

## Drug War Follies - Skunk Magazine Issue #20

If the story had been written on April 1, I'd be sure it was an April Fool's gag. But no, it was written on the 11th, and it purported to be serious. The headline read: Colombia and Mexico to Work More Closely on Drug Gangs. The story explained that the two countries would work hand-in-hand to put an end to drug gangs which produce drugs in Colombia and ship them through Mexico. The reality is that they'll probably work more closely to ensure the two countries' leaders get a larger slice of the drug war profit pie: both in US aid and drug sales. I mean, who on earth could believe such nonsense? Colombia's President Uribe is probably the single key player in the coca trade in all of Colombia, and Mexico's new President, the Harvard-educated Felipe Calderon Hinojosa has made such a fuss about going after drug lords since he took office in December, 2006 that it's difficult to imagine he's doing anything but trying to consolidate the cartels to make them more efficient. Uribe, you might remember, grew up with the Medellin cocaine cartel leaders as friends, was mayor of Medellin during the height of the cartel's power, and has close ties with the right-wing AUC paramilitaries, who finish and move the vast majority of the cocaine-base produced in Peru and Bolivia to Mexico.

And Calderon has repeatedly called for more US aid to support his police and military forces wipe out the evil drug trade. Which he is libel to get. And then, like Vladimiro Montesinos in Peru a decade ago, he'll probably use it to eliminate all cartels who refuse to pay him a tithe.

So now it's announced that these two countries will work more closely together to eliminate the drug trade on which their economies depend enormously. Yeah, right. And if anybody wants me, I'll be in church next Sunday. For nearly 10 years Bill Weinberg and I—he with his HIGHWIRE column and me with news stories and features—covered wrong-address deaths for High Times magazine. It seemed like every month there was some SWAT team banging down the wrong door and shooting some mofo in the head when they reached for their glasses to see who was breaking into their home.

The story was always the same: some snitch, often facing a third-strike-and-life-in-prison, has to come up with something to get off the hook for some bad thing he's done. So he invents a drug dealer, gives the cop who's pulling his string a name and address and claims to have bought dope there. The cop tells his superior his snitch has solid info, no one actually checks it out and the next thing you knew another poor bastard was shot by a narc squad while sleeping—most often someone who wouldn't know what dope was if they had to step over it in the street.

Weinberg and I think we might have actually brought enough light to the issue that most SWAT teams and narc squads began checking out the snitch's info instead of blindly acting on it, and wrong address deaths seemed to diminish over the past decade.

But it still kills me when one happens. Because all it takes is 15 minutes of surveillance to verify a drug location. Yo! Mind I don't think drug locations are bad places—they're some of my favorite places, really—but in the game the way it's played, the cops are going to go after those locations and they should at least have the freaking courtesy or decency or humanity to check their sources. Hell, if the source is a snitch he or she's a liar by trade, so why the fuck wouldn't you check it out?

That was a quiz, boys and girls, and the answer is: Because there are some lazy, jerk-off, no-good cops out there making all cops look bad, cops who should be in jail rather than wearing a badge. (You all lost points for not getting that one.)

Anyway, last November 21, on the strength of a snitch-tip, undercover officers get a no-knock warrant and burst into the home of 92-year old Kathryn Johnston's Atlanta, GA home. She fired a wild shot at them from a pistol and they returned it with 39 of their own, hitting her five or six times and killing her instantly.

No drugs were found in a subsequent search of the dwelling. But one of the officers involved, realizing the mistake, planted drugs in the house and paid a street-informant to swear they'd bought drugs there. Worse, it turns out the police involved lied to a judge to secure the warrant in the first place.

All of this came out recently at hearings in the US House of Representatives looking into the use/misuse of informants. I'll tell you what: all use of snitches and informants is bad. If you have the power to tell someone they can avoid jail by ratting on someone else, nearly everyone will. Whether they know anything or not. And the vast majority of informants and snitches—as opposed to citizens who witness a crime and report it voluntarily—happens in the War on Drugs. Why? Because buyers and sellers don't go to the cops. Because the police would never know of drug activity if they didn't utilize snitches. So end the freaking war on drugs and you end the use of snitches. And you might even stop having stories about people like Ms. Johnston getting killed while sleeping in her own bed.

The only positive thing to come out of Ms. Johnston's death is that two of the cops have pleaded guilty to manslaughter, among other charges, and will be doing several years in prison. A third officer is awaiting sentencing. Wouldn't surprise me to learn he snitched on the other two and gets to walk away clean. It's not only bad cops and snitches who lie. In mid-May three then-current and former employees of Purdue Pharmaceuticals LP, maker of OxyContin—including its president, top lawyer and former chief medical officer—pleaded guilty to "misleading the public about the drug's risk of addiction" according to a May 11 AP Press story.

It seems Purdue was warned by physicians as early as 1995 that the painkiller was unusually addictive and frequently dangerous, but rather than warning doctors about the potential for harm and abuse, the company supplied its sales reps with false information claiming that the drug was less addictive than other painkillers.

So doctors prescribed it and patients got hooked and there was a lot more pain around the wonderdrug than there should have been. In 2002 alone OxyContin was responsible for 146 deaths and a contributing factor in more than 300 others.

The company was fined millions, and the three employees millions more. But the three were allowed to plead guilty one misdemeanor count each of

&ldquo;misbranding&rdquo; a product and walk. Imagine you were a pot dealer who was willfully killing 150 people a year and knowingly contributing to hundreds more&hellip;.what the????? You&rsquo;d never see another sunrise. But hey, these were just white-collar guys lying to the public and watching grandmas get crazy. Why shouldn&rsquo;t they be able to pay a fine and go back to their elegant Connecticut homes? You&rsquo;re not gonna begrudge them that, are you? You know, from where we sit, in god-forsaken, alcohol-free Joshua, Texas (yup, I got to drive 23 miles each way to buy a beer), you guys up in Canada have it pretty good. A recent bust of a pot dealer in Cochrane had the police all over the poor guy because they were claiming he was selling the weed to school kids. Okay, as a dad, that&rsquo;s the sort of press that even gets to me&mdash;though I know kids don&rsquo;t even develop receptor sites for cannabis till they hit puberty, and even if they could get high who the hell can make a living off of 10-year-olds&rsquo; lunch money? Nonetheless, that&rsquo;s what it was made out to be.

But then along comes Dr. Gord Breen, the principle of a nearby high school, a man who&rsquo;s very anti-pot, and instead of pouring fuel on the &ldquo;pot dealer&rsquo;s selling to kids&rdquo; story comes out and tells the local paper that the term &ldquo;school aged-children&rdquo; misrepresented the issue. &ldquo;You would have to distinguish between school age children and young adults,&rdquo; said Breen. &ldquo;To the best of my knowledge there were no young children whatsoever involved.&rdquo;

Which will probably save the dealer years in prison. Good for you, teach.

And then there is the ongoing trial&mdash;as we go to press&mdash;of Matt Beren and Michael Swallow up in Victoria. The men were arrested in 2004 and charged with growing 900 pot plants in East Sooke. Here in the US, a federal bust of 900 plants gets you a mandatory 5-10 years on a first time offence. Here in Texas they get you a mandatory 5-99 years in the state pen. And nobody has anything good to say about Texas penitentiaries except the boys doing the cornholing.

But up there in Sweet Canada, Beren and Swallow are calling the whole thing a constitutional challenge. According to the May 11 Goldstream Gazette, out of Victoria, BC, lawyers for the men &ldquo;will argue that Health Canada's medical cannabis program has failed to abide by recent court rulings ordering the government to make pot available for medical purposes&hellip; and accuse Health Canada of restricting access to the program, placing arbitrary limits on pot production and supplying an inadequate source of cannabis.&rdquo;

Have you any idea what would happen to you in the US if you tried to pull that shit? They&rsquo;d enhance your sentence range by 15-years for obstruction, being annoying and trying to make the government look bad.

In Canada they&rsquo;ll probably walk with no time, even if found guilty. As noted, Canada sometimes looks pretty good from down here. It would all be funny if people weren&rsquo;t dying and the prisons weren&rsquo;t full.

## About the Author

Source: <http://petergormanarchive.com>