



AROUND TOWN

AMERICA'S WHIMPERING 'WAR ON DRUGS'

...Is it possible that the American government stumbled onto a solution for drug addiction over fifty years ago but decided to remain silent?

It is as much a part of modern life as the Internet, iPods and cell phones. Crossing all social, economic, and cultural boundaries, its corrosive effect on individuals, families and society continues to grow within pockets of urban decay and upscale suburban enclaves. The issue in question is drug abuse and its impact on modern life. Statistics offer a grim picture concerning America's achievements in the "War on Drugs." According to figures from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), approximately 8% of high school seniors nationwide have abused the prescription narcotic Hydrocodone within the past year. Described by the Drug Enforcement Administration as "the most abused prescription drug in the country," Hydrocodone is a Schedule II substance, making it one of the most highly controlled narcotics currently in use. Criminal activity associated with the multi-billion dollar illegal drug industry continues to grow across the nation and along America's Main Streets. Throughout the United States, narcotic-related robberies of pharmacies shot up almost 100% from 380 in 2006 to 686 in 2010.

For Queens residents seeking help in treating drug addiction, it is readily apparent that almost every hospital, clinic and related health care facility in the borough offers programs or referral services designed to relieve addiction from alcohol, cocaine, heroin and other assorted opiates. Now, in spite of the formidable challenges facing those who do battle with addiction, there is new hope offering an opportunity for a return to sanity and a drug-free way of life. Mirroring the many ironies in the history of science, the catalyst for this new hope resulted from the experience of a layman in the past century.

In 1962, 19-year-old New Yorker Howard Lotsof, a low-level user of heroin, ingested a highly unusual drug known as Ibogaine. Much to his surprise, within 33 hours all desire for heroin ceased without any withdrawal symptoms whatsoever. Intrigued by his experience, Lotsof, an aspiring film student at the time, redirected his energies into exploring the possibilities Ibogaine held out for others suffering from the ravages of drug abuse.

Derived from the Tabernanthe iboga shrub indigenous to Gabon, West Africa, Ibogaine is an inherent part of the culture associated with the Bwiti people of that region; tribal boys ingest Ibogaine in their ritual journey from childhood to adulthood. In western civilization, the ability of Ibogaine to interrupt drug

dependency became apparent to the American government in the fifties. Doctor Harris Isbell, an alleged CIA operative, used Ibogaine on eight African American males suffering from drug addiction at the now-defunct Federal Narcotics Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. His experiments, conducted without patient consent during the chilliest days of the Cold War, were designed to search for a substance that could induce mass psychological disorientation. Unfortunately, his report in November of 1956 that Ibogaine (marketed under the trade name of Bogidan at the time) was a highly effective tool in resetting brain chemistry to a pre-addictive state remained tucked away in the CIA archives for over half a century.

Is this an apocryphal story, just another urban legend of the mass culture to be lumped in with rumors of a secret cure for cancer, UFO contact and sightings of Elvis? Or is it possible that the American government stumbled onto a solution for drug addiction over fifty years ago but decided to remain silent? According to Doctor Rick Strassman, a research psychiatrist at the University of New Mexico, the answer to the latter question may very well be "Yes".

Under the Freedom of Information Act, copies were obtained of a March 8, 1995 seminar conducted at the National Institute on Drug Abuse in Rockville, Maryland. In the discussions, Dr. Strassman noted the Ibogaine research Isbell did with the eight black prisoners at Lexington, Kentucky in the fifties. During the course of the talk, Strassman even made reference to specific dosage information, sighting the 50 to 300 milligrams of oral Ibogaine the unwitting test subjects received during that experiment.

The ability of Ibogaine to interrupt broad-spectrum narcotic addiction would certainly seem to be a major step forward in the "War on Drugs", but clinical research into its use can be fraught with career liabilities and Machiavellian political intrigue. Dr. Stanley Glick, chief of the pharmacology department at the Albany College of Medicine in New York and a one-time Ibogaine researcher said, "There's no question that there's a political barrier to Ibogaine research. Why it's there I really don't understand, but I received advice from people I know at NIDA, who were acting in my best interest, advising me to work on something else."

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REMEMBERING CONTINENTAL (Cont. from Page 8)

Across the street today is a McDonald's. It wasn't always there. There was a popular men's clothing store there that sold its business in the late '60s and the growing fast food chain took over the premises. The area soon became a new hangout for kids. The outside architecture of the nearby bank provided the perfect place to 'park your butt'. This corner was also unique in that it provided a public telephone booth whose phone number was frequently used by the local gangs. It was not uncommon to walk by while it rang and witness a teen answer it, then shout out, "Hey Steve, it's for you!"

The phone no longer exists; instead, everyone has a cell phone. The faces have changed but kids still hang out on the corner.

Continental Avenue continues to grow and change. Memories are still being made. There are still banks and bakeries, candy stores and delis. It's just that the names have changed. Instead of the Peter Pan Bakery, we have a Gotta Getta Bagel. Instead of White Tower to grab a quick hamburger, we have Gamestop where you can pick out the latest computer and video games. And while it's no longer a large store on the main drag, Continental Photo still maintains a presence in their new location at 70-50 Austin Street.

As for the future; will the large movie houses ever come back? Will the economy allow stores of old to remain? At least the 71st Street / Continental subway station will finally get a much needed elevator. And who knows? By the time it's finished I may need to use it.

If you have special moments you'd like to share, the Facebook Group "You are probably from Forest Hills," offers a marvelous venue to hook up with memories other folks have of growing up in Forest Hills. You can also email me at ccuddeback@gmail.com. Let's keep our past alive so we can share them with future generations.

AMERICA'S 'WAR ON DRUGS' (Cont. from Page 14)

In spite of government indifference and even outright hostility, the ability of Ibogaine to stop drug abuse has attracted attention and support from some members of the scientific community. Dr. Kenneth Alper, an assistant professor of psychiatry and neurology at New York University observed, "I crossed the threshold of belief [concerning Ibogaine] when I saw a young man go down to Panama dependent on a 70 mg dose of Methadone per day. After undergoing Ibogaine therapy in that country he came back without any drug dependency whatsoever. I don't know of any other substance that can do that."

Ibogaine therapy is fast becoming an attractive option for those seeking an escape from the nightmare of addiction. While Ibogaine therapy is illegal in the United States, a growing number of clinics in foreign countries offer a variety of programs dedicated to freeing individuals from the tyranny of drug addiction. Among these is Transitions, a rehab center located at Rosarito Beach in Mexico, offers a comprehensive treatment regime that includes a complete physical examination/evaluation, before and after psychiatric care, counseling and medically supervised Ibogaine therapy. Conducted under the direction of board certified physicians, registered nurses and certified health care technicians, medical intervention into drug addiction at this facility consists of a 10-day therapy session for \$7,500; food and accommodations are included in the price. Unfortunately, Ibogaine is not recognized as a legitimate pharmaceutical product by the United States government, because of this, insurance does not cover the costs associated with rehabilitation centers using Ibogaine. The Transitions Rehabilitation Center currently accommodates only 10 patients at any given time; but the growing epidemic of narcotic abuse is bound to call for an increase patient load at this much needed facility and others like it around the world.

Drug addiction and the subsequent damage it causes should be a call to conscience for governments and the scientific community to re-examine the role of Ibogaine and the important role it plays in winning the "War on Drugs." All they have to do is just say "Yes."

For those interested in the Transition drug treatment program, please call (206) 353-9722 or visit their website at www.ibogaineintervention.com

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