**TOM ALEXANDER INTERVIEW**

**(Sizzle Reel\_1st File)**

**TRANSCRIPT**

INT: Where did those seeds- When you first came to Oregon, what kinds of plants were you growing?

**16:33:37 – W/S**

Tom: Well, this Hawaiian grower who I grew for in 1978, he had indica, sativas, ruderalis, and he had crosses between them all from some growers in Hawaii that obviously had good seed stock. So I had a bunch of seeds from him and it’s not like today where you know what a strain its’ called(?), a variety, and it was just you know, obvious: This is sativa, this is indica, and this is ruderalis. And so that’s where I originally got my seed stock. And then in 1979, um, I used some of that seed stock and then I had friends in the coast range of Oregon that gave me seeds that have been bred for Oregon. Again, the strains weren’t like today where you have 2,000 different strains, when in reality they think there’s only 50-100 strains and breeders just name something a new name just to create a new name, so...

INT: (Tries to remember his question) What does the word “home grown” mean to you?

**16:35:17 – M/S**

Tom: Home grown is locally uh grown by mom and pop family type growers. It’s almost like a brand name for- To me I think organic, sun-grown outside, uh, home grown to me doesn’t mean indoor. Home grown is like the original product from back in the ‘70’s that um, you know uh... is, is done by local, small, mom and pop growers.

INT: I’m trying to figure out how the Pacific NW became infamous for growing cannabis. How did the home grown thing fit into that?

**16:36:08 – M/S**

T: Well it was a double uh sort of collision from cultures. The San Francisco Haight-Ashbury and then the Seattle um, sort of came together. Seattle is where indoor started back in the late ‘60’s. Again, Vietnam veterans settle in Seattle and started using HID lights. Whereas down in Haight-Ashbury they went to northern California and to Oregon and then um, the two cultures in the ‘80’s sort of merged where the indoor phenomena from the north, Seattle and Portland, merged with the outdoor of southern Oregon and um, northern California, and became this juggernaut of cannabis. I mean, the amount of cannabis is astronomical, you know. Thirty years ago the University of Oregon Business School did a graduate study and they estimated Oregon alone was $1 billion crop. This was 30 years ago and the crop hasn’t gotten any smaller; it’s only gotten larger. And you know, the economic impact of that is serious, I mean we would have had a depression in the recession that we had 7 years ago if it wasn’t for home grown cannabis, mom and pop growers spending their money in the local economies.

INT: How has cannabis been a good part of your life? Tell me about the magazine, the good part and the negative part.

**16:38:03 – W/S**

T: Well, when they um... stole the crop and got such a lenient sentence, I was outraged and I wanted to write a book or a movie or something to vent my feelings. And my grower friends said, “No, no, do an ongoing magazine so that we can express ourselves.” And so I started Sensemilla Tips in 1980 and took 1,000 copies down to southern Oregon/northern California, and they immediately- and sold them in street corners, store, immediately sold it out, and it basically created a life of its own. And growers were sending me stories on how to grow, drama in their cooperative, communal lifestyle, um, it just became a life of its own. And then through the ‘80’s it got me on Phil Donahue, Geraldo, all the major talk shows in the country where I was debating the DEA and Congress uh, member like Charles Rangel and um, so it, it became a successful business, and um. I guess the negative part of that is it got so successful the DEA targeted all my advertisers that were grow shops and uh in September of ’79- I’m sorry, September of 1989, they raided 62 grow shops around the country that were either advertising in High Times or Sensemilla Tips or both. And they took them out, they used civil forfeiture to steal the merchandise and um, basically put almost all the stores out of business, and indirectly put Sensemilla Tips out of business because without advertisers I didn’t have the revenue to publis the magazine anymore. So that was a negative, and probably spending a night in jail when I was growing in 1979 was a negative. And um... They continued to harass me, like 7 years ago I found out through a Freedom of Information request they were still physically surveilling me at my business, at my home, probably on my phone, who knows where else. Over what? I have no idea because I wasn’t growing back then, uh, I was publishing Growing Edge, which was a legitimate uh high tech gardening magazine, farming magazine, that talked about hydroponics and lighting and, but never mentioned cannabis or marijuana.

**16:40:42 (cont.)**

And so for some reason they um, continued to surveil me throughout the years. Like I’m a domestic threat or something. But um, so that- The whole uh stereotype, stigma thing that goes along with that is also a negative, you know, it’s changing nowadays because it’s becoming mainstream accepted, but people really uh, some people really have a stereotype view of you if you’re involved in cannabis.

INT: So what are some of the things you’re doing now with cannabis?

**16:41:26 – M/S**

T: Now I’m speaking at conferences around the country, both about the history and the current situation. I’m consulting growers that are in the legal states and want advice on various aspects of cultivation, and I’m trying to set up a tour company that will take in fine wine, fine food, and fine cannabis in a tour situation and stay at bed and breakfasts, or as they’re called “bud and breakfasts,” that specialize in cannabis consumption on the property. So those are the balls I have up in the air right now and uh, I go to a lot of cannabis trade shows and conferences uh, even when I’m not speaking I write intelligence reports, I’m sponsored to go and paid to write intelligence reports on the conference uh, on this company’s competitor, what they’re doing at the show, and sort of uh, the CIA of cannabis.

INT: Why should we preserve these stories of early pioneer growers?

**16:42:49 – M/S**

T: Because it’s gonna be like alcohol , you know, it’s, it’s gonna become part of mainstream America-

INT: Let’s start again and phrase it a bit differently.

T: That’s what I’m saying is, looking back on alcohol prohibition, we wanted to know to the history of that, and so as cannabis comes into the mainstream, we’ll all be dead and it preserves the uh story of what happened in these days during cannabis prohibition. I mean in 10-20 years we’re gonna look back on cannabis pro- cannabis prohibition much like we do alcohol prohibition. It was foolish, stupid, and a total waste of taxpayers’ money, and they lied to us and people want to know the story of how and what happened, and people love human interest and drama and angles. There’s loads of it in the cannabis story of the past. Is that what you want?

INT: Yeah. Did you ever think it would become legal?

**16:44:26 – M/S (wider than previous shot)**

T: Not in my lifetime, seriously, because the prohibition propaganda and outright lies uh were so believed, but somehow in the past five years I think the medical aspect of it has changed mainstream America’s view on cannabis. That, yes it’s a medicine, yes it helps people, and maybe all the lies and propaganda that they told us were just that: Lies and propaganda. And so um... that drastic change I never thought would happen in my lifetime. And now when I go to these trade shows and conferences it’s like that movie “Back to the Future” you know, it’s like “Whoa this is really happening, “ but you know, it makes me dizzy how fast it changes. It changes daily some, sometime- some weeks. Monthly, at least, but daily sometimes.

INT: What’s the difference between old time growers and the new guys?

**16:45:31 – M/S**

T: Well, old time growers, they just grew it and you know, they didn't have to worry about marketing and shelf space and getting a good price, they got all those things, it was like gravy. But now, it’s cut throat, it’s a real business, and you gotta think about marketing, you gotta think about you know, workers compensation. If you have plants in an indoor operation on the ground and workers got to pick them up, you’re gonna be paying workers comp claims like crazy. You want the plants up 3 feet off the ground so people don’t have to bend over and get back strain and file workers comp claims. Uh, it’s a whole different world now that it’s legal cause you gotta have security, you gotta have human resources department, basically, although there’s a company now that do human resource for any aspect, whether you’re a grower, a dispensary, whatever, whatever uh... job you have they have somebody already checked out, background checks, everything ready to go right in. So, it’s a real business now and you, you really can’t compare it to the old days when it was just you know... grow some, somebody would buy it and there’s no problem, get a high price. It’s now really competitive, you’ve gotta have uh, you gotta start thinking about branding, marketing, getting samples out, you have to treat it like a real business. You’ve gotta have a lawyer, an accountant, you have uh all this infrastructure to run it as a real business.

INT: So what’s better? The way it used to be or-

**16:47:32 – M/S**

T: (Sighs) I think now because you won’t get arrested or thrown in jail, as long as you go with the regulation and license and permits and all the red tape that you have, because you know I only spent 24 hours in jail but it felt like being in a zoo, in a cage. Obviously you’re in an enclosed area, and it just, losing your freedom isn’t really worth the risk to me, at my elder age, and so being legal and uh, and playing their game of regulations and licenses and fees and- It should be like tomatoes; it’s a plant. But the voters and the electorate won’t pass something to treat it like tomatoes. They don’t even treat it like beer. You can brew as much beer for your own consumption as you want, but they limit it to four or six plants, and uh, a pound amount that you can possess. And it should be like beer, tomatoes, whatever. But we gotta take gradual steps to implement it into society cause they believed the lies for so long that they don’t like drastic change.