

THE BAD NEWS: 25 Years For Six Ounces of Weed

In an outlandish case of judicial cruelty, Steven D. Corbin, of Caldwell County, MO, has just begun serving the seventh year of a 25-year sentence for involvement in the sale of less than six ounces of marijuana. He had no prior record. The case began in 1985, when Corbin, an oilworker from Caldwell County who moved to Oklahoma in 1982, returned to Missouri. Before long he ran into an old acquaintance, J. D. Clug, in a club in Chillicothe, and the two smoked marijuana provided by Clug. "I didn't know he'd become a narc since I last seen him," Corbin told HT from Missouri's Fordland State Penitentiary. "I mean, he's the one who suggested we smoke. He's the one who had the dope."

Two weeks later, undercover state highway patrolman Clug asked Corbin if he could score an ounce for him. "I wasn't dealing but I knew where to pick up an ounce, so he drove me over to this friend's house and I picked it up for him," says Corbin. "He was waiting outside."

Clug later asked Corbin to score for him again. This deal was for a quarter of an ounce, and Corbin never even touched it. "I just introduced the two guys and they did their business."

Shortly thereafter Corbin moved again, to Colorado. "I never saw Clug again, and I didn't think anything of it until a couple of months later when I was driving home and saw four police cars parked in front of my house. I kept driving, of course, then called my sister to find out what was going on. She said my wife had been arrested for drug trafficking and there was a warrant out for me."

Corbin stayed underground until his mother could contact a lawyer, Thomas D. Kelly. By then the charges against Corbin's wife had been dropped. "Kelly told me that I was wanted on charges of marijuana trafficking in Missouri but that since I was a first time offender he was able to make a deal with the prosecutor. So I went over to Kansas City and turned myself in."

The deal called for Corbin to get five years probation in exchange for a guilty plea on all counts. To Corbin's surprise, he was faced with five counts instead of the two he expected. Two additional charges were alleged sales of 109.3 gms and 11.3 gms of marijuana. The fifth concerned transportation of a sale across county lines. The counts amounted to 166.6 gms, just under six ounces, with an assessed total value of \$435.

Corbin pleaded guilty and expected to walk. But the prosecutor, James R. Broshot, a hard-liner up for re-election on an anti-drug platform, denied that a deal had been made and asked for the maximum. On May 1, 1986, Circuit Court Judge Kenneth Lewis gave Corbin 25 years on the four trafficking counts and five years on the cross-county charge -- the longest sentences ever meted out by Judge Lewis for a first-time pot offender.

Corbin was assigned to the maximum security state penitentiary in Moberly, MO, and transferred to the minimum security Fordland in December 1990. A release date has been set for August 1994, by which time he will have served eight years and four months.

There are many loose threads in the Corbin case. Shortly after the sentencing, Corbin's lawyer Kelly was sued by the Corbin family for fraud and malpractice. The suit prompted investigations which led to his being disbarred.

Another enigma is the alleged arrest of the anti-drug prosecutor, Broshot, for cocaine trafficking in Liberty, MO. According to an anonymous source working within the police department at that time, Broshot was discovered transporting several kilos of cocaine. The source claims that a deal was quickly made in which charges would not be filed in exchange for Broshot's resignation. As the records were supposedly whitewashed, HT was unable to verify this. But shortly after his hard-fought re-election campaign Broshot resigned his post and left town. Broshot refused to discuss either the Corbin case or the allegations against him with HIGH TIMES, saying only "I'm tired of answering questions about that. It happened a long time ago."

Some months after Corbin's incarceration, a friend of his, house-painter Jack Salcedo, began looking into the case. Corbin says Salcedo uncovered corruption in Caldwell County--"something to do with stolen county farm machinery." But Salcedo's investigation was halted when his house mysteriously burnt to the ground. Shortly thereafter Salcedo died in a car crash.

Corbin's parents, Arlene and Dewayne, have spent their life's savings--more than \$150,000--trying to appeal their son's sentence, enlisting the services of eight lawyers who have filed four appeals. The appeals have all been heard by Judge Lewis, the man who originally sentenced Corbin, and been denied. Lewis refused to return repeated calls to HIGH TIMES.

The Corbins have also enlisted the help of State Senator Robert Johnson, who has repeatedly appealed to Missouri Governor Ashcroft to look into the case.

During his incarceration Corbin has not only lost several years of his life, but his wife and child have left him as well. Yet according to Corbin's prison caseworker, Steve Adams, "He's one of the good ones. He'll come out okay." Adams, who had never checked into why Corbin was jailed until HT questioned him, was appalled at the sentence once he realized what the charges were and that it was Corbin's first offence.

Corbin still doesn't know why he got what he did. "Every day I walk around my cell, trying to think of who's way I got into," he says, "but I can't come up with anything. Either they needed a scapegoat or else I stepped on someone's toes. But I can't figure out who it might have been."

NOTE: As we go to press, Dan Viets, NORML's board chairman and a Missouri criminal defence attorney, has agreed to look into Corbin's case in the hopes of mounting a new appeal.

About the Author

