

Great Moments in Weed History

S2, E6 - Philly

BEAN: This podcast is for adults 21 years of age and over. We talk about cannabis history and advertise cannabis products. If you're not 21, please come back when you are.

[Spoke Media]

BEAN: Hi, everybody. It's Bean.

ABDULLAH: And Abdullah.

BEAN: And welcome to another edition of Great Moments in Weed History. On this podcast, my partner, Abdullah and I, we're both cannabis media makers and aficionados and we explore a story from the long and fascinating history of the cannabis plant. Now you should know, I don't know anything about what we're about to talk about on this episode. My partner Abdullah has done all the research. He's written it all out. He's got the story ready to go and..

ABDULLAH: Yeah, and a hopefully you've got a joint, you know, getting rolled up for us Bean. If you haven't already, please do cause we're going to get started soon. If you're at home, I suggest you, take a second to roll up a joint as well. Some of you might be wondering, you know, this feel a little weird, a little backwards this time around. Am I extra stone? What the hell is going on? Well, this is a special episode because we have reversed roles on this one. And I in fact have written the story and I'm going to be reading it to you Bean.

BEAN: This is like our freaky Friday episode, except I'm going to call it our freaky high day episode.

ABDULLAH: Freaky high day, or Vice Versa, if you remember the Fred Savage version of this movie, the movies remade every six or seven years. But this time around I'm going to be telling you the story and we've got a really great one today that's about a place that's very close to my heart and involves people that I really admire, and who have done really great things for cannabis, where they are. And really, you know, I think when it comes down to it in the places where we can freely smoke cannabis in a post prohibition world, there's always somebody who's fought for that, right? So whenever you're on the street or in the patio of a bar or in your own living room and you're smoking weed freely, you should know that there was somebody that came before you that fought for you to be able to do that. And this episode is a tribute to people like that.

BEAN: That is incredible. I'm thinking of episodes from season one like Dennis Peron and Brownie Mary. and I'm just, I don't have a guess of what you're talking about, but I have a feeling that what we're heading towards is yet another

[GMIWH Intro]

[Spoke Media]

ABDULLAH: The funny thing about fighting to decriminalize something is that you can quickly become a criminal in the process. Every protest is as much an opportunity to move the needle as it is a way to get yourself arrested. And the heroes of today's story put their own nuts and a vice without knowing if their sacrifices would ever pay off. All they knew was that the best way to express yourself is to smoke weed in public for the world to see.

BEAN: Hmm. I think we're talking about civil disobedience and that is a long tradition in the cannabis movement and as you say, when you're trying to make something legal that's illegal, you probably like it a lot and you're probably the one breaking the law you're trying to change.

ABDULLAH: That is exactly what we're talking about. Our story is about a small band of so-called criminals who gathered at the birthplace of American democracy and held a simple protest peacefully smoking at 04/20 their act brought on the wrath of authorities, federal and local, who turned a demonstrative sesh into brutal chaos, but from the ashes of this chaos, rose a new opportunity, one that led to the first decriminalization of cannabis possession and public consumption in a major East coast city. Do you know what we're talking about now?

BEAN: Birthplace of American democracy? That was pretty big hint.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Yeah.

BEAN: I think that both the location and your Philly Normal tee shirt that you're wearing for the occasion indicate to me this is about a group of, I will say in your face, in the best sense, activists in Philly. Now, here's what I know. Kind of what went down a little bit, but the details...

ABDULLAH: Yeah. And I think you know a couple of the guys as well.

BEAN: yeah, I know a couple of the guys. I grew up in New Jersey, but I've been in California a long time and you know, I'm excited to hear like how they did all these things that they did. This story is inspirational, I think in a big way. Sometimes it feels like, Oh well if you want to make change, you have to be a part of a big group. And that big group, everybody does a little, and at the end of the day you mildly change something incrementally. And that's true. And that's a big part of changing things. But every once in awhile and just a couple of wildcard, wildcat people just take it to the street and, and find that a point where authority is wobbly and push on it. And the one thing I do know about these cats is that's them.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Are you ready? We'll get into it.

BEAN: All right. Lay it on me.

ABDULLAH: Our story begins in 2011. In cities across America, bands of activists, idealists and malcontents set up camp at landmarks of political and economic significance to protest Capitol inequity and promote a new participatory form of democracy. This was the Occupy Movement.

SEGMENT 1: It started sHall.

SEGMENT 2: Protesters call the movement Occupy Wall Street.

SEGMENT 3: Here in New York, thousands of demonstrators descended on the financial district.

SEGMENT 4: From auto workers to teachers, service workers to actors.

BEAN: It was this moment in modern American history, the only one I can really remember where you felt that politics was spilling over into the street and that some of these issues that are pushed aside and left to simmer, we're bubbling over and in a way that was constructive in a way that was about discussing the underlying causes of problems instead of just marginalizing people who aren't making it in this capital system.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, exactly. Truly the average person was revolting, you know, and, and it's a thing when you see that throughout history, it means that market change is coming. While most of the camera's remained trained on Zucati park and downtown New York city at the loud and proud protesters of Occupy Wall Street and the much larger mob of onlookers, Philadelphia was home to the biggest permanent and camp men of the movement, a lively village of tents on Dilworth park and Thomas Paine Plaza in front of the city's historic city hall. People of all races and ages gathered and remained chanting banging drums, holding up signs and calling for an end to the injustice of a broken system. So I think this is pretty much what you're talking about. All of the sort of, you know, anarchists and punks and all these wild and really interesting people came out of the woodwork and join this movement. Philly is the home to, you know, pockets of socialist liberal kind of forward thinking differently thinking people.

BEAN: And, and I think just living in a city in it where the symbolism of revolution is everywhere has to have a psychological effect and like, you know, just spending time in Philly. I grew up in Jersey, so I've been to Philly a lot. You are struck by like walking through this place that is full of monuments to people who overthrew the government. And I think that's remained a part of Philadelphia ever since.

ABDULLAH: It's this sort of like Rocky mentality that is the through line to every Philadelphia story. You know what I mean? In a way. And this one is no different. So one of the occupants of the Philly camp was an activist named Chris Goldstein. Now I think you know Chris Goldstein, is that right?

BEAN: I know Chris Goldstein going back like 15 plus years when I was working at High Times. Even when I was just first there, he was with Normal, he did a lot of cool radio stuff with them. I have to say, I didn't hear a lot of the crazy shit we're about to hear coming, but a really cool dude.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, and very involved guy and a really, you know, determined activists for sure. So prior to joining occupy, Goldstein had been a highly active member of normal and it produced over 650 episodes of their news magazine, podcast *Normals Daily Audio Stash*, interviewing activists from around the country who are on the front lines of reform. One fall day when occupy was in full swing, he decided to bring his core cause into the fold and this is Goldstein. "I was determined that if we were going to create some sort of new culture and a new form of politics that marijuana would be a part of it." So here's what he did. Goldstein set up a blue tent and covered it in signs promoting cannabis policy reform. He dubbed it a marijuana safety zone right there in front of city hall and welcomed any protesters who were so inclined to take a load off and blaze there with them.

BEAN: Amazing.

ABDULLAH: The best spot and all of Occupy Philly. So naturally the tent attracted a lot of like minded people. It became a meeting place for the mellower end of the occupy spectrum and many assessed was had over black market bowls. One of Goldstein's visitors was a local comedian and conspiracy theory are named Nikki Allen Poe. Have you heard of Poe?

BEAN: I've seen, I've seen some of the video.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. So yeah, this guy, since this time has become a total Philadelphia character. He ran for city council at one point. And I mean I voted for him then and I mean like he's definitely one of those agitators that you just really love to watch, you know? At the time he was doing a podcast called the panic hour and it was a conspiracy theory podcast that he did with a comedian named Steve Miller Miller. And they made a whole bunch of videos together that are all on YouTube. He was a goofy agitator, a real Philly guy and a Philly native

POE: ...running 24 hour shifts here throughout?

Ramsey: Well, yeah.

POE: Now what is the police expectancy of the timeframe or something like this do you think?

RAMSEY: We think it could go on for god knows how long we have no expectancy.

POE: and that's great for overtime.

ABDULLAH: There's POE with, actually police chief Ramsey at Occupy Wall Street and he's totally breaking their balls and he's using his humor to reveal the truth, which is that the police

loved Occupy Wall Street because it allowed them to clock lots of overtime, literally like that's the real scooby snacks for the police is overtime and it was an opportunity for them to do that and flex and all this shit. And he really, you know, got to the heart of that and just a couple of seconds. I think it really encapsulates what he does. Goldstein and poke clicked right away, as you might expect. Couple of potheads definitely similar views of the world, right? Bonding over their love of cannabis and their frustration with its prohibition and moreover it's used by the police to harass and jail a massively disproportionate number of black and Brown people in a city as historically black and Brown as Philadelphia. Right? I mean, Philly has had terribly disproportionate arrest numbers. Definitely you know, searching someone cannabis or the suspicion that they might have cannabis. The fact that a cop can say, Oh, his eyes look red, or he might smell like cannabis and that's probably cause to search him also fueled stop and frisk in Philly, which was a massive issue there. So, you know, this was definitely very pertinent stuff.

BEAN: Yeah, this was, this was about 2011, right?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, that's right.

BEAN: That's right when this big ACL you, a report came out, everybody knew that the arrests were disproportionate, but it quantified it and it quantified it in a way that the system could not deny it. these were facts. Here's the number of arrests. Here's how they break down by race. And here's, you know, what percentage of people in this city are this race. Very clear. I was going to say black and white is black and white either and five, six, depending on the city up to eight times as likely to be arrested. That's all coming to light, right at the same time that these events are telling me, happen. So, so, so what, what happens next?

ABDULLAH: In late November of 2011, the Philly police department evicted the encampment at city hall. The grandest manifestation of occupy Philadelphia was over. The movement dwindled worldwide in the beginning of 2012 it was kind of a sad time because this thing that seemed like it was gonna cause so much change just kind of dwindled. There was infighting supposedly, and it was reported a certain way and everyone was like, Oh, it's just a bunch of crazy kids and then it fucking fell apart. So Goldstein and Poe were not quite ready to give up the momentum. They spent 2012 engaging in activism for a number of causes, many of them cannabis related, just as the national attitude towards cannabis appeared to be softening. So you know, 2012 was when it really started to seem like cannabis could actually potentially be legalized in a couple places. There's medical cannabis bills across the board. So they were like, we love cannabis, we're activists. The cannabis thing seems to be happening here in Philadelphia. This place really needs to change his stance on cannabis. Why not join forces and really focused on cannabis activism in this way? By the way, I'm going to note right now that I always do this. I think his last name is pronounced Goldst-ine. I always default to saying Goldst-een, but I'm just going to call that out right here and disclaim it. It's Chris Goldst-ine and Chris, I'm sorry. We're probably going to accidentally say Goldst-een again a whole bunch more times. But we love you.

BEAN: I was led astray by my cohost.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, yeah. Goldstein And Poe felt the time was right to do something big. They were discussing their plans at a Normal meeting, in the basement of underground arts in Philadelphia, which is a place I've hung out at a lot when I used to live there. When they connected with a new guy named Mike Whiter, with whom they started brainstorming. Whiter is a military vet, a former Marine who was diagnosed with PTSD following combat, and was medically discharged and sent home with his wounds. In a story that's all too familiar to veterans and their families, the VA put Whiter on a regimen of psychotropic drugs, and a lot of them, and this was just before he showed up in normal and met up with Goldstein and Poe.

WHITER: I literally, when I say I sat on my couch and drooled on myself, that's what I did. Sat on my couch, hated my life, drooled on myself and felt sorry for myself. I was watching the National Geographic channel. It was a, a special about, veterans with PTSD using cannabis as an alternative. So that day I called up, my friend asked her to get me some weed and we sat in my living room and smoked a joint. And, and I laughed and I smiled. And I felt good that that was the turning point in my life. Two weeks went by and I became an, a weed activist, and made cannabis my purpose in life.

BEAN: Wow. That's incredible. And you know, when combat veterans started to speak out about this, it was really powerful because it's a group that's hard for the establishment to keep down, to keep their voices out, to tell them that they're wrong because they have been through this experience. And I think the other thing that I heard in there that was really heartening and made me feel good is the idea that responsible media about cannabis broke through to this person and offered them, offered Mike. This person, I know this guy, I didn't know this about him, offered him the route to go from that person on the couch drooling to the person I know who was full of ideas and energy and vibrancy of life. And we've put a lot of time and, and energy and had a lot of fun into trying to tell good stories about weed. And I always do feel great. You know, that neither of us had anything to do with that national geographic story. But that idea that people hear the truth about this plant and it changes their lives.

ABDULLAH: National geographic, shout out you guys for being responsible and documenting veterans using cannabis and working very, I mean, I haven't seen this film, but clearly it got through to somebody who really needed it. So, you know, clearly there wasn't that much cannabis media out there. But this little bit of it on a major platform got through to them. so I think that's pretty great. So,

BEAN: okay, so now I feel like we've got our core team.

ABDULLAH: Yup.

BEAN: ...assembled.

A; The suit, the jester, and the warrior. The stage is set. Goldstein, Poe and wider commit to staging one protest a month at IndependenceHall for the next year, starting in December of 2012 here's Goldstein. It's a free speech zone. It's the original national park free speech zone. When you entered the area, you're actually Independence Mall national historic park. So you're on federal land, you're not on city property anymore. And at the time in 2012, it was actually less serious to get caught by the park Rangers than it was to get caught by Philly cops because the cops were going to stick you in handcuffs and take you to jail whereas the park Rangers, we're gonna write you a ticket. That was the whole reason we thought we could have a little more fun there. We didn't want to invite people out to a big pot-smoking protest where everybody ended up in city jail.

BEAN: The idea that they chose this ground, not just symbolically because as you say, this is where the constitution was written on, on hemp paper. I'm required to say that.

ABDULLAH: it is actually written on hemp paper, historically accurate.

BEAN: But they also understand that this isn't just symbolic ground. It's a ground where they can have their say with less consequences. And like we've talked about these guys as kind of like pranksters and wild and crazy. but you need to put a lot of thought into civil disobedience as well, particularly if you want it to be effective and particularly if you don't want to separate terrible consequences for it. And so, you know, I think that's an important lesson here. There, they know their city, they're fighting on their own terrain, they've studied it and looked for those wobbly points and now they're going to be taking action right at the heart of what, you know, this link between the American revolution occupy and the cannabis movement in all coming from the same place trying to address wrongs.

ABDULLAH: And they're really trying to take measures to do this in the most sanctioned and correct way. Right? So on Independence Hall, right by the Liberty bell, there is a granite plaque with the first amendment inscribed into it. Okay? Literally, it's sitting out there and, and this is, this is that free speech zone that Goldstein's talking about. So on October 2nd, 2012, Goldstein and activists, Colleen Begley's smoked a joint, at IndependenceHall to signify the 75th anniversary of the first federal marijuana arrests. That was Samuel R Caldwell, this dude who was arrested under the marijuana tax act, first guy.

BEAN: Friend of the podcast.

ABDULLAH: Friend of the podcast.

BEAN: In memoriam.

ABDULLAH: So this inspired Poe, who was like, okay shit, let's do that, like, you know, but in a bigger way. So he jumped on it to plan and promote the next one. Right? And on December

15th, a hundred people showed up at Independence Hall for a protest dubbed Smoke Down Prohibition.

BEAN: Yeah. So this gets into a really interesting area of legal theory, kind of still contested in the courts, but a lot of legal scholars believe that if you're within 100 feet of a plaque with the first amendment on it and it's 04/20, weed's legal for the next 15 minutes or what's known as a sesh.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, it, that sounds so reasonable. You know what I mean? Like as much as I know you're joking and it's like, Oh yeah, but it's like, it sounds so reasonable. Right? It seems like that really should be an actual rule. So yeah, they, they went over there, they gathered up a hundred people, a poet promoted the events with people with like RSVP to the event and you know, it was like college kids and like people of all ages, people of all different races. Right? it's also worth crediting Ed Forchion, NJ Weedman, who had performed this protest previously on the same spot. NJ Weedman, of course, is a well known cannabis activist who's based in New Jersey who is known for agitating by smoking cannabis in public, blowing weed smoke in the face of cops. There's videos of that online that you can check out.

REPORTER: You must be Ed, New Jersey Weedman.

NJWEEDMAN: New Jersey Weedman. Well, obviously it's still against the law to possess marijuana in New Jersey. So I will be openly possessing marijuana. I'll be openly selling marijuana. I'm selling weed here at the state house. Oop, here come state troopers.

ABDULLAH: He definitely was part of the inspiration of the Smoketown prohibition. So they have this little party and it goes off. It's fine. They count down to 04/20, they blaze, they have a good time and in 15 minutes they're gone. Right? They did it again in February of 2013 and 200 people showed up. Right? Here's Poe speaking to a libertarian group about the progress after those first two smoked downs. "So we decided to get as many people as we could to smoke at the Liberty bell. The first one, 700 people RSVP'd and then a hundred people came out and the second one, 500 RSVP'd and about 200 came out. People are starting to see that if you want to go out and you want to break unjust laws that you can and there will be no repercussions and that's how you gain your freedom back. And I'm starting to laugh as I'm reading it because clearly that's not where this is going to go. but okay. So, yeah, so th what do you think of that?

BEAN: I think there's going to be repercussions and I think that, you know, civil disobedience and, and all of this, you, you know, you should be aware of what you might be getting yourself into. You know, if you're taking a risk and you know it, so be it. That's your decision. You're a free, autonomous human. If you're taking a big risk and you don't realize you're taking a big risk, then you're fucking up.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, exactly. All right, so for a little bit, Poe was right. I attended, smoked down prohibition number three, which happened March 17, 2013. I wrote an article about that. So I

actually asked one of the park Rangers at the time, I was like, is this cool? And he was like, yeah, it's the protest, you know? So like they'll do, they'll protest and then they'll leave. It's, it's fine. You know, I'm just here to watch and make sure it's cool. Everything seemed all right. Right? So after that, right, the next smoke down was going to be really big that year for 20 landed on a Saturday and it was to be a crisp and beautiful one according to the weather forecasts, Goldstein, Poe, and Whiter gathered with their biggest crowd yet and smoked the fuck out right in front of the Liberty bell, eliciting no guff from the park Rangers. That party went off without a hitch, right?

BEAN: Wow, still?

ABDULLAH: Yeah. So here's the, here's Goldstein "On 04/20, everything was as good as it could possibly get. Six to 700 people show up in front of Independence Hall, light joints at 04/20 on 04/20, no one was arrested. No one was cited. But there's this one video from this jerk of a Christian activist who's always out there with anti-abortion pictures and shit in front of the Liberty bell. And he was chiding the park Rangers saying, why aren't you arresting these guys? What the hell is wrong with you? So this is Michael, Marcovage, he's from an organization called Repent America and he was a harbinger of doom for Smoke Down Prohibition.

BEAN: Here's this guy who's out there. Okay. I don't agree with his cause, but I do completely believe in his right to have his say in a free speech society, but as soon as he sees what he doesn't like, and also it's like, I doubt there were hundreds of people having the greatest day of their life hanging out with his bitter olds, you know, screaming asshole vibe. And so you can imagine you're out there, you're like, this is my place to rant and rave and now all of these people are out here smoking weed and having a great time. I'm a gonna be a dick about it.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. 6 or 700 people is a lot. But I mean that, you know, they were peaceful. That's the thing. They showed up. They did their thing, they left, they cleaned up after themselves. What more do you want? And, after the break, I'm going to tell you what happens.

CROWD: 04/20 in 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, HAPPY 04/20!!

[Smoke Weedia]

ABDULLAH: All right, we're back and we're ever closer to our great moment in weed history. So the fifth edition of the protest Smoke Down Prohibition, landed on May 18th, 2013, which is incidentally my 29th birthday. This was the rainy Saturday in Philadelphia. Goldstein was a wasting family for that one, and he got a call from a very concerned Mike whiter in just a couple hours before the event. So, okay, this is Whiter, "Poe and I went down there first a couple hours early to check things out. And there were bike racks that made kind of a cage around the free speech zone."

BEAN: And this is a combat veteran looking at this.

A; Yeah.

BEAN: You know what I mean? And seeing my own country is gonna barricade me him. I have the sight of free speech because they don't want me to smoke a joint. It's ridiculous.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. "After this fifth one, it was where free speech went to die, so we started calling it the "First Amendment Tombstone". There were bike racks all around us. They had us caged into this thing. They put us into a pen and they were ready for us, but we did it anyway."

BEAN: Damn.

ABDULLAH: 27:48 Yeah, about 300 heavily armed and armored Philly cops, national park rangers, DHS officers and federal protective services officers lined up along the outside of the barricade in a massive show of intimidation to a ragtag band of stoners and medical patients. They had tied signs to the barricades saying, "marijuana is prohibited". This is Goldstein, "I never knew that park Rangers had riot gear until Smoke Down Prohibition."

BEAN: Damn.

And then just that idea, like you said, they did it anyway. I mean, that's part of civil disobedience too. You don't always have to make that decision, but you know, I think of the original essay by a Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, he refused to pay his taxes because the money was going to support a war that he didn't believe in and he went to prison for that and he set that example. And you look at people like Rosa Parks who, you know, refuse to give up her seat on the bus. And so many people at st protests who say, I'll be willing to be arrested. And that is an effective means of protest. It's not one to be taken lightly.

ABDULLAH: So shit's about to get a little bit crazy. Poe and libertarian activist Adam Kokesh. Have you heard of Adam Kokesh?

BEAN: It sounds familiar, but...

ABDULLAH: Yeah, he's one of these guys. Poe and libertarian activist. Adam Kokesh, led the protest in the face of all those cops and predictably the cops descended upon them with great vengeance. In the melee that ensued, Poe was pinned to the ground by multiple officers with their knees in his back and then dragged away in handcuffs while fellow protesters filmed and chanted "No Victim, No Crime."

CROWD: NO VICTIM, NO CRIME! NO VICTIM, NO CRIME!

BEAN: yeah, that makes my skin problem be honest with you.

ABDULLAH: Doesn't it?

BEAN: I've been at some protests, you know, not, not at about weed where the force comes in and that feeling is eerie. It's, it's frightening and it's intimidating and it's enraging. And I think you see all of that in the crowd. I gotta say big up to Poe for, you won't be able to see this in the podcast, but he's got a lit joint in his mouth. I'd say there's at least three cops tackling him and you could see a little puff of smoke come up. So that's,

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, he didn't, he didn't let go of that thing. His mouth was still clasped around the joint and they were hog tying him. I mean, they, they, they really, really roughed him up. Like they were bending his legs back and like, you know, tying his feet up. I mean, really, that's extremely invasive to be manhandled by professionally trained thugs. His active disobedience and in fact, the reaction that it elicited from the authorities is really what propels the rest of this story forward.

BEAN: Yeah. And interestingly, you know, there's all of these people smoking weed, but they only go after one person, which shows a few things. They have been watching carefully enough to figure out what's going on. But also it's not about smoking weed because all the people were smoking weed. It's about leading people to disobey.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, exactly. And clearly they were trying to make an example out of Poe and Adam Kokesh who was also arrested that day. They were trying to cut the head off the snake. Okay, so Poe gets arrested, right? And he gets locked up in federal jail. Poe was charged with a federal crime of marijuana possession and with assaulting a federal officer. So if you see that video, the assaulting's really going from one end of the table to the other. There's really no back assaulting happening at all. He's pinned down by three guys. So Poe was charged with a federal crime of marijuana possession and assaulting a federal officer and was held in federal jail for eight days before being released on bail. He was fined \$800 in place on a years federal probation, and he was barred from the Independence Mall area. Whiter, managed to walk away from the incident. And this is Whiter, "I actually ate an edible that day."

BEAN: That's a rough pairing. Yeah. And

ABDULLAH: Yeah, "and it's one of the reasons I didn't end up in jail. At 04/20 I shoved an edible in my mouth and chewed it with my mouth open like a cow just to make the point that I was eating an edible. This was his protest. Other people spoke the joint though. Some people smoke the bowl. He put an edible in his mouth, but to the cops it was just a man eating a brownie, at a us historic site, not a crime.

BEAN: That's amazing.

ABDULLAH: No one is quite sure why the cops and the feds decided to crack down on that protest when the previous ones had proceeded without incident. Maybe they were freaked out by the size of the 04/20 one and wanted to put a stop to it. Maybe that lunatic preacher complained just enough to make them act. Maybe Goldstein had pissed off one too many powerful people with his savage political tweets or maybe sometimes in America, free speech is suspended for no good reason. No one was sure what would happen if they went back to the Liberty bell to protest again the following month. Clearly the authorities wanted to send a message despite the threat of bodily harm and likely federal charges, Goldstein and Whiter decided to press on. They had committed the 12 protests and they were gonna demonstrate, barricades be damned.

BEAN: That's incredible.

ABDULLAH: They gathered in June for Smoke Down 6. The cops, federal and local were out in full force again. Poe was now banned from the site so he could only protest from a hundred feet away. The crowd of stoners and patients gathered with Goldstein at the center yelling into a megaphone as the clock tick down

WHITER: This weed's fucking good. Hey, guys, this weed's fucking great. You want some?

BEAN: Well, I think yeah. You got to break out the good weed for an event like this.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, I think he did.

BEAN: Apparently.

ABDULLAH: He was like, this shit's good. And I like to think that at least one of those cops or park rangers or officers like throwing these guys to the ground was like, you know what I do want some, but I have to do this, you know what I mean? But who knows? I don't know how cops think. I never claim to know. All right, so just before they come over and walk Goldstein and Whiter away from the protest, the crowd chants, "Nazi's, Nazi's" behind them.

CROWD: NAZI'S, NAZI'S, NAZI'S...

ABDULLAH: The cops walked them over to a processing tent that had been set up on site where the local US attorney was present and they were issued a \$175 federal tickets. So that's all that they got that day.

BEAN: So that's like the worst they could throw at them?

ABDULLAH: Yeah, that's the worst they could throw at them on this one. They didn't brutalize them or arrest them the way that they had done to Poe, but you know, there was still very

present there. So it was clear that they did not want these things to go on. Despite that they continue doing the Smoke Downs. They had committed to 12 of them and they were like, we're going to fucking do 12 in August of 2013, Goldstein was cited once more and this one would fuck his shit up, and this is him, "They remanded me to the New Jersey office. I couldn't leave the state of New Jersey without permission. I literally had the borders of the state of New Jersey as my prison for two years, which is a sentence almost worse than hell, I assure you. I had a federal probation officer assigned to me who would come to my house once a month and drug test me. 26 drug tests, no joke." But, Goldstein did say that he was able to request permission for media appearances and things like that, outside the state. As if a year or two of abstinence from weed wasn't bad enough. They both also have federal criminal records and we'll have to deal with all the pains in the ass as that comes with for the rest of their lives. Only a presidential pardon can clear them. And this is true. The only way that they can clear their records is with a presidential pardon. But after all of this bullshit, an opportunity was finally about to knock. This is Goldstein, "Our whole point was to reform marijuana laws and we had certainly gotten the attention of city government. At Occupy Philadelphia, We had made super friends with a woman named Anne Gammell and she was friends with everybody at city hall. We were really lucky to know her and at the time there was a city Councilman named Jim Kenney. He was an at large city councilman sitting in his seat for over a decade, a very, very good guy in a progressive city councilman. Anne brought me and Poe into a meeting just as we were both in the midst of our federal trials, November of 2013 and Anne got us an official city hall meeting. Kenney and Poe, both Philly natives connected in that way that you often can with someone from your hometown." Like the way Poe described it, it was like a real straight shooter. He goes, he's a straight shooter and I'm a straight shooter, so we got along just fine, right? At this meeting, Goldstein and Poe laid it down for Kenney. Those arrested for small amounts of weed are usually people of color. The police burn roughly 17,000 work hours a year on marijuana crimes and the local court system weighs \$7 million annually on processing these arrests. Moreover, decriminalization could be the first step to mending the frayed relationship between the black community and city police. Kenney found the argument's compelling enough to pursue a change in the law. With Poe and Goldstein's collaboration, he and his staff drafted a bill that would sufficiently alleviate the arrest rate, reducing penalties to a \$25 ticket for possession of up to 30 grams of pot and also a hundred dollar ticket for consuming cannabis in public. Kenney fought like a bulldog according to Goldstein and gained strong backing in the city council. He won over the very resistant mayor Michael Nutter and the police chief Charles Ramsey. Neither of these guys were down with this at all. Nutter, a black mayor of Philadelphia, was still like, no, I don't want to decriminalize cannabis. And Kenney managed to finesse him as well. "Even though we were now federal criminals on probation, we were testifying before Philadelphia city council trying to get decriminalization done and also holding protests and rallies and drumming up public support for this issue." So they were still hitting the streets, but now they also had this sort of inside track to be able to directly feed ideas to somebody with some power. Against all odds, they managed to find a like minded person in city government and then that person was tenacious enough to not only get support throughout the city government, but to change the mind of a really stubborn mayor who was really not inclined to decriminalize cannabis at all. And just a couple of weeks before he actually agreed to sign the bill had said that it's not a priority.

And he made a couple of baffling statements that are out there on the internet that I, I chose not to put in this podcast. So on October 2nd, 2014, exactly two years after Goldstein and Colleen Begley smoked on Independence Mall, and so exactly 77 years since the Caldwell arrest, right at city hall in Philadelphia with Poe and Goldstein and Whiter a rejoicing in the crowd and I myself was there as well in city hall for this. Michael Nutter signed the decriminalization ordinance. It would go into effect October 20th of the same year. Just a couple of weeks later, maybe the greatest moment in Philadelphia is weed history. Here it is. Mike Whiter had an idea inspired by America's first recreational cannabis customer. Sean Azzariti, who was also a combat veteran, Mike sought to be the first person in Philadelphia to receive a mere a hundred dollars ticket for smoking cannabis in public. He made a request to the Philadelphia police departments, chief inspector, Joe Sullivan, who agreed.

BEAN: Wow. Wait a minute.

ABDULLAH: He said he wasted about three quarters of a gram and a joint. He lit it. He took a couple puffs and Sullivan made him put it out, wrote him a ticket. There was some news cameras there. It was on the news that day.

BEAN: Sully? Sully gave him a ticket? But I think what this shows too is like those guys, not that this was part of what's important, but those guys won the respect of the fucking cops. And you know, we can't think of the police as like a monolithic thing. They're comprised of human beings and these human beings looked out on the Mall and saw people fighting for what they believed in despite the consequences.

ABDULLAH: Cops still not friends of the podcast.

BEAN: Cops still not friends of the podcast. But you know, kudos to these guys for changing hearts and minds on the other side at least a little bit. And I, and I know that Philly now has a very progressive district attorney.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, that's right. Larry Krasner.

BEAN: Friend of the podcast.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Friend of the podcast. Chill guy. I remember, I used to see his ads in the subway. He was from a law firm called Krasner, Krasner and Unwodinjo, Unforgettable fucking name for a law firm, for sure. And it turns out the guy's pretty cool. and he is decided not to prosecute marijuana arrests in the city of Philadelphia.

BEAN: Yeah. Oh, along with a lot of progressive changes in policing and criminal justice. And, you know, I think it's easy to draw a line from that first joint that they smoked, you know, pretty innocently and freely and without a big clan to this commitment to do it 12 times and see what happens. And following through on that to real change in the city government. And now, you

know, somebody who is really in charge of law enforcement, all the way up that chain from the streets and definitely not the other way.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, absolutely. And, I have a little epilogue here and I, I think you're going to like, what happens? All right. So things got better in Philadelphia. It was always a city where people were certainly smoking weed in the street. You know, you saw that all the time. You smell weed all the time in Philly, but you never knew when a cop was going to come and use that as an excuse to fuck your shit up. Right? So Philly has become a weedy town. People don't have fear anymore about like, you know, smoking at a park, or smoking in public. It has really changed. These guys enhance this thing that I love in this incredible way. They made it so that I can smoke weed freely, more freely as a person in Philadelphia. And I think that is so priceless. Right? So Goldstein continues, his activism teaches the next generation of agitators at Temple University. You should definitely check them out on Twitter. It's @freedomisgreen. He says all kinds of amazing shit on there. He's hilarious. And he's really awesome. Mike whiter, as we were saying before, works at NowThis Weed and has continued his fight to normalize cannabis and to, you know, educate people about cannabis. So shout out him. So this decriminalization issue made Jim Kenney the city Councilman and our story, a household name in Philadelphia.

BEAN: Especially in households with a bong.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, seriously. Yeah. And you know, he was always a progressive guy and Philadelphians were apparently into that because he ran for mayor of Philadelphia in 2015 and he won. He is currently the mayor of Philadelphia

BEAN: and currently a friend of the fucking podcast.

ABDULLAH: Friend of the fucking podcast. And in fact, I mean, I would love do a story about Jim Kenney that involves cannabis on this show. Jim Kenney, if you ever want to come on our podcast, we'd love to have you and talk about your weed history. All right. Poe had a few more shenanigans. Like I was telling you, he ran for city council in Philadelphia on a platform of decriminalization of cannabis, abolishing the Philadelphia parking authority, who are notorious in the city of Philadelphia, and renaming Broad Street Allen Iverson Boulevard, which I can definitely get behind. And I voted for him then and I would do it again as I suggest everyone else as well. If you ever have the opportunity and it has improved the culture of that city, I think, you know, it's, it's a better vibe in that town walking around. It was always a good vibe, but now it's better.

POE: Every time I walked out my front door, even when I'm pushing my baby in a stroller and I see four people spoken a blunt or I smell it, I know that, you know, all the fucking articles and all the accolades and all that bullshit, the real gift is the fact that people can smoke marijuana openly in the city that I love. And I think that like that, you know, till the end of time will be the crowning achievement of my pot career.

BEAN: You know, I think that's what it all comes down to in the end is if you can make your world a little freer, you make the world a little freer. And sometimes you can get hesitant to act because the problem seems so big and the problem seems so global. But you know what he's saying is I focused in on something that was really important to me, that was local and was able to change it. And that alone feels really good. And, and I haven't been to Philly in a while, but I do not doubt that it's a better vibe. I know that like, I feel better anywhere I can smoke weed and, and know that I'm not going to get in any trouble beyond maybe a small fine.

ABDULLAH: I really am truly so deeply thankful to these guys and to their entire cohort in Philadelphia for fighting to make this happen because they could have just sat there and not done anything, even when it seemed like they were going to get totally fucked for it, they continued to try and, I mean, what are the odds? What are the odds of this would be off? There's so many stories like this where there's no happy ending, but I'm really glad that in the city I love there was a very happy ending for the cannabis decriminalization fight. All right, well that's it for this episode of Great Moments in Weed History. Bean, this was really fun. I have a new appreciation for what you do on this show. It's not easy. It takes a lot of work and you do it really well, man. I hope, that I can live up to your standard.

BEAN: No, this was a ride, man. This was an incredible story. And you know, you told me a story about people that I, I know, but I didn't know their story.

ABDULLAH: I'm so glad you liked it. Special special shout out to Chris Goldstein. Sorry I butchered your name on and off throughout the podcast. N.A. Poe and Mike Whiter, you guys are the best and a lot of love to everybody in Philadelphia, listening to this podcast. Thanks for hanging with us, and to play us out -

[Stayin Real High in]

ABDULLAH: -Poe and his cohost on the panic hours, Steve, they made a few songs that are kind of like funny covers to promote Smoke Down Prohibition. So this one's called "Stayin Real high"

BEAN: Great Moments in Weed History is a Spoke Media production. It's hosted by me, David Bienenstock, AKA Bean and Abdullah Saeed.

ABDULLAH: We're produced by Brigham Mosley and Cody Hofmockel, with help from Lee George.

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ABDULLAH: Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian, and Keith Reynolds. Check out our show notes where you'll find more information about things we discussed today and links to our sponsors.

BEAN: And very special thanks to all of our supporters on Patreon.

ABDULLAH: And if you're enjoying our show, please tell your friends about it the next time you're smoking weed with them.

[Stayin Real High out]