

Green Acres

Marijuana. Pot. Weed. Ganga. Maryjane. Herb. Folk medicine. Whatever you call it, JIM WAKEFORD is fighting for the right to grow it for therapeutic uses and he won't give up until he's won. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

I AM ONE OF THE LUCKIEST MEN ON THE FACE OF THE PLANET, despite the fact that I've lived knowingly with HIV since 1989 and with full-blown AIDS since 1993. Born in 1944 in Regina, Saskatchewan, land of wheat, big sky, Northern Lights and farms, I've outlived countless prognoses. At 57, I've put my affairs in order often enough to know they never will be. I currently weigh 123 pounds and I know my days are numbered.

Some people say the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Well, the grass on my side is pretty green. I live on the beautiful Sunshine Coast and devote much of my time to growing marijuana — the most magical plant I've come across in my search for relief from AIDS and its accompanying blood tests, pokes and prods, and the nasty effects of the chemical soup of prescription pills I consume daily to survive. Though I have just over 200 T cells and an undetectable viral load, my face is gaunt. I have no body fat. Veins run like bloated rivers up and down my skinny arms and legs. My gut has a life of its own, changing shape at will. I have lipodystrophy. Small wonder that I seek relief where I find it.

In 1996, I began my first four-drug combination — Crixivan, d4T, ddI and 3TC. I added vitamins and supplements to my health care regimen, which I continue to use when I can afford them. That year, to address my wasting, I also started using marijuana, both smoking it as well as using in teas, brownies and soups. Marinol, a synthetic pill form of THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) available by prescription, and its sister drugs caused waves of nausea and vomiting. Mostly I smoke buds and inhale, because this lets me control the dosage. Controlled consumption of marijuana allows me to

manage many of my symptoms. I believe I'm alive partly because of my purposeful use of this herb.

Two years after starting combination therapy, I spent several weeks in and out of Wellesley Hospital in Toronto. I was taken off my meds when doctors realized that they had caused wasting so severe that a Hickman line was inserted in my chest to give my bowels and gut a break. I was fed by total parenteral nutrition, through a tube, 12 hours a day for two months. After the line was removed in the spring of 1998, I had to relearn how to eat, which I did with the help of remarkable friends who brought me meals and love while I fought to reclaim my life.

Taxing exemptions

Seven gorgeous green girls — strains of marijuana sativas, indicas and hybrids grown from seeds I planted in November 2001 — are flourishing in the flowering stage in my garden in rural British Columbia. They are so legal and illegal at the same time, it breaks my heart. This will be my eighth crop of marijuana. I've lobbied for six years and fought civil litigation for the past four — all for compassionate access to marijuana for therapeutic uses. It has cost over \$125,000. I don't qualify for legal aid.

Marijuana has been used for centuries recreationally and medicinally. It was demonized in North America by the 1937 American Marihuana Tax Act, effectively prohibiting production of hemp and marijuana. Fast-forward to the 1980s, when we needed compassion most, the Reagan administration instead declared war on drugs in North America, including marijuana.

In 1999, I thought I'd resolved my pot problems. On May 10, represented by my lawyer, Alan Young, I won the >



constitutional right in the Ontario Superior Court to use and grow marijuana for medicinal purposes. The federal government began granting exemptions in June 1999, through the office of Allan Rock, then Minister of Health. I was issued one of the first two section 56 exemptions in Canada. Rock got good sound bites for his “compassion,” while his bureaucrats created a fatally flawed process. There is no legal supply of marijuana in Canada.

I launched an appeal for a legal supply and caregiver immunity. I lost, twice. Regulations proclaimed in July 2001 pit patient against doctor against bureaucrats. Application forms require doctors to “prescribe” dosages in grams. Doctors can’t do that. They don’t know what we’re smoking. They observe and chart our reported use, that is, the doctors who cooperate. I’ve found it helpful to be able to talk to doctors about my care, including marijuana use, but I don’t rely on them for supply or assistance. I’ve recently sought leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, my last hope.

Right without remedy

By the year 2000, some of my friends with AIDS began to get exemptions. It was like being all dressed up with nowhere to go. We had no supply and no seeds or clones to start gardening. My first exemption had no limit to the number of plants I could grow. Subsequent exemptions, including those issued to my friends, limited us to seven



plants each. I brought up the idea of pooling exemptions. Five agreed. I went to British Columbia and met a breeder who donated clones, baby pot plants, which I flew home and grew on my Church Street balcony. Our crop was bountiful, our exemptions well exercised, or so I thought. We had safe, clean, affordable, high-quality strains of marijuana to fight malnutrition, chemotherapy side effects, anxiety, fatigue, depression, exhaustion and the occasional feeling of hopelessness at the relentlessness of AIDS. We had choice. I called it the Cannabis Research Cell. It was wonderful while it lasted.

Attempts to collaborate with underground growers and keep the strains led to police involvement and lost crops and strains. We’d soon be without medicine. I began to resent the exemption process, the police, dealers, crooks and politicians. And so I decided to bridge the gap between exemptees, police and government.

I rented a farm just north of Toronto, in Udora, Ontario, and invited the chiefs of the RCMP, OPP and York Regional police to visit after the “grow system” was set up. I was hoping for their support. They wouldn’t come. Days later, two officers from drugs and vice in York region paid a visit. I showed them my grow room, which at the time was a 20-by-20-foot room with dozens of donated cuttings and sprouts. Three or four plants were flowering in a closet. I told them about our illnesses, our exemptions and my plans to establish The Farmer Jim Society, a nonprofit registered charitable organization, to grow marijuana, herbs and vegetables for people experiencing catastrophic illness. I am working to establish a way for the poor to have equal access to marijuana. Like Valerie Corral, founder of the Wo/Men’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM) in Santa Cruz, California, I want to take the money out of the access problem (check out her website at www.wamm.org; great recipes!). Like Valerie, I give marijuana to sick people. The police took notes and left.

Then it got hot. Two days after the police visited the farm, the phone rang. I was being busted. I made it out to the farm in time to be arrested and charged with production, possession and trafficking. I watched in horror as police slaughtered our little green girls. They left seven plants. I wept.

I was arrested twice more in Ontario for similar “offenses” before I decided to pick up my pussycat and move. The planned May 27, 2001, planting ceremony in Udora, to which I’d invited 500 guests, turned into a closing ceremony. I gave the remaining pot plants to people with exemptions and moved the rest to another farm in Ontario that was dedicated to growing marijuana for exemptees. That night, thieves stole all the donated lights, nutrients and grow equipment.

Broke and exhausted, I sold most of my furniture and moved out here last August. After nearly 40 years in Toronto and several careers, including working at Casey House Hospice, I now live on a farm with Kiri, my 17-year-old Siamese cat, and a group of creative people. We dwell communally, committed to learning to live with the rhythm of nature.

Up the creek

Spring has arrived in Robert’s Creek and our world is bursting with life. We are committed to reclaiming and reshaping five acres of land into gardens of bamboo, herbs, vegetables, fruit trees, paths and ponds. Our shared service to Mother Earth allows us to live largely from her bounty. We reuse, recycle, repair, buy second-hand or go without. The land is lush, and we help keep it that way. We call it permaculture. It’s a way of life, not just gardening.

Our fruit trees are bountiful, our blackberries huge. Our chickens lay orange yolk eggs that taste like “buttah.” Rich, black, oozing soil brimming with worms has been layered into large sculpted mounds. Among the green vegetables are flowers, including nasturtiums, to garnish meals. In the Zone One gardens, just outside the front door, we grow beets, broccoli, cabbage, kale, leeks, lettuce, onions — food we use every day. Herbs grow on layered rock formations. Zone Two gardens, a short walk away, yield corn, potatoes and yams. Growing my few pot plants in a zone of their own scarcely makes a dint in the gardens here. It is one plant among many.

I’ve barely begun to learn about the healing properties of this amazing plant. But I’ll tell you what I do know: The sativa strains I grow yield a cerebral “high,” while the indica strains provide more of a “body stone.” Sativas are excellent for daytime use if I’m nauseous because they don’t make me sleepy. They increase mental alertness and are remarkable for appetite enhancement. Indica strains relax me, reduce anxiety and help me sleep. Basically, I use marijuana to fight wasting, not to get wasted.

Waste lines

My 13-year battle with AIDS has led me to luscious green marijuana gardens and a lot of thorns. I’ve survived wasting, crooks and cops, threats, debt, exhaustion, anger, depression, diarrhea, thrush, rage and grief — unfathomable grief at the deaths of hundreds of my friends. AIDS still shocks me.

My adverse drug reaction to my meds in 1998 resulted in an unplanned drug holiday until June 2000 when I began a new combination — 3TC, d4T, abacavir and efavirenz. I resumed life chained to a drug regimen with nasty side effects. I continue on that therapy and I’m rigorously compliant, even as my skeleton pushes at my skin through my limbs, face and spine. I am shrinking and I can see my body without me, my raw skeleton, the body I’ve loved and lived >

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OH CANNABIS

Bowing to pressure from the Ontario courts, the Canadian federal government has set up a system to grant the legal right to grow, possess and use marijuana for medical reasons. These “Marihuana Medical Access Regulations” went into effect July 2001, replacing the “section 56 exemption” system.

All necessary forms and instructions are available from Health Canada’s Office of Cannabis Medical Access:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/ocma/ or **1.866.337.7705**.

Most PHAs need a medical specialist (not “just” a primary care physician) to complete one section of the application form. (Although you’re allowed to use a non-specialist if they say you’ll probably die within a year. Seriously.)

This office does not supply marijuana, only the legal right to use it. You have to grow it yourself or designate someone to grow it for you. Many people use buyers clubs or “compassion centres” as their source of marijuana, even though they are illegal.

Compassion centres sell clean, safe marijuana to anyone with written proof of a relevant medical condition such as HIV. Some of the larger compassion centres are:

- BC Compassion Club Society, www.thecompassionclub.org
- Toronto Compassion Centre, www.torontocompassioncentre.org
- Cannabis as Living Medicine (CALM), www.cannabisclub.ca
- Montreal Compassion Club, www.clubcompassion.org

The Community Research Initiative of Toronto (CRIT: **416.408.1041**) will soon be enrolling patients in a small pilot study of smoked cannabis for appetite stimulation and weight gain.

Other websites to check out:

- www.medicalmarihuana.ca — how to use the federal regulations, a listing of all the compassion centres in Canada and lots of other useful stuff
- <http://cannabislink.ca> — Canadian trends, info and resources connected to cannabis
- www.mpp.org (Marijuana Policy Project) — an American site (if you think it’s bad here!) with tons of info and current news
- www.maps.org (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Drugs) — the latest medical marijuana research

— Derek Thaczuk

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in, worked and played in. I feel thin. It hurts to sit on hard surfaces. None of my clothes fit anymore. My feet are no longer cushioned. I no longer hope for a cure.


But my life is richer with fine-quality marijuana. Nothing else relieves me from the bone-crushing fatigue or the feeling of having to puke and trying not to because it hurts too much and your mouth is full of thrush and you wonder how the hell you're going to survive this time and AIDS feels so unforgiving.

Future growth

In April, I appeared in court, charged with possession for the purpose and trafficking. I pleaded not guilty. (Although the Ontario charges were withdrawn last October, I was busted again in November in B.C.) There will be a preliminary court appearance in September and I go to trial January 20, 2003.

The epidemic continues to horrify me, as my wasting fascinates me. I feel betrayed by the government and the courts for putting me in this Catch-22 situation. The arrests, the costs of setting up the farm in Udora and the move to B.C. have all taken a toll on my health and my pocketbook. I've never been poorer and never been richer. I have no money but I have people around me who really care and who know the work has barely begun.

Hundreds of sick Canadians have been granted Ministerial exemptions — people with AIDS, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, mental illness, spasm, arthritis, hepatitis, cancer. None have safe, clean, affordable high-quality strains of marijuana. Most are poor and can't afford it. There is an office for cannabis medical access in the federal government, which has spent millions of tax dollars growing marijuana in a bunker in Flin Flon, Manitoba, from seeds confiscated by the RCMP. There is no distribution plan for any of it. I want sick Canadians to have choices of strains so we can begin to translate “Hey man, that was a blast” to “That strain helped me eat, or deal with nausea or spasms, or whatever the problem.”

A few months ago, returning from a trip visiting my supportive parents in Saskatchewan, I flew over the mountains and saw the green vastness of British Columbia, knowing that this is where I'll continue the work. Marijuana must be legally available to Canadians who need or want to use it therapeutically. How lucky I am to be Farmer Jim, growing pot for pain, not for gain. 

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