

# THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

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## HAVE JOINT, WILL TRAVEL

*The Legend of Lexington's "Gateweed" Galbraith*

SLADE, KENTUCKY

**A** long about Mile Marker 34 on the Mountain Parkway, Lexington lawyer Gatewood Galbraith begins his closing argument.



His courtroom is a shaky Ford Thunderbird that reeks of marijuana. His jury is me. I've asked him about his most rewarding cases, and, as he drives, he is proudly reprising for me his courtroom performance in a federal drug trial in Illinois that ended with the acquittal of his client.

Mr. Galbraith often defends people facing drug charges. It's one such case, that of Rich Evans, which has Mr. Galbraith, the erstwhile gubernatorial candidate, back in the news in Northern Kentucky.

Mr. Evans, who runs the Cannabis Buyers Club in Covington, faces three counts of trafficking in marijuana within 1,000 yards of a school. He says he sells the drug only to the terminally ill, who use it to deaden the pain.

"I've been looking for a case to go after these marijuana laws," Mr. Galbraith says. "Northern Kentucky's the hardest spot in the state to do it. It's pretty bedrock up there. But at the same time, it might be where it's most brittle."

Gatewood Galbraith, marijuana champion, is an optimist. But mostly he is a fighter, and always he is confident. "I'm the best trial attorney in the state," he says.

That kind of hubris is why, as the lush, green mountains of Kentucky slide past his white Thunderbird, Mr. Galbraith is revisiting that federal trial from the 1980s. It was a trial, he says, in which he overcame great odds, won the day with a powerful closing argument and told off a prosecutor he shall henceforth refer to as a Nazi.

As he reprises that closing argument, the big T-bird begins to slow - 71 mph, 69 mph, 67 mph - until we are below the speed limit and listing ever so slightly toward the shoulder of the highway. Destiny calls Gatewood Galbraith, but his passion sometimes works against him.

The man who would be governor is no politician. Mr. Galbraith's populist stands, his tireless campaign for the legalization of marijuana and his seemingly bizarre behavior don't have major corporations or other deep-pocket donors rushing to funnel money into his campaigns.

"Politics is an addiction, and it's as expensive an addiction as any drug," he says.

Country singer Willie Nelson tried to help. After endorsing Mr. Galbraith for his stand on marijuana, The Pony-Tailed One held benefit concerts to raise money for the campaign.

One of Mr. Galbraith's prize possessions is a copy of High Times, the alternative magazine devoted to marijuana, with Mr. Nelson and Mr. Galbraith pictured on the cover.

Gateweed, as he is known in Lexington, has gotten a lot of mileage out of his call to legalize marijuana. Some of his fame is from politics, but most is from pot. His stand on marijuana isn't a schtick, though. He's passionate about it.

Hemp is the greatest medicine on Earth, he says. He thinks corporate America, that fascist state he so deplores, is responsible for pot's outlaw image. He blames the drug companies in particular.

"I'll fight 'em in the streets," he says. "I'll fight 'em physically if I have to."

A wadded-up white napkin stained orange with carrot juice lies on the edge of the driver's seat, nestled against Mr. Galbraith's leg.

A bottle of Visine lies on the console.

An un-smoked joint waits inside the console.

"I'm like Karl Malden," he says, grinning. "I never leave home without it."

We are on the Mountain Parkway headed east toward Salyersville in Eastern Kentucky, where Mr. Galbraith is due in court for the sentencing of a client.

"Pow!" he says, breaking into a broad grin and pumping his fist as he wraps up his closing argument from that Illinois case.

"I call that my 'Two-Red-Cents Defense.' "

With that, Gatewood Galbraith jams that big wingtip back down on the gas and we are off again, zipping past Mile Marker 38 and making the dashboard rattle. Mr. Galbraith is as pure Kentucky as the Bluegrass: steady, funny, polite, down-to-earth, as easy as the rolling hills and as gently up and down, too.

Sometimes he is as loud and intense as a Baptist preacher. Other times he is as quietly deferential as a Southern gentleman.

He is uncertain whether he will run for governor again. Right now he has other things on his mind, like the next race for mayor of Lexington. He's thinking of moving from Jessamine County to Fayette so he would be an eligible candidate, he says.

Mr. Galbraith is a strong believer in many conservative values: family, country, moral living, limited government. He has not had a drink in 25 years, he says.

He thinks American society has strayed morally because it has gotten away from its agrarian roots. "It teaches us lessons," he says of farming. "You don't work, you don't eat. You reap what you sow. There is a time and a season for all things.

"These are basic cyclical lessons. Now all that's changed.

"And people wonder where morality has gone."

The T-bird is shuddering so badly now that Mr. Galbraith's billfold keeps popping out of the console. He is baffled by this, but it's clear the car has seen better days.

On the way to the Magoffin County Courthouse, his car turns over 198,000 miles. He put 126,000 on it in just two years, as he campaigned for governor last election.

But even when he's not campaigning, he is on the road a lot. Half the cases he takes are outside Fayette County.

"I love traveling Kentucky," he says. Good thing. When Mr. Galbraith arrives in Salyersville, he discovers that the judge has continued his case without calling to tell him.

On the advice of his client, a man with a dark tan and dark shades who pays him on the courthouse steps in big, crisp bills, Mr. Galbraith stops for lunch before hitting the road back at the dining room of the Appalachia Motel.

He eats a bowl of beans, some cornbread and a bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwich, then gets back into the car and steers out onto the parkway. "Well, my official duties are over now," he says.

Then he pops open the ash tray, extracts the joint and fires it up with one click of a lighter, never doubting for one minute that when his day comes and the jury on Gatewood Galbraith finally returns, they will find him an innocent man.