

“Weeds” (Hollywood Does Cannabis)

By Walter Russell

The first season of “Weeds” recently came out on DVD. Some pro-cannabis friends who get Showtime had given it two thumbs up and I rented it with high hopes. The plot revolves around a young widow, Nancy Botwin (Mary-Louise Parker), who deals marijuana to maintain her bourgeois lifestyle in an LA suburb called Agrestic.

Nancy doesn't smoke the commodity she sells—which is unusual if not completely unrealistic. She drives a leased Range Rover, employs a Hispanic maid, and pays the mortgage on a big house. She has two sons, Silas, 16, whose interest is girls, and Josh, 10, who acts out in troubling ways (he shoots a wild animal, bites another kid) and is a candidate for Zolof. Nancy, supposedly a good mom, pushes sports on Josh. She is preoccupied with her pot business, which she conceals from the kids, i.e., she lies to them all the time. No wonder the little guy is troubled.

Nancy's friend from the PTA, a striver named Celia Hodes (played by a very droll, intelligent actress, Elizabeth Perkins), doesn't smoke pot, either. In the early episodes she is pressuring her 10-year-old daughter to lose weight (baby fat, obviously). When Celia finds the kid's hidden bag of chocolates, she spikes it with laxatives, leading to the girl's extreme humiliation in school.

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Equally perverse is a scene in which Andy Botwin—the younger brother of Nancy's late husband—tricks Silas's girlfriend into a cybersex dialogue. Andy then convinces Silas that his behavior was acceptable and is allowed to continue living in the house by Nancy lest he reveal her source of income to the children. This “good mom” would sooner tolerate a child molester under her roof than level with her family and/or quit dealing pot. (Andy showed up unannounced one morning with gifts for everyone, including a vibrator for Nancy, his grieving sister-in-law, which he presented in front of the kids.)

Kevin Nealon plays a more likable pothead, Doug Wilson, Nancy's accountant. He advises her to set up a legitimate small business as a front, and she opens a bakery. We don't see her finding the location, buying fixtures, dealing with contractors or vendors or any of that mundane stuff. Although Nancy has no experience or affinity for baking, and is



supposedly broke (her home phone gets cut off at one point), her place of business somehow materializes.

One evening Doug comes over to Nancy's house, she's not there, and he and Andy go into her personal stash, only to discover that a rat has found it, too. They get loaded and hunt for the rat, which they intend to shoot with a pellet gun. They use peanut butter as bait and get it all over the furniture. They trash the living room and kitchen, then crash in a stoned stupor. The Drug Czar's

office couldn't have scripted a grosser caricature of Reefer Goofiness. Marijuana turns grown men into Beavis and Butthead!

In the third episode there's a scene set in a pot club. Nancy shows up at Doug's office to make a delivery and he tells her he doesn't need anything. He takes out his wallet and shows her the reason why...

DOUG: It's my medical marijuana card. I got a note from a clinic doc for a hundred bucks. Went down to the pot store and mama, I was home! It's a weed wonderland, Nancy. It's like Amsterdam, only better, because you don't have to visit the Anne Frank house and pretend to be sad and stuff. See this lollipop?

NANCY: It isn't...

DOUG: (Medium shot of Doug sucking) Yes! I'm getting high right now. You can't even tell.

NANCY: How is it possible?

DOUG: The genius of Prop 215: medical marijuana for sick people. And



seriously, who couldn't use a little medication, right? My friend's friend's friend gave me the address of the clinic, I went down there, and loaded up. [From his desk he takes a baggie full of big colas.] I love California! I can't wait to tell the poker game about it. The one buzz kill is you can only buy eight ounces a visit.

NANCY: That's half a pound!

DOUG: Well, they allow you to make two visits a day, but you know with all the traffic on the 110 it's practically impossible.

NANCY: Are you fucking with me?

From Doug's office the scene shifts to the Bodhi Sativa Caregivers Club. We see a security guard in the background as Nancy enters. How she got past him is unexplained. We don't hear of her visiting a doctor, getting a card, etc. She looks around in awe to the strains of “Ganja Babe,” by Spearhead. From her POV we see cakes, cookies, tinctures, buds in apothecary jars... She is greeted by the owner, a smarmy club-owner.

CRAIG (Bowing, hands clasped): Welcome. I'm Craig X and you are at the Bodhi Sativa Caregivers Club. How can we care for you.

NANCY: Hi, I'm kind of new at this.

CRAIG: A virgin? Don't worry, I'll be gentle on you. C'mon this way. The First thing you want to do when you come to the club is check out the big board. On the big board here we have all the prices and strains, and they do change daily. (To a seemingly able-bodied young man entering the club) Hey Billy, how's the anxiety?

BILLY: Awright.

CRAIG: Cool... What was I saying? I got spaced.

NANCY: The big board.

CRAIG: And on this big board we've got two specials today. You want to check out the granddaddy purp, it's actually purple. And today we've got a Sativa blend—the flavor, bellissimo! Second we've got the Here's Johnny, the king of late night. You don't want to be messing

with this before the sun goes down, it'll knock you out. In the other room we've got the clones... (To a seemingly able bodied even younger man carrying a skateboard and wearing a t-shirt with a peace sign) Hey, how's it going Robbie. I see the arthritis is getting better, huh?

ROBBIE: Yeah, you know it

CRAIG: Cool. (To Nancy) What was I saying?

NANCY: Clones.

CRAIG: Oh, yeah. You hear that dial tone? My clones are off the hook. Check this out... We have the most beautiful clones. They're ten dollars apiece and ours are guaranteed female. To get you started. And over here we've got the food section. [As a senior citizen enters] Hey, Mrs. Rappaport, nice to see you, you look beautiful. We've got your sponge cake in back. Okay, go ahead and get that.

MRS. R: Thank you.

CRAIG: She's got diabetes. We make it with Splenda instead of sugar. Where was I?

NANCY: Edibles.

CRAIG: Okay, look at all this great stuff we have: infusions, goos, kief, kief oils, hash oils, hemp oils. You look a little overwhelmed.

NANCY: Where does all this come from?

CRAIG: A combination of our patients and some very compassionate farmers. Doing God's work.

NANCY: And it's all legal.

CRAIG: Well, we operate under the guidelines of Health & Safety Code 11362.5...

(At this point DOUG enters, hugs CRAIG, hardly reacts to seeing NANCY)

DOUG: I love it here so much!

CRAIG: (to Nancy): He's suffering from depression.

DOUG: Do you have any more Steven Hawking? I want to be wheeled out of here.

CRAIG: Oh yeah, I'll hook you up...

“Craig X” was known as Craig Rubin when he had a store that sold bongos in West Hollywood c. 1996. In addition to playing himself on “Weeds,” he was hired as a consultant to the writers and he provides a commentary on the DVD. Either his cynicism pervaded the episode, or he did a brilliant acting job.

“Weeds” took a turn for the better about halfway through the season. Celia has a double mastectomy, and becomes more serious and compassionate. So does the writers' attitude towards her and some of the other characters. In a scene possibly presaging Celia's becoming a medical marijuana user, Doug comes by to visit her husband and chats with her in the kitchen. He admires her wig.

DOUG: What's wrong?

CELIA: Nauseous. Chemo.

DOUG: That sucks. Want some pot?

CELIA: That's illegal, Doug.

DOUG: Not really. You can get a medical card.

CELIA: Well, I have pills for it, thank you.

DOUG: Ooh. What'd they give you?

CELIA: Zofran.

DOUG: Can I try one?

CELIA: No, they're three hundred dollars a pill.

In the final episode of the first season, Nancy decides to organize a marijuana-growing business in alliance with Conrad, the nephew of the woman who has been her supplier. He has developed

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a potent strain that can be harvested in 60 days. Doug will be the accountant. Their plan is to sell to the burgeoning cannabis clubs of L.A... And in the very last scene, Nancy realizes that the sensitive, confident, affectionate man she's sleeping with—a divorced dad, how appropriate—is a DEA agent.

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As the second season got underway, we were hoping that the producers and writers would have learned enough about the scene to portray medical marijuana more respectfully. (Yes, hustlers of the type portrayed by Craig X abound; but there are righteous growers and club owners, too.) We heard that some activists had been invited to take part in a future episode and thought maybe they have some influence on the script.

No such luck. In the second episode of the new season Nancy, Doug and Andy attend a “cannabis cup” trade show. Craig X, the dispensary owner, shows them around. Nancy has come to buy a potent, fast-blooming “mother plant.” Aggressive salesman—shot through lenses that make them look wierd—pitch their products to her, employing lingo like, “It's Afghani Indica crossed with Oaxacan Sativa.” Doug and Andy get loaded and reprise their Beavis and Butthead routine, ending up in the ladies bathroom with Andy on the floor writing an application to rabbinical school on a roll of paper towels.

Despite its disrespectful attitude towards the medical marijuana movement, activists and rank-and-file users generally love “Weeds.” Prohibition is so oppressive that pot smokers are grateful for the slightest little breach in the wall. We're grateful to see people smoking pot on TV. Grateful that a mainstream show would portray a functioning CPA as a heavy user. Grateful to have a basis for discussing the forbidden subject around the water cooler.

The writers of “Weeds” ought to check out the first two seasons of “Everybody Hates Chris,” a show that has what theirs lacks—heart.



Craig X. Rubin, who plays a cynical club owner on “Weeds,” is flanked by Francis DellaVecchia and Rob Kampia of the Marijuana Policy Project after taping of the “cannabis cup” episode. Many activists appeared as extras and strove for product placement on the set.

PHOTO BY TODD MCCORMICK