

Down at the Green Line

I dropped by the Green Line Mennonite Coffee Shop and Gin Joint this evening for my customary Vanilla Chai Grande Con Molto Abbraccissimo and was brought up short by the sight of a friendly familiar-looking green leaf waving over a display of "Auntie Ruth's Hemp Bars". Fearing that I was hallucinating again, I wiped my glasses on a Kleenex and peered closely at the display. Yep, there they were -- "Auntie Ruth's Hemp Bars" in multiple flavors: mocha java, panama red, thai stick, and tutti-frutti, two bucks apiece.

Whoa, I thought, ye olde UC Village gets more and more like Amsterdam everyday. I picked up one of the mocha java bars and waved it at the young lady behind the counter with a broad smile.

"No way!" I enthused.

"Way!" she replied with a wink.

"Sweet!" I countered.

"Sweet!" she replied.

So I sat down at my table on the corner, watching the Penn bicycle cops, who would come rushing up to the Failsafe Line in formation, then screech to a stop, pop some wheelies, and scream north on 43rd Street. Every now and then they would get tangled up with some hapless UCD newbie Safety Ambassador, whom the Penn fuzz seem to regard as hopeless amateurs, and a skirmish would ensue, with the predictable result that the UCD guy would get left in the dirt with some bent spokes.

As anybody who's been in this neighborhood more than 20 seconds knows, that intersection is one of the liveliest in the hood. If it's not the Penn's Angels and the Ambassadors mixing it up, there are the Explosively Formed Dudes, or EFD's, raging anarchists who rush out of the bushes at irregular intervals and whack the bejesus out of the UC Review box with baseball bats. Sort of a West Philly version of the old Chinese Fire Drill.

Anyhow, the Hemp Bar proved to be a major disappointment. First of all, it was composed of bird seed pasted together with soybean juice and a couple of carob chips. Secondly, it didn't do anything. I sat there for a full half hour and nothing happened. Reminded me of the old Fugs' song:

"I waited thirty minutes for my body to sing

I waited and I waited but I couldn't feel a thing, you know

I couldn't get high. Oh oh no!

Don't know why! Oh yeah yeah!"

More in sorrow than in anger, I went back and carefronted the chick at the counter.

"Look, I don't know how to say this, but what you advertize as 'hemp power bars' have absolutely no discernible psychedelic effect. May I inquire about your refund policy?"

She looked up at me, smiled gently, reached out and stroked my cheek.

"Brother, you just gotta wait for it to kick in, know what I mean?"

I looked again at her, and this time a faint scent of patchouli wafted its way toward me. She was staring deep into my eyes, and her eyeballs were pulsating like a lava lamp. The coffee shop muzak was playing "If you go to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair..."

Strobe lights flickered, and the traffic on Baltimore slowed down to a lazy crawl.

"Whoa! Duddetttttette...." I stammered.

"Feel the buzz?" she crooned.

Clutching my chai, I staggered back to my table. A yellow submarine floated tranquilly into the Park, no doubt on its way to the Bowl. Then a curious convoy made its way east along the Avenue -- three luminescent green Hummers preceded by a whacking great long Penn Transit bus, carrying all of three passengers, then a Penn Escort minivan, followed by a float decorated with bright red poppies topped by Amy Gutmann in a bikini waving enthusiastically to the throng. Then the Penn marching band playing "Louie, Louie".

Just then Siano rolled up with a camera glued to his eye.

"Dude!" I exclaimed. "Did you see that? Better yet, did you get that all on video? Man, this sure beats your film "15 Minutes of Deer in the Cemetery!"

"See what?" he replied.

--Ross Bender