

Chapter Seven

Seeking Purity

Keeping Your Drugs Off Drugs

As Socrates might have said, the unexamined bud is not worth smoking. So let's examine the bud. During the past years of draconian prohibition, cannabis consumers had scant knowledge of exactly what they were putting into their pipes and smoking. Only closeted home growers and their most trusted confidants knew. The rest of us were kept in the dark. Even the dim flames from our lighters to fire up our pipes shed little light on the subject.

As if tobacco were not already risky enough, cigarette manufacturers stir an array of additives into tobacco's toxic brew. Taking a cue from the tobacco industry, cannabis growers, too, apply an arsenal of chemicals during the cultivation process, both indoor and out. Eating any plant produced with growth hormones and chemical pesticides is worrisome, but a question hangs in the air. Does chemical contamination get transmitted in that plant's smoke? Or does combustion destroy or neutralize those contaminants? Scientific studies have already confirmed that contaminants indeed do get transmitted in tobacco smoke. Researchers are just beginning to confirm the same for cannabis smoke.

Among the first of its kind, a study published in 2013 analyzed the chemical residue not in cannabis itself but in its smoke.¹ It tested specifically for only three pesticides and only one growth hormone. Its findings weren't pretty. It found all four in the smoke. Of the three pesticides, two-thirds lurking in the plant matter was transmitted into the smoke. The researchers concluded that the pesticide and hormone residues in the smoke may pose "a significant toxicological threat."²

They advised that the best way to reduce that threat was to make sure that there was not any pesticide in the cannabis in the first place.³

WHAT'S IN YOUR WEED?

In decades past, your dealer typically sold you cannabis in flimsy see-through plastic sandwich bags. Full ounces (28 grams) came packaged in bigger and thicker freezer bags. Those bags were the street standards because they enabled buyers to glimpse the proportion of leaves and flowers to stems and seeds.

In the days before advances in cloning techniques of female plants and in the early identification and removal of male plants, the female flowers inevitably were fertilized by the typically domineering males. If there was just one male or hermaphrodite plant in a patch of forty female plants, the overassertive stud joined forces with the wind and flying insects to see to it that most of the females got pollinated and bore seeds. Happy to add weight to the harvest, growers routinely included the male plants and the seeds even though male plants contained little THC and the seeds nearly none. The seeds came either encased within the female buds or, if dislodged, fallen to the bottom of the bag. To fake the weight, sometimes even dark-colored tiny pebbles were hidden inside the bag. Contrary to popular belief, numerous studies have proven that stones do not get you stoned.

The sandwich and freezer bags were just about the only things about the cannabis that were transparent. Your dealer often spun whimsical yarns about its origin and cultivation. He might have pretended it was Acapulco Gold smuggled under the bananas or pretended it was Maui Wowie flown in by a flight attendant in her carryon luggage or pretended it was Jamaican Dream descended from seeds from the home grow of Bob Marley's personal gardener. And no matter how incredulous the stories, you pretended to believe him.

In reality, neither of you knew if the contraband was indica or sativa or hybrid. You could only guess if its terpenes were rich in pinene or myrcene or limonene. You could only hope that it was high in THC, and you didn't know or care about any of the other alphabet-soup cannabinoids. The only thing you could be sure of was that the cannabis provided you relief or got you high, if even that.