

Drug War Follies - Skunk Magazine Issue #13

What a difference a country makes. For nearly 25-years Peru has been my second home. I got married there, my kids were born there and much of my work has been there. My first home is the US—New York City until 2002 and then Joshua, Texas—but I generally spend several months a year in Peru. I even ran a little joint called the Cold Beer Blues Bar on a port on the Amazon there for a couple of years, which my ex and I opened in the late 1990s because we couldn't get gold beer or blues music in Iquitos, the jungle city that's our base. To support my family—the bar never made a buck since the tourists were too afraid to come to that part of town—I began taking people out to the jungle about the time the bar opened. It's generally one or two groups a year, maybe half-a-dozen people who want to feel what deep jungle is like. I take them into the thick of that fantastic green hell and when they're full I drag them to the mountains to clamber over Machu Picchu in the high Andes. Along the way they get to drink the jungle medicine Ayahuasca several times during the Amazon portion of the trip, then they drink the Inca medicine San Pedro up in the mountains. They also get to partake in coca leaf ceremonies—leaf, not cocaine—eat magic mushrooms, and frequently get to try the Matsigenka Indian medicines sapo and nu-nu. The former is a frog secretion burned into the skin and the latter is a magic snuff. By the time they're done my clients frequently refer to the trip as the Peter Gorman Exotic Drug-Sampler Tour.

It's not. While there are a lot of exotic substances to try, each is done in a traditional context and each is a healing medicine. My clients sometimes get healing immediately, sometimes the medicines work their magic months later. I got a letter a couple of weeks ago from a client who was with me last year. The fellow, a former world-class body builder who's now a wealthy investor, wrote: "How do I quantify that trip? Put it this way: Before the trip I woke every day wondering if today was a good day to put a pistol in my mouth. Since the trip I wake every morning thinking that today is a great day to be alive."

Another client who was with me last year came to Peru to die. She had end-stage cancer and wasn't scheduled to live the length of the trip. She and her husband planned on her being out in the Amazon when it happened. More than a year later she's still writing me and her plans to die have been put on hold: Her cancer miraculously went into remission in the jungle.

These are extreme examples of the healing that takes place using traditional medicines administered by local doctors—curanderos—but they're not unusual. Dozens of clients over the years have written months after their trip asking me to thank the healers for eliminating a physical or emotional illness. Others write to say their spiritual life has been given a heaven-sent boost.

What the hell does this have to do with my column? I'll tell you: If those people did those substances in the US or Canada they'd be facing jail, not healing. The US Feds are dying to nail someone for ayahuasca, and nearly got my friend, Alan S., a few years ago for importing the plants used to make it. Their logic was that the chacruna leaves that are part of the ayahuasca tea contain DMT and so Alan was charged with intent to distribute a Schedule 1 controlled substance. They couldn't make their case and finally gave him back his passport and allowed him to return to Peru, but they'll make a case on someone sooner or later.

The San Pedro is similarly prohibited. A cactus that's a close cousin to Peyote, it grows wild all over the southwest US, but if the Feds get wind of you cutting it up and boiling it, you'll minimally have your home forfeited and probably face 5-years in the pen. And forget the Little Sister mushrooms. If I were caught handing out a dozen pair to each of a half-dozen people in Texas in a little ceremony I'd be facing at least 10, maybe more, for distribution. And the kilos of coca leaves utilized in the traditional Incan ceremonies? Fuggedaboutit. Tack on another 5. Add the magic snuff? Buddy, you're never going to see the sun rise on the street again.

So I'm sitting in Iquitos right now, having just finished a trip during which several people who badly needed healing on some level—physical, emotional, spiritual—got it. I don't even know what was wrong with them but I know they got healed. The medicines simply get the job done. And I'm glad I could facilitate that by getting those people to the curanderos who could make a difference in their lives. At the same time I'm shaking my head and gritting my teeth in anger at the stupidity of the US government and the war on drugs which would put each of those people, along with me and the curanderos, in prison if we were caught doing that healing on US soil. First time looking at the net in three weeks and I remain pissed off at the US government. Seems you turn your back for one freaking minute and the assholes in charge of things push for harsher penalties and suck a little more of our freedom down their tubes.

In the last couple of weeks of June alone, there were several wretched developments. The UN's Antonio Maria Costa, the director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime announced that marijuana use is "out of control," and "extremely problematic because of the much-increased THC content." His comments were seconded by US Drug Czar John Walters who noted that pot use is "a massive global problem," inferring the US may once again turn its big guns on the little weed.

The US Supreme Court weighed in with a ruling that helps eliminate whatever was left of the "knock and announce" ruling that police are generally supposed to follow when busting into your house. Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the majority in *Hudson v. Michigan*, noted that the "knock and announce" is really nothing more than the right "not to be intruded upon in one's nightclothes." So expect more wrong address searches based on bad snitch tips, which result in more people dying at the hands of wagger SWAT boys.

Then Michigan's Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling and found that any driver in an accident who has any amount of an illegal substance in his/her bloodstream can be charged with driving under the influence. It doesn't matter if there are only THC metabolites that indicate a person was high last month—the DUI can stand. And as anyone who has ever gotten a DUI knows, it's a little charge that can fuck your whole life up. In their ruling the court noted: "It is irrelevant that a person who is no longer under the influence of marijuana could be prosecuted under the statute."

And then the topper of them all: The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department announced that it will begin testing small, unmanned drone aircraft for surveillance purposes. The planes, about three-feet long and six-and-a-half-feet wide, are, theoretically, going to be used to relay live-time video feeds to the department of hostage situations or help locate criminals on the run. But you can bet your ass they'll soon be outfitted with thermal imaging equipment and flying over a neighborhood like yours, looking for rooftop heat sources. So buckle your seatbelts, kiddies: The ride's going to get rougher. It would all be funny if people weren't dying and the prisons weren't full.

About the Author

Source: <http://petergormanarchive.com>