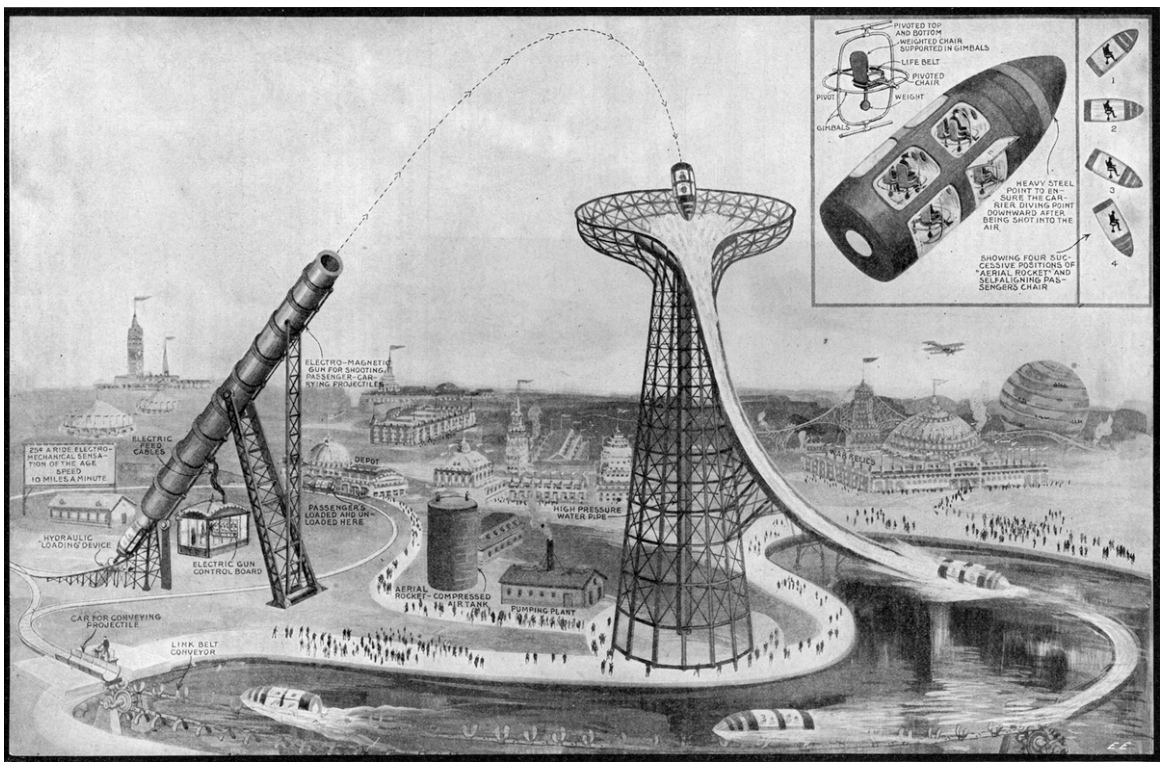
Turn Around the SoHum Slide



What a difference a couple of years can make. Suddenly, SoHum seems to be sinking. The Mateel is broke. KMUD is on the brink, and the business district in Garberville has a hockey player's smile. No one has moved into Paul's bookstore since he got evicted. No one has moved into the previous location of Paul and Kathy's bookstore, in Redway, since their previous eviction almost a decade ago, but getting back to Garberville. The restaurant at the North end of town seems to be the latest gap in our grill. The House of Burgess Restaurant is now closed, and empty. Across the street, the ice cream shop, Treats, has been closed for a couple of years now. The big theater next to it hasn't shown a movie since 2016. Across the street again, the bank in the next block of Redwood Drive is closed, and everyone else seems like they're just barely hanging on.

The Chamber of Commerce keeps organizing street parties, and they've made feeble attempts to revive Arts Alive, but Garberville's illicit sparkle is gone. The bling, has blung, leaving just another poor small rural town with a big drug problem. Weed has lost it's intrigue, along with it's profit margin, reducing the whole sexy outlaw industry into little more than hard, boring, farm work that barely pays the bills. Say goodbye to the Napa County of fine marijuana, and say hello to the new Southern Ohio of the West Coast.

The easy money is gone, and growing marijuana gets closer to honest farm work every day, and honestly, honest farm work sucks. I've done it. I respect the people who do it, but I hope I never have to do it again. I'm not a farm guy. I don't mind growing my own weed, so I can get high while I do my thing, but my thing is not farming.

I think that if we, here in this community, can be honest with ourselves, most of us will realize that we are not farm people. The people who I met when I first moved here, were not farmers. They grew pot, but they also painted, made pottery, played music and made art. They didn't move here with a burning desire to grow the very best marijuana in the world, and a shitload of it. They moved here to get away from the rat race. They grew cannabis to pay their bills, and to buy time to pursue what they loved, be it quality time in nature, their propensity for other drugs, or their own art, music or craft. They called it "The Cannabis Grant."

I'm sure that some of the people who grow cannabis around here, do it because they love growing weed, and they never get tired of it, because growing weed is what they were born to do. That's not most of us though. Most of us were looking for a way to avoid long hours of hard work. Growing marijuana was a way of stealing your life back from the man. People grew marijuana so that they could enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without selling themselves into corporate slavery. Growing pot was stressful, and it wasn't easy, but it didn't consume your whole life.

Today, most people in the business are working themselves to death on a non-stop light-dep treadmill to hell. The artists and writers and oddball misfits who grew marijuana to buy some autonomy and freedom are getting squeezed, and for people in the industry, growing marijuana is rapidly becoming just another shitty job. This is not the time to let your talents and your dreams languish while you toil away your life in Humboldt's ganja fields. Get out while you can. You have better things to do.

Don't measure your success in dollars, because dollars mean nothing. Measure your success in happiness; measure it in time spent doing what you love. Whether it's playing the guitar, talking with friends, painting, hunting, fishing, gardening, working on cars, writing, partying or fucking, nothing you can buy will ever make up for what you lose by giving up what you love. When you deny your own talents and proclivities that way, you rob the world of your creativity, which makes the whole human experience that much less interesting.

When a lot of people deny themselves what they love, for an irresistible monetary incentive, it deadens the whole community, because people who deny themselves what they really love, for money, die inside. They die inside, and they become resentful of anyone who has the courage to live their dream and do what they love. This community resentment gets translated into words and actions that beat people down spiritually. Here in SoHum, we find ourselves caught in a spiral, where the lower the price of weed falls, the harder we work. The harder we work, the more resentful we become, and the more resentful we become, the more we beat each other down.

Our whole economy is built to beat people down, and to force them to abandon their dreams and sell themselves for money. Capitalism needs people who are dead inside, because people who are dead inside buy more crap, take more drugs, go to the doctor more often, and do what they are told. When you sell yourself for money, it's like surrendering without a fight. It is the most debilitating kind of defeat, and no amount of financial success can mitigate that loss.

The strength, and future, of SoHum does not lie with the cannabis industry. The strength and future of SoHum lies with the many talented and creative people who are getting the life squeezed out of them in the cannabis industry, and are being beaten down spiritually by a resentful community. One of the things that makes cannabis so attractive is the creativity it can release in the user, but one of the worst things about the cannabis industry is all of the creativity it squashes with never-ending hard farm work.

As a community, we need to recognize that the cannabis industry will employ fewer people in the future, and a lot of those people will be low wage workers. Most of the honest jobs in our local economy pay low wages. If we can figure out how to create housing and establish businesses that cater to the needs of people with low wage jobs, and make life easier for people at the lower end of the pay scale, we can create an environment where people feel less pressure to stick with an unsatisfying job, and more freedom to try something different. The more we can do to help release the creativity that is already here, the faster we can build an attractive local culture and a vibrant, diverse and resilient local economy. Honestly, it's about time.

John Hardin
lygsbtd.wordpress.com

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