

# “I’m Never Lost, Someone’s Always Telling Me Where to Go”

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An alienated generation is made not born!

At birth there is the incredible contribution from both parents at the point of conception. In man there are twenty-three pairs of forty-six chromosomes of which 50% is from the mother and an equal amount from the father. On the chromosomes in linear arrangement sit the genetic or hereditary determinants, the genes. A baby at birth weighs six billion times the size of the original fertilized egg.

Then there are the environmental factors that impinge upon the child’s development. These influences are also incredible.

As a Churchill Fellow, it was my privilege to observe the alienated generation of America. I shared with youths in jails, institutions, drug referral centres, Methadone clinics, forest camps, open house counselling services, street academies and treatment alternatives to street crimes. Whilst reflecting on these experiences to prepare the Report known as “I’m Never Lost, Someone’s Always Telling Me Where To Go” I became convinced that American Youths were a reflection of their Nation.

There are numerous events and countless variables that contribute to make or break a nation. However, from my observation there have been catastrophic upheavals in the American nation to bring it to this point of time. What I am going to say is my own inner reaction to what I felt and whilst being critical, I must also commend the country for its outstanding hospitality, unflinching courtesy and unbounded display of patriotism. Australia would well do with more of these attributes.

Having acknowledged all that America stands for as Champion of the Free World, Leader of Individual Enterprise and Buffer to the Totalitarian doctrines of other world powers, I felt there was a “sickness” that had brought America to its knees.

The former American President, Jimmy Carter, stated that America was practising the “politics of selfishness” and other observers have stated that there is a malaise within the American way of life.

Four major events have attributed to this situation and I diagnose:

1 The assassination of President J. F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22nd, 1963. It appeared to me that the nation had not recovered from the shock of having this man, who was Leader to so many and therefore considered “indestructible”, cut down in the prime of life. That gun-shot affected the American people as it did those who admired him from afar.

2 The Liberation of the Black Population from oppression and degradation, where in many cases they were considered at best, second class citizens, purely because of the colour of their skin. The hatred engendered by racial prejudice causing students to be gunned down at a University, the great rallies of united effort by people of common skin pigmentation and the eventual success of being recognised equally in life was another body blow to the “sacred” way of life of America.

3 The Vietnam War, with its horrors of scorched earth policy and destruction of life as well as property and the incredible build up of resentment that meant eventual withdrawal of troops from that area. The agony of grappling with issues of life and death and the underscoring of uncertainty for so many who had been born and bred on the doctrine of “might is right”, now to find that the war was over without being victor helped shatter the Nation’s confidence.

4 The Watergate Scandal and subsequent downfall of President Nixon, was a further blow that brought America to its knees and sapped its morale.

One could enumerate other factors that have contributed to the malady such as, inflation and economic uncertainty, the difficulties associated with nuclear power waste disposal and contamination, as well as the manipulation of people’s minds by the advertisers of goods in an already choked materialistic society. The overemphasis on “due process” where people were so concerned about civil rights that common sense was completely forgotten. I attended court proceedings, where I was led to believe the Police were on trial and the alleged criminal was the one who was unlucky that the police were so vigilant. This is only one attempt to hold authority in contempt that strikes at the heart of responsible living and concern for others.

A further sociological impact on America was that having arrived on the Moon, as J.F.K. said they would within the decade of the 60’s, there is a feeling of “where do we go from here?” This feeling is known by all who strive for something and then having achieved it — there is a very real let down in one’s life.

Let the words of a 17 year old in gaol summarise the despair and cynicism that has had an effect on the youth of America

Q: What are you going to do when you get out of gaol?

A: Make as much money as I can.

Q: Why?

A: Well, the way I reckon it is, I’m booked on the Titanic, I might as well go First Class!

The American People are looking back to the days when leaders like Lincoln and Kennedy trod the stage of national affairs. It is not uncommon to see photos of these two assassinated Presidents in offices and private homes. Prose such as this, illustrate the fascination they still command.

## LINCOLN-KENNEDY COINCIDENCE?

Both Lincoln and Kennedy were concerned with Civil Rights. Lincoln was elected President in 1860; Kennedy in 1960.

Both were slain on a Friday and in the presence of their wives. Both were shot from behind and in the head.

Their successors, both named Johnson, were southern Democrats, and both were in the Senate.

Andrew Johnson was born in 1808 and Lyndon Johnson was born in 1908.

John Wilkes Booth was born in 1839 and Lee Harvey Oswald was born in 1939.

Booth and Oswald were southerners favouring unpopular ideas.

Both Presidents’ wives lost children through death while in the White House.

Lincoln’s secretary, whose name was Kennedy, advised him not to go to the theatre.

Kennedy’s secretary, whose name was Lincoln, advised him not to go to Dallas.

John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln in a theatre and ran to a warehouse.

Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy from a warehouse and ran to a theatre.

The names Lincoln and Kennedy each contain seven letters. The names Andrew Johnson and Lyndon Johnson each contain thirteen letters.

The names John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald each contain fifteen letters.

Both assassins were killed before being brought to trial.

Both Johnsons were opposed for re-election by men whose names start with "G".

It took 3 weeks for the American Nation to learn of the death of Lincoln in 1865, but in 1963 it took only 3 minutes for the world to learn of Kennedy's death.

We have come a long way in 98 years — but have we?

A further observation of the American situation which highlights the plight they are facing, is seen in the following extracts from "America's Looking Glass" by Jean Young, Chairperson of the United States National Commission on the I.Y.C.

#### Socially

- ★ 1 million children each year are victims of child abuse;
- ★ More than 600,000 children are born annually to teenage mothers whose ability or desire to care for them is, at best, marginal;

- ★ Adolescent females from ten to fourteen are the only age group for whom the birth rate is rising;

- ★ One out of every 6 children in the U.S.A. under the age of 18 lives in a single-parent home — a figure that has doubled since 1950, reflecting the escalating disruption of the conventional family unit;

#### Medical

- ★ 10 million (approx.) children under the age of 16 receive practically no medical care whatsoever in the U.S.A.;

- ★ 50% of all children under the age of 12 in the U.S.A. have never seen a dentist.

- ★ Of more than 52 million American children under the age of 4, some 20 million are inadequately protected against prevalent childhood diseases which can be prevented with proper immunization;

- ★ It is estimated that 10 million school age youngsters need help with psychological problems and they are not getting it. This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of health professionals are not adequately trained in rehabilitation techniques and the management of developmental disorders;

#### Education

- ★ The U.S. has the most comprehensive, costly and pervasive public school system in the world. How can it be that 13% of the 17 year olds in the school today could be categorised as functionally illiterate? How could they have progressed so far through the system and missed acquiring the basic skills — the ability to read and write.

#### Juvenile Justice

- ★ One million children every year find their lives so distressing that they run away from home.

- ★ Approximately 77,000 youngsters under the age of 18 are in American prisons. The cost of keeping a child in this environment is staggering. More than 17,000 dollars per year per child, according to a recent estimate by the Congressional Budget Office. That amounts to more than 139 million dollars — an expenditure that would accomplish miracles if it were spent every year on constructive programmes and services for children who are in trouble with their families or with the law.<sup>1</sup>

Now, it is easier to talk about another country rather than our own.

You are able to make an Australian comparison by adding certain dates and National events that have polarised people and sent shock waves through parents and young people. These knee-jerk reactions have had a great effect upon us.

Technology, economic uncertainty, a shrinking "global village" in Marshall McLuhan's terms, means we are no longer immune or isolated from world events.

Australian youths suffer the "shock waves" of National and World events that unfortunately cannot be evaluated on any Richter scale.

However, there are some indications of "tremors" in the developing lives that it is our privilege to have on loan to us. Parents, teachers and significant adults must realise that their role is to encourage to the point of self sufficiency. The generation we guide while we can, will be increasingly alienated if we try to dominate their lives.

1 The transition from Primary to Secondary School occurs at a time of a psychological turmoil, if a youngster has very little support from significant adults.

With the onset of puberty and the emergence of the adolescent; the explosion caused by entering Secondary School which loses classroom security of the Primary School, and other bewildering challenges some pupils find it very difficult to cope.<sup>2</sup>

The number of times I have counselled young people and observed that there has been some deep traumatic experience in their life when they were aged 10, 11 and 12 years of age is too frequent to be co-incidental.

2 The young person who suffers separation anxiety from death, divorce, desertion, drinking or other similar problems is more likely to become a delinquent in two years time than will those of ages below or above this critical period.

3 However, the reason why this age-group is particularly prone to delinquency is that they are not given physical stroking and cuddles during and after the anxiety. Younger ones of 7-8 and 9 years will receive all sorts of physical attention, hugs, kisses, stroking attentions and physical appraisal by "aunties" and "uncles". The age group 7-9 years soaks up attention like a sponge. Teenagers of 13-16 years who suffer the pain of parting associated with the 4 d's mentioned above will go out and use the aggression in many and varied ways — They are allowed a certain amount of freedom that allows them to wear off some of their excess energy and at times, hatred and anger for the set of circumstances that they only vaguely perceive is happening to them.

It is the age-group 10-12 years who do not receive the physical cuddling — many regarded it as "unmanly" and they lack the cuddlesome appeal of their younger siblings. They are unable to get free of the situation of grief, guilt complexes, neuroses, that overwhelm them from the feelings of the adults around them. There is a system of involuted anger taking place and if not handled with care can surface in 2, 3 or 5 years in a series of hostile, anti-social acts. To some observers a previously peaceful child may become unruly and act quite out of character and it appears that the actions are not easily explained.

It is my belief that the reasons may be rooted several years back involving separation anxiety.

4 The peer group pressure to experiment with drugs is another "tremor" that needs to be carefully monitored.

From my observations and research I am alarmed at the acceptance of marijuana as a "phase" when we have at last become intelligently informed of the dangers of alcohol and smoking as very real health hazards.

I have witnessed a 15 year old girl degenerate physically to look older than her mother after only 3 months on marijuana.

In Boston, Massachusetts, I saw "flakies" of 13-15 years of age locked away in padded cells who because of being high on marijuana thought they were dogs and had tried to bite tyres on cars along freeways. Others had jumped from 2nd floor window ledges believing the pavement was made of marshmallow and they would "trampoline" back up again. The "pot personality".

"Not all kids have all the symptoms", says Dr Dean Parmelee, the Director of adolescent in-patient services at Charles River Hospital in Massachusetts. "In fact, some bright youngsters with outgoing personalities seem to be able to maintain their school marks and activities for a few years. But gradually all users — youngsters and adults — compromise their potential, their activities and their lifestyle. And heavy young users eventually must develop all of the 'pot personality' systems."<sup>3</sup>

Psychiatrist Dr Harold Voth has studied the psychopathology of marijuana in depth for the past eight years. He defines the pot personality:

"The most obvious impairments caused by chronic marijuana use are in the area of Organic Brain Syndrome (OBS). These include impaired short-term memory, emotional flatness, and the amotivational — or dropout — syndrome. This can progress from dropping out of sports, to dropping out of school, to dropping out of the family."

Voth lists other symptoms of pot-induced OBS: "diminished willpower, concentration, attention span, ability to deal with abstract or complex problems, and tolerance for frustration; increased confusion in thinking, impaired judgement, hostility towards authority".

"Another pernicious symptom", says Voth, "is the element of denial — refusal to believe the hard medical evidence that marijuana is physically and psychologically harmful". He also points out that it takes years of heavy drinking to reach the same point of psychological weakening that marijuana can induce in a matter of months, particularly in the case of the very young user.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the heavy drinker who generally "becomes himself again" when sober, the underlying personality structure of the chronic pot smoker seems to change. "If someone smokes twice a week or more, sobering up — in any total sense — never occurs", says psychiatrist John Meeks. "Even when not 'high' he or she remains in a state of subacute intoxication — in most cases, without even recognising this 'holdover' effect."<sup>5</sup>

#### Dramatic Changes.

While alcohol is water soluble and washes out of the body in a matter of hours, cannabinoids are fat soluble and accumulate in fatty sections of the cells and in fatty organs (the brain is one-third fat). Only very slowly do the cannabinoids seep back into the bloodstream so they can be metabolised and eliminated. Thus they act like time-release capsules, constantly emitting subtle intoxication.

In March 1980, Dr Adam Sulkowski, a psychiatrist who specialises in geriatrics, published the first scientific paper to set forth the many similarities between the psychological symptoms seen in marijuana intoxication and senility.<sup>6</sup>

In July 1981, psychologist Stephen Williams also found a number of "senility symptoms: in a study of 60 teenagers in a drug-treatment programme who were daily pot smokers but used no other drugs."<sup>7</sup>

Another finding is regressive immaturity. Says psychiatrist Mitchell Rosenthal, "Just when our youngsters need most to be growing psychologically, they are pushed back towards infantilism by self-absorption and the desire for instant gratification. When they need most to learn how to cope with the emotional storms and squalls of the teenage period, they are instead copping out, blowing their problems away with pot."<sup>8</sup>

Rosenthal predicts: "A sizeable number of our young people will not mature as they should. Instead, we can look forward to a growing population of immature, under-qualified adults, many of whom will be unable to live without economic, social or clinical support".

#### Risk of Relapse

In August 1981, Dr Mark Gold completed a study of 100 teenage and adult "marijuanaolics" — chronic users of pot, who are psychologically, physiologically and socially disabled.<sup>9</sup>

"Our study", says Gold, "shows that in the case of youngsters who abstain completely for an average of six months, there is return of concentration, attention and memory to expected levels."

Gold also found that, like alcoholics, marijuanaolics are always at high risk of relapse. "Even if off the drug for a year", he says, "one or two joints can send them on a pot binge, and they relapse quickly into their former use patterns. And although it may have taken two years to reach their prior seriously disabled state, it may take only two weeks of renewed pot smoking to revert to that same level."

In 1978, Dr Marietta Issidorides of Athens, Greece, one of Europe's most respected biologists, conducted electron-microscope studies on the white blood cells of 40 long-term hashish smokers. "We learnt", she reported, "that long-term use of cannabis (the plant from which marijuana and hashish come) deformed a significantly high proportion of the cells. Impaired white blood cells are unable to function properly and protect the individual from infections."<sup>10</sup>

Two years earlier, Dr Akira Morishima of New York looked at the white blood cells of 25 apparently healthy young males who had smoked marijuana at least twice a week for four years. He found that one-third of their cells contained only 5 to 30 of the normal human complement of 46 chromosomes. Remember, these are the particles in every cell's nucleus that pass on genetic instructions to the next generation. "In my twenty years of research on human cells", said Morishima, "I have never found any other drug that came close to the chromosome damage done by marijuana."<sup>11</sup>

These research findings are just a few examples of marijuana damage to basic life processes. Since 1975, some 300 studies of cannabis's harmful effects on animal and human cells have appeared in scientific journals. These effects include "faulty division, slowed growth and abnormal-size nuclei in cells, disturbed production of protein, and also damage to sperm cells and ova, nerve and connective-tissue cells".

Pioneer marijuana researcher Dr Gabriel Nahas sums up the central role of marijuana's effects on human cells. "The many findings of cell damage caused by cannabis explain all the other damaging effects of the drug — on the lungs, sex organs, brain immune system. I call the cell damage done by regular pot smoking over the years a slow erosion of life."<sup>12</sup>

Psychological signs of pot impairment are often not slow to appear and, generally, the younger the user the more rapid the onset of the damage.

We cannot afford the luxury of abdication from the issues confronting our youths. If we do opt out of our responsibilities we are making a further generation that will be increasingly alienated from all that makes life worthwhile.

These "tremors" are illustrations that make it absolutely essential, to train parents and significant adults for their roles in producing a generation that will not self-destruct.

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