

Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs, and Aunt Bee's Pickles

by
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Perhaps you remember the episode of *The Andy Griffith Show* where Aunt Bee made pickles to enter into a contest. Andy, Barney, and Opie thought that they were more akin to kerosene cucumbers than to pickles. In all her other culinary efforts, Bee was the best. Therefore, Andy and the others were having a hard time telling Bee that her pickling efforts were less than extraordinary. So they pretended to like them. After losing the pickle contest, Aunt Bee informs the family that their love of her pickles was good enough for her. Not knowing what to do, Andy finally pulls out a big ole pickle dripping with kerosene elixir, takes a big bite, and says, "Let's learn to love 'um."

This is a funny story, which is what a comedy show is after. But in real life we would probably say, "For everybody's sake, they should have told Aunt Bee that her pickles were best suited for hog slop or for igniting charcoal at a barbecue. They would then not have to eat them, and perhaps Aunt Bee could work on improving them."

The "Aunt Bee's Pickles" story reminds me of when I was a high school and college student. Many of my friends liked to drink beer, but I hated the stuff. They were always coming up with a new brand for me to try, sure that I would like *this* one. "Bleeeeeech! How can you stand to drink that stuff?" became my standard response.

One day I was told that some Coors, which was not distributed nationally at the time, had been brought back from Colorado. "Oh, you're gonna love this beer. It is the smoothest of them all," my friends informed me. They handed me the bottle and I took my traditional sip.

"Bleeeeeech! How can you stand to drink that stuff?" I was beginning to sound like a broken record.

At this point my friends became exasperated and finally stated the bottom line, "Well, you just have to learn to like it." What they meant, of course, was that I would just have to drink, and drink, and DRINK this hellish-tasting brew until I forced my taste buds to accept it.

I responded, "Why would I want to torture myself for some who-knows-how-long period of time in order to learn to like the taste of beer when there are so many other drinks like sodas, juices, and milk, that I already like?" It wasn't as if I was going to die of thirst if I never drank beer.

It wasn't just beer, I also didn't like mixed drinks. In short, I just didn't like alcohol. So I did not drink it. But being in a band, I was occasionally around not only alcohol, but also tobacco and that dreaded weed, marijuana. Although I never tried marijuana, I did try smoking regular tobacco. I discovered that I did like some cigars and pipe tobaccos, but not nearly enough to warrant the risks associated with them. So I gave them up rather quickly. As for cigarettes, there just didn't seem to be a point unless you liked the taste of ashes on your tongue. I was told that I had to learn to inhale them to really appreciate them. But just like the beer, why would I want to suffer through this experience when there were so many other things, such as slurping up watermelon or

snarfing down a Baby Ruth bar, I already loved. After all, if I'm in a burning building and my lungs are filling up with smoke, I'm going to try to get out and clear my lungs. Would I then want to celebrate my escape by lighting a cigarette and sucking its smoke into my lungs? I don't think so!

As for marijuana, I do have to admit that I kind of liked its smell. This was fortunate as concert halls in those days were like what LA would be like during a severe atmospheric inversion if all the automobiles burned weed for fuel. However, I also liked the smell of freshly cut grass (the kind grown on lawns, not the kind grown in secluded places to escape the purview of the authorities). But I wasn't about to follow behind lawn mowers, set the clippings on fire, and snort the fumes into my lungs.

The dangers of drugs were driven home as a teenager while watching *Police Woman*, a TV show starring Angie Dickinson as Sergeant Pepper (without the Lonely Hearts Club Band). In one particular episode, a boy convinces his girlfriend to try LSD. Unfortunately, she gets so spaced out that she believes she can fly and takes a swan dive off the balcony killing herself. That scene made a great impact on me. (Who says no good can come from TV?) I decided right then that the greatest tool I had in my "human toolbox" was my mind. I did not ever want to compromise this tool in such a way as to possibly bring harm, death, or just simple embarrassment to myself or others. That's why I never tried marijuana or any harder drugs. To mess with my mind in such a way would have been like a plumber purposefully breaking his wrench and using his hands instead, ending up with a leaky faucet. I did not want to end up with a leaky mind.

There are many reasons why people begin engaging in activities they either don't enjoy or they know to be self-destructive. They don't want to offend someone. They want to fit in. They want to be considered cool by their peers. On and on the reasons go. My plea is for everyone to stand up for himself. Don't fear offending others by telling the truth about your likes and dislikes. Don't be afraid to reject things that are bad for you. Don't worry that you won't fit in. I realize this is not always easy; but it is always for the best, and it can be done.

I have often wondered how, as a young man, I was able to refuse activities that I disliked or knew were bad for me. Although I never thought about it at the time, I now realize that it was due to a commitment on my part to do what was best for *me* without regard to what others would have me do. I did not need the approval of others to esteem myself. I knew that if my friends rejected me, they were not really my friends. In most cases I found that my friends actually respected me for my stand. If this attitude could be instilled in the troubled youth of our day, they could each stand proudly and say, "I have more guts than Andy Taylor and Barney Fife combined!"