



# 'ARE YOU A COP?'

## CRIMINALS LIE, BUT SO DO POLICE OFFICERS

By Camilla Mortensen

### **E**ver smoke pot? Obama has. So has Bill Clinton.

Most everybody has at least tried it. But before you smoke it, somebody usually has to buy it. And buying it, like smoking it, is illegal. Ever bought pot?

Ok, you're probably normally a totally law-abiding citizen, with barely a speeding ticket to your name. But let's just say that at some point in your life, you feel the need to smoke a little weed. Since you don't grow your own and don't usually buy drugs, you don't have a regular source for the stuff.

No problem. This is Eugene; word on the street is that you can buy marijuana most anywhere, from the back of an LTD bus to the UO campus to an alley in downtown Eugene on a Saturday night.

You find a hookup and get ready to seal the deal. But you naturally want to make sure that despite breaking the law, you're not actually going to get in trouble with the law. Before you hand over the cash, you ask the nice gentleman who is about to sell you that bud, "Are you a cop?"

And if he's a police officer, he has to tell the truth, right?

Wrong.

A little informal survey of people around the *Eugene Weekly* office and downtown from students to attorneys reveals that a rather large number of Eugeneans believe that if they ask a cop some version of "Are you a police officer?" the cop in question has to answer truthfully. This is also apparently a commonly held belief among hookers.

What bad TV shows are you people watching? Here's the truth that law enforcement doesn't want you to know: Cops can lie.

Police officers don't have to tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth — not while they're trying to arrest you, investigate you or even while they're interviewing you. There are times they do have to tell the truth, and there are times when lying becomes entrapment, and that's not legal. Law enforcement would prefer you didn't know about this whole lying thing; it makes it easier on them to arrest you. *EW's* here to help you out.

### PANTS ON FIRE

Lying police officers are a dirty little secret that nobody wants to talk about. The Eugene Police Department had no comment and the Springfield Police didn't reply. Even criminal defense attorneys want to speak off the record on the issue.

In response to the *Weekly's* request for comment on situations in which a police officer might have to lie — undercover operations, stings etc. — Melinda Kletzock, EPD's public information officer responded, "We do not discuss interview tactics because that might jeopardize cases."

It hopes that EPD could discuss arrest or investigative tactics, rather than interview tactics, *EW* was more specific: If in the middle of a drug deal, for example, a drug seller asks the buyer, "Are you a police officer?" Does the officer have to tell the truth?

Unfortunately, "We aren't able to provide these details for your story because we can't discuss tactics," says Kletzok.

Lying is fast. Lying is useful. Lying is effective when it comes to taking down criminals, but the police would prefer this remained under wraps. As Winston Churchill supposedly said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to put its pants on."

Day Owen of the Pitchfork Rebellion ran into a possible undercover cop playing with the truth last November when his activist group went to the Bureau of Land Management's offices in Springfield to deliver the verdict from their Halloween mock trial protesting pesticide spraying on public lands.

Owen says not only was the Pitchfork Rebellion followed from the old federal courthouse to the BLM offices by a car with Department of Homeland Security license plates, but at the BLM offices a separate, unknown man trailed after them with a camera.

Owen says when the man was asked if he was a police officer, he denied it and responded that he was "just a concerned citizen," and said, "None of you broke any laws; you did just fine, so it doesn't matter who I am."

If the man was a police officer, then he lied to the Pitchfork Rebellion when he didn't identify himself as a police officer, and that's perfectly legal.

After a photo of the man ran in *EW*, Owen received an anonymous tip that the man who followed them was Springfield Police detective Robert Conrad. *EW's* repeated requests to