

## Smuggling Pot With My Dad

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor  
February 2017

---

### A tale of a square grouper in Biscayne Bay



Florida voters just gave medical marijuana the green light, most likely a first step toward legalization. And as legislators try to figure out what comes next, think about what you'd do if you found 40 pounds of pot floating in Biscayne Bay.

One summer circa 1975, 12 years old and skinny as an eel, I stood at the bow of our modest Aquasport, one hand on the rope, the other in the air, pretending to ride a bucking bronco with each dip and soar of the waves. We sped across the bay, en route to a day of diving and spearfishing on the reefs outside Elliott Key.

With my father and his lanky boat partner (we'll call him Frank), side by side at the center console, I caught sight of what appeared to be a large crate bobbing. When we pulled up alongside, my dad said, "Looks like we caught ourselves a square grouper."

All I knew of drugs then was that they were bad. So the idea of all this marijuana floating like seaweed (no pun intended) shocked my sensibility. Both my dad and Frank, a Harvard-trained lawyer, decided it made sense to bring it aboard. The burlap-encased bale appeared water-tight, wrapped by pros in some god-forsaken, machine-gun protected place, I imagined. Standing beside the dripping mess, I began to feel anxious, and more so as my dad and Frank had this conversation:

## Smuggling Pot With My Dad

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor  
February 2017

---

“We need to call the police,” said Frank, his voice deep, his patrician eyes stern.

“Wait a minute. Let’s think about this,” said my shirtless father, tan fingers raking across his dark curls.

“What’s there to think about, Art?” the lawyer barked. “Let’s just go diving and then review our options.”

“Options?”

We headed out to the Atlantic and spent the day communing with the tropical abundance. All the while, the bale sat silently beneath a towel at the stern. Heading back, my dad realized we were nearly out of fuel, so we pulled into the station at Elliott.

I hopped off to pump the gas and noticed the marine patrol station a few paces away. What if they boarded our boat for a routine inspection? Are we drug smugglers now?

We got our five gallons (the max they’d sell), and my dad hit the throttle and pointed us home. “I’m just saying this would make some mighty fine Christmas gifts,” he told Frank, as the boat planed off. Not a smoker at the time (he dabbled a bit later on), my dad had some dear friends who were.

The wind whipped my eyes, and I rubbed them vigorously, then stared straight off the bow into the green mangrove coastline of Coral Gables and the Grove. The skyscrapers of downtown Miami sat off in the distance to the north. These waters were my domain, and I felt that an intruding force had violated my sanctuary. “Dad, you have to turn it in,” I said, walking back to join him at the helm.

“Maybe,” he said, never taking his eyes off the horizon.

## Smuggling Pot With My Dad

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor  
February 2017

---

We kept our boat in a slip behind a friend's home. As I hosed down the gear, Frank and my dad hoisted the bale onto the grass. The cops were called and Frank agreed to wait for them, as my dad had an appointment. Ironically, when the police arrived, they shook down Frank pretty hard. "Where's the rest of it?" they kept asking him, unimpressed by his earnest insistence that he was the good guy here.

I felt much relieved by my father's choice. At that time, the law clearly deemed marijuana a dangerous, evil substance. Yet I've come to recognize over time that the law doesn't always represent the truth, or what is right. The law once said slavery was okay.

Today's national trend toward legalization has borne out my dad's thinking to be less insane than it appeared to my prepubescent mind. As is most often the case, his intention came from a place of genuine kindness. There was nothing in it for him beyond helping his buddies enjoy their private time, saving them money, and sparing them the headache of interacting with shady dealers.

That said, why go there? No matter how selfless his motivations, getting caught with 40 pounds of dope would have altered his life forever. He'd probably just now be getting out of lockup.

My dad has always impressed me with his gut sense of right and wrong, something I hope my children recognize in their own father. I take small pride in the fact that he gave this particular situation a good thinking over -- and then did the correct thing. Hopefully, his friends enjoyed the neckties they got for holiday gifts that year.

*Stuart Sheldon is an artist, author, and Miami native. Follow him on Facebook and Instagram at @stuart\_sheldon, and subscribe to his Fancy Nasty blog at stuartsheldon.com.*

## Smuggling Pot With My Dad

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor  
February 2017

---

*Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)*