

features

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## Smoke shops unfiltered

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If there is one thing I have learned during my four gutter-inducing years at this magical, manure-scented hayride of a university it's that there are just some habits way too expensive for me to even bother forming.

The Bo, with my old pal and martial arts B-movie extra, Billy Blanks, is one such habit that I thought I could handle. However, it wound up being one of the most wallet-draining habits of all time. Everything was fine and dandy at first: a kick here, a punch there, the occasional leg lift. But one day, Mr. Blanks decided to become a puppet for the fast food deli chain industry. He was soon using his puffy workout gloves to clench cold cut trays in ads for a sandwich chain that shall remain unnamed. Shortly after Mr. Blanks joined the ansholy army of the sandwich, chips and medium diet Coke regime, a new recruit was hired. This young soldier was a formerly obese male from Bloomington, Ind. and is a living, (heavily) breathing (and constantly sweating) example of how any typical cholesterol-stuffed American can lose weight and still enjoy a variety of seven hearty sandwiches containing only six grams of fat or less.

Everything had snowballed. It started with Tae Bo and that high-stepping idiot and ended with my insatiable hunger for foot-long analogo Caesar chicken sandwiches in freshly baked parmesan oregano bread, flavored with only a small drip of mildly sweet honey mustard. I was soon broke and had to turn to lesser habits. Smoking, I quickly learned was not such a habit.

In researching what I was to now call my new habit, I had to get the "inside scoop" on the places that supply smokers with their treasured goods. So in a typical journalistic fashion I sauntered about the city of Boston harassing and tossing lemon meringue pies at anyone one willing to provide me with information. The first stop was Sugar Daddy's in our very own Kenmore Square.

The outside of this small shop is moderately decorated with some psychedelic colors, a drawing of an alien and some signs stating that it is a "ethilla authorized dealer" and sells "hand-rolled cigars and humiders." In order to enter the shop, one must provide a valid ID with proof of age. Only those 18 and over are allowed in to see the graphic images of nudity, snuff and Gilbert Godfrey that wait inside. The shop is often cluttered with annoying college kids seeking to start a new expensive habit of their own. It is actually your typical, run-of-the-mill bong and cigar shop. The glass cases and counter tops are furnished like a room from a stoner's wet dream. Bong (waterpipe is a must-use term in the shop, unless you wish to guarantee your immediate expulsion from the store), pipes, hooks, filters, cigars, cigarettes, cloves, lighters, throwing knives, and other accessories cover every inch of space. There are even free authentic jumping beans for those who wish to watch a leaping Phaselus for many mind-altering hours on end.

I approached the gentleman (who I assume is the manager of the store) for a brief Q&A session, only to be denied the opportunity and offered a free lollipop from a selection of assorted Chupa Chups and Mofus Pops.

"Sorry, we don't speak to the press," he said.

A bit disappointed with Sugar Daddy's and suffering from a diabetic fit from the exceptionally sweet cream pop, I wanted to head somewhere that would lift my spirits without altering my brain chemistry. Nicotine was not the answer, so I sought a little clothes shopping would suit me well. I made a trip to Hempest on 207 Newbury Street. This



Cigars of slightly higher caliber than Phillie Blunts can be found at Gloucester Street Cigar Company. T.J. PATRICK/STAFF

little trip was special, not because I witnessed students feebly donate money to a talentless "street performer" whose mic was merely a shower-head on a stand; nor was it the "homeless" man on a bike who insisted I give him change because he could relate to me and my Yankees cap. No, this trip was special because I learned a little bit about Woody Harrelson's philosophy and religion.

This fashion boutique can be considered aptly named, since every item sold consists of hemp in one form or another. Items included clothes, rope, shoes, oils, candles, and various literatures on hemp. The prices for a short-sleeved men's shirt ranged from \$50 to \$78. Mostly everything was some sort of earth tone color, from the hemp-silk blend

head, and the "Hemp Manifesto: 101 ways that hemp can save our world" in my hand, I repeated ways 34 and 35 out loud to the denizens of Newbury Street — "Hemp can save our world because it's patriotic." On that note I went to the most American smoke shop I could think of, a place where my newly adapted habit would be accepted and respected as a symbol of class. I went to Cigar Masters, just a few yards away on 176 Newbury St.

Cigar Masters caters to the white collar American who laughs in the face of cancer and really thinks that George Burns is God. Self-titled, "Boston's First Cigar Cafe," this posh cigar bar site on the most American strip of Newbury Street — beside Ben & Jerry's and across

let paper had been stuck to my fist and dragging behind me for most of the day. Luckily, I had packed my infanthood blanket along for the ride. Amongst the plush leather sofas, shiny Oakwood chess tables, and glass display cases containing cigars even frequenters of this place couldn't afford, were people too self-important to even acknowledge the contributions Oingo Boingo has made to pop-music. For without Oingo Boingo, the town of Springfield may have never had a theme song. Many people here were simply sipping expensive coffee, cappuccino, tea, beer, or fine wine, and talking about stocks and their latest pointlessly expensive purchases. I decided to find out a little more about this place before I regurgitated the Italian BMT I had for lunch.

When asked if college students ever haunt this place, I was told, "No, thank God. Usually people between the ages of 28 to 45 inhabit this lounge and we usually sell about 250 cigars a day." Of the 250 cigars sold the least expensive go for \$3 and are usually of the Roller's Choice brand or flavored novelty cigars. The most expensive are Cobaltas for \$28.

A chronic smoker and smoker of the chronic once said, "Purchasing tobacco products may be a lot like setting your money on fire, however, purchasing food is kind of like showing Lincoln down your throat." Rest assured, I had finally settled on my habit and will be sticking to open-faced Lincoln sandwiches for the remainder of my life on this little planet of ours. For this reason I went to Kenmore to get a bit of mayonnaise and a bottle of Robitussin from Campus Convenience.

The bright red and white of CampCo is sorely missing the blue of Cigar Masters. Yet, it still has some of that all-American irony for all to enjoy. CampCo began selling its own collection of mid-range cigars sometime last year. A small glass case has cigars ranging from \$2 to \$10 all purchasable with the convenience points Mommy and Daddy paid for at the beginning of September. Among the names in the case are Macinudo and Cohiba. Whatever your case may be, I have decided that smoking just isn't for me, unless what I am smoking was packaged in a yellow and blue makes green zip lock bag for \$50 an eighth.

### "Cigar Masters caters to the white collar American who laughs in the face of cancer and really thinks that George Burns is God."

underwear to the Cambridge Soundworks system that was supplying the country blues grass that was the store's ambiance.

I asked one of the sales representatives about the benefits of hemp and he provided insight on such things as the pesticides used on cotton crops, the creation of paper, fuels, and how alternatives such as hemp and organic cotton provide little to no harmful environmental problems while replenishing the soil from which it comes. I told him I was nothing but non-biodegradable disposable boxers and he clenched his heart in fear for the world, and because he was suffering from heartburn due to his filet mignon dinner the night before.

When asked why a boutique would sell items such as waterpipes when they do not sell tobacco, he responded, "Those aren't waterpipes. They are hand-blown glass art. We had a demand for such art, and decided to support the artists involved." I have never considered a quadruple chamber acrylic waterpipe with three water filtration chambers and ice chamber art, but maybe I am just old-fashioned.

With some new knowledge in my

the street from the Wireless Resource. In an act of tremendously brilliant cruelty on the behalf of the Cigar Masters marketing team, a 100 percent Cuban male in his mid-40s sits outside the posh smoker's lounge. He sits on his poorly assembled wood chair and performs the tedious task of making cigars on his table of equally poor construction. Soccer moms and their children stand by and watch this man as a networking executive named Jim puffs on his Haashon's inside the bar, playing chess. Simply brilliant.

Typically this "cultural" activity is enough to draw a passerby into Cigar Master's place of business. Occasionally all it manages to receive are a few ignorant tourists and students taking snap shots as they admire the man's work. They pretend to have just witnessed something unique and foreign to them, much like seeing my roommate being seduced by an attractive member of the opposite sex.

The magnificent interior of this place sent goose bumps up the arms of the man who entered before me. I was feeling quite uncomfortable as well, for I had just realized a four-foot long piece of toi-