

FREE THE WEED 107

A Column by John Sinclair

Hi everybody, as Ernie Harwell used to say when they had a major league baseball season, and welcome to another month of my recovery from open heart surgery on Valentine's Day, when the people at the Heart Hospital in the Detroit Medical Center gave me a quintuple bypass operation in response to a heart attack I suffered on February 10th.

After my Hash Bash column last month raised so much controversy, I wanted to come back this month with something that could cause no worse reaction than "ho hum," so I decided to write about the long series of physical difficulties I've suffered all of the current century and for ten years previously.

Really my bodily troubles go back to 1991 when I was diagnosed with diabetes after I took a couple of major falls and tore the tendons on both knees, one after the other, and was forced into an operation on both legs at once that necessitated hip-to-ankle casts that lasted several months until I started rehabilitation and learned how to walk again.

I ended up with a 20% disability in both knees but basically still able to walk properly and exist without much strain on my knees. I should say in conformance with the basic theme of this column that I continued to smoke copious quantities of excellent weed during this entire process of injury and healing because it helped me keep my positive outlook and remain focused on making myself better.

As I review my medical problems of the past 30 years I think of all the positive effects smoking weed has had on my struggle to overcome severe physical disabilities, avoid serious depression, and maintain my grip on everyday life, including my work as a creative person who writes poetry and prose, performs with musical ensembles, and operates an internet radio station called RadioFreeAmsterdam.org.

Let me say it right out: Life would be an entirely different experience for me without smoking weed on a daily basis. I can't imagine another type of life without weed, and that's why I've dedicated an inordinate amount of time over the years to legalizing marijuana—to get the police out of our lives and to create free space for us to get high and do whatever we want.

Going back to my medical troubles, my current phase started in the early 2000s when I was living half of each year in Amsterdam. I developed a condition in my foot called "hammertoe" that resulted in undue rubbing my toe knuckles against my shoes and opening up a wound on my fourth toe that would immediately become infected and cause major difficulties.

This condition led to two or three 5-day hospital stays in Amsterdam to cure the infections and interfered considerably with my ability—or desire—to do much walking. My feet troubled me all the time, with the worst episode in 2007 when I was in Florence, Italy and walked too far in the wrong shoes. This time I went back to Detroit and my daughter Sunny took me to her foot doctor, Stanley Cohen, who began treating me then.

Dr. Cohen and I went through several operations to remove the knuckles from my toes on both feet and then straighten out the big toe on my left foot, which eventually suffered the loss of the tip of my middle toe and then the little toe was completely removed. My right foot didn't come out right: all the toes were cocked severely to the right, with the big toe tucked underneath, so that I would stumble by tripping on that big toe, causing a disastrous series of serious crashes to the ground between then and the present.

I fell three times in Oxford, Mississippi, in the autumn of 2007, ripping over a curb on the street and on two doorsills in residences. During this period every step I took was painful, and I ended up getting some special shoes recommended by my acupuncturist in Amsterdam that would dig new arches into the bottoms of my feet simply by wearing them every day. I did this for two years and then the pain stopped, but I wasn't any surer on the feet during the following ten years, and that was the beginning of the awful series of falls— too numerous to recount—that I've suffered in the 13 years up until the present.

It was in the spring time of 2017 that I began to develop my current panoply of physical problems, starting with an instance in a hotel in Amsterdam where I woke up at 4:00 am and couldn't catch my breath for two hours. I went from checkout with Steve The Fly to the expatriates' clinic and got treated, filling two prescriptions for 200 euros and paying 49 euros for the office visit. That amounted to a good two weeks worth of modest dining privileges and I saw at once that it would be necessary to come back to Detroit to get my government-sponsored medical care at the Detroit Medical Center instead of paying for services in cash.

After being treated at DMC by my principal doctor, Muhammad Kang of the Rosa Parks Geriatric Center at Detroit Receiving Hospital, I returned to Europe to perform a series of concerts in Sweden and then spend a week in Amsterdam before returning to Detroit. It was then, in August 2017, that I was hit in the back by a man on a bicycle on a street near the Spui and knocked face-down on the pavement, taken to the hospital and released without surgery.

I went back to Detroit in September 2017 and I've been here ever since. At Thanksgiving time I tripped on the carpet in my bedroom and fell flat on my face, cracking my head on a crystal geode sitting on the floor next to the bed. Then I fell in New Orleans in March of 2018 when I tripped over my feet trying to catch a streetcar on Carrollton Avenue and smashed down face-first on the pavement. I was taken to the new Louisiana State Medical facility, treated and released.

Recovery progressed smoothly until October 2018, when I fell getting out of my chair at my desk and landed on my right forehead and right hip, causing months of diminished capacity including two weeks in the hospital and a month in a rehab facility before I could go home. I was (and still am) recovering from that particular fall and undergoing rehabilitation treatments at home when my walker collapsed at the corner of Woodward and Peterboro and I fell to the sidewalk, breaking my right humerus bone in three places when my shoulder hit the ground.

It took three months for the shoulder to heal, and I asked my doctor for permission to travel to Amsterdam for two weeks in February 2019. Dr. Kang reluctantly agreed, and my comrade Joeri Pfeiffer had come over from the Netherlands to accompany me on my flight to Amsterdam. We went to the airport and I was experiencing some feelings of weakness that alarmed me to the extent that I decided not to board the flight. I went home and the next day suffered a heart attack that propelled me to the hospital once again.

The heart specialists advised open heart surgery and conducted a five-bypass operation in Valentine's Day, after which I spent more time in a rehab center before being released prematurely under orders of the insurance company. Dr. Kang arranged for in-home rehabilitation but before it started, I fell in my apartment and injured my back and right side, which delayed my rehabilitation for a couple of weeks and then stopped with the pain.

That's where I am today, dear friends, recovering at home from open heart surgery and trying to get my strength back after months of inactivity. My therapists, nurses and doctors have all written me a clean bill of health up to the present week and I'm continuing to get better every day. I know this is a lot of hooey to most of my readers, but I've pissed & moaned so much about my health problems that I thought I'd spell it out once and for all.

In the ultimate of ironies I woke up this morning, headed for the bathroom, missed a step somewhere on my way to the toilet pbowl and crashed onto the tile floor with all my might, hitting the commode with my left side above the hip on the way down and opening up about 3 more weeks of injury, suffering and recovery. So let's just roll up a big joint and FREE THE WEED, everybody!

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