

Personal prescription

One pill makes you vomit,
one weed keeps it down

My name is my secret. What I can tell you is that I'm a 34-year-old gay white male living with AIDS. I'm also living with a felony conviction.

A couple of years after testing positive for HIV antibodies, I had what amounted to a total nervous breakdown. I freaked out—I admit it—at the prospect of becoming sick. That mortal fear, combined with various other personal crises, tempted me to start "self medicating" as a way to ignore what seemed inevitable and to lessen my anxiety. Some people would certainly call this rationalizing my addiction.... Whatever.

Eventually, I got busted for "attempting to possess a controlled substance"—heroin. I was convicted of a felony and I spent three weeks in prison.

At that low point, I could no longer deny my disease—both the addiction and HIV. I knew I had to face it and do something about it. Either that or prepare myself for a longer and very unpleasant stay at one of our fabulous government correctional institutions.

After a long, body-and-soul-crushing struggle, I quit using heroin. In its place, I got myself to a doctor and started on the "cocktail."

My T-cells stabilized and my viral load sank to nearly undetectable levels. And I felt like shit. My triple-antiviral side effects were textbook: fatigue, diarrhea, numbness in my fingers and lips, low platelets, etc., etc., etc. The nausea was the worst of it.

In an attempt to keep me from feeling sick perpetually, different drug combinations were prescribed. The doctors fiddled with my dosages. In vain. I was prescribed several anti-nausea drugs which were absolutely useless. The nausea remains a constant problem for me.

Apparently there are some anti-nausea drugs that really do work. My doctor even prescribed one of them. But at more than \$500 per bottle, my insurance provider just laughed at me.

Of course, I already knew about marijuana's stomach-settling qualities. Those many college mornings spent hung over and vomiting made me a quick study. But I was in early recovery, and everything an addict is taught in those god-awful 12-step programs is that you can't do anything. Ever. And I didn't. I didn't want or need to slide down into that hell again.

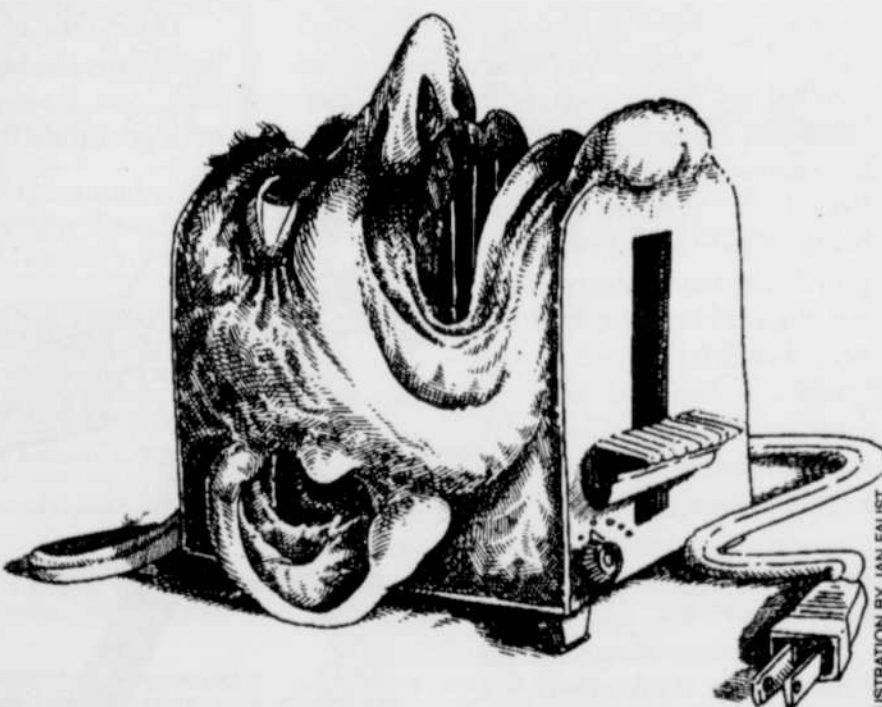
Instead, I struggled with my meds for a while longer. My doctor was thrilled with my nearly undetectable viral load. She was helping to win the good fight and make me better. I, on the other hand, was not so thrilled. Even though I was technically healthier with the AIDS drugs, I felt like shit all the time. It was torture to put those pills in my mouth, especially in the morning.

I would tell myself: "OK, eat some breakfast first, then take your meds." Later, this turned into: "OK, eat some breakfast first, then watch Regis and Kathy Lee (ugh!), then take your meds." That lasted till: "OK, breakfast, Regis, Jerry Springer, then lunch, then take your meds." Eventually, it got to the point where I'd only take them before bed. Then, not at all.

Being sick sucks, and the only time I ever really felt sick was when I was on the meds. So I stopped taking them. Not surprisingly, my doctor was mortified when I finally told her. After about nine months off the body-wracking drugs, she took T-cell and viral load counts. Naturally, my T-cells had plummeted to an all-time low and my viral load was back to its previous high. I knew that the only thing that would keep me from dying was to go back on the meds.

That's where I am now. I've started taking the meds again. I've also started to dabble again with marijuana. For me, this is particularly dangerous. Not because it will lead me down the "slippery road back to addiction,"

I would tell myself: "OK, eat some breakfast first, then take your meds." Later, this turned into: "OK, eat some breakfast first, then watch Regis and Kathy Lee (ugh!), then take your meds." That lasted till: "OK, breakfast, Regis, Jerry Springer, then lunch, then take your meds." Eventually, it got to the point where I'd only take them before bed. Then, not at all.



but because I, a convicted felon, am breaking the law simply to keep myself from hurling.

When I first started smoking herb in college, I was fearless. I had the same fuck-the-world arrogance that all young people have. I'd smoke a joint just about anywhere. Now I'm terrified. If I'm going to smoke marijuana, I open all the windows and burn way too much incense because I'm worried the neighbors will rat me out and the police will come knocking on my door. I hide it places only neurotic paranoids would think of.

The heavy dose of fear and anxiety I'm carrying sucks. Feeling like a criminal sucks. And the healthy, martini-swilling assholes who believe they have a right to maintain prohibition suck. For me, marijuana works. It works better than anything modern medical science has offered me. And it keeps me swallowing those pills that I hope will save my life.

Flights of Fancy
Portland Lesbian Choir in Concert
Saturday, May 15, 8 pm
Trinity United Methodist Church,
39th and S.E. Steele
Tickets \$12 Available at It's My Pleasure,
and from Choir Members
Party and Dance to Follow
Free Parking & ASL Interpreted
for deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons
• Free child care FFI: (503) 241-8994

Silent Auction at 7pm. Wonderful items from the community.

Darcelle XV Productions presents

the Second Annual
BEAU BRUMMELL

*A pageant to crown the gentleman
with personality, wit and buff*

Formal — Theme (Under the Big Top) — Swimwear — and Fantasy
Sunday, May 16: Doors at 7 pm, Pageant at 8 pm, \$8.00
Darcelle XV, 208 NW Third Ave., Portland, OR 97209
Res/Info: (503) 222-5338 www.citysearch.com/pdx/darcellexv

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Fri. May 22, 1999 8:00 p.m.
Civic Auditorium

*"The depth of where they're singing from,
politically and personally, is just unmatched."
~Bonnie Raitt*

All Fastixx outlets, PCPA Box Office
or by phone at 503-224-8499

WOMEN IN THE WOODS '99
AUGUST 20-22, 1999

- Join with 100+ lesbians for a magical women-only weekend at Breitenbush Hot Springs resort in Central Oregon, 2 hours drive from Portland
- Cozy heated cabins and 3 delicious vegetarian meals daily
- Hot springs pools (open meadow and tiled tubs) and lithium sauna
- Hiking trails through Oregon's old growth forest
- Swimming hole with crystal clear cold water
- Massage available
- Workshops/discussion groups on anything 2 or more people want to talk about
- craftswomen space
- amazing talent show
- drumming circle
- dancing

3 days/2 nights - \$160 per person

- Registration deadline is August 1, 1999.
- Fees must be paid in full at that time.
- Call 503-284-0722 for registration form.