

Dr. Mikuriya’s Obituaries —a post mortem

By Fred Gardner
Tod Mikuriya was not self-aggrandizing and I doubt he would have been grateful for the size and prominent placement of his obituaries. He was a historian and he cared about accuracy.

The obits failed to convey that Mikuriya was, in his lifetime, proved right. The very thing Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey mocked him for in 1996 —the finding that cannabis is helpful to people suffering a wide range of ailments— has been confirmed and explained in recent years by scientists studying the body’s own cannabinoid messenger system.

The endocannabinoid system functions as a master modulator, a “retrograde messenger” setting the tone and tempo at which other neurotransmitters fire. It inhibits neurons firing too intensely and disinhibits neurons firing too sluggishly. Cannabinoids promote homeostasis (an even keel) in systems that regulate appetite, movement, learning and forgetting, perception of pain, immune response and inflammation, neuroprotection and other vital processes. *That’s why smoking or otherwise ingesting cannabis affects such a wide range of symptoms.* The editors should have known this and the obit writers should have been reminded of it and conveyed it to their readers.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* obit by Henry Lee didn’t make reference to McCaffrey’s mockery of Mikuriya’s findings. Lee focused on Tod’s subsequent prosecution by the Medical Board of California, which he had reported on for the *Chronicle* after briefly looking in on the hearing in Oakland. He didn’t mention that all the allegations against Tod had come from law enforcement, none from patients.

Lee redeemed himself by including interesting info from Tod’s sisters. “His interests were varied, said his family, who called him a ‘modern man for all seasons.’ He enjoyed racing cars, flying airplanes, singing and playing traditional

It’s not a matter of “Mikuriya said this, McCaffrey said that.” Mikuriya’s observation has been substantiated!

folk music, and singing choral music and Elizabethan materials. He collected tools, electronic gadgets, political newspaper cartoons and marijuana T-shirts and posters. “People didn’t really appreciate that Tod was not just all about pot,” his sister, Beverly Mikuriya, 61, of Bucks County, Pa., said Monday. ‘He was really a very eclectic person who had lots of other interests and abilities.’”

Margalit Fox of the *New York Times* wrote that Tod was “widely regarded as the grandfather of the medical marijuana movement in the United States” —a term no one ever applied to him. “Elsewhere, however,” Fox went on, “Dr. Mikuriya’s work found little favor. In 1996, for instance, Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President Bill Clinton, publicly derided the doctor’s medical philosophy as ‘the Cheech and Chong show.’”

Give Fox credit for reminding readers that the Clinton Administration began the rollback of Prop 215 immediately after it passed; but she omitted the salient fact that Mikuriya had been proven right. It’s not a matter of “Mikuriya said this, McCaffrey said that.” Mikuriya’s observation has been substantiated! Science is all about proving and disproving theories and findings. It is the responsibility of the editors of the major metropolitan dailies to understand the state of the science and to incorporate it into their coverage of events when relevant.

It’s true that political and legal controversies still surround the medical use of cannabis, but there is no *scientific* controversy regarding the existence of the endocannabinoid system. It is an es-

tablished *fact* that cannabinoids, terpenes and flavonoids in cannabis affect various systems within the body and therefore can alleviate seemingly disparate kinds of symptoms. It has been *proven*.

More will be learned about the mechanism of action, of course, and our present understanding will be refined and revised; but there *is* such a thing as “what scientists now know,” and responsible journalists should refer to it when applicable.

Time’s Inept Copycat
Time Magazine’s terse Mikuriya obit, which reads like a self-parody, was lifted, obviously, from Margalit Fox’s piece in the *New York Times*. Its sole paragraph contains at least six errors of varying magnitude—four in one sentence.

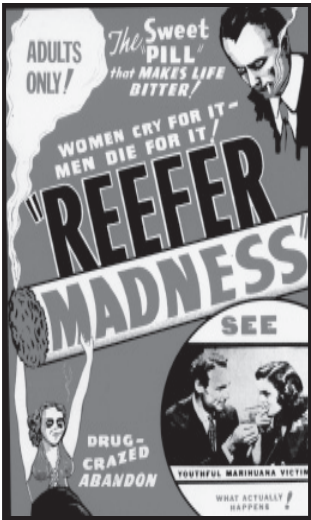
“MILESTONES. DIED. Like a lot of people who support marijuana use, psychiatrist Tod Mikuriya had detractors. (His work was called “the Cheech and Chong show” by Bill Clinton’s drug czar, General Barry McCaffrey.) The longtime Republican¹ believed in² the therapeutic effects of the drug on more than 200 ailments³ and in 1996 saw a bill he crafted⁴, Proposition 215, pass in California, legalizing the use of pot for the seriously ill. The “grandfather”⁵ of the medicinal-marijuana movement said his fight to “restore cannabis” stemmed from a backlash against its medical use following the late-’30s film *Reefer Madness*⁶. He was 73 and had cancer.”

1. Fox’s *NYT* obit had mentioned Tod’s Republican affiliation, but it was only nominal after Wallace Johnson’s tenure as mayor of Berkeley ended in 1971. Mikuriya despised Nixon, Reagan, and the George Bushes.

2. “Believed in” applies to matters of faith. “Observed and recorded” would have been accurate.

3. Drugs don’t exert effects on ailments, they exert effects on people.

4. THM didn’t “craft” Prop 215 and



any implication that he was the prime mover is wrong. Dennis Peron was.

5. By putting “grandfather” in quotes, *Time* presents it as Tod’s well known sobriquette, which it certainly wasn’t. Fox of the *Times* told *O’Shaughnessy’s* she thought of it herself.

6. Fox had written, truly, “Dr. Mikuriya saw his work, he often said, as a means of righting a historical wrong, namely the backlash against medical marijuana that began in the ‘Reefer Madness’ era of the late 1930s.” *Time’s* inept copycat makes it seem as if the film established marijuana prohibition when in fact the prohibition was established in 1937 by an act of Congress orchestrated by the U.S. Treasury Department. The film “Reefer Madness” was just one element in a long p.r. campaign that included numerous articles in the print media. It didn’t have much of an impact or attract an audience until the early 1970s when pot-smokers decided to laugh at its lurid, false depictions.

There’s actually a seventh gaffe in *Time’s* ‘graf about Tod. Drug Czar McCaffrey had said, “This isn’t medicine, it’s *a* Cheech and Chong show.” The *New York Times* misquoted it as “*the* Cheech and Chong show” —and so, with a slide of the mouse, did *Time*. A tiny error that shows how lazy and slovenly these well-paid journalists tend to be.

Mikuriya doesn't make the cut!

60 Minutes Rewrites Prop-215 History

A “60 Minutes” segment that aired in Sept. 23 and was re-run Dec. 30 —“Pot Shops,” produced by David Browning, narrated by Morley Safer, and featuring Scott Imler as a Methodist minister—was a blatant revision of history. Did CBS News lay off all its fact-checkers in an economy move? Roll the tape:

Morley Safer: ...Even one of the key proponents of medical marijuana says things have gotten out of hand.

Scott Imler (*a 50-something man in a white collar*): It's just ridiculous the amount of money that's going through these cannabis clubs. It's absolutely ridiculous.

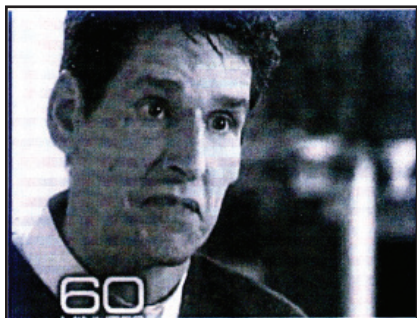
Morley: Scott Imler, a minister in the United Methodist Church (*shot of Imler in a white robe preaching to bored people in pews*) who has long been active in promoting medical marijuana. Eleven years ago he was working to pass Proposition 215, the ballot measure that legalized it. Today, Imler has second thoughts.

Imler (*smiling, to Morley*): The purpose of Proposition 215 was not to create a new industry. It was to protect legitimate patients from criminal prosecution.

Morley: The aim back then, reflected in television spots, was for a highly regulated system in which licensed pharmacies would dispense medical marijuana to the seriously ill. (*Over footage of ads made by Bill Zimmerman*) Proposition 215's backers had people with AIDS, cancer, and glaucoma in mind.

Imler (*sounding beleagured as he recalls the enormous imaginary pressure*): What happened when we were writing it was, as you can imagine, every patient group in the state and they all have their lobbies —you know, the kidney patients

and the heart patients. Every patient group wanted to be included in the list. And so we didn't want to get in the position of deciding what it could be used for and what it couldn't be used for. We weren't doctors. We weren't scientists. We weren't researchers. We were just patients with a problem.



Press pause, please

The drafting of Prop 215 was a collective process. The primary authors were Dennis Peron and John Entwistle; Dale Gieringer of California NORML; attorney Bill Panzer; Valerie Corral, a medical user, caregiver and gardener who insisted that cultivation be protected; and the late Tod Mikuriya, MD, who contributed the opening line allowing doctors to approve use in treating “...any other illness for which marijuana provides relief.” When Imler says, “We weren't doctors,” he simultaneously claims authorship credit for himself and denies it to Dr. Mikuriya, who interviewed some 200 patients at the SFCBC in the early '90s and documented their ailments.

Gieringer says that Imler attended planning sessions regularly and that his past experience working on an initiative opposing nuclear power proved useful; but he can't recall anything that Imler

When Imler says, “We weren't doctors,” he simultaneously claims an authorship role for himself and denies credit to Dr. Mikuriya.



contributed to the final version of 215, and acknowledges that the image of patients' groups clamoring to be protected is absurd on its face. “He was confabulating,” says Gieringer about Imler's claim on *60 Minutes*.

Imler's confabulation was the lynchpin for the whole segment, prefigured by Morley asking rhetorically, “How is the California state law working? The answer involves another statute: the law of unintended consequences.”

Click that play button again:

Morley: What you're saying is, you were forced to make the proposition vague.

Imler: We were, yeah.

Morley (*over a long shot of the ballot measure's text*): So the law voters passed mentioned not only cancer and AIDS but (*we see a blow-up of words, as if they had been buried in fine print*) “...any other illness for which marijuana provides relief.” A decade later, if you've got a note from a doctor, you can buy medical pot for just about any imaginable condition. (*Cut to a young Black woman at a dispensary...*)

Eradicating the Truth

David Browning, the producer of the deceitful *60 Minutes* segment, didn't return requests for a comment. (*60 Minutes*

producers revel in showing people who can't defend their lies fleeing from the camera. You can dish it out, Brownie, but you can't take it.)

The phrase “...any other illness for which marijuana provides relief” was not buried in fine print towards the bottom of the initiative, it's in the first sentence. Nor is it “vague,” as Morley Safer characterized it; it's clear and all-inclusive.

The fact that Prop 215 covers people who use marijuana to treat a wide range of conditions is not an “unintended consequence” of vagueness forced on the authors by patients' groups. It reflects the understanding that Dennis, Tod and others had reached by listening to thousands of medical users. And it reflects the way the components of marijuana actually work, modulating the rate at which neurotransmitters are released in various systems of the body. (Dennis says of Imler: “He's just jealous of me —so, so jealous.”)

Tod Mikuriya devoted himself to recounting the history of cannabis as medicine —history that had been systematically eradicated by the corporate media, the universities, the medical establishment, and the government. Now these forces are out to eradicate Tod's own role, spraying their damned RoundUp on the progress he propagated, the history he helped make in his time on Earth.