

Superman and the Best Vacuum Cleaner Salesman in New York City

by Jerry Ratch

I remember driving to New York City the summer of 1964, just before I met you. That was the very first time I ever smoked a joint. In those days it was happy dope. We got high and everything seemed so funny! Those were the days!

I drove into the city with a pool shark who was the grandson of a world-famous Russian composer, who shall remain unnamed. But it started with "S." Let's call him Superman, just for fun. We went to visit a friend of his who had an apartment not too far from the infamous Times Square, a very seedy area with prostitutes and drug addicts everywhere, nothing like the Mickey Mouse image they are trying for now. And it was close to impossible to find a place to park my car.

When we got up to Superman's friend's apartment, where we rolled out our sleeping bags on the floor and immediately began smoking a number, Superman's friend looked at me in disbelief that I even had a car. The guy was a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman, one of the very best in the city, he assured us. He was on a roll recently and immediately launched into an explanation on how to close on a client by letting the pen roll down the clipboard and landing in the woman's lap. They just couldn't resist grabbing for the pen before it hit their dress and he would gently guide her hand by the wrist to the proper place to sign for the Deluxe Vacuum Cleaner of the Century, the ultimate requisite for the poor woman's daughter's dowry. Even if there was nothing else in the dowry yet. Even if they hadn't even started on a dowry for their sweet little angelic daughter.

“What! You drove into the city? What are you, crazy? Nobody drives a car in this city. Nobody!”

“What!” I exclaimed right back. “What kind of city is it where you can't have a car? That's so ... last century!”

He specialized in making mid-day appointments with the ladies, so that often the daughter wasn't even home. And then banging every other mother if they were lonely. or even if they weren't necessarily lonely. As he said, he was on a roll and nothing was going to stop him from climbing to the top of the company. Nothing.

We sat around the miniscule apartment in our underwear, it was so hot out that summer, rolling and smoking joint after joint. I swear I couldn't figure out what all the shouting was about with dope. But of course in those days it was real mild and happy dope. You barely got stoned at all. I remember him running out the door with a five dollar bill to go get another “Nickel Bag,” because we weren't getting stoned enough, the three of us.

And having to get out of my sleeping bag at 6:00 a.m. to go move my car across the street so it wouldn't get towed. Who the hell drives a car into New York City? That's all I want to know.

People from New Jersey, looking for a good time, that's who.

