

Celebrating Fifty Years of 420 with the Waldos

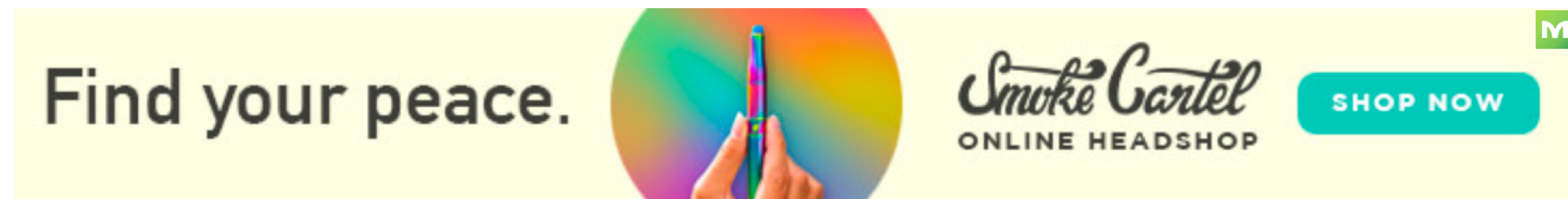
April 12, 2021



By Mitchell R. Colbert

Growing up in Marin, I grew up with the 420 story. I don't mean the rumors about it being Bob Marley's birthday (which is February 6th) or being police code for cannabis (it is not), I mean [the real 420 story](#), about a group of guys at San Rafael High School. Those guys, known as the Waldos, are the real life [Goonies](#), complete with a treasure map. While the Goonies were seeking gold, the Waldos were seeking Acapulco gold, and their map was to a huge cannabis grow out by a Coast Guard station near Point Reyes where bud was free for the taking. The Waldos gathered at 4:20pm afterschool by a statue of Louis Pasteur, and that was where their journey began.

Since this year is 420's 50th anniversary, Stuff Stoners Like spoke to three of the five Waldos to learn more about the 420 story from the source and to discuss their many philanthropic partnerships.



Fifty Years of 420 History

The Waldos are a remarkable group of guys, who have managed to stay friends for over four decades, and through their friendship, created an enduring piece of cannabis history. Their [website](#) has digitized letters, photos, and other historical documentation substantiating their role in originating and propagating 420. Waldo Steve critiqued the way they have been portrayed by some members of the media, "they only have a one-dimensional view of the Waldo's story...which is often narrowly focused on cannabis only." For Waldo Steve (Steve Capper), "The Waldos were an entire culture, a mental outlook and perspective, and a way of dealing with issues of everyday life." These guys were all high school athletes and friends, their bond was much deeper than just smoking weed together. "420 was only one-slang catchphrase of many," says Waldo Steve pointing to their website, which has a [glossary of Waldos terms](#), complete with audio pronunciation guides. Waldo Steve was clear that it was "not just a story of a few teens running around smoking pot, but brotherhood and mutual support while being creative and coping with life's challenges."

But about that pot...where did that weed treasure map come from? They got the map from a Coast Guard sailor who, as the story goes was tending the plants, but could not care for them any longer. Years later, the Waldos were able to track down that Coast Guard sailor, a man named Gary Newman. As Waldo Larry (Larry Schwartz) tells it, "Waldo Steve spent an unbelievable amount of time and money to track him down. When we all finally met him, it was like a family reunion!" Waldo Steve describes Gary as "a mellow gentle soul, he loves to laugh," saying he "was very joyous to be associated with 420, and he treasured our friendship and humor." Waldo Steve spoke about some of Gary's struggles, saying he was "homeless off and on, living on the streets in a world of unstable, dangerous or desperate people, and substance abuse, it was so good for his mind and soul to associate with the Waldos." Waldo Dave (Rave Reddix) says that they unfortunately have lost contact with Gary since they reconnected in 2016, and he asks our readers, "If anyone reads this article and knows where Gary Newman is please contact us at 420waldos@gmail.com. He would still be somewhere in the South Bay."

The Waldos are proud of their role in creating an enduring piece of cannabis history, albeit, accidentally. "We always thought of 420 as a 'joke,'" says Waldo Steve, "we are happy that everybody has shared the joke, and the good times." Even though it was a joke, Waldo Steve described 420 as having "a heart and soul, born in a brotherhood, and continues along with lasting friendships." Waldo Dave spoke to the universality of 420, saying "420 has crossed ALL cultural and age barriers to a world wide collective in celebration of Cannabis." The global spread of 420 was accelerated through ties the Waldos had to the [Grateful Dead and other musicians](#), who brought the gospel of 420 on tour with them. It was at a Grateful Dead show in 1990 that Steve Bloom, a former writer for High Times, was handed a flier about 420, which he wrote about in High Times the following year. Members of the Cannabis Action Network also saw that early 420 flier which they copied thousands of times using a "hacked" printer at a Kinkos.



A Tale of Two Cities – Lagunitas and San Rafael

Right down the road from San Rafael High School and the statue of Louis Pasteur, where the original 420 gathering happened, is the small hamlet of Lagunitas, known worldwide for the brewery that bears its name. Lagunitas is no stranger to 420, cannabis, and cannabis-themed beers. They actually hold the distinction of being the [only brewery to ever be raided for cannabis](#), something they now celebrate every year by releasing [Undercover Shutdown Ale](#). Several years after the raid, Ron Lindenbusch, Lagunitas' "head beer weasel," reached out to the Waldos about partnering on a beer.

Waldo Larry does printing for the wine industry and says "Lagunitas originally approached me because one of my Vendors knew the true story from working with me." Ron loved the [420 story](#) and asked Larry if the other Waldos were interested in doing a limited release ale. Waldo Dave recalls, "we all went up to Lagunitas and picked the original hops that most replicated the dank smell of Cannabis." [The Waldos Special Ale](#) has been so successful that rather than just being a limited release only on draft, it can now be found in bottles too. Like Undercover Shutdown, there is no cannabis or hemp in the beer, but Lagunitas has since released [products](#) that do contain [cannabis](#).

Waldos discuss the Evolution from Smoking to Vaping

As you would expect from a group of guys known for smoking weed far more than they are known for drinking beers, the Waldos also have lent their name and history to a partnership with the vape company [Chemistry](#). The Waldos didn't do it to make money from the 420 legacy they created, at least not for themselves, as all the net proceeds were donated to the non-profit drug reform group, the [Drug Policy Alliance](#). "We thought that after 83 years of persecuting Cannabis smokers for something that is natural and harmless as well as having medicinal properties, The Drug Policy Alliance was a good match for our philanthropy," said Waldo Dave, adding "The Drug Policy Alliance works every day to help people get the free legal representation they deserve to overturn draconian government policies."

We also talked about the phenomenon of joint circles, where people passed joints, evolving into vape circles. I've casually noticed at cannabis events that when everyone has their own vape there is less passing of devices than in the days of joints, which could contribute to an isolation as strangers no longer get to meet. "Not at all, people pass vape pens too," said Waldo Dave, but he noted "Right now with Covid 19, passing joints and vape pens are out until further notice." Waldo Larry echoed Waldo Dave's thoughts, "I think the vape pen isolation is more because of the pandemic which also means no more passing joints to strangers or even casual friends." Despite the pandemic, the Waldos still gathered last year for a virtual 420 session together, but Waldo Dave says while it was fun "we look forward to people being able to puff and pass to other smokers together." Waldo Larry summed it up, "Waldos believe nothing beats a good old toke off a joint!"

4:20 – The Time of the Waldos

Appropriately, as 420 has always been code for what time friends should get together to smoke, last year the Waldos launched a line of watches with [Time Concepts](#). Like the Lagunitas partnership, this one evolved very organically. Waldo Larry has a printing business and has known Barry Cohen from Time Concepts for 25 years, as he printed some catalogs for his previous brand, Luminox. Waldo Larry says that Barry "reached out to say it seems the stigma around cannabis is dying off so it might be a good time to launch a 420Waldos watch collection." Waldo Larry introduced him to the rest of the Waldos and the idea became reality. What sets the [420Waldos](#) watches apart from other watches is the "4" on the band is a cannabis leaf, celebrating what happens when those watch hands meet at 4:20. As a special promo for 4/20, Time Concepts has some promos for the whole collection of Waldos watches. Just like their partnership with Chemistry, every 420Waldos watch sold helps support drug legalization.

420 is a time for celebrating together, and even though the pandemic is still going so all in-person gatherings are still on hold, take an example from the Waldos and gather with your friends virtually. If you want to celebrate 420 in style, grab yourself a pack of Waldos Special Ale, a Waldos vape, or watch the countdown to 4:20 on your 420Waldos watch.

