativas, which are very gangly, take a longer time to mature and are very difficult to work with indoors.

SECONDS: *Tell us about Indica and Sativa.*

SIMONEK: There's Cannabis Indica, Cannabis Sativa and Cannabis Ruderalis. They come from various parts of the world. Sativa is equatorial: longer breeding time, takes a lot more sun, a lot more time. The Indica is more of a northern strain, from places like India. It breeds shorter, like hash plants, which are bred for resin. They mature a lot quicker and what the breeders did was take those strains and cultivate them for indoor fast-harvest cultivation. Ruderalis is very rarely seen. It's not really prime breeding material. It tends to have a very buddy top — it's like a single stalk

A Brief History of HIGH TIMES – CHRIS SIMUNEK

with a couple of outshoots. It doesn't do very well for potency or smokeability or yield, so it's usually not used purely, though it does appear in some strains. Those three are the only genetic variances of the plant. But, there's an endless amount of strains.

SECONDS: *What is Sinsemilla?*

SIMUNEK: Sinsemilla is Marijuana that does not contain seeds. It's like growing Sunkist seedless oranges. It's grown from clones and is not pollinated.

SECONDS: *How about Pot grown indoors? What's Hydro?*

SIMUNEK: Hydro is exclusively indoor grown, in a soilless medium with the roots growing directly in water. It's a high-yield, fast way to harvest. If you want to pump out the most amount of Marijuana in the least amount of time, you're probably going to want a "sea of green," which is lots of small plants grown in a hydro system where you can pump a lot of chemical fertilizers into it and really beef them up. Hydroponics is not normally organic — I myself like organically grown bud — but in this age of prohibition, you want to put the best looking product on the market in the least amount of time.

That's why Hydro is so popular.

SECONDS: *How has Pot changed in the sense of being an intoxicant? I think it's an entirely different drug from the Pot of twenty-five years ago.*

SIMUNEK: The difference would primarily be the way it was grown, which was outdoors in large fields without the heavy modern fertilizers that we use indoors. And the fact that it was Sativa, as opposed to what they now grow indoors — usually Indica or an Indica/Sativa cross.

SECONDS: *Because of the prohibition, some great types of Pot of lore, like Acapulco Gold and Panama Red, are extinct. Being the cultivation editor of High Times, could you find Panama Red?*

SIMUNEK: I've never been able to. Yes, because of prohibition these strains were

not properly preserved the way you would preserve oranges or tomatoes. Holland has done its best, but as far I can see, they haven't managed to preserve that wide of a range. They've preserved the Skunks and

Northern Lights and things like that. There's also genetic drift. A lot of these things are crosses. You cross two plants together, that's going to drift. Some strains are stable, some are unstable. Like your Skunk is a more stable strain that has remained the same throughout the last twenty years.

SECONDS: *Was the name "Acapulco Gold" just a catch-all phrase for good Mexican Pot?*

SIMUNEK: I'm sure there was an Acapulco Gold at one time, but there's no regulation of this, obviously — so anything could be "Acapulco Gold."

SECONDS: *Were there more botanical descriptions of Marijuana in the past?*

SIMUNEK: There is literature going back hundreds of years on Hemp because it was first bred for fiber, clothes, sails, ropes and things like that. It wasn't bred for its psychoactive properties.

SECONDS: *What was the watershed event that got people smoking Pot?*

SIMUNEK: The way it entered mainstream White American culture was through Jazz and the Beats.

SECONDS: *Anyone in particular?*

SIMUNEK: Louie Armstrong was a Pot smoker. Mezz Mezzrow was the Jazz dealer in the Thirties.

SECONDS: *When I became aware of Marijuana, it was considered very transcendental —*

SIMUNEK: It is transcendental. You can't classify it with any other drug except for Mushrooms or Peyote, the psychedelic plants. It's administered exactly as it comes out of the ground. Pot is not altered, changed, reduced or distilled. It should not be lumped in with other drugs.

SECONDS: *What's the future of the drugs laws? Are we going to see decriminalization?*



***“Pot is not altered, changed, reduced or distilled.
It should not be lumped in with other drugs.”***

SIMUNEK: Now it's become a States' Rights issue. It's bringing up a lot of constitutional issues, like does a state have the right to declare it legal — like in California for medical buyers — while Federal laws prevent it? You're going to see a lot of litigation in the next decade or so. I don't think you're going to see too many politicians getting behind it. It's taboo. You've got sixty years of rhetoric and propaganda against Marijuana at this point, dating back to Anslinger, and it hasn't abated. The same way it took Nixon, a strong anti-communist, to establish relations with China, it might take a conservative to say, “Why are we spending all this taxpayer's money on a drug war? If people want to kill themselves, let them.” If the Democrats get behind it they're accused of being druggies. Clinton is the architect of the most expensive drug war in history.

SECONDS: *What's the profile of today's typical American Pot grower?*

SIMUNEK: A guy with problems in social management skills. [laughs] He's going to be paranoid, self-righteous and difficult to get along with because it's a solitary business. Loose lips sink ships and they're well aware of it. They've got to worry about the landlord, the gas reader, cops walking by, next door neighbors, girlfriends and business associates.

SECONDS: *And satellites looking for tenth-of-a-degree temperature differentials —*

SIMUNEK: That's overrated, though. Ninety percent of busts come from a snitch. Once they get that, they'll take out all the satellite imaging equipment and the heat radars —

SECONDS: *To justify their funding for next year.*

SIMUNEK: Sure. After the Cold War, the government had all this money that they couldn't spend on bombs anymore so they built up this police state instead. They have all this technology for some guy who's growing a couple of plants in his basement.

SECONDS: *Isn't it scary that we're exterminating this plant?*

SIMUNEK: Yeah, it's hard to think there would be such a war on such a beneficial plant — an aesthetically beautiful plant. It gets down to the essential insanity of their

argument that this plant is bad when the fact is it's good. This is a movement with such a stigma attached to it, it's going to take years and years to shake the stigma. In the Thirties, when homosexuality was illegal and homosexuals had no rights, they were in the same social ghetto. How could such a large amount of the population not stand up and fight for their rights? It was just the social climate of the times.

SECONDS: *So is it a civil rights issue?*

SIMUNEK: That's exactly what it is. It's probably the most important civil rights issue today. What other socio-economic group can be arrested at any time just for being who they are? We've got targets on our backs. I compare it to the beginning of the anti-war movement of the Sixties or the women's movement of the Seventies. We're approaching that crest where we're going to come out. We're getting a lot of good media coverage. CNN, ABC — these networks are starting to give unbiased reports about Marijuana for the first time. It's just going to take time. Drug use is a medical issue; it's not a criminal issue, plain and simple. Putting a person with a substance abuse problem in a jail is not doing him any good and it's not doing the world any good.

SECONDS: *You've talked about the stigma of Pot smoking. Does High Times perpetuate that stigma? I see a vestige of that Robert Crumb vision of the Pothead in your magazine and I wonder if that's not something that turns off the Yuppies —*

SIMUNEK: That's our culture, Marijuana culture. What you just said to me is like saying to Pharoah Sanders in 1969 — with an Afro out to here and African robes — “Hey, you're trying to advance your people, but you're not going to do it this way. White people aren't going to accept you.” It's the same thing with the gay rights movement when they're prancing down the street dressed like Alice In Wonderland. People say, “You want people to take you seriously and you dress all fucked up like that?” Hey, this is what we do and this is what we are. We have our straight, conservative side, but let's face it, Marijuana's a drug that promotes happiness and a sense of humor. *High Times* covers the waterfront. ●●●