

Sunshine Cop

Anathin

1968

from *San Francisco Express Times*

San Francisco, April 18 — Easter noon on the steps of the Hall of Justice a cop with a red ribbon in his hat and an iris in his lapel took out a joint and lit up.

“I wasn’t there for grass, I was there for a bigger thing. We’re trying to start a disarmament program with a ten cent piece of ribbon.”

Sergeant Sunshine, “the pot-smoking cop,” was sitting in his red underwear on a bare mattress, discussing his pot bust. As friends wandered in and out he explained why he thinks cops shouldn’t wear guns.

“They arrested my best friend and that pissed me off. I can smoke it and hide and my friends get busted. So I figured to lay the whole thing out on the front steps of the Hall of Justice. But marijuana is only part of it. I’d like to stop some of this killing. There’s no sense in killing something unless you can eat it. I like being a policeman. I’d still like to be one. But the police code of ethics says it is the fundamental duty of a policeman to serve mankind. You don’t serve people with guns. I’ve never seen one on a waiter yet.

“I don’t need a gun to deal with people because I’m not afraid of them. Any policeman who can’t take off his gun and put a red ribbon around his hat ought to go looking for a safer occupation.”

Sergeant Sunshine, known to the straight world as Sergeant Richard Bergess, spent twelve years on the San Francisco police force. Two years ago he kept some confiscated grass and tried it. He’s been turning on regularly since. He explained that he liked most of the men he worked with on the force, but that most of them were up-tight and frightened in their dealings with the public. Sergeant Sunshine thinks police and the public would get on better if the cops didn’t wear guns.

“How come uniforms do such nasty things to people? I know and like 90% of the police officers. How is it that I see them as nice and you see them as pricks? We need a new image. I’m hoping that there will be some policemen out there who will listen to me and say ‘Hey, maybe he’s right.’ If there are any other cops around that have the guts they should put a ribbon on their hats and smile on their faces and put a gun in the trunk if they feel they really need it around. But don’t wear it.”

Bergess didn’t want to talk about the use of drugs among other policemen. He said most of what he could say would be gossip and that none of it really mattered. He doesn’t believe it does any good to stress the negative, as he puts it. “Course it’s all true. We all know it’s true, it’s not news. But it’s like sitting around talking about your operations. It doesn’t accomplish anything.”

The conversation ebbed as Sergeant Sunshine wrapped himself in a pink blanket and complained about the Fairmont, where he spent Sunday night after his release from jail. Boyd, the best friend whose initial arrest sparked the Easter incident, sat on a table in a bright flowered shirt and striped cords and rapped. Periodically, he would urge Bergess to go to sleep. Bergess looked like he was about to drop off any minute, but didn’t want to sleep yet. He followed the conversation sporadically, commenting occasionally.

“I only have one more thing to say,” Bergess interrupted Boyd at one point. “I’d like to encourage the cops to keep a little of the next stash they confiscate and try it. It really is great shit. Maybe they’ll understand if you say it’s like pouring your best bourbon down the sink.”

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