

A Plea to Locally Owned Dispensaries

TSUNAMI BOOKS SEEKS TO STAY IN BUSINESS

The first time I ever smoked pot was two weeks out of high school at a rock festival in the Atchafalaya Basin about an hour north of New Orleans. June 21, 1971. The sun was just above the western horizon on a 105-degree day. A surfer dude convinced me to give it a try. He thought it might help my incipient depression. As we finished the joint the sun dipped below the distant swamp line, the temperature dropped to a cool 98 degrees, I opened my eyes, really opened my eyes and saw, also for the first time, live naked female breasts. Probably about 50,000 of them.

I've been a pot smoker ever since.

For the past 21 years I have been a worker-owner of Tsunami Books at 2585 Willamette Street in beautiful South Eugene. Tsunami has changed my life in as many good ways as there are books on our precious reclaimed lumber bookshelves. The best people — which is to say, all people at their best — enter this big umbrella for the arts and the human heart and openly, consciously give in ways that no amount of money could ever replace. Considering I began this bookstore business with about \$50, soon lost it, and have only recently begun to get it back, the deep rewards I have garnered are all the more worthwhile.

Early in this enterprise, when former bookstore partner Dave Rhodes and I were expanding the store into the back two-thirds of what was then a leaking, effervescing mess of a 1949 cement block building, the fellow who did the wiring was well-known and respected for building some of the best and biggest illegal grow rooms in the county. There is a 1,500-square-foot unsupported upstairs room in the Tsunami building that apparently had been used by a previous occupant as a sweatshop. Our electrician proposed a secondary set of wires.

"One year's time, you'll pay cash for the building," he promised. And no doubt, if all went well, he was right.

At the time I was wrapping up a 20-year career planting a couple million trees. As part of the job I knew

every secret spring on every south-facing mountainside in the Willamette National Forest, as well as most of the guys who grew the illegal crops. But I just wanted to make a living working hard and planting trees. Planting trees, reading and writing, and smoking a little pot. And Dave and I just wanted to make our living selling books, reading and writing books, hosting events and smoking a little pot. Making a living from pot was simply never a part of the plan.

Now, at age 63, to paraphrase my old friend Ken Babbs, it only takes "a single toke and it all comes back, better than ever." And though people come by the store all the time offering up big bags of smoke, I always turn it down, in part because suddenly in the last two years there's a tax in Oregon I really like to pay. To wake up late on a Sunday morning, walk to my local dispensary, buy a gram of something suitably weak and know that not only am I good for the next two weeks, but my tax dollars are headed straight for the schools of Oregon, is a simple mix of pleasure and duty I can look forward to the rest of my life.

Amen.

But here's where it gets weird, folks. This is where your help is needed. See, over these 22 years our rent has slowly quadrupled, to where Tsunami now pays \$50,000 per year in rent. A lot of money, but we have learned that when a venture such as Tsunami begins with \$50, and is fortunate, a living begins to be made after about 21 years. Meanwhile, hosting over 4,000 community, cultural, educational, heartfelt events has turned this place into so much more than just a bookstore. Some good people call it an institution; some, the community's second living room.

In 2015, with 30 days' notice, the building came up for sale. Some local people bought this 16,800-square-foot property, having to pay top dollar to do so. Our 22-year lease is up on June 30. For us to procure another five-year lease, with options, our rent will have to immediately double to at least \$100,000 per year. We simply do not have the money to make it happen.

What we do have is a community process, some-

thing invented by the many loving people who are intent on helping Tsunami survive and thrive. A unique pledge campaign is under way. So far over 750 people have turned in pledge forms. Our goal is at least 1,500. Over \$125,000 has been pledged — as loans — toward a dedicated rent fund that will ease the transition we are confident we can move through into a good long future to come.

Unfortunately, modern commercial leases in a boomtown being what they are, this is not enough to secure a new one with the building owners. In our most recent conversation, I was informed that though we are not out of the running, a dispensary has made a much better offer.

So here's the idea: Tsunami Books wants to stay at this location. Period. And we want the local folks who own dispensaries, who have been and will remain citizens of this wonderful little town and big county, to step up ASAP with the other half of the pledge money we need to make a convincing offer to our good building owners. Tsunami knows your customers; many of them are our customers. And even if they aren't, most want us to remain.

The website Leafly states there are at least 50 dispensaries in Eugene. Many come from out of the area. Many more are coming. Local dispensaries are being challenged by hedge-fund money. From many directions come stories of the pressures of an ugly competition.

There is only one Tsunami Books. Time and again we have helped show that community energy makes things happen.

To all good local dispensary owners: Please contact us at TsunamiBooks.org/contact-us/ for a pledge form. Or email me, Scott Landfield, at tsunami1@opusnet.com and we will talk. Help us to succeed now, and we will share the story far and wide of how you stepped up in service to the community to help Tsunami Books keep its home.

Scott Landfield is the owner of Tsunami Books.

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