

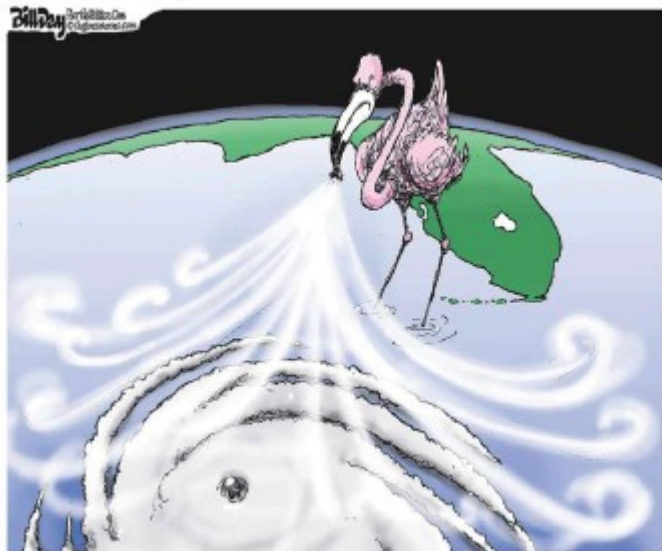
## My brief criminal career

---

The Union · 31 Aug 2023 · A4 · TOM DURKIN Columnist Tom Durkin is a freelance writer/photographer and a member of The Union Editorial Board. He may be contacted at [tdurkin@vfr.net](mailto:tdurkin@vfr.net).

---

“What were you in jail for?”



“For being dumb.” Susan St. James asked that of Peter Fonda in the movie *Outlaw Blues*. Peter Fonda can't act, but Susan St. James carried the movie for both of them.

Sometime last century, maybe 1984, when I was still young and dumb, my mother invited her four kids to come visit her in Kansas City for Christmas. My brothers and sister were close enough to drive from Colorado, Texas and Kansas.

Since I was the prodigal son in California, Mom bought me a plane ticket. I got as far as Dallas-ft. Worth airport, just in time to become fogged in with hundreds of other woebegone wayfarers.

Day One was tedious and slow. Wall-to-wall people. No place to lie down. I stashed my carry-on backpack in a locker so I could wander around or read a book.

Day Two was even more tedious and slow ... and tense. We were unhappy and tired from trying to sleep sitting up. Foggg. Neither the airport nor airlines seemed overly concerned for our welfare.

Late afternoon of Day Two, I decided, Screw it. I'll go outside and have a few tokes.

I had two joints in my backpack, so I retrieved them and wandered outside into the Foggg. I ambled about 30 yards away from the glass-walled waiting area teeming with the ever-mad-denning crowd inside. It felt good to be alone.

I took a few surreptitious hits and put the rest of the joint back in my pocket. I looked over at the glass wall and saw this little Texas cop hardcharging through the crowd.

He looks agitated. I wonder what's up.

Me, apparently. It looked like I was about to become the object of law enforcement.

He came at me as fast as he could walk, hand on his gun, yelling orders at me stay where I was. “Don't you run!”

Running hadn't occurred to me. Where would I go?

“Awright, are we going to do this the easy or the hard way?” he demanded.

I had no idea what he meant. He was a good four inches shorter than me, but he looked quite capable of taking me into custody whether I liked it or not.

“What's it gonna be, punk?”

I just shrugged in confusion. I was, you know, like, stoned.

“Put your hands on the wall and spread your legs.”

That I understood. I'd seen it on TV. I complied, hoping this was the easy way.

He professionally frisked me. Of course, he found the one and a half joints. The unsmoked Thai stick had the words, “Merry Xmas Bro” written on it. It was a gift from my dealer friend to my younger brother who had visited us last year.

His eyes lit up when he saw my press pass in my wallet. He'd just busted a California reporter. Cops don't like reporters. This was a good day. For him.

Then he found my locker key. “We're going to search your locker,” he informed me with a gleeful grin. As he escorted me through the crowd, he cheerfully told me about short-handled hoes at the Huntsville prison farm.

He obviously thought I had a stash in my locker. That didn't worry me, because my four-ounce Christmas stash of marijuana was in my luggage, wherever the hell my missing luggage was.

I wasn't scared although I was seriously concerned. This was not a time to panic (is there ever?). I was quiet and cooperative and stoic. Yes, sir. No, sir.

What little high I'd had was long gone. Adrenalin can sober you up right quick.

Okay. He hadn't handcuffed me or read me my rights. I took those as good signs.

Disgusted, he shoved my backpack back into the locker, locked it and gave me the key.

“Come with me,” he said gruffly. No longer talking trash at me, no longer talking at all, he led me downstairs.

Oh, no, I thought, he's going to commit some Texas-style extrajudicial justice on my sorry ass with a rubber-hose. Now, I was feeling fear.

Instead, he marched me into the men's restroom and over to a stall. He took out his evidence bag with the two Js and gave it to me.

“Flush `em,” he ordered. “The bag too?”

“No, not the bag!” I dropped the happy sticks in the water. The ink on the Christmas reefer immediately began to run. I flushed the evidence into oblivion and gave him back his police-issued baggie.

“Huntsville. Short-handled hoes.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Go.”

“Merry Christmas, officer.”

“Merry Christmas,” he growled as he stomped off.

It was a blessed catchand-release. Small fry. I guessed they would have laughed at him back at the station for his big bust of a California reporter with two lousy joints who was mainly guilty of being stupid.

This near miss had already convinced me that this was to be my first, and last, attempt at drug smuggling. Problem was, it wasn't over. I still had to get to Kansas City with a potential interstate narcotics trafficking rap in my missing luggage, but that's another story.