

ANABAPTIST BUD

I was engaged in a vigorous early-morning game of shuffleboard doubles with a few other octogenarians on the courts in Clark Park when I noticed we had a spectator. For those who have never seen the shuffleboard courts, this is a new UCD innovation. In August, when all the black people cash in their quarterly drug earnings and fat welfare checks and jet off to the discos of Reykjavik or wherever the "in" spot happens to be this summer, UCD cleans off the basketball courts down by USP and converts them to shuffleboard courts for the aged. Since the population of UC Village in August is down to hard-working white real estate magnates, coffee-shop proprietors, bordello-managers and Young Pioneers all working at the unending task of gentrifying the Hood, it is safe for us oldsters to come out.

At any rate, we don't often have an audience for our game at 5:30 am. Occasionally some off-leash but well-groomed Labradoodle will bound up and make off with one of the pucks, but normally it's just the four of us. On this particular morning, however, we couldn't help but notice the young lady in a lavender granny dress and floppy hat lounging on her lounge chair with a Victrola by her side, playing old Beatles songs.

During a break in the action, Frank sniffed the air and said "Smells like hemp." Tony took a whiff and agreed. "Smells like dope to me. Man, I'd recognize that scent anywhere."

"Couldn't be," I replied. "All the black people are in Reykjavik." But after another sampling of the air, I had to admit that, although heavily mixed with the fragrance of patchouli, there was the odor of good old marijuana.

We got back to our game and played another round. Then Brian said, "Hey, dude, I think that chick is winking at you."

"At me?" I said, surprised. I looked over at her, but it was hard to tell if she was indeed winking through her granny glasses.

After a little more urging from Brian, I parked my stick and limped over to her. I had just had my annual ultrasound of the prostate the day before, and the guys had been giving me a hard time about not walking straight.

"Good day, young lady," I said, beginning to bow, then thinking better of it after a sharp pain in my nether regions. "How'dya like the game so far?"

"Groovy", she smiled. "Say, aren't you that famous poet? The Bard of UC Village?"

"Spare me my blushes," I replied modestly. After my reading for the Queen's birthday at Buckingham Palace I had been getting a lot of publicity, and was often recognized whilst strolling down Baltimore Avenue. "No doubt you saw my picture on the cover of the latest Rolling Stone?"

"Well I saw it somewhere. Maybe in the Philly City Paper."

"I see." I was a bit put off, but after all publicity is publicity.

"Anyway, my name's Sweet Jane. Although some call me Lady Tripps. Heh. I'm the new barrista over at the Green Line. Wanna toke?"

"Oh dear." I said. "I'm afraid I've given up, um 'toking', since I had a bad experience. I fell off the roof one time while smoking hibiscus over at Cassidy's."

She looked me over sympathetically. "Is that why you're limping?"

"Uh, no, dear lady. This is, I hope, a temporary limp, from a male problem."

I was not a little embarrassed, but she urged me to tell her what ailed me, so I explained about the ultra-sound for prostate. I even told her what my thankless son had said when I reported to him about my ultrasound on the telephone:

"So, Dad, is it a boy or a girl?"

"Well THAT wasn't very kind of him," she empathized. "Anyhow, I bet a toke of this new blend would be just what the doctor ordered -- we call it 'Anabaptist Bud.' It's done wonders for my colitis. In fact, we're starting a medical marijuana dispensary over at the Green Line."

"Now that's a novel concept," I laughed. "I suppose it was only a matter of time until this hip and trendy neighborhood got one."

She exhaled directly but gently into my face, and I suddenly noticed the lines "Lucy in the sky with diamonds" rising from the Victrola with a certain vivid poignancy.

"Yeah, it's gonna be called the Mennonite Medical Marijuana Clinic. Turns out there's this fabulous organization called Mennonite Central Committee -- they go all over the world doing good works, and they discovered this group of Mennonites down in Mexico that had fallen on hard times, and they showed them how to grow weed. Now they're back on their feet and thriving, and marketing 'Fair-trade Marijuana' in the US and Canada. So Green Line is making this new outdoor 'Parklette' for people to smoke on, so they don't smell up the

inside. It's gonna be da Bomb!"

I stared at her face, which was sort of flashing a soft blue light. "Um, maybe I could try a toke of that -- I mean, just for the sake of my prostate."

"Sure," she said, handing over the cigarette. I took a slow deep toke.

"Hey, don't Bogart that joint, my friend," she grinned, with a tinkly silver laugh. By this time Frank, Tony and Brian had come over to see what was going on.

"Hey dudes! Don't be afraid! It's the Mennonite Medical Marijuana comin at choo!"

They looked at us doubtfully. Usually we retire to the Gold Standard for a pitcher of martinis after our game. Frank and Tony talk a lot about stoner times in the old days, but I'm not sure how much of that is just talk, and I'm pretty sure Brian has never partaken of the sacred weed.

"Here, guys!" I yelled, waving my joint expansively. "Sweet Jane, got any more doobies secreted in your underwear?"

She laughed and got to her feet. "I'm just about to start the morning shift at the Green Line. Why don't you gentlemen join me there?"

Tony, Frank and I started off after her enthusiastically. Brian looked hesitant, but I urged him on. "Hey, come on, Brian, you gotta try this stuff. And you can always get a vanilla Chai if you don't want a smoke."

--Ross Bender