Avalanche Story

Anonymous

Well... Haaa most were kinda scary or classified as shady... I would like to be anonymous!

There was a funny story in an extremely large mountain operation. We called it the avalanche of 2008. The scene is hundreds, if not thousands of pounds being processed—about fifty workers, and I was the weigh girl—in a small room inside a large farm-sized barn. The barn had so many growers using the processing facilities that we had to make coloured tape combinations for the garbage bags to keep track of growers' product coming in and out. We ran out of single colours and ended up making a unique array of colour combos for each grow team. I had a very small room to weigh and process the buds. They kept bringing in dried product in garbage bags and stacking them. I literally had just enough room to move my hands. I joked that I might get trapped in the garbage bags full of weed! Well, the avalanche happened and it was kinda scary and funny. I am guessing 150-200 pounds fell on me and I got covered up to my chin in garbage bags of weed while sitting in my weigh chair! I actually had to call for help! Lol. It was one of those moments in life where I was just had to shake my head and wonder how I got there. Lol.

The other experience I will never forget is from hikers in the hills during major bust times. There was a story that happened to hikers on a team I worked with. They were harvesting many bins of wet product from the hills. They had called their lead truck and pick up vehicles on the radio. About eight men and women hauling bins with one dog. The folks picking them up had a white truck. It was dusk, which is a great time to use the shadows in the forest as cover. A white truck appeared and everyone got up and started walk out of the woods to the road. One hiker noticed the truck was white but it was a different truck. Everyone hit the ground and tried to stay silent and invisible. The truck stops. It is a dude who races to the edge of the woods, fumbling with his belt, with explosive diarrhea! The dog was being held down by the owner but tried to move and snapped a branch. The pooper-guy notices the sound. You know when you hear a sound in the woods and get scared? This guy got scared. He started screaming, thinking it was a bear. He then started lobbing rocks into the forest and yelling "Go away bear!" Some of the rocks fell close to where folks were laying on the forest floor. From what I was told when they arrived at the processing house, this poor guy lost his mind up there. Screaming with his pants around his ankles at the edge of the forest. Luckily, no rocks hit anyone! At one point, some of the hikers told me they could see him clearly but he wasn't seeing them. The shadows and light were just right! I was so happy nobody got hurt. He eventually sped away and the right truck picked the hikers up. Thank goodness!

Why Cannabis Became Illegal

excerpt from "The Role of British Columbia in the Fight for Cannabis Legislation in Canada" by Ashley Hall

Morphine, opium and cocaine were being openly sold and possessed all across British Columbia up until 1911. The passing of the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act in that year was connected to racial discrimination against Chinese people in Canada. At the time, there was an increase in Chinese opium dens and this frightened many Canadians. There was a belief that Chinese people who used drugs in British Columbia were spreading their ways to white women and girls (Castairs, 2000). Because of this, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who was the Deputy Labour Minister at the time, visited the west coast to assess the situation and it resulted in the government prohibiting the use of opium and other drugs. In 1923, cannabis was added to the list of narcotics along with codeine. It is somewhat of a puzzle as to why cannabis was added to the list, considering most British Columbians had never heard of the drug (Carstairs). The first seizure of cannabis was in 1937, and between the years 1946 and 1961, there were only six drug offences involving cannabis in BC. Historians have argued that one of the reasons the government added cannabis to the list was because of the frightening views Emily Murphy spread through her book The Black Candle (Edwards, 2012). The book by Canada's first female magistrate was published in 1922 and talked about the implications of drug addiction. In chapter 23, she wrote about cannabis. She quotes many people such as Charles A. Jones, the chief of police for Los Angeles at the time. He wrote her a letter stating his beliefs:

Persons using this narcotic smoke the dried leaves of the (hemp) plant, which has the effect of driving them completely insane. The addict loses all sense of moral responsibility. Addicts to this drug, while under its influence, are immune to pain, and could be severely injured without having any realization of their condition. While in this condition they become raving maniacs and are liable to kill or indulge in any form of violence to other persons, using the most savage methods of cruelty without, as said before, any sense of moral responsibility. When coming under the influence of this narcotic, these victims present the most horrible condition imaginable. They are dispossessed of their natural and normal will power and their mentality is that of idiots. If this drug is indulged in to any great extent, it ends in the untimely death of its addict (Edwards, 2012).

As well, Dr. Warnock from The Journal of Mental Sciences wrote: "Acute mania from hasheesh varies from a mild, short attack of excitement to a prolonged attack of furious mania, ending in exhaustion and even death. Users of the drug are good-for-nothing lazy fellows who live by begging or stealing, and pester their relations for money to buy hasheesh, often assaulting them when they refuse the demands" (Edwards, 2012). With the strong imagery from those opponents to cannabis, it is easy to see why even those who did not know much about the drug would have a negative opinion. Cannabis was added to the substances on the list in the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act without any real public input or debate amongst political leaders.

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the grow show

A History

by MLA Brittny Anderson

If you would have told me a decade ago that I would be the MLA for Nelson-Creston, touring Ministers through cannabis fields in the Kootenays, I would have laughed.

The Early Years

Growing up in the Kootenays, cannabis was simultaneously completely normal and taboo.

I remember a poster that was up in Johnny's Bakery, a local favourite, that closed its doors many years ago. The poster read, "This is your Brain. This is your Brain on Drugs." The imagery that depicted "your brain on drugs" was a smashed watermelon.

When I "experimented" with cannabis for the first time, it was very intentional.

We were having a sleepover at a friend's house and as a group, we decided we wanted to try cannabis for the first time. One of our friend's sisters had access to cannabis so we planned to purchase it from her during the night of our sleepover. We went for a walk halfway across town and spent $5 on a joint. I was told the first time you smoke cannabis you never get high and I would need to smoke it at least three times before I would really feel anything. We smoked the joint outside my friend's dad's backdoor (right below his bedroom window, which was probably open at the time). I do not recall feeling the sense of elation or relaxation. Suddenly, I became paranoid that we were going to get caught. I emptied what was probably half a bottle of cheap perfume into the living room where we were sleeping to mask the scent. I think I might have even done a few spritzes outside for good measure. It probably took him days to air out the synthetic smell of perfume.

It was probably a few months later when I saw my first live cannabis plant. I was over at my friend's house and she had to do a few after-school chores which included watering the three cannabis plants that were in what appeared to be a coffin with glowing lights.

The Holy Smoke Culture Shop was a hot topic and a curiosity when I was in school. To the best of my knowledge, the iconic founders of the grassroots cannabis activism movement in Nelson never allowed minors to purchase from them. We didn't need a storefront to access cannabis, we were stealing it from our parents, or buying it from our siblings or classmates.

Later, whenever I would smell cannabis halfway around the world, it always gave me a sense of calm. It reminded me of home.

Cannabis was a plant that I was fascinated with and respected but also felt very defensive about. I could not understand why a plant that was intertwined in Kootenay culture was also vilified by the war on drugs. It was a cognitive dissonance that I could not wrap my head around.

Fast forward several years…

Cannabis Legalization

When it was announced that cannabis was going to be legalized in Colorado, I was at first excited and then immediately concerned about what the future of cannabis legalization was going to look like in Kootenays, and I was also concerned about the environmental impacts of cannabis cultivation.

When cannabis was beginning to be legalized across states in the United States, and federally in Canada, there was an opportunity to create a sustainable industry, however the focus only appeared to be about public safety.

Is public safety important? Is the health and well-being of our young people important? Should we be working to extinguish violent organized crime? Absolutely, but it should not be the only focus of cannabis legalization legislation.

My former university roommate and I felt that if government was not going to push industry in a sustainable direction, we could look at other opportunities. We both have Masters of Science in Environmental Science and Policy and we view the world through an environmental and climate change lens.

In 2014, we established The Cannabis Conservancy. Our mission is to empower and assure that the regulated cannabis industry achieves environmental, economic, and social sustainability. We developed sustainability standards for cannabis cultivation. Our standards assessed seven pillars of sustainable cultivation: Policy & Implementation, Land & Infrastructure, Cultivation Practices, Harvesting & Processing, Energy, Water, and Waste.

When cannabis legalization became a federal topic in Canada, I followed it with great interest. In March 2018, I was invited by Kelly Coulter, an advocate, feminist, environmentalist, and writer to join her with Mark Spear, an outdoor cannabis cultivator and entrepreneur, to visit Ottawa to speak with Senators, Ministers and MPs about the importance of allowing outdoor cannabis in legislation and allowing small cultivators to enter the regulated cannabis industry. I jumped at the chance. I had never been to Ottawa before, I had never presented to a federal official before, but I knew this was an opportunity I could not miss. I used my own money, which was tight, to fly to Ottawa. We spoke with as many people as we could about the importance of small cultivators and outdoor cultivation. The highlight was speaking to Senator Tony Dean, who was very supportive of our work and vision for the future of the cannabis industry in Canada.

As a reader you might be wondering why we felt the need to advocate for both small and outdoor cultivators. In February of 2018, Bruce Linton, the CEO of Canopy Growth, took several Senators on a tour of their Smiths Falls indoor cultivation facility. While they were there, Linton took the opportunity to raise security fears over outdoor grow ops, suggesting that tech-savvy teenagers would be using drones to steal weed.

As ridiculous as this was, we were in the era of “toaster bud” and I felt like I needed to do everything I could to convince policy makers to allow small cultivators to enter the market and enable outdoor cannabis production. I felt passionately about this because the Kootenays has been the epicenter of cannabis cultivation in Canada, and I wanted to see small cultivators in my community have the opportunity to enter the regulated market.

We were concerned that this fear mongering would influence Senators and potentially lead to not including outdoor cultivation as part of legalization. It was unfathomable to us that a plant may be prohibited from being cultivated outside in an era of legalization. We were compelled to change the narrative.

We were also concerned that large scale operations would try to prevent small cannabis producers from entering the legal market.

Small Cultivators:

- Help to ensure diversity,
- Often bring more expertise and care for the plants,
- Enable more owners and head cultivators,
- Keep money in the community rather than it getting syphoned off to shareholders (or not),
- Maintain the integrity of the culture of cannabis cultivation in the Kootenays,
- Create rural economic development opportunities.

Also, through the work I was doing for The Cannabis Conservancy, it was abundantly clear that outdoor cannabis cultivation has a much smaller environmental impact and in fact, it can even help to regenerate the soil and our planet.

We were on a mission.

When I left Ottawa, I felt I had done my best, but I did not know if it would have an impact on the future of cannabis legalization in Canada.

Our work was validated when the question of outdoor cannabis cultivation came up in the Senate debates. I was gleefully shocked to hear the words - we had written verbatim - come out of the mouth of Eric Costen, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Controlled Substances and Cannabis Branch, in support of allowing outdoor cannabis cultivation.

When the legislation finally passed, outdoor cannabis was allowed AND a micro licensing class existed.

On October 18, 2018, federal cannabis legalization was finally here. It was a reason to celebrate but I also knew we had a long way to go to create the cannabis industry I envisioned for my community. That is a journey I am still on today.

Entry into Politics

I was invited by Sarah Campbell from The Craft Cannabis Association of British Columbia to be part of their team that hosted the first cannabis reception, an educational event, at the Union of British Columbian Municipalities' annual conference. On our long drive to Whistler, I was carpooling with a few women, and I mentioned that I was considering running for Nelson City Council. When we got to the house we were staying at, it was late, we were tired, but we were excited to host an educational event for the local government elected officials. We felt the educational opportunity was huge.

As we chatted around the living room late into the evening, Teresa Taylor, a Director of the Craft Cannabis Association of British Columbia, and one of the women I was carpooling with, announced to the group that I was running for Nelson City Council. Everyone was so excited and supportive that I decided that I was serious about running in the election.

During my election for Nelson City Council, I was the first person running to verbally support our Kootenay cannabis industry and I was pleased to see most, if not all, other candidates followed suit.

Soon after legalization, we started to see predatory organizations roll through town. They were promising that they would be able to help growers switch to the regulated market. These people basically stole growers' money, produced few results, and created a real need for an independent, trusted organization to support cultivators through the licensing process.

At the time I was working for Young Agrarians, The Cannabis Conservancy was growing but not paying all my bills, so I was delighted to work with young farmers across the Kootenays. During one of the events I organized, Paul Kelly with Community Futures presented a Business Planning 101 course specifically tailored to farmers. I was very impressed with his work and the supports available to farmers in our region. We discussed the need for a program for cultivators to transition to the regulated cannabis market; noting the immense challenges cultivators were facing with Health Canada but the tremendous opportunity for our community.

In April of 2019, a few months after legalization, I was informed that the Kootenay United Cannabis Association, in cooperation with the RDCK, were planning The Kootenay Cannabis Symposium. It was the largest cannabis event our community had ever seen. Mary Shaw, BC's Cannabis Secretariate and her team came to the Kootenays to listen and participate. We saw legacy cultivators come out of the woodwork, outing themselves and their

profession because they wanted the opportunity to express their concerns and dreams for the cannabis industry in our region. I was honoured that I was asked to MC the event.

In August of 2019, I was delighted that Michelle Mungall invited me to participate in a roundtable to discuss the emerging cannabis economy in the Kootenays. Cultivators, dispensary owners, and advocates were invited to share their experiences and concerns with Minister Farnworth, Solicitor General of BC and the Minister that oversees the provincial cannabis file.

The day after the Kootenay Cannabis Round table was Kootenay Pride, and the last Kootenay Pride Parade before the pandemic struck. Michelle Mungall brought Mike Farnworth to our Pride celebration, which gave me a few more moments to try to make an impression on him as he held the keys of change for cannabis distribution in BC. Little did I know that in just under a year Michelle would ask me to run to be MLA for Nelson-Creston and that a few months after that, Minister Farnworth would be my colleague.

A few weeks after pride, I was off to the UBCM annual conference for the second year in a row. However this time, I was attending as a Councillor for the City of Nelson. The Craft Cannabis Association of BC was hosting their second annual cannabis reception. As part of their educational offerings, they played a video from Flow Kana, a Californian distributor that was working with several outdoor, small-scale, cannabis farmers whose practices were regenerative. When the video ended, I heard one of the elected officials in the room say “that is what I would like to see in B.C.”

I thought, I want this for rural B.C. too, but we need to make changes to make that a reality.

These farmers were healing the land, building their soil, retaining water, and cultivating high quality cannabis. Their farms are also aesthetically stunning so opportunities such as tourism automatically came front of mind. The federal government had not created a realistic pathway for most legacy cultivators to transition to the regulated market in Canada; however, the rural economic development opportunities are significant in the emerging cannabis economy.

During the UBCM reception, I was able to introduce Minister Farnworth to Brian Taylor, Mayor of Grand Forks, and show the Minister a large photo of the Mayor’s stunning outdoor cannabis farm.

Minister Chow

I was delighted to hear that Minister of State for Trade, George Chow, was going to be visiting the Kootenays. I was a little surprised when I asked his staff if he was interested in anything specific regarding his portfolio and they responded that Minister Chow would love to see cannabis cultivation. He was specifically interested in seeing an outdoor cannabis production site, as he has already visited a site with indoor production.

Game on! I was ready.

Che LeBlanc has always been very generous with his time and when I proposed bringing Minister Chow to Rosebud Cannabis Farm, in the middle of harvest - the busiest time of year on the farm - he said yes. Che and his business partners have worked extremely hard, with the support of the Community Futures Cannabis Business Transition Initiative, to become a licensed producer.

I also reached out to Shannon Ross, who is a local cannabis expert and worked on the Community Futures Cannabis Business Transition Initiative. Shannon has a wealth of knowledge of both cannabis cultivation but also the regulatory framework and has identified specific areas of opportunity for the emerging cannabis economy in rural British Columbia.

When we arrived at the farm on a beautiful, crisp autumn day it was clear that everyone was in work mode as they teamed up to harvest, trim, and preserve the outdoor cannabis.

Rosebud Cannabis Farm follows the principles of regenerative cultivation: All the cannabis is grown under the sun, in nutrient rich soil that supports biodiversity and increases resilience to climate change.

As we walked through the rows of cannabis plants Che shared with us his philosophy, practices, and dreams for the future. He also shared the challenges he has faced as he transitioned from a legacy cultivator to a regulated cultivator.

George Chow is a very hands-on Minister and he got right in there asking several questions and wanted to learn all about cultivation and harvesting practices.

When I asked Minister Chow if I could share the story of our tour, he enthusiastically agreed. When I asked him to share a few words with me for this exhibit he stated:

“The entire visit was educational and interesting, and I liked plucking off leaves surrounding the cannabis flower! Unlike growing in concrete bunkers that I visited, this is outdoor growing in natural conditions using in-the-field composting to fertilize and retain water. I am most impressed with the entrepreneurship and self reliance shown by grower Che. I wish him well in his operation.”

I will end by saying that Minister Chow is not the first, nor will he be the last Minister to visit a Kootenay cannabis farm with me… but those stories are for another day.

I will continue to work to advocate for the Kootenay cannabis community as their representative in the provincial legislature.

Again, my relationship with cannabis has changed. I have learned that cannabis can be of great benefit to me personally, particularly in small amounts, as I wind down from a long week with my partner, at home, around the campfire.

Lastly, I would like to shout out to all the amazing folks who have been part of this journey with me. A few of them have been named here today, most of them not. The gratitude is all the same.

Brittny Anderson

MLA for Nelson- Creston and Premier Horgan’s Special Advisor on Youth

November 2021

Kootenay Cannabis: Outlaw Farmers in the High Country

by Clayton McCann

"Everyone's got a secret," Appledale's Tom Wayman once noted, "but around here, everybody's got the same secret."1

"In the days before Ronald Reagan's War on Drugs, pot farming was a lackadaisical business in British Columbia. Everything was grown outdoors from seed. There was no such thing as clones, indoor gardens, marijuana eradication teams, pruning for beauty, medical marijuana or high prices. Everything but the roots and the stem was sold, and the going rate for rough buds, leaf and even male plants was two to three hundred dollars a pound" (Hamilton & Olesko 2014, 113).2

"The City of Nelson located in the Kootenay region of southern British Columbia has long enjoyed a reputation as an alternative community because the surrounding regions, including the west Kootenay region, were a destination for groups like the Doukhobours (a pacifist religious sect that migrated from Russia to Canada in the early 1900s with the help of Leo Tolstoy) and for Americans fleeing the military draft during the Vietnam War, in the 1960s and early 1970s. The region has become associated with pot growing in the folkloric sense, places where the cultivation of marijuana had become a necessary economic supplement for a declining forestry sector" (Boyd & Carter 2014, 59).3

Production. If one word can explain, or organize our thinking around the Kootenay marijuana phenomenon, it would be production. Let's consider a cannabis farmer: we'll call her Susan. Susan has all the worries any farmer might have, how to obtain her seeds, getting the seedlings into the ground, how to irrigate them, promote growth, and eventually handle harvesting and getting the produce to market.

But what if Susan is growing marijuana? On the one hand, her crops will in the best of times be worth a lot more than if she grew tomatoes. And she won't have to dedicate as much land area as well as other resources to growing her "cash crop." So, it seems pretty smart. On the other hand, since 1923, cannabis had been illegal to possess in Canada, and since 1954, illegal to produce (Boyd & Carter 2014, 50).

For most people, this seems a difficult choice to make. But then, as many eventual Kootenay residents discovered when they moved into the region, Susan didn't need to own any land to grow her marijuana. In this sense, the usual expenses associated with being a farmer—owning, or leasing the land—don't apply. All Susan needs to do is find some places, deep out in the woods, where she can grow her crops.

This is where production really comes into the story. Susan might need to clear three or four growing sites in the bush. This is difficult labour, and while resilient, she may wish to hire some helpers. They need to locate a space near a year-round water source. That space should be at least partly south-facing, so the plants will get lots of sunlight. Then the "sites" can be spread out along that water line as it proceeds down-slope.

Maybe Susan needs to hire the same people to help her maintain the crops, and by the end of the growing season (late September - mid-October) she may need her staff to help her harvest and process the cannabis. The relationship Susan has with her staff is a complex one. She needs to be able to trust her employees, so she should pay them well. They are likely folks who live in her community. She needs some of her employees to "trim" her marijuana—a complex of skills associated with processing harvested cannabis, including drying, speedily cutting away of fan leaves, stem and stalk, down to sugar leaf, and finally bagging the produce up into half-pound Ziplock bags. The seasonality of such practices implicates the people of the Kootenays in thousands of years of agrarian practices: planting in the spring, celebrating in mid-summer, and harvesting in the autumn.

These relations are important, because they reveal why marijuana was such an historical force in the Kootenay region: Communities had a vested interest in producing it. Once it became profitable, the cash economy meant properties could be purchased, restaurants could be opened—how many small towns like Nelson do you know of that have more than 30 restaurants?—arts could be funded, festivals launched, ski hills supported, and so on. But it was people like Susan who made it profitable.

And Susan's outlaw farm is important for another reason—it is socially rhizomatic. That means that after Susan has two or three profitable harvests, her staff start thinking maybe they should break out and start sites of their own. This sort of grass-roots proliferation helps explain the widespread success of "outdoor" cannabis production in the region.

But what if Susan's wholesale customers in Vancouver say to her, "People don't want all the varieties you're growing anymore. They only want that 'Pole-cat' strain." Now Susan is responsible to give her customers what they want, so she shifts her production to respond to demand for 'Pole-cat.' In this way the development of marijuana varieties (called 'strains') occurs, creating a competitive environment between producers to produce the best cannabis. Over successive years of production, the Kootenays began to be associated with some of the world's best marijuana.

So, we have our outlaw farmer Susan, her employees, her competitors, her customers out on the coast, all held together by a largely hidden cash economy, and the skill-sets that constantly seek to improve the marijuana. These relations came to define the region's underground agricultural economy. Everybody's off before sunrise to go "help a friend."

But it doesn't stop there. Instead of ten pounds of Susan's excellent cannabis being sought after by avid marijuana consumers in Vancouver, now California rappers want it, and NYC "boutique" consumers want it. The commodity's aggregate shifts to 400,000 pounds at $3,500 apiece and the Kootenays are suddenly producing $2billion/year in economic activity.

At about the same historical moment (late 1980s) that law enforcement's cannabis eradication efforts become more sophisticated, production splits into two distinct types: a continuation of "outdoor" no matter the risks, or a shift to "indoor," facilitated by new technologies like the high-pressure sodium and the metal halide grow light, or the air filtration system that got its start in the Kootenays, CanFilter. The two primary methods dictate how marijuana is produced, and the human relations necessary to produce it. This distinction is more important than we might think.

Outdoor cannabis is the original agricultural method by which marijuana has been produced for millennia. Historical evidence suggests that humans have been cultivating cannabis for more than 10,000 years, out in their fields and wild spaces. Harvesters once ran naked through the ripening plants, gathering marijuana resin in the form of body hash. In fact, the word "sativa," the scientific taxonomic specification for Cannabis Sativa, is latin for "cultivated" (Coombs 2012, 59).4 This is a plant strain that humans have been labouring to perfect for thousands of years.

"Outdoor" marijuana, in the form of genetic starting materials (i.e. seeds), may have arrived in the Kootenay region as early as 1908 (Taylor 2021,para.4),5 sewn into the hems of Doukhobour garments for the long journey by ship from Europe to Halifax, part of the largest single mass migration in Canadian history (Rak & Woodcock 2019, para.8).6 Or maybe the Doukhobours only brought hemp to the region, a highly useful strain of cannabis nonetheless, with zero intoxicating effects but a multitude of industrial applications.

If marijuana-as-intoxicant wasn't already being grown in the Kootenays by the 1960s, the arrival of "back to the land" Baby Boomers, as well as Vietnam "Draft Dodgers," certainly resulted in the establishment of cannabis-as-intoxicant in the region.

“Outdoor” would be slow to establish a foothold in a geographic area busy with other forms of resource extraction: logging, dam construction, and mining. But over time, with the further development of marijuana strains—making them “fit” the Kootenay climate and covert mountain growing environments—the agricultural product known as “BC Weed” would soon gain a reputation across Canada and elsewhere as “BC Bud.”

All cannabis produced for profit is produced at scale. This is an important concept when we discuss marijuana production, and it breaks down like this: growing one cannabis plant might earn Susan 25 cents, not very much money, even by 1970 standards. But growing 1000 marijuana plants could parlay into about $1,735 by today’s standards. The incentive in the process is to increase outputs, and thereby increase profits. This is exactly why farmers grow entire fields of potatoes, instead of just one potato plant.

Certain technological advancements would ensure that cannabis farmers could produce at scale. If we think about farming, and about the physical needs of plants, these advancements seem to make common sense. But if we think about the difficulties of hauling materiel up steep mountain trails, deep into the woods, these technologies become profound.

The first technology was invented about the same time as the “back to the land” kids were making their way into the lower Slocan Valley, Nelson, East Shore (of Kootenay Lake) and other areas. Invented in 1959 by a Polish immigrant to Israel, Simcha Blass (Nachschon 2021, para.1),7 the Israeli Irrigation system optimized water use in farming conditions that are extremely dry and difficult for any number of other factors, such as the rugged Kootenay mountain environments in which “outdoor” marijuana was produced.

Using “drippers” meant using a lot less water than conventional farming techniques, which is a bonus when one thinks of how hot and arid Kootenay mountains can get in high summer. First, however, the cannabis farmer would have to locate a reliable water source, typically on or near a south-facing slope. Once this was accomplished, the farmer would sling hose from an intake point to a makeshift reservoir, which could be used to filter the water, add nutrients, etc. The Israeli irrigation technology was so critical, it is debatable whether Kootenay “outdoor” would have been the wildly successful industry it became without it.

Piggy-backing on this technology, the injector and timer (temporal monitoring and switching) technologies would make remote management of outdoor growing operations possible. This, too, was an important step, especially when risks increased as law enforcement’s anti-marijuana eradication campaigns increased in frequency, complexity, and severity.

Such pressures explain why cannabis production also moved indoors. Why fret helicopters and police roadblocks when you can grow marijuana in the comfort of your Nelson basement that will, someday soon, pay off your mortgage? Of course the risks don’t go away. Your electricity bill might quadruple overnight, sending a strong signal that you’re up to something. Your CanFilter fan might break down, and the piney-peppery skunk fills the night with a dead give-away.

Estimates from the height of that era indicate that perhaps one in three houses in Nelson were “flashed out” with an indoor grow operation. While impressive if true, folks out in “the Valley” (the lower Slocan Valley) if history supports the observation, “lit up” one in every two residences. Now we see how production has entered even the homes of our outlaw farmers, a fascinating return to “cottage industry” economies associated with the tragedy of the commons, and the enclosures era (1350-1850) in Europe.

How do we want to think about this incredible history? If thousands of people in the Kootenays and beyond created one of the major driving economies in British Columbia and beyond, what importance do such activities hold now that cannabis for recreational purposes is legal, and giant corporations make the product? And what is that new, sanctified cannabis? It certainly seems to be a desiccated, irradiated pharmaceutical product, sold in a child-proof non-recyclable can.

But there's no need for cynicism. The future may very well include a combination of the "commodity" produced by those corporations, and the "craft" marijuana that only places like the Kootenays can produce (Stoa 2018, 190).8 And there is little standing in the way of a grassroots-led political effort to create an agricultural model that supports the unique Kootenay cannabis cultural heritage, especially if it supports the local, and serves the public interest.

One possibility is a marijuana appellation, much like the Champagne Region in France. The appellation model, currently enacted in other cannabis-producing regions like California's Mendocino and Humboldt counties, is a protected geographic region of origin that includes specific cultivation practices, like organic, or regenerative farming. The goal becomes "Marijuana from the Kootenays" a destination for agri-tourism, much like the micro-brewery industry.

What is needed is popular support for such measures, the political will to make transitioning to the legal sector a simple process, and the public's encouragement to bring introverted "legacy" producers of top-tier cannabis ("quads") out of the shadows, and into adult-grade pipes, vaporizers, and gummy bears of the world.

Much as cannabis appellations expert Ryan Stoa suggests, "I can't think of a more responsible approach to marijuana agriculture than a vigorous and cooperative community of family farms, supplying consumers with sustainable, high-quality marijuana" (2018, 194). Right here in the Kootenays.

Coming of Age

Anonymous

In the 90s, my dad had a grow show in the little guest cabin at the back of his property. He always told my younger sisters that the cabin was full of spiders and rats and that they could never go in it. One day they decided they wanted to explore the cabin. The older of the 2 was maybe 12 and the younger was around 7. My dad was inside working, and he heard them as they approached. The door could only be locked from the outside so he had to stand there holding the door closed from inside while the girls pulled and pulled trying to get in. He could hear their devilish little conversation and he had to work really hard not to crack up laughing at them trying to be all sneaky. Needless to say, they never did get in that day, and he loved telling us this story over Thanksgiving dinners.

I was born in Queens Bay. The first time I smoked pot was when I was baby-sitting one of the neighbourhood kids. Actually, there was a group of us baby-sitting; we always did that. When the adults partied, we would have a separate kids' party, where the older kids took care of the younger ones. Anyways, this particular summer day we found multiple garbage bags full of weed in one of the closets at the house we were all baby-sitting at. Obviously, the logical thing to do was for us all to try some! I also rolled myself a few joints to bring back to Victoria with me where I was living and going to middle school. One day before our school dance (grade 9), I thought it the perfect time to pull out one of the joints. My good friend and I hid under a tree outside of the school and smoked one between just the two of us. We then went to buy our tickets to the dance. We walked into the excruciatingly bright, fluorescent-lit cafeteria and were so obviously struggling counting our change and making any sense out of what was going on that the principle came over and pulled us into a separate room while he called our parents. I was adamant that we were not stoned, indignant even, until I stood up and saw myself in the mirror. I knew I was busted! I was sooo pie-eyed it was embarrassing! Nonetheless, my parents were called in, and my stepdad (who was a defence lawyer) stepped right into defender mode. He said, "Now to be fair, she is from the Nelson area and this type of thing is much more normalized there." And the principal replied, "Oh, I am very aware of what goes on in Nelson. I grew up in Trail!" After my 1-week suspension I was deemed a drug-dealer by that principal, who was convinced I was bringing weed home from the Kootenays to sell at my middle school. Of course, at that time I was not. I was only in grade 9, for heaven's sake! I didn't start doing that till at least grade 11, and I would like to thank that principal for such a great (and lucrative) idea!

The Compassion Club

by Phil McMillan

Hi, my name is Philip McMillan. I moved from Vancouver to Nelson in the spring of 1999. In Vancouver I was a Support Worker. I mainly worked with street youth.

After arriving in Nelson, I soon found the Holy Smoke Culture Shop. I overheard the same conversation almost every time I was there: that Nelson needed a Compassion Club just like the BC Compassion Club in Vancouver and the Vancouver Island Compassion Society in Victoria. Numerous times seniors would come into the Holy Smoke looking for cannabis for medical reasons. The owners of the Holy Smoke were very distraught about sending Nelson's elders to the bus stop to buy cannabis for their multiple different medical conditions. They wanted to provide a safe and secure place for people to get cannabis. After the third time hearing the same conversation, I put up my hand and stated, "I was a Support Worker in Vancouver. I could start a club." I was new to town and the owners didn't know me from Adam. They were encouraging but sceptical. I had been slightly bluffing with that statement. Just because I was a support worker who had worked for different non-profits, didn't mean I knew anything about starting and running a non-profit.

I went to Community Futures and it turned out they had a resource library and lent me three books on non-profits. I then went to another non-profit in town, the Eco Society, and received invaluable help from a lady named Suzy Hamilton. She showed me how they had become a non-profit, even giving me a copy of their application.

After a week of study and some paper work preparation I returned to the Holy Smoke and announced that I was ready to start the club. We would just need five people to volunteer for our board of directors. I think they had forgotten about me and my saying that I could do what was required to start a compassion club. They were in shock when I returned and kept saying, "You did it and you're a doer." All I could think was that that wasn't my reputation with my Alberta relatives.

The Holy Smokers quickly arranged a community meeting in the basement of the library. I was surprised at the turnout. Well over a hundred people packed the meeting. Through that meeting we were able to put together the five people we needed for our board of directors. At a follow-up meeting with these new directors, we finished up our paperwork for the province and made a mission statement. We crossed our fingers and mailed off the forms to the provincial government in September of 1999.

March of 2000, the Nelson Cannabis Compassion Club received non-profit status. We were the third non-profit compassion club, not only in BC, but in all of Canada. We were also the first with "cannabis" in our name.

At first, we ran the club out of the back of the Holy Smoke, but we wanted to separate the issue of medical and recreational and decided that the club needed a different location. So, armed with the certificate of non-profit, I started the task of trying to rent a commercial space for the club. It didn't go very smoothly at first. Landlords were nervous about renting to us. After months of searching and no results, I was getting a little discouraged. Then one day a friend heard about my troubles finding a space and suggested he might be able to get me a space in a building he was managing. He just needed to clear it with the owner, one Tim McDaniel. I met with the owner and with more than a little Irish charm he agreed to rent to me. He just had to clear it with his wife. Well, I wouldn't be writing this if she hadn't given her permission. On June 1st of 2000, we opened the new location of the NCCC.

We stayed in that location for fifteen years and three owners of the building. When the building would sell, the old owner would introduce us to the new owners and rave about us. We were professional, quiet, discrete, and always paid our rent on time, or in most cases early. Unfortunately, the fourth owner was forced to evict us to keep their

insurance on the building. We then spent our last four years down at our Front Street location.

After twenty years we were shut down by the BCNDP Government and their enforcement team, the poorly-named "Community Safety Unit." We closed the doors at the end of October 2019.

Philip McMillan, Former NCCC Facilities Director

from Corky

I smoked some dope when I was a teenager in the United States, mostly around Oakland, California. It was hip, then, and I was a kid and wanted to be part of what was cool. It was also the time of the Vietnam war and societal change. I worked in the community of West Oakland where the Black Panthers were a predominant force. Martin Luther King was assassinated, and the politics of race was as serious an issue as the efforts to stop the war.

Then, four of my siblings went to jail or prison for various reasons related to the times. None of them were criminals. My father left the country when it became clear to him that he, as a Public Defender, would see his own children imprisoned by his country for their beliefs. I never saw him again.

I became pretty much paranoid about using marijuana. It seemed to me that drugs were taking apart the political good works of the 1960s. I stopped using marijuana and never did any of the other drugs available on the street. When I turned twenty-one, I got married, learned to drink whiskey instead of smoking dope, and moved to Canada.

Our family desperately wanted to become Canadian Citizens. Thus, I never let anyone into my house or my car with drugs out of fear that something might jeopardize our citizenship. We moved to the Slocan Valley in 1972 and became citizens shortly thereafter.

The drug culture in the West Kootenay's was irrelevant to me. I tended to think that getting stoned was pretty much like getting rich, it was a way to abdicate or ignore one's responsibility. I was a logger and happy to use alcohol without thinking about its similar influence.

When we moved here, we had three kids. Kids were raised by everyone. They went everywhere. Nobody had any money. Land was cheap and young families were the norm. Cultural trauma between historical residents and we newcomers was rampant. I blamed it, largely, on drug culture and, therefore, on the growing and use of marijuana. Then the growing of marijuana became big business. Now kids couldn't go everywhere. Some growers had dogs and gates and did not want visitors to their property. The price of land went up as growers could afford to pay more for property than working people. Being a person hired to visit homes to take the Census or to Register Voters became dangerous jobs.

All in all, I was not pleased that our region became a haven for marijuana production. But I also knew, as everyone did, that we, as a community, were solvent largely because of the income dope generated. And I had friends who engaged in the work. And I understood that legalization was the only way to end the contradictions and the trouble caused by the stupid laws.

I am glad that marijuana is now legal. I don't want to use it, and I don't want to celebrate it, but I get that much of my historical thinking is based on bias and without merit.

Exerpt from an Interview

Brenda: Okay, so I'll just bring up… so this thing of the secrecy, the danger, the protection, the paranoia that would build up… I was going to just put in this thing about the culture, the lifestyle and culture. What it did, and, like, when you started, you didn't really know that, except you were always very careful, that you end up having two lives. I had a profession, and I had to be very separate, and many people found that they were one way with one set of people and you totally hid the other side of your life. And then, the people who were within the "grow group" you could talk about certain things, and then the regular people, you talked about other things. So that was very difficult, in a lot of ways, yeah. And you always had to be on. You could never slip up. Because you could be in trouble if you slipped up. And the thing of protection and danger, as someone who wasn't in the grow system, wouldn't understand that, and you couldn't talk about that. But you had to live it. But wonderful - this we talked about, Brad, the really good thing of it that there was this sort of level of loyalty and cooperation within your group, and that was wonderful. And that was beyond what you would get in ordinary work, I would say.

Brad: Yeah, we were pretty tight.

Brenda: Yeah. Very good people around that you completely bonded with.

Interviewer: Because you were all in it together, in this secret culture- this subculture?

Brenda: I guess it would be like when people… [during] prohibition, making alcohol. Same kind of thing. You had your own little group, and you're organized…

Brad: Alcohol would be much rougher

Brenda: I think that was much rougher, yeah. This was… you can actually, you know, live a life, a hidden life, and be doing this. And a very normal seeming life, for sure. Yeah, because there were people, I'm sure, people went in for different reasons, and would have different attitudes towards it. And some more interested in the biology, some more interested in the-

Brad: Money.

Brenda: - money, right. And that, in the end, I think, my feeling was, that it can't just be about money, it has to be about lifestyle, people, friends, loyalty, and all that. Because if it's just about money, you end up a bad road. But, yeah, the… one of the things… sorry, I can't remember what the point I was going to make on that was that… oh yeah, so, the people who worked for you in the beginning… Brad was very careful to… that he always had good meals, good surroundings, paid the highest wages, at the beginning, in fact some other people said "Oh, you can't… we can't afford that" but it was good because your attitude was "it's as much about supporting other families, because it is our job."

Brad: Yeah, yeah.

I: So, you were generous?

Brenda: It was an attitude about it. It was why he did it.

Brad [agrees]

I: Because you were doing well, so you wanted other people in your community, who were helping you, to do well.

Brad: But all in secret.

[Laughing]

Brad: But it was kind of funny, like, sometimes I'd pull very lengthy shifts, so I'd go in about 7 in the evening and not get out until 2 or 3, and quite frequently in the summertime, I'd hear this old rusty pump, and I couldn't hear the engine behind it, but I could hear the pump, and it was somewhere up there. But I didn't think I should go and look, although I was very curious. And then lo and behold, the police stepped up the program of flying over people's places and whatnot, and lo and behold, they saw my friends. And they caught them and then they looked through their literature and then they found they had another place, and they hit that, too. However, the people that they hit were pretty resilient, and when the time came, I wasn't there, but others were, guy went down to pay, and he said "you take cash, don't you" and they said yes, and so he gave them $5 / $10 bills. Maybe a few 20s, but it was … [laughs] and that was his sort of way to get back, which I thought was kind of nice.

Brenda: Yeah, the other thing, was, you know, you dealt in cash, right, you had to deal in cash, because you couldn't be writing cheques or anything like that, or credit cards, because that would just follow you, right, so there was this whole thing of security, of how you talked on the phone, how you… yeah, all those kind of interactions… you're very careful. And code words, all that kind of stuff. And you also, you had friends that were, on the island that were… people were building up a culture there too, of growing. It was the beginning of their time, too, so there's interaction between the community here and there, which was really good. And, yeah, so lots of connection, very secret, very careful, but lots of good connection. Yeah, and then, even… okay, at that time, which I thought was good, I think it was the Liberal party in power, and there was a report out, a study made that it should be legalized, and of course now we're finally legalized, this should have happened way back then. It would have changed the whole valley, right? But it would have changed this odd culture, and the friendships that arose from it, and the lifestyle that arose.

The Story of Foxhole Five

Jorma Orton

Most often when an outdoor crop was harvested, it would be hiked out of the bush and loaded into a vehicle, destined for drying on private property—in a basement, barn, shed or spare room.

When the garden site is very remote and difficult to access (imagine ninety minutes by vehicle, forty-five minutes by boat, then a sixty to seventy-minute hike), the gardener sometimes chooses to dry near the garden in a simply constructed drying shack. Using raw natural logs, decent plastic, nails, plumber's strapping and a ton of staples, we could build an effective dry shed.

Many growers who dried in the woods used diesel stoves for a heat source, but in our case we used firewood harvested from the immediate surroundings. Being that far out it was a practical choice. The downside of wood heat is, of course, the smoke, which we worried would be visible from the air and might draw attention during the day if seen or smelled by anyone in the area. So we dried at night. When the sun went down we did three to four-hour shifts in rotation all night long.

In our first year we had one shed, then over the next few years as our gardens in the area expanded we added three more. Life was good. We were doing our own thing and succeeding at our chosen mission, hiking around, working hard, solving problems and producing nice weed in a remote and very private setting.

Eventually, the garden area was discovered—presumably by a logging crew who came to scout the area—and was raided by the RCMP. We weren't there when they flew the gardens but were present the day they came in a boat

and hiked up to destroy the site. Fortunately for us we heard them talking as they hiked and booted it out of there. After that, we knew the garden was busted and we waited two weeks to go back and witness what had transpired.

We were shocked to find the cops hadn't wiped us out entirely, and in fact we had roughly half the crop still standing. The way the plants were spread out in little sites across a unique landscape of swamps, thickly treed small ravines and bluffs made it confusing on foot. Also the sheer distance from the lake (they arrived late afternoon, were overheard to be tired and thirsty) and size of the plants made hard work for two guys with machetes at the end of a hot day. We didn't know if they'd be back but felt it was worth doing the harvest of the remaining crop—with extra security scouts camped out near foot access zones to warn us if the cops returned.

Still, we were very paranoid about a bust, so we hedged our risk by creating Foxhole Five, the fifth drying shed. When the harvested plants were dried at main camp for a couple nights and lost a lot of volume, we would transport them over to Foxhole Five for the last three to five days to finish drying, safe as possible from detection.

It was located a few hundred metres from our little wooded village of camp and the other dry shacks. It was tucked in against a rock wall, surrounded by trees and dense shrubbery. We shrouded the roof and entrance with camouflage netting and cedar boughs.

It always took a little extra courage to leave the relative comfort of camp and go up to that stealth shed and check the fires alone, during a dank shift at 3am, when the others were snoozing in their tents. More than once one would flash the headlamp around to scope the darkness and see eyes staring back. Might be a bear or just a raccoon, but was sometimes a cat, canine, and even a moose.

Government Jobs and Helicopters

Anonymous

Weed Stories - the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

The two of us had semi-important (so we thought) government jobs here in the Kootenays. Most of the time when on the road doing important government work, we were either stoned or getting there. We, in our wisdom, decided to make a bit of pocket change by buying, packaging, and reselling marijuana. We purchased a whole pound from some hippies, weighed it out into ounce bags, kept a couple for ourselves and transported the rest to Vancouver in the trunk of a government issued vehicle. No problem. Made a couple of hundred each along with a bag of good weed for the road.

Some friends of mine had a grow op (before legalization) in a remote site up a logging road, hidden from prying eyes of other growers, those that would rip you off, and of course the police. A long, hot summer of travel, weeding, watering, and the hope of a bountiful, financially rewarding crop was on the horizon. Come harvest time, the crew once again travelled many miles, and as they approached the area where the crop was, they heard the ominous sound of a helicopter rising from the bush, strapped to the undercarriage of which was their entire summer's work. As they made their get-away, they turned in dismay to see the crop rising out of the forest. They watched the helicopter travel across the lake and dump their hard work.

Holy Smoke

Dustin Cantwell

It is hard to believe that 25 years ago, three like-minded people, Paul DeFelice, Alan Middlemiss and Dustin Cantwell started a cannabis activism journey that would see the legalization of cannabis on a national scale.

I can remember the first time I knew for sure that cannabis had been legalized. I was stopped in my car in Nelson. On either side of the street were dozens of Toronto Raptors fans celebrating. The vape and cannabis smoke drifted in through my windows, it was like a cannabis carwash. As I drove through the crosswalk, I realized I had smelled freedom, change and people enjoying life. Later, as I reminisced about this incident, I asked myself how many of those people realized the challenges, sacrifices and suffering that was experienced to get to the point of cannabis legalization? As we look back on cannabis activism in this area, we have to realize that it was considered a time of war, the War on Drugs. In that war people died, had their children taken, had their houses confiscated, scapegoated, prevented from achieving meaningful employment and mocked. The amount of mistrust, fear and destabilization of the community was damaging long-term.

Holy Smoke Culture Shop was on the frontlines of that war, backed by the support of the community. We were an illegal cannabis dispensary decades before it was legalized. I believe we helped inspire, in a small part, a model or vision of what cannabis legalization could look like: though somewhat less clean and spiffy than today's dispensaries.

We spent a lot of time and money in court. We had some victories: staged evidence in our first bust forced all of the charges to be dropped, an obscene business license fee increase was overturned, the creation of the Nelson Cannabis Compassion Club and a sentencing reduction in the B.C. Court of Appeal. In the end, Paul Defelice and Alan Middlemiss, co-owners of Holy Smoke paid the ultimate price and served sentences of 9 months house arrest.

War is not without times of peace, and we did experience some of the most beautiful gatherings of people: creation of art and music, endless fundraisers and being a hub for the "alternative" community. Holy Smoke Culture Shop was supported by so many people that it is impossible to name them all here. We thank you so much, with all of our hearts. Without you, and your love, it would have just been a head shop. Instead, it was a place of activism of all kinds and a cannabis cultural pilgrimage site.

We hope you enjoy the exhibit and for a moment remember all of the Drug War veterans who have passed and are in your community today, remembering they helped bring more freedom to your life.

Home-grown Pioneer

by Bud Green

We arrived in Kaslo in the mid-seventies with nothing much except a cache full of recent world-travel experiences and stories, a mystical dream of "going back to the land," a couple of degrees and some skills in typing and languages. 3.3-acre parcels of Crown land were still available from the government lands office. All one had to do were some improvements, like building a dwelling and an access road. A year later one could purchase the lots for the price of a small compact car.

Our rustic cabin lacked 20th century conveniences like water, hydro and sewage but that was soon remedied by West Kootenay Power (Fortis today) supplying the electricity for free, a shallow well dug by a backhoe and two abandoned culverts, courtesy of BC highways: one for the well casing and the other for the septic tank.

We knew how to grow things, like hair and children, vegetables, outbuildings and additions to our humble dwellings. Windows and doors were gathered from the community dump, roofing retrofitted from abandoned mine buildings up in Retalac, and lumber was cheap and abundant from the local sawmills, where many of us laboured in dangerous conditions for low wages. We had enthusiasm, acquired construction skills and built our empires with work parties which brought together a dozen or more people every weekend. We built barns, roofed houses with hand-cut shakes, dug a septic field, cut a winter's worth of firewood or made apple juice from the old abandoned orchard next door.

The one commodity which was lacking was money. Apart from menial, temporary construction jobs for cash, or gigs at the local sawmills, or working for government grants in the summer building hiking paths through the woods, there weren't a lot of job opportunities. Despite the lack of money, we still found resources to put on rock'n'roll dances at the local Legion or share in the odd once of Mexican 'grass' or maybe even a Thai-stick. Smoking weed in those days was a hazardous affair. Most of the pot was riddled with seeds that would explode in your face or land on your T-shirt. You could always tell those who smoked Mexican from the tiny burn holes in their shirts.

I saved some of those seeds and stuck them in some dirt in the spring and lo-and-behold little green shoots began to appear like magic. We had a sizable vegetable garden dug up and fenced in and when I looked for a place to plant these rapidly growing seedlings, I figured that I might as well go big. A roll of 6-mil plastic from the building supply, some 2x4s for rafters on top of the fence rails and in no time, I had erected a sizable 12'x20' greenhouse, about eight feet high, at the back of the property, away from the road. At the time we also raised some chickens in a fenced-in space with a ramshackle coop. Besides eggs, they left behind another valuable commodity and several wheelbarrows of chicken shit found their way into the new greenhouse. The Mexican seedlings loved their new environment and grew like - weeds… The trick then was to identify the male plants by their seedpods and cull them in order to let the females grow their buds looking for fertilization. The plants grew to astonishing heights, taller than Christmas trees with sticky buds the size of cigars.

I made no great secret of my homegrown plantation and proudly gave tours to my friends and anybody that expressed an interest in my Garden of Eden. Even the RCMP cops in town knew what was up and one constable even hinted that soon it was harvest time. "Yes," I replied, "The tomatoes and cabbages are doing nicely." He just winked at me as if we shared a secret. Considering that this was the seventies and old man Trudeau was still talking about legalizing marijuana, I didn't feel that I was doing something terribly illegal. I was also actively looking for future customers for my product. One fellow, a friend of a friend, was interested in my whole crop and promised to be in touch around mid-September.

Harvest time was the most exciting time. I had no idea when the ideal moment was for bringing in the crop and relied on visuals like crystals appearing along the buds which got denser and started turning brown. I cut the whole plants and hung them upside down on strings all over our small house. I had the woodstove going to facilitate the drying process and once dry, I stripped the leaves, separated the buds and burned the stocks. During these days of processing, a very distinct but not unpleasant aroma filled the whole house and it proved to be a very popular place to stop by for a chat and a toke.

The cash that rolled in built most of our additions, bought the washer and dryer and paid off the building supply. The money never really left the community it was generated in. I did this for a few years, until one day my son came home with some friends from his grade 2 or 3 class and wanted to know what I was growing in the greenhouse. "Just some Mexican corn," I fibbed and felt a bit foolish. I couldn't tell them it was Kootenay Thunderfuck and I didn't want to lie to my kids. That season was my last one as a purveyor, cultivator and merchant of home-grown pot. I think it was the year of EXPO 86.

I definitely inhaled.

by Aimee

A politician's account of how cannabis instigated an unexpected journey.

I grew up in rural Ontario where back roads were grounds for social distortion of the status quo. While my peers and I may have spent a lot of time opposing skateboarding rules, stigma for anything out of norm was seeded deeply. Combine this with a family history, and a cultural history, of alcohol abuse that perpetuated often untold trauma, I found myself at a young age very curious about all things not normal and not societally accepted. Welcome cannabis! Well, in Ontario, it was hash.

Mind. Blown. Open.

While admittedly, the initial use and cultural exploration of cannabis was mostly within a party environment, I found myself embedded in a history lesson that opened the door to seeing my family in a different light. I quickly learned that alcohol was not the only vice of choice to manage family trauma, but because it was legal, it was the primary one. Getting 'busted' for possession at the US border rendered some unexpected responses from my parents: "tell them it's mine!"; "Jesus, did we not teach how to conceal better?"; "Why didn't you ditch it?" As I faced criminal charges for a half a joint, I was reaching out for any supports I could find. This was at the very beginning of the era of computers and well before Wikipedia or Facebook, research was about community and activism – and so it began…

I was able to network with a group of folks who had been pushing decriminalization and while that was fascinating, I really only wanted to know how to get out of the criminal charges I was facing at that point. Reading the court papers, I determined that the officer who charged me was incorrect in his statement that I withheld evidence as I had willingly given it over, admitting I had forgotten about it being in my cigarette pack. Enter my curiosity for the details between the lines and the power of loop holes. By addressing that detail and thanks to a recommendation letter from the Canadian Comptroller at the NATO air base (knew a guy, another life lesson) the possession charge was reduced to disorderly conduct. A bit of a proud moment for a policy & paper detailed nerd, even if only a partial victory. I still cannot get into the US but I do not have a criminal record.

The group I connected with regarding marijuana law were an interesting bunch, they were launching a supreme court case for legalization. A couple of young ambitious folks from London, Ontario. I joined the bandwagon, and as the movement grew it moved to Vancouver and I quickly followed suit. One of my earliest experiences being a new resident of Vancouver was going to the first compassion clubs at the bottom of Commercial Street, beside a slaughter house. Hillary Black and crew were driving the message of medical access, whilst hanging out in a dingy office space downtown; heady times!

I found knowledge was the tool I would use. I wasn't artistic and certainly not one to flaunt hairy body parts while chanting about faeries, I was the quiet one, the curious one. So, I dove into the biology and legal history of cannabis. I was astonished at how one plant offered so many resources, from high nutritional content and medicine to practical applications like: rope and fuel; and the best momma medicine there is. This plant was amazing! More than 400 compounds and endless possibilities for its use and application. This is God in a plant!

From this point, the legal implications of why it was illegal was my focus. Why would we make such a valuable resource illegal? Was I naïve!

Looking into the medical history of cannabis, the plant helped it all; glaucoma, pain management, skin, cancer, HIV, and more. Learning about the pharmaceutical industry, which really is what determines our health system, I quickly realized it is not designed to be about our health but rather by where the money flows. I do not state this in a flippant way nor do I intend to negate the very real necessity of our modern medicine. It is evident, however, that what is created is based on where the research funds focus as well as patents to ensure a profit. This is where

health is lost as the goal and cannabis was the first place I really understood this. The primary barrier to the use of cannabis as medicine was that it was illegal and the pharmaceutical industry's inability to accept or replicate the same results as pure plant material would.

Every other aspect of what this plant could be used for, from marijuana to hemp, a plethora of options, all sustainable, with less footprint than the current options available. Hemp versus paper for example has four times the growth rate and it bioremediates soil as it goes. In present day work, I am very curious to see the potential for forestry to shift to hemp, using watershed enhancing growing methods amongst blocks that rotate with trees following.

The work in the early 2000s with the compassion club in Vancouver instigated my first protest/advocacy experiences. Helping promote the importance of medical access. One evening, a lovely plate of cookies was circulated. Being high from smoking all day while we schemed how we were going to change the laws, I took a few. Another move for naïve me. Not knowing until after consumption, I quickly entered the world of what the hell is happening? I am a total lightweight. With alcohol, sugar, caffeine – you name it. Consuming weed via smoke I can handle. Eating it on the other hand was a body experience from another world. Knowing what you are consuming and how… lesson learned. 100% lightweight when ingesting.

I hopped on the bus home to the North Shore. Commercial to Waterfront. Twenty years old and only just arriving from small town Ontario. Higher than I have ever been, I float through the darkest part of the city. It was the longest bus ride of my life. I recall the sense of being a little kid that wasn't supposed to be there yet completely curious about all I was seeing. Distraught, angry, dirty and scared people. Everywhere.

I was so naïve.

I worked for a few years with the compassion club and the larger movement for legalization. At the same time, my research into the medicinal qualities led to a larger interest in plant medicine. Here I dove into herbal, botany and nutrition. I spent a season being an intern at a large herb farm in Southern Oregon which led to diving deep into soil and growing medicine became about food as well, nutrition studies proving to me that what we eat daily is where health begins.

In the farming world, advocacy and justice movement came into play, front and center. Working with Farm Folks City Folk researching regulations and running incredible edible tours in the Fraser Valley while farming part time at Glen Valley Organics, I was quickly wrapped up in the fight for the right to not only access healthy, sustainable food but for the right to grow it. Marketing boards were controlling all of the dairy/meat markets with preset prices that erode pricing based on cost of production and equal access to subsidies. Organics versus conventional; two different economies. This is the same issue with the current legalization of cannabis. Preset pricing and homogenizing of products remove the consumers engagement with what it is and how it is grown, this is critical to sovereignty of the body and foundation to health. Whether food, medicine, or momma medicine.

Farming introduced me to a new crew of amazing people. The elders on the farm, a scientist, agrologist, historian, a few rebels, its where Farm Folk City Folk started and the first Feast to Fields movement. These farmers started the first BC certified organic association with a heavy focus on soil health and the BC Association of Regenerative Agriculture. The skills I learned at Fraser Common are critical to land management in a changing climate. As a cooperative with an urban center, this was no small community. As I lived, worked and played, I discovered a new language; I found my tribe. My physical life of farming became full time, complemented with a plethora of nonprofit work, from the biotech action network and working with Percy Schmeiser to fighting the marketing boards and meeting the first MP I would talk policy with. While this was all inspiring and fueled my motivation, the lower mainland did not. I kept thinking about sustainability. True sustainability is harder in urban landscapes, rural was a missing link. Enter the next chapter - moving to the Kootenays.

After eight jobs to secure my future in small town Kaslo, I was hired to do a food forum for our local community services, this led to a part-time roll as the food security coordinator for North Kootenay Lake. We created the Kaslo Food Security Program and opened the first accredited food hub in Canada. Here I combined my work with studies at Ryerson in food security and spent about a decade working on rural food systems, documenting it all in Groundswell, a guidebook to building food security in rural communities. I also continued with my obsession for regulatory change.

At the heart of all of these disparate details is a cumulative curiosity and motivation to see change. To do well, there are a few key ingredients: community, listening, and most importantly, the heart.

Cannabis has been the fuel to open my heart and mind to hear those soft rumblings I experienced in small town Ontario, those things that said there is more then you see, look deeper. Even deeper. Politics is not much different, although too many people see it as less interesting. How we make change is through understanding issues and finding those 'out of the box' solutions to bring about positive change.

Today's reality is bleak, to say the least. We are watching our forests burn, sometimes while there are floods in our valley bottoms. Our economy is facing changes to its driving forces, forestry, and energy. The pandemic has close to crippled supply chains. The answer to climate change is the same as the one which holds the key to revitalizing rural economies. Cannabis is the tool, along with food security. The two together can transition our heavy resource extraction focus to one of sustainable resource management while building a robust rural economy that does not need shipping cargo for thousands of miles. Everything from remediating the soil to replacing items that depend on fossil fuels. Plastic! for God sakes. Why are we still extracting oil when we have hemp? I am reminded that our medical system is fueled by pharmaceuticals and not health. I am no longer as naive as I was, and the tools are certainly closer at hand.

I am on a mission. Join me.

I Didn't Know

Anonymous

I didn't know when I bought these pruners at my local hardware store for $10 to chop down my first crop in 1999, that I'd still be using them 22 years later. I would not have guessed that they would harvest over 1000 pounds or that I'd have to scrap the excess 'hippie crack' off them every year or two.

I didn't know that I'd raise kids on the work, learn electrical, plumbing, horticulture and how to run a business. "Lazy," I hear us called, but a lazy pot grower does not last long.

I didn't know my house would get broken into six times, or that I'd have to meet strangers in the night to sell my weed. Nobody told me that people would put chicken wire around their rooms to avoid detection from infrared helicopters, or line their rooms with steel to stop the thieves.

I didn't know that I'd pull overnight shifts filling the generator with gas every four hours during power outages, or that I would always have to hide what I do and be careful what I say for two decades.

I didn't know the girls I hired to trim every month would become some of my closest friends, or that anybody in this community of growers would do anything for each other.

I didn't know that this is what I would do.

I didn't know…

Herbers

by Jubby

In the 90s some people used to call us “Herbers” (a term not used very much nowadays) to describe someone who grows pot, and that’s what we did. We grew marijuana in the Okanagan and in the Kootenays, both indoors and outdoors, for many years until the industry itself changed drastically.

Looking back, there were good days and bad; a lot of time spent worrying about getting caught and trying our best to minimize that possibility. Our small circle would rent houses to grow in and try our best to leave them in better condition when we left. We moved houses often, until eventually we would find the perfect remote property with out-of-town landlords who just wanted the rent paid and were not too concerned about who they were renting to.

It was challenging building rooms and bringing in loads of equipment and heavy bails of dirt with neighbours close by that were sometimes much friendlier than we would have liked, coming over for a visit unannounced or just noticing our unusual daily routines. I had one neighbour, who I luckily became solid friends with, tell me that he could smell the pot from our basement and could also see my power meter spinning around a thousand miles an hour from his kitchen window. After my neighbour’s info I added urinal pucks, bought from a janitor store, throughout my fan air system. A little trick that ensured there was never a pot smell again.

The power company and meter readers who came by were always a concern too. Sometimes we would rent a place with average power billing and suddenly after we moved in the consumption tripled. We had to be fast talkers to explain ourselves if ever asked about our usage. We attempted to cover our tracks by finding creative ways to appear to be using lots of power: my main partner bought a huge 10-man hot tub and put it right beside the power meter. I still laugh about that. It never even worked and neither did the portable welders, etc. that we left strewn around. In an attempt to keep the power bill down, we usually disconnected all of the appliances and used hardly any household lights. As long as we paid the bills and kept our household usage down, we managed to get by without attracting too much attention.

All of us would get asked what we did for a living, etc. It’s another response we had to be ready for. The “I have a rich dad” excuse didn’t work that well, especially as we were renting, so obviously weren’t that rich. Personally, I always went to school and worked part time and played sports and didn’t hide like a lot of my friends. I kept a low profile, but was still able to be part of the community. One bud of mine made a fake business name and had magnetic signs made for his Suburban van. He would get up and go to work at his grow houses and appear to be legit busy, which worked perfectly for him as a cover story.

The good days began when we made a real American connection with American cash. Someone would take a nice load in his spare tire and drive across the border. A lead car would go ahead first to check for sniffer dogs and make sure the coast was clear. This routine worked well, allowing us to deliver BC bud to our neighbours. The cash price was high enough in those days to be able to pay people to drive it to our connection in the states and to exchange the cash into Canadian currency. Nowadays the same product goes for about 50-75% less.

Like all good things, our US connection came to an end. From this point on, prices were constantly going down, so we had to be creative in order to get decent money for our product. There was still no talk at all about legalization at this time.

The bad days began when a rental property we lived in caught fire. I had a small grow show going below the loft we lived in and was sound asleep one night when I was awoken by my girlfriend yelling that she could smell smoke. I ran downstairs to the grow room and found it was on fire. One wall and the door were in flames. It was made out of cheap wood and had straw bales right beside the room. If the fire spread the whole place would have gone up in flames so fast.

I had a garden hose nearby that I used to feed the plants with and tried putting it out, but the fire kept growing. The smell of burning plastic was horrible and must have been toxic. I had my shirt pulled up to my face to try and help me breathe. I yelled at my partner to call 911 and to grab our passports and any cash and important things and get out of the house quickly. Calling 911 was going to bring the firefighters, but also the police, which obviously added to the stress of the situation. I began to fight the fire harder and slowly managed to get on top of it, keeping it contained to the grow room and away from the straw bales.

The firefighters arrived and quickly put out the fire and hosed the room down. Thankfully my partner knew one of the firefighters and he told us that we had about 4 minutes to clean out our scene before the police arrived. I ran into the burnt-out room, which was now flooded with water, and grabbed plants by the handful and tossed them into the darkness behind our garden. By the time the police came, there was only maybe ten plants and two lights remaining.

I told the officer right away that the plants and lights were mine. After listening he stated that he would walk around and investigate the scene before discussing any criminal charges. I focused myself and made sure that I talked to him the whole time, playing dumb and trying to appear as if I were a novice, just growing for my own personal use. He eventually bought my story and thankfully agreed to not charge me, with the caveat that if I applied for any insurance claim he would be back to charge me criminally. Before leaving, he made sure to take my customized power board and ballasts with him and added that he hoped I'd learned my lesson. I loved that power board. Amazingly, the firefighters stayed quiet throughout the whole police inspection and focused solely on their cleanup. Afterwards a firefighter told me that an 880-watt high pressure sodium bulb had exploded, which was enough to ignite anything flammable.

I rebuilt the room - repainting and replacing the door, walls and ceiling so that the landlords never even found out that there had been a fire. We were lucky that day–that was the last time that I ever grew indoors, thankfully ending my career without a criminal record or perhaps even worse. I'm glad to have survived the days of being a renegade Herber from an entirely different era. Today, it's amazing that marijuana has finally been legalized. No doubt there will be good days and bad days in today's modern industry too, but that is a whole different conversation.

From "Kootenay Cannabis History"

from Weed, Greed, and the Need for Reconciliation: Cannabis Legalization and the Case of the Rural Kootenay, BC Region by Tracey Harvey, pp 112-113.

Most notably since the decline of lumber in the 1980s, [disparate countercultural migrant groups in the Kootenays consisting of Doukhobors, Quakers, American draft-dodgers, back-to-the-landers, and unemployed workers from Eastern Canada] supposedly united over shared values and political views while they quietly refined the skills to breed, cultivate, harvest and process cannabis. This development of the local cannabis economy and its eclipsing counter culture eventually included the involvement of the once rivaled long term residents, or homesteaders many of whom had started to welcome the newcomers as a "therapeutic antidote to the boredom of an empty landscape" (Hamilton & Olesko, 2014, p. 23). These dichotomous groups, because they were both remunerated by cannabis, bridged the divide that decades of animosity over traditional land values had kept them separated. Cannabis filled bleak legitimate employment opportunities, allowing under-educated, disenfranchised, low income and other vulnerable groups to find well-paying yet flexible work and remain in the area.

This demonstrated how cannabis cultivated social capital by connecting people over a common goal of employment, bringing traditionally polarized groups together. With this socio-economic contextual background the cannabis market in the Kootenays earned a reframing that challenged traditional drug market stereotypes.

Traditionally, drug markets have been described by their “dealers” and “users” as based on pathological and social dysfunction (Scott, Grigg, Barratt, & Lenton, 2017). But instead, the pre-legalization cannabis market in the Kootenays has enjoyed reciprocal supply agreements which appeared to be supported by social networks where shared norms, objectives and values fostered cannabis market participation and interconnectedness within the community (Scott et al.,2017; Stoa, 2018).

Legacy to Licenced

Sweetgrass Cannabis

We cut our teeth in the legacy market during the heyday of the Kootenay cannabis scene in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. You could loosely lump us in with the second generation that followed in the footsteps of the original wave of trailblazing growers in the 70’s and 80’s. Over those 20+ years we’ve seen a lot of change and innovation in the local cannabis community and can safely say that Nelson and the surrounding area wouldn’t be all that it is without a proper nod to the green economy that has woven its way throughout.

Since legalization in 2018, we’ve taken the steps towards becoming a legitimate, licensed cannabis producer in the local area and have experienced firsthand how this federal policy change has affected the entire cannabis scene. Many of these changes have presented an enormous challenge for those in the legacy market and, while opportunities abound in this newly minted industry, the promise of an easy transition through the established grey-market to the over-the-counter market has not necessarily been of net benefit for everyone - especially in rural communities like ours.

Despite Health Canada’s efforts to develop a micro-cultivation program for smaller craft producers - one that was designed to give access to the burgeoning legal cannabis boom being seized upon by larger corporate players - the regulators and regulations have made it difficult for most small-scale legacy growers to feasibly come to the other side. Daunting costs, bureaucratic hoops, a tangle of red-tape and an ever-shifting set of targets have all been intimidating factors for anyone looking to grow commercial legal cannabis. On the flip side however, fortune favours the brave and, if you’re willing to take on the risk and commit to the process of getting an approved license, there is a viable roadmap to success. The new business model has room for people to make a decent living but unfortunately, by design, it naturally excludes many. While criticism of Health Canada runs rampant, the people within the institution have been quite open to feedback and are making improvements to their overall system as time goes by. Compared to 2 years ago, the licensing process is getting considerably easier and can be less expensive depending on how you approach it. With luck, there will be continued support for those in the legacy space to get on board and participate in the licensed craft cannabis scene. Word on the street from consumers and dispensaries is that the demand is there for small batch, craft product and it’s only going to keep growing.

For communities like ours, where knowledge of cannabis runs deep, we’d like to envision a near-future where several local micro-producers can find their niche, work together and thrive - all the while supporting the local economy. There’s no doubt that the entire region would benefit from a vibrant and economically successful cannabis community. Thankfully we’ve been able to assemble a dedicated, skilled and passionate team to support us throughout our venture into becoming one of the first few licensed micro-producers in the area and we owe it to them and our wider community to keep pushing forward. As we’ve always said, there’s no ‘I’ in team but there’s ‘we’ in weed and, as we continue to draw upon roots that go back almost 50 years, the aim is pretty much business as usual - to represent the Kootenays at a national level as one of the original hotspots of that infamous ‘BC Bud’.

Medical Cannabis

by Terese Bowors, Cannabis Wellness Coach

We've traditionally used cannabis recreationally in our modern age, not really focusing or understanding the medical aspects of cannabis that have existed for centuries. Now, in our new awareness, legalization and education, we are understanding more and more about the medical aspects of cannabis. The 20th century was a sad time for cannabis with criminalization and stigmatization of this plant and the many people who advocated for its benefits. Prior to criminalization, cannabis was used medicinally to treat conditions like arthritis, migraines and "women's pains." Cannabis consumption originated in Asia and spread throughout the world. Most cultures historically did not intend to use cannabis to get high but rather as an herbal remedy, typically in the form of tinctures and smoking it. Over the years, growers started to focus on breeding for higher amounts of THC, but as we are studying more about the medicinal benefits of cannabis and legalization, we are seeing growers incorporating more CBD-dominant plants and experimenting with up-and-coming cannabinoids and terpenes that have a more direct impact on certain conditions.

You've likely heard your grandma, uncle, sister or best friend all exploring cannabis and CBD as a way to manage different symptoms. People turn to cannabis to help manage symptoms like chronic pain, insomnia, migraines, anxiety and more complex conditions like cancer, MS and AIDS.

The process of consuming medical cannabis is a very personal one and we need to educate ourselves on safe consumption, effective dosing and avoiding unwanted side effects. Medical cannabis puts a lot of control into our own hands. During the experimental phase of cannabis dosing, it's important to start with low doses and slowly adjust to reach your ideal dose. We have to be a bit savvy right now and find good educational sources as many of our family doctors are not yet on board and educated in the safe consumption of medical cannabis.

Before I tried Medical Cannabis…

...I struggled daily with symptoms like insomnia, fatigue, fuzzy brain, overwhelm, lack of lustre and joy. I had anxiety in public situations and often felt uncomfortable in my body. I avoided socializing and adding anything extra to life. I opted out of fun activities to avoid burnout and low mood. I was barely getting by. I'd sleep for hours during the day, as I wasn't sleeping well at night. I was tired all the time and experienced brain fog and overwhelm with anything extra. I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome but I didn't get much support from my medical team.

I'm a wife and mother to a blended family of four, two of whom also live with chronic illness. I didn't have time to be sick and tired. I was in my mid-30's at this point and I didn't have any knowledge of cannabis as medicine. My upbringing taught me about all the stereotypical stoner personas of losing control and not caring about life after smoking. But once I learned how to consciously include cannabis in my day, my health and energy turned around.

After Medical Cannabis,

my relationship to my own self-care began to change.

I was able to develop a peaceful relationship with my self-care routine. It became as important to me as breathing, and started to outshine all the other daily, non-stop tasks.

I developed the self-discipline to put my health first. I started to listen to my body and honour what works for it, what I put in and on it, what thoughts I allow myself to dwell on.

Consuming cannabis with intention brought peace to my body and mind. I could sleep at night and wake up more

rested. My mind slowed down and the overwhelm lessened so that I could cope with life one breath at a time.

Cannabis helped to decrease my unhealthy responses to stress and let go. It deepened my spiritual understanding and offered a deeper connection to nature and my being. In anxious situations, cannabis calmed my nerves, quieted my racing thoughts and gave me a sense of well-being and appreciation for life. My pain faded to the background so that my mind was more at ease.

I couldn't believe the versatility that cannabis offered as a medicine. I no longer needed a sleeping pill, anti-anxiety pill or a pain pill. I had it all in one medicine that I could customize to the amount, method of intake and ideal timing.

Medical Properties of Cannabis

by Erica J. Sullivan

According to the National Academy of Sciences in the United States, the only conclusive evidence about the therapeutic benefits of cannabis are that it can be used to treat chronic pain in adults, chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, and to improve spasticity symptoms in patients with Multiple Sclerosis. Moderate scientific evidence suggests that it can improve sleep disturbance in people who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea syndrome, fibromyalgia, chronic pain and multiple sclerosis. Very limited evidence suggests that it can help to increase appetite and weight loss associated with HIV/AIDS, improve Tourette syndrome symptoms and help with anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder.

That being said, there are years upon years of anecdotal information and stories from citizens worldwide, supporting the multiplicity of conditions that have been managed and healed thanks to medical marijuana. We are currently in our infancy of researching this medicinal plant, due to practically 100 years of prohibition in Canada and North America. As such, the conclusive science about what cannabis can offer us is yet to come.

What we do know is that the true healing power of cannabis comes from cannabinoids. Cannabinoids are the groups of chemical compounds found in cannabis plants that have physical and mental effects when they interact with cannabinoid receptors in our cells. The most commonly known cannabinoids are THC and CBD, however there are over 100 known cannabinoids contained in the cannabis plant. The therapeutic properties of cannabinoids are vast, including but not limited to: anti-inflammatory, neuroprotective, analgesic, antispasmodic, anti-oxidant, antibiotic, anticonvulsive, antiviral, antifungal, bone stimulant, anxiolytic, antipsychotic, vasorelaxant, antidiabetic, antiproliferative, and anti-tumor.

Some true pioneers in the medical cannabis field have illuminated the potential use of cannabinoids to prevent and heal cancer. CBD has recently been discovered as a highly effective treatment for epilepsy in children, especially in drug-resistant seizures such as Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. Other conditions that are currently being treated by or have the potential to be treated by cannabinoids are anorexia, emesis, nausea, pain, inflammation, multiple sclerosis, neurodegenerative disorders (Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, Tourette syndrome, Alzheimer's disease), glaucoma, osteoporosis, schizophrenia, cardiovascular disorders, obesity, metabolic syndrome-related disorders, wasting disease, autoimmune disorders, and addiction.

This versatile and powerful plant will undoubtedly open many new doors in modern medicine, in North America and worldwide. As the current science evolves, the potential for remarkable healing and growth is right on our doorstep.

NDP Exerpts

from Fred Mansveld, Howie Grant and Chuck Brind'Amour

Excerpt #1

Officer 2: Well, there's a saying "Kootenay Green Bud"--KGB. And this area was famous for that.

Officer 3: But Nelson isn't the only town with a history with marijuana. Every town in British Columbia and every town in Alberta is the same. We're all dealing with the same issues or at the time, the drugs were the same. It's just that here, it's more prevalent, perhaps more open. And over the last twenty years, there's been stories that always come up that to make it more popular. You got the Holy Smoke shop, things like that, that always brought it up again and again and again.

Officer 2: Well, one famous case was the "pot bears" of Christina Lake. And that was our case. And Chuck was in charge of that case.

Officer 2: And that was a big story.

Officer 2: Yeah, they made it sound as if it was entertaining and funny. But in actual fact it ended up in the demise of a lot of wild critters, a lot of bears. So it wasn't really that funny.

Officer 1: Yeah, but there's a very sad part to that story.

Question: Well, were all those bears not euthanized?

Officer 1: Yeah, most of them were the next year. You know, they continue to feed them because what are they going to do? They went into hibernation, but when they came out, they cut them off of food. So they're habitualized. And they started to roam around, and a lot of them were destroyed. So that was a bad side of the story.

Officer 3: Well, the basement was being used as a dry room and storing of the dog food for the bears. The only access to the basement was through a door in the basement, which was at floor level or ground level. And we left it open. And that one wasn't surrounded by the electric fence. So a bear or two, (I can't remember if it was two, but...) went in. And they had to be shooed out. Like, "Shoo shoo!"

Officer 1: And one bear sat on the police car hood and watched the whole incident. It was a very strange call.

Officer 3: I don't know how it started, but his place was like a compound, like it was Jurassic Park. Except the animals were in the outside not inside. And the electric fence was there to protect him from them. All around the fence it was trails of bears walking around.

Officer 2: And there was a substantial amount of marijuana being grown there too. Quite a bit, eh Chuck?

Officer 3: Thirteen-ish hundred plants? Something like that. Eleven-hundred, thirteen-hundred.

Officer 3: He was charged under the Controlled Drugs & Substances Act and the Wildlife Act as well, for feeding the bears.

Officer 3: Well, you can still buy the t-shirt in Christina Lake.

Officer 3: It's a bear smoking a doobie.

Officer: It is, I have one (laughter)!

Excerpt #2

Officer 3: I can stay here for an hour and tell you stories. But okay, I'll tell you a quick one. So, this was a City of Nelson grow. It was a grow in a basement of a house, and the only access was from the outside again. So, possession of the grow was in question in court. So the woman that had actually complained ended up at mid-trial marrying the accused. And the case was dropped.

Officer 1: You can't give evidence against your husband.

Officer 3: They ended up marrying each other. I don't know if it was for the sake of the trial, or perhaps it was. I don't know.

Excerpt #3

Officer 2: I guess the Holy Smoke is probably the one that stands out in my mind. That goes over a number of years or so. There's also the fact of road safety checks when you come across dope and cash. Large amounts of cash. And even one safety check was at Christmas. And you look for these indicators on the vehicle. This indicator led me to search this vehicle and I ended up finding $25,000 in a grocery bag. The guy said he didn't know it was there. It was a rental vehicle. I said, "Okay," so I seized it. So over two years, he tried to get it back.

Question: What's an indicator? What's an example of an indicator?

Officer: Red flags that are pointing at you.

Officer 2: Or you see some dope, some marijuana in a Sunvisor, which I did in this one.

Officer 1: You know, the important thing to remember is when you're doing road safety checks, or traffic stops, you're doing them to check for sobriety, vehicle condition, and driver's license. That's what you're doing. Nothing else. But if you're a sharp officer, or you're on the ball, and you've had some training, you start looking for other things too. Just is the person impaired? Is there a smell of marijuana? Have they been traveling a long time without any baggage? There's all kinds of things you look for. But the main reason you're there is for vehicle safety, sobriety, driver's license. That's what you're there for. If, by chance, you come up with something else, or it's there, you have to deal with it. You can't ignore it. So that's where these cases come from. And there were lots here, there were lots of cases.

Officer 1: Midway, for instance. We were scheduled for training at the office, and the trainer said, "Well, it's your day for this and that training." I said, "Nope, we're not doing that today. We're going out on the road." "Well, you it's your scheduled day." I say, "We gotta get out on the road and get our work done."

So we went down to Midway and set up a road safety check at Midway, at the scales. And a few vehicles came through and then two similar vehicles—with one vehicle with a mom and pop in between, but both these other ones are rental vehicles. And their story was that they were going to see a viewpoint and that's all they could say. It had no baggage or anything which ended up being suspicious. And a few other indicators came forward and they were detained. And there was a narcotic detection dog there from traffic services, and it ended up that he indicated a narcotic and we opened the trunk and there were two suitcases in the trunk. And when one of the officers opened the suitcase, it was just loaded with ecstasy pills. So it was 126,000 hits of ecstasy.

Officer 2: Going somewhere here in the Kootenays or across the border. One of the biggest non-intelligence-led seizures in British Columbia. And it went to court and one of them did do time over that. One of the drivers took the fall for it.

Officer 3: What I remember from that case is the look on the accuser's face just when the dog indicated. The dog sits. It's common on these cases. You understand the dog has just located a controlled substance or a substance. And he sits. The defeated look on the person's face was ... I have never seen a person so defeated and deflated all at once by a look. Like it was a "My life has just ended" look. Like, it's just, "Oh my god, what have I done?"

Officer 2: I can just imagine.

Excerpt #4

Officer 1: A lot of people in the early 90s thought marijuana operations were all Mom and Pop operations, right? Well it wasn't. I mean...

Officer 2: Some were.

Officer 1: Some were. But I mean, there was also the gang element as well. And not a lot of people know that. And that's what you attract to an area like this. When there's limited enforcement, because of resources, shortage, this is what happens. So you get the guns. There were some murders that were attributed to grow-ops.

Officer: Absolutely.

Officer 1: You know, around the Holy Smoke time, that whole era, right? It was a scary time. She could have gone either way, right?

Officer 3: Very often we have received information of major criminals in the area. Exactly for that reason, to come and pick up money or, you know, do a number on somebody because they didn't pay or whatever.

Officer 3: If there's money to be made, organized crime will be there.

Officer 2: Well, we had that incident where that enforcer came to town and started collecting debts. And there was a call up at Svoboda road and the first place he went to he cut off a finger or two.

Officer 2: Yeah. And then he came up towards up the lake, and they were running like scared rabbits because they knew he was coming. And that guy ended up being arrested and going to jail. And on a visit with his girlfriend—they allowed the visits—she smuggled In a bag of dope and a guard came in, and he tried to swallow it and choked and died.

Officer 2: So there's tragedy all through the system with this. I mean, people say, "Oh, it's harmless." Well, it is in a way, but it isn't. You see the underbelly of it. The organized crime, the cocaine, the hard drugs, the guns, the violence. The tragedy, the impaired driving, the crashes.

Officer 2: And serious drug habits have to be fed, and it'll lead back to break-ins and theft from autos and all kinds of petty crime and that's part of it.

Excerpt #5

Question: What do you think of the narrative of cannabis being a gateway?

Officer 3: I'll tell you a situation. When I was in Vancouver, I was walking the beat down there, and you had these girls work in the streets, right? And young girls, I mean, they were fifteen, sixteen years old, right? And they're just wired on coke and heroin. But I got to know them because you do—you get to know them because sometimes there's warrants out for their arrest or whatever. There's one little girl that I got to know, and she was the one that told me she started off at her place with marijuana. And most of the girls I talked to down there when I was walking the beat, that's what they told me: They started with marijuana and went from there. Mind you, their

home life was the shits, okay? And that's why they left and that's why they're here. But they always told me. They started with marijuana.

Officer 2: They never had a good start. Never a hope.

Officer 3: And that was, I don't know, maybe it was a combination of the marijuana and the home life—or lack thereof. And a lot of those girls that I talked to, ended up at Pickton's farm.

Except #6

Officer 2: Seen a lot of action, the three of us. Combine the amount of years together policing, seen a lot. Seen the bad side. The dark side. And most people have no clue.

Officer 3: I'll tell you for me, when I was ready to retire here, for me, when I was working here I never bothered coming downtown. Because of the soul. I found it so dark.

Officer 1: But there is a dark aspect of all this that most people do not see, and unfortunately because of our jobs, we did see that part. And it's dark. There are a lot of people that do pay the price. They've become victims and...

Officer 3: Well, it seemed like, to me anyway, it changed it all when they made it legal. I don't even see it as serious anymore. Well, I don't care anymore because probably after 31 years of enforcing it. But like if somebody talks about it now, I, "You know what? doesn't matter." No, it doesn't matter. That's what I think. But it does matter.

Nelson Cannabis Exhibit

Anonymous

From memories as a small child, to first-hand experimentation as a teenager, to the situational awareness which came with adulthood, one thread remained constant: exposure to the "pot." One of my most vivid memories as a child was my mom telling me, "If you ever say pot, they'll take you away!" I was terrified of "them" and never dared say the word "pot." As a teenager experimenting with the "pot," I was no longer afraid of "them" taking me away; instead, I was afraid of my mom catching me and my friends who found her sweet-leaf stash and were now thinking we were smoking the "pot." Being amid the "pot" as an adult looks much different, and my experiences have changed rapidly even within the last few years. I would like to share my story with you of how the "pot" has changed and influenced my life.

I remember my mother and her friends always smoking pot – I mean always. To this day, my mother smokes pot as if it were cigarettes, which has helped her to quit her many-decades addiction to tobacco. What I didn't know is that as a young mother, she was also using pot to sustain our livelihoods. So very typical, as I've come to know, of many Kootenay families. My sister and I had a great childhood. We never went without, and we got almost everything we ever asked for (within reason). It wasn't until I was older when I learned how much pot contributed to my childhood extracurriculars, including expenses of hockey, skiing, art, music, and family experiences. However, I never did get that pony lol!

As a teenager growing up in Kaslo, it was inevitable my friends and I would experiment with pot. Growing up in the Kootenays from the 80s to the 00s there was not much going on in our little town, and having parents immersed in the weed culture would only lead to one thing: we would try pot. We had a great time! Hanging out on the school trails, tailgate parties on the beach or in the mountains and, who could forget, the Argenta Fall Fairs. Pot for us as teenagers was never a gateway drug as "they" would have you believe. Pot was a form of socialization, connection, creativity, and a cure to teenage angst. These old friends of mine are still in my life today,

and while some of them still smoke pot, my personal use of pot never extended beyond experimentation – which makes where I sit today a little ironic.

My intricate connection to pot ceased to exist for many years when I grew older and moved out of the house. I didn't smoke it, work with it, or know anything about it – my exposure was limited to friends or family smoking it. I was completely oblivious to the magnitude of contribution this little plant had made to our local economy. One day I realized where many of my friends and some of my family members were going each fall and why they came back with cash in hand. And this is when I decided to rekindle my personal connection to pot.

I worked in a coffee shop on the corner of Ward and Baker Street for over a decade of my youth. Throughout this time, I met many people and saw many things that shed light on the ebbs and flows of the economic drivers of cannabis in our community. There are two main memories that stand out for me. Firstly, I remember my boss and I standing behind the counter looking out the window at all the Nelson locals walking and driving by and wondering, "How do all the dread-locked hippies have so much money to be shopping and eating out during the day on a work week, while driving their brand new Toyota Tacomas?" (Her words, not mine). Secondly, and sadly, standing behind that same counter in the late winter of 2009, looking out that same window wondering where everyone was. The weeks following the death of a young local man caught in a cross-border drug-smuggling ring left downtown Nelson feeling like a ghost town, and while my boss thought it was just the time of year, I knew better. I asked her if she had read what happened in the paper regarding this drug bust. She had no idea what I was talking about and what that meant for our community, let alone her coffee shop. Things around town seemed to come to a stop for a period. It felt in this time that many people involved in the black-market cannabis industry were laying low until the dust settled.

I bring the above tragic example to light only because it was a moment in time when I observed the industry's influence from the other side of where I am now. This was a time when cannabis was still illegal, with industry involvement severely punishable. It seemed at the time an industry only gangs and people running with the wrong crowd could access. I know better now that this is not entirely true, but I will get back to this later.

When the coffee shop sold, I decided to follow my dreams of going to university to become a botanist or a fish and wildlife biologist. I had dreams of working in nature, with plants and animals, and truly trying to make a difference in the sustainability of our Earth and its resources. I spent several years away, completing a Bachelor of Science, then came home to Nelson to live and work my dream. I soon realized the local competition was fierce, and with only a Bachelor of Science and minimal work experience I would have to move to areas with less competition or get a master's degree. This was not an option for me; I needed a job at this point. Luckily, I had a good neighbor who needed help on his "farm." It was there that I met an old friend who taught me just enough to be asked to help with an outdoor crew one fall seven years ago.

For many reasons, I never looked back. I was employed in the Kootenays, my home, where I wanted to live and be surrounded by my friends and family. It meant the world to me. The more people I met in work circles, the more work became available to me, allowing me to further develop my skills, eventually leading to more responsibility and credibility. I have had a vast array of experiences over the years working in this industry and have met some of the most incredible people I know.

I have reconnected with old friends and made many new ones who are still a big part of my life today. I have learned so many things from these people: gardening tips, recipes, health and beauty care, relationship and sex advice, politics, science, and religion. Not to mention aliens! You name it, we've talked about it! In many of these circles we have helped each other out in the darkest of times and we have laughed so hard we can't stop crying. In these circles I have found true friendships that will never be replaced. When you spend as much time as you must in these circles, true bonds are bound to form. But as the years went by, it was time for a change. I loved working with the people I met and the plants, of course, but I needed to use my degree and I needed to validate

the experience I gained in the black-market cannabis industry.

One day in one of these work-circles I was stressing my need for change and validation. As I put it, "I need to get back into the real world." I needed to find a career which would put my degree and experience to use. But how was I going to account for the seven-year void on my resume? Who was going to hire me? Luckily, the right person was there at the right time, with the right advice for me. So, I took it, and I ran with it. I have recently completed an online course with an accredited university, gaining a certificate to work in the regulated market of cannabis. And to my delight, to qualify for the position, you should have a Bachelor of Science! I have almost successfully reached my goal, with only a couple more steps to go at this time and I look forward to what the future will bring.

The social aspect of this industry, as mentioned above, is irreplaceable – the same goes for the knowledge you gain from working with this little plant. Cannabis is incredibly diverse, not only socially, but economically, biologically, and ecologically, with plenty of opportunity for industry sustainability. It is an amazing time to be part of such a "new" industry with the potential to be scientifically grounded in research of its benefits to so many different aspects of our health.

The industry's transition has made for an interesting time for many people, including me. It's a strange experience working up in the mountains – having to hide from passing helicopters, to sharing your experiences in the cannabis industry with your classmates, to having a virtual inspection with Health Canada – all in a matter of years. On the one hand, legalization of cannabis has hurt many local families financially, but on the other, the health and safety regulations are benefiting those who use this medicine for ailments such as cancer, including my mom. If there is any industry that can help alleviate the symptoms, or even cure such ailments, I am proud to focus my energy, time, and career on it. Funnily enough, and though she may never truly admit it, due to her love of "the pot," I'm pretty sure my mom was prouder when I started working with weed and deviated from my plans to work in the field of my degree.

I write about my life-long journey with cannabis today being fully aware this is my own lived experience. I am aware there are many sides to the story and some people's past, present, and future endeavors with the cannabis industry may not be so pleasantly remembered. My experiences have taught me that this industry is one of trust, integrity, and honesty. I look forward to seeing what the future will bring.

Do You Smoke Weed?

A poem by Blair Leamen

Cannabis Industry circa 2002. 'Quads' did not yet exist, nor did the market that would value the quality of cannabis beyond its appearance. Terpene profiles, strain diversity, and the obsession with 'gas' were still at least a decade away from popular ganja nomenclature.

By and large the value of cannabis flower was based solely upon how it looked. Neglecting to care if it even burned, the metrics for top quality flower where that it be dried until the stem snapped, but not so dry it would crumble in the bag. It needed to be lime green, very frosty and have a nice nose.

For a short time there existed a strange and dominating qualifier in the high-end cannabis space. This was caused by the influence of Mexican "pretendica' flooding the market. 'Pretendica' was racist protectionist term to describe well-grown seedless Mexican cannabis flower. Because of the role of organized crime and low Mexican wages, Mexican weed has always been much cheaper. For the longest time this had little effect on the much better grown Canadian and American grown flower, due to its high quality and lack of seeds. However, when cloning technology and current strains were brought south, it created a panic.

A new irrational qualifier was forced on Canadian and American growers. For a short period of time 'Triple A Cannabis' (the highest grade at the time) could no longer sport red hairs.

Thankfully and regrettably much of this piece is out of date. While appearance is still king, the quality of the smoke is queen with an ability to trump the king. This poem is in reaction to the market forces of the early 2000s.

Do you smoke weed?
Ever felt the need
to sprout the seed
that could'a been bird feed?

Or a path to the limits of greed!

Flip it, kick it, roll it up, I lit it.
Sittin' in my pocket is a little green bud
Feelin' like my head needs a little green thud
I can crumble, roll, light like a cow chews cud!

I think a few here know exactly what I mean
'cause I seen in your eyes there's a puffed-out sheen
like you been sittin' somewhere tokin' 'fore you hit this scene.
Keep it well flushed, so the ash is clean!

Lots of folks out there like them bimbo colas
Blond hair, big boobs, a bud ya' might call Lola
Frostier than shit, I just hope it bites like a cobra!

I don't care if my weed has red hairs
I don't care if it's brown, so there
I don't even care if the crystal count ain't there

The only thing that matters to me
is that the bud that I smoke helps to set me free
it has to taste nice, with a smoke I can chew on
if your works like that…roll it up, I'll put the brew on.

So many poor farmers from around these parts
are sick of growing crops that only get them into Wall Mart
So lots of green thumbs are getting into the weed
Getting clones from friends, or growing straight from seed.

So satisfying the market is an obvious need.
This is where my story goes to pot!
'Cause so many kids puffin' think they know a lot
Staring at weed pornos, frosty big green cocks
When it's time for them to lay down their dollars
They think they're ganja connoisseurs, they think they're kind bud scholars.

The only things these dopes are looking for
is blond hair, big boobs, they don't know there's more.
Really it's typical of a superficial culture
Don't read the book, just check out the cover
Make my sandwich big, I don't care what I waste
I need a big red tomato, who cares who it tastes
What I really need for sure is that it looks stupid Phat Great!!

I sure hope sometime soon the quality of buds is judged by its smoke
not just whether it's so frosty, looks like it was grown and covered in coke
It should be the dance and the taste that counts most
Not whether your gall is sexier than your host.

Do you grow weed?
Ever felt the need
to sprout the seed
that coulda been bird feed
or path to the limits of greed!

the grow show

An Interview with Ryan

Ryan is the Manager of Pacific Northwest Garden Supply Nelson

Arin: So, we had a good thing. And now we're in a completely different environment. So, why did we have a good thing? And how has it changed; do you think?

Ryan: Well, I'm just one opinion. But I think why it was a great thing was that a small amount of financial capital and a small space allowed people to supplement their incomes in a bubble where the stigma wasn't as strong as in the rest of Canada. I think most people understood that the communities, finances, and businesses were able to still stay open thanks to the padding of incomes with basement hobbies. And I think that when it really became clear to me that things were changing was when the medical cannabis licenses started being brokered by separate entities, selling licences for quantities of plants and prescriptions that no single person could ingest in a year. That enabled many growers to grow way bigger crops and not worry about legal consequences. Which contributed to flooding the market and greatly reducing the market value of the crops.

Arin: And that's a specifically Kootenay lifestyle that defined this place? That ability to have that kind of economy that fuelled people's lifestyle?

Ryan: Absolutely. The restaurants were aware that they were busy five, six days a week because some people didn't run a stove, because the power's all used up in their basement. People don't do laundry, because the power's used up in their basement. So yeah, all kinds of elements of small businesses really got the buffer.

I'm sure in the 90s, many people, whether they were in their mid 20s, into their 50s and 60s—the legacy growers as people want to call them now - the people who've been doing it for 30 years. They were able to take vacations, own homes. They could support Playmor Sports, local outfitters, local restaurants, salons and so on. Now, if we don't have an influx of people selling their North Van, Edmonton homes, many local businesses will struggle.

Arin: And so, from your perspective, watching the people that had six lights and were able to diversify their income or augment it, or cover it in its entirety by growing. And the prices then supported that. Because the prices are different now.

Ryan: Well, they're incredibly different, the average grower right now is definitely getting less than half of the prices that we were getting 15 years ago. The power bills aren't going down, and the cost of nutrients isn't going down. The cost of importing things isn't going down. So, you know, in the last 10 years, I just drastically saw the size of gardens increase. It often gets called "a race to the bottom".

And then when it comes to the quality of the product, it's hard to maintain the same level of quality if you've quadrupled your canopy size. Further, our markets: 15 years ago, or even more so, pre-9/11, it all went south. Nobody cared about the quality. And now if it's not like, Instagram material, then it's not worth anything.

The other thing I'm not pointing out yet was that trimmer parties, when I started, would be the growers making food all day, providing organic food and roasts. "Hey, it's a party. This is a lifestyle choice. We all love our trim crew." And trimmers—typically women—could have five, six different shops and be working at least a part time job. Lots of single moms being trimmers where you could just go do these jobs when they came up. And like, prepare the babysitting circle for the fall when everybody goes to Crawford Bay together to work, you know? Yeah, all of that's over. You know, people don't feed the trimmers anymore, because they can't afford it. People can't guarantee to single moms that they'll help schedules or work week to ensure that the kids are cared for and they can make some money on the side. It's just like any other business now: Cut costs, lose the personal touch to all of it. There may be some good to that. There were times in the early 2000s that I heard about trim parties that I didn't understand how any work could be done. Drugs being provided, nice meals and a massage table and all that, but there was enough margin for the grower at that time to be like, "I care about my employees. I'm gonna do this."

Arin: It has taken the soul out of an industry that really felt like part of this community?

Ryan: It's definitely something I'm grieving regularly, and maybe is part of the reason I'm a shut-in in Blewett.

Arin: We're all shut-ins somewhere. [they laugh]

Ryan: Yeah. It's just like any other industry. It's just like, there's some love in a little kid's lemonade stand on the side of the road. I don't know if there's any love in Dole Inc - but welcome to Dole Inc.

Arin: Diversification. Is that the answer? To expand the growing knowledge? And supplies and support into food securities for instance?

Ryan: It is for me.

Arin: Yeah?

Ryan: The reality is like, I have had clients for 17 years that come into my store and say, "I'm only growing peaches. I'm only growing tomatoes." And again, my passion is not related to cannabis. It's related to the community we had. So, people come in and say, "I'm only growing tomatoes." And I'm like, "do you know how close that is to growing a pot plant?" Like, aside from the pruning skills, it's all the same. They love light, they love fertilizer, they need pruning. You know, and we sell all those things. And now that goes further. Like, we've had people move into town knowing it's like a popular growing place, and they decided to get in on trendy things like goji berries. I haven't seen those goji berries farmers back yet.

Arin: [laughs]

Ryan: [laughs] Superfoods! Stay alive forever.

Ryan: But yeah, it's just a very sad, slippery slope off to where you're only going to be able to smoke radiated weed unless the growers are empowered enough to stand up. Like, I don't microwave my food. I'm not saying whether or not it's cancer-causing. I don't care. I'm not a hippie. I don't care about any of it. But I don't microwave my food. So do I need to smoke radiated weed? No. If it has a little bit of powdery mildew in it... I've been smoking the shit since I was 13. I don't care. But I don't want to smoke Ford or Chevy weed. I want to smoke Mom and Pop weed. I wanna smoke Ann and Nancy weed. You know?

Arin: Legalization has kind of taken those options off the table in a way, yeah? Or no?

Ryan: Well, on some level it blows me away there's dispensaries in Nelson. Why don't you just knock on your neighbour's door? But people like to go to a store, you know? They're building a legit dispensary at Crescent Valley grocery store and I'm like, "Can't you just drive down the road and see who doesn't have a filter working and pull in and say 'Do you want to sell me an ounce?'" But the growers now that are going legit, it's like a 15% off-the-top tax on the grower. I've recently had an outdoor organic micro farm tell me they get around $2 a gram, so clearly the government and the dispensaries will be ok through this.

Arin: Really? Wow.

Ryan: How many middlemen, including fucking government, are getting a piece of that? Government getting a huge piece of that, you know? Because it's not $2.80 on Baker Street, I don't think. I don't buy from dispensaries.

Ryan: Yeah, you knock on your neighbour's door.

Ryan: Well, and again, I want every business to have a chance. But it's always the farmer that ends up working three times as hard, and you know, pushing his tired ox across the field.

Arin: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.

Ryan: So yeah, it was really nice when it was... I mean, again, I don't think it was realistic in the 90s, when, you know, the people that came here from Vancouver are telling me, they're like, "Oh, yeah, I was doing cocaine every day and drinking [???] and buying boats. And that money is all gone now. So I'm in the Kootenays hoping to just have a ski pass."

Arin: I mean, I think that's the important conversation... It's not about begrudging modernity and that the future's rolling out the way it is, because we're all gonna have to adapt and figure out a way to deal with it. But talking about the past and what built this place and how much it's changed is not sour grapes. It's just talking and giving honour to something that happened.

Ryan: Yes. Well, that's it. We burnt this town down 100 years ago for mining. How many mining operations are surrounding us in this area that was all once burnt down? If there was a very big change, Nelson was a way bigger place 100 years ago. And we will see what the next chapter is in our lovely little piece of the planet.

A Biography

by Shannon Ross

Shannon Ross is a cannabis advisor at Community Futures Central Kootenay, in the heart of Canada's legacy cannabis culture in Nelson, BC. With over twenty years' experience working in the cannabis industry and managing commercial organic farms she provides guidance on business start-ups for craft growers.

Shannon facilitates legacy growers transitioning into legal cannabis production by providing guidance on licensing requirements, facility design, production, reducing costs of inputs, and increasing profits, while maintaining the long-term health of the planet. Knowledgeable and passionate about sustainable agriculture and helping cannabis growers plan a thriving business from the ground up.

Shannon grew up in the farming community of the Fraser Valley before moving to Lofstedt Farm, Kaslo, BC in 2003 to study biodynamic agriculture. Starting her career in 2001 at FarmFolk/CityFolk she became deeply involved in localized food systems and advocating for food sovereignty. In 2013 she put her passion for farming to the test when she instigated the development of Red Lion Farm creating an organic garlic farm and resurrecting a historic Doukhobor farm.

In 2020, Shannon co-founded the Cannabis Economic Development Council in the Kootenay region, comprised of local government and the legacy cannabis industry, chaired by Abra Brynne. The council's is split into Provincial and Federal Policy committee's and an Appalachian committee for the future of small cannabis farms and canna-tourism opportunities. "Legalization was a painful process to go through, I was resisting the takeover of the industry. Eventually I came to a place where I wanted to help instead of resist. I became a regulatory expert and business advisor allowing me to help change policies and advise the government". The council's goal is to create a unified voice from local government's perspective and the cannabis industry on how to support economic growth of the cannabis sector in the Kootenay region. Recently, the Provincial Policy Council played an instrumental role in British Columbia's upcoming changes to sales and distribution allowing farm-gate and direct to retail sales in 2022.

Recently Shannon co- founded Antidote, a grower owned standard processing facility in the Kootenay region to support legacy cultivators to have fair market access. Antidote's vision is to be a hub for legacy growers,

providing services and infrastructure to process and market premium quality cannabis products the Kootenay region is known for. “Our focus is on extraction and premium craft products that would excite the connoisseur!” Shannon explains “Meanwhile, we aim to create a culture of caring and model corporate responsibility to both our community and the planet.” With a focus on regenerative agriculture Antidote aims to educate the market about the many uses of the cannabis plant.

Shannon and her team continue to provide licensing and business planning support for the cannabis industry in the Kootenay’s. She is an advocate for the craft industry and the region’s cultivators, recognizing the area’s unique culture, knowledge base and history. Shannon has been working in the field of health and wellness since graduating as an herbalist from Douglas College in 1997. She has extensive knowledge of organic farming and local food systems and envisions the holistic use of the plant as fiber, food and medicine, free from the stigma created by prohibition.

In her spare time Shannon is found studying plants and walking in the forests of the Interior, Vancouver Island and Yelapa, Mexico. She has a deep love for nature and dedicates her life to being a voice for the plants that often speak in silent and mysterious ways.

Undiagnosed Kootenay

A poem by Blair Leamen

The Kootenays are a fragrant
burst of life uninhibited
pert nippled long legged old saggy
purple haired tattooed patched up gore-tex
sport coat motor boat driving

skidoo riding kite board surfing
circus of freaks and mellow folks
organic drunk alpine enthusiasts
music loving pot growing
farmers and gardeners.

We are child care home support
drug testing apolitical anarchist
social workers. We are card carrying
union workers welding bridges and

bicycles. We are nurses, doctors and teachers.
You might think we live in Nelson

but for the most part we visit town
for groceries and great bands.

We are the ones that got away;
the wild salmon returned to our rivers
the wolves to our mountains.

A lot of us are apathetic
a lot of us aren't. We are
loud proud and getting
more gay every day.

The words 'shouldn't can't and don't'
don't fly near so high hear as 'Hell yah!!
Hallelujah! Dig deep and let it ride.'

We are seekers of the light at home in the dark.
We are not perfect. Hell no!
Dysfunctional drug addicted alcoholics
raving the summer away, but we don't fight too much

at least not at the with fists and blood
at the bar you are more like to find us dripping sweat
shaking sexy hips and limbs at each other
pinching and slapping to the beat.

Yah the beat is important here.
The beat of the word, the beat of the drum
the heart beating harder and harder
as we climb our way to glacial
palatial mountain peaks.

The blade of the paddle pulls at
green piles of white water rodeos.

And even though we are whiter
than many of us would like
we worship many gods.

Ullr the Norse god of mountain travel
Freya, Loki, Coyote, we worship
Jehovah, Satan, Allah, Artemis
White Buffalo Woman, Buddha and Jesus.

We worship Dionysus, Shiva, Gaia, Kokopelli
Minos, Demeter and Persephone…
yeah the whole damn pantheon
is welcome in the broad shrine of our hearts.

Our hearts are large, large
as the spring flooded creaks
and snowy alpine peaks
many of us live to explore.

We are home to the elusive
redneck hippy logger chic.
We are a love song
teaching each other
bending smiles in harmony
and hugs for the baseline.

For the most part we
are not proud of this, only
proud to do it justice

to live up to the undeniable
majesty and grace of what
it means to be Kootenay.

Holy Smoke Trial

by Donald W. Skogstad

Holy Smoke Culture Shop faced the law on two occasions. I was selected as counsel for one of the accused on each of the two trials that took place in Nelson. The Culture Shop was a building located initially on Ward Street that promoted and allegedly facilitated the use of cannabis products. Apparently after receiving complaints, the first case was initiated by a police raid on the premises and led to charging of four individuals associated with the enterprise with charges under the Controlled Drugs and Substances act. All of the individuals were acquitted. The issues that arose in that particular trial were primarily with the nature of the investigation by Nelson City Police. Photographs that would've been expected were not taken and handling of exhibits was questionable. In the end, Judge Mark Takahashi acquitted the individuals as he was not satisfied that the federal Crown had established the charges beyond a reasonable doubt or that the evidence was sufficient. He seemed to lay the blame on one particular police officer with the department. While we agreed with the result, we did not agree that this was the right individual to blame for the problems of the case. This individual was someone that we respected, and we felt bad about this outcome and the effect it may have had on him. I'm going to call him Jerry. That is not his real name. Jerry and I were members of the same service club, and right after the decision came out, I made a point of sitting at the same table as Jerry and reassuring him that we did not agree with that part of the judgement. Jerry later told me it meant a lot for me to come and sit with him and speak to him about it.

Several years later, one of the members of the Culture Shop who was my assistant at the time left his jacket at the courthouse outside the courtroom and it was stolen. I said "You ought to be more careful. That courthouse is full of criminals." We called Nelson City Police. It is my belief that Nelson is extremely well served by their local police department. This case is a perfect example of that. Within three days, Jerry called to say they'd recovered the jacket. I have since lived in RCMP jurisdictions that would barely take such a complaint, let alone solve the crime. These RCMP jurisdictions are not policed nearly as well as I found policing in Nelson. Traffic defences are dealt with in Nelson and property crime is low. There is a national index on crime that rates the crime severity. Nelson rates well. The Okanagan RCMP jurisdictions where I now live are among the most crime-prone in Canada. It's not that the individual RCMP officers are to blame. They are extremely well trained, honest, and reliable. But the RCMP system of moving individuals once they got to know a community is a big mistake. They don't get to know the good guys from the bad guys, and as it's not their permanent home, they don't have the commitment to safety that I found the Nelson police officers to have. I am glad I raised my children in Nelson. There is no better place in the Interior to do so. It is not a coincidence that it is the only city in the interior of British Columbia with local municipal policing.

In the second case, convictions resulted. This trial took place before Judge Don Sperry, a former federal prosecutor. A different defence was advanced. By this time, it was becoming apparent that culturally, Holy Smoke was leading the efforts to decriminalize marijuana, at least for medical purposes. In that trial, the defence of necessity was used. The criminal codes specifically allow common-law defences to be raised in the defence of a criminal charge. The defence of necessity is essentially that the good outweighed the bad. In other words, that committing the offence was for the overall benefit of society and our culture, compared to the offending behaviour. This trial occurred over several days and the number of witnesses courageously testified, some under protection of their identity, on how marijuana had helped them. There were two professionals that come to mind. They each were able to manage their anxiety or addiction to other substances by using marijuana, and they had no reliable source of the product except through the Holy Smoke Culture Shop. These were fully functioning individuals going about their day-to-day lives with the help of marijuana, and they clearly made the case that without the use of marijuana, they would be far worse off. The evidence was essentially unchallenged on the ground, how could it be? And it was pretty compelling. This did not, however, lead to acquittals. We had in fact put all of our eggs in one basket trying to show the public and the media that marijuana could become a very helpful medical tool to deal with certain conditions.

Eventually, in 2010, the federal government was forced to enact the Medical Marijuana Access Regulations because it had been successfully argued in Ontario that access to marijuana under the existing provisions of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act was inadequate, that individuals requiring this medicine were unable to easily obtain it. The MMARs lead to a vastly simpler access, individual or proxy growing of medical marijuana, and prescriptions and licensing. One could argue that Holy Smoke was at the forefront of the arguments that led to such a result. Now of course we have complete legalization of recreational marijuana and even government-owned stores doing exactly what Holy Smoke was alleged to have done some 20 years earlier.

It is not surprising that such an enterprise should come about in Nelson. Nelson leads the way throughout Canada in many aspects. For example, Kootenay Car Share Cooperative precedes car-sharing in major British Columbia cities. The health food store is one of the best in the province, if not the country, and generally Nelson has been the Holy Grail for those seeking an alternative lifestyle. It has been a sanctuary for the LGBTQ community with little discrimination and much freedom. While the owners of Holy Smoke had to pay a price after the second trial, Judge Sperry deemed it appropriate to sentence them to six months in jail. I was asked to conduct an appeal which would go straight up to BC's highest court, the British Columbia Court of Appeal. Three judges would decide the fates of these individuals, all released on bail pending appeal. The four individuals asked me to handle this appeal and I was initially reluctant to do so, but I was persuaded that this was a just cause. Throughout my career I handled many matters regardless of the ability of my clients to pay simply because I thought it was the right thing to do. At the Court of Appeal, all the sentences where reduced and no jail occurred for any of the accused. The Court of Appeal relied on a case in Toronto that I brought to their attention for individuals promoting the use of marijuana like the operators of Holy Smoke did, not for financial gain but for the benefit of the health of its customers. It is generally hard to win appeals, especially sentence appeals, as the presumption going into an appeal is always that the sentence and outcome below was proper. But in this case, although the Department of Justice lawyers argued that the sentence was appropriate, the Court of Appeal disagreed. Looking back upon those events in Nelson, now more than two decades ago, it seems incongruent that such efforts were put towards cases such as the Holy Smoke Culture Shop on the misconception about the effects of marijuana. Would it not have been better to redirect those efforts to those victims of assault and sexual assault, particularly women and children? Or in some communities of British Columbia, towards rampant property crime that goes unchecked, particularly in the RCMP-patrolled jurisdictions?

Getting the Load Out

Anonymous

Getting the product to market was not always easy. Local law enforcement knew there were only a few ways out of town and did their best to intercept loads on their way out. For a time period in the early 2000s there were seasonal roadblocks on a daily basis. With the advent of group texts on cell phones one of the most popular was the "Roadblocks" group, where growers could let each other know where the RCs had set up their latest check stop.

One group that moved most of their product to Eastern Canada would use commercial flights to get there. They would have their runners fly out of anywhere but Castlegar, as that was one of the few airports in the country that x-rayed every bag and suitcase as you went through security. Vancouver, Calgary, and Kelowna were all better spots as your suitcase was never examined after check-in. At one point, there was a rumour that Kelowna airport had installed a new x-ray machine and that all bags were now going to be checked. The crew decided to test the system by loading up a suitcase in the same fashion as always, but this time they wrapped 20lbs of romaine lettuce in Food Saver bags (rather than the Kootenay's finest). A quick flight from Kelowna to Vancouver with no incident brought on by the lettuce allowed them to dispel the rumour of the new security. The Kelowna airport remained good to leave from for another decade!

Spending the Cash

Anonymous

Local businesses received lots of cash from the industry. From restaurants to ski shops, clothing stores to nightclubs, every business in the area benefitted. The local off-road vehicle shops would check in with the manager of the grow store each spring to get a feel for how that year's outdoor season was looking before putting in their order for that winter's new snowmobiles–a good outdoor season for the growers meant there would be bumper sales for large ticket items.

Almost everyone was on board and knew the main rule: don't spend more than $10,000 at a time, as the business would be obligated to declare anything over that amount to the tax man. This led to some funny situations on occasion. One friend was buying a new truck at a local dealer, a pimped-out ride that would take six or seven separate trips to the dealership to pay for. When he went in to make the first payment ($9900, all in $20s), the salesperson he was dealing with was not adept at handling cash. The counting process took the better part of a half hour as he slowly made piles of $100s all over the table, gathered those to make $1000, and eventually got it all counted. For each subsequent payment on the truck after that, our impatient friend made life a little easier for the salesperson. He showed up with the bag of cash under one arm and his own personal money counter under the other to expedite the process. Problem solved!

Spot the Smuggler

Anonymous

Trips to Van…

He would load up all the hockey bags and suitcases into the back of his Toyota pick-up, throw a few other things on top, and then of course his 'lucky bike' – an old ten speed that was missing a chain, but stopped the cops from asking more questions one time when he said he was moving when asked what was in the back of the truck.

Truck loaded, and ready to depart, he'd take a couple shots of G to calm his nerves and off we'd go. He'd put on some John Prine or maybe some Emmy Lou Harris or Be Good Tanyas. It felt like we were crawling down the highway. "Are you going to drive faster?" Nope. Then I heard 'the rules.' Never drive over the speed limit, never drive after dark, and not on weekend nights. He never broke the rules.

"Want to play spot the smuggler?" It's a game he played with his dad. His dad used to smuggle hash in from Afghanistan and transport it from the coast into Winnipeg and knew which cars had interior door panels that came off, or bumpers that the ends came off and could be filled and put back on. Is that a real propane tank in the back of that truck or a fake filled with drugs?

We'd drop the load off at his buddy's place and head to his dads. Dad's place was an old A-frame with many additions in what used to be a rural area, but now surrounded by million dollar homes. Dad might have had a million dollars buried somewhere, but that didn't stop him from stopping at the local free store on every drive to town and picking up any item with potential value or use. Need a new lamp, dad had 10 extra, a Lonely Planet book for every country you could imagine, dad had it. His place was a collection of collectibles.

The table in the kitchen was solid wood and sat about 8. At about 5 pm every day his local friends started arriving. The single ones came every night, the married ones just on weekends. They would bring their own little coolers and bring home their empties. Dad would make chicken wings and fries or something at some point in the night. A plateful for him and his son with the rest shared around. This was family supper.

This table of men help raise him. They gave him advice on 'chasing skirts', on which truck to buy, and of course, on smuggling. There was a sticker on the phone receiver that you couldn't avoid when picking it up "loose lips

sink ships." It had been there since he was a boy. 25 years he'd looked at that sticker every time he picked up that phone. He knew that warning with every cell of his being. He did not talk. He followed the rules.

The trip back was always a bit more relaxed. The hockey bags traded for a shoe box of 'paper work'. The music a bit more upbeat – but still, no speeding.

On the home stretch one day, the tell tale sound of a flat tire and one of his favourite expressions… "oh, fuck a duck!"

Stoned

by Bobbi Ogletree

Your buttery touch has no floor.

Heart arrythmia or blaze of Mahayana
a slip of my beast waves at the periphery
shaken and stirred.

But I get it, I get it!
My nemesis,
she is just like me.

What exactly or thereabouts was the problem anyway?
I thought I would never forget the sound
of the wild horses that ran past us,
our presence of no interest
and the Cariboo fall sky. But

there is the *Maggie's Farm* clock radio
we have allowed in our bedroom.

Once there was a couple
she was named Blue and he was Yellow.
Luckily, they did not have a child,
you know with the raging paint debate: Does mixing yellow and blue
really make green? Should the color wheel be revised?

There are many secrets here, something always needs revealing.
First though, S'mores.

The Days of Prohibition

by Wm. Bogart

Back in the days of the Prohibition I used to look at buildings for a living - all kinds of buildings, houses, trailers, abandoned schools and workshops, old gas stations and grocery stores. People wanted me to look at them because they wanted to buy them or sell them, get some grant money to fix them, or sometimes, when something had gone wrong, they wanted to know who to blame. Along the way, I saw a lot of grow-ops.

Elsewhere in the world there might be a boatload of other problems that could damage a building, but here it was usually water, water in all its forms, liquid rain and surface water on top of the ground and in the ground, solid ice and snow, but maybe the worst form was the one you could not see: water vapour. And a grow-op can make a lot of water vapour.

The first grow-op I ever saw was a house in the woods somewhere in the Slocan Valley, probably 30 or 35 years ago by now.

I always started a building at the outside – looking for those sources of water - and believe me, people did all kinds of things to just invite the water right in; they laid out the red carpet. They sloped the lawn and the patio and the deck to drain right in, they collected the roof drainage into gutters and then poured all that water right beside the house, they built up the flower garden so that the wet soil soaked the wood at the base of their walls, and they put the wrong kind of roofing materials on their roof. If it could be done, it has been done around here and most of it was usually easy to spot. But the moisture vapour sources were not so obvious.

I remember my puzzlement as I walked around that first grow-op; the paint was blistering and bubbling on the old wood siding, it was coming off the walls in page-sized sheets. I knew that I was looking at the phenomenon known as “vapour drive”, where vapour moves through a building, its roof, its walls, always moving from the warmer to the cooler side, but I had never seen anything like this before. The entire time I spent outdoors at that first grow-op, I was weighing all of the possible causes in a very technical, very building-science way. A very naïve way.

As soon as I entered the house, I saw the other evidence, and figured out what was going on. The weird electrical job, the hole busted in the masonry chimney, the strings of lights, the spots of mould growth in the corners. It didn’t take me so long to recognize them after that.

Those were early days, but over the years the grow-ops became much more sophisticated. The electrical started to look like professionals had been hired, real mechanical ventilation systems began to appear, and, in case the extra power draw would give the game away to the electrical utility, you could see where overall energy use was being reduced by heating with multiple wood stoves and then, eventually, heat pumps. The moisture vapour issues became better controlled too by enclosing the grow room in plastic, which was stapled to the walls and ceilings - usually in some basement room - and then ventilating the enclosure to the exterior with fans, ducts, and charcoal filters to reduce, or even eliminate, the pretty distinctive (and pretty incriminating) smell of the crop.

Over the years, as the grow-op technology became more sophisticated, the crop began to change too; it got stronger. It was no longer the mild home-grown weed of the seventies, but something else entirely that was scientifically force-fed and supercharged. “Face ripper”, “AK47”, and “Wheelchair” were some of the names I heard. (I advised my friends not to inhale). But this move to super-strength was inevitable; with Prohibition it became an economic imperative forced by the Laws of the Market, or the Rule of the Jungle: No-one smuggles a sack full of leaves. And they say that the same thing happened during the Prohibition against that old liquid drug, alcohol; Al Capone smuggled high-proof bourbon and gin across the line from Canada. He didn’t bother with the beer. And I guess that the present-day prohibition might be doing the same thing with today’s illicit drugs. Is this just more self-inflicted harm for our society? But people pour their roof drainage against their own houses too.

When people decided to sell a house or any other building, they usually made some efforts to remove the evidence. Sometimes all I would find would be an enigmatic abandoned electric panel in the middle of a basement room whose walls had been stripped down to the studs, sometimes an unused duct running all the way from the basement and up through the roof, and sometimes just a row of staples across the basement ceiling where the plastic sheets had been removed. But at other times, it looked as if they had entirely forgotten to hide it, or did not care who saw it. And perhaps there were times when someone in a very well-kept home had no idea that one of the teenagers had a flourishing side-business in the side-attic that led off their bedroom.

The words "grow-op" were a damning stigma to a building. Banks and Credit Unions might not lend, insurance companies might not insure, and most fatally, the Office of Civil Forfeiture might decide that the building, or some percentages of the property, were the proceeds of crime and therefore subject to forfeiture. You would not use those damning words casually; perhaps the owner simply grew a big garden and liked to start a lot of their carrots and cauliflower in the basement. But, while being very deliberate about not using the term, I also needed my client, the purchaser, to know exactly what I knew. This led to a number of conversations filled with absurd euphemisms: an extended mime show.

"See this abandoned electrical panel in this unusual spot? Yeah, there might have been a need for extra power usage of some sort in that location."

"And take a look at this unused exhaust fan and duct running up from the basement to reduce moisture vapour."

"Yes, I think you need to come up to the attic to see the buckets filled with soil."

More than once, I found myself pointing out the forgotten leaves of some plant in an attic or a basement, agreeing with my client that they looked familiar and tacitly agreeing to say no more. When you consider the number of people that traipsed through a building for sale, the tours of realtors, the troupes of potential purchasers, the appraisers and inspectors, the contractors in to price the remodelling and repairs, it's clear that more than a few had tacitly agreed to say no more. This was the Kootenays.

Once in a while I saw houses that were being sold in a hurry. There had been a bust. The owners were in a panic and wanted to sell within days; they were afraid that the Office of Civil Forfeiture were about to take the house away. And they felt they needed to sell for whatever they could get before they lost everything. I don't know how The Office works but it seems as secretive as the Star Chamber of medieval times and its decisions appear just as arbitrary. 77% of one home are the proceeds of crime, 93% of the next. Most of us would probably support the removal of ill-gotten gains from organized crime, but organized criminals have teams of lawyers ready to fight. Around here the properties that I saw taken were mostly family homes. I often wondered if the decisions made over coffee in The Office, were the easy decisions: pick the low-hanging fruit.

I wonder about the net effect of all of this in our very warm and very creative communities. Obviously, the "mystery economy" kept a lot of local businesses afloat and a lot of locals employed through hard economic times. I have benefited for years from the panoply of great restaurants that have survived and flourished here - I love to eat out. But the last Prohibition also brought the Law and all authority into disrepute. I wonder if we are seeing that distrust of authority playing out in deadly ways in the middle of this pandemic.

The Dump

Anonymous

Back in the mid-90s, my Sunday tradition was to sleep in, have a big greasy breakfast, and then go to the garbage dump, or "the mall" as we called it. At that time, one was allowed to poke around the metal and wood piles, and more often than not, come home with something useful and/or interesting. One particular Sunday, I woke up much earlier than usual (on the sofa) as my partner and I were in a major disagreement over our dire financial

situation. There was no greasy breakfast for me that morning, and I made an early escape and parked at the gates of the dump waiting for it to open. When the attendant arrived, he noted that I was there much earlier than normal, I explained that I was in "the dog house." He chuckled a bit, and then let me in for an early viewing. I began at the wood pile, found a few good 2x4s and some nice scraps of plywood. When I got to the metal pile, my eyes nearly popped out of my head. I rushed back to the attendant and said, "So hey, there appears to be quite a stack of electrical components in the pile. Is that something I may help myself to?" He looked left and then right and replied, "Have at it." I proceeded to load up my truck with ballasts, tracks, sockets, bulbs, hoods and pumps, all marked with RCMP seized evidence stickers…

I drove straight home and woke up my partner. I said, "I realize that you don't particularly like me right now, but you really have to see what I scored at the dump." After a quick viewing and explaining that this was just a fraction of what was there, she said, "Well get this unloaded and get the hell back there!" Which I did, getting another half load.

Long story short, after sitting on the hydroponic components for a couple of weeks, not knowing if it was some sort of sophisticated police sting operation, I made some calls and then made a deal for $3600 USD---setting us up to make it through the Kootenay winter.

Cannabis in the Changing Economic Landscape of the Kootenay Region

by Paul Kelly, Program Manager, Cannabis Transition, Self Employment Programs at Community Futures

The economy of the Kootenay region has a long history, with human settlement thought to have begun over 10,000 years ago. This account will begin with the Sinixt and Ktunaxa First People who had created and evolved a balanced resource management economy or "grease trail" along the region's waterways. They harvested what they needed from the salmon-rich water and the land that made up their traditional territories, and traded items among bands and other Nations. Kettle Falls was an important indigenous gathering and trading hub at the southern point end of the Sinixt territory, later inundated with construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in 1939.

Written documentation of cannabis use specifically in the Kootenay region prior to European contact is scarce, but references to Sinixt elders smoking cannabis and its medical use as an anesthetic appear in at least one source. Archaeological discoveries in Ohio, California, and Mexico indicate indigenous use of cannabis for at least 500 years, so it is reasonable local People would have known of, and made use of the plant pre-colonization.

The balanced regional economy profoundly changed with European contact. Smallpox preceded the first Europeans travelling to the region, decimating local Indigenous families in the late 1700's. The Columbia River would soon become a trading thoroughfare for First People and colonizers alike. In 1825 alongside a Sinixt village, the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) set up a fur trading post at Kettle Falls. Fur trading was the region's first introduction to colonial commerce, and provided some benefits for indigenous inhabitants (like traded metal goods). Sinixt are said to have worked together with HBC to prevent American interests from encroaching too significantly into the northern territory.

Establishment of an international boundary along the 49th parallel, surveyed in 1846, between lands claimed by the United States on one side and Britain on the other, bisected indigenous territories and eventually impeded pre-existing grease trail economy, along with freedom of movement by First People within their traditional lands. HBC established a new post at Fort Pend Oreille (later Fort Shephard) south of what is now Trail in 1858, so that there would be a convenient trading post north of the border. It eventually also served to supply miners who were headed north.

Discovery of gold and silver in the region led thousands of gold and silver miners to make their way up the Columbia River from the US and West from the prairies. Remaining Indigenous people north of the new border did what they could to protect their home fisheries and natural resources, but the number of newcomers outstripped their ability to control the situation. By the late 1890's, the gears of industrial activity were in full swing. New towns like Sandon, Slocan and Kaslo became hubs of mining activity. Logging scaled up over this period to be milled for construction and to provide biomass to heat homes and provide fuel for business operations. Hydro-electric energy was produced for industrial operations and residential use in Nelson (1896) and Sandon (1897), two of the first hydro grids in BC. Rail systems built in the 1890's soon connected Nelson and Fort Shephard (via Salmo). Rail lines also connected Nelson to Robson, where steamboats could transfer goods up the Arrow Lakes to the main line at Revelstoke, though the most mining concentrate and lumber headed south by rail to markets in the US. Only 15 years later, by 1910, the gold and silver hype had largely been quelled, and mining activities consolidated under fewer large players. By this point the underpinning industrial Infrastructure of the region had essentially been built, the ability to transport goods beyond the region existed, and so despite the mining bust, the economy began to diversify.

Prior to further hydro dams being built along the Columbia, micro climate and valley bottom soils, denuded of trees by mining and logging were inviting for agriculturalists moving to the Kootenays from Saskatchewan. 8000 Doukhobors moved to the region between 1908 and 1912, and Mennonite orchardists developed the community of Renata along the Arrow Lakes. Dairy farms were established in areas suitable for haying. Farming and food processing came to the fore, along with logging and lumber milling, and mining supporting the 1st World War effort.

Cannabis was unlikely to have represented a large economic sector prior to the early 1900's. From 1600 to the mid 1800's, Britain had encouraged hemp farming for settlers, with the Upper Canada government providing the first agricultural subsidies and even paying for hemp processing equipment in order to produce rope and textiles. Cannabis was used medicinally in various forms at the time as well. Several factors led to the decline of this crop though, and reduced its spread westward before colonial settlement of the region began. Advances in cotton genetics, production cost savings from slavery, and mechanized means of production, meant that by the mid-1800's cotton could be produced and shipped more cheaply and in higher volumes in the Southern US than in India (that had previously led production), and more far cost effectively than hemp from Canada.

Post-war economic interests from a growing synthetic fiber industry and developing pharmaceutical sector lobbied government for a prohibition of cannabis cultivation, which was set into law in 1928. For 40 years, relatively little cannabis activity occurred in the region. But that would soon change. The hippy movement beginning in 1968 spurred demand for cannabis, and the crop rapidly gained market traction for both recreational and medical use (less so for fiber as in the past), despite prohibition.

With hippy culture invigorating cannabis demand across North America, cannabis farming became popular in sparsely populated places with mild climates and difficult access like rural California, Washington State, and in British Columbia. The Vietnam War also drove American conscientious objectors north of the 49th parallel, where desire for anonymity and need to make a living and build community matched well with illicit rural cannabis cultivation in the Kootenays.

Illicit cannabis became a larger part of the social and financial fabric of the region, to a point where it began to provide economic resilience during boom and bust cycles of both lumber, mining and agricultural sectors from 1970-2000. Cannabis, like alcohol, saw healthy sales during economic downturns, providing a buffer for commodity cycles. The fast growing crop allowed people laid off to quickly pivot to cannabis cropping to ensure family income. A community knowledge base of cultivation technique, plant genetics, processing and distribution grew over the next few decades. While there was little official measurement of this illicit industry (beyond numbers of investigations and arrests), production volumes climbed, through to the early 2000's.

The long undefended border between Canada and the US allowed for significant volumes of cannabis to move to international markets, despite the "war on drugs." On September 11th 2001, the World Trade Centre bombings led to a scaling up of border protection, and technologies such as drones and heat sensing optics contributed to border surveillance. The Stephen Harper era "Tough on Crime" agenda also convinced some families to stop cultivation due to increased minimum sentences and family impacts for cannabis cultivation convictions. It also encouraged entrepreneurial growers to get even better at hiding their operations.

A federal medical licensing program in 2013 brought some light back to the industry. By 2018 on the eve of legalization, there were still estimated to be hundreds of illicit producers and about 2000 Central Kootenay growers that had medical cannabis cultivation licenses. Recreational legalization on Oct 18, 2018 opened the door for commercial cultivation and processing. Regulations around site security, Health Canada operating compliance, Canada Revenue Agency excise tax, and cumbersome provincial supply chain limitations limited early license uptake, and profitability for legal market participants.

At the time of this writing, a regulatory review is being undertaken, which local cannabis industry players hope will result in changes that will help accelerate economic development of the sector, and ensure that cannabis cultivation can continue profitably, so that it can continue to provide regional economic resilience, as it has for the past 50 years.

Women/Trim Room

Anonymous

I moved here in the mid-90s in my early 20s and as a single mom with two kids. I was struggling to get by and was looking for work. One day a friend asked me to come and trim weed for $25/hr. I needed the money and was open to it.

I arrived to a small room with about four women already seated in a circle. They had Rubbermaid lids or black trays on their laps, a couple had scarves wrapped around their hair, and they were deep in conversation. I sat down and the friend who invited me showed me what to do. With borrowed scissors I learned to clip the darker leaves sticking out to reveal the sticky, crystalline buds just behind. "Tight, trim it tight, and no rat tails. The buyers hate rat tails. Don't shave the buds."

Midway through the day I could not believe they were paying me this much to do this! I got to sit and chat with a group of interesting people, uninterrupted, without kids to take care of, and get paid for it! I was too young and green to complain about the sticky fingers, the sore back, cramped hands, and smelly clothes I notice now. But I was clever enough to keep saying yes to the work.

Twenty-five years later, I still sit in the trim room. I have raised my kids–the money earned paid for their sports, their ski passes, their bikes, and their school fees. I've paid income taxes, my mortgage, my bills and put food on my table for my family week in and out since 1995. I've done other things–gone back to school, worked part-time jobs, took courses, etc., but I always go back to the grow room. The work has been consistent over these 2.5 decades. Other jobs have come and gone, but the $25/hr of the industry has been consistent. It is one of the few industries that paid a living wage.

Twenty-five years in the trim room means that I've spent time with mostly women on a regular basis. Some have come and gone, and others I've developed life-long deep connections with. No conversation is off limits–what happens in the trim room stays in the trim room. Dashed dreams and hopes, marital problems and successes, we've become mothers and grandmothers, witnessed teen trauma and broken lives of those around us. There have been hours of chatter, some poignant silences, millions of stories, tears of despair, podcasts, music, and oodles of laughter and connection. All is revealed when you spend eight hours sitting intimately in a room with the same group of women–sometimes annually (doing outdoor) or at least consistently. As somebody who worked for

many growers over the years, I had many different circles of women. Some have other careers, doing it for a bit of spare change. Some became growers themselves. Others were like me, migrating from house to house every eight weeks to celebrate the bounty of the harvest.

Twenty-five years later and I am now a supervisor at one of the legal grow-ops–working full-time with a decent salary. The industry has always been here for me. I can think of six single moms who solely raised their kids in the Kootenays trimming weed. I know growers who would only hire single moms, and ones that would go out of their way to give work to those who needed it most. In some circles in this community, we took care of each other.

The Water System

Anonymous

I don't resent the cannabis business sector, in fact, I've favoured Canada's legalization of access & usage of cannabis by adults, for many years before the Trudeau government enacted it. Actually, smoking weed was beneficial for me in my early twenties, as I transitioned from a pretty rigorous education into a more fun-loving, aesthetically-sensitive adulthood.

What I object to is a default of attention to specific issues: The lack of community or neighbourhood influence on how commercial-production facilities are located & developed. The lack of coordination among agencies that should probably have some jurisdiction: the regional district, the environmental and ag ministries, the water branch, the RCMP. The lack of inspection of grow-ops run by people claiming to be licensed already, but even if so, who may be growing crop beyond any licensed quota (which can overdraw water, or function beyond the capacity of waste-management systems, etc).

My attitude is the outcome of my personal experiences and those of some friends and neighbours. Scale and siting of production facilities will be important factors. The problems in my neighbourhood don't seem to have ever been attributable to very small illegal grow-ops, nor are they likely to proceed from well-planned, licensed, and well-supervised legal operations.

Somewhere Up the Mountain

by Blair Leamen

Somewhere up the mountain is where my garden grows

springs right off the creek by 3/4 inch poly-hose

Turn the soil, mix it up and plug two plants a whole

Yup Somewhere up the mountain is where my garden grows.

Start them in the winter time and you grow them Mamas up

Cut the slips, plant the clones, an' put em in a four inch pot

Tend them 'till there one foot tall, then haul them up the hill

Be careful with that awkward load you don't want to take a spill.

We've got emitters and amendments, we've got shovels and a mattock

We've got feeders and the timers, thank god, to do that all automatic
Well pruning time's a lot of work, to grow the fruit big and strong
Now don't you ever try to tell me, that what I'm doing is wrong!

Well, Somewhere up the mountain is where my garden grows
springs right off the creek by 3/4 inch poly-hose
We got ratchet straps, frame packs we got hiking boots 'n ski poles
Somewhere up the mountain oh Lord…is where my garden grows.

Don't you ask cuz I won't tell No you don't wanna know
If I happen to see there…. well you'll wish it wasn't so
We're into peace kindness here but don't you cross that line
An' if you stay away from my patch I think we'll get along just fine
Cause we're farmers and we're outlaws, living as we see fit
Subject to a market place that some times it treats us like shit
You ask anyone who grows a crop, and I'm sure they'll tell you true
It's the best of all them livings, But it sure can make you blue

Somewhere up the mountain is where my garden grows
springs right off the creek with 3/4 inch poly-hose
Turn the Soil and Mix it up and plug two plants a whole
Somewhere up the mountain is where my garden grows.

Harvest times a heaven, but it works you to the bone
Cutting down all that fruit and trying to get it home
You've got trimming crews working around the clock,
you gotta feed them folks till they're full
Yeah harvest times a heavennnnnnnn
if you don't get burned by mold
Trim it fast and dry it slow, bag that up and out it goes
Somewhere up the mountainnnnnnnnnnn, is where my garden grows.

Touchstones Nelson
Museum of Art and History

The Grow Show exhibited at Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History from November 27, 2021 to February 27, 2022. Thank you to the community for sharing stories, photographs and paraphernalia.

Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History acknowledges that the Museum resides on the traditional unceded territory of the Sinixt and Ktunaxa Nations. We would like to thank and acknowledge the Sinixt, Yaqan Nukiy Ktunaxa, and the Métis people for the opportunity to live, learn and share in cultural experiences in this beautiful place.

We recognize Indigenous Law and Protocol of this land and have built relationships with the Sinixt Nation through the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation; with the Ktunaxa Nation through the Yaqan Nukiy people (Lower Kootenay Band) and the Ktunaxa Nation Council; and the Métis Nation of British Columbia through the West Kootenay Métis Association.

the grow show