

Hello.

Welcome to Part One of *A Question of Compassion: An AIDS-Cancer Patient Explores Medical Marijuana*.

This first part is a free preview of the book. Please feel free to share it with your friends. The remaining parts will be available soon. The completed book will be a hardcover and sell for \$19.95. The entire book online will cost \$1 (paper and printing costs a lot).

This book is unlike anything I've done before. Please let me know what you think.

Thank you for reading.

Take good care.

Enjoy,

Peter McWilliams

P.S. If you're not familiar with Acrobat Reader, here are a few basic hints:

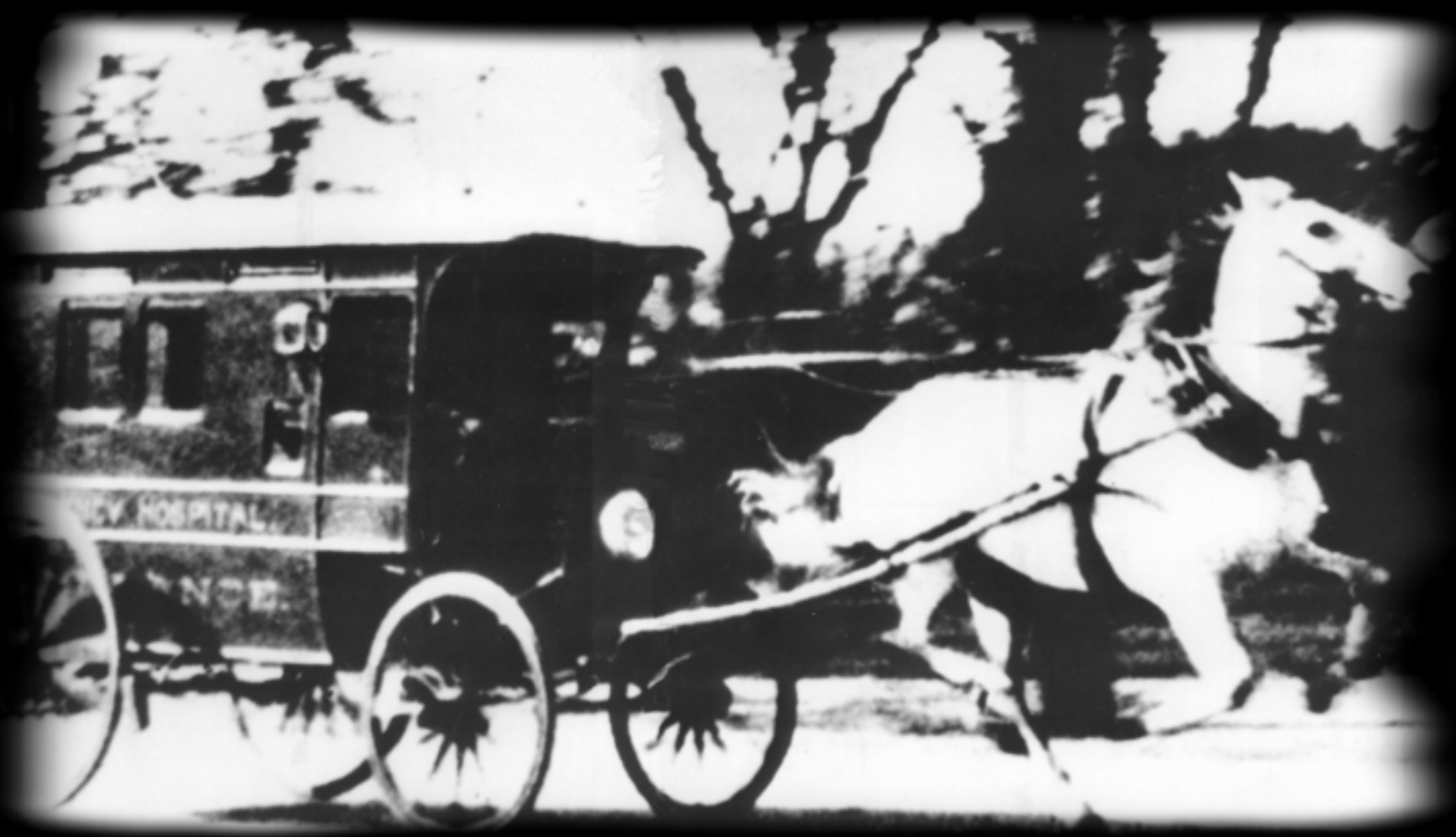
—to turn pages, use the triangles (arrows) on the top of the screen, or press PAGE UP or PAGE DOWN.

—Although there are many ways to navigate around a picture, one of the fastest is to use the magnification tool. (It looks like a magnifying glass with a + sign in it). You can use the mouse to move the magnifying tool over an area you want to see larger, click the mouse, and it magnifies that area by zooming into it. To reverse, hold down the CONTROL key and click the mouse. This zooms out.

—To zoom in on a particular area, simply select the magnification tool, hold down the mouse button, and draw a box around the area you want to magnify. Release the mouse button, and the selected area fills the screen. If you want to read a caption, for example, just hold down the mouse button and draw a box around it. To return to the full page, right-click the mouse and select "RETURN" from the pop-up menu. This will take you to the last view. If you want the full page to fill your screen, hold down the mouse button and draw a box around the whole page.

We are a compassionate people.






We cheer when we hear that someone
—even someone we don't know—
has survived a serious illness or accident.

We make exceptions for the sick every day.

We pull over to let ambulances by.

And we reserve for the disabled
some of the best parking places in town.

A black and white photograph showing a doctor in a white coat and dark vest examining a young boy's mouth. The doctor is on the left, leaning in, and the boy is on the right, looking up with his mouth open. The doctor's hands are positioned to examine the boy's oral cavity. The background is dark and out of focus.

We trust our physicians to write prescriptions for amphetamines ("speed"), barbiturates ("downers"), morphine (the active ingredient of heroin), cocaine, and a *Physician's-Desk-Reference* full of drugs with side effects ranging from dry mouth to death.



Aspirin, for example, is a drug considered so safe it doesn't even require a prescription.

Millions of children are given aspirin by loving parents every day.

All this in spite of the fact that aspirin-induced bleeding kills more than 1,000 American every year.



And yet,

an herb that has few side effects
and no known lethal dose
(not one fatality in
five thousand years
of recorded human use)
is one of the most
illegal substances on earth.

Doctors cannot prescribe it.

And,
since the passage
of the
Omnibus Crime Bill
of 1995,
if the United States government
(*our* United States Government)
catches you with
enough of it,
even for medical purposes,

it can put you to death.



*A Question
of
Compassion*

*An AIDS-Cancer
Patient Explores
Medical Marijuana*

*written and designed by
Peter McWilliams
www.mcwilliams.com*

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8159 Santa Monica Boulevard
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800-LIFE-101*



Please allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Peter McWilliams.

I am an author
who self-publishes
out of self defense.

I have been writing and printing
and selling my own books for thirty years.

More people know
the titles of my books
than know me by name:

How to Survive the Loss of a Love,
LIFE 101,
DO IT! Let's Get Off Our Butts,
How to Heal Depression,
Hypericum (St. John's Wort) & Depression,
Ain't Nobody's Business if You Do.

I even wrote a book about
surviving life-threatening illnesses eight years ago,
You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought:
A Book for People with Any Life-Threatening Illness
—Including Life.

I was glad to have that book on hand.



In mid-March 1996
I was diagnosed as having
AIDS *and* cancer.

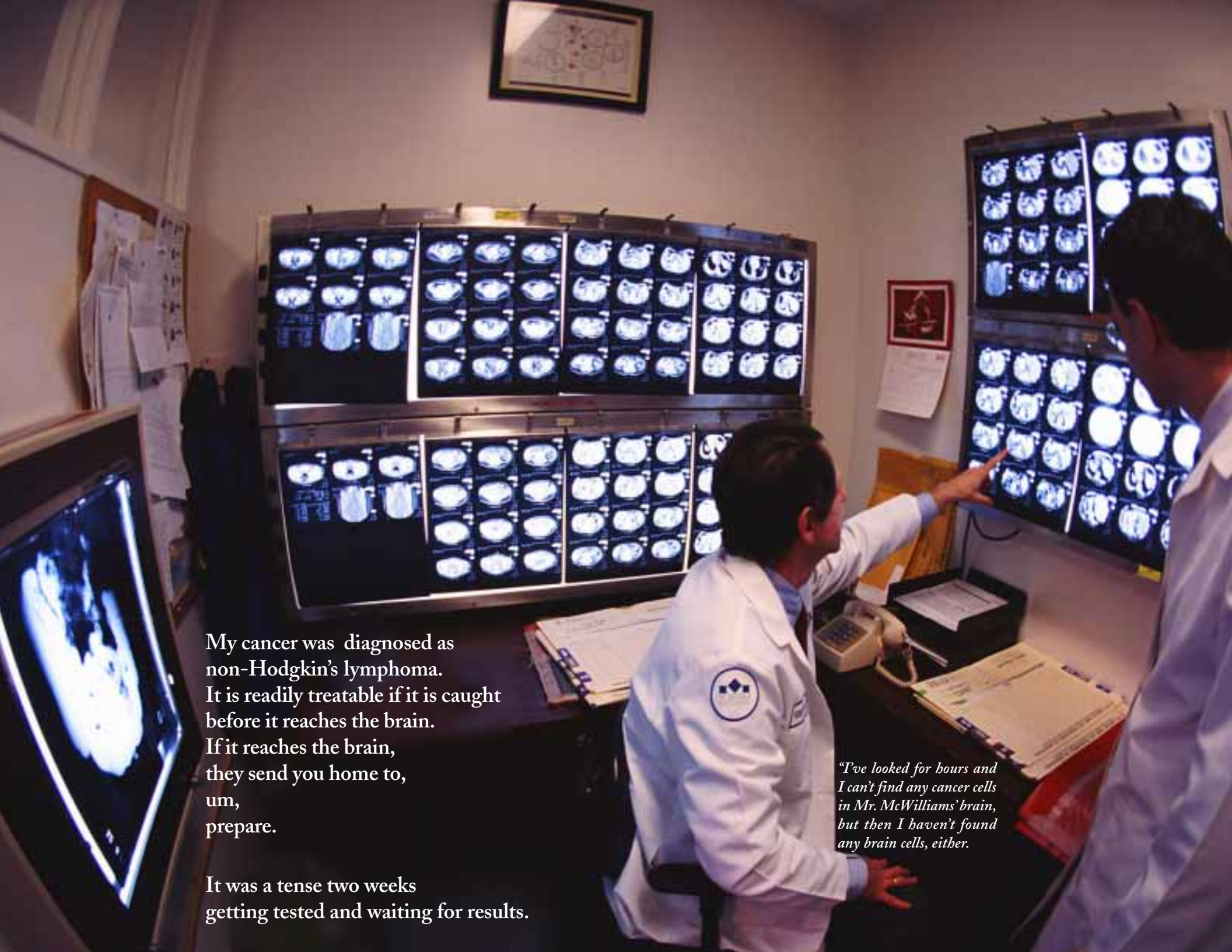
Beware the Ides of March, indeed.

I went in for a growth my neck.
It resembled the animated
pimple from hell in those
Clearasil commercials designed
to drive teenagers into fits
of embarrassed discretionary spending

It turned out to be a tumor.

I was lucky it was where it was.
It seems my body was riddled with tumors.
Like most people who die from cancer,
I had been ignoring the danger signs for months.

I was lucky enough to get a tumor on my neck.
If it weren't for this cosmetic embarrassment,
I'd be dead now.



My cancer was diagnosed as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It is readily treatable if it is caught before it reaches the brain. If it reaches the brain, they send you home to, um, prepare.

It was a tense two weeks getting tested and waiting for results.

"I've looked for hours and I can't find any cancer cells in Mr. McWilliams' brain, but then I haven't found any brain cells, either."



*“Oh, τωσω.
What is this stuff?”*

Fortunately (although there are decidedly mixed opinions on the subject of my longevity being a fortunate occurrence), the cancer had not yet reached my brain.

I threw myself into the hands of medical science for treatment.

Actually, I never went under the knife.

The cancer required chemotherapy (*chemo*, I discovered, is short for chemical) and, later, a little radiation (in which they sort of microwave the cancer cells away).

At the same time, the AIDS was treated with the miracle “three-drug” “magic cocktail” combination (two antivirals and a protease inhibitor) which, in March 1996, had just become available.

My initial response to treatment was good. Cancer and AIDS seemed on the way to being under control.

The problem now was nausea. Fourteen of the fifteen drugs I was taking to keep me alive had nausea as a side effect.

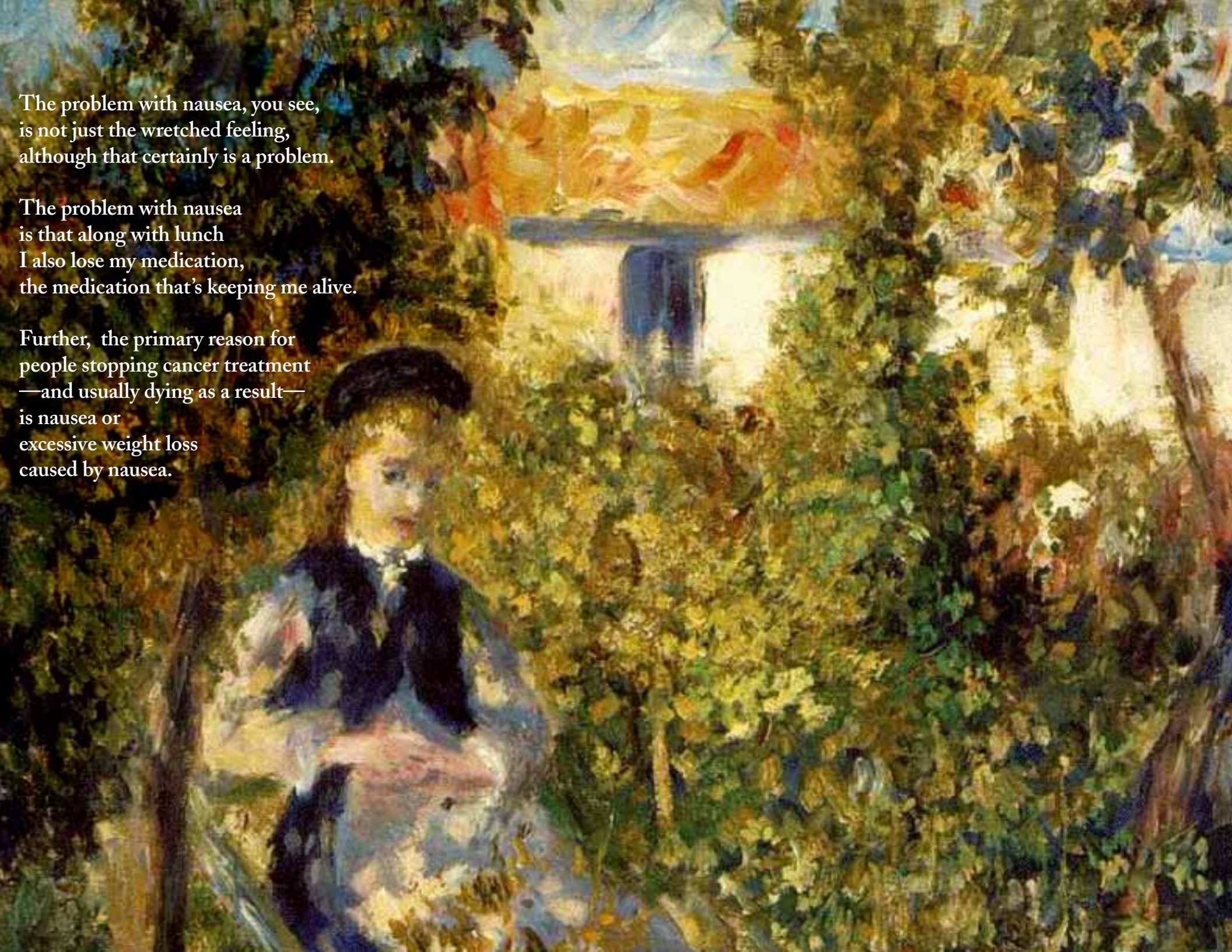
The fifteenth was an anti-nausea medication that wasn't working so well.



The problem with nausea, you see,
is not just the wretched feeling,
although that certainly is a problem.

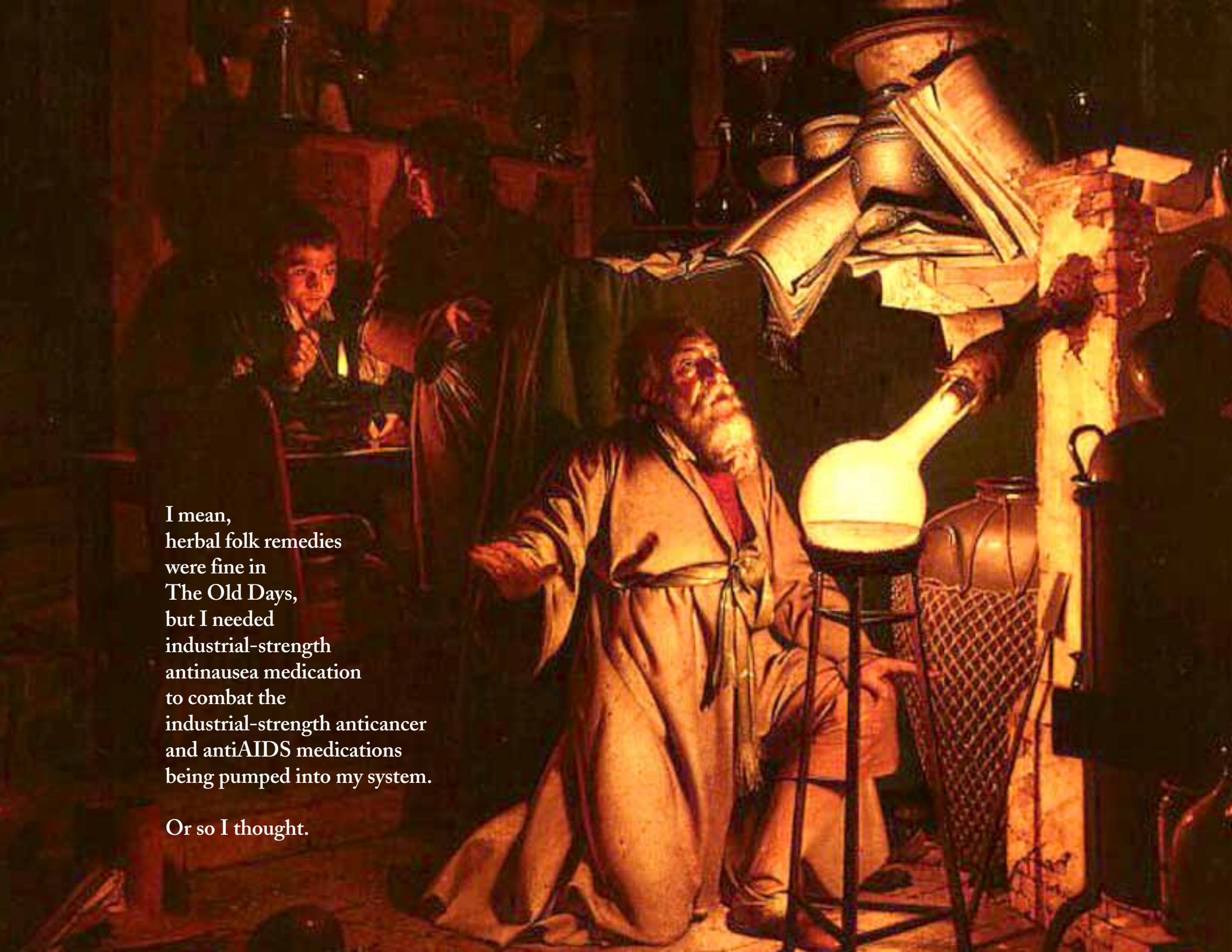
The problem with nausea
is that along with lunch
I also lose my medication,
the medication that's keeping me alive.

Further, the primary reason for
people stopping cancer treatment
—and usually dying as a result—
is nausea or
excessive weight loss
caused by nausea.






Frankly, I found it hard to believe that modern medical science (all those test tubes and machines that go, “Ping!”) didn’t have something better to treat nausea than inhaling the smoke from dried marijuana plants.



I mean,
herbal folk remedies
were fine in
The Old Days,
but I needed
industrial-strength
antinausea medication
to combat the
industrial-strength anticancer
and antiAIDS medications
being pumped into my system.

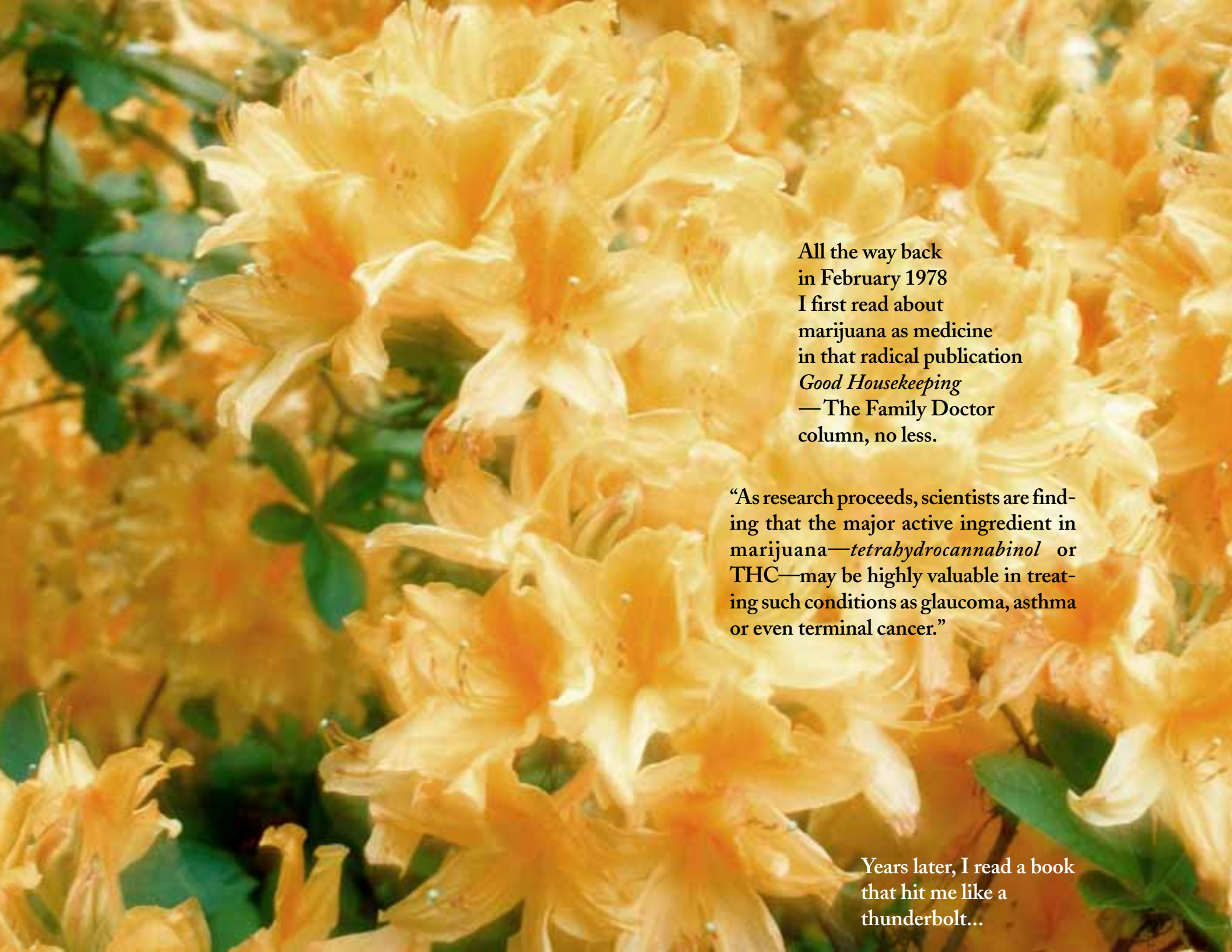
Or so I thought.



As it turns out,
even with the endless
medical miracles available today,
some people in this country,
lacking an effective antinausea medication,
must choose between
death by malnutrition or
death by cancer.

The words I had waited
a whole lifetime to hear
coming from a doctor,
“Eat as much as you can,”
fell on ears deafened by a stomach
not at all happy with life.

The way chemotherapy works is that it kills the fastest-growing cells in the body, whether they're good cells or bad. Certain cancer cells grow faster than most necessary body cells, so the cancer cells tend to die first. The cells that hold the hair in place, however, grow faster than most cancer cells, so these cells die, too. That's why people often lose their hair during chemotherapy—the cells holding in the hair die and we find ourselves roaming the wig department of K-Mart looking for blue light specials. The cells that line the stomach grow faster than most cancer cells, so chemotherapy kills them. Nausea is caused by the instant death of millions of cells in the stomach and, understandably, such nausea can be difficult to control.



All the way back
in February 1978
I first read about
marijuana as medicine
in that radical publication
Good Housekeeping
—The Family Doctor
column, no less.

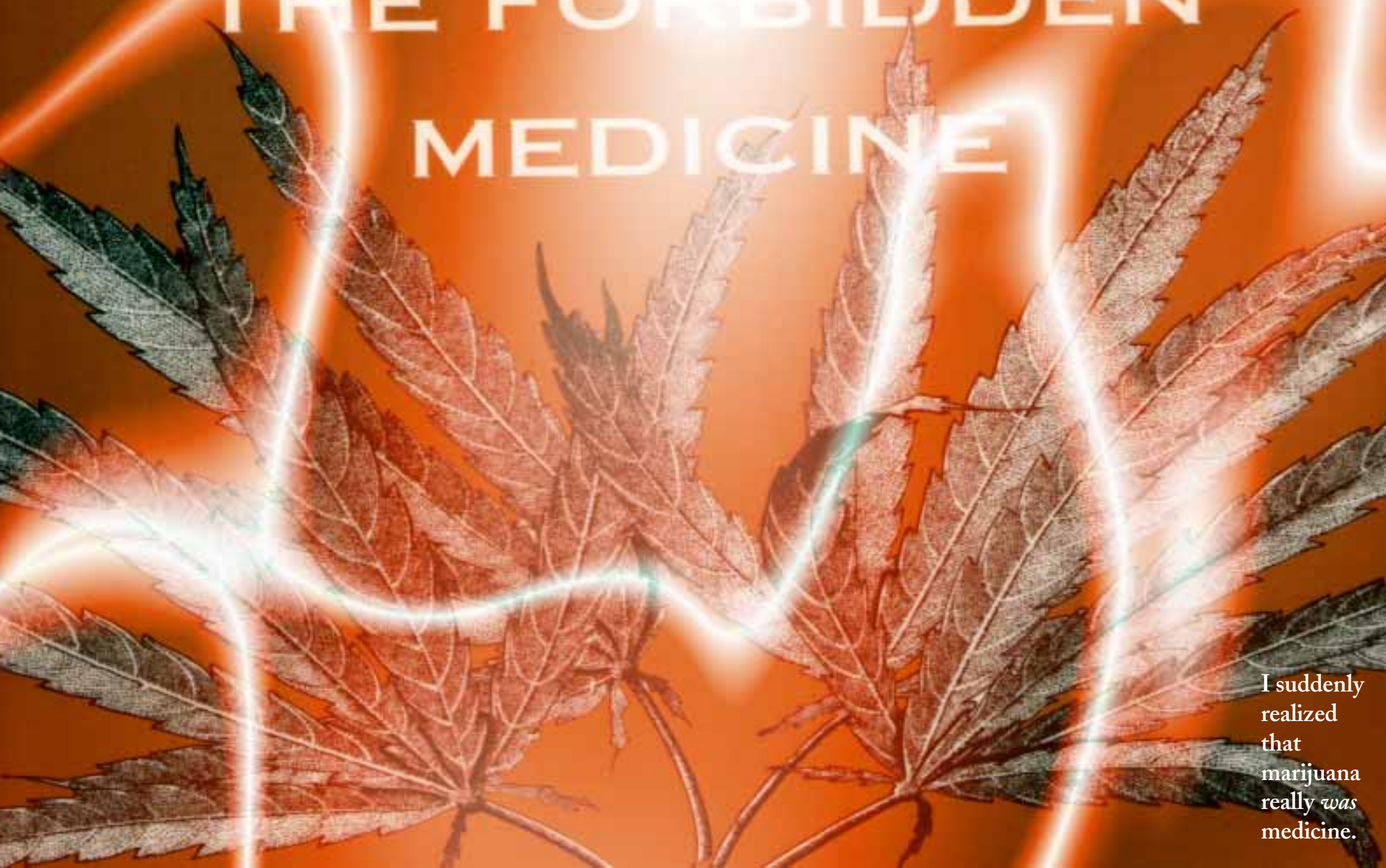
“As research proceeds, scientists are finding that the major active ingredient in marijuana—*tetrahydrocannabinol* or THC—may be highly valuable in treating such conditions as glaucoma, asthma or even terminal cancer.”

Years later, I read a book
that hit me like a
thunderbolt...

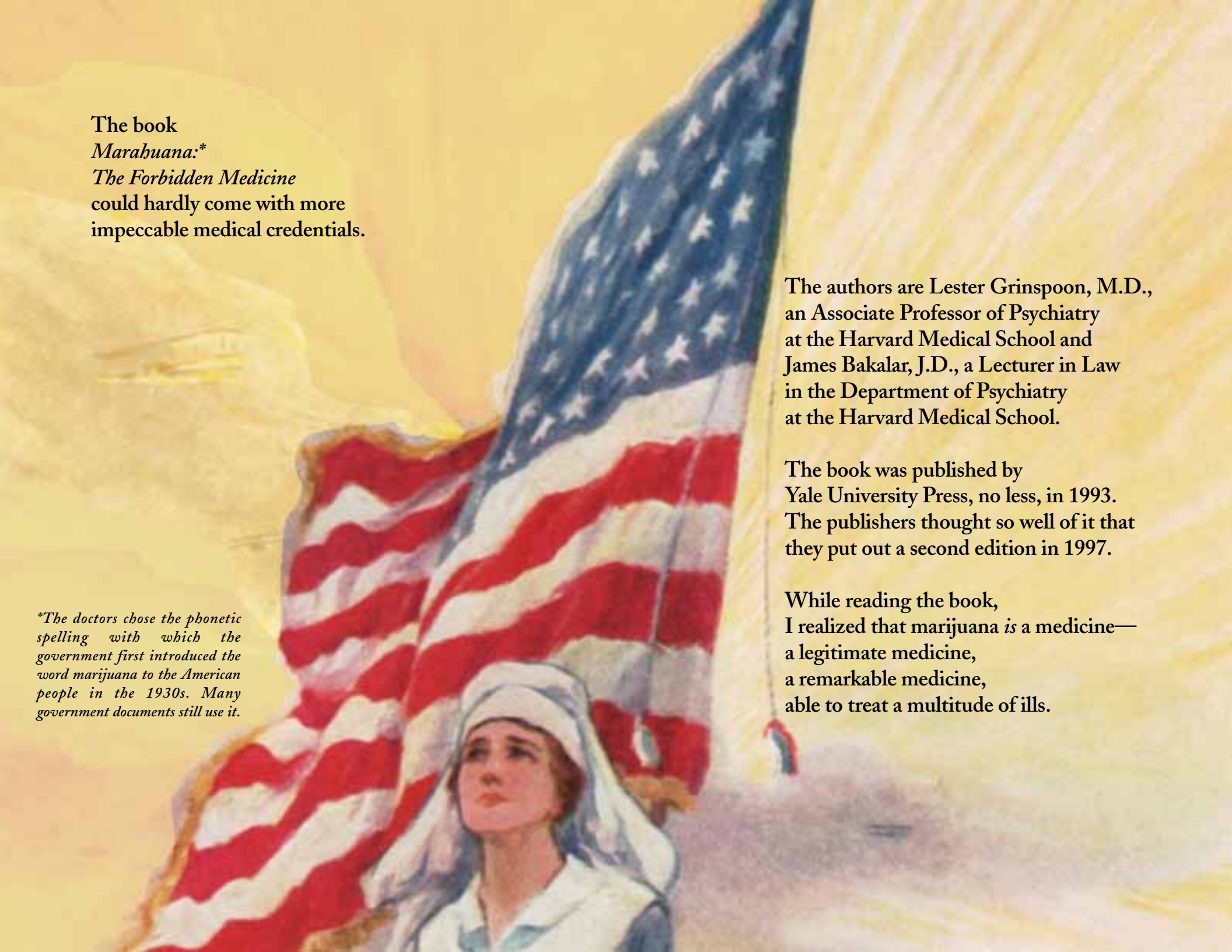
MARIJUANA

THE FORBIDDEN

MEDICINE



I suddenly realized that marijuana really *was* medicine.

The background of the entire page is a painting. It depicts a woman in the lower foreground, wearing a white headscarf and a light-colored top, looking upwards with a contemplative expression. Behind her, a large American flag with its stars and stripes is shown waving. The background is a bright, warm yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of hope and reflection.

The book

Marahuana.*

The Forbidden Medicine

could hardly come with more
impeccable medical credentials.

The authors are Lester Grinspoon, M.D.,
an Associate Professor of Psychiatry
at the Harvard Medical School and
James Bakalar, J.D., a Lecturer in Law
in the Department of Psychiatry
at the Harvard Medical School.

The book was published by
Yale University Press, no less, in 1993.
The publishers thought so well of it that
they put out a second edition in 1997.

While reading the book,
I realized that marijuana *is* a medicine—
a legitimate medicine,
a remarkable medicine,
able to treat a multitude of ills.

**The doctors chose the phonetic
spelling with which the
government first introduced the
word marijuana to the American
people in the 1930s. Many
government documents still use it.*

The chapter *Common Medical Uses* includes a section each on:

- chronic pain
- cancer chemotherapy (nausea, appetite loss)
- glaucoma
- epilepsy
- Multiple Sclerosis
- paraplegia and quadriplegia
- AIDS
- migraine
- rheumatic diseases
(osteoarthritis and ankylosing spondylitis)
- pruritus
- premenstrual syndrome
- menstrual cramps
- labor pains
- depression and other mood disorders

In the chapter *Less Common Medical Uses*, the doctors explain, “The following medical uses of cannabis are more speculative than those described in the previous chapter, but there is reason to believe they will eventually be accepted.”

These illnesses include asthma, insomnia, other forms of nausea, antimicrobial effects, topical anesthetic effects, dystonias, Alzheimer’s, adult attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia, systemic sclerosis (scleroderma), Chroné’s disease, diabetic gastroparesis, pseudotumor cerebri, tinnitus, violence (a fascinating section), posttraumatic stress disorder, phantom limb pain, and alcoholism and other addictions.

“The way I figure it, if nature can make something that looks like me, that can fly and lays eggs, it can make a plant that grows like a weed and helps human beings in many, many ways. This I can understand. What I can’t understand is why so many human beings hate this plant so much.”

“Marahuana: The Forbidden Medicine” is available at better bookstores, or by calling 202-483-5500.



The good doctors' web site is www.rxmarihuana.com.

So, I had a Harvard Medical School doctor
in a book published by Yale University Press
telling me medical marijuana was worth a try.

The next problem, of course,
was where to get marijuana.
I hadn't used,
much less purchased,
marijuana in decades.

Was I supposed to
go up to people
less than half my age
and say:

*"Hey, like
I'm trying to score
some weed, man."*

*"Wanna hear me rap?
I saw the best minds
of my generation..."*

Even in drag I looked like a narc.



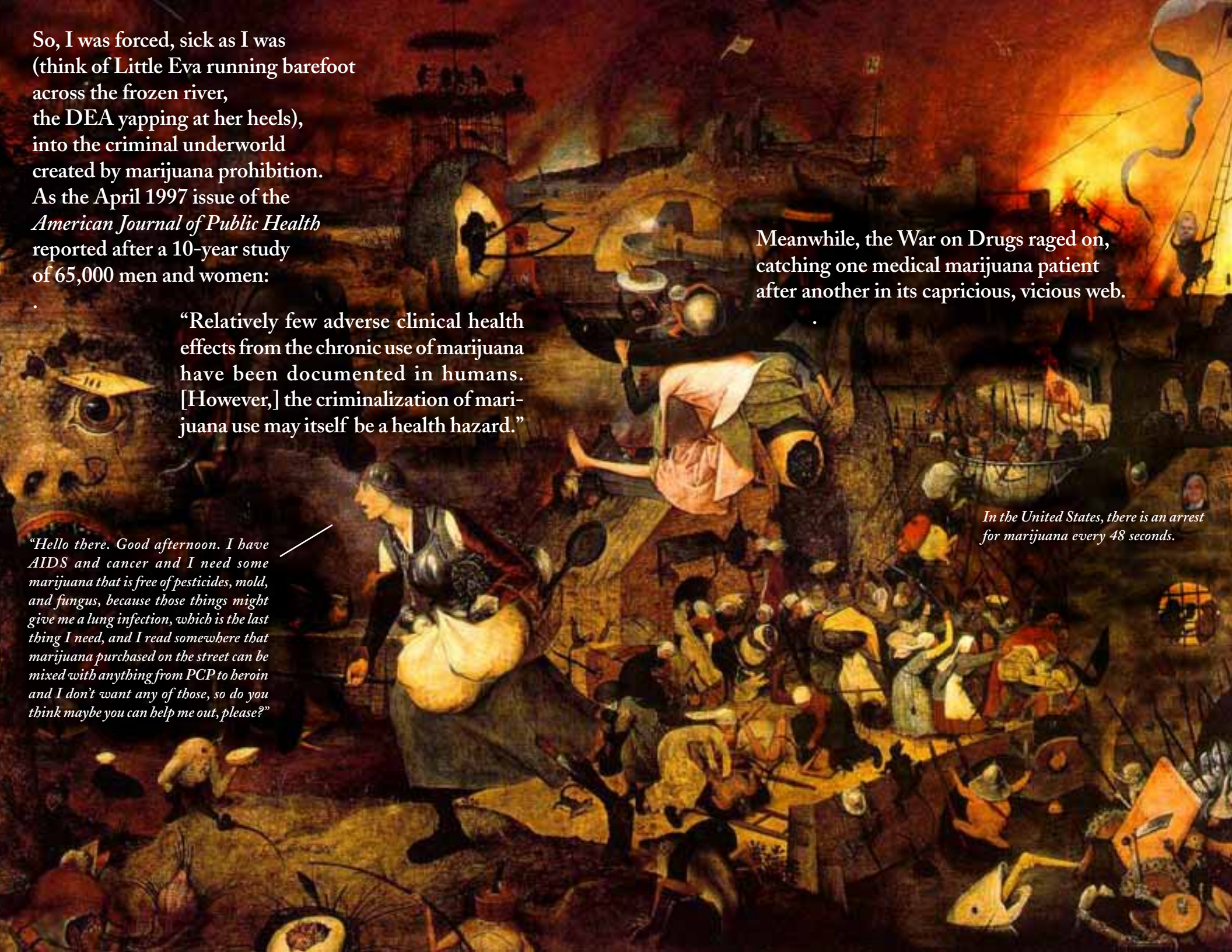
So, I was forced, sick as I was
(think of Little Eva running barefoot
across the frozen river,
the DEA yapping at her heels),
into the criminal underworld
created by marijuana prohibition.
As the April 1997 issue of the
American Journal of Public Health
reported after a 10-year study
of 65,000 men and women:

“Relatively few adverse clinical health
effects from the chronic use of marijuana
have been documented in humans.
[However,] the criminalization of mari-
juana use may itself be a health hazard.”

“Hello there. Good afternoon. I have
AIDS and cancer and I need some
marijuana that is free of pesticides, mold,
and fungus, because those things might
give me a lung infection, which is the last
thing I need, and I read somewhere that
marijuana purchased on the street can be
mixed with anything from PCP to heroin
and I don't want any of those, so do you
think maybe you can help me out, please?”

Meanwhile, the War on Drugs raged on,
catching one medical marijuana patient
after another in its capricious, vicious web.

*In the United States, there is an arrest
for marijuana every 48 seconds.*





So, I finally got some medical marijuana and I tried it and it worked.

It was miraculous.

Within seconds of the first toke*,
the nausea was gone,
vanished with the smoke
into the air.

With the second toke,
the anxiety and all the other
emotional and physical tensions
associated with nausea disappeared.

By the third toke,
visions of pasta trees beckoned:
“Come, eat!” these sirens sang
in the voice of my Italian mother,
“Just something to tide you over.”

Many an emergency trip to the bathroom
became a meandering raid on the kitchen.

With the doctor’s words,
“Eat as much as you can,”
urging me on,
I thought I had already died
and gone to Italian heaven.

**On the board of the California Medical Examiners is a very nice doctor
—from India, I believe—with the last name of Toke. When I testified before
the board about medical marijuana, I told Dr. Toke he may be the first
physician to have a medical procedure named after him since Dr. Heimlich.*



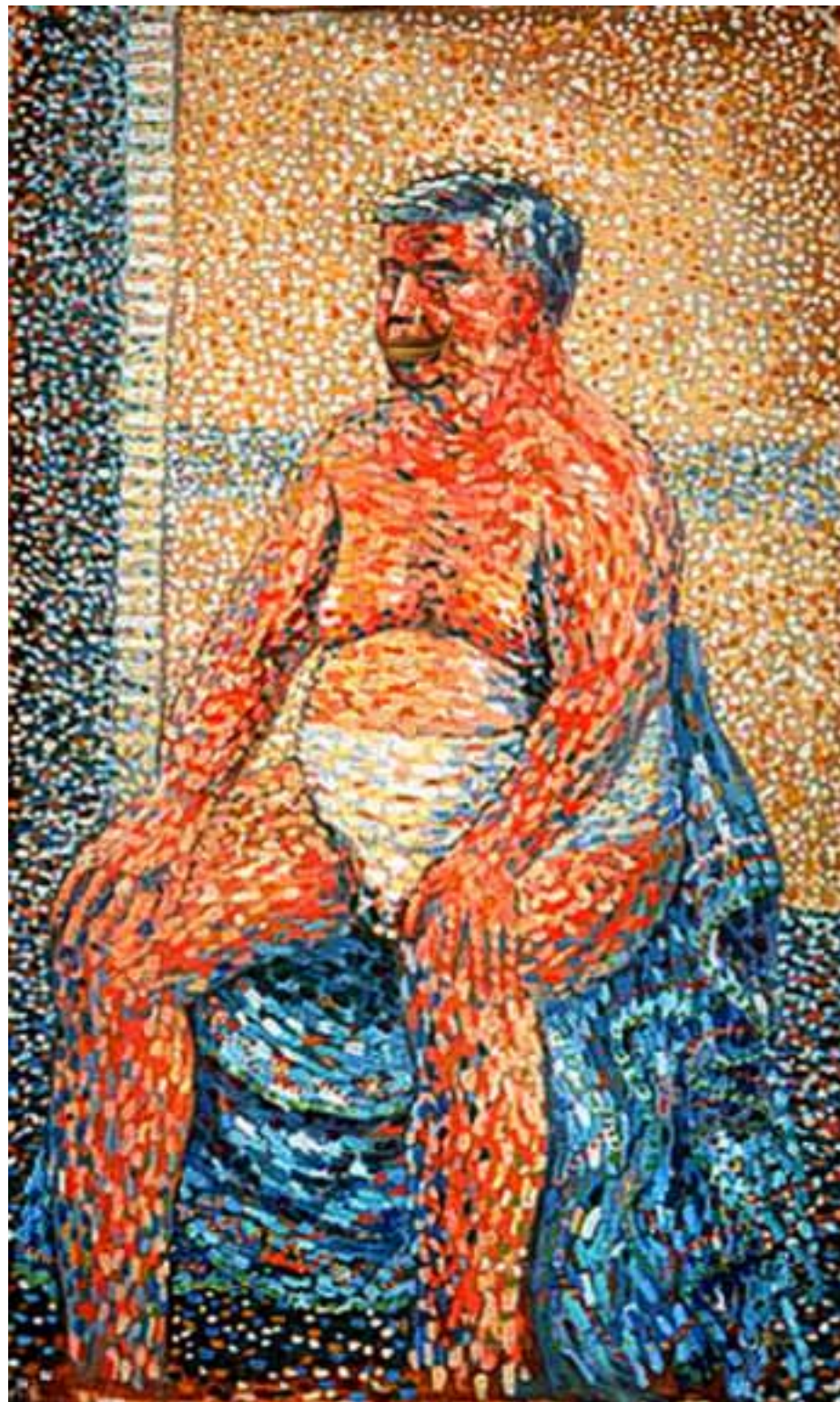
During chemotherapy,
the weekly weigh-ins
are usually solemn events:
based on how much weight
the patient has lost due to nausea,
the doctor decides whether or not
it's safe to continue the lifesaving treatment.

My weekly weigh-ins, by contrast,
were joyful, laugh-filled events slightly reminiscent
of the hog-weighing competitions at the state fair.
The more I weighed, the happier everybody was.
It was like Oprah Winfrey's weight-loss video
played backwards.

The Mixmasterpiece on your right is entitled "Sunday on the Pot with George." It is on loan from The Museum of Bad Art (MOBA), and sooner or later they are going to take it back again, whether they want to or not. Like many of the art world's Great Masterpieces, this painting by Anonymous (the elder) had unaccountably found its way into the Fine Arts section of the Boston Salvation Army. (The Sistine Chapel, I believe, was rediscovered at a Salvation Army in Rome in 1923.) Of the work, the Museum of Bad Art monograph expounds:

"This pointillist piece is curious for meticulous attention to fine detail, such as the stitching around the edge of the towel, in contrast to the almost careless disregard for the subject's feet."

Indeed. Bad art historians will note that I have added a subtle smile to George's otherwise dour expression. This is because the scene I described in the text above called for happy, not dour. So I made the change, just as the artist would have if slipped an extra buck. Before outrage crosses any bad art historian's brow, might I point out that the smile I used to brighten up George was taken from a digitalization of the Mona Lisa itself? The retouching was performed on a genuine computer with some of the finest pixels money can buy (imported from Japan), thus preserving the pointillistic artistic integrity of the original piece. As with so many bad things, MOBA has a book, a CD-ROM, and a home page. For book or CD-ROM, orders are accepted at 617-444-6757. The home page is at www.glyphs.com/moba. You see, I found humor central to my healing, laughter illuminating. Me on marijuana and George on Pot certainly helped.



A woman dressed as a nurse in a white uniform and cap is holding a wooden tray with several plates of food. On the tray, there is a carton of Vanilla Vitamin Milk, a plate of green peas, a plate of orange carrots, a plate of red velvet cake with white frosting, and a plate of mixed vegetables. The nurse has a name tag that reads "K. AMY" and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

"Red Jell-O again, Mr. McWilliams. Your favorite!"

Medical marijuana
also transformed the way
I viewed my
already wonderful
medical treatment...



"Here, let me light that for you."

A painting depicting a medical scene. A doctor with a mustache, wearing a white lab coat, is examining a young boy's chest with a stethoscope. The boy is shirtless and has a white bandage wrapped around his waist. A woman wearing a red top and a white headscarf with a floral pattern stands behind the boy, looking on with a concerned expression. The background is a simple, slightly textured wall with a framed picture hanging on it.

Medical Marijuana
made my weekly
chemotherapy
visit so enjoyable
—for me, at least.

*“Mr. McWilliams, why are you still here?
And why are you wearing that ridiculous babooshka?”*

“You said I’d lose my hair during chemotherapy.”

“You haven’t lost your hair yet.”

*“I’m practicing. Makes me look like Mother Thresa, don’t you think?
Or Arianna Huffington without makeup. Who is this boy?”*

“He is my next patient. I finished with you an hour ago.”

“So you want me to wait in the waiting room?”

“No, I want you to go home.”

*“But I came all this way to see you.
‘Over the river and through the woods...’”*

*“Stop singing, Mr. McWilliams.
You have already had your treatment.
You can go home now.”*

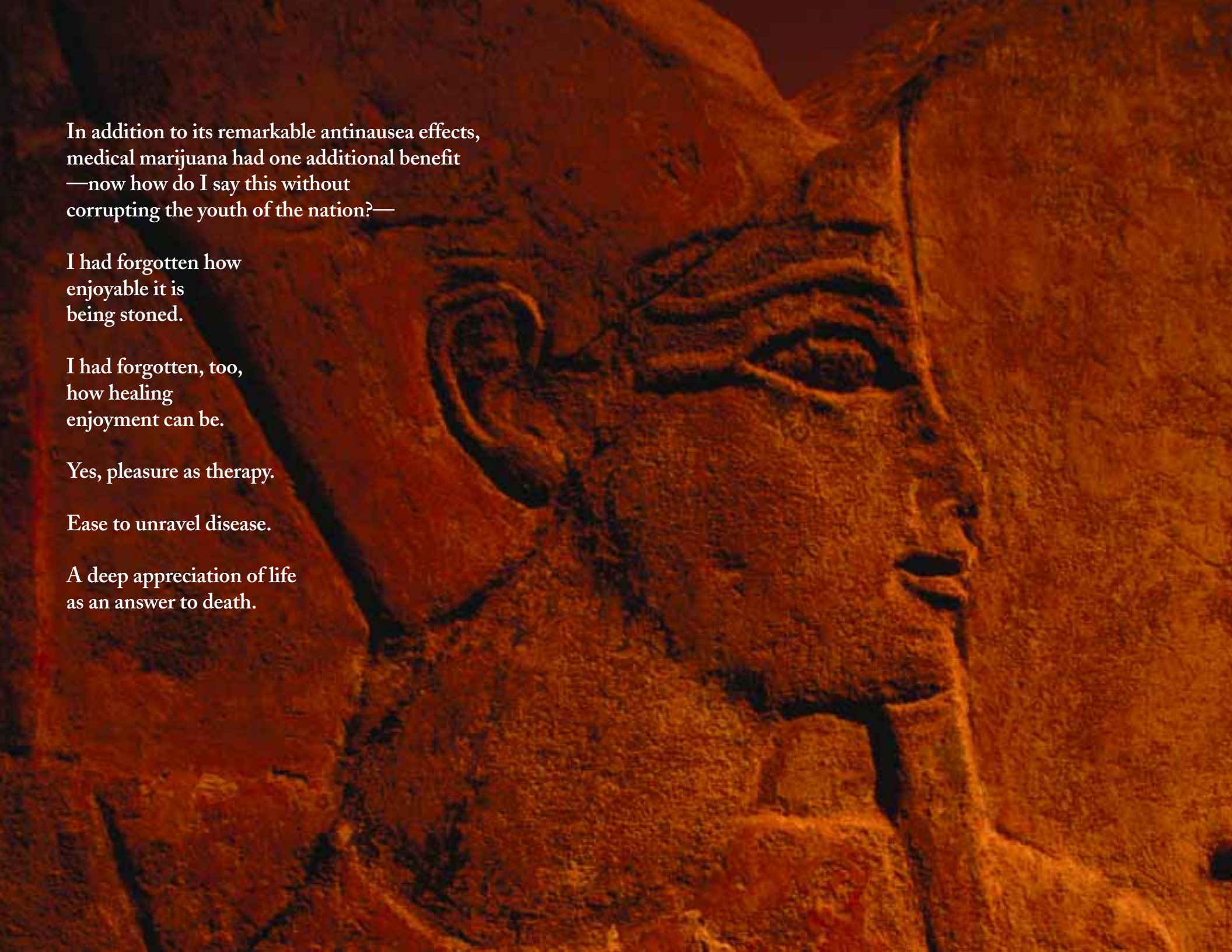
*“Oh, I see. Well, I’ll just wait
in the waiting room, then.”*

*“This successful use
of marijuana has
given many cancer
chemotherapy
patients a much
more positive
outlook on their
overall treatment.”*

*—DEA
Administrative
Law Judge
Francis L. Young*



*My mother worried I would become a pothead.
My brother worried that my sense of humor had
fallen to this level. I wasn't worried about a thing.*



In addition to its remarkable antinausea effects,
medical marijuana had one additional benefit
—now how do I say this without
corrupting the youth of the nation?—

I had forgotten how
enjoyable it is
being stoned.

I had forgotten, too,
how healing
enjoyment can be.

Yes, pleasure as therapy.

Ease to unravel disease.

A deep appreciation of life
as an answer to death.



*"In the depths of winter,
I finally learned that within me
there lay an invincible summer."*

—Albert Camus

I also discovered something that had been
cloud-hidden from me for years
—my creativity.



STEREO Remember when records came in stereo and mono?
Remember records?

This may sound strange coming from an old media whore such as myself, who self-published his first book the same month *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* hit the stores (June 1967) and has been at it ever since.

Medical marijuana put me back in touch with a creativity that is at the very core of my being. It had been a long time since I felt that, yes, there is a better world to be had —and it is there for the creating.




Rather than laying in bed and feeling miserable,
I was up at the computer and
creating my little heart out.
I began mixing
photographs
with text
and it
turned
into
this
book.



Modem line

Voice line



What would have been a harsh and barren time
turned into a flowering of creativity.

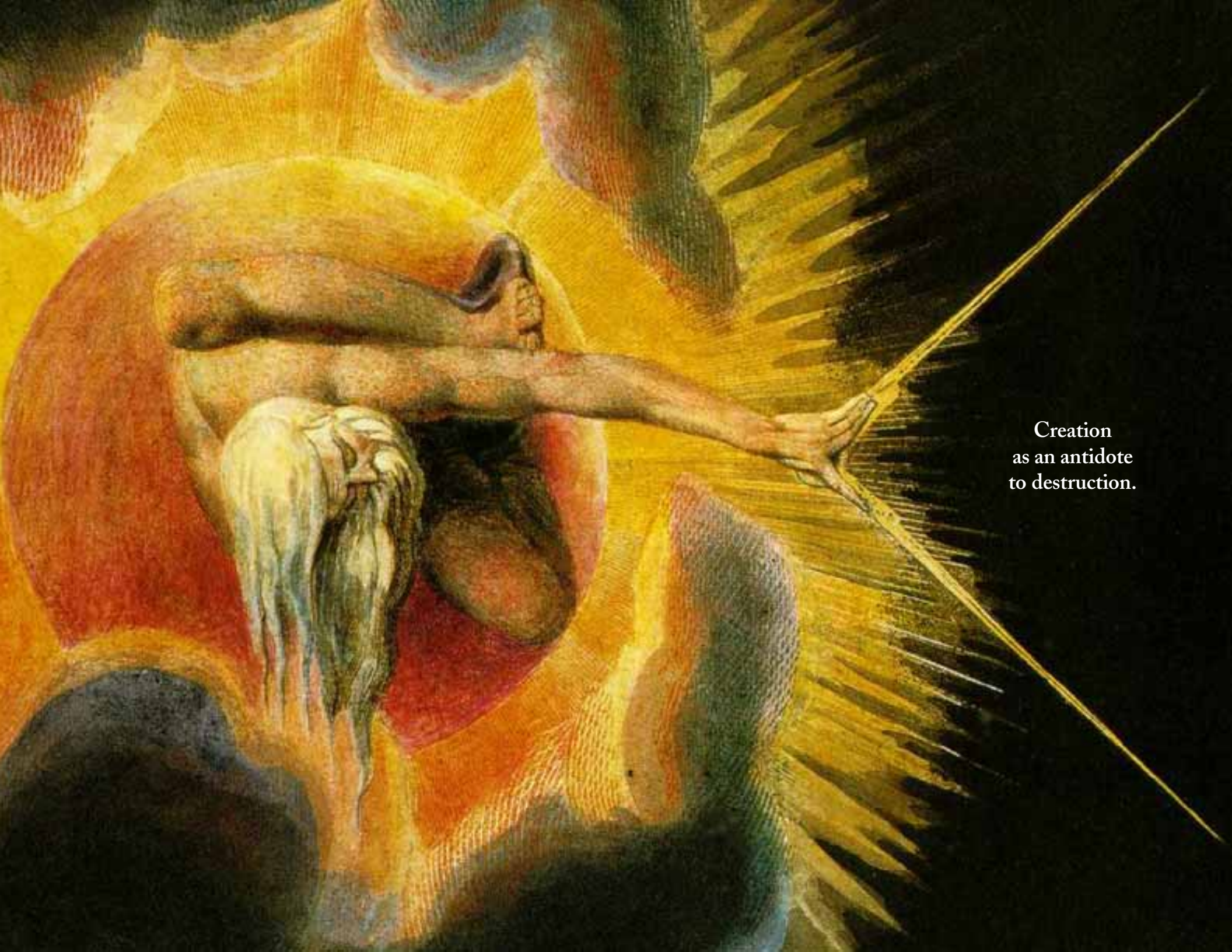
It wasn't so much
what I was creating
but *that* I was creating.

“Energy flowing through a system
acts to organize that system,”
the Whole Earth Catalog told us.

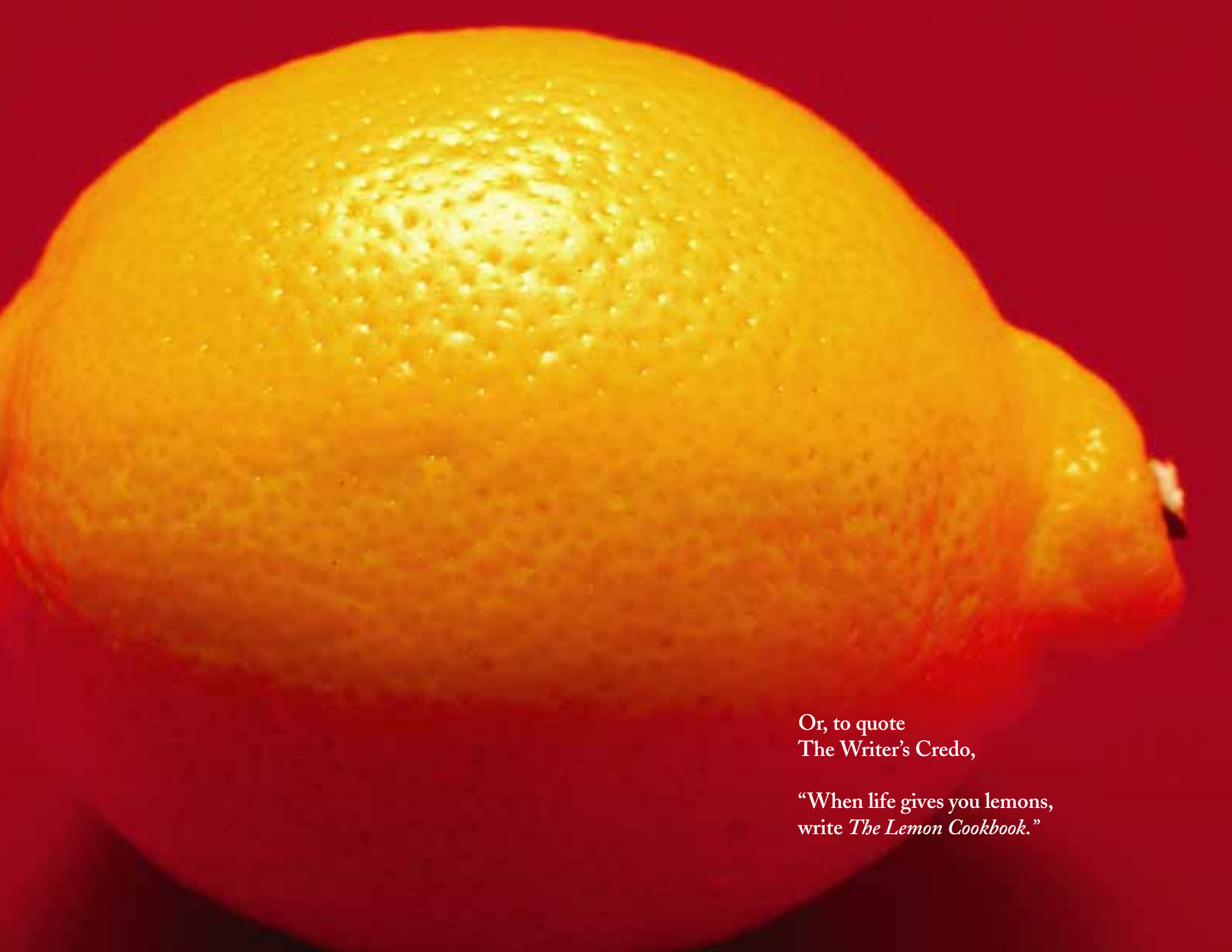
Creativity flowing through
a creative person's system
acts to heal that system.

With Armageddon
going on inside me,
I could use all the healing I could get.

— This reminds me: did I tell you I had to
give myself an injection every day?
And did I tell you about my spinal taps?



Creation
as an antidote
to destruction.



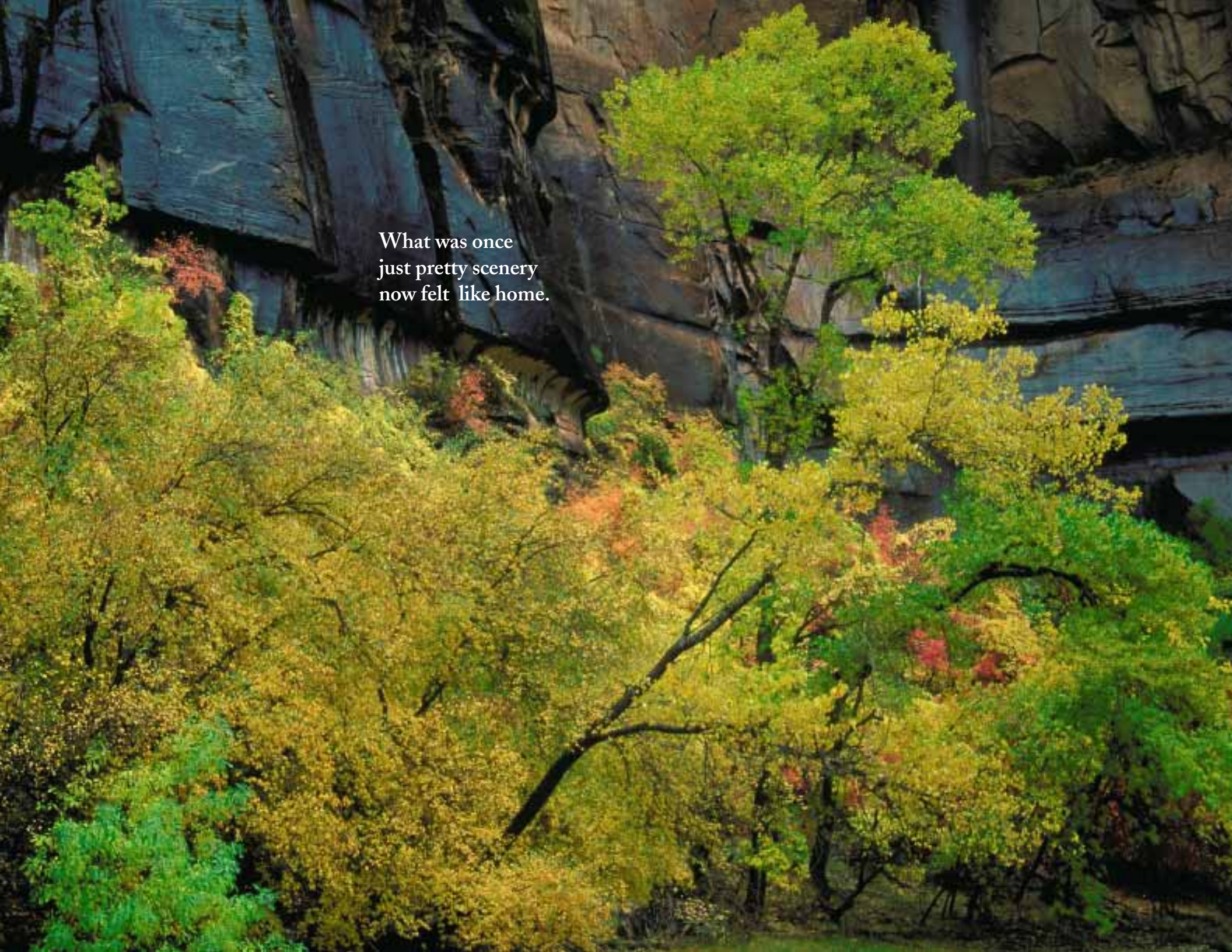
Or, to quote
The Writer's Credo,

“When life gives you lemons,
write *The Lemon Cookbook*.”




Another healing benefit
of medical marijuana
was that it opened my senses
to the beauty and majesty
of the natural world.


It seems altogether fitting and proper
that a plant would be the bearer of this message.



What was once
just pretty scenery
now felt like home.

A golden-hour landscape featuring a range of mountains on the left, a forested hillside in the foreground, and a rocky coastline with waves crashing against the shore. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow over the entire scene. The sky is a mix of soft yellow and orange, with some light clouds. The water is dark with white foam from the waves. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

I saw that I was
of nature,
not just
in it.

A dramatic landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a dense forest of evergreen trees is partially shrouded in mist. The middle ground features a deep valley with a lake, surrounded by steep, rocky mountains. The sky is filled with heavy, white clouds, with a bright light source breaking through, creating a strong contrast and illuminating the scene. The overall mood is awe-inspiring and majestic.

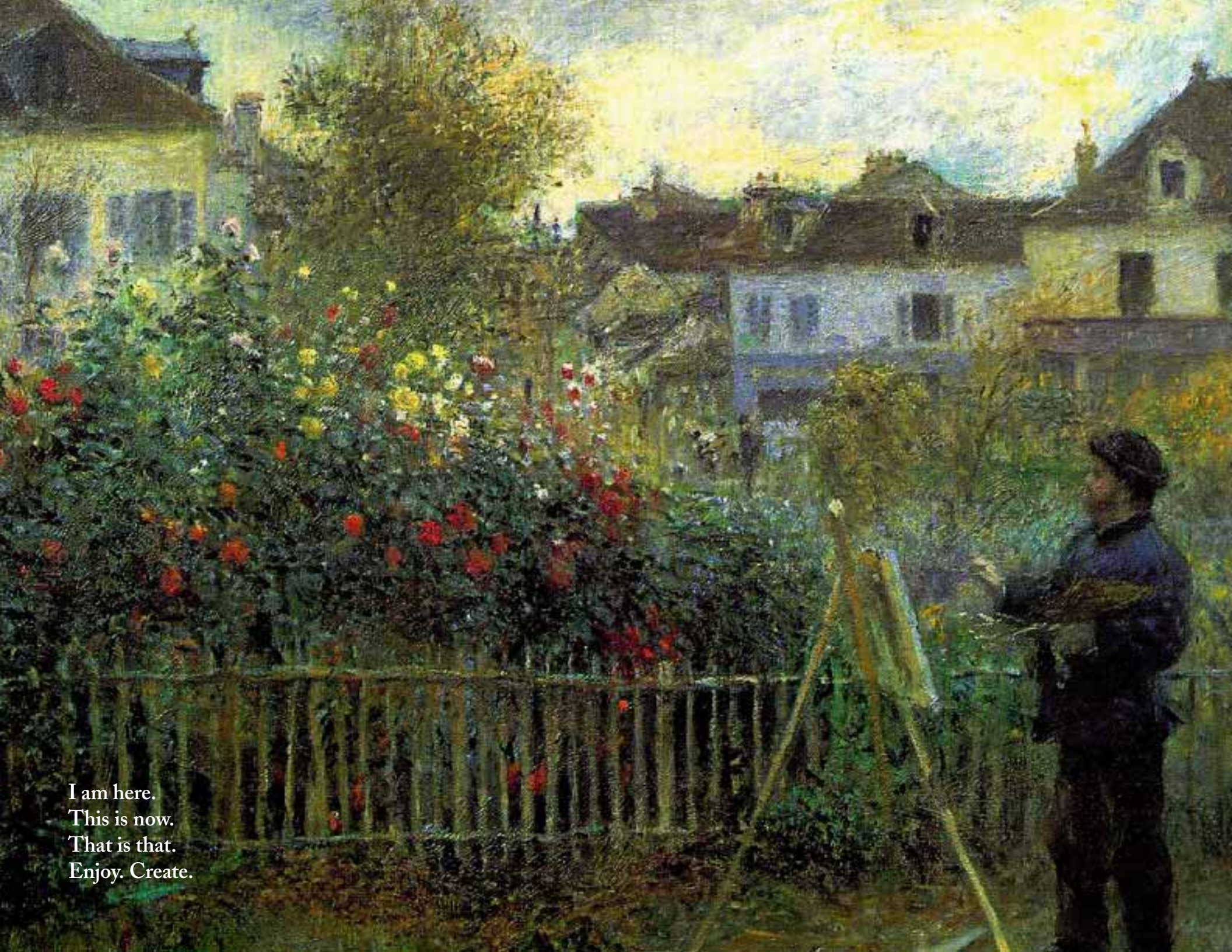
I stand in awe
at this
magnificent fluke
called life.

Who would have thought
my rainbow's end was
not in some celestial by and by,
but right in my own back yard?

Actual rainbow

My lemon tree

In other words,
men are from Earth,
women are from Earth,
John Gray is from the moon.



I am here.
This is now.
That is that.
Enjoy. Create.

I saw that when I'm enjoying the now, truly partaking of it, fully immersed in it, there is no fear of death, because death and fear are part of a system that believes in the there-and-then not the here-and-now.

That's the big joke marijuana smokers and people with life-threatening illness often laugh about. ("Something is happening here but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?")

As human beings, we gladly take hardship on ourselves thinking we have somewhere, somehow saved up all the pleasure we so nobly let pass by. Many people take a healthy helping of the bad ("I guess I'll clean out my closet, again"), thinking there's only so much good that's ever going to come their way.

They want to save it all for later.

The joke, you see, is that there is no "later."

Pleasure is like ice cream on a hot day. It doesn't keep. What pleasures we let go by—close moments with family and friends; the thrill of following a creative idea down the tunnels of our imagination like Alice following the rabbit down a hole; enjoying a sunset, in person or on television—don't keep.

If we don't partake of the pleasure offered to us within a reasonable amount of time, it's gone forever. This speck of life will never come again. By being forced to count my remaining moments, I learned that each moment is precious.

If we'd only stop working so hard at not enjoying life, we would all have a pretty good time.

Selfish? You bet. But I'll have plenty of time to be selfless in the cemetery. In fact, after my death, I promise to be completely selfless. Until that golden morn, I find that when I'm taking care of myself first I can help a lot more people than when a lot of people have to look after good-old self-sacrificing me.

But that's not worth thinking about now.


The moment calls. Here comes one. They come all the time, you know. Little moments of choice. The next moment's coming up, just ahead there. What do you think would be the most life-affirming choice, pleasure or dis-ease? Here comes another.

Your choice.

Tuning into the flow of the moment and then following it into the next moment is a lot like listening to jazz. Marijuana helps. I find that slowing down and pleasing up releases my emotional isometric energy so valiantly wasted trying to hold onto the spinning earth, fearing I might fall off.

I can relax and be happy, right now. Joy. True relaxation. The release of tension. The release of worry. The release of anger. The release of pain. Within that release lies health. Or at least the prospect of health. I very much wanted to live now that I knew how much fun it was to live at ease.

Wait a minute. This is the wrong format for this book, isn't it? I'm so sorry. I have no idea what went wrong. Obviously a major malfunction. Please ignore all this. Photos, please!

A close-up photograph of a cockatiel bird with white and grey feathers, perched on a stack of film slides. The bird is nibbling on the edge of the slides, which are stacked on a wooden surface. The background is dark and out of focus.

But those are just the conclusions I came to.
Marijuana did wonders for my journey
from the perpetual then to the eternal now.

Other people come to other conclusions
when they use marijuana as a therapeutic
“time out”
while confronting death and the meaning of life.
Some move to Rome to be closer to the Pope.
Others adopt a child* or plant a tree or write a book.

Some do just what they were doing before,
only appreciating it all a whole lot more.

**A fine feathered friend has joined my life. She's next to me now, nibbling on slides that otherwise might have ended up on this page. Pookliums was having so much fun I didn't want to disturb her, so I grabbed my digital camera, beep-beep (cameras don't click anymore) and here we are. Could this image perhaps be a metaphor for the death of film?*

That's Part One of *A Question of Compassion*.

Subjects covered in future parts include:

The risks of using medical marijuana.

How medical marijuana works.

The benefits of medical marijuana.

The history of medical marijuana.

How to use medical marijuana.

Your thoughts and corrections are most welcome.

Please e-mail me at:

compassion@mcwilliams.com

Thank you.

Enjoy,

Peter