

If You Build It, They Will Come

Chico and Italia. For purposes of this article series, those are the names of the men who grow for the [Sisters of the Valley](#). I have to protect their anonymity because they don't know, yet, that I'm blogging about the business, and when they learn, they are going to have a collective cow.

I had never lived anywhere before where more than fifty percent of the population has a 'handle' in real life, a name called them by everyone, a name that isn't their birth name. I have never lived anywhere before where I've met people who have long histories together, shared decades of their lives together and still never know the birth name of the mate. (Or so they claim.) And that's why, as soon as I entered the cannabis business, I took a 'handle' as well. I used Kate because I had used that name to publish a [sex tip book](#) for men, once, co-authored with a world famous Madame. My name was actually Dutch, Katje van Dijk. (I was poor, three kids, dead-beat dad, it paid an advance...)

Kate became Sister Kate in the Autumn of 2011, when congress declared pizza a vegetable and, in response, I declared myself a nun. I was furious with Congress for filibustering so that they wouldn't have to listen to Michelle Obama talk about how unhealthy our children's school meals are ... and a week later, as if to flip her off completely, they convened to declare pizza a vegetable. I was outraged – enough to try to match their crazy. Conveniently for me, that same period was the dawn of the Occupy movement – which spoke to my heart – and gave me a place to go with my rage.

“You aren’t a real nun, are you?” asked Italia, over a year and a half ago, when he and his partner, Chico, were interviewing for the job as the Sisters’ [growers](#). “I’m real enough,” I replied, pushing my glasses down onto my nose and looking up at him over the rim (as a real nun would do). “I am just not a traditional nun.” I explained.

“Look,” I said, pushing my glasses back into position. “I don’t really have any interest in explaining this to both of you, but if we can’t get to grow-talk without it, I will spell it out. Are you both Catholic?” I asked and they both nodded (not a hard guess, since Italia’s ancestry is Italian and Chico’s Hispanic, hence, their handles). “So you must know that the Catholic nun is going extinct?” This time they shook their heads, ‘no, they didn’t know’.

So I explained to them that there are sixty thousand nuns left in America, the average age is eighty years old and they die at the rate of ten thousand a year. They do have new recruits, but the average age of the new recruit is seventy-eight, so it is a zero population growth situation. Essentially, in less than six years, they will be statistically extinct here in America.

You probably also know that Saint Scholastica, the very first nun ever, was self declared. She declared herself a nun because her brother, Saint Benedict, founded the first monastery and there was no room at the inn for the divine feminine. She did her own thing. And that’s all I’m doing.

“You’re bat-shit crazy.” Said Italia.

“You... you... go out like this?” asked Chico, pointing to a picture of me in my office in full black and white habit, holding the sign that says “Respect Existence or Expect Resistance”. Without waiting for me to answer, he said, “You shouldn’t be putting yourself out there like that if you are going to be a cannabis growing nun.” Early warnings that he was the worrier of the two.

“Are you celibate?” asked Italia.

Instead of answering his question directly, I continued my story. “Technically, nuns live a cloistered and prayerful life, so we are really Sisters. Sisters are in service to the people and through our medicine – and our activism for exoneration of the medicine – we are too.”

I continued, “We dedicate our lives to service, that’s one,” I said, ticking off my fingers. “The Sisters generally live together and pray together and in this case, the other sisters live in this town and we put prayer into our [medicine making](#), so that’s close enough until we get a farm. Nuns, or Sisters, are generally celibate and we are celibate during medicine-making moon cycles, so that’s three. Vow of poverty. That’s number four. Look around, we’ve all been put there anyway by free trade and five million manufacturing jobs going out of the country the last twenty years... so, check. I summarized: (1) In service to the poor, (2) living a humble existence, (3) cloistered (sometimes) (4) celibate (sometimes) and dressing the same. Yep, we meet all the requirements and that’s my sisterhood. Now, can we talk about growing? Because without cannabis, we can’t launch our business and without the business, we can’t grow the Sisterhood.”

“Other women are not going to be crazy enough to put on the habit... “ Italia started to say, but I interrupted him.

“Hah! You’re wrong!” I said, pointing back, once again, to the economy. “People today wear full parrot costumes in one hundred and five degree temperatures, waving a sign, for take home pay of about eight dollars an hour. The young girls will gladly wear the uniform for honorable work that pays fifteen dollars an hour. Because I want young nuns to join us, I have surveyed girls from eighteen to twenty-four at a number of college campuses, and I’ve done my research, and I’m telling you... if I build it, they will come.”

“You’re going to have a band of paid nuns?” asked Chico, skeptically.

“Why not?” I asked. “Saint Scholastica grew her order by giving food and shelter and medicine to all the women who came to her, the Catholic church only gets priests and nuns from abject poverty countries any more, so my version of ‘feeding and clothing’ is a fifteen dollar minimum wage job that provides at least thirty hours a week of solid, dependable employment.”

“Someone’s gonna shoot you.” Said Chico. And it made me smile. I’ve heard it before.

“Religions have been messing with women for thousands of years. All of the women-empowered spiritual movements were stamped on by men. All of the male-dominant, male-run religions won and the divine feminine lost (in the race of air space) and I think it’s because men are meaner than women. So

tell me, why should we trust you to grow us proper medicine?"

There was a pause in the air, as the thoughts of the men before me caught up with my words. Then, Italia said "You don't know it, but you are looking at the very best grower in the valley." As he said this, he unwrapped some Strawberry Diesel Coffin Cut and set the bud before me. I picked it up, inspected it, smelled it, and put it down. It didn't mean anything. That bud could have come from anywhere.

"Outdoor or indoor?" I asked. "That's from last year's fall outdoor harvest." Italia explained, while Chico just watched me.

"Seriously, Kate," said Italia, the man I had known for years. "Chico, here, has been growing for thirty years. He gets the highest grade product and the most output per plant. And his kolas are huge!"

"Yes, yes, yes, I've heard this all before. All the growers in the central valley think they are the best. All think they have the biggest kahonas, I mean, kolas. Words are cheap guys, and pardon me for not believing you." I let that hang in the air a second and then continued talking, peppering them with questions. Have you had this tested before? Do you know the average THC percentage for your crops? Do you do indoor, as well? Do you grow organic? Do you specialize in strains? Do you grow from seed or from clone?

A half hour later, we were back to talking about big kolas. Huge kolas. They made me look at pictures on their smart phones. They were expecting me to 'ooooh' and 'aaaaah', but I

didn't. It's a sad fact of reality that since coming to the Central Valley of California, I no longer believe anything anyone tells me.

"Let's do this, anyway," I proclaimed, after hearing all I needed to hear. "Because I know of no other way to see if you are full of shit or not... You grow one season for me and prove to me that you're as capable as you say, and then we will talk about a longer term deal."

The conversation took place in March of last year. By October, the Sisters harvested their best crop ever. The buds were beautiful, the Sister's portion of the harvest was enough to seed the launch of the product line, the bud and leaf tested out all organic, and the potency of the bud ranked over 22% THC – near the top of any bud potency scale. And you know what all that meant? It meant I had to start being nice to my growers. It turns out, they weren't exaggerating about the quality – nor the size – of their kolas.