

# Florida Accent

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**The Head Flower Child Is Bullish On Capitalism**





As Eddie Says,  
he's always  
been a  
money-making  
person.

—Staff Photos

Eddie Magedson imparts some selling savvy to one of his flower children.

# The Flower Child Entrepreneur

It was by accident that Eddie Magedson stumbled on a sure-fire way to make money: Put cut flowers on the street and people will buy them. Elementary.

By Judy Hamilton

Eddie Magedson says an honest mistake propelled him into the presidency of the nationwide, curbside flower business, "The Flower Children, Inc."

Eddie Magedson says he doesn't know how much money he's making from flowers, but he's planning to retire to a horse farm in four years.

Eddie Magedson says he keeps his hair long because it helps prove to people that you can't judge a book by its cover.

Eddie Magedson is 21 years old. You can call him Ed, but he still calls himself Eddie. His story is the saga of a middle-class kid who renounced the drug scene and turned on to capitalism.

It began some 17 years ago in Long Island, New York, when Eddie was

four years old. The toddler was given a bright shiny quarter whenever he helped clean up flower scraps on a carnation farm near the family home.

"I really liked money, you know, even as a little kid. I just liked to have it, you know," Magedson said during a recent weekend spent in Tampa overseeing his flower business. Eddie says "you know" a lot, like they do, you know, on radio call-in shows. He also says "wow" and "into" a lot, but that's all right by us, because we know he's into the youth scene.

With his Tiny Tim hairdo, huge leather satchel, quiet voice and bassett-hound eyes, he comes across like a hippie Candide, an innocent wandering among the worldly. Most people find him immensely likable, although a few seem to feel that he's

somehow threatening.

Magedson's dad was a waiter, his mother worked for Avis Rent-a-Car, and there were three kids and appearances to be kept up. "We were the kind of family who always lived in a nice house, but we were always stretching things to make ends meet, you know," Magedson recalled. "So, I've always been a money-making person because I liked to go to the movies."

When Eddie was 14, he bought himself a quarterhorse, with money he earned working nights in a Long Island bakery. He also worked as a helper to the veterinarian at the Roosevelt Raceway ("You see, I'm into horses . . .").

A vet was what he wanted to be, and so he enrolled in a two-year insti-

tution near Dallas, Tex., named El Centro College, with the idea of transferring later to Texas A & M University. He drove to Texas in a '65 Chevy, pulling in a van his horse stock — which by then had grown to two animals, a stud and a mare.

About this time, as Magedson rather delicately puts it, "drugs came into our culture," and the aspiring veterinarian explored the drug scene. Nowadays, Magedson is a hardworking member of several drug reform and counseling groups, and he says that a joint of marijuana in the evening, instead of the businessman's martini, is sufficient for him.

While at El Centro, Magedson leased a farm, with an option to buy. He had three roommates, and a job as the manager of a donut store.



But before the school year was finished, Magedson's parents both became sick, and he dropped out of college and flew back to Long Island. When the senior Magedsons recovered, Eddie returned to his horses, farm and roommates in Texas. He was greeted with bad news: his donut shop job had been filled, and his friends were all out of work also, and in danger of losing the farm.

The first afternoon Magedson was back in town, the foursome ventured into downtown Dallas for a lark. "Well, I had been taking a lot of agricultural courses," Eddie continued the story, "and a woman who owned a flower shop was in one of my classes.

"I was walking down the sidewalk that afternoon, feeling really lousy about everything, you know, when I passed her shop and she saw me. She asked me if I would watch her store while she ran an errand. A wholesaler was coming by to bring some flowers."

The wholesaler soon arrived, and young Eddie industriously set up a card table and opened the flower boxes right there on the sidewalk. "That's what I remembered the flower sellers did in San Francisco, and I thought that was the thing to

do. People started stopping and buying them right there on the street.

"When that lady came back, she was so hacked off at me that she really yelled at me. I'd sold 75 per cent of her flowers. She needed them for wedding stuff and things."

The irate florist, Magedson said, called the wholesaler, who said, in effect, "I told that dumb kid to take the flowers inside."

Ed Magedson, however, had not been working since he was a child without picking up some basic business savvy. He realized that he had stumbled on the better mousetrap: he put the flowers on the street, and people bought them. Simple.

Not so simple. "I asked that lady to let me sell some more flowers, to buy them from her and sell them across town. She said nothing doing. I didn't realize that right from the beginning florists fought street sales."

Magedson went back to his farm and told his friends how easy it was to sell cut flowers on the streets of downtown Dallas. They thought he was crazy.

Within the next few days, Magedson tried to get a supply of flowers so he could make sure he wasn't dreaming the first time. Every wholesaler in Dallas refused to sell to him,

Eddie said. Finally, he placed a long distance call to the carnation farm across the street from his parents' home, and the owners, old family friends, shipped him some flowers.

With that small supply of begged carnations, The Flower Children, Inc., was born. Within two weeks, Magedson said, there were 50 young people working for him selling flowers from street corners. The Dallas Times Herald saw the youths, and ran a story about Eddie, who was by then working around the clock setting up his flower business.

Magedson then turned around, and, resourcefully as usual, clipped the story to send to major flower growers around the country, to show that he was for real.

Some of the growers replied, and in three months, Magedson claimed, he was selling, on the streets of Dallas, more flowers than any wholesaler or retailer in the city.

Meanwhile, anti-flower children letters began to appear in the local press, with remarks like "Dallas is being invaded by hordes of hippies peddling flowers." But, an interesting thing was happening about that same time to the head hippie — drugs and the counter culture were becoming less and less exciting to him, and

for occasional complaints of the vendors walking in traffic with their wares.

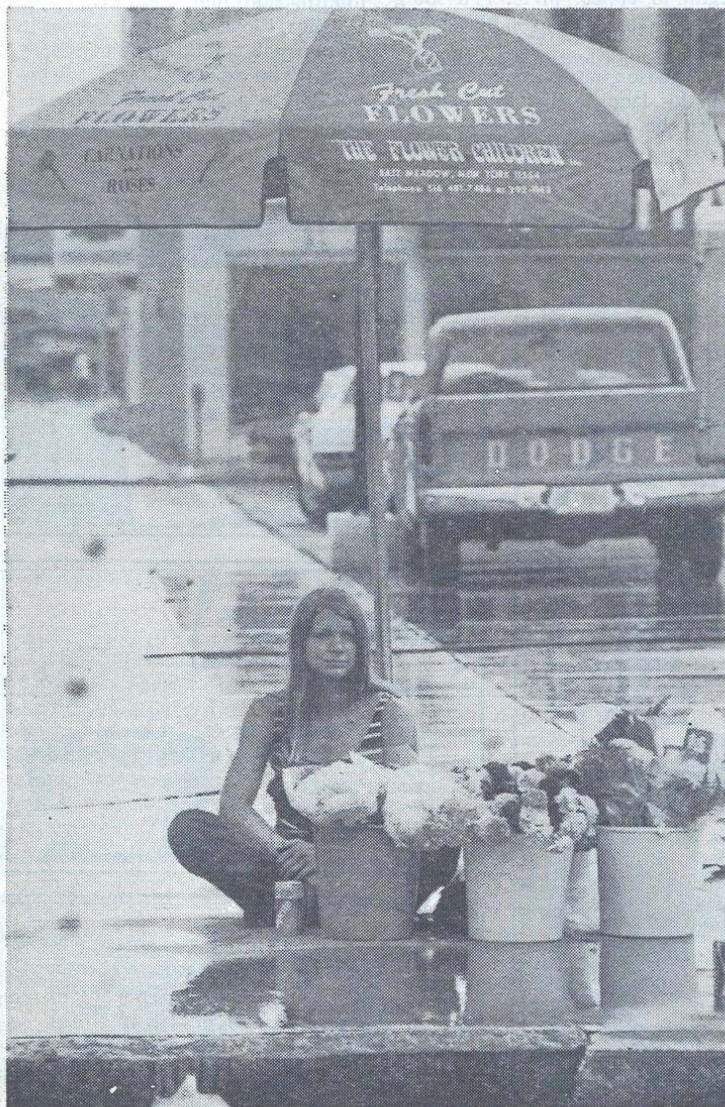
Magedson's flower children are recruited by word of mouth. Most of them, he says, "are really not into dope — they really are flower people." They are paid a percentage of what they sell each day, and the leftover flowers are distributed to hospitals.

The flower kingpin has now sharpened his operation, buying from 40 to 75 per cent of his cut flowers from one major grower near Denver, Colo. He often buys crop rights to the flowers, and he said that all his stems are greenhouse grown.

"I don't know where the rumor that my flowers are seconds got started," Magedson added indignantly. "My flowers have to be fresh, or they wouldn't survive standing out on the street corners. My flowers are quality flowers."

"Flower managers in the various cities order the flowers each day before 3 p.m., they're air-freighted and arrive ready for sale the next morning. The flower children pick up buckets of flowers and red and yellow shade umbrellas from a central depot. The one in Tampa is at the corner of North Boulevard and Columbus Drive.

"You see, usually the flowers in



A flower girl waits patiently among sweet smells and carbon monoxide for a sale on a rainy day.



A flower child shows his wares.

capitalism was becoming addictive.

It was not long, Magedson now says, before he forswore drugs, with the exception of a marijuana joint now and then. "When I started out, people kept accusing me of having kids selling dope on the streets along with flowers. That's not true at all. That's ridiculous. Just because a kid has long hair, people think he's into drugs. But you can't judge a book by its cover — the bag boy at Kash 'N Karry could be selling drugs on the side for all you know."

Now, Magedson's army of young flower sellers has expanded into as many as 50 cities (although flower operations close down in the northerly locations during the winter), including Tampa and St. Petersburg, Col. Allison Wainwright, right hand man to Tampa's police chief Babe Littleton, says that the flower operation here has a clean record, except

a florist shop go through the growers to the brokers to the wholesalers to the retailers, and they can be over a week old before they even get to you," Magedson said. "We've eliminated the middle steps."

It is just that very elimination of the middle man which has raised the wrath of the retail florists, who recently turned out in a flowery rage at a Tampa city council meeting to protest a proposed new peddler-of-cut-flowers-classification which would give Magedson a lower city license for moving peddlers. The barbs they threw at Magedson were hardly petal-like.

The flower children now operate under the "small business" city license classification, but Magedson had thought that a peddlers' license would be cheaper.

Jimmy Williams, spokesman for the florists, said "I think it's wrong to



consider lowering their license fee when all through the years, none of ours have been lowered." Council then turned around and moved to not only quash the special classification, but to tighten the rules for the stationary peddlers so that the licenses are non-transferrable, a move that would crimp the flower children, since many of them work for only a few days at a time.

The council also wants to make the property owners legally responsible for the flower sellers on their property.

Councilman Joe Chillura calls Magedson "an enterprising young man," and says "everything he wants to do makes sense — as long as he does it without creating unfair competition."

When pressed, Chillura says he can't determine if Magedson's elimination of the middleman is "unfair competition" to the florists. "Whether the (the florists') complaint is justified or not, I don't know. It's too complicated for me to determine, the councilman says. He then adds, "You've got to understand the position of council. We're elected to evaluate what's good for everybody."

Magedson said he has run into opposition from the retail florists in several other cities, but in no city has the legal red tape been as confusing and as quick to change with the winds as in Tampa. He has hired local young attorney Mike Shea to represent him before council.

Councilman Lee Duncan, who has

been quoted as saying Magedson's buckets of flowers are "ugly," says his main objection to the operation is that the young sellers sometimes walk in the streets with their wares, in violation of city law.

As for Eddie himself, Duncan had this to say: "What I've been opposed of he doesn't always tell the truth or make a falsehood of it."

The only council person to come out unabashedly in support of Magedson and the flower children is Joe Kotvas, who says "I think it's terrific. It beautifies the city and helps the ecology. This country is built on competition. This is free enterprise at its best. At least we know where these kids are."

Two of the council members interviewed by Accent suggested that we check the state sales tax office to determine if Magedson is meeting his tax obligations. "I'm not sure, but I think you'll find that Mr. Magedson has a little trouble in these areas," one of them said. But, according to E. N. Dickinson, the Tampa director of the State Sales Tax Division of the Department of Revenue, the flower man has paid the taxes "right from the start. He's just as prompt as he can be."

Magedson is not letting his difficulties with the Tampa city council or with any other governmental body get him down. "I think they've treated me nicely. They've always been very polite to me," he said. "We live in a democratic society and our world

is built on free enterprise. I am doing nothing but improving the business of the florists."

When Eddie appears before the council or similar groups, he always tries to tie his shoulder length hair into a pigtail at the nape of his neck. It looks neater that way, he explained, and, although he is willing to cut his hair or wear a suit and tie.

"I want to show them that I can do it; you know, I want to show them that a person can become a successful businessman and look anyway he wants to. You can't keep going around judging books by their cover."

The young businessman is devoting his considerable energy to improving and refining his business. He now offers carnations, roses and small bouquets in his outdoor flower stores. In some cities, the flower children now operate from behind tiered stands, or gaily painted pushcarts. Magedson wants to get the pushcarts into the planned downtown Tampa mall, but council has also been cool to that idea.

He is now launching a series of supermarket flower stands, which he calls "Flowerpots," a name he has registered with the U.S. patent office. The Flowerpots, which have already begun to appear in St. Petersburg Kash 'N Karry stores, will be self-service.

Magedson travels from city to city with his large leather briefcase, in which he keeps scrapbooks filled

with press clippings and pictures of the flower children in operation. Many of the color photos he takes himself, whenever he catches a spare moment. His mother, father and brother all work for him, his mother operating the flower children office from the family basement.

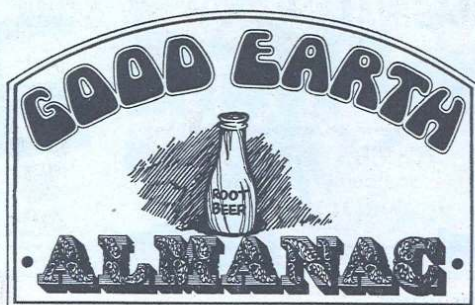
He pays himself, he said, no salary, but \$150 a week for expenses. Magedson is vague, however, about the amount of profit being made by Flower Children Inc. "I'm really not in it for the money. I just like the business. I'm fascinated by trying to make it work, you know."

"Sometimes I wake up in motel rooms and I ask myself what I'm doing there. There are a lot of pressures on me, but it's still fun."

Magedson is so involved in his flower business that he doesn't have time for much else. He still keeps one horse, a deep bronze beauty named "Shalimar," in New York. He will show pictures of her with almost parental pride, adding that he hopes to retire to a farm and breed horses by the time he is 25.

In fact, when Magedson arrived for his Accent interview, there was a small black, white and brown dog present, a dog who took a liking to the flower man and proceeded to robustly slurp him.

"Gee, I love animals. It's great to love animals and flowers and people, isn't it?" he exclaimed. And it is impossible to argue with a sentiment like that.



SOME OF THE LEAVES OF THE SASSAFRAS TREE ARE SHAPED LIKE A MITTEN, WITH ONLY ONE LOBE, AND SEARCHING FOR THE MITTENS IS LIKE SEARCHING FOR THE 4-LEAF CLOVER.



NATURAL FOODS

SASSAFRAS TEA WAS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL BY THE OLD TIMERS AS A SPRING TONIC TO "THIN THE BLOOD."

## SASSAFRAS--THE ROOT BEER TREE

ROOT BEER IS A FAVORITE DRINK WITH YOUNG AND OLD. IT COMES FROM THE SASSAFRAS ROOT AND WAS ONCE A FAVORED BEVERAGE WITH PIONEERS.

SASSAFRAS IS FOUND THROUGHOUT MUCH OF NORTH AMERICA AND IS AN EASILY RECOGNIZED PLANT. IT IS A SMALL SCRUBBY TREE WITH SMALL YELLOWISH GREEN FLOWERS AND WIDE 2 OR 3 LOBED LEAVES. THE CRUSHED LEAVES, TWIGGS OR ROOTS HAVE AN UNMISTAKABLE ODOR.

THE TREES ARE FOUND IN CLEARINGS IN OPEN WOODS AND AROUND THE EDGES OF TIMBER.

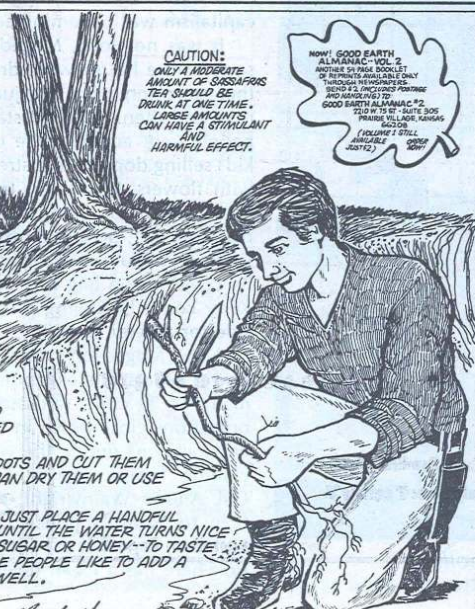
THE EASIEST WAY TO USE SASSAFRAS IS TO DIG THE ROOTS. USE ONLY THE SMALLER ONES, BECAUSE THE LARGER ONES HAVE A COARSE COVERING WHICH MUST BE SCRAPPED AWAY. SASSAFRAS IS USUALLY BEST GATHERED EARLY IN THE SPRING.

CLEAN AND WASH THE ROOTS AND CUT THEM INTO SHORT LENGTHS. YOU CAN DRY THEM OR USE THEM FRESH.

TO MAKE SASSAFRAS TEA, JUST PLACE A HANDFUL OF ROOTS IN WATER AND BOIL UNTIL THE WATER TURNS NICE AND RED. ADD SWEETENING--SUGAR OR HONEY--TO TASTE, AND DRINK HOT OR COLD. SOME PEOPLE LIKE TO ADD A BIT OF COUNTRY CREAM AS WELL.

CAUTION: ONLY A MODERATE AMOUNT OF SASSAFRAS TEA SHOULD BE DRUNK AT ONE TIME. LARGE AMOUNTS CAN HAVE A STIMULANT AND HARMFUL EFFECT.

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TO BE USED AS A "HERB" OR SPICE, SASSAFRAS LEAVES AND SMALL TWIGGS ARE DRIED AND GROUND INTO A FINE POWDER, THEN ADDED TO YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE.