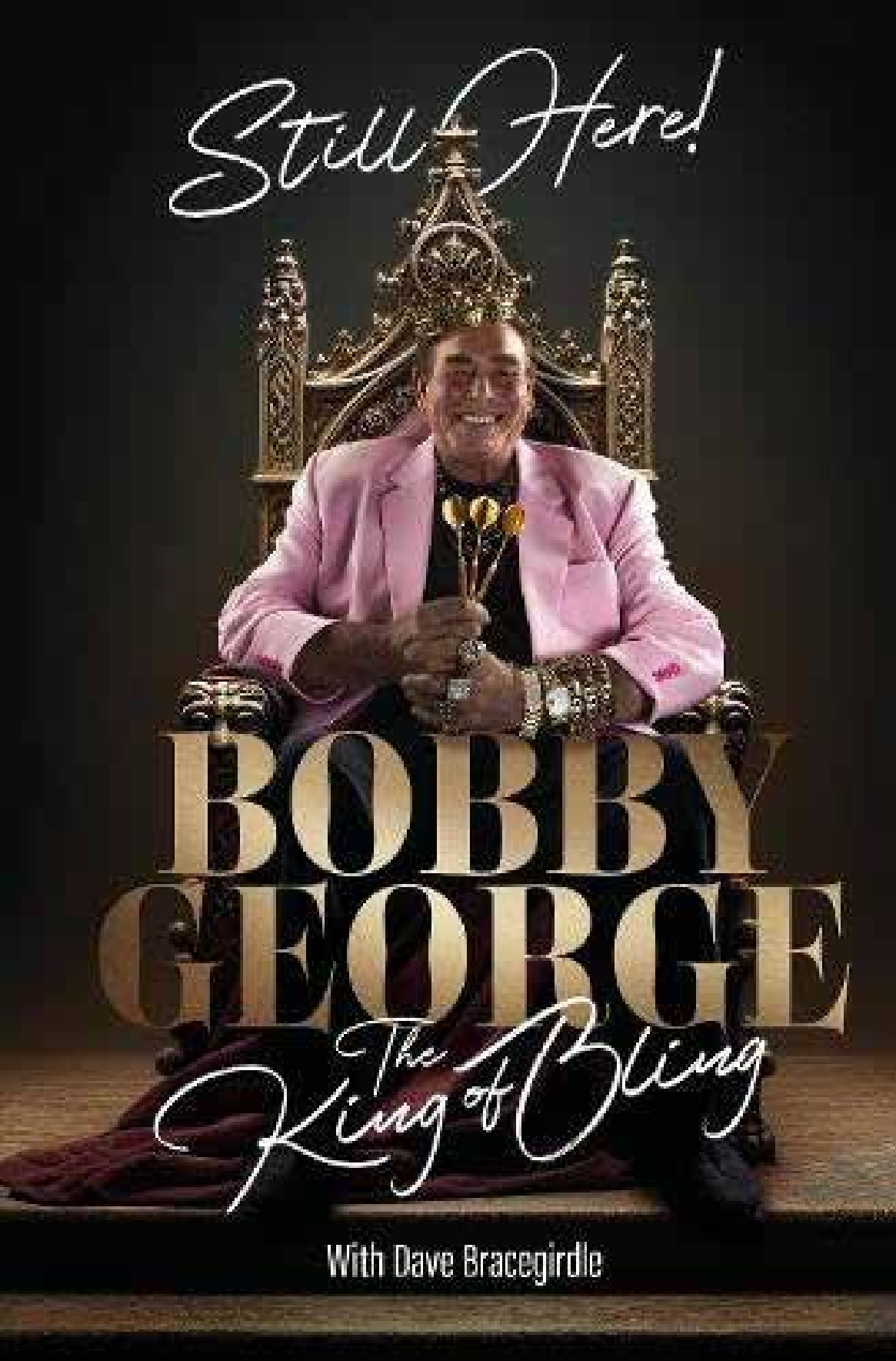


*Still Here!*

A man, Bobby George, is seated on an ornate, golden throne. He is wearing a bright pink blazer over a dark shirt. He is smiling and holding a small trophy with three golden spheres. He is also wearing several large, ornate watches and rings. The background is dark, and the floor is a light-colored wood.

# BOBBY GEORGE

*The King of Bling*

With Dave Bracegirdle

*Still Here!*

**BOBBY  
GEORGE**

*The King of Bling*

With Dave Bracegirdle



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## ICE CREAM BOBBY?

I'VE ALWAYS loved ice cream. Who doesn't? I've never really been keen on too many fancy desserts or puddings but offer me a bit of ice cream to round off a nice meal and I'm a happy old soul.

I'm sure the medics would say it's not that good for you but it's never done me any harm. Or hadn't, until I went on a television programme a few years ago. You may have seen it – *Gone To Pot: American Road Trip*. The clue was in the title really.

Having already done some television documentaries on how you can improve your life as a senior citizen, I thought this was going to be something similar when I got a phone call from Ros Edwards, a television talent producer, asking if I'd be interested in going to America for a few weeks to feature in a fact-finding show they were making for ITV.

'What's it all about?' I asked naively.

They told me it was about exploring the medical benefits of taking marijuana. In certain states in the USA it's legal to buy the stuff and for many people it has been proven to provide pain relief, control inflammation and help with all sorts of

ailments from dementia to cancer, arthritis to rheumatism and other general pains.

I wasn't into any hippy stuff back in my younger days. Working hard for a living, playing darts and enjoying a few beers was my lot. I certainly had never been interested in taking drugs. This was different, and I was intrigued to find out if it could do me any good, as I've lived in almost constant pain for much of the last 30 years. Those that have followed my darting career or read my first book *Bobby Dazzler, My Story* may know that I sustained a freak injury on stage, playing in the 1994 World Championships at the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green.

During my quarter-final match against Liverpool's Kevin Kenny I celebrated the winning of a leg by getting a little too excited. I leapt in the air and let out a celebratory roar, 'Yes, c'mon Bo.' [I've always called myself 'Bo' and Eric Bristow used to call me that as well.] As I landed, I felt a sharp pain in my back. Subsequently, having played my semi-final and final in absolute agony it transpired that I'd broken my back.

I was fortunate not to have been paralysed but I still required immediate surgery, which my £16,000 runners-up cheque helped to finance. Eight titanium screws, each around two inches long, were inserted into the base of my spine to help me on to the long road to recovery.

It's given me plenty of gip ever since and like a lot of people my age I'd love to roll back the years and wake up pain-free each day. I'd never taken marijuana before but had an open mind about it. Some say it's good, some bad but I felt I'd like to find

out for myself. Wasn't it John Lennon who said, 'Don't knock it until you've tried it'?

There are more and more states in America that are making it legal to use marijuana and whilst it's still outlawed over here, there's a growing feeling that those in need of pain relief should be able to access it.

Does it do any good? Well, that's what we were supposedly sent to try to find out.

Meeting up in San Francisco, I discovered my fellow travellers to be stars of stage and screen Linda Robson, Pam St Clement and Christopher Biggins, plus former footballer John Fashanu. I'd met Biggins and Linda before but didn't know Pam or John at all. Understandably, whilst breaking the ice with a couple of drinks after our long flight, the conversation quickly turned towards the reason for our trip.

At the start of the documentary we were described as 'five national treasures' but as we set out on our adventure we felt more like five gullible guinea pigs.

I sensed early on that four of us were very open-minded about trying the stuff for ourselves, whilst John was far more reticent. Ideally, I suppose, for a programme like that, you need a bit of Yin and Yang, differing views on whether the drug should be made more widely available. But it was pretty clear what we'd signed up for and I struggled to see what John was going to bring to the party with his reluctance.

Even if the marijuana didn't send us nutty as a fruitcake, our psychedelic minibus might do the job anyway. A 21st-century recreation of the Beatles' Magical Mystery Tour bus,

it wasn't something you could stare at for too long. We dubbed it the Magical Marijuana Mystery Tour.

It was clear that we needed some instruction on how to get hold of the drug, what to take and in what quantities. Chris, our tour guide and driver, explained the procedure to us and it couldn't have been any easier – maybe too easy, in fact. We went to see a local doctor – at least I assume it was a doctor. For all I know it could have been just a local spiv we were talking to, we honestly wouldn't have known any different.

He asked us about our respective conditions and I told him that I was on 16 tablets a day for pain relief after breaking my back, had shocking arthritis in my hips and had pain in my feet having had four toes removed. (I'll tell you about that later!)

Individually we all met the necessary 'criteria' and for a princely sum of \$100 each, we were issued with our prescriptions. It was so easy, it looked like a right con to me but that's what we were there for, so off we went to a dispensary, called The World of Weed, or something like that, to see if there was anything suitable for us to try.

A little bit like entering an airport, we had to take our passports with us and then were screened as we went through, just in case we had inadvertently forgotten to tell them we were carrying any weapons or anything on us.

Once we were in it was like a mini supermarket. The place was rammed full of stuff, all containing cannabis for medicinal purposes. You could buy anything you wanted: soap or cakes or biscuits or chocolate – and do you know, you can even buy



fanny cream? Instead of KY Jelly you can use some fanny cream that's got marijuana in it!

Linda, Pam and Biggins each emerged with a bag of goodies and I said I'd try some of theirs but Fash was far more reluctant. I still felt it was wrong to go on a programme like that and condemn something before you know what it does, but he didn't want to know.

In very small quantities the rest of us each tried some of the cake or chocolate but not to the extent we could form any sort of opinion on it.

A day or two later we were taken to a church and I wondered if we were going to see somebody baptised or something, but it was clearly used for other purposes these days. This bloke explained to me that his mate had bought the old church intending to convert it into apartments, but he'd instead been persuaded to leave it as somewhere that people could go in and smoke marijuana. The new owner had, surprisingly, agreed, as long as the community paid the rates and provided funds for any upkeep. So they did: they painted it up and made a very good job of it and made it into a place that served the whole community. There were loads of toys and rides where you could take the kids but there was also a place where you could go and relax and get stoned out of your fucking head if that was your thing.

He asked if I wanted a joint, so I said, 'Yeah, I'll have one with you.'

Fash was quick to jump in and offer his opinion. 'That's disgusting,' he said to me.

I asked him what he meant by that and he told me that I shouldn't be smoking in God's house because this was where people came to pray. He wasn't aware that the church was no longer used for religious purposes, so I told him and added, 'You don't have to come into a building to do that, you can pray to God in your toilet if you want to!'

'Ignore him, he's just a prick,' I said to the old bloke and had a couple of puffs with him, aware that we were becoming more and more exposed to the drug each day.

We were taken to loads of outlets that you could buy these goods from, including a vet's surgery that provided the same sort of stuff for animals. If your cat or dog or budgie or something had an ailment, cancer of the pancreas or skin cancer or whatever, they claimed that this stuff would help cure them.

Take your poorly racehorse down and, Bob's your uncle, give him a 'biscuit' and he'll be cured.

We moved down the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles and were taken to a club called Puff, Pass and Paint. Admission was \$39 for two hours and it was basically a warehouse where you get stoned, under the pretence that you're attending an art class. You all sit around this table and there's something in the middle to draw or paint – with us it was a cactus in a pot. Whilst you're busily being creative, a bong is being passed around the table and you all have a puff. A bong is a glass pipe filled with water. As you inhale, the cannabis smoke is filtered and cooled by the water. There's no smell to it and you don't know you're taking anything but it gets in

your head in about four seconds flat and you're suddenly high as a kite.

You're all there doing your painting, la di la, chatting and humming away, then suddenly BANG. You think you're producing a masterpiece and can't see how bad it all is.

When I was young I was quite good at painting and drawing and fancied going to art college but when the subject was raised with my dad all he said was, 'Who do you think you are, Leonardo da Vinci? Get to work!'

It was never mentioned again. Now, thousands of miles away, my talent with a paintbrush resurfaced and my cactus in a pot was acknowledged as the best, although most of us were well out of it by the time they came to judge our efforts.

They'd brought us a couple of little tumblers, one with red wine in and one half-filled with water, to wash our brushes in. I was so bad by the end that I actually got confused and mixed my tumblers up, washing my red paint brush out in the water and then drinking it, instead of the wine!

Pam St Clement loved it and got high as a kite; she got the giggles about it and couldn't stop laughing at me.

One of the cameramen had been filming me and kept egging me on. I asked him if he'd ever tried it and he said he'd briefly had a go in his college days, so I passed him the bong and told him to have a go. I gave him some wine as well and within a minute or two he was helpless and could no longer use the camera because he was giggling along with the rest of us. It was one of the funniest experiences I saw there and I was helplessly crying with laughter. It was a shame they didn't use

any footage of that in the series: maybe it was to save our blushes but it would have been hilarious to watch it back.

Friends have asked me what the experience felt like and I can only say that it was all very relaxing, the sort of feeling you get when you've had about four pints of lager.

Maybe you're so relaxed that you can't feel any pain but I sense that it does have some healing properties. I'm sure there are benefits to using it and certainly there are plenty of believers that swear by its usage. One fascinating story I remember from being there was when I was sat chatting to a lady who, like me, was getting on a bit in years. I asked her how long she had been taking the stuff.

'Not long,' she told me, then went on to say that her boys had often used it at home but she couldn't stand the smell so made them smoke it outside.

Then she told me that she'd got breast cancer and they had to remove one of her breasts. So, she went through all that trauma and then had all the treatment afterwards but after a few months it came back again on the other side. They told her to prepare for more surgery but she was adamant that she wasn't going to go through all that again.

'It was hellish and I couldn't face it again,' she told me. 'I couldn't handle it again, so thought if I pass away then I pass away.'

Someone suggested she try a herbal doctor and he put her on the marijuana. Do you know what? It got rid of it. She told me that she had her own little name for marijuana, she called it the Plant of Life. I always remembered her and her little pet

name and when I got back home I had some darts shirts made up with marijuana all over them in glitter and on the back it said The Plant of Life. It was just my little tribute to her but when I started wearing the shirts at darts exhibitions I think everyone thought I'd become a pothead. If I went for a quiet drink at the end of an evening I'd get guys sidling up to me at the bar – 'Want a joint, Bob?' – and then pressing one into my hand. Some nights, depending on where I was, there would be the offer of 14 or 15 a night.

I'd always refuse. 'No, no thanks,' I'd say, leaving them feeling very confused I'm sure.

A couple of days after we'd been to Puff, Pass and Paint, we were taken to the house of Nonna Marijuana for an experience I'll never forget. This 94-year-old lady incorporates marijuana into her cooking and we'd been invited around for dinner. She'd made two pans of gnocchi for us to try, one containing a small amount of marijuana butter and one without. Some of the others were keen to sample her added ingredient but I resisted, not being a big fan of gnocchi anyway.

When added to food, it can take up to two hours for marijuana to have any effect and Nonna mentioned that she'd only used a small amount in any case. We were having a nice evening, chatting away normally, and it was perfectly natural for me to accept when offered some ice cream for afters. I didn't know that it contained one of Nonna's special 'kicks', so happily allowed her to fill my bowl, putting five big scoops in. Biggins did the same and even Fash said he'd try a little bit.

It just tasted like vanilla and chocolate and I gobbled it down but by the time we were back on the coach, a couple of hours had passed and I began to feel awful. My head was spinning and I could sense that I was in a bit of trouble. Biggins was worse. He looked like a zombie and couldn't speak. Then it hit me properly. I was sick at the back of the bus and began to cry. Totally disorientated, I'd never experienced anything like it. It felt like being seasick 100 times over and like the worst hangover I'd ever had. I honestly thought I was going to die and don't remember anything else. Both Biggins and I had to be looked after by the production crew; we were in a bad way.

Unbeknown to me at the time, our accommodation for that evening was called the Madonna Inn, which was known for having themed rooms. Mine had a Flintstones-type theme to it, caves and stuff everywhere. So, when I woke up the next morning I didn't have a clue where I was, but just presumed I'd died and gone to heaven – or the other place. Blinking my way back into consciousness, I looked up and saw rocks all over the ceiling.

'Fucking hell, the plastering is a bit rough,' I said, out loud.

'Oh, Bobby's back.'

My head hurt as I moved and looked to my left. It was Linda.

I was struggling to make sense of anything at all but something needed addressing straight away. There was a big double bed. I was there and so was Linda.

'Erm, we didn't, did we?' I stammered.

'No,' she shrieked, 'we didn't!'

Bless her, Linda had been so concerned about my welfare, she was perched on the edge of my bed just making sure I was going to be alright.

Having a few puffs of marijuana can have a gentle side-effect to most people but when it's added to food you have to be extra careful. Very small quantities is the key and I'd learned a very sharp lesson and vowed there and then that I'd never eat it again.

I've not taken anything since but if I ever got to a point where I couldn't walk properly or was in so much pain with my back or from my feet that I felt it would do me some good, I'd happily take it, assuming it was prescribed, of course.

It's not a cure-all and it's not for everyone; it doesn't work for everybody, so it's not down to me to tell anyone to go ahead and take this or that and you'll be cured instantly. But for some people it does seem to have healing benefits.

One thing I would add is that the stuff we saw and were given in America was the proper stuff, nothing dodgy about it at all. It wasn't grown in someone's attic or back garden but grown under government conditions, without any pesticides or insecticides or anything. Produced in mass quantities, it was all grown in giant warehouses, with bright lights and all the proper fans. This stuff was the pure plant, nothing else.

I'm glad I went and did the documentary, even if it put me off ice cream for life – which, thankfully, it didn't.