

My favorite subjects that year were speech and dramatics. In drama class I met an upperclassman named Glenn Vernon Hughes, to me then and always Vern. He starred in a number of the school plays and his performances were outstanding. He was also Commissioner of Assemblies, whose responsibility was to produce school shows. I was in a couple of school plays that year, and I also took wood shop, electrical shop, and auto shop. These enabled me to maintain my hobby of buying, renovating, and selling used cars.

My goal was to be in radio, even if only as a hobby at first. I made an appointment to visit San Rafael's radio station, KTIM, and prepared a proposal for a radio show aimed at teens. I met the station owner, Hugh Turner, and presented my idea. *Junior Jamboree* would be a one-hour live show in the studio each Saturday morning. There would be quiz contests between rival high schools, live music by teen-age performers, and interviews – including more than one on what drugs teens were using.

“Fine idea, David. You find a sponsor and I'll hire you for a 13-week contract.” His polite smile told me that he didn't think he'd ever see me again.

I approached a number of potential sponsors. The last one was *Hoy's Radio and Record Shops* in San Rafael and San Anselmo. I was ecstatic when Mr. Hoy said, “Let's give it a try!”

The show was a huge success. The live audience response was impressive. KTIM had an amazingly talented pianist, Jack Risso, who was one of our featured attractions. Halfway through one show, while Jack was playing a concerto he fell off the piano stool and began thrashing about on the floor with foam oozing out of his mouth. The kids applauded at such a funny prank. The only problem was that it was no joke: Jack was an epileptic. I signaled the studio engineer to spin a record while I attended to Jack.



*Back from a fishing trip in my first car, a midget racer, wearing my V for Victory sailor cap in 1942. That year I began driving a taxi for my dad. Wartime rules allowed me to get a driver's license at 14.*



*At 16 I created, produced, and emceed a top-rated teen radio show, Junior Jamboree, broadcast from KTIM in San Rafael.*

He was replaced by an equally talented pianist, Fae McNally, a 15-year-old student – who smoked pot. Fae could improvise great jazz. He would roll an orange across the keyboard and play Kitten on the Keys while high on grass. He could also roll a joint with one hand. He would smoke a joint and go to the movies just to watch the cartoon. He'd get a good laugh, then leave.

His home life was not good. His dad, a heavy drinker, caught Fae smoking grass. He told him if he ever caught him again with that “violence-causing drug” he would turn him over to the police. Fae eventually switched to alcohol.

I heard that that the famed crooner Bing Crosby was at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, so I tried to arrange an interview. He wasn't available the first time I phoned, so I left a message.

An hour later I got a call. “Hi, ol' buddy, how ya doin'?” It was the unmistakable voice of Bing Crosby. I tried not to be too excited by the friendly “ol' buddy” – I knew it was a signature phrase for him.

“Hi to you, Bing! I was wondering: if I brought a crew over to your hotel, could I do an interview with you?”

“Of course you can, ol' buddy. How about six tomorrow evening?”

“That would be perfect, Bing, thanks.”

Then Bing said, “See ya tomorra, John.”

“Bing, the first name is Dave.”

“Isn't this John Ford?”

“No, Bing. This is Dave Ford. I do a radio show for kids in Northern California.”

*Click!*

Apparently Bing wasn't as interested in an interview when he found out I wasn't an Oscar-winning movie director.

### *Alcohol versus pot*

On the radio show I interviewed hundreds of teens on the drugs they “saw” being used. In those days it was generally pot or alcohol. One feature common to many of the interviews was the kids' impression that alcohol frequently caused violence, including date rape, while the most earth-shattering effect of pot was “the munchies.” Drinkers sometimes attacked girls. Smokers attacked French-fries.

I also interviewed celebrities, including vocalist Frankie Laine and actors Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. One result was that I was invited to parties where marijuana was smoked openly. At first I was

dazed. Then I asked the marijuana smokers, “Aren’t you afraid of becoming violent?”

“Dave, pot makes you feel relaxed, not violent. Marijuana is nature’s tranquilizer. It’s medicine – and it’s far safer than other drugs.” It was then that I decided to do some serious research into why government and big business continue to demonize marijuana and hemp.

### *Making love for the first time*

I had just turned 16 and was almost constantly preoccupied by admiration for those beautiful, spirited young ladies in school. I took the girls for picnics, to movies, or out to lunch, and was occasionally rewarded with a kiss; but a couple of them said, “If you touch me down there, you’ll have to marry me.”

A lovely Italian student, my age, lived just a block from my home; and we began walking home together. One afternoon she asked me if I would like to join her doing some homework. “Sure,” I said.

Janice asked me to wait until she checked to see if, by any chance, her father was home. “No one’s home,” she reported. “We can study in my grandfather’s old room in the basement – he’s not here anymore.”

The little room held an Army cot, a dresser, a small desk and chair. On the dirt floor of the basement I noticed a large wine vat, about six feet high and about 12 feet around. We sat on the bed and opened our books. In about one minute, we were necking. She pulled down the shade and we undressed each other, kissing and exploring each other’s bodies. I was glad that I had a condom in my wallet that had been there for three years, waiting for such an opportunity.

Soon we were making real love. Wow, I thought, *this* is the most fun I’ve ever had. In about 15 minutes I experienced a full-blown explosion, but I didn’t stop: I wanted her to feel the same ecstasy. (Boy, did this beat *solitaire*!) Then she screamed, “Oh Davie, Davie!”

Seconds later there was a pounding sound. It must be my heart, I thought. God, no, it was the door! “Janice, is there a boy in there with you? Why is this door locked, and why did you scream?”

“Daddy, I didn’t know the door was locked. I’m doing my home work and I saw a mouse.” Good girl, I thought.

“Open this door now or I’ll smash it open!”

I’ve never seen anyone get dressed as fast as Janice. I was frozen in terror; all I had on was the condom.

“Go. Go! He’ll kill you!” whispered Janice.

“Where can I go?” I whispered back.

“I don’t know! There’s only one door down here. Just go!”

I grabbed my clothes and stumbled against something cold and smooth – the wine vat, with a ladder on the side of it. With my clothes under my arm I climbed up the ladder and down the other side – into four feet of wine.

I heard a slap, and something like “Don’t you ever lock that door again!” and then a lot of Italian. Next I saw a flashlight on walls. I was so frightened I hoped I wasn’t about to have an accident in his vat of homemade Italian wine, what the locals called “dago red.” More yelling. Then the door slammed shut and I heard a key turn in the lock.

It was quiet upstairs. Janice must have convinced him she’d been alone in the basement. I felt relief that she wasn’t being hurt. And that I was alive. I was thirsty, so, like a horse drinking water, I lowered my head and sucked up some wine.

After a long period of silence, I climbed up and out of the vat and peered around. What happened to the condom, I asked myself. What if it ended up in her father’s dinner glass of wine! I thought giddily. I was drunk.

It was getting dark, but I could see a screened air vent about a foot and a half square, low on one wall. My escape route beckoned. I pulled the screening off, paused for a brief prayer – please God, don’t let me get stuck in this vent – and, naked, pulled myself through it. I huddled in the shrubs, put on my dripping clothes, and staggered off toward home.

Mom caught me trying to slip into my bedroom. She looked at my wine-soaked clothing in utter disbelief and asked, “What happened to you?”

“I fell into a friend’s wine vat while we were fooling around. I’m sleepy. May I pass on dinner?”

“All right, son. I’ll leave a plate for you in the refrigerator.”

I stumbled into the shower, washed clumsily, and left my clothes on the floor of the shower. I passed on dinner, all right. I also passed *out*. I awoke at midnight with a throbbing hangover.

The next day in Study Hall, Janice and I sat next to each other, rolled our eyes, and smiled sheepishly. I discovered that lovemaking was a lot sweeter than ice-cream, and I decided I wanted to savor as many flavors as possible.

*Groucho Marx swears by (at) me!*

San Francisco radio personality Marjorie Trumbull heard about the success of *Junior Jamboree* and kindly invited me to co-host a broadcast of her classy show at the Mark Hopkins Hotel on ritzy Nob Hill. The show was called *Top of the Mark*, after the restaurant on the hotel's top floor, famous for superb food and a spectacular view of the city and its sparkling blue bay. Its gimmick was a four-star luncheon served to the host and guest. In exchange for the lunch and the use of a studio with one of the world's grandest views, Marjorie would compliment the hotel, the food, and the view.

That week's guest was the zany Groucho Marx, known for his snappy comebacks. Heavy traffic and rain made me run late that day. I reached the hotel only five minutes before air time. It was still raining and there wasn't a parking spot in sight. I parked in a loading zone a block away, ran to the hotel, and rushed up to the studio. The engineer's arm was already raised and his finger poised to cue the announcer to introduce the show when I flopped into my chair.

Groucho looked at me and deadpanned, "Late again, huh?"

We all survived lunch, and the interview was going quite well. Dessert was apple pie à la mode and, to help Marjorie plug the hotel and its food, I asked Groucho, "Isn't this pie delicious?"

With a perfectly straight face, Groucho said in his classic Brooklyn accent, "It's the worst apple pie I've ever sunk my teeth into."

Marjorie winced. I said, "Thank you for your recommendation, Groucho."

Groucho replied, "Think nothing of it."

I said, "I didn't."

Groucho added, "It sounds like you're stealing my material."

After the show ended, Groucho accepted my offer of a ride to his hotel. When we got outside, it was still raining. Belying his name, he took the lousy weather in good spirit. You might even say he took it in stride: he pulled his topcoat over his head and did his signature funny walk for me – stooping down and taking giant strides.

"Where's the car?" he asked, at just about the same instant that those words were racing through my own head. I was afraid to tell him I didn't have a clue. It *had* been there before the show. Rain had now soaked Groucho's topcoat. All I could hope for was that I made a minor mistake. "It's on the next corner." Groucho wasn't walking funny at all now, and water was dripping from his cigar. The next corner appeared,

but my car didn't.

I spotted a police officer and asked if he had seen a blue 1936 Ford. "I just came on duty. Saw one parked in the yellow, and had it towed."

I was mortified. "Ah, Groucho, did you hear what the officer told me?"

"I'm not totally deaf, you stupid little bastard."

"I'm not little. I'm six foot one!" I said.

At that point, repartee deserted Groucho, and he deserted me. The last I ever saw of him, he was running through the rain and melting into the crowds.