Thankfully, we still have medical cannabis to help us through tough times.

Spread facts not viruses, share love not hate. Rely on medical cannabis to help see you through times of trouble, naturally. It may not cure you but, it sure will make you feel better.

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Due to the Governor’s restrictions on large gatherings for the state that were announced, Weekly Alibi has decided to postpone the New Mexico Cannabis Expo scheduled for April 4th, 2020.

The new date of the event will be **Saturday, May 16**, at the Santa Fe Community Convention Center. Stay tuned for more details as we get closer to that date. Thank you all for supporting the event, and we look forward to seeing you in May.

**STAY SAFE!**
-Weekly Alibi Staff

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Staff of *Weekly Alibi*
To All Our Friends, Past, Present and Future

Your support means the world to us

by Dan Pennington

You might have seen a couple of the ads bouncing around in our paper, or heard word of it online, but I personally wanted to talk to you, the reader, about what Friends of Weekly Alibi is. Weekly Alibi has been publishing since 1992, a friendly guide to the city and it’s going-ons. What started as a small publication meant to help highlight all the things that make the city so enjoyable grew into the second largest paper in the state. We’ve grown and changed throughout those years, and it’s been with the help of you that it has been possible.

Right now, things have gotten tight. We’ve managed to hold things together through thick and thin and continue doing what we do best: Highlighting the impact businesses and events have on our day-to-day lives. We want to continue that tradition, even if right now, it’s not necessarily possible because of quarantine. That’s where FOWA comes into play.

Our advertisers are hurting more than they ever have before, and some may not come back at all. We’ve put together a way to help support us so we can continue to support them in the future. You can donate, either on a recurring subscription basis or through a one-time offering, and allow us to support the staff that come together to make the magic happen every week. These funds go to ensuring the people who bleed and sweat over keyboards continue to be compensated for the work they do. Our writers, our production staff, our web team and our oversight team all play different key roles in getting a paper into your hands week to week.

As the most junior of writers on staff, I know that it might seem that maybe my insight and love for this doesn’t come from a place as deeply held as someone who has been on staff and writing for decades. Maybe that is true. But I hold a different space for Weekly Alibi in my heart than others on staff. I’m young (maybe too young, some might argue), and was born 3 years before the paper began. For as long as I’ve been alive, the paper has been in my eye. How could you not want to stop and read the colorful pages that stood out, offering you to grab a free copy? It was an obsession of mine from the youngest ages I could remember. It was different, it wasn’t stuffy, it was fun and unique, especially compared to the paper my parents would read. Sure, I couldn’t attend most of the events written in it, but I could hear about them and pretend I could.

It was an integral piece of my life, and most likely yours too, if you’re reading this. As I grew older with it, I remember ravenously reading the movie section and idolizing my current boss, Devin D. O’Leary. I was starstruck during my interview with him, finally meeting the person who had written so much of the content I consumed growing up. I was even more awestruck that I was entrusted to write about food, to help create that culture that I’ve engaged in for so many years. I shared an office with the August March, man about town who covered news, music and life. I had found a home with the writers who defined the alternative culture coverage of the city, and I felt a sense of pride in my work unlike anything I’d ever done before.

I know that currently, we’re facing tough times, but ultimately, we’ll be back and better than ever. What more could people want after isolation than to go out and enjoy the company of others again? To stand in a room with others, all part of a single experience and celebrating the joy of human interaction. We’ll be there to cover that. We’ll be there to tell you which restaurant is back in action with new and interesting choices to delight your taste buds after you’ve spent a month eating ramen and PBJ sandwiches. We’ll highlight the art your eyes have missed experiencing in person, the stories you’ve yearned to hear told, and the shows you’ve longed to see. We hope you’ll be able to support us in our time of need, with the promise that when this is all just a dark memory, we can continue supporting you and the city. For more information on how to support independent journalism, visit us at alibi.com and click on our “Friends of Weekly Alibi” banner.

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Love in the Time of Coronavirus

by Joshua Lee

I thought I was so clever when I made that title. Turns out, every hipster this side of the Mississippi has already made it twice. I’m always late to the party.

It’s turned into a ghost town out there, and you’ve likely gone to ground avoiding contact with the infected hordes. The good news is you still have access to cannabis and there seems to be no shortage in sight.

Luckily, New Mexicans have been smart enough not to lose their minds and blow out the state’s marijuana supply. If only the toilet paper hoarders were as conscientious as the weed smokers. But COVID-19 is still changing the way we consume cannabis.

For those of us who are used to at least hanging out with fellow patients in close quarters to share company as we smoke: *Rolling Stone* recommends using social media and telecommunication apps to stay connected while maintaining a safe distance, instead.

And if you’re used to going into a dispensary and jawing the ‘tender’s ear off and being all social and friendly, you’re in for some changes.

As of this writing, most dispensaries in Albuquerque are continuing to operate normally—although nearly all of them are encouraging patients to call in their orders before visiting and to take advantage of curbside service to practice social distancing. Near the end of March, the Medical Cannabis Program Director Dr. Dominick Zurlo reportedly wrote a letter to the state’s licensed medical cannabis producers assuring them that dispensaries were considered “essential” businesses and were exempt from the recent emergency health order that directed most businesses to shutter their operations. But the order also instructed “essential businesses” to “adhere to social distancing protocol and maintain at least six-foot social distancing from other individuals, avoid person-to-person contact and direct employees to wash their hands frequently.”

Here’s the thing: This virus has legs, and it isn’t safe to keep pretending that it doesn’t. Near the end of last month, reports surfaced of a Washington church choir that decided to meet and practice prior to the state enacting stringent social distancing orders. According to those who attended, no one showed signs of being ill. But more importantly: No one remembers hearing any coughs or sneezes.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, this case and others have alerted health officials to the possibility that COVID-19 can be transmitted through aerosols. The World Health Organization has admitted that aerosols—particles smaller than five micrometers—play a part in spreading the virus, but are quick to point out that “in an analysis of 75,465 COVID-19 cases in China, airborne transmission was not reported.” They’ve been focusing on transmission through “respiratory droplets,” which are produced through coughs and sneezes.

The possibility of transmission through aerosol makes this a completely different battle. A study published last month in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that COVID-19 remained infectious for three hours when dispersed as an aerosol. While this was in strict lab conditions, imagine the conditions of a small dispensary lobby cut off from the fresh air coming in at the front door. These places were designed to trap the delicious aroma of cannabis in a small space. At this moment, that also means they were designed to trap the virus, too.

The number of COVID-19 cases in New Mexico are a drop in the bucket compared to the numbers coming out of places like New York and New Jersey. If we want to keep it that way, we should be stringently practicing social distancing. For cannabis users, the best practice would probably be to voluntarily ask for curbside pickup at dispensaries instead of trying to use their lobbies—whether they require it or not. Call in orders ahead of time to your favorite dispensary and take advantage of curbside service. From what I can tell, nearly every place in town is offering it.

When it really comes down to it, it’s the responsibility of every person reading this to do their part to curb the spread of this virus.

Hopefully, this will all be over soon, and we can go back to being the friendly New Mexicans we’re used to being. In the mean time, stay safe and healthy.
Most of the cannabis bills that were considered during this year’s legislative session faced an almost completely disengaged media audience, overshadowed as they were by the almost nervous excitement surrounding the doomed recreational marijuana legalization bill. That’s probably why most of them failed to lift off the ground.

“You Ain’t From Round Here”
The madness has finally come to an end. The New Mexico Department of Health is no longer required to issue medical cannabis cards to non-residents. Last week, the governor signed a measure that once again requires medical cannabis program applicants to be residents of New Mexico.

That means at least 613 out-of-state patients are probably pretty bummed this week. But I think I’m pretty confident in saying that we all expected this to come. The argument was made last year that because of a wording change made to a medical expansion bill that defined a patient as a “person” instead of a “resident of New Mexico,” the Medical Cannabis Program had to be opened up to nonresidents. A judge repeatedly ruled in favor of this interpretation, but the state wasn’t having it—probably because it was turning our program into a quick-stop pot supplier for out-of-state patients are probably pretty bummed this week. But I think I’m pretty confident in saying that we all expected this to come. The argument was made last year that because of a wording change made to a medical expansion bill that defined a patient as a “person” instead of a “resident of New Mexico,” the Medical Cannabis Program had to be opened up to nonresidents. A judge repeatedly ruled in favor of this interpretation, but the state wasn’t having it—probably because it was turning our program into a quick-stop pot supplier for out-of-state patients.

And before anyone starts complaining about non-resident visitors in need of their medication, keep in mind that the new reciprocity rule kicks in July 1, allowing individuals enrolled in other states’ medical cannabis programs to make purchases at New Mexico dispensaries. It will still be illegal to cross state lines with cannabis, though.

For those out-of-staters who already have a New Mexico medical cannabis card, state Health Secretary Kathleen Kunkel told reporters that they would be allowed to keep their cards until they expire—about three years—but will not be able to renew them. So, yes. For the time being, you still have to continue being polite to those Texans you keep bumping into at the dispensary, no matter how painful that might be.

Cannabis in Schools Fix Fails
Another hot topic last year was a new rule that allows cannabis patients enrolled in public school to have medical marijuana administered while on campus. The rule gave schools some discretion when it came to implementation, but many complained that the language was too vague and open to interpretation.

The new rule gave schools the option of allowing students to receive their medication from a designated faculty member or their guardian. Many school leaders said that requiring staff to administer cannabis could endanger their jobs and chose the other option.

Parents were upset. For many, that choice meant they had to find a way to leave work and travel to the school multiple times a day just to give their children medication. Concerns were also raised over an exception that allowed schools to ignore the regulation if they could provide written proof that they would lose federal funding by following it. Senate Bill 276 was set to change some of that. It would have barred schools from restricting the types of faculty who may administer the drug and prohibited the schools from discouraging or disciplining faculty who volunteered for the job. It would also only allow schools to opt out if they received notice from a federal agency that they would lose federal funding for the policy. But it didn’t pass, so the battle will continue to rage on this year.

Native Patient Protection Flubs
A bill that would have potentially protected Native cannabis patients living on tribal land from federal prosecution stalled on the house floor. Under Senate Bill 271, “Tribe and Pueblo Medical Marijuana Agreements,” the New Mexico Department of Health would have been authorized to enter into intergovernmental agreements with tribes and pueblos that would have allowed tribal groups to come up with their own medical cannabis programs.

This would have gone a long way in protecting patients from federal scrutiny. While a patient is able to purchase and possess medical cannabis on state land, the moment they enter federal trust lands, they are considered a criminal.

Apparently that will continue for at least another year.

Research Bill Fails
A bill that would have allowed research facilities to grow or buy cannabis for research purposes was also put into the ground before the session was out. House Bill 334 would have established a Cannabis Control Division to regulate licensing for research facilities. The facilities would be allowed to purchase and cultivate their own cannabis to be used in much needed studies. Currently, scientists can get authorization to grow cannabis for research, but they can only use plants provided by the Drug Enforcement Agency—plants that are well known to be subpar in quality and useless for these purposes.

So don’t expect any of that research that our dear lawmakers keep crowing for, since they keep missing opportunities to make it happen.
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The groundhog may have missed his shadow this year, but self-quarantines and state emergencies have thrown a kink in our plans to celebrate an early spring. With a tense and fear-fueled winter behind us, we’re turning to the healing powers of cannabis this spring to warm our hearts and thaw our spirits.

Lemon Skunk
This strain will hit you like a blinding ray of sunshine and leave you glowing. Lemon Skunk’s citrus and pepper flavor profile is the perfect spring strain—intriguing, invigorating and inspiring. Patients should expect side effects such as uncontrollable laughter, embarrassing affliction and one-sided diatribes. Users’ faces may sometimes become locked in painful wide smiles for long stretches of time. If we haven’t made it clear enough: This strain stretches of time. If we haven’t made it clear enough: This strain is anything but poisonous. It tastes sour and bright, with diesel notes. Its effects are fast—a great day-starter! If you’re looking for an attitude adjuster to let questions bother you. Why’d you even start asking yourself. This hybrid is great for those suffering from depression, pain and anxiety.

Stardawg
A standard of the New Mexico cannabis scene, Stardawg is a beautiful hybrid known for its sugary buds and mood-enhancing powers. This strain tastes sour and bright, with diesel notes. Its effects are smooth, easy-going and relaxing. It sports a soothing body high accompanied by a light mood and a sharp mind. Ride this friendly standard is good for winding down after a tough day or chilling out an edgy spring afternoon. This flower brings on a relaxing and tingly body high accompanied by a talkative and social mental state. A truly beautiful hybrid known for its spiky aura. This spicy and fruity flower is a wonderful attitude adjuster recommended for patients suffering from depression, fatigue or anxiety.

Durban Poison
This classic sativa-dominant strain is anything but poisonous. It tastes woody and sharp, with sour notes on the exhale. Durban Poison is known to promote creativity and flow states. It also makes patients talkative and happy, driving positive social interaction. This flower will make you think fast and act fast—a great day-starter!

Matriarch
If you’re looking for an emotional bump, you’ll likely find it in the loving arms of this special strain. Its grassy and diesel flavor profile strike the perfect chord on a temperate spring afternoon. This flower brings on a relaxing and tingly body high that seems perfectly paired with a talkative and social mental state. A truly beautiful hybrid known for its spiky aura. This spicy and fruity flower is a wonderful attitude adjuster recommended for patients suffering from depression, fatigue or anxiety.

Sativa Diva
Despite its name, Sativa Diva has a distinctly relaxing vibe. This tangy and minty flower produces smooth and pleasantable hits that bring on a happy and silly high. This is followed by an extended period of dreamy introspection that gives the world a pleasant, slow quality. Time becomes meaningless, and minutes drift away like pillow clouds. This mild and enjoyable strain is perfect for those suffering from tension, pain and depression.

Platinum Delights
Platinum Delights is a total creeper. The high it produces starts out easy and mild. But after the third hit, you realize you’ve been holding the pipe and staring at a blank wall for at least five minutes. What were you thinking about? What were you supposed to be doing? You can’t answer any of these questions, but who cares? You’re too relaxed and content to let questions bother you. Why did you even start asking them in the first place? This strain could benefit patients seeking relief from pain and insomnia.

Cherry O’s
This easy-going strain tastes like fruit and berries with diesel highlights. Cherry O’s is a hybrid that will soothe tension and ease pain. Its high is fairly mild, but its therapeutic effects are notably powerful. This flower can round out the edges of frustration and tame the very worst mood. It brings mental tranquility and deep physical relaxation. Patients in need of stress reduction and sleep aid will find this strain useful. It’s also great for fighting quarantine cabin fever.

Strawberry Shortcake
A sweet-tasting hybrid with sharp diesel notes, this popular strain turns frowns upside-down. Strawberry Shortcake promotes excitability and induces giggling fits. Make sure you’re with understanding friends while under its influence, because you’re likely to tell very bad jokes and just as likely to laugh at them, yourself. This hybrid is great for those suffering from fatigue or anxiety.

Eagle Scout
The birds are a-chirping and the bees are a-buzzing. It’s time to get off that couch and step into the light. This grassy and somewhat harsh strain will inspire your imagination and get your body moving. It’s the perfect flower to smoke before you get started on that spring cleaning project. Be warned, however: This potent sativa-dominant hybrid can be a little intense. The manic and paranoid high might put off some newbies, so proceed with caution.

Raspberry Diesel
Puff on this peppery strain if you start feeling those tense, antisocial vibes overwhelming your powers of empathy. Raspberry Diesel will calm your nerves and smooth out that spiky aura. This spicy and fruity flower is a wonderful attitude adjuster recommended for patients suffering from depression, fatigue or anxiety.
Tarry Wisdom
What is Rick Simpson oil?

by Joshua Lee

You’ve talked about it. You’ve wondered about it. You’ve considered it. But you haven’t been able to work up the nerve to try Rick Simpson oil (RSO)—the black tar in a syringe they keep at the far end of the dispensary counter.

You’ve asked about it a few times. It looks viscous and gummy, refusing to shift as you roll the syringe in your hand. They say you’ll have to eat some of it—a dose the size of a grain of rice. You asked how it tastes and the tender made a face. You hemmed and hawed and eventually lost courage. It just seemed too hard to make the commitment.

And who the heck is Rick Simpson, anyway? According to High Times, back in 1997, Simpson was working at a Canadian hospital as an engineer. While treating the hospital’s pipes with a potent aerosol glue for asbestos, toxic fumes from the glue caused him to fall off a ladder and hit his head. After the injury, Simpson developed post-concussion syndrome, causing him to suffer from an incessant ringing in his ears. He also says he began giving the oil to sick Canadians for free.

Doctors later diagnosed Simpson with basal cell carcinoma—a type of skin cancer. Simpson says he decided to treat the associated tumors himself by putting the oil onto bandages and applying them to his arms. He claims that after only four days the tumors disappeared.

Simpson continued to give out free samples of the oil to friends and even published the recipe for his oil for free online. But in 2009, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police raided his home in Nova Scotia and shut his operation down. Simpson was in Amsterdam at the time and decided not to return to Canada to avoid incarceration. In 2013, he moved to Europe. According to a statement, he can return to Canada but has decided against it.

Simpson has made some pretty big claims about his oil—none of which have been corroborated. “This harmless non addictive natural medication can be used with great success,” he writes, “to cure or control cancer, MS, pain, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, infections, inflammations, blood pressure, depression, sleeping problems and just about any other medical issues that one can imagine.”

If you’ve ever heard someone claim that THC “cures” or “kills” cancer, then you were probably speaking to a Simpsonite. They can have very compelling arguments, but the veracity of their claims has yet to be tested properly.

And while no self-respecting doctor would say that cannabis “cures” cancer without enough evidence, one study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute back in 1975 found that tumors in mice seemed to shrink in relation to THC and CBN dosage. The resultant substance is a dark, sticky oil that can be eaten directly (although it tastes horribly bitter). The process is quite simple, though. Professional extractors will steep plant matter in solvent until the trichomes have separated. Then they burn the solvent off slowly over low heat to activate the THC. The resultant substance is a dark, sticky oil that can be mixed into foods, vaped or eaten directly (although it tastes horribly bitter).

And while it might not cure cancer, it certainly will give you a psychotropic kick in the pants. And that’s plenty valuable on its own.
Recreational Marijuana under Fire during COVID-19

Pandemic Regulations Cause Stress for Cannabis Users

by Missy Sweetwillow

Here in New Mexico, we’ve been fortunate enough to see medical marijuana dispensaries deemed essential. Patients can still get their medicine, and most dispensaries have addressed the risk of disease spread by offering curbside pickup options to keep immunocompromised patients from going inside the dispensaries. Other states with medicinal marijuana programs have followed suit, but in states where both medical and recreational marijuana are legal, a new predicament has arisen.

Massachusetts became the first state to draw a line between medical and recreational dispensaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Last week, Gov. Charlie Baker ordered that nonessential businesses needed to close their doors, and while medical marijuana dispensaries were deemed essential, recreational dispensaries didn’t make the cut.

It almost makes sense. The term “recreational” implies a nonessential good or service, no? Except Massachusetts has had legal recreational marijuana since 2018, and many patients who began using cannabis medicinally since then decided it would be much easier to forgo the medical card route and just start buying their cannabis at recreational dispensaries. Those patients are now left without medicine for an undetermined amount of time, during the most stressful period in memorable American history since 9/11.

Some patients in this situation ran out to stockpile marijuana before the recreational dispensaries were forced to close, but they didn’t know what to prepare for. Shannon Venezia, who treats her epilepsy with marijuana, only bought enough medicine for two weeks. Gov. Baker updated his mandate earlier this week, however, and now recreational dispensaries will be closed until at least early May.

If this continues for even longer, “I have no idea what I’m going to do,” Venezia said. “Am I going to have to go to the black market, or am I going to have to try and get my card renewed and potentially expose myself to people who are sick?”

The panic is evident at medical dispensaries in Massachusetts (and the other states with medical marijuana programs), as well. Cannabis sales are at an all-time high, with huge lines full of patients fearful that they will have to self-quarantine and go without medicine. The ability to afford a long-term supply of cannabis is a financial privilege that many do not have, and those patients who can only afford small amounts at a time wonder what the available supply will look like in the months to come.

Gov. Baker is well aware that Massachusetts is the only state so far to deem recreational marijuana nonessential, which has garnered a fair amount of backlash while liquor stores are allowed to remain open. He said that since Massachusetts is one of the only states in New England where recreational marijuana is legal, he didn’t want people flocking across state lines to stock up, spreading disease along the way. What is it like to live in a state that’s only about 10,000 square miles? New Mexico is over 12 times that size, so I think we’re safe from any flock-and-stockers.

Dispensaries aren’t buying that as a valid reason to cut cannabis patients off from their medicine and are petitioning to have the governor allow them to reopen to the public. Many dispensaries have a recreational and medical side and say they likely won’t be able to keep their doors open if they can only sell to patients with medical cards. Let’s take this time to be grateful that New Mexico was incapable of passing recreational marijuana legislation once again in 2020, so we don’t have to deal with this quandary. Our residents without medical cards are stuck at home drinking their problems away as it is, and it looks like those in Massachusetts will have to do the same.
The history of cannabis on the planet earth is a simple one, really. It all starts with the cultivation of a medicinal herb whose healing properties regaled the ancients.

Ancient Days
Although precise histories differ, cannabis cultivation is generally believed to have begun in Asia thousands of years ago. There is evidence, for example that the people in China began cultivating cannabis between the years 8,000 and 6,000 BC. 

*Cannabis: Evolution and Ethnobotany*, by Robert. C. Clarke and Mark D. Merlin, and published in 2013, documents the cultivation of cannabis during a period in human history when civilization was at its very beginning. In the preface to the book, one of the author’s notes, “The culturally valuable and often irreplaceable goods derived from cannabis deeply influenced the commercial, medical, ritual, and religious practices of cultures throughout the ages, and human desire for these commodities directed the evolution of the plant toward its contemporary varieties.” In ancient China, cannabis was a part of daily life.

Besides being an early adopter of cannabis, ancient Chinese culture had many proponents of the herb, including the emperor Shennong, a semi-mythological figure who is credited by some as the man who invented agricultural tools like the plough. Shennong is also credited for developing irrigation techniques, learning the importance of preserving certain seeds and creating the first farmer’s markets to sell fresh produce. The emperor’s medical text lists cannabis as one of the 365 medicines that was most valuable to health and according to at least one modern website, the emperor “claimed cannabis to be harmless and said that, if taken in the right dose over a prolonged period of time, it would allow the communication with spirits.”

According to modern authorities on the subject, “His affection for the plant and the invention of agriculture strongly suggest this period in time to be the one during which cannabis was first purposefully cultivated by humans”—at least that was the recent determination made by the modern cannabis mavens at straininsider.com.

Spreading the Love
By the time the year 2,000 BC rolled around, the use of cannabis spread out of central Asia and into places like Japan, the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent. Nomadic tribes and a flourishing trade route into and out of central China are generally credited with the herb’s spread.

Chief among those cultural groups who helped the spread of cannabis cultivation and use during that formative age were a group of nomadic warriors known as the Scythians.

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Scythians lived in wagons; the men among the group were formidable horsemen as well, according to the famous Greek historian who also wrote a major treatise on the Peloponnisian War and traced the development of Scythian culture more than 500 years after the tribe began spreading through the ancient world.

Besides the cultural aspects Herodotus wrote about, it seems cannabis use was also a part of daily Scythian life. The combination of all these cultural traits led to a very diffuse presence of the Scythians throughout the ancient world. It’s no wonder that cannabis cultivation and use spread with them.

One of the most fascinating aspects of ancient Scythian Culture was their use of cannabis in religious rites. The ancient Greek historian mentioned above also reported that the Scythians would take hemp seeds and “creep under the cloths and put the seeds on the red hot stones; but this being put on smokes, and produces such a steam, that no Grecian vapour-bath would surpass it. The Scythians, transported by the vapour, shout aloud.”

Romans
By the beginning of the common era, during the reign of Augustus, the Roman world was awash in cannabis due to the influence and import of the Scythians.

In about 50 AD, a Roman botanist and physician named Dioscorides wrote about the physical properties of hemp; he also was interested in the plant and its seeds as a medicine to treat hypersexual desire and physical afflictions like worm infestation.
On a more positive note, Galen, the great Roman writer and physician, also studied the plant that had come west to Europe with the barbarian hordes nearly 1000 years before. Galen described the powers of the flowers that come from cannabis as he observed their use at social gathering in the Empire, noting that “they were often shared around social gatherings to help induce enjoyment and laughter.”

The famous Roman poet Ovid was also down with the flower of the plant, and even wrote a poetic about a man turned sea-god named Glaucus who ate a cannabis-like plant that induced joy and euphoria.

Get Medieval

As cannabis cultivation and use spread through the Middle East and Mediterranean areas of the globe, it was just a matter of time before the herb began to see growth in Central Europe.

After the Roman Empire fell—the barbarians, again—cannabis use was spread by tribes who brought the herb to Germany. From there, cannabis traveled to the British Isles courtesy of the Angles and the Saxons, yet another of the many nomadic, marijuana-using peoples that came to dominate the culture after Roman influence began to fade in the West in about 500 AD.

Reports indicate that the Vikings also became part of the wider European culture that indulged in cannabis for various reasons from medical to recreational.

Cannabis researcher Barney Warf, a professor of Geography at the University of Kansas wrote that: “For the most part, it was widely used for medicine and spiritual purposes” during pre-modern times. “For example, the Vikings and medieval Germans used cannabis for relieving pain during childbirth and for toothaches.”

Northern Africa

Between 700 or 800 AD, cannabis was introduced to Northern Africa and became a cultural phenomena in that part of the world before pushing North into Spain. While the seeds of the herb eventually came to be cultivated continent-wide, particularly in Nigeria and the Congo, it was in the North where its influence had the most impact.

Although the Koran does not speak specifically about cannabis use, many devoted practitioners of Islam consider the plant to be haram, or forbidden. The thing is, many of the cultures where Islam took root—particularly in in North Africa, have roots that precede Islam.

In Morocco for example, the Berbers have long been known as cannabis cultivators; cannabis was probably introduced to their culture during the Arab invasions of the 7th century AD.

After that series of invasions from the Middle East—and despite religious differences—cannabis cultivation became a big deal in Northern Africa. Nearly 1000 years later, in the 19th century, the king of Morocco reiterated the herb’s cultural importance when he decreed it was the right of certain tribes to cultivate and use the plant.

Europe and Beyond

While many humans in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and ultimately, the Americas, began to use cannabis for its medical and recreational properties, it seems that, as the plant spread around the world, its use in Central Europe was focused on the strength and durability of the fiber that comes from the hemp plant.

After the end of Islamic rule in Spain, but probably because of the huge influence that the culture had on the Spanish, cannabis cultivation in Spain really took off. In this area of the world both the medicinal and the structural properties of the plant were important to its popularity on the Iberian peninsula.

In the 16th century, Spanish settlers flooded North and South America. One of the most important crops they brought with them was industrial hemp. The settlers started cultivating hemp and cannabis in Chile in about 1545.

The practice of growing cannabis as hemp spread to Spain’s main competitor, England, during the same time period. For the English, hemp provided a strong and sturdy resource. At the proceedings of the Virginia Assembly in 1619, a new law required all planter to sow the plant for pleasure and for profit.

Interestingly, as cannabis cultivation and use continued to grow, attempts began to be made to prohibit the use of a plant that began its journey alongside the humans as a ritual partner and medicinal wonder.

After France invaded Egypt in the early part of the 19th century, Napoleon had to ban the use of cannabis among his troops who were occupying the ancient, albeit now Muslim kingdom.

Alcohol it seems, was already prohibited in Egypt; it follows the laws of Islam, after all. But because his soliders couldn’t get any culturally familiar intoxicant to help them through their soldierly duties, many turned to hashish for relief.

For some reason, this change of habits outraged the French emperor, who then quickly moved to staunch the new habits, writing a law which, in part, read, “Throughout Egypt the use of a beverage prepared by certain Moslems from hemp (hashish), as well as the smoking of the seeds of hemp, is prohibited. Habitual smokers and drinkers of this plant lose their reason and suffer from violent delirium in which they are liable to commit excesses of all kinds. ... The preparation of hashish as a beverage is prohibited throughout Egypt. The doors of those cafes and restaurants where it is supplied are to be walled up, and their proprietors imprisoned for three months.”

And that, as they say, is where the worm turned. After that simple act, much of Europe and later America, began to change the way they viewed cannabis. What was once a loyal helper and friend became a possible danger to all.

But that’s a story for another time. That will happen in the next part of this series when Weekly Alibi’s Cannabis Manual takes a historical look at cannabis in the 20th century.

Next Issue: Cannabis in the modern world; Prohibitions Created.
Hash Eaters

How cannabis helped form the legend of the Assassins

by Joshua Lee

It’s not too often that a mystical sect from the Middle Ages snags the attention of modern audiences, but when you’re group’s name is said to translate to “hash eaters,” you can expect to turn a few heads.

The Hashashin, a highly secretive military sect of ecstatic Nizari mystics based in Persia (modern-day Iran), were known for political intrigue and assassination. In fact, the term “assassin” derives from their name, which was synonymous with murder and blackmail.

The Assassins were not nice people. Their sect, which broke off of Isma’ili Shi’i Islam, is often considered the first terrorist group in history. To ensure power and influence, the Assassins infamously used the threat of death at knifepoint and bribery to control political leaders in the area. When asked why he’d ceased his angry sermons against the group, Sunni scholar Fakhr ad-Din al-Razi famously told a student that he’d reconsidered his stance once he’d heard the Assassins’ “pointed and weighty” arguments.

But operating with nefarious intent while hiding in the shadows was only one aspect of this complex and baffling group. The Assassins were also known for a bizarre streak of Sufi mysticism and an undying love of hashish—which they are often said to have smoked and consumed ceaselessly.

Hash was also reportedly used by the Assassins for trickery. In The Templars and the Assassins: The Militia of Heaven, author James Wasserman tells the legend of a group of devotees who were shown the decapitated head of one of their colleagues as it rested on a plate. He had successfully completed an assassination mission and this was his reward. The group’s leader asked the decapitated head to describe paradise, and it answered, telling the devotees about the amazing sights and pleasures that would be experienced if they sacrificed themselves for the order. Once the witnesses had gone, the Assassins’ leader freed the “head”—a man standing in a pit that had been dug out of the floor and ranting after ingesting too much hashish—before striking him down dead.

According to another famous legend about the order, an Assassin leader claimed he was able to send his followers to paradise while they were still alive. To “prove” it, he allegedly used hashish to drug targeted dupes, who would then wake up in a walled garden full of delicious delicacies served by beautiful men and women. After blissing out in “paradise” for a while, the mark would once again be drugged and then awaken back in their room. The walled garden’s actual location was said to be within the confines of the assassin fortress, of course.

But these stories are largely considered myths, and some scholars have even questioned the legitimacy of accounts that claim the group used cannabis at all. It’s been suggested that
while the word “hashashin,” derives from either the derogatory term for “hashish eater” or “outcast,” it was used by foreigners in place of “Asasiyun”—which denotes followers who are faithful to the foundation of faith—as a way to demonize the Nizari.

What’s curious is that whether the Assassins used cannabis or not, it’s their association with the drug that brought them to the attention of pot-loving Western anarchist philosophers in the 20th century. Much of their popularity in modern pop consciousness can be attributed to beat writer William S. Burroughs and his partner in crime, artist Brion Gysin.

Burroughs and Gysin were fond of the supposed last words of Hassan-i-Sabbah: “Nothing is true. Everything is permitted”—attributed to him by Betty Bouthoul in her 1936 book, The Master of the Assassins. They would both go on to repeat the phrase and other passages from the book during interviews and incorporate the story into their own works of art. The idea of a sect of drug-addled mystics who ruled the world from their mountain fortress clearly appealed to both men (for obvious reasons).

In the ‘80s, scholar Peter Lamborn Wilson’s essay, “Secrets of the Assassins,” cemented the sect as Anarchist heroes. The essay describes how Hassan-i-Sabbah II, son of the founder of the Assassins, declared the Qiyamat on Aug. 8, 1164. The Qiyamat—or Resurrection—is a complex theological doctrine that has to do with an apocalypse. According to Wilson, the Assassins’ Qiyamat was an “abrogation of the law” that overturned the rules of orthodox Islam and initiated a kind of paradise on earth in which the faithful could reward themselves with “communal as well as individual participation in the mystic’s great adventure, perfect freedom.”

This philosophy of freedom and openness was directly associated with cannabis by Wilson and his contemporaries—correctly or not. In his book, Scandal: Essays in Islamic Heresy, Wilson writes “cannabis inspires some of its devotees with precisely the sort of ‘state’ which the Koran appears to associate with paradisal wine, which ‘causes no headaches.’”

Wilson’s essay pushed the story’s signal out into the creative ether, inspiring a number of artists to latch onto the legend. It would eventually make its way into pop culture through the popular Assassin’s Creed video game franchise.

Today, the Assassins are regarded as folk heroes by many. Their supposed creed—fictitious or not—is seen by many as a beacon of independent thought that was centuries ahead of its time. If researchers are correct, and the sect’s association with cannabis is purely the result of a defamation campaign waged hundreds of years ago, then that campaign failed miserably.
The Big Disappoint
Why the legalization bill failed

by Joshua Lee

We’re knee-deep into the 21st century, and we’re still getting shafted in an area that should have been fixed decades ago. Cannabis is still illegal.

It’s preposterous, but it doesn’t even feel weird. We’re all used to it. I’m bored just saying it.

Apparently our lawmakers still need more time to think about it, though.

The recreational cannabis legalization bill, Senate Bill 115, was unceremoniously shoved to the side earlier this year. I heard they took it to a quiet spot out behind the Roundhouse—somewhere where its cries wouldn’t be heard—and strangled it like a mad dog. The tattered bill was seen tumbling lifelessly along the gutters of Santa Fe later that evening. If you can’t tell: It still bugs me.

I’ve been asked what went wrong, and I still refuse to guess. I have my own conspiracy theories, but I’ll be tucking them away for now. It’s likely that the more vanilla explanations are right, anyway. Some aspects of the bill rubbed people the wrong way, after all.

For instance: If it had passed, the bill would have made it illegal for individuals not enrolled in the state’s Medical Cannabis Program to grow marijuana plants. Imagine the state criminalizing growing your own tomatoes—it seems crazy. Placing limits of any kind on growing marijuana seems ridiculous until you consider the need to control potential black market activities (made possible by the drug’s illegal status elsewhere). But outright barring law-abiding citizens from growing a plant naturally is beyond strange when you stop and think about it.

Another big problem with the bill was the extreme limitations it would have put in place regarding how cannabis is advertised. Under the bill, advertising cannabis products would be prohibited on billboards, the sides of buses, unsolicited internet pop-ups, radio, television or other broadcast media (with the exception of subscription services that can guarantee that there audience is over 21).

The only places where advertisements would have been allowed—in print and digital media—were also restricted to areas “where the audience is reasonably expected to be 21 years of age or older, as determined by reliable, current audience composition data.” In other words: Not in easily accessible publications (like the one you’re holding) or on a website without an age verification check.

These restrictions would have been detrimental not only to the dispensaries, but also to the many local media outlets that rely on ad revenue to continue running (like the one you’re holding).

A major point of contention over the bill was a lack of protection for businesses wanting to maintain a “drug-free workplace.” Business leaders and, by extension (for obvious reasons), lawmakers said they needed assurances that employers could still enforce marijuana-free hiring practices. Some have tried arguing that it’s a safety issue, but the reality probably has more to do with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988.

This law enables employers to collect federal grants as long as they maintain a drug-free workplace policy. Under those policies, employees often have to sign an agreement saying they will not partake in illegal drug activity on or off company premises. Since cannabis is federally illegal, an employer couldn’t knowingly employ a user—even if it’s legal in the state.

Maintaining a drug-free workplace can also benefit employers by giving them cuts to workers’ compensation insurance premiums. The logic behind the discounts is that drug-impaired workers cause more accidents, and a drug-free policy lowers that number.

So, of course, employers don’t want to have anything to do with a legalization bill that doesn’t explicitly allow them to keep screening for THC during the hiring process. Considering recent changes to the state’s medical cannabis laws which protect patients from being turned away for cannabis use, the concern is definitely real. It also means they consider the weight of their wallets to be more important than progressive drug reform. No surprise, there.

I still think any bill that will free those who have been incarcerated for minor cannabis crimes should be pushed through, no matter what flaws it has. It’s easy for me to hop on Twitter, take a dump on our leaders for not passing the bill and go about my day like everything’s groovy. For the poor wretches sitting behind bars over a joint right now, the news was probably devastating.

Oh well! Maybe next year. I’m sure that will comfort them as they rot in their jail cells.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham doesn’t seem ready to back down yet, anyway. She told reporters that legalization is “inevitable,” and I’m inclined to agree. It only took a few million years for that first fish to crawl up on the beach and take a nervous breath. I just don’t want New Mexico to be like his neighbor, the nervous fish that waited another million “to see how it pans out.”
This April 20th, the New Mexico Cannabis Chamber of Commerce recommends #virtual420

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