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BUZZ

# 420 OR FIGHT

MEET STEVE WALDO, A CALIFORNIAN WHO CLAIMS HE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE THE TRUE ORIGINATORS OF "420."

## STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEVEN HAGER

It started with an e-mail message I received last May. "My name is Steve," it began, "and I am the member of a small group of friends known as the Waldos, from San Rafael, California. The Waldos are the true originators, the founding fathers of 420, and I would be willing to put up as much as \$1,000 of my own money for the Waldos to be tested by polygraph or stress-voice analysis to prove our claim. I assure you we would pass."

"420" as a euphemism for pot smoking first appeared in *HIGH TIMES* in the May '91 issue, after a photocopied flyer arrived in the hands of Steve Bloom at a Dead show. HT's resident Deadhead, Bloom jumped on the expression and spread it around the

to contain exactly 420 distinct chemicals.

I e-mailed Steve "Waldo" back, told him to assemble the Waldos and all their evidence and I would come to San Rafael to interview them and document their claims for the Cannabis Hall of Fame. I was especially impressed because Steve told me in his original e-mail "we are not looking for money or any kind of rights... we are just a bunch of Waldos who are proud of the legacy we began."

When I arrived in San Francisco in late June, I went to the skyscraper where Steve Waldo oversees his own successful company. He had many letters postmarked from the early '70s, all of which contained references to 420. The following day we met four other Waldos: Dave, Larry, Mark and Jeff, and went

PT. REYES PENINSULA WAS THE LOCATION OF A SECRET POT PATCH.



office. It began making frequent appearances in the *Hemp 100* and, in the May '97 issue, HT freelancer Brian Jarvinen, in his article, "The Story of 420," stated: "The most repeated explanation for 420's origins is that the San Rafael police department defined a '420' radio call as 'pot-smoking in progress.' However, the department denies this and says there currently is no such code." Another popular explanation is that marijuana is reputed

to trace the origins of 420 at the actual locations where everything originally took place. The first stop was a wall on the campus of San Rafael High School.

"We used to sit on this wall and mock everyone," explained Steve. "We would mock the greasers with their fast cars, we would mock the cheerleaders." The Waldos were mostly known for their great devotion to cannabis, the Marx Brothers and stand-up comedy. One day, while



LARRY, DAVE, STEVE, MARK AND JEFF WALDO AT THE LOUIS PASTEUR STATUE WHERE 420 STARTED.

they were sitting on the wall, a friend gave them a treasure map to a pot patch on nearby Point Reyes Peninsula. "His brother grew the patch," said Steve. The Waldos decided to meet after school and pick the patch. Since school got out at 3:10, and since some of the Waldos had after-school activities that lasted approximately one hour, someone decided they should meet at exactly 4:20 PM, at the statue of Louis Pasteur, which was located near the entrance to the school parking lot.

The Waldos took me around to the side of the school, where we found a strange bullet-shaped statue. "We reminded each other about the meeting during the day," said Steve, "by saluting each other in the halls and saying, '420 Louie.' We hopped into my 1966 Chevy Impala and headed for Point Reyes. The Peninsula is very rural and quite large. We always got lost and would "420" contin-

uously. Strange humorous things would always happen to us out there. We never found the patch but we had a lot of fun searching. We did discover we could talk about getting high in front of our parents without them knowing by using the phrase 420."

But how did 420 go from a code used by a group of high-school students to a worldwide phenomenon? "We were really big fans of the New Riders of the Purple Sage," explained Steve. Somehow, the 420 expression leaked into the Deadhead community and spread from there.

Today, "420" as a code for getting high is more widespread than ever and still growing, and "420" events are almost worldwide. 4:20 PM has become sort of an international "burn time." And the Waldos, now in their forties, still exhibit such a spirit of fun that they make instant friends with strangers wherever they go. Hey, what time is it?