

Grass roots

Both sides of marijuana debate go too far



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Murphy Brown toked up a couple of weeks ago.

And as remarkable as that may be, what's even more amazing is that nothing is being said of it.

Well, I shouldn't say nothing. A few high-ups in the government anti-drug crusade issued the predictable denouncement, the usual "how low we've sunk" smack, and a small spew of marijuana advocates issued the predictable praise, the usual "how far we've come" smack.

But for most Americans, it was no big deal.

I didn't actually see the episode, but from what I've been able to glean from those who have, it seems

that Murphy is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, which involves a great deal of painful and debilitating chemotherapy.

If you've ever known anyone who's been on chemo, then you know it's not a pretty sight. Not only does it involve the more obvious hair and weight loss, but there's a whole host of other symptoms, both mild and severe, that come and go.

And it turns out that Murphy, being the hard-hitting journalist that she is, knows of a certain illicit substance that can, among other things, alleviate her pain and give her back her appetite, which is almost nil during chemo.

Of course, there's the little problem of getting hold of it, but it really is a little problem. Even here in conservative Nebraska, anyone with the motivation can get hold of a respectable stash in a manner of hours; in the Big City where Murphy broadcasts, we're talking about minutes.

So Murphy gets her pot, smokes up, and feels a little better. And here we are, no uproar.

Could it be that we just don't care?

What a startling idea! Almost as

startling as recent surveys which suggest as much as 80 percent of the public support legalizing marijuana for medicinal use.

That rather high number shouldn't come as much of a surprise. The last thing we tend to worry about is deathly ill people getting a little high to ease their pain and eat a little. Many people are aware that marijuana isn't nearly as dangerous as many legal prescription drugs (which includes cocaine).

But beyond that, many people seem to be aware that we've been pulled a fast one. That the vehement, even zealous, anti-pot campaign of the last decade or two has blown things remarkably out of proportion.

What makes this all the more interesting is that the anti-marijuana folks actually have a point: Marijuana is hardly harmless. With long-term use, it can decrease motivation, increase paranoia, and promote an extremely annoying laugh. And that stuff simply can't be good for your lungs. Add the short-term problems of driving impairment, decreased motor skills, and that same damned laugh, and you can see why people who claim it's harmless are equally silly.

But by painting pot as Satan's spawn, by claiming it causes everything from sterility to insanity, prohibitionists have squandered the right to be taken seriously. Eager potheads made a similar mistake back in the '70s by over-promoting its good effects, making it out as some kind of miracle drug. Their zeal helped lead to our more recent mind-set. A mind-set that has helped contribute to an incredibly costly War on Drugs, which has little to show for it beyond crowded prisons, harassed citizens, and a black market where growers and dealers are making a killing.

Which leads to an obvious question: Are we going to be smart about it this time? Are we going to continue to swing wildly between demonizing and worshipping the almighty dope, or will cooler, yet sober, heads prevail?

I'll go out on a limb and say yes. Recent initiatives in California to legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes have passed by healthy margins; now there just needs to be a legal supply. And while the federal government is being uncooperative in that department, the national push is great enough that they should come around by the end of

the century.

Maybe we could even see the cultivation of hemp as a cash crop before we die. You've probably heard endless praises for all the uses of hemp, and the people who told them to you may very well have had that damn laugh.

But don't tune them out on this one: They're right. It is pretty useful. I'll just emphasize two uses in particular: paper and plastic. In a time when we worry about our dwindling tree supply and overflowing landfills, here we have a product that can make biodegradable plastic, and paper so good they wrote the Constitution on it.

But many are still frightened at the prospect. What if hemp products and medicinal marijuana leads to general legalization?

(insert incredibly sinister music)
Believe it or not, I don't find that a thrilling prospect. But it's not quite as bad as our current situation. If it means alleviating the pain of thousands, cultivating a remarkably useful cash crop, and getting more than a little extra prison space, I'm willing to put up with a few more people toking up.

Even if that includes a television character I never watch anyway.

Girly man

Being 'whipped' not so bad with a little help from Dad



STEVE WILLEY is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Throughout my years of writing for the Daily Nebraskan, I have always seen myself as the guys' columnist.

In the past, I've written columns about farting, masturbation and playing football — things a guy usually finds humorous. (Unless, of course, the guy happens to unintentionally walk in on his roommate who happens to be performing all three acts simultaneously. In this case, these topics quickly go from funny to frighteningly arousing.)

So as a guy's guy, I find this column a little hard to write.

And why?

Because after all I've done for the guys of this university, they are the very ones who have gotten me angry. They make fun of me on a daily basis. They call me whipped and a poser. They say my actions make them sick.

And they're not gross actions, at least I don't think so.

You see, recently I got a girlfriend, and I really like her a lot.

I send her flowers and poetry, and I've yet to tell a booger joke in her presence. But seeing me act this way has got a lot of my guy friends downright perturbed.

So I'm sappy and sentimental. Sue me. And I'm sure if some of my friends could get a court to hear the case, they would.

I'm sure I'll hear it just for saying

in this column that I like the girl. See, they think that guys are not supposed to divulge such information in public. In their opinion, the most a guy should be allowed to say is, "She's OK. She smells nice."

But I do like her, so why hide it? And it's not like I'm close to marriage or anything. I'm still way too upset from the last time I asked a girl to marry me. (For the record, she said she couldn't on account of she was a prostitute.)

But when my friends kept laying into me, I felt like I needed some family support. So I called my dad in Mississippi. Dad, like usual, was stone drunk and playing Pac-Man on the Atari, a system my father contends is a "modern-day miracle."

Because conversations with my drunk father are always entertaining, I took the liberty of taping this one:

"Hey Dad, how's it going? Look, I want to talk to you about something. It's ... Dad? Is that a walrus I hear in the background?"

"Er — No! Hell no! Forget about that. Now what was you saying?"

"Well, I met this girl up here and I sure do like her"

"Ruuuuuunnn!!!"

"What? Run? Run from the girl?"

"Ooops, naw, naw. I was talking to Pac-Man. I don't know what he done to piss off Blinky so much, but that som' bitchin' ghost is shore after him. Now what was you yackin' about? You met a squirrel?"

"No Dad, I met a girl. She's really sweet and — I don't know — Dad? How do you know when you're in love with a girl?"

"Usually, the witch will tell ya."

"I'm serious, dad. How do you know?"

"OK. OK. Well, first thing that happens is you get this funny feeling in your gut, like you gotta dump, only you ain't ate in

a while. Then, your hands start sweating. And when you try to speak, the only thing that comes out is bagpipe music. Awww, naw, wait a sec! That's the feeling you get when your trashy momma turns state's evidence against your old man."

"Dad, you're not helping."

But Dad did help. I realized that sometimes, when I think like a macho guy, it's because of him. After all, he's been my role model for years.

He's taught me a lot about how a guy is supposed to act. And according to him, I should never wear my emotions on my sleeves.

And that includes sentiments for women.

Dad doesn't do it. Matter of fact, the only time I even came close to witnessing him cry was after he lost a contest to our dog,

Skippy, over which one of them could urinate

the farthest.

I, on the other hand, have no problem crying. I cry when I watch a good episode of "Sanford and Son." I cry when I'm out of mayonnaise. Hell, I even cry when the phone rings and the answering machine picks up before I get there.

And sometimes it pains me to say that. American society doesn't look too kindly on sensitive men. That's too bad. Maybe it's the fault of our earliest male ancestors whose rugged environment prohibited their expressing sensitive emotions. Personally, I blame David Hasselhoff. Shows like the one he's on have caused all kinds of problems for us sensitive guys.

All guys do on those shows is make love to thousands of women and then proceed to wrestle a back-

hoe because they "felt like proving" themselves.

Well, I don't care anymore. I'm happy being sensitive, and I don't care if folks make fun of me or not. I'm going to do things the way I want them done, regardless of whether people think I'm not macho enough. Maybe I am feminine. After all, when I cross my legs, I throw the back of one knee on the top of the other.

And I don't care if I'm sensitive. I'm still going to cry when I watch "Gone with the Wind" or some other love show like "Diff'rent Strokes."

And most importantly, I like this girl I'm dating. I like sending her flowers and writing songs for her. I'm not going to stop that just because a few Neanderthals say I'm "whipped" or call me a "wuss."

And if they got a problem with that, we can take the dog outside.



JON SYPAL/DN