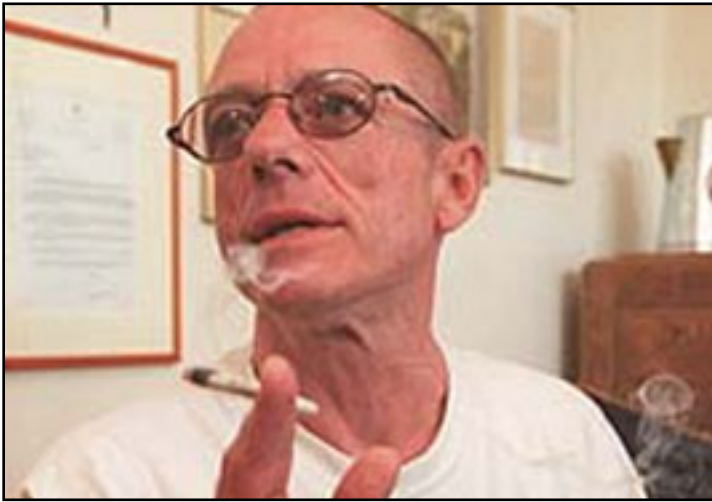


STEP INTO MY PARLOUR



By Shaun Proulx

Jim Wakeford calls marijuana magical. And while millions of happy smiley people couldn't agree more, what the former Church Street resident means is that the greatest relief he gets from the full-blown AIDS he's had since 1993 comes thanks to bud from the 'gorgeous green girls' he is legally allowed to possess.



As Wakeford, 59, put it in an article for *The Positive Side* last summer, 'my face is gaunt. I have no body fat. Veins run like bloated rivers up and down my skinny arms and legs. My gut has a life of its own, changing shape at will. I have lipodystrophy. Small wonder that I seek relief where I can find it.'

Wakeford believes he's alive partly because of his purposeful use of the herb. This belief has driven him to spend the last six years lobbying in the name of compassionate access to marijuana for therapeutic uses, and over four years fighting civil litigation. It has become his life's devotion despite cops and crooks, threats and debt, and the ravaging effects of a disease that still shocks him.

SHAUN PROULX TALKS TO JIM WAKEFORD



With no supply of pot, but a legal right to possess it, Wakeford managed to access some clones and attempted to establish the non-profit Farmer Jim Society. He rented a farm north of Toronto in Udora, where he set up a system to grow marijuana, herbs and vegetables for people experiencing catastrophic illness. He invited the chiefs of the RCMP, the OPP and York Regional Police to visit his set-up. No one came. Instead, several days later he was arrested and charged with production, possession and trafficking, watching in horror as his precious plants were slaughtered.

After being arrested twice again for similar 'offences', Wakeford, broke and exhausted, sold the majority of his possessions and moved to British Columbia's Sunshine Coast after nearly 40 years in Toronto. Up until this past summer he was living in a communal arrangement with a group of creative people on a farm. But another round of arrests, followed by the theft of his plants and equipment, forced him off the farm this past July.



He is now destitute and AIDS is taking an increasing toll. He lives alone in a B.C. town

In 1999 when Wakeford was issued the first marijuana exemption in Canada he thought he'd reached the end of pot problems. It was just the beginning. Although he was legally allowed to possess pot – up to seven plants - there was (and is) no legal supply in Canada. Wakeford's two subsequent appeals for a legal supply and caregiver immunity were lost.

where he knows no one, feeling betrayed by a government and court system for putting him in an impossible situation. He continues his fight, but says he knows he hasn't got much time left. When I spoke to him over the phone his voice was faint and tired, but still full of passion about his little green girls and ready for a frank discussion about the need for weed.



When you won the right to possess pot in the Ontario Superior Court in 1999 we saw Allan Rock (then Minister of Health) receiving accolades for his 'compassion' –



He hasn't got a compassionate bone in his body.



Because he gave you the legal right to smoke pot without giving you a legal supply.



Yes. There's no compassion involved. The government has fucked us all over by granting right without remedy. They have then stalled and delayed ...



With all that pot sitting in mines in Flin Flon, Manitoba.



It's a scandal. Allan Rock promised to help with compassionate access, which is all I've been after. I'm not interested in clinical trials. I don't expect to be around long enough for the results. And certainly I'm horrified at the clinical trials they are going to do in Toronto by CRIT (Community Research Initiative of Toronto). Just disgusting. And I'm ashamed to say my former HIV/AIDS specialist is heading up one of the fucking studies. And they are using pot from the National Institute Of Drug Abuse. It's shocking and horrendous. Even some of my activist friends in Toronto are helping them. I'm so disgusted.



Is this a placebo study?



It's a double-blind placebo study. Some people aren't even getting pot. When I was an AIDS activist – which I still am – we didn't allow that. You didn't allow people to fuck around when you are dying.



The Canadian Medical Association advised doctors not to prescribe pot to patients because of possible implications or liabilities.



There are a number of physicians in the country who think they are doing us a favour by getting caught in the middle and 'prescribing' marijuana. Physicians don't have the training and experience and knowledge to prescribe marijuana. They should butt out. They should observe and chart what we choose to tell them and that's their role as far as I'm concerned.



Can you describe for me how exactly pot helps your specific situation?



Pot helps me with appetite stimulation, anxiety-reduction, nausea and my over-all well-being. I incorporated marijuana into my medical regime in 1996 when I was wasting. I began to use it consciously and purposefully to address those things and have ever since.



You're talking about controlled consumption as well.



Yes. Once can control the dose by smoking.



There's still a great deal of ignorance as to which strains have the best utility.



Yes. For instance if it's early in the morning and you need to wake up your appetite, smoking a heavy indica, which gives a 'body stone' is contra-indicated. You need a sativa, which gives you a more cerebral high. This is where I had hoped the work would happen, scientifically. This is the research that I am interested in being part of. Which strains are most effective? But even when we know, the problem is that you can't ever get them again, that's why pot shouldn't be illegal.



Legalizing pot – for medical or recreational use - is not an issue that should be so complicated. What is everyone so afraid of?



Why are people afraid of fags? Why are people afraid of AIDS? The fact of the matter is that marijuana is a folk medicine. People have been smoking it for centuries.



These myriad complications smell like stall-tactics, to appease someone. Who? The United States?



Yep.



It's the U.S. that Canada is trying to keep happy?



Yep. This is a big test to see if Canada really is an independent country. The American's have been very threatening to Canada as we progress on the pot issue. They view pot as a hard drug and it's part of their 'War On Drugs'. I have a friend who is a fugitive from the United States. She was caught watering her plants in California. She's a fugitive now. She's in Canada; she's married to a Canadian and has a baby. I don't know if she'll ever be deported but if she is she faces ten years in prison in the States.



Up until this summer you were living in a communal situation, but you had to leave. Tell me what happened there.



Before I came to B.C. I was busted three times in Eudora, Ontario. I was pretty beat up. The people on the farm on the Sunshine Coast voted to allow me come and live with them. After I was there a while I was busted again and that made everyone on the farm nervous, but I took the rap. I also took the cops back to court on restoration orders and got almost all the pot they had seized back. I got 945 grams back of the 1023 that they confiscated. At this time I was growing my seven plants with a friend. They were so beautiful: seven or eight feet high, bushy, full, gorgeous. But thieves hit and stole them. And then a week later they stole all the lights and equipment. I filed an insurance claim. The insurance company not only refused to process my claim, they cancelled my insurance and the insurance on the property. I was forced off the farm to save the farm. I haven't been there since July.



Where are you now?



I live alone on a hill in Gibsons, where I don't know anyone and where I have to borrow money to see a lawyer to try and get out of debt. And I no longer have a grower or a supply or money. Because they've driven me across the country ... (A long pause.) It's been very difficult.



Are you still due in court again in March?



March 11th. I'm sure what that is for, exactly, because the lawyers I was referred to were supposed to be pro-bono but afterwards I found out they wanted \$30,000 - \$40,000 to defend me. So I've since been referred to yet another lawyer. I don't qualify for legal aid or medical care because my pension is higher than what people get on welfare.



What kind of ultimate outcome to the marijuana issue would satisfy you?



I've always been advocating for safe, clean, affordable, high-quality marijuana for medical purposes. By safe I mean free of criminal sanctions, clean: free of contaminants, affordable: free for people who can't pay for it, high-quality meaning the best strains available.



What about just legalizing pot, period?



Oh I wish they would. Legalize it and we'll figure out the medical part ourselves



Do you think it's hypocritical that the gay community remains so silent on this? We've got people in our community we care about who are sick and need it, plus a great many of us use it recreationally - whether we'll say we do or not.



I agree with you. I've had no support from the community. In fact I get laughed at. Because it's about pot, and somehow that's funny. I find it so offensive to be such a sick person, struggling with the illnesses I have. To be laughed at on top of it is ... unbearable sometimes. But people don't understand. There's a huge amount of ignorance.



Has the marijuana issue heated to a point where it's not going away anymore?



We've made unbelievably amazing progress from when I started in February 1998. I know a lot of people who are growing it now, legally, who would never have considered it in the past. A lot of my friends have exemptions. As useless as they are, people got them. For me, I feel the issue is now out of the closet. I was in Toronto when it was still in the closet. It took three years for a physician who was an activist with me back then to acknowledge that he smoked, too. Even that people are talking about it – including this conversation right now - and fighting about it at the federal level is exciting.

**Donations to the Wakeford Legal Defence Fund can be sent to:
Jim Wakeford, Unit 21,
622 Farnham Road, Gibsons, British Columbia, VOM 1V8.
He can be contacted at wakeford@dccnet.com**