Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Oliver Bates

Oliver Bates: Reflections on Over Three Decades in the Cannabis Industry

California Cannabis Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Todd Holmes
in 2021

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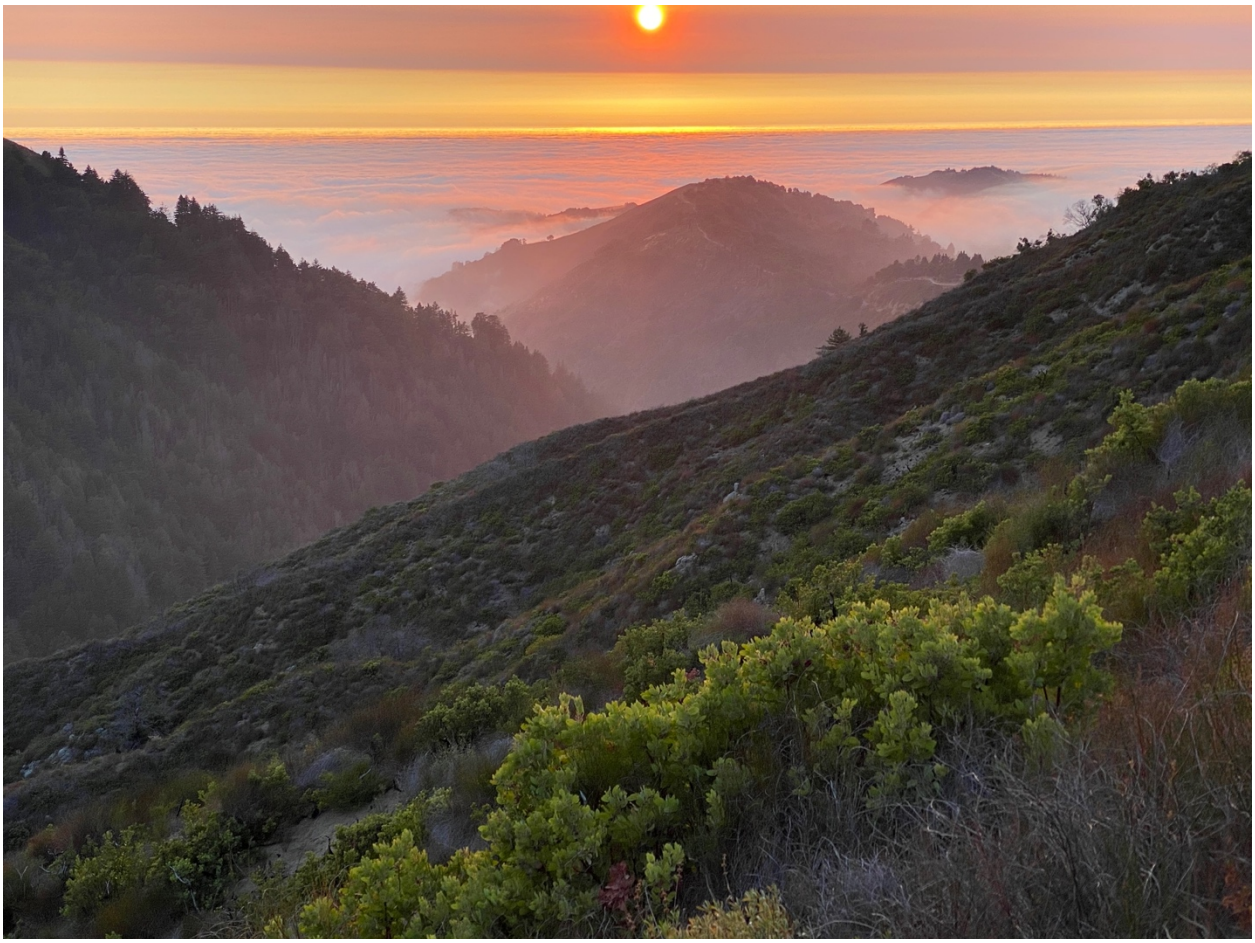

Big Sur mountain garden

Flower close-up

Cannabis plant

Cannabis garden

Abstract

Oliver Bates is the president of the Big Sur Farmers Association and a thirty-year veteran of the cannabis industry. A native of California's Central Coast, Bates began growing cannabis in the secluded mountains of Big Sur where he applied the methods passed down from elder farmers in the community. With the passage of Proposition 215 in 1996, which legalized medical cannabis in California, he became one of Monterey County's earliest open cultivators. The medical boom of the next two decades would see him involved in growing operations in the Emerald Triangle (namely Mendocino and Humboldt counties), Oregon, Colorado, and Santa Cruz. In 2012, Bates returned to Big Sur with the aim of growing organic, legacy strains of cannabis. With the passage of Proposition 64, which legalized cannabis for recreation in California, he helped found the Big Sur Famers Association, a mutual benefit non-profit that works to support, protect, and advance the rights of cannabis cultivators in the region. In this interview, Bates discusses growing up in Carmel and Big Sur; the history and culture of cannabis in the region; the hippie trail and importation of cannabis seeds into Big Sur; the development of strains such as Big Sur Holy Weed, Big Sur Chamba, and SAGE, among others; the family networks connecting Big Sur and Northern Mendocino and Southern Humboldt counties; the impact of the War on Drugs; early experience growing cannabis; opportunities of the medical cannabis market; growing in Big Sur and Northern Mendocino/Southern Humboldt; working at Spyrock community; shifts and consumer impact of the medical market; stepping into indoor hydroponic cultivation; growing in Oregon and Colorado; coming back to California and opening his operation in Santa Cruz; further development of strains and THC products in medical market; coming back to Big Sur and returning to a natural, low-impact cultivation; his hopes and anxieties around full legalization; the passage of Proposition 64; forming the Big Sur Farmers Association; and his reflections on the evolution of cannabis culture in Big Sur.

Table of Contents

Interview History

By Todd Holmes
Historian/Interviewer
April 2023
Berkeley, California

It is fitting to feature Oliver Bates, president of the Big Sur Farmers Association, as the inaugural interview for the California Cannabis Oral History Project. A thirty-year veteran of the cannabis industry, Bates began growing on California's Central Coast in his teens, applying the methods he learned from working with elder farmers in the Big Sur community. Upon the passage of Proposition 215, he moved his small operation from the secluded mountains of Big Sur to a sizeable open farm in Monterey County, where he was among the region's earliest cultivators of medical cannabis. The medical boom soon led him north to the border area of Mendocino and Humboldt Counties—the epicenter of the famed Emerald Triangle. There he worked in the Spyrock community with some of the top growers in the industry, helping to develop the new techniques and strains needed to meet the ever-changing demands of the evolving cannabis market.

His experience at Spyrock expanded and refined his skillset as a cultivator. It also introduced him to the next chapter of his career: indoor hydroponics. As a grower who strove for perfection with every plant, Bates found the potential of indoor hydroponics hard to resist. Outdoor cultivation requires a farmer to work with the natural environment to produce the best possible product—a factor that explains California's preeminence in cannabis cultivation. Indoor cultivation allows growers to create the optimal environment, and with it a greater chance for a more optimal product. Bates quickly took to the new venture, opening large indoor operations in Oregon and Colorado before returning to California to run one of the largest hydro operations in Santa Cruz County. And in each location, he increased both scale and variety to keep apace with the shifting currents of the medical cannabis market. For a farmer who began growing in the secluded Santa Lucia Mountains of Big Sur, the developments he had both witnessed and helped advance in the cannabis world were staggering. The medical market came to include hundreds of cannabis strains, powerful concentrates, and an ever-growing assortment of THC products. As the first decade of the twenty-first century came to a close, consumerism had left its mark on cannabis.

In 2012, Bates returned home to Big Sur. Bothered by the environmental excesses of indoor growing and the commercialism of the cannabis market, he yearned to get back to a simpler practice. His career, in many respects, had come full circle. Over the years, he had pushed his craft to its limits: bigger yields, new strains, higher THC, more and more products. He now wished to return to his roots by growing legacy cultivars in the community he called home. And in 2016, he helped found the Big Sur Farmers Association, a mutual benefit non-profit that works to support, protect, and advance the rights of cannabis cultivators in the region.

This oral history is not just the story of one farmer's journey; it is also the story of community, culture, and craft. Oliver Bates always viewed his work in cannabis as building upon the generation of growers that came before him. In that vein, he consulted with a number of elders in the Big Sur community prior to this interview in the effort to make sure he accurately framed the rich history of the region within his own story. For Oliver, paying tribute to those previous generations in the history we document here stood as a top priority. It is hoped that both this interview and the larger project does justice to that goal.

Project History

By Todd Holmes
Historian/Associate Academic Specialist
April 2023
Berkeley, California

There's no place like California. For over 150 years, residents and visitors alike have not run short of reasons to support such a claim. And since the 1960s, it has been echoed—albeit in whispers—among cannabis circles around the globe. Bestowed with rich soils and a unique Mediterranean climate, counterculture-turned-farming communities in California pioneered cultivation and breeding practices that would revolutionize cannabis, and in the process, give the Golden State near mythic status. Strains such as Haze, Kush, Blueberry, Purps, Skunk, and SAGE became legendary, as did the California regions that produced them: Big Sur, Santa Cruz, and the famed Emerald Triangle of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt Counties. For a plant whose history spans millennia, such developments were more than just a feat; they proved to be a game changer. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the innovations of California cultivators had created the very seedbed upon which the modern world of cannabis would flourish.

The history of California cannabis, however, has long been relegated to the shadows. Designated an illegal substance in 1937 with the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act, cannabis cultivation was forced to take root in the dark soils of prohibition—a landscape that legally branded farmers as outlaws, and their crop as contraband. Thus, unlike other agricultural sectors, cannabis had no state organizations to provide support to growers, no venues to share the latest methods and innovations. In fact, most cultivators lived and operated in near seclusion, which proved an important survival tactic amid America's escalating War on Drugs. The craft of cultivation, therefore, came to resemble a highly guarded secret among cannabis communities, one that was passed down over the decades from one generation to the next. In 1996, California voters finally began to pull back the veil of prohibition with the passage of Proposition 215, which legalized cannabis for medical use. Twenty years later, voters fully legalized cannabis in the state with Proposition 64. For the first time in modern history, California cannabis farmers were able to fully step out of the shadows; and with them, came the untold history of their craft.

The California Cannabis Oral History Project was created to capture the history of these communities and finally situate cannabis within the historical record. From the start, our efforts at the Oral History Center benefited greatly from the help and guidance of Genine Coleman of Origins Council (formally the Mendocino Appellations Project) and Joe Hoover of 420 Archive. Both had worked extensively with the state's cannabis communities for years through their respective organizations and proved invaluable partners in the project. Chief among their many acts of support was to provide introductions to members of these communities, most of whom still stood quite leery of outsiders, especially those seeking to document their stories. More than once, these communities had felt burned by writers and filmmakers whom they believed chose sensationalism over history, profits over professionalism and respect. It was a testament to the trust Genine and Joe had built—as well as the collaborative process the Oral History Center has

been committed to since its founding in 1953—that such apprehension was eased. As this volume goes to print, we are excited about the future of this project and the impact these histories will have for the scholars and policymakers of today, and those of tomorrow.

Interview 1: October 14, 2021

01-00:00:01
Holmes: All right, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is October 14, 2021, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Oliver Bates, President of the Big Sur Farmers Association, for the California Cannabis Oral History Project. This is our first of two sessions, and we are here in the mountains of Big Sur, in a beautiful mountaintop house overlooking the forest and ocean—his residence part of the time. Oliver, thank you so much for sitting down with me today.

01-00:00:48
Bates: Thank you for having me, Todd. It's a pleasure.

01-00:00:51
Holmes: Well, in these oral histories, we're going to talk about cannabis culture and history, both in this region and others that you've encountered in your long experience. In this first session, I'd like to start with your family background, and then get into the history of the cannabis cultivars, practice, and culture here in the Big Sur region. So tell us a little bit about yourself and your family background here?

01-00:01:22
Bates: Sure. Well, my name's Oliver Bates, and I'm from Carmel, California. But I live here in Big Sur, or in the North Coast of Big Sur, as we like to call it. I'm the third of four generations from Carmel. One side of the family came from Texas, one side of the family came from Illinois—and this was my grandparents. And then my parents, through the sixties, came with their parents to here. So my parents actually had their own upbringing in Texas and Illinois, but were here by the sixties. They raised me and my brother, and my other half brothers and sisters, here on the Central coast in the Carmel area. So we're from here, and I got a good, steeped, rich history of the region. Both my parents are artists, and my mom was an oil and acrylic painter. My dad was a cartoonist, and got to enjoy that artist lifestyle here in Carmel, California. And yeah, it's just a beautiful place to grow up. So I'm from here, and I went to school here, and just love it here. [laughs] Yeah.

01-00:02:39
Holmes: Well, talk a little bit about the experience of growing up here in Big Sur. Tell us a little bit about the family environment. You were saying that both your parents are artists?

01-00:02:46
Bates: Yes.

01-00:02:47
Holmes: So what kind of environment did that bring, both to the household, as well as expose you to, in regards to their friends in the larger community in the Big Sur/Carmel area?

01-00:02:59

Bates: So my parents, they were definitely from the bohemian era, I'd like to think—art, poetry, writing, lots of music in the families. It was really family style. There wasn't a lot of venues or places you could go for that, so it was usually done in households. In Carmel—in the greater region really—the artists were few and far between, so they really got together and supported each other. Many of the family friends stretched from Big Sur to Carmel, and then out to Carmel Valley. And so growing up, we had a house full of too much food, music instruments, and piles of books, and fun, colorful people coming through.

We spent a lot of our time in nature. My mom liked doing landscapes and still life pictures of things, and a lot of times in natural locations. Back then, there wasn't the usual video game distraction or the Internet, or anything else. So much of my life was spent on the river fishing, catching turtles, doing things like that. At a young age I was blessed to have this beautiful beach down the street—started surfing when I was nine years old. And really, by the time I was twelve, I just lived for it, so that was a lot of fun. But it was a real quiet area, kind of residential in Carmel, but real rural on all the outskirts. So, you know, bicycles and running around nature, hiking.

01-00:04:29

In the home was really special artistic people, which brought a lot of culture. It brought people from all over the world. We had Tibetan monks around the house. We had African musicians around the house. We had lots of interesting folks from all over the world. And part of my upbringing as well, I should mention, is my dad, who is a cartoonist. He spent twenty-six years as a cruise director for the Cunard Cruise Line, which is run by the government of Norway. So he did around-the-world cruises, booking entertainment and planning activities for the guests. He was a real stylish man—paisley tuxedo, dancing, wining, dining, art—and so that was part of our culture.

01-00:05:22

Carmel and its rural region really brought all these neighborhoods and communities together. We all went to school together. We all went to the same kindergartens and grade schools and middle schools and high schools. So there's a real integration of eighty miles down the coast, and about forty miles inland, all of it hugging the Santa Lucia Mountain Range. So it's very rugged, just natural lands, park, so that was our playground really, these mountains and the parks and the rivers and the ocean. But like I said, no Internet, no conveniences, or restaurants and galleries. All these things are relatively new in our area. So I just remember a lot of playing outside with my friends, and always on the land and enjoying camaraderie with the other families.

01-00:06:17

Holmes: Maybe to give us kind of a range of the time we're talking about, what year were you born?

01-00:06:24
Bates: I was born in 1977.

01-00:06:27
Holmes: Okay. Looking back at this this area of Big Sur and Carmel, going up to like the Monterey Peninsula, today it's very well to-do. If we look back, post-World War II, even up into the 1970s, we had the canneries.

01-00:06:49
Bates: Yes.

01-00:06:50
Holmes: We had this mix of not just artists, as you were saying, but also blue-collar workers.

01-00:06:54
Bates: Yes, and even Carmel itself. You know, there was always a certain amount of inherent wealth right on the coast, but really the rest was literally the services and the blue-collar workers that supported all of that. When I grew up, the canneries had tanked already. So in the 1980s, all of Cannery Row, and where the aquarium and all these tourist locations are now, was literally rundown, abandoned canneries, with old whisky-drunk hobos in there. We'd ride our skateboards inside of the industrial junk, and it was our playground, in a way. Really, it was our skate park. But Carmel itself was blue collar until fairly recently. I'd say the 1990s, and the rise of the Silicon Valley, is really what turned it into what it is today, which is an interesting dynamic. When I grew up, it was sleepy, boring, the town of my grandmas—just couldn't get out of there fast enough. There was *nothing* happening in Carmel, California.

01-00:07:54
Holmes: Talk a little bit about the community environment, particularly growing up in both Carmel and the larger Big Sur area. How would you describe the community culture? We were talking about that here just a minute ago, right, of the wealthy, and the service industry, and these kind of things.

01-00:08:11
Bates: Sure.

01-00:08:12
Holmes: But talk a little bit about the community culture. Was this a multigenerational kind of community? What kind of gatherings and community events stand out in your memory?

01-00:08:24
Bates: Sure, it was very much a multigenerational community, and still is. Many of the homesteading families are still here; the people that built the monasteries are still here. Some of these families have 150 years of history. Where, for me, being third generation, I was kind of a newcomer, right? My dad said it took the local community ten years to get his first name, and twenty years to know his second name—or surname—you know? The atmosphere was very family

style. Everybody's door was open. We were all welcome in each other's households. I could literally walk to a friend's house, walk in the door, and raid the fridge. So it was just really an open kind of community, and they'd take turns raising all of us. There were the grandparents helping a lot back then, and other families. My family was very blue collar/working class, so you also had to work and do art. Often, the parents would kind of take turns taking on the herds of kids and finding activities for them to do. It was very welcoming.

But it was also pretty conservative. I will say, my dad left North Beach San Francisco in the sixties because he couldn't stand the hippies, and he was kind of a mod. He was bartending back then, so he came to Carmel to be with his more kind of mod friends—a little more respectable light, less hippish. There were a lot of churches. Both of my grandmas are Irish Catholic, so they were often sitting there counting our sins for us on their rosary beads. So there was this funny dynamic of conservative with a really fun, liberal, creative class underneath it all, that was kind of loved, protected, but not out in the open, not advertised, not really talked about.

01-00:10:29

So we had a *flamenco juerga* that would happen on the North Coast of Big Sur here, where the Spaniards would come in and play guitars for days on end, and wheelbarrow the wine in. All the kids would come and camp with each other, and the parents could get drunk on wine, and scream and yell and smoke weed, and whatever else, without being subject to our respectable Carmel Catholic communities. So there was this funny conservative dynamic, with this fun underneath. It was definitely that kind of town, when you go to Grandma's house, you wear slacks and nice shirt. We'd call it "Carmel clean." So it's like Carmel clean, and then go ahead and be free, and that was kind of the vibration too, especially here in the hills of Big Sur. Everybody was like really open and loose and comfortable, and it didn't matter what you wore or what religion or creed you were.

01-00:11:28

Holmes: Well, I get into the historical roots of cannabis, as you were just mentioning, here in the Big Sur area. But before we get to that, maybe tell us a little bit about the cannabis culture that you observed growing up?

01-00:11:47

Bates: Sure, sure. So, it was always around us. I remember being a young little boy, running through a living room, and I jumped right onto a tray of pot, and all the parents were disappointed. That was my first memory of weed. And the second memory of weed was running around with my friend Matthew, in his back yard, and his parents would watch videotapes of the Grateful Dead and eat giant bags of popcorn. We'd run around these sticky, funny flowers, you know, so that was part of it. It was there, in the osmosis.

Another part, I definitely attribute to my godmother, who was my mom's best friend. She was an old Jewish-Spanish gypsy, that played flamenco. She had been smoking weed since the 1950s I think. So when we were young, she always had these beautiful gardens with flowers and vegetables and fruits everywhere. But if you looked closely enough, there was all the stinky, funny flowers in there. Once we became a certain age, usually of drinking age back then—which probably was around twelve years old—they would allow us to partake if we wanted to. So some of my first experiences were with my godmother, and coming down here to these *flamenco juergas*. She'd give all the kids a little baggy of pot so they weren't jonesing, and take us on these wild little adventures. My mom and my godmother would go paint cows in the field. And the same thing—my godmother would give us each a little baggy like, "Okay, go to the creek. We'll see you all in a few hours," and that was kind of one way.

01-00:13:24

I also grew up surfing on the beach at Carmel, and all the Big Sur kids go to school with the Carmel kids. I actually did most of my schooling in the next town over, called Pacific Grove. I lived in this funny in-between Carmel zone with my mom. But the kids in Big Sur had a much more liberal environment, where it was literally on the counters, in jars, in the spice cupboards, always being smoked. And ever since I was about twelve years old and surfing, I met some Big Sur buddies on the beach and we became good friends, and so we asked our parents if we could have stayovers, you know. And that started the stayovers with Big Sur friends—and oh, the weed, it was so cool. I had a dear friend, and his mom was an old lesbian lady that was a wonderful parent—really like helped raise a lot of kids around the community. And it was okay with her, but she showed us how to be kind of socially conservative in town with it, and it was very much impressed upon us that we keep this quiet in town, but it's okay out here. And so from a very young age, it was around and we were exposed to it socially. And culturally, it was absolutely acceptable in rural communities; and absolutely unacceptable within the townships and those jurisdictions. Back then, I understood my parents—they could have lost the house if somebody found a joint there, you know.

01-00:14:59

Holmes: Yeah, which is very interesting now, here in 2021, looking at in an age of legalization, you know. But your parents came to age in probably some of the harshest periods of prohibition.

01-00:15:15

Bates: Oh yeah.

01-00:15:17

Holmes: And so the legal ramifications of cannabis—somebody reading this oral history may not really understand what it was.

01-00:15:25
Bates: Right! A whisper could ruin a reputation.

01-00:15:28
Holmes: Yeah.

01-00:15:28
Bates: Yeah, back then.

01-00:15:30
Holmes: Well, let's dive into the history of cannabis here in the Big Sur region. And again, you're speaking not just from the authority of a long-time grower, but also, I believe, as president of the Big Sur Farmers Association?

01-00:15:48
Bates: Yes, still president to the kind of de facto Big Sur Farmers Association. We are the only local trade association for Big Sur residents, and for outdoor cultivation, on the central coast. We're the only group that represents that, and we're sixty legacy farms; multigenerational farms many of them—second, and working on third-generation farmers with a fourth generation on the way. So we actually have this unique window into our history through kind of what you do—these oral history accounts that we get. We drum up the empirical evidence we need to show their historic value and their significance and their proof. So, yes, still president of the Big Sur Farmers Association, and very proud to do so.

01-00:16:50
Holmes: Well to start, tell me a little bit about the historical roots of cultivation. I know in some of our discussions you've mentioned the hippie Brotherhood of Eternal Light.

01-00:17:01
Bates: Yes, yes. And you know, of course I wasn't around back then. I was born when Star Wars came out and Elvis died, so they call me a kid—still. As far as the histories we're tracing, all of these histories—from the strains to the cultivation and who brought that cultivation here—it is actually really hard to pinpoint one individual or one time. But what we do have is a few individuals at a few close-knit times. They're very close timelines.

And as far as the history we're digging up, it really appears that the actual strong cultivation of cannabis happened in the early seventies, but had been cultivated in Big Sur perhaps as early as 1955, on a very small scale. There's a few routes to these conclusions through stories and personal accounts ranging from 1955. A New Camaldoli monk named Perry, who came from Mexico, maybe perhaps Mexico City. But there's a hermitage in Big Sur on the South Coast, where they walk around in robes and brew their beer, and they've got their incense and make fruitcakes. But there's this legend of a very special monk named Perry, who had it in the vegetable gardens, just as a healing

herb—a very medicinal thing actually. It was even rumored he may have used it for salves, not smoking, for pain relief and things.

01-00:18:40

Holmes: And was that what many attributed as what became the original Big Sur Holy Weed?

01-00:18:46

Bates: Right. The stories of the origin of cannabis in Big Sur—there's three possible origins and three possible outcomes, in a way. And then three possible dates as well, right? So this is where it gets kind of goofy. But the furthest back we can track is 1955, a monk named Perry.

Next in line would be the actual Big Sur Holy strains. And not to lose track of your original question, but getting back to the Brotherhood, or some of these folks that might have made it possible, we know this group from the late sixties as *the* Brotherhood, that is what they called it. And we know for a fact that there was a logging community and a fishing community that partakes, in the beginnings of the hippie movement, in the Summer of Love, even pre-Summer of Love. Many of them were known for their rural activities, but also their smuggling skills, and what have you. Part of that story says that the pot-growing in Big Sur started by the brick weed in Mexico getting more and more expensive. People had tried to grow these seeds—because everything was seeded. They tried to grow it in many regions, and for some reason, Big Sur just took off like Jurassic Park. So that's one origin story of, perhaps, where the weed growing in Big Sur came from. Definitely, a closer origin to how it hit scale, or when it got big and production started.

01-00:20:23

Then there's kind of a third one, which would be more around the early-to-mid-seventies, which is a little more just tied into the loose association of the community. Like the founding and creation of the Esalen Institute, and the international crowds, and medicines, and meditation, and music. All these alternative lifestyles and medicines that were promoted through the Esalen Institute, and the wide variety of people that were traveling folks.

But two things are for sure. Most of it started in the late sixties, and particularly about circa 1970. And then the second being that, for sure, most of our strains, outside of the Holy and some specific Brotherhood—these smugglers that took care of the hippies, imported for them, grew for them, were security for them, were all sorts of things for the hippie movement—came from what they call the hippie trail. So in the sixties and seventies, many of the hippies went to Asia, and went to places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, India. The Beatles, you know, got into that—the Ravi Shankar, and then they all go to do yoga, with Yogananda already being here. There was a huge movement in my parents' generation, and particularly my mom's generation, that did this hippie trail across Asia. And that's where many of our

strains—maybe roughly half of them, in the beginning—came from that hippie trail.

01-00:22:12
Holmes: We're talking about the Khyber Valley—Afghanistan/Pakistan.

01-00:22:19
Bates: Right! So actually, the way we know many of these origin stories is from certain folks, like as we chase down strains, a lot of people said, "Oh, it's an Afghan cross." Well, that's an entire country. And who brought it? Was it somebody from Los Angeles? Who brought this here? So as we started chasing that history, it turned out on the hippie trail there were certain spiritual hotspots, whether that be like Dharamshala, India, or in Nepal, Kathmandu. In Afghanistan, there were certain places as well.

So there's a high Himalayan area of spiritual significance between Afghanistan and Pakistan that's called the Khyber Valley, or the Khyber Pass. When we were young, some of our parents would specifically tell us—*this* is the Khyber Pass, where very popular strains were made out of Mazar-i-Sharif, which is another area of Afghanistan. So that would be the other big one that actually became more popular as the weed migrated out of here into the bigger industry later on. So that's kind of like a real origin in the hippie trail, as far as Afghan strains coming from these two specific places. The hippie trail led these hippies to the best weed, or the best hash, that they'd ever smoked. They collected a few seeds, you know, and would put them in the hem of their pants or in their shorts, or in a bag of spices, and get a few seeds home and try it here.

01-00:23:59
Holmes: So that's where some of the early cultivars, which I want to get into talking a little bit more about, began?

01-00:24:08
Bates: Yes.

01-00:24:08
Holmes: I guess we can call it the seed bed, right, of those early cultivars—the seeds from this hippie trail.

01-00:24:17
Bates: Right! We've talked about the Brotherhood, and how maybe they brought some from Mexico. And then we have the hippie trail, and how they were right there in the Himalayas especially, in the spiritual regions of northern Indian/Pakistan/Afghanistan/Nepal. Now, there's two other groups worth noting. For sure, Vietnam, and Vietnam- area growers in Southeast Asia—places like Laos/Cambodia/Vietnam, all those areas, which had their own form of exploits, but some rare strains as well, where it was often the same thing. It wasn't that they were importing because they knew it was the best. It was just like something they might have smoked there, and they wanted to

bring a little something home as memorabilia, or something to cherish, and would bring these strains from that area.

01-00:25:11

And then, I'd like to think that there's even a fourth part that sort of correlates to the hippie trail, and definitely correlates to Esalen, as far as opening up to world music, ethnic diversity and different ethnic religions and things. It was quite new back then, I guess, in the seventies and eighties, which was a little before my time, like I was saying. But there was a lot of folks that actually went to Africa. We had a legend that would come to Esalen since the sixties. After the Woodstock show, all these hippies met in their drum circles, and a really famous African man that won a Nobel Peace Prize—his name is Babatunde Olatunji—came with some of his hippie brothers from Woodstock out to Big Sur, California. They visited the Brotherhood and Esalen, where they started a long, strong tradition of ethnic percussion, and especially African percussion, which decades later, I grew up in as well. So when I was a boy, I'd go down to Esalen and learn African drums with Babatunde Olatunji and my friends. He'd come every year, and hold week-long workshops. And then, we'd all have a big dance party of the Fourth of July, and those guys were real hippies. So some of those folks would do the same thing—bring a little something special from across the seas.

01-00:26:37

Holmes: Well, another character I wanted to ask you about, who comes into the history of cannabis in Big Sur, is a man named Patrick Cassidy.

01-00:26:46

Bates: Yes.

01-00:26:47

Holmes: Tell us a little bit about Cassidy, and the growing culture that he was also a part of and helped nurture in the area.

01-00:26:55

Bates: Sure, so Patrick is probably one of most legendary, for both good and bad reasons, if there is such a thing in cannabis. I want to start somewhere in the middle, where he definitely got famous through a couple different things that happened. I hear there was a *New York Times* article. I've seen the *National Geographic*, amongst others, but it had this article about Big Sur, and then it showed this guy Patrick Cassidy coming out of the hills with his white donkey, with saddlebags full of weed that he'd give to people for free. And it kind of hit the big time, and the local conservative enforcement *really* thrashed and trashed Big Sur for it. And then right around the Just Say No campaigns and the War on Drugs—I was still a little boy when they had those original harvest parties—he also invited an undercover officer to the legendary harvest parties that used to happen down here, and they came down on the entire community hard, brought the National Guard in and destroyed

things. So it's both a good and bad reputation that he probably had locally. But we very much consider him a founding father and a legend in many respects.

So I'd like to start back to the history we know of. As far as him growing up, and what that whole scenario was, I have no idea. But I do know that in the sixties, he was part of a logging community. These logging communities were legendary, multigenerational logging families that came in the 1800s. They logged in California, and they logged in Northern California, and they logged in Oregon. He was here on the South Coast of Big Sur, and really was a pioneer in the hippie movement. An absolute wild man, loved it, was very welcoming—invited a lot of people down.

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Some of his legendary stories, as far as origin stories, were he was part of this group of folks that would import cannabis from Mexico during the sixties. And most of the weed that was in California—outside of Thai sticks or Colombian Gold, or something—came from Mexico, traditionally, and he was part of that mechanism. I guess the price went up a little bit, to like $20 a pound—who knows. [laughs] But all of a sudden, they felt like they were spending too much money. They tried some of their Mexican seeds *here*, and that was a cost-effective way to go ahead and produce themselves, and hopefully do good that way. But through the course of this, beginning to take Mexican strains that they were importing from Mexico already, the Holy Bud was developed. We grew up calling the best weed in Big Sur Dolores, from a place right near San Miguel, Mexico, north of Mexico City, in the Sierra Madre Mountains. And so that was the chronic, and these guys had like absolutely pinpointed the chronic crops in Mexico. That's what they were getting, and so we actually knew it as Dolores. And the Dolores he had grown was amazing, and people really loved it.

Where his origin story takes a wonderful and wild twist was there's a legendary story that they grew a bunch. They had never grown a bunch. They maybe grew, who knows, a thousand pounds. They had a relation already with different smuggling groups, so the story goes that the Hell's Angels came down and bought a thousand pounds for the hippie movement, for the [Grateful] Dead shows, or whatever. And Patrick Cassidy said, "Oh, this will be the best weed that you've smoked in your life." And they said, "Okay, whatever." They took it, and then many months later they came back, and this person from the Hell's Angels said, "This *was* the best weed we smoked in our life, except for all of this." And he handed back the seeds and stems, and said he wanted a refund, which they tried to honor, because they were terrified of the Hell's Angels back then.

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And then the story goes that they had heard about a technique in Afghanistan, where they had taken the males out for hashish production. They decided they would try this, because one of their friends supposedly had rats eat all of the

males out of one of their crops, and they ended up with six plants of this amazing weed that had no seeds, which got them so high they didn't know what to do. So, they tried that, and then the story goes that he said, "Take the stems out of it, take the seeds out of it. We can't do the seeds. We've got to sell it like this." And then, once that was done, those first crops literally blew people's minds. Cannabinoids and THC contents were, from what we understand back then, they were about 6 percent, and they were a 1:1 CBD/THC with many of these landraces—and it was seeded weed, so it was not strong. This might have bumped it up to like 16 percent, with way less CBD. People were getting *really* high, like they never have in the sixties before.

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And *supposedly*, this is where the term Big Sur Holy Weed originated—the one we're kind of going with out of the three holy-weed stories. This is where people decide, 'Oh, this is magical weed, this is holy weed.' Part of that Brotherhood story goes that they sent the word out to their brothers in Laguna Canyon in Los Angeles, and in Hana, Maui, where they were also importers/smugglers, to take the seeds out—or take the males out—trim it up, buh, buh, buh. So, many attribute Patrick Cassidy, and his clan, to really creating modern cannabis the way we know it, breeding up for THC, trimming, taking the males out, all of these things.

But to go even further into Patrick Cassidy, we also attribute the California iconic harvest party to Patrick Cassidy. In the seventies and eighties, even when I was a boy, they used to have these big parties where every year the pot farmers would have an underground party. They'd pick one virgin girl from the community, that would start the weekend off by marching out with the biggest pot plant grown the whole year, and setting it on fire in a bonfire, and that would unleash the weekend's festivities of mounds of cannabis, and food, and psychedelics, and drum circles. All of these really cultural aspects of the cannabis community would really shine through in these very special events that were only whispered and spoken of, and people would come do that. So we actually attribute a lot of modern cannabis, the way we know it in California, to Patrick Cassidy and his brothers, the way they did it.

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Not to go too much further, but Patrick Cassidy, being the man he was, was actually a logger. They had set up a logging station which is now a resort called Treebones. And it was called the Treebones because it was kind of their logging front, and they'd just do wood art. There was piles of wood everywhere, and old tree parts everywhere, so they called it Treebones. But that being said, when that Reagan Administration's War on Drugs started in the eighties, and then the Just Say No campaign, they really smashed the hell out of all our forefathers here. That's when Patrick Cassidy and his sons went to their comfort zone, which was the logging communities of Northern California.

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So, we actually like to tie the late Patrick Cassidy's name to the late Harvest Cassidy's name. Harvest Cassidy was really attributed to taking that old-school way, and taking it into the medical-marijuana area, and really raising the roof. He was one of the main suppliers of growing supplies in Northern California, and really one of the first of these logging community growers in the Mendocino and Humboldt regions. So they're kind of tied together in these logging communities, and we would like to attribute the modern techniques to this legacy. These techniques include certain soils like all the Fox Farm and all these coir-heavy things and nutrients, and then bringing that kind of supply and turkey bags being used, smart pots getting imported from Missouri off of tree farms to the cannabis industry. Things like that, Harvest Cassidy was very instrumental in starting.

01-00:36:03

Holmes: To ask you really quick, so the seedless cannabis, as you were saying with Patrick Cassidy, just to follow up on this. That process of separating and cultivating cannabis without seeds—if I have the term correct—is *sinsemilla*?

01-00:36:23

Bates: Ah! So here's where sinsemilla comes from, according to our lore. Once they caught on to that, and this hippie Brotherhood started really ripping, they couldn't produce enough because they had to hide. So they actually called down to Mexico and said, "Take the males out. We need it seedless." And actually, the word sinsemilla was a derogatory remark for decades down in Mexico. They didn't catch on until the late seventies/early eighties. So, it was actually derogatory, they're like, "seedless?" They didn't even understand. It's like, "How are you going to have seeds for next year?" And like, "Why the *hell* would you do that?" So actually, sinsemilla was a derogatory remark. But then people—in Central and South America, Colombia, other places—it's like they would go in, and once it really started ripping in the eighties here, it was just the best weed on earth. They'd go through—sinsemilla, sinsemilla, sinsemilla—it just rung through everybody's ears. So they didn't get it at first, they laughed at it. Now it's like this sacred thing—the sinsemilla. The Rastas, the people in India, everybody say sinsemilla, you know? But it literally was a derogatory remark for seedless.

And so, that's how we know it. Pat Cassidy and the Brotherhood guys telling them down in Mexico, "*Take the seeds out*," and they just would laugh at them. They had such a big production, they're like, "Whatever, with these little, crazy mountain hippies." So yeah, sinsemilla is that seedless technique. Although it's Spanish, this technique, was actually observed, or heard about, through the hippie trail in Afghanistan.

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Holmes: That's really interesting. Well, I want to talk a little bit about the legacy cultivars of the region. As we were talking about the historical roots of cannabis cultivation in Big Sur, this cultivation then leads to heritage strains,

heritage cultivars that would become historic in and of themselves. We talked about Big Sur Holy Weed. There was also another strain: Big Sur Chamba.

01-00:38:50
Bates: Yes.

01-00:38:51
Holmes: Talk a little bit about that.

01-00:38:52
Bates: Well, one almost leads to the other, right? And here we get back to the local lore and the few origin tales that we think lead to the source. So with Holy, there was the monk named Perry; there was Patrick Cassidy doing the best weed you ever smoked in your life. But this is how it relates to Chamba. There was also the wonderful hippie trail folks, and particularly, a friend of mine on the South Coast. His parents had a little Buddhist center which was very ahead of its time in the seventies down there. But they had actually traveled the hippie trail to Afghanistan and certain places, so we believed the Afghan strains might have come from there. But that's also another myth—the Holy might have been the Buddhist ceremony at the hippie house down on the South Coast. But how this relates, is Chamba—

01-00:39:49
Holmes: Before we get to that, let's clarify real quickly. So we think of Big Sur—there's North Coast, South Coast—and we're going to talk about this in a little more detail when we talk about environment. But maybe just to clarify things, tell us, how do you separate North Coast, South Coast, and say like the Carmel Valley, if we looked at this on a map?

01-00:40:09
Bates: Sure, so if we looked at it on a map, the way we define Big Sur is actually an eighty-mile stretch of coast, which is the Santa Lucia Mountain Range on the water. That stretches from Cambria in San Luis Obispo County—just north of there is a place called Ragged Point in the old Hearst Castle, William Randolph Hearst's place. That would be the boundary of the *south* of what we consider Big Sur. And then to the north is Carmel, California, right where the Santa Lucias dive into an agricultural valley of Salinas. And our eastern boundary would be the Salinas Valley, and the northern boundary would actually go from the town of Carmel all the way through the Carmel Valley, into the Salinas Valley, into an area called Greenfield or Arroyo Seco. So, the whole area is the Santa Lucia Mountains, but it's actually the Los Padres National Forest. And this is a place of extremes, so we've got almost 6,000 feet of elevation diving straight into the ocean. Very rural, almost all park, very few residents. So it's an eighty-mile stretch of coast—still, we're at about 5,000 seasonally, where really there's somewhere around 3,000 permanent residents on this eighty miles of coast, so those are the bounds.

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And on the coast, we kind of break ourselves into three bits, in a way, because we're hours away from each other, right? So I come from the north end, which might be the lighthouse north to Carmel, in that twenty miles. Then there's what we'd call Big Sur proper, or even downtown Big Sur, which isn't a town—you know what I mean? It's maybe a five-mile stretch of businesses. What we would call Big Sur proper, per se, from the lighthouse in Big Sur down to the Esalen Institute, or right where the valley gives way to some cliffs, and then really gets steep. Then we would call the South Coast—usually it's somewhere around the Esalen Institute all the way down to the county line, which is Gorda, or an area called Salmon Creek and San Carpóforo, so these really gnarly rugged mountains that just *stop* in San Luis Obispo and end at Ragged Point in San Simeon. So that's kind of how we break Big Sur into three regions. Usually when I'm talking about it, I'll be talking about a north, a central, or a South Coast. And all those individuals know who they are.

01-00:42:40

Holmes: [laughs] Well said, well said. All right, well, let's get back to Big Sur Chamba, which again, as you were just describing, has a very historic and heritage cultivar that comes off the back of Big Sur Holy Weed.

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Bates: Sure! It does come off the back, in a way, because we relate it to that fourth part of the hippie trail I was talking about—the ones that really got into African music. Some of these folks were musicians, and some were actually surfers as well, so the Chamba is like quite big in our surfing community.

The origins of it are interesting. Chamba has cannabis connotations in three regions of the world. First, I'll say *chamba* is a slang word for "hard work" in Mexico. We were like, 'Okay, is this Mexico's hard-work weed? Is that what they're saying?' When we were kids we were always trying to figure out the chamba name. Chamba is also a village right between Pakistan and Nepal, in the Himalayas. But in our story, we believe this comes from an area in East Africa. So there's an area of Central and East Africa, and especially there are some tribes, I guess, in that area—in Zimbabwe, in what was Rhodesia, and even kind of spilling into Nigeria, where their word for cannabis is chamba. And the more that we've dissected this part, Rhodesia is a likely answer. But we know that the name of cannabis kind of changes as you go south. And into South Africa or into Central Africa, they call it "dagga," and so these are kind of like general terms. But then it turns out that the hippie trail in Africa led a lot of these people to that area, in particular, we believe Malawi, although some people said there was people going to Tanzania. But the general consensus is that this comes from Malawi, and that the people of Zimbabwe, or old Rhodesia, the general region there, their word for cannabis is chamba.

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Chamba is very unique as a sativa—we'll get into the environment later, but these are definitely strains that were well-adopted by the surfing and hippie communities, especially the ones that lived on the coast. These were amazing sativas that could be grown in the microclimates right down by the beach without a speck of mold, and absolutely unique in taste. From what I understand, way back in the day, it was like spicy, almost a savory taste, or like a potpourri, a strong, like flowers taste. But then eventually bred into this place, you might as well call it Mamba, because it's just so sweet and delicious, you know? But what we'll talk about later, I'm sure, what we call a unique expression of these cultivars. And every one of our breeders, and every one of our cultivars from the coast, was specifically the best they could do in the region with what they had. And then the unique expressions of those cultivars. So it might have been a shitty little hash plant in Malawi, but came here and turned into this giant, sweet, beautiful nug, because of these environmental differences.

But the Chamba is a champion, especially among some of our folks that are part of what I'll call the medical marijuana and the legalization period, the last twenty-five years of cannabis-growing. That, with Malawi, some of our Afghan strains—the Khyber, and what have you—we really took time doing inbred lines and hybridizing them into our bread and butter, production strains that could really produce—low pest, low mold, high THC. And once again, sativa dominant, ocean grown. OG is a big deal here. The surfers believe in the light—the light of the sky and the ocean combining and making rainbow-colored wonderweed, you know, and so it has huge play there. And then also, with the adoption of the Afghan strains that were kind of mixed in there, the Malawi and the Mazar-i-Sharif. They were kind of the local bit that came in with the African weed, but also the highlight of Malawi and really being one of the first areas that really highlighted African strains, where people only had ever heard of like dagga and spicy hash.

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Holmes: Another cultivar that became very linked with this area was SAGE.

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Bates: Yes, and there's another couple-prong origin story, but we're still working on that. So SAGE stands for Sativa Afghani Genetic Equilibrium, and this was a name given to it for two reasons. One, because it is half Big Sur Holy Weed, so they say, but definitely a Mexican sativa that's indigenous to here for decades. And then, two, our Afghans, right? They felt like they had the perfect mix of the two. And then the story goes that they did some genetic work behind it, and they ran it past some other experts in the world, and they do believe that it was a perfect hybrid—the perfect equilibrium between sativa and an Afghan indica-dominant strain.

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But where it really takes off is when it was given to some farmers to go to the cup in Amsterdam, when it was still the High Times [Cannabis] Cup in Amsterdam, the only kind in the world at that time. And I believe that was like the early nineties, when it was gaining a lot of popularity, or maybe at the beginning of medical marijuana, Prop. 215, so maybe '96. And it was designated one of the best. It won the cup—one of the best weeds on earth, you know? One of the best smokes on earth, and it really did a lot of pride. Of course our little community—we're one of the smallest growing communities—it did us a lot of pride, because it said right there on the headlines: "half Big Sur Holy Weed, half Afghan, from the Big Sur region." So it was something to be proud of and really helped lift some of my friends that are more like the seventies/eighties growers, just right before me by ten years. It really helped lift them up in the atmosphere to be more professional as medical marijuana hit, so it's very significant that way. And one last bit about the SAGE—everybody swears it tastes like sage, so the name and everything coined was pretty perfect, and we're pretty proud of it really.

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Holmes: Well, and to look at the legacy of SAGE, from my understanding, it had a huge impact on Dutch cannabis.

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Bates: Yes, huge, huge impact. In many ways, it capitalized in Dutch systems, which are greenhouse systems, and mostly indoor systems, you know, so taking an outdoor cultivar into an indoor system rarely had worked out before, where this had a shorter node structure and a more compact size. And then also the THC counts were through the roof at the time. Maybe some people were coming in at anywhere from like 12 to 16 percent, and maybe they were getting 20 percent out of this one; 18 to 20 percent out of that one. So I feel like that's part of it. And then also, it opened up a new realm of possibilities for them. Before, it was only landrace done by a couple experts given a goofy name. There wasn't such a collaboration done in a different zone, if that makes sense. And then also, it does go back to them like—more or less they would hybridize everything. It wasn't stabilized. So they were heavy on cloning and stuff because they couldn't control their phenotypical difference. And what the SAGE brought was a really consistent, strong production cultivar, and a hybrid at that, where it hadn't quite been figured out before that point. So as far as my understanding, that was a big part of it.

And yeah, when I look back at those older strains, they had two much older strains, like even the Bubble Gum or the AK-47, or some of these things—Sensi Star or the Dutch Passion—certain things that were done there were very established from landrace cultivars. That was just the way they did it. So to hybridize and go that far in weight production, it really floored them, the production per square foot.

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Holmes: Yeah, I wanted to get to more of that because when we think of cannabis production, there's California—Big Sur, Emerald Triangle, right—just a historic impact on global cannabis. Going over to the Netherlands, to Amsterdam—that was also another node of production.

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Bates: For sure.

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Holmes: And the interplay there with SAGE—as well as other strains we'll talk about like Skunk #1 and Haze—also played a very big role. Now the Netherlands doesn't have the climate California does, right?

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Bates: Right.

01-00:53:15
Holmes: And you were saying that the Dutch system is largely greenhouse, indoor. How much did these California strains also help them produce actual cannabis, versus leaning more towards hashish production?

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Bates: Right. So, I've met a few Dutch farmers, actually, and they are some of the world's most amazing farmers. It was legal for consumption, but it wasn't necessarily legal to grow—and they had the poor environment for it, right? But they are some of the best ornamental and cut-flower growers on earth, so they had mastered greenhouse systems since the 1800s. They're like that, but it does come down to this production style and parameters.

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So the Dutch, their practice is different than ours. Where ours is this full season, all year, outdoor, it takes nine months for a plant to grow. It's in the woods, it gets gigantic, and we get as much as we can out of that. For the Dutch it's much different. They had always worked undercover, with the different flower producers or agriculture producers. Often, they would never keep a crop more than one round—like eight weeks in one place—and they'd move from flower farm to flower farm to flower farm. And they worked well with the flower-farm industry, and those industries would move them around. So the name of the game for them was get it done as fast as you can from start to finish. So often, they would cut, root immediately, flower immediately—and it's all about how many plants they can fit in a square meter. So often, they'll put ninety/a hundred plants in one square meter, 3x3 [feet], and literally three or five days after it had rooted, and then they will flip it, and turn it all into cola nuggets. Harvest it and get out of there. And then on to the next, on to the next flower farm, on to the next spot, to keep it absolutely moving and absolutely hidden. Now, they were actually pretty smart. In their eyes, this gives no chance for disease and for pests to take over. They said the shorter life span—their plants don't even live long enough to get powdery mildew or

spider mites. From what I understand, in most of Europe and even the Dutch guys moving down into Spain now, that is still very much how they operate.

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So, two different styles, right? But then we all kind of met somewhere in the middle, as things started advancing with medical marijuana, and when our communities opened up to each other, which was more the late eighties/early 2000s. We all started sharing, and that created this somewhere in between, where maybe we'd cut them, we bagged them up for a week or two—not too long, not like we used to for months, in America—and then flower, and go that way. Yeah, so it is about these production styles, and cultivars being very specific to that, and then how they express themselves under those conditions. It's pretty impressive actually. Those are two vastly different ways to do cannabis. But no one is better than the other, any good farmer would say to the other farmer.

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Holmes: Absolutely. Well, I wanted to ask about a few more strains that also made their way over to the Netherlands, but also have their roots right here in the Big Sur area. The first is Haze. Now, many cannabis connoisseurs have come across the numerous variants of Haze. But why don't you tell us a little bit about the original Haze—its roots and creators here in Big Sur, and then how this grew to, of course, the famous variants that we're all aware of.

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Bates: Sure. Big Sur's play in this is that our sister county, Santa Cruz County, is actually the birthplace of two brothers called the Haze brothers. They were seventies growers that traveled a lot, and had their fair share of importing, from what I understand, more a Vietnam-era crowd. Back then, you know, the hippie movement was kind of small, the growing community was small, so they all kind of knew each other in these different areas, and especially the Big Sur and Santa Cruz areas, and particularly amongst like the artisan and the surfer communities, right? The Santa Cruz Mountains and the haze brothers, from what I understand, are more of the Vietnam-era guys and even some of the defector guys, right, which were very tight with our folks in Carmel Valley.

In these areas—Tassajara, where the Zen Buddhist retreat is, and Cachagua, where we've got some really nice boutique vineyards and things—there was these hippie commune communities. Like a small startup, what they called the back-to-the-land movement, right, in the seventies. All these people moved out, usually like pretty wealthy college dropouts moved out to the land to create these sustainable family-living things. The Hazes came to Carmel Valley, and they were kind of playing off the same thing, the back-to-the-land movement in the Santa Cruz Mountains, so it's about our relation, right there. But as they grew—some of their weed was absolutely amazing. And I think it has various origins, but there's a strong belief that many of its origins are from the Himalayas—kind of India, for sativas. And once again, the hippie trail.

Like a lot of it stems from that, my parents' generation, my mom's generation, particularly.

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So the Haze brothers, and their strains at that time when they were creating all this, were very much adopted by our families in Carmel Valley. And so many of the original strains that we grew up with in the eighties in Carmel Valley, were Haze strains. And in particular, there's this old Vietnam vet who lived in Carmel Valley, and he moved, in the early eighties, down to this town called Pacific Grove, in the fog, and he had his Silver Haze. It was one of the first ones I remember. And now the guys in Amsterdam always say, "Oh, I took this and that, and bred it—and it's *mine*." Silver Haze has been around forever, down here, and we actually originally knew it as the PG Fog. But really, it was just this old crazy guy and his name for it, and he'd grow everything under fluorescent lights, spindly like this, you know? But once again, it was these sativa dominant, heavy yielding, almost ammoniac flavor, like Windex, just strong, pungent.

And then right around the time of the Skunks, some of the next strains we'll talk about, they were of that era, which is a little bit before my time. But when I was growing up, our Hazes—there's even one they call Santa Lucia Haze, so it's just the Carmel Valley. And then the Silver Haze. And then some that we just called Haze, and there were Haze crosses—Haze this, Haze that, Haze—it all stems from these two brothers in the Santa Cruz Mountains. But it is part of their greater back-to-the-land movement family that preserved these things, including some *really,* just outstanding nutcase Vietnam vets in Carmel Valley that used to have these strongholds, these weird grows, where when the War on Drugs started, they started just sinking everything in the ground and putting fiberglass over deep pits in the ground, and growing these sativas on the north end of the hill, in the woods, in pits with greenhouse material on top, with leaves and shit all over it. And there was Haze in there, surviving, mold free, pest free, strong, ammoniac. So it's always been a champion of ours.

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And then some of the family, down the line, has moved here as well. I know some Hazes, and in particular a surfer one, who's a dear buddy I grew up with. So you know, it was a small family back then. It's a bigger family now, but the origins of this is actually a very small tight-knit community.

01-01:02:00

Holmes: And as you were saying, this was another cultivar, another strain, that was also taken to Amsterdam?

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Bates: Yes.

01-01:02:07
Holmes: Where that also became intermixed within the Dutch cannabis production and their own cultivars.

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Bates: Yes, and there was great controversy behind that, right? Because all these other folks are taking the prize and selling the seeds, and all of that, after generations of people being smashed by cops and their neighbors, and having to go through hell and dying to get this stuff across, you know? So it was a point of contention, I'd say, especially when it comes to the origins of these strains. It's important we're doing the history now. Many of these folks—Patrick Cassidy recently passed away. His son, Harvest Cassidy recently passed away. My friend on the South Coast, the mom with the cool Afghan strains and the Buddhist garden—they passed away. So we're really trying to get this history now, to give recognition to the origin and these people that sacrificed so much to create this beautiful thing.

01-01:03:06
Holmes: Absolutely. Well, the next strain that we want to talk about is Skunk #1, and in regards to, of course many of these seeds finding their way on the other side of the Atlantic—one of the breeders that's most linked to Skunk #1, of course, is Sam the Skunkman, also known as David Watson, I believe.

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Bates: Yes.

01-01:03:32
Holmes: Many point to him with, again, contention and a little controversy. He took quite a number of different strains of seeds over there. But he was also part of, I think in Santa Cruz as well here in the central coast, a network of breeder. Talk a little bit about what you know and what you've heard in regards to David Watson and that breeding operation, and then we'll move into Skunk #1.

01-01:04:04
Bates: Sure. The way I understand, David Watson does have the brass. He was there. He did do it with a lot of these things. He deserves all the brass he can get. But I will say that with *High Times* magazine things became popular, some of these folks capitalized on it, or not. And so, he was definitely in Santa Cruz, these surfing communities, these hippie communities. They hit some sort of feverish pitch, especially in the late seventies/early eighties. I'd say the War on Drugs really helped that, because the prices of cannabis went from $100 a pound to $5,000 a pound.

The way that relates is these folks had been spending decades traveling the world, just hunting the best strains and bringing them home. And it was in these hippie communities that had already started brassing up for ten, twenty years. They really had their experience, and now they're going to get more cultivars to have something unique to set themselves apart from the market.

The Skunk strains are interesting, because there's a lot of consensus that maybe it's probably Indian Himalayan weed or Nepali weed, but then there's all these other consensuses that maybe it was some of those strains or Mexican strains that also made it to Hawaii and Southern California and places, and then perhaps were mixed. So actually, chasing down the Skunk is hard, because a lot of folks, right, when the word skunk got popular, if it smelled like stinky weed, "Oh, it's Skunk. I've got Skunk." You know, you're driving down the street with Mom, and there's a dead skunk on the road—you're like "Ahhh." She's like, "Why are you enjoying that smell?" You know, they're just Skunk, Skunk, Skunk, Skunk.

01-01:05:50

But Sam the Skunkman was definitely there. He deserved credit. But I will say, when it comes to the origins of these things, it's like they might have contributed, but it's hard for any one person to claim something like Skunk #1. Before that competition where it was called Skunk #1, it was just all skunk weed, right? And this is back when it was still brown weed or green weed. There wasn't even strains. Just a few growers on the inside had their names, or maybe there was a couple little names, like this is the Holy, right? But when I grew up, the Holy was any green weed out of Big Sur. It wasn't brown Mexican; it was green, it was from Big Sur—it's Holy Weed. That's when I was a boy, you know, in the early nineties.

So it's points of contention, but it's interesting how sometimes these folks maybe take their credit without necessarily sharing it with all the folks and communities around them from which this came. So there's other folks that are less known, that really had the massive seed collections and were world travelers as well, that kind of shared with these other people that were producing the weed, right? And generally, we kind of have two crowds. We have the eclectic mad scientist, super weird seed breeder that everyone goes to because they know they can bank their crop on a production strain. And then we have people that dust weed and try things out, and maybe something works and maybe something doesn't, but they'll still go to the extra eclectic absolute nutcase that decides to take on thousands of plants, just to figure out one group of seeds. So these are kind of two categories. I feel like a lot of the guys that made money were in this production play with it, where the guys that did the real work were never noticed, because they were just too crazy and busy to be noticed.

01-01:07:56

Holmes: That's a good distinction.

01-01:07:58

Bates: Yeah.

01-01:07:57

Holmes: Well, we'll talk a little bit more, of course, how things have changed in our next session. But I think one of the things that's really interesting that you've

mentioned here, when we talk about the strains, looking at Big Sur Chamba, looking at Haze, looking at Skunk, is a stable strain, meaning it's able to produce, it's pretty resistible to disease, to pests, right?

01-01:08:30
Bates: Yeah.

01-01:08:32
Holmes: Talk about how important that is for growing. We often, and particularly in today's cannabis market, look at all these different strains, all the flavors, and the various names. But we know little, as consumers, about how stable strains like this, outdoor strains, are the backbone to the cannabis market.

01-01:09:02
Bates: Well, absolutely. It's easy and complex to talk about that. Really, you know, it comes back to this mad scientist breeder that spends all his time just in the seeds, and then to this other person that might try it out, but really try to produce for a market. And strain name is kind of a new thing, where traditionally there wasn't pots in soil. Traditionally, there wasn't fertilizers and pesticides, outside of like bone meal and maybe bat guano or something, and maybe some Raid, you know, so you had horrible practices back then. But for each of these breeders, especially down here, to get these strains to work for themselves, that *was* the name of the game—to try *everything* that you could get your hands on and really go with what works. And you focus on what works there, and try to keep that going and then narrow that part down.

But the practice started in the ground and under cover of trees. It was actually shade-grown. Out in the open was kind of new, in a way, in California and North America, because there was such a stigma behind it, they often hid these crops. And then, there's this other component, which we call unique expression of the cultivar, and that's how each cultivar acts differently, depending on its environmental conditions and its natural inputs. We can literally take the same cut of the same strain, grow it at the top of the mountain, the middle of the mountain, and the bottom of the mountain, and have three different profiles, shapes, production weights—all these things. And then take it to an indoor greenhouse and it's just off in another land, right? So these unique expressions of the cultivar, we call those the bread and butter.

01-01:11:05

But all of us down the coast here, we were lucky to have these wonderful parents and forefathers, who really showed us the complexities of breeding a strain into production, and not being able to bank our livelihood of a whole year's worth of work on hearsay, or on a fashionable name, or any of this other stuff. But as you take a plant and you like it, and even if you know both parents, if you try to replicate that, it's next to impossible. And usually, if you take two different strains and just put them together, you could have a great outcome. But you do that again, and it could be all over the place, right? So

the rhyme and reason part of getting these strains into production for most of these people was all about stabilizing a consistent flavor, size, look, appeal, that worked with their specific environment. And this is where landraces get so interesting, because people were trying to landrace weed here by inbreeding it for generations in a certain direction, whether that's the Holy—just with the Mexican weed from Dolores. But after a while, that genetic strength and production value waned. They would go get more and try to breed it back, but couldn't quite get there. But that's because they were bringing the old one that didn't adapt, back into a place of adaption, and that was really hard.

01-01:12:39

So our forefathers learned along the way that they can inbreed lines and turn them into kind of a landrace that might have a lot of diversity in its genetic profile—like 10,000 different phenotypes. But they realized if they could get it to consistently grow with certain attributes, and it was strong, and it made it through everything—great. But if they could get two strains to do that, over the course of time, when they combined the two in that same region, *from* that region, then they get hybrid vigor. And that F1 generation is what we call our production strain, which many in the industry still have no idea. They're just dusting pollen, they're dusting a clone, make another clone, dust that, make another clone, and all they have is a genetic wildshow that can never be repeated. And most folks are going through 10,000 seeds to find one cut, where a lot of our folks could start 10,000 seeds and maybe only have three variations instead of dozens of variations with no consistency. So that's why we call it a production strain, and we can put it into production and bank the crop on it and have a consistent bag of weed that doesn't look like Skittles.

Where the millennial weed is quite different: it's totally subject to environmental conditions, totally subject to stress of any type—heat, cold, food, in the shade, in the sun—any one of them can trigger them into not producing, or low production, or into the worst-case scenarios of hermaphrodite and ruining crops. And then now we've got hemp russet mites and hop latent viroid. We've got plant COVID, and whatever else. It could head so many directions if it's not backed up with strong genetic profiles that are built in, in that biodiversity, to create production.

01-01:14:36

Holmes: Well, speaking of breeders, and one of these strong genetic profiles that served as the backbone to other heritage cultivars is Blueberry.

01-01:14:51

Bates: Yeah.

01-01:14:52

Holmes: And I know this is one that you've also used. And this was produced by a breeder, DJ Short, who again, was one of those mad scientists who was going through hundreds of different strains trying to find one that worked.

01-01:15:09

Bates: And an amazing one, at that. He's like my superhero, since we were kids and Blueberry came out. We've known for about thirty-five to forty years now, he had his history in the hippie movement as well. He spent a lot of time in Big Sur, and I've heard this from DJ Short himself. I had a wonderful little afternoon talk with him, and just was gushing and flattering him—he was my superhero. But we smoked some weed and hung out a little bit, and he said, "Oh, you're from Big Sur?" He was like, "Oh, I spent time there." And you know, that's where he was talking about his time in the Santa Cruz Mountains as well and working with some of those communities there. He was in Northern California, but then eventually suffered the War on Drugs and had to go to some of the disappearing parts of California.

But he has a really interesting story about how he acquired these strains from different regions and created more or less his own art out of them—Blueberry would be one. It was a magnificent hybrid that is indica dominant, but still has these unique strangely sativa characteristics of being able to handle weather, wet, and cold. And it tastes just like blueberries, right? So the Skunks, and the Hazes, and everything were happening. And he is actually an early attributor to Haze brothers, the Haze in Santa Cruz, with his DJ Short Blueberry, and that is what the world knows as Blue Dream. So actually, that's a staple strain we've been working with since we were kids. Some of my elders, that are about ten to twenty years older than me, helped create and still hold on to those original Blue Dream cuts, which is, I think, in America—in Colorado, California, Washington, Oregon—when they all started legalization, the top-selling strain, number one overall. Everybody likes their Blue Dream. It's a perfect medium of not too stoned, and happy and high, but not panicked with anxiety, no paranoia. It's just a beautiful hybrid.

01-01:17:20

But DJ Short, he definitely said, "Oh hey, your forefathers really brought it on, and really did bring on the sinsemilla, and really did breed up for TCH." And he was saying that some of his strains he used for the DJ Short Blueberry come from Big Sur, and he actually really propped it up, you know? I think he's an amazing man for that too. He didn't say it's just the *me* show. He did say this is art. He bred this; this is *his* contribution, which is *so* beautiful. It's some of the best weed anybody will smoke in their lives. But I thought it was really neat that he like also shared that he got this from other regions and made his own art. That's what I considered anyway—he made his own art out of these beautiful regions in his experience with it, taking it to his unique area and creating his unique expressions and cultivars to change the game with DJ Short Blueberry. And that is blue anything—like Blue Dog, Blue Cheese, Blue Chem, Blue Dream—anything blue, if it's not DJ Short's Blue Dream, it's out of here, right?

But then the Hazes, so—expressed to him maybe—now I'm a little vague on this part, but about where they might have gotten some of their weed on the

hippie trail out of the Himalayas. And so, he's actually got a few strains like the Neville's Haze and the Whitaker Haze, and these different folks that kind of grabbed these strains of Haze out of the Himalayas and brought them here. Actually some of the weed in the track right now is actually DJ Short's—his unique expression, his answer to Blue Dream that he calls Azure Haze, which is his Blueberry with, I believe, the Silver Haze—and boom. He's making the Blue Dream again for us, because it kind of got mudded out with a lot of people, and only a few elders held on to the cuttings. So he's a magic man. He's a founder. He's unbelievable. He loves his plants. He loves the males—they get their wives to smoke the males. Interesting stuff that we would never think of unless you're absolutely obsessed with a plant.

01-01:19:54
Holmes: Yeah, you're going to have to tell us how that works before we move on.

01-01:19:58
Bates: Oh well, I heard this in a discussion panel with DJ Short, and with a grower—I think he's originally from Oregon, but Subcool, who's a big name, and then they had this gentleman from Canada that created a lot of autoflowers, and the Bullrider, and stuff. But they were all kind of agreeing that the smells and the effects of male flowers can only be felt or tasted or smelled by female humans. And the story goes that even some super flower-production males will actually even create a bit of a high for ladies. So Subcool was explaining all about it, and DJ Short said he agreed, and that was an observation he had in his breeding practices. And for all of us, we're like, "What the fuck?" Sorry for the French. But how do we smoke—males? I don't understand, you know, so it was very unique.

01-01:20:58
Holmes: Oh, that is unique. Well, I want to talk a little bit about the culture and practices, which we did hit on, but I really wanted to kind of dig a little deeper here on Big Sur. This region, as you were describing, is a very unique environment with the Santa Lucia Mountain Range, the elevation, the sea, where within just a very short distance, we're talking from sea level all the way up to nearly 6,000 feet. Discuss how this environment and culture really created the unique cannabis cultivation of Big Sur.

01-01:21:35
Bates: Sure, sure. Well, for us it does boil down to these extremely diverse geographic locations, and the microclimates within all this diversity, like you were saying. It's 6,000 feet up, and it's usually high and dry and just has cactuses and a little bit of brush that's two or three feet tall, and some flowers. There it's dry most of the season, and maybe hot. Where you get halfway down the mountain, and you're maybe in some oak and madrone forests, and there might be some redwoods and things around. It might often be hot during the day, and cold at night. And then you get down into the coast zones, and you have just pure ocean influence. Fog every night, every day is 90 percent humidity, and the middle of every day is 50 percent humidity, every day at the

top is 10 percent humidity. And so what makes it unique is these people spread out across this area, in these remote locations, having to deal with that remote location.

01-01:22:37

So they all would work very hard to find the one that worked for them, and then they would all swear—*this* is the one. This is the one for the whole world! This is the best weed on earth. And literally, that's the kind of the nature of how they held onto it. "No, I'm going to keep breeding my Pineapples." "I breed my Maui—that's all I do." "I just do my Holy Bud." "I'm only doing my Malawis or my Skunks." And they're very fixed to these very unique microclimates. The surfer crowd is great, because they have all sorts of superstitious beliefs about the moisture, and the reflection of the sun off of the fog, or the reflection of the sun off of the ocean enhancing their THC levels, and the uniqueness there.

And then the set of geological and hydrological diversity that goes on here as well. The mountain you're on with me here now is a granite-dominant mountainside, and then we've got a fault right in the creek right here. That next mountain right here is a lime-dominant mountainside, and that changes the pH and the hardness, and everything in the water—the mineral contents of the soil, the rocks that are in the ground, the trees or plants that might grow there. So all of these things are very unique.

01-01:24:06

But the homesteaders stayed at their homestead, or these specific locations, and have worked in those specific locations for generations often, and definitely decades, most of them. Big Sur is very unique, and we consider whatever we have unique, you know what I mean? And everybody's the king of their mountain. So they really cherish what they *have*, you know, without looking out too far. So that being said, the techniques relate, as well, directly, whether that's in the ground because they can, or whether that's in a bag on a constant-drop system because they *can't*. And then the evolution of the science, right? When I was a boy we didn't know the difference. We started our weed with our corn in an aquarium at home, and we went and planted it on the side of the road, and we peed on our plants to try and keep the rats off of them. We were like twelve or thirteen or fourteen, you know?

The elder ones that were really good from the seventies—they had their belief system. They didn't even have the science. They had this belief system, that you go out and you get as much biodiversity as you can, and you put it in that spot. And then you add the minimal amount that you could hike in, and then you can taste the woods. That's what they'd all say—the taste of Big Sur weed. You could taste the woods. A lot of our farmers swear by that, and I do too. I can taste redwood forest or an oak forest or a manzanita hillside. I can taste the difference in the cannabis. So the techniques range, from the 1940s, '50s, into the 1960s and '70s, which had good and bad, natural and *horrible*

practices. The 1980s had some really scary practices. That's when like the rat poison and the Miracle-Gro came out. [laughs] But we were lucky here in Big Sur to have all these naturalistic people and these back to the land organic farming. We'd use as much land as we can in our soils.

01-01:26:14

And so it's also a time thing, right? When you have a grower that's been growing for fifty years, he's probably very much the grower he was thirty or forty years ago, you know? And then you have some of these growers that maybe have been doing it for twenty years. They might be a little more like they were five or ten years ago, right? So there's this diverse map. And then only recently—like maybe over the last ten, fifteen years has there ever been sharing of these techniques, and of these strains, and of our knowledge.

01-01:26:51

Holmes: Well, talk a little bit about the Big Sur area—so North Coast, South Coast, Carmel Valley. If we wanted to take those three regions of this larger area, how did you see those environmental factors as well as cultural practices? How did that impact in unique ways the cannabis that was grown there?

01-01:27:22

Bates: Oh, sure, sure.

01-01:27:22

Holmes: Was it different strains? Was it certain strains?

01-01:27:27

Bates: It was strains, practices, standards—all of those things were kind of at play in the regional, in the rural communities. The South Coast, let's just say it's like fifty, sixty miles of the coast. Within that sixty miles, there might only be a few hundred residents. They all know each other. They all go down to the same school. They go to the same health clinic. They all show up to the same firemen's barbecue, you know? So they do kind of keep tabs on each other. And then there's social acceptance levels in these tight-knit communities. Then there's the geological and hydrological, the geography of where they are. So breaking that down a little bit, the Holy Bud was quite dominantly on the South Coast. And on that South Coast is quite dominant lime. There's lime kilns and lime creeks and lime water, and that was a softer water. And then, dominantly, those guys would all kind of try to help each other out when they're having a bad year, especially when it wasn't worth anything, and they'd just trade weed for gasoline and food and chainsaws. They would share common knowledge in practices, in cultivars, and that could be a whole region.

Where the North Coast of Big Sur was maybe a little more connected to Santa Cruz and Carmel, and some areas, a little more connected to Big Sur proper itself, so that might have more to do with another set of strains and stuff. And this is where like the Chambas and the SAGES, and some of the African

weed, and the Afghan stuff kind of comes into play up here on the north end of it. But it's also a granite-dominant situation, with hard water. And these folks out here—there's maybe more than a few hundred people. Like maybe you've got about a thousand of us just on this strip up here. So that's almost half of the population of Big Sur, on the north third of the coastal strip. That being the case, with more people came a little more hiding and secluding, so maybe there's like two or three factions of strains, practices, and cultivars here.

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Then Carmel Valley is absolute different. It's about twenty miles to thirty miles in is where it starts, the production of the rural communities. It's absolutely dry. It's granite dominant, it's hard water again, but it has next to no coastal influence, no redwoods, all oak and madrone, this whole other set of factors. And then the community, right? A lot of expats and Vietnam vets, and more of the ranching, cattle ranching, vineyards, things like that are in Carmel Valley. So they have their own set of people that they played with, and their own set of strains that they kind of held onto. We've got a really great, wonderful woman that we used to call the Cat Piss Lady. But she had the Cat Piss strain, and *still* has the Cat Piss, and does whatever to keep that Cat Piss going, and is legendary *for* it. But that's very much a Carmel Valley thing.

Where for me, I'm a Hindu Skunk man. So they're like, 'He's got his Kushes from the Himalayas, and he's got his Skunks and his Hazes.' And that's maybe more of a North Coast into the Valley thing. So it's regional, it's social, and the practices are as such, as well. They're diverse, but they're usually broken into these few regions that did kind of try to watch after each other as rural communities.

01-01:31:26

Holmes: You were just talking about the different kinds of cultures, the practices, as well as the environmental factors. Which cultivars do you think are more linked to these regions? Or are they grown generally across the regions as well?

01-01:31:54

Bates: They are grown across the region. Geology is definitely a strong player, because in these microclimates. I can tell you I have a cliff-side garden that's kind of in the middle of the mountain, that the bottom of the garden's maybe 1,500 feet, and the top of the garden's maybe 1,800 feet. But because of mountains, valleys, woods, different cultivars react differently in different zones. So even within my one garden, I have some knuckles of exposed hillside with cactuses and with yuccas. It gets kind of cool in the winter, but it's bright and hot and would maybe stunt a beautiful, big sativa right there. So actually, that's where I put in my Khyber and the DJ Short Blueberry, and some of these other really heavy indica dominant strains. They love staying short and compact, and high light. Where right when I go into la bit of a valley that's blocked, and maybe doesn't have the full spectrum of sun, and maybe

the brush is a little higher and all these things, then that's where I might do something in between, or hybrid strains. Often I would do the Malawis or the Mazar-i-Sharif or something, in that kind of zone. Once we got down into the pitch, at the bottom of my garden, or like the little backyard area I was sharing, that's like in the woods, practically shade-grown, cool all the time with the coastal influence, I'm going to make sure it's just sativa dominant, but even coastal-sativa dominant, making sure it comes from really wet regions, and those can be some of the Southeast Asian or maybe low-lying India strains. The Blue Dream that we had worked with from years ago was definitely Haze dominant, so we could grow real low and wet on those.

So it's more about that really. It is about the farmers adapting to the farm, or adapting to their region, and kind matching and toning the practices and strains *to* that. Up high, it's going to be drinking water—it's going to evaporate in half an hour. You might need to do something—put burlap around it, water earlier in the morning, do things to safeguard it. In the middle, it might be this consistent thing, and down low it might just sit in the wet constantly—you *want* it to dry out and barely water it. So working with nature is very, very elaborative. It's very interactive and changes from foot to foot practically.

01-01:34:49
Holmes: Especially in environments such as Big Sur, right?

01-01:34:53
Bates: Yes!

01-01:34:55
Holmes: Like, for example, if we reference other parts of California, if you went to the Central Valley of California, you may have some soil difference, but the environmental difference is constant, right?

01-01:35:09
Bates: Yes.

01-01:35:10
Holmes: Largely throughout the valley. And where here, you not only have the geological difference, you not only have an elevation difference, but you also have a difference in regards to the coast.

01-01:35:26
Bates: Right, and that's what makes it unique. And it's so small and treasured as well. Like the Central Valley you were talking about. You could do a thousand acres of oranges, and it's going to act the same way. There's not one place in Big Sur you could get away with five acres of oranges and have it come out the same way, so that's where it gets so in-depth, and each grower goes *so* far to get it right.

01-01:35:49
Holmes: So if we brought that example, say to cannabis, you could have five acres of cannabis in the Central Valley—not much difference, right?

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Bates: Yeah.

01-01:36:01
Holmes: Five acres, or even less, say an acre of cannabis here in Big Sur or Santa Cruz—big difference.

01-01:36:07
Bates: Big difference. It could be night and day. It could be mold or gold, is what we call it. [laughter]

01-01:36:16
Holmes: But would you also say, too, that that difference is one of the things that also makes growing regions in California—your legacy regions like Big Sur—why they are legacy regions, why they are unique, *because* of that environmental difference?

01-01:36:32
Bates: Yeah, there's that environmental difference, and then the techniques or our standards and our practices, and maybe how they evolved, has gone a long way. It's gone from in the ground just natural, into plastic pots and things. Gopher wire or whatever, in the seventies and eighties, into smart pots and what have you, and then into greenhouse and indoor everything. And then now we're kind of going the other way, into our deps [growing using light deprivation]. And now, we're going back to regenerative farming, and it feels like we're making this full loop to where we started from. But it was all about what was learned the generation before, and then what we learned along the way. And as it's become more normalized, and as we've been able to share more information, it's been advancing as far as sustainability and ecology, and things like that.

01-01:37:32
Holmes: You were mentioning too, the different points on the coast, the community looking out for each other, sharing knowledge. If we're thinking of cannabis cultivation, the cannabis communities, how much are practices and knowledge passed down? I mean particularly when this is all developing under that kind of shadow of prohibition, right?

01-01:38:03
Bates: Yes.

01-01:38:03
Holmes: That constant threat, right? And there weren't magazines like *High Times* going around in Patrick Cassidy's days to kind of discuss this knowledge. From your discussion with the elders, how was this knowledge passed down? And even you, as a grower, how much did you learn from the elders in that?

01-01:38:26

Bates: When I began, I learned everything from the elders. And actually, only recently has there been sharing, in many ways. And to go even further, I'd put it into a couple phases of advancement: there was the complete prohibition; there was the medical; and then there's this legalization. Even within the medical, which is the bulk of my time, that twenty years. I started maybe five to six years before medical, and then on to five to six years after medical marijuana now. I was definitely given *everything* by my elders, including the place to do it, the seeds to start with, how it was done, why is was done a certain way, what they used, their experiences through the decades and everything.

It was so dangerous and so tight-knit, that it was very small. Generally an old grower would only invite one, usually young kid to labor like a mule, and maybe, if they're lucky, share some of their knowledge with them. [laughs] And I'd say that was pretty true, even through the medical era into maybe the early 2000s somewhere. So actually that tradition carried for a strong thirty, forty years, where if you were lucky enough to know a grower, and then worked very hard for that grower, maybe you were lucky enough to get a few tricks so you didn't have to spend the next ten to twenty years falling on your face to get it right. Because it's a very finicky plant if you don't know what you're doing. It's very sensitive. It's hard. People think and say, 'It grows like a weed.' Not true.

01-01:40:10

For me, personally, I was given this opportunity to come in as a laborer, and then to come in as a trimmer. At first, I learned from some guys in the seventies that kind of had maybe what we would call a primitive way of doing it in a kind of hippie spiritual way. They were like, "Okay, you've got to pray to it. You've got to find five different soils from around that mountainside, put it together in the hole, and then you poke a hole through it with a stick, and put a pipe in the other end, and you've got to make an earth pipe and *smoke* out of it before you plant your seeds." And we'd plant all our seeds in one pot and hope that they made it, you know? Because we were out hours in the middle of nowhere—too dangerous to grow at home back then. Your parents would lose their house if you got caught with one plant. And so there was those techniques, but it was very hard.

And then, when medical came around, it was like this whole other place that like nobody maybe had experienced since the fifties or sixties, where we can do it at home, and we can bring whatever we want. And that was a very fun, creative era, where people would try *anything* and *everything*, and just see if it works. I call it the throwing-the-spaghetti-at-the-wall period, where the first few people took it onto the property, and some of the old guys are like "Oh, hell no, I'm going to stay out in these mountains." And we started just throwing everything at it to see what would happen. That's where I'd say

like—*High Times* got a little more popular, and this was all right around medical marijuana.

01-01:41:46

Then as the magazines came out, and what have you, it became a little more normalized through medical, and I'd say by the early 2000s, it actually had turned from, "here's a little bit of weed for someone with AIDS and cancer," to more of almost a business model. Like a lot of doctors see the benefits, and then they started making prescriptions, and then there started being these dispensaries, which all of a sudden equaled kind of money and shared knowledge and preferred strains. And then, all of a sudden, there was this knowledge pool that started gaining real ground, in a way, as far as playing off the Dutch farmers, going after Japanese technologies, and a lot of tech was kind of coming in. Indoor was kind of coming in a little heavier, and the techniques—the nutrients were a little more precise.

But it was still that spaghetti-at-the-wall period a little bit, until it hit some sort of magnificent point—and I'd put that point somewhere around maybe 2005, where there were enough regions doing it. Then the price had dropped because there's enough of it, and then there was more demand from the markets that the floodgates of information started opening a little more regionally—not quite public worldwide like it is now. People are just throwing everything out there. You don't even know what's real. Where, back then, it was like more groups of folks making sure the whole region goes up—so like another region wouldn't dominate. When we went into production to make money, we're limited here in Big Sur. Like we were saying, we can't have the ten acres of grapes *here*. But the logging families up in Northern California would adopt the hardest workers they knew on earth, like Big Sur farmers—such billy goats. It's called mini-Afghanistan you know, and you take the roughest workers, and import them into these logging communities where they don't know anyone, so they're not distracted, and they could go into more of a production scale—scaled it up, through medical marijuana.

01-01:43:56

And that's where the techniques really started getting a little more international, worldly. People started opening up a lot more and people started doing the science, started the testing, started a lot *more* testing. I went from peeing on plants, to refractometers checking sugars, into dissection scopes and microscopes, microbe counts in compost teas, and all these things—the soil biology and the microbiome. But then also hydroponics in Dutch production, and rockwool and HPs [high-pressure sodium lights], to right into some of these sulfur and other technologies—LED. It kind of hit this launching point, where there was enough money put into it that the research could be done, and then the companies that saw the money started divulging their research to us. Mainly, it was like a giant beta project, of agriculture from across the world on a very, very expensive crop.

And at that point, it still had that ground where we could produce it, and we were making great money. It wasn't like the eighties and the nineties, where we were producing it for an amazing amount of money, but it was scary. You could go to jail for life. You could get shot in the streets for it. It was horrible. It was war, war constantly, then it turned into this other thing, where this could be a business. And that's where we see the real elevation to where we are now. With outdoor, it would be regenerative farming, or with indoor, we're scaling up the greenhouses and hydroponics, and what have you.

01-01:45:40
Holmes: I want to talk a little bit more about these early connections and communities, and then also hit on that kind of prohibition period. That's kind of like our last stretch, but I wanted to maybe stop, and we'll take a break real quick, grab some coffee, and then we'll finish that up.

01-01:46:00
Bates: All right. Sounds good. [interruption in recording]

01-01:46:04
Holmes: All right, now we're back after a coffee break. Well, Oliver, before we took a break, we were discussing all these connections, communities, the passing down of knowledge. But you were also touching on—which we'll get more into tomorrow—the evolution of this and how it changed. I wanted to talk a little bit about that coastal connection you were talking about. You hit that with Patrick Cassidy, right? This connection between Big Sur and parts of what is also known as the Emerald Triangle, particularly Mendocino County. And these are logging connections as well, right?

01-01:46:46
Bates: Yes.

01-01:46:48
Holmes: Which again, we'll see tomorrow when we get into your personal story, you have personal experience with these connections. But talk a little bit about this coastal connection. What we have is these interesting connections, through logging families, to these very peculiar, very famous coastal regions that also, within the cannabis world, are huge players historically speaking. Talk a little bit about those connections, of Big Sur and Mendocino.

01-01:47:22
Bates: Sure, sure. It is kind of a funny subject. You know, most people wouldn't put weed, hippies, and logging communities together. But what it comes down to is families, and hardworking families, like salt of the earth, working off the land type of communities. And logging's not the only industry. I mean orchards, fruit tree orchards, vintners is another dimension. Fishermen, they were the best of the best at the whole import/export trade. And there's these strong connections, and it's a lesser-told story, that there's actually a deeper root and foundation of cannabis in these other historic communities. You know, it could almost go as far back as this being Old Mexico, right? And

Pancho Villa, in the Mexican Revolution, and "La Cucaracha" really was about the roach, in their practices. They had brought weed into this area hundreds of years, I guess, or a hundred years before a white man even stepped on it. So it's been part of the heritage, but it's that unspoken part. It's that kind of heathen, bohemian, underneath it all, not really talked about, but do whatever you can.

Where the loggers were really interesting, they have very much like a cattleman's mentality or something, where it's all about a cash crop. The trees were a cash crop, you know? And you log, you get the land, you try to manage that land so you can keep harvesting these trees, and the quality trees. And the cannabis really related strongly with that.

01-01:49:15

In these communities, I guess maybe the Gold Rush Era, and then after—I know for sure that after the Great Earthquake in San Francisco, that big earthquake in the early 1900s, when that happened, they had to rebuild the place. California was very small, as far as the number of tens of thousands of residents that lived here. There was only a couple of places to get all the timber, and all the rock, and the granite, and the lime, and the redwood trees which San Francisco is built on, the entire Bay Area. They quite quickly used up their resources right north of there and right south of there—so the Santa Cruz Mountains and Marin area. And then, as they were building more, they had to reach further out, especially after that earthquake. Probably by the time of the earthquake, they had used up a bunch of what was close, and had to move further to get more supplies to that city to build the beast.

So there's a real strong history there of logging families that kept going further and further north, until they kind of hit this, 'Okay, now we're way north, almost to the Oregon border.' Or 'Okay, now we're way south. We made it to Big Sur and beyond.' And so those families, they didn't just move on and leave, and a lot of those families that were loggers were these pioneering families that might have even came from places like Germany. Big Sur has a strong history of German and Swedish homesteaders, and loggers, and pioneers. And so does the north. Whoever is most industrious that way, the ones that ran the Chinese labor, maybe some of the railroad families. Not to get too far out into the woods, but like the El Sur Ranch is run by the Hill family, or JJ Hill, and his great-grandad connected the Southern and Pacific Railroads, and got all the cattle rights in between the two, and they ran Mexican and Portuguese gauchos. So actually, Big Sur was originally called El Sur Grande, for the El Sur Grande Ranch, and that cattle is still like the hood emblem of his empire. It's a magnificent Pacific beast.

01-01:51:34

But how that relates to the cannabis, and with the logging—back to Mendocino—is that these families never lost touch. And as places got developed or urbanized and residentialized, and concentrated into more city

centers and what have you, the rural communities really stuck together, and so we all know each other. And for me, that was my parents' generation probably, where that bond got strong again. But for me, I just grew up that way. We commonly had kids from families that were related down here, coming down out of Alaska, Oregon, Northern Mendocino in particular—where the redwoods are, Southern Humboldt/Northern Mendocino. We all grew up kind of playing, second cousins and third cousins of people, in these rural communities that were coastal, that were redwood communities. We all kind of knew each other and grew up around each other. So even from a young age, I knew of Mendocino and went there with my parents in the little artist community, that's like a really secluded, tight little, teeny old-school version of Carmel—very similar.

01-01:52:44

Holmes: Well, in regards to cannabis and cultivation, what have you heard about some of that shared knowledge between the two? Were there strains that were brought back and forth? Something that was adopted, maybe up in Mendocino from Big Sur, or vice versa?

01-01:53:05

Bates: Sure, there was vice versa as well. Like I definitely know of our north end here, in some of the logging/mountaineering communities here in the north end that were very industrious, also went and built up a lot of Southern Humboldt, and were logging Southern Humboldt. Where like the South Coast guys, and the Cassidys, were more in Northern Mendocino. But they're all kind of in the same region. It's regional. There's county lines, but there's not really community lines. And you know, a big part of that, as well, was this back-to-the-land movement, and in the seventies, people finding the rural locations, building their own homesteads, and starting their families that way.

But the shared interest—I feel like it came a little later, actually, and really stems from the War on Drugs in the Reagan Administration. It was all one happy family until that point. Once they started bringing in the helicopters and machine guns, and the troops, and started smashing families and putting people in jail—Big Sur was one that they hit right off the bat, and one of the hardest-hit communities, which really decentralized Big Sur and its cannabis heritage. Many of them literally had to flee persecution and arrest, and warrants, and danger, and head to their families, to more remote locations where they felt safeguarded and protected. And for sure, that was the big uptick in Big Sur farmers ending up in Mendocino County, the War on Drugs. It started before I started, but towards my beginning, I had spent my years in the War on Drugs as well, with CAMP—the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting. We have a County of Monterey Marijuana Eradication Team—COMMET. We still have it, and it was here. They could focus their money and effort here, where there were so few of us. It was harder for them to go to such a vast area and pinpoint, when there were so many.

01-01:55:11

So really, you know, it was kind of a convergence of the War on Drugs, and then people ending up in an area of vastness, where they could work within these Christian camps and logging communities, that maybe didn't even necessarily smoke weed. But they all had the same family values: you get a crash crop, you do everything for your family that you can, and get that money any way you can. It's for your family. It's not about getting rich. It's about your family surviving—it's about a cash crop. The logging communities worked that way, but I will say that was a great migration out of Big Sur, straight into those communities to set up shop within the logging and fishing and Christian camp—big, giant swathes of land that were run by church camp groups. But really, it was the same values—cash crops, support of the family. Many of them didn't even smoke weed. They were just all about that cash for their family, and holding on to their lands as logging, fishing, everything—as the environmental groups really came down here, and it just all got outsourced to foreign soil, and they had very little to hold onto.

That was really the days in the beginning of medical marijuana, when people really decided that they've lost everything, and they're open to this marijuana thing, because they had very few avenues to turn to, to save their lands and their families from the devastation of globalization. And that's definitely where my ride was, and that's where a lot of these families' rides still are. Many of our finest, because it's still hard here—which we'll get into tomorrow—we're right back into the War on Drugs because of legalization, back to the helicopters and machine guns and the feds, and smashed-up families and felonies, and everything being taken. They go right to a welcoming area, such as Mendocino. So a lot of our elders and our youngsters, at this point, have flourishing ranches of cannabis in Mendocino, where they're treated openly—with open arms and respect. Where here, it's still the War on Drugs, but we're working on that. [laughs]

01-01:57:25

Holmes: What kind of impact did you see of the sharing of knowledge? The Emerald Triangle also is a very famous cannabis region. It's a legacy region. Growers from Big Sur obviously brought certain strains and practices up there when they went up there. Did you see any of that interaction also coming back down? Were there strains or cultivars and practices that you saw that also kind of developed up in Mendocino and made their way here?

01-01:58:05

Bates: Yeah. And this this is an important part to talk about. When medical marijuana hit that uptick I was talking about, especially in the early 2000s—maybe like 2001 through 2005, somewhere in there—a couple of the more friendlier counties about it were Santa Cruz, but also Mendocino and Humboldt, at which point it had already been a giant production region. A lot of people don't like to talk about it, but we're one of the biggest suppliers of marijuana on earth, and definitely the biggest supplier in the United States, and it's always been 95-98—maybe almost 100 percent export, on an absolute

illicit market. But what that means is it reached a lot of people. All those people found out about this area, that it's okay to grow, and that we're kind of open with hippies. There are some hicks, but it seems okay—it's California. Really kind of opened up the world to cannabis in California, in a much bigger way. We started getting a lot of people from France and Holland, a lot of people from the East Coast. We started getting Jamaicans. We started getting more Mexicans—other people in our area come and contribute, right?

01-01:59:18

That was kind of like the tail end, I'd say, of like the seventies and eighties generation, where maybe more of the highlight of the nineties and the 2000s, which I came out of, was where all of a sudden there was these couple generations of folks where their parents had already been through the meat grinder, and now they're in this open space where they can *quasi*-legally do it. Everybody knew that if the tide rises, all ships rise, and that's when there was real sharing of techniques and strains and styles. I feel like it was all the geeky younger brothers of the hard gangster world back in the day that got together and said, "Oh, okay, let's share some of this stuff, and come up with some angles, and come up with some marketing, and kind of come up with certain strains that might be unique." This is where we get into gas and fuels, and the Dead already had their Chemdog, because they thought it smelled like a chemical. That was a really big deal actually, and that evolved into the OG Kush, but it was actually still Chemdog. It was Chemdog in Fort Collins, it was OG Kush in Laguna Canyon in Southern California, and it was New York City Diesel in New York, on the East Coast, but it all stems out of these Deadheads, right?

These Deadheads were also up north, so my first jobs were working for Deadhead families, and mostly wealthy, gay, Jewish folks from San Francisco that owned vast quality land where they lived their normal lifestyle, but also enjoyed some cannabis and some wine—they're an eclectic bunch. The Dead, the hippie movement, kind of evolved into more of the Niman Ranch, Dr. Bronner. This like business class of individual, and kind of went from hippie to yuppie, right, or whatever. But they were even more different than that. They'd already kind of built their eclectic empires.

01-02:01:13

I remember being one of the first guys to even—we started making our own cage pots, and a few guys did it out there in Mendo. And then they shared with us, and we're like, 'Okay, we need all our good soil not in the ground with gophers or a gopher basket, but we need it to breathe.' We realized that there was a certain amount of oxygen that needs to penetrate the soil to create more of a size, and this is where the techniques go off again. We used to grow in the woods, thousands of plants, hopefully a couple make it, work all year, we end up with four pounds, you know. But up there, all of a sudden it's a number game. We can depend on it. We can only have so many numbers, so all of a sudden we're growing for size and mass, and then we realize that the

oxygen needs to get into the roots to get them bigger and thicker, and get this rapid growth, and we started making our own above-ground mounds. And then we started making cages. It used to be even like a 4x8 sheet of plywood, 2x4, 4x4 box with four hog panels on it—all of a sudden—boom, we're in! It went from one pound to five pounds, like practically overnight, and people shared. It was like all right, let's make our millions now, and they started investing in ranches and businesses.

And then, quite quickly, it went from there to making our cage pots and our own custom stretchers, which turned into five-to-ten-pound plants, right? And then some guys caught wind of some tree farmers in Illinois that bought these special felt pots from some guys in Missouri, and then all of a sudden smart pots hit the scene. And then they realize that the turkey bags work a little bit better than the black trash bag. A lot of these things were developed in that region of all this production and sharing, at which point a lot of folks in my generation were able to come back down here and give our people some edges while we were working up there. 'Here, use smart pots. Go above ground. We need soil to be lighter. We use more minerals. We use compost teas, and we're caging, and we're doing things.' So it really did raise all ships.

01-02:03:16

And then it hit this awesome point, maybe about 2008 or 2009, where it even poured out of there, right? All of a sudden there was medical in Oregon, there's medical in Colorado—there's medical all over the place. We're all seeing each other and getting to know each other and share all of our techniques. And then indoor farming, greenhouse farming, light deps, all these things really ramped up at that point to what we know it today. And once again, places like Santa Cruz, I feel like all the geeky younger brothers of the big gangsters got together and had fun, were smoking weed. And hey, hang loose man, and surfing and relaxing and sharing, and that tide rose all those ships. So it did, out of Mendocino, our experiences going there, the collaboration, a lot of us were able to bring it back home and share it with our local people, who got to raise their ships as well.

01-02:04:13

Holmes: And this started even earlier too, as you were saying. One of the earliest examples, I think, was with Patrick Cassidy's son, Harvest.

01-02:04:22

Bates: Yes.

01-02:04:22

Holmes: Who went up to Mendocino and played a big role up there.

01-02:04:27

Bates: A big role, and he was already growing and stuff. But once that medical hit, and he saw that some people were doing it, he saw the beautiful business opportunity, right? That's how these loggers are. He was the guy that sold the

shovels to the gold miners. And the first guy, on a big scale, with like fleets of cars—like they used to drive semi-trucks around with different cars that people didn't even know, just making sure they weren't being followed, or they weren't going to land in something, and they'd divert whole shipments of things if they thought they were being followed, or something was bad with a group of folks, it would just all be diverted. They'd rent out horse fields that nobody owned to put all the supplies. He was a real craftsman when it came to keeping a low profile in medical marijuana.

01-02:05:27

Holmes: Well, before we wrap up this session, I wanted to talk a little bit about your recollection and also the stories that you have heard from the community in regards to prohibition. Of course cannabis was officially made illegal, at least on the federal level, in 1937. Then during the sixties and seventies, we have this rising War on Drugs, which again, under the Reagan Administration, during the 1980s, peaks to a new level. Talk a little bit about what you have heard from the elders in regard to how they handled prohibition in the Big Sur area early on in the seventies, and then how that evolved?

01-02:06:20

Bates: Literally, they kept their mouths shut. They were proud of it, but they knew it was something to protect. And so, during prohibition, outside of the circles of growers, or the people actually on the land smoking the weed, it was not talked about whatsoever. They definitely had this code of honor amongst them that was so strict, if somebody mentioned it once in the wrong place, they'd be excommunicated or they would not be talked to again. And the way they dealt with it was literally by going further and deeper. So as there was a stigma in the sixties—let's say, with the Monterey Pop Festival. The sheriffs didn't like all those hippies. They kicked them the fuck out, but a bunch ended up down here. And those hippies that ended up down here, they were very adamant about not allowing it to happen. So if they were just in a park or just off the road, or had their own little house where it was easy to get to, often the law enforcement would really be looking for any sort of nefarious or illicit activity.

So the way they did it was by going farther back in, and that's what makes Big Sur so unique as well, is folks could really hike into the back country. It could take fourteen, fifteen, twenty-five, forty-six hours to hike to the place—one way, in such harsh, gnarly terrain that the helicopters couldn't even get to it. And that was the name of the game, actually, to find the most extreme, most far-out place that you could, in the most extreme conditions, that would deter animals, humans, law enforcement—anything. That was a tradition carried-on for decades, and that's where I came into this. Like we were told to hike as far as you can, until you can't anymore. Hike for one day, and then you can stop and think about growing there. Hike until you're just at the end of the earth. Just stay out there, and only hike at night. Never be seen in the neighborhood. Never park a car, never any of that. Get dropped off in the wilderness, hike in

the middle of the night, only with what you can carry, and stay out there for as many days as you can. And then when it came to harvesting, they did the same. They had these guerilla camps, very primitive, harvest all the weed and sit there, literally burning twigs on a fire, eating canned food. To not be seen was how they survived. The uniqueness of the geography in this region really did help preserve it, because anywhere else it would have been raided immediately. It was common practice, even in the communities of Big Sur, to call the cops if you smelled marijuana.

01-02:09:15

Holmes: Oh wow.

01-02:09:17

Bates: Yeah, and a lot of people think that Big Sur is beautiful and eclectic—it is, and there is this great art and history. But really, it's founded and built on conservative. A lot of the industries were very conservative, whether it was cattle, logging, fishing, and then the lodging—there was old hunting clubs, and lodging was a very conservative situation. Very religious people as well, who would more or less stick themselves in the middle of Big Sur so that they could practice their religious strictness, so it has this extreme within it, of extreme conservative and extreme liberal, and it's really a vortex that way. Everything's extreme. There's no level ground—nowhere that's flat. Everything is up or down, and so are the people.

01-02:10:09

Holmes: How did this evolve, particularly with the war on drugs in the 1980s, that reaches a new peak. From stories you've heard and even your own experience and what you observed growing up, how did this impact the community, and how did it evolve in regards to grappling with the growing intensity of prohibition?

01-02:10:34

Bates: Right. Well, naturally, anybody that enjoyed cannabis felt like an outcast, like a freak. We grew up worried, and actually were treated like drug addicts, or like it was a gateway drug, that it would destroy our lives. The stigma behind it was so fierce, we couldn't share it with anyone except with a couple of people, so you definitely felt like black sheep, most people. And what that created was two options. Either you don't do it at all, or you do it, and it's you versus the entire government and society. So a lot of us wore that weight on our shoulders, constantly watching our backs, couldn't show any form of wealth, stay in the crappy old pickup, say nothing. My dad went to his deathbed not knowing what I do for twenty-five years. My mom knew, but she didn't like to discuss it, even though she was a liberal hippie woman. All of these things because of the stigma that was here.

What that created though, was a very tight network of hard workers, that against all odds would work to the bone, in any situation, to get it done. So it did make some of the sturdiest, hardest workers in the industry. Many of us

had to work in the middle of rainstorms, or in snow, or had to deal with gangsters in the streets pulling guns on us, or had to deal with any number of horrible circumstances—helicopters with military personnel and machine guns coming out of the sky onto us—and not get caught. And what it did is it bred this hybrid vigor of extremely resilient people with strong ideals of what they believe in.

01-02:12:25

By the time it came to medical, it really started getting good, because it was everything we believed in. But it was still very bad because we had the scars of the War on Drugs, and many of us grew up feeling like outlying freaks. It was not cool, at all. It was not cool, and we couldn't talk about it, and we couldn't share it, and it was dangerous to talk about it or share it. It could absolutely equal getting ripped off, shot dead, kidnapped, hijacked—any number of things commonplace. And instead of being able to sell to a dispensary or a kind person like you, we'd have to go sell to a gnarly gangbanger with guns, or somebody completely dangerous. There was no lines drawn, because there was no line. So, for that, it was sad. There was lots of tragedy, lots of death, lots of destroyed lives, lots of properties taken, lots of family fortunes lost. All of it because really kind people were exposed to this really nasty, nefarious greater world of drugs in the illicit market.

01-02:13:36

Holmes: What were some of the techniques that you grew up with, and that were passed on by elders here in Big Sur, during those heated days of prohibition?

01-02:14:11

Bates: Well, low impact to the land was actually a huge one. Like the more invisible you could be, the more success you had, which meant often no fences, no smart pots, no cleared open hillsides—none of that. Which is kind of funny, because I think we're kind of going back to that, in a way. But that was a huge part of prohibition. Another big part of prohibition was literally like individuals out there on their own—say nothing. So we were very divided. I know people that grew up here for thirty years, three miles from each other, never met each other. Even till recently, we had kids that grew up five miles from each other, went on the same bus to town, never got to know each other. They may know who they are, but never talked to each other, never, because of how they had to protect these farms and these techniques, and protect themselves from the danger.

You know, there are some good things that carried over though, I will say. It's like we were onto biodiversity. We knew it. And onto companion plants—we'd look for certain plants that grew in the woods, and we knew the weed grew good there. We'd often camouflage it the color of certain plants grown in certain soil with certain other plants would almost take on the color or identity of these things, like thimbleberries in the redwood-to-sagebrush transition zone. Weed would almost come out kind of light green and looking *almost* like a thimbleberry, which is like a wild raspberry. So there's a lot of really

neat camouflage techniques. And then water systems as well—we were trained how to make leaches. We could literally take a little damp part of earth and take stockings and socks and nets and everything, and create a leach that would create a couple drops, and you do a few of those and create a water system out of nothing.

01-02:16:15

So there were some good techniques, but then there were some bad techniques—as far as booby traps, and setting loud alarms, or making trails that collapse, all the stuff that went wrong during those eighties War on Drugs. There was still some of that. There was rat poison, there was Miracle-Gro, because they didn't want to be seen, right? And they didn't want to bring rat traps out there or make that noise, or couldn't do anything like that, so they reverted to chemicals, which gave a lot of the industry a bad reputation. And I won't lie—it happened out here. I'm grateful it wasn't me or my crowd, but it was definitely the ones that were trying to survive, and without consideration to the nature. That's where a lot of this gets a bad name, is those techniques that they used to survive.

Yeah, so that's from prohibition, you know, where the best practices really weren't shared, like I said, until well into medical marijuana, until people started opening up. Maybe into the early-to-mid-2000s was when folks would start to go around, like, 'Hey, stop using rat poison, that's trouble. Don't put a catch in a park on a creek.' And from which point now you've like cleaned up everything and are the gold standard of land use in the US.

01-02:17:47

Holmes: In one of our conversations earlier, you discussed how prohibition really drove cultivation underground. What was the long-term impact of this, particularly for the growers in Big Sur? I mean I'm thinking of two—seeds and cultivars, and things like that. What was the long-term impact of driving this underground?

01-02:18:21

Bates: The loss of growers, the loss of genetic biodiversity, the loss of respect within the community, certain things like that. When weed wasn't a big deal, it's okay if you grew weed. You were still contributing to the community, but they lost that. It turned into this outcast, this rejected community. It could be a heroin junkie or a weed grower, right? No—practically trained us all to give a false persona, even though we *did* have normal day jobs. That was the highlight, right? I was a carpenter, coffee shop barista, I was a this or that—not actually what we were.

But the consequences were the loss of families, loss of family lands during that—all through the seventies and eighties, they would come through and raid, and throw people in jail for lifetime sentences and give felonies, and repossess their land. Much of the founding fathers that founded this place have all lost their lands and all their money, and were in the dirt by the time

they left—even Patrick Cassidy had nothing to show for it in the end. And their sons—running from the law and having to go hide with their families in Mendocino and Humboldt, where they got to build up again. But they were literally treated like dirt, and everything was taken from them. I got kind of lucky, because I was on the fringe of that, but I had to live so scarcely, to maintain it. But the saddest effects were the loss of family and community and land. And the wealth—they had built wealth for all their families, time and time again, to have the government come in and take it all away.

01-02:20:11
Holmes: You have also mentioned too that, when we were talking about prohibition one time prior to the interview, there was all these negative impacts on the community, negative impacts on growers, both socially, economically. But also, you had mentioned too that if there was an inkling of a positive effect, it did allow some growers, particularly here in the region, to really focus on their craft.

01-02:20:47
Bates: Yes.

01-02:20:48
Holmes: Intensely.

01-02:20:48
Bates: Well, that's the beauty of it, right? We do have a saying down here in Big Sur, what they don't know about you makes you very powerful. Keep 'em guessing, right? The second they feel like they know you, or they know your scene, they are going to take advantage of that and say, "Well, I'm a member of the community. I think *this*." But if they know nothing, there we are, just getting stronger, just getting stronger, working every day, working with every plant, checking everything in. And then once we could have one friend or two friends, which would be a lot—back when I was growing up, it's like I had four—and that's like a huge group of growers for Big Sur. And we would all share what we're doing and keep it hush-hush. And so yes, I feel like what they don't know makes us very powerful, because here we are, creating our craft, coming up with something amazing. And they go, "Oh my God, how did you do that?" "Well, that's for me to know, and you to spend twenty years figuring out."

01-02:21:50
Holmes: Well, that's really well said. I think this is a great place to stop, and we're going to pick that up, this up, here tomorrow, in our next session, and learn more about your story and experiences.

01-02:22:00
Bates: [laughs] Oh boy!

01-02:22:02
Holmes: Oliver, thank you so much.

01-02:22:03
Bates: Thank you, Todd.

Interview 2: October 15, 2021

02-00:00:08
Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is October 15, 2021, and I have the pleasure of sitting down for our second session with Oliver Bates, president of the Big Sur Farmers Association. And this is for the California Cannabis Oral History Project. We are here in his lovely home in the mountains of Big Sur, California. Oliver, thank you so much for sitting down with me again and sharing these couple days with me.

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Bates: Thank you, thank you—a pleasure, Todd.

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Holmes: Well, in our first session we spent a lot of time discussing the history of cannabis, the cultivars and practices, and how that was developing here in Big Sur as well as in related regions. In this session, I'd like to explore your experience as a grower. So, in a sense, we went from the history of cannabis in Big Sur, to now discussing that history and development from your own experience. Why don't we start with how you got started in cannabis?

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Bates: Sure. Well, how I got started would definitely come from family, in a way. As we were discussing yesterday, I had a very unique, artistic family with lots of really great friends and family around us. Some of my first memories are definitely as a young boy in the Santa Cruz Mountains with my mom's best friend, who is my godmother. Her name was Madeleine Berger, and she was a Spanish-Jewish gypsy, believe it or not—so Hanukkah and flamenco guitars. But I always remember walking to her front porch, and she had these beautiful gardens with food and flowers and grape vineyards and things, and if you looked closely enough in there, you would see a cannabis plant or two. You'd have to really look to find it. But she was very sweet and kind, and I remember from a young age my mom and her best friend would get together and they'd paint. They'd do landscapes and still lifes, and they'd paint together as friends. And Madeleine always smoked cannabis. My mom was kind of conservative, but allowed it to happen because it was her best friend, and so it was kind of around the household.

Some of my first memories, for sure, were just kind of seeing it happen. And then me and one of the little kids kind of grabbing a little piece and going around the corner, coring out an apple, and then sticking a pencil in there to make the hole, and we tried it. The first couple times I tried it, actually, I didn't get high at all—not at all, but it felt like we did something sneaky, you know? But it was around, and it felt like wine, I suppose, where like my stepdad, maybe when I was ten years old, after doing a roof or something, he'd let me have a sip of a beer. It was kind of something similar, where it was okay if a little nug slipped away off the counter. So the cannabis was around.

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Living here on the Monterey Peninsula in Carmel, it was quite a conservative atmosphere, so we had to keep it much more under wraps. My mom never had cannabis around, wasn't a cannabis smoker, anything to that effect. But my friends that I connected with, their parents did, especially in the regions of Big Sur and Carmel Valley. Once again, it was just kind of around the household, and we took notice. We took notice. I remember being a little boy with one of my friends—his parents used to watch Grateful Dead tapes all night long and eat giant bags of popcorn. One of my fondest memories is just chasing his cats through these wild, sticky bushes in the back yard. And yeah, so I'd like to think it kind of came to my attention then, that it was a bit of a sacrament or something the parents did on the weekend in the evening when they're hanging loose. So I personally didn't have a stigma, like this is a bad drug. It was just about like beer or wine, or something to that effect.

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Holmes: Your godmother, there was other cannabis connections in her family as well.

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Bates: Yes, so it turns out my godmother was a very interesting person. She grew up in a Spanish family on the East Coast in New York, but then moved out to California in the sixties, where she met her husband, who was a photographer. She was an artist and a flamenco singer—and quite crazy and cool. But those travels and those connections with her family took her to Spain quite often, since she was thirteen or something, which would have been probably the fifties, really. And then in the sixties, she and her friends did the hippie trail—and Afghanistan was their spot. She had brothers and sisters that were quite the international crowd that way as well. And so we remember being very young and having people come in from Spain with hashish that might have been stuffed in their boot or in their sandals. They'd just rip out a chunk out of their sandals.

And then her brother would come down, and back when I was a boy in California, there was only green weed and brown weed. And one tasted like a fart, and one tasted like heaven on earth, you know? I'll never forget the first time I got high and really kind of blown away by the psychotropic effects of THC, if you will, and that was my godmother's brother. He had been living in Alaska, and in particular the area above Anchorage we now know as the Matanuska Tundra, which turned out to be an excellent place to grow short-season strains. We were just loved as kids that he brought down a strain called Alaskan Thunderfuck. At one of these big *flamenco juergas*, with the guitars going all night long, and the wheelbarrows of wine and ladies stomping away on the platforms, and the screaming and yelling, my godmother, she would give us a little less than a dime bag—and each kid, so they don't fight over the bowl. And like, "All right, kids. Go have fun now." So maybe I was like twelve, maybe a little younger even, when I actually smoked some and had the effects. And for me, the effects were silly and fun. They weren't like, 'Oh

God, I'm high.' They were definitely, 'Yay! Let's go play!' We had fun with it as kids.

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Looking back on it, she was an amazing woman. Sometimes she would put me in the car, with like a bowl of soup, headed to mom's house. She could drive down the road, weed already trimmed up—back then they didn't have grinders or anything, but it was all chopped up—and she could roll a joint with one hand. Lick it and everything—one hand. To this day, it still amazes me. So my godmother was a huge introduction, I think, to cannabis, as far as in my family. And she lived maybe an hour, an hour and a half, away from where my family was in Carmel. So once we were kind of made aware, or what have you, I did start to notice the other folks around me that may or may not have cannabis in their life, and that was from a young age. I'd say by like twelve, thirteen years old, I kind of decided cannabis is cool, and I didn't understand why people called it a gateway drug.

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Holmes: Well talk about your first experience growing. I mean there are those who maybe partake and live their entire lives, right, just being a connoisseur of cannabis.

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Bates: Yeah.

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Holmes: Then it's a whole other path to really try your luck, like 'I'm going to try to grow this,' especially during the dark days of prohibition.

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Bates: Sure.

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Holmes: Talk about your first experience as a grower and your first grow.

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Bates: Sure. My first two grows were pretty fun and funny, actually, as a kid. We had Mexican friends in school. I lived next to the Salinas Valley, and there's actually a gigantic labor pool—hundreds of thousands of green card, working folks that come up from Mexico seasonally, so there was really a big access to Mexican brick weed. Where there was so much sinsemilla already grown in California, it was kind of hard to—there wasn't such things as clones really, even though some people might have done that. There wasn't seeds available. But we'd get these bricks of brick weed out of Mexico. It was super cheap, and we could just share and give it away—it didn't matter. We called it fart weed. It kind of smelled like a fart but got us kind of high. But I remember we would pick all the seeds out, because they'd make a joint explode in your face, and they'd taste like burnt hair.

One of my friends—it was funny—when we were thirteen years old, and he's like, "Man, we've got to *use* these seeds for something." And this weed's so hard to get, we're like stealing it out of his mom's jar in the bedroom and doing whatever—that he's like, "We've got to try this." So I was like, "Okay."

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I lived in an old Victorian house that was made in the 1800s, and there was a closet with a cubbyhole, with like a false room in there. I'll just never forget it. I had reptiles and aquariums for fish, and so we took an aquarium and put it in this little room with a fluorescent light on it, and like covered it with a blanket. I put a bed of dirt in there, and we decided, in case Mom finds it, we'd better plant something else in there. So we actually took corn, dry corn off the cob, and planted it with all the marijuana seeds in an aquarium. So I had this aquarium with corn starts and cannabis starts all mixed in there. But then my mom found it, of course—like you cannot hide anything from Mom. She was like a wolf, would just stare right through to the back of your head and get to the truth, you know? So Mom found it, and she didn't quite understand that there's cannabis there. But she did understand that I could have set the house on fire, with a blanket over a light in an aquarium stuffed in the walls, you know? So the first attempt was a failure. And she found my little room—such the undercover little club. We had Playboy pinups and cigarette cartons on the wall. We were like—this is the Dude Lair. Mom got me, the first one.

The second one, we actually moved out of that Victorian house to where I spent the rest of my school years, in an area of Monterey that's between Monterey and Carmel, on the spine of the hill in a giant pine forest. Up there, actually, my older brother, who was maybe eight years older than me, like discovered I was fourteen years old and smoking weed. He was like, 'Oh, really? That's cool.' And him and his friends went to Hawaii and came back with some seeds. He started them in his house—we had the same dad, different moms. Then *his* mom found out and was outraged! "Get rid of these plants," she said. And he's like, "Okay, I'll get rid of them." So he brought them to me. My first official crop was actually six Maui Wowie plants that were already sexed, that my older brother had grown in Dixie cups. They're like overgrown in Dixie cups, and I was like oh God, what do we do with this? We actually took them outside into the sagebrush, and I planted them in the ground. Most got eaten by rats and everything, and it was like, everything's dying, but I didn't take it too seriously. But then one plant came through. And that one plant—it was like striking gold. Fourteen years old, got a quarter pound—four ounces—and shared it with all my friends. And really, and a lot of it does stem from my mom being a real green thumb. She always had food and ornamental orchards and ornamental plants. My mom was a serious green thumb, so we connected on that level. We were always growing things. So I wasn't scared to grow things and not scared to start from seed.

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So that's officially how I got started, and by fourteen I had my first giant harvest. I had a quarter pound. None of the kids had seen that for miles, and we were burying it in the ground, in jars, burying it deep in the ground and taking eighths, and I'd bring it to all the kids and give them all a piece, you know? And that kind of started us on the career of meeting other pot farmers. A couple of kids found out that I had grown this Maui Wowie, and they were blown away. A couple kids around my age were like, 'Oh, I've got some in Pebble Beach, by the golf course in trash cans.' This other kid had just silly things. His laundry hamper that his parents never went to, with all the dirty laundry in it, but underneath, there's a light with some seeds. That was kind of my first introduction to collaborating with other folks about growing cannabis. But it was very in-house and very silly. We would pee on our plants to try and keep the rats off.

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Holmes: After this first successful grow, did you continue? I mean when did growing become an annual kind of venture for you?

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Bates: I'd say that was actually a few years later. After that first Maui Wowie harvest, I tried the next year when I was fifteen. My mom found fourteen plants in the bushes, when it was totally illegal. She was right. We could have had the house taken away from us. There could have been felony charges. She's a very Buddhist woman that wouldn't get too upset, but she pulled me and my brother into the living room when she found it. She took those plants out of the ground, brought them into the living room, started a fire, and proceeded to chew us out for about two hours, ripping branch by branch off. "You could destroy our family. This is going to lead to drugs." She really put an impression on me. I was like, 'Wow, I'm never doing that again.' [laughs] So I kind of decided at the time that career's kind of over. But some of my friends continued to, so I actually helped a friend in trash cans that we hoisted up into the pine trees. We heard it was done by guys in Humboldt. So we have these five-gallon buckets and would have a trash can with some water that we would try and collect and bring little gallons of water every once in a while to fill it up. It was kind of like a goofy, kind of playing mode for a few years.

By the time I was sixteen, I had some friends that I already knew and we had started spending a lot more time down in Big Sur with the friends that I met off the beach, like I kind of came in with the surfing community. Knew some of my parents' friends, but really my people were the kids that I surfed with in Carmel. I went to a school right over the hill in Pacific Grove, California, which is just a town away, but it's enough that nobody knew each other. So I felt like I almost had like a double life, and this Carmel/Big Sur life was kind of a secret life that I was really enjoying. Where I went to school was fog and depressing, and the weed would mold and it was horrible. But then the other side, in Big Sur, it's just like I found this bright, sunny lifestyle that I just couldn't get enough of.

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So with a friend, we kind of started being a little truant at school. We started just literally in the parks, right off the side of the road. Not big crops that people hear of, but maybe we'd have like three or five plants here, and then go drive ten miles down the coast and have another three or four plants over there. We had these little outposts, we called them, of cannabis, and we actually did okay. We both worked all year, worked full-time jobs, and I think we harvested like, maybe a pound. It's like we got a half pound a piece, and it was like the world back then. I think that was maybe $2,500—we were making like $5 an hour, or something, so it was kind of a big move up. It's like, 'let's go get a new surfboard.' So that was kind of like the beginning of—okay, we can do this for work. It equals some money, and then we had some smoke. We didn't have to pay those outrageous prices. And so that was like the beginning, we can take this seriously.

Where for sure, the beginning of my career, per se, was definitely given to me by the community of Big Sur. I was an emancipated youth, so I left home around sixteen, but really established around seventeen and took a job as a busboy down the coast at a restaurant called the River Inn. I did that like sixteen to about eighteen, maybe nineteen almost. It felt like forever. And I'll never forget, I was sitting down in a pub parking lot, smoking a joint with some hippies, and then a VW bus came out of the hill with a cool hippie chick, and she's like, "Hey, what are you boys doing for the weekend? We need *help*."

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They drove me down the coast to the middle section of Big Sur, and up into the mountains, and that's where I worked my first harvest. Back then, it was still pretty extreme. There wasn't such a thing as medical marijuana. There was no legality, so it was dogs and guns. They'd set up these makeshift camps on platforms, and have groups of kids and hippie ladies and stuff all under these tents, trimming weed out in the woods, in all the conditions. I was horrible at it. I worked my way up in the first month to like a half a pound a day, but I think I started at like an ounce or two a day and maybe could do a quarter of a pound a day. The boss that was kind of running that job is like, "Oh, I don't know. You're pretty slow at this, but maybe you're good at something else." So he kind of pulled me into, "Why don't you go and try to harvest some of this stuff," and I helped him pull down.

At that point, it really opened my eyes to like—wow, okay, these guys have normal jobs, but they're doing this on the side, and this allows them to have houses and vehicles and travel. So it became very appealing as a teenager. It was like, wow, I could work and then supplement, get a bit ahead, not feel the struggle as much by having this seasonal kind of supplemental income back then. Other people were going hard at it, but it was just kind of this supplemental thing for me, in a way.

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Not to head too far down the same hole, but that definitely opened me and my few buddies that had been in it for a long time—like three or four years, since we were thirteen or fourteen. We decide, we've got to do something about this. Those same elders kind of said, "Well, hey, back in the seventies and eighties, we used to have these grows out in the forest, up on the top of this hill in the north end." And they said, "You know, all that stuff's still out there. Why don't you boys just go take the seeds, go to this one tree, hang a left, hike up till you see another set of trees and look for the rocks." Literally, we got encouraged by our elders to go plug into old seventies and eighties grows that had been busted in the Just Say No campaign.

We were literally like scavengers. We went out there. We'd bring our seeds. We'd take their old water systems and their old places and their old kitchens and everything. We just kind of refashioned it, and kind of redid the soil. And that's when we like hit the big time. We worked all year, had full-time jobs, full-time out there. We would hike about nine hours just to get there, and then we'd spend days there in hammocks, with next to no food, in the heat, getting sick off of creek water. And then we hit the big time. I think me and my buddy got four pounds apiece at that point. And at that point, cannabis was about $5,000 a pound. So my friends that were already in college, we went down to Hollywood, and that four pounds was $20,000, which was, for sure, more money than we could possibly imagine. And then we went out and blew it all on reggae shows and surf trips, and just had a few pictures to show for it, but that was kind of the beginning.

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Holmes: What strains did you grow during this time?

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Bates: So back then, it was heritage strains, for sure; or as far as what our elders had around us, and there was a few others that would always help out the youth. [laughs] So back then we had this one called M10, which is out of Santa Cruz, which may have some Haze relation, I don't know. But I was always told that it was kind of a mix of AK-47 and Bubble Gum, so it was like they were already mixing in a little Europe, even though we had our traditional American strains. Back then, White Widow, which was like big on the European market. To me, in the late eighties and early nineties is when the name game kind of came out. And then these guys were working on stuff here, like Skunk—anything that smelled like a skunk, they called it Skunk. But I think we had Pineapple, we had Maui Wowie, and we did a real variety too. It made no sense. There's like forty-seven different plants that we each got an ounce off of each one. Just a terrible mish-mash, and we'd just put it all in one bag and call it Big Sur Holy, and go sell it for $5,000 and have some fun, you know? [laughs]

But it was supplemental. The way I was raised with it was like okay, work hard, do this crap, then you've got your extra money. When winter comes and

tourists die out, and the season slows down and it gets wet, while most people are just staying at home, we were out surfing all over the place, and playing music and going to reggae shows, and doing all that. It was a really enriching experience. We met very, very interesting, international types out in the middle of the woods. We were very young, but that's where I met my first Jamaican friend that's a dear friend, and he just showed up at a coffee shop on the side of the road, and was like, "Hey man, you guys grow weed? What do you do with the weed?" And we were kind of like hush-hush for a while, and then he's like, "I've got all these seeds." And we're like, "Ooh, ooh! All right, let's put them to use." [laughs] There was some sort of old guy that was like an IRA refugee, some Irish dude out in the middle of nowhere. We'd like see him once a week on the road, walking by, looking all scraggly, like what's wrong with that guy? But really, he was out there working around the clock to make his little family fortune and then travel afterwards.

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Holmes: Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about the elder community, because as you said, you were taken in and kind of got started on this path by the elders.

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Bates: Yes.

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Holmes: First as a laborer, right? And then pointed to some old sites that could be put back to use, if you will. Describe this elder community and the knowledge they passed on?

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Bates: Sure. Well, this elder community already had thirty or forty years of their own kind of secretive normalized cannabis, so down the coast of Big Sur when I was a boy, every household was open. It was a really trusting community. Everyone really relied on each other and helped each other, and so, the elder community was very caring. There was few youths, few people period on the whole coast. So, if they saw kids that were kind of wayward, or maybe getting into trouble because they didn't have anything to do—ingenuity and hard work has always been a standard of mountaineering in Big Sur. So these elders always would try to find a constructive life building, wealth building, house-building utility for us to focus our young, frustrated testosterone energies at. I think that's a beautiful thing. The community that I'd ever really experienced in Carmel is go to school, get a degree, be a professional, have a family, go to church, retire. That was like this societal progress. Where Big Sur was much more of—okay, there's a few of you guys. We need you to be productive. It was very much a hands-on approach, and our elders were pretty outgoing, encouraging. They'd support that—music, art, carpentry, weed growing. So it was very supportive.

And that progression of being gifted by the elders, taught something, and then being guided towards our own continued throughout my cannabis career—and

actually gave me an extreme edge wherever I traveled in the world, to have that humility to find my place and to learn from the wisdom of the people that came before me. I repeated that pattern throughout my life, and I continue to.

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Holmes: Talk a little bit about the knowledge they passed on. I think you've said in another place the elders were a hodgepodge of a group—veterans, old hippies, expats perhaps?

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Bates: Yeah.

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Holmes: But what were some of the techniques, or at least knowledge and techniques that they passed on as you started into your growing career?

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Bates: Sure. Well, you know, one place my mind immediately runs towards is this sense of community and of family values, and that was almost first above all. All these men were doing the best they could to get a cash crop for their family, and against all odds and against extreme consequences, they would still put it all on the line to do everything they could to bring it home to the family. Literally, everything they could. They put themselves in extreme risk to be able to give, and that was huge to me. So that was one part.

Then the other part was the dignity of having respect for hard work put in, no matter what that life choice was—as long as it equaled hard work and contributing. There was this contribution thing in Big Sur, especially when I was a boy. In town you could pretty much just be a kid, and they didn't expect you to do much—but you've got to go do your studies. Down the coast it was quite a bit different. It's like hey, you're here. You've got to contribute—go clean the yard. Do some dishes. Help cook the food, help the guys go to do the fence. Chop wood. There was this real utilitarian, like always be useful, create value, add value wherever you go and you'll be taken care of. And in Big Sur it was really special actually, because you would feel that value. They'd honor your hard work with *great* comforts and entertainment and any number of things. You work hard enough, they invite you right into their home and give you the nicest room in the house, load you down with weed, feed you until you can't even eat anymore, and then you get to go dance and play with beautiful, topless women from all over the world. An absolute utopia, but it was *earned*—and it was hard earned.

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I'll never forget one of the elders telling me, with cannabis in particular. He said, "Listen, a lot of people are looking to get rich on this thing, but this isn't what it is. There's easy come, and there's easy go, and that's how it'll go. If you get rich quick, it's gone quick." But he said, "I want you to learn how to be hard earned is hard kept." So you know, you work hard, you do all the

sacrificing, but you structure it in your foundation, and you will keep that for years to come. So, in modern terms that would be know the difference between liabilities and assets, or between an equity or just a flow of cash? So it was actually really great training, to think about a larger picture down the road, building a foundation, things that would last.

Land stewardship was a big one. This is definitely my introduction to Big Sur. Most people, I'd imagine—even though I was working a full-time job growing weed, I still spent ten years caretaking. That's how I ended up with a place to live, is that I caretake, which means I'd have to be very humble. No matter how much money I made that year, I'm still cleaning up the septic system and fixing the leak on the roof, and you know, filling the potholes on the driveway.

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Holmes: We talked yesterday about the unique environment of Big Sur. The different microclimates and everything else, which puts it in those special regions of California to grow cannabis; its place within the rank of the legacy regions. Talk a little bit about learning that process—of how the soils work, of how the environment worked as you began as a grower.

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Bates: Sure, sure. Well, we started in a place of these old grows I was talking about, so far out there there's no option of hiking soil, driving soil in, anything of that nature. There's this particular group of elders, like I said, that guided us, gave us seeds, said, "Go for it kiddos," because it was a tradition, you know? It was a transition into manhood, if you will, for a lot of Big Sur folks. It was part of the tradition. If you can handle that, you can handle anything, including a family, right? [laughs]

But they showed us. One of my main teachers, his thing was to go find five different types of soil and create your soil out of that. You shouldn't have a problem, right? But what that led to, technique-wise, is getting to know soils, getting to know aggregates—stones, sand, clay, all these different things—and then in varying degrees. And we're usually so obsessed with our plants, we'll just spend hours staring at a plant and looking at the soil, and feeling it, and watering it more one day, less one day. You try everything. But then we really gained this knowledge. What's too airy. What's too dense. What stunts its growth. What loosens its growth. What drinks a lot of water. What doesn't drink a lot of water. Really got us into soil science, but in a really natural, almost like an ethnobotanical way. It was mostly lore, mostly oral history. [laughs] And the science was not there. The money in the science wasn't there, outside of the commercial agriculture industry. So it attuned us to really analyze our soils, to analyze our waters.

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Our inputs were like gold. I mean taking a fifty-pound sack of something like seaweed, or a couple ten-pound sacks of bat guano, or something, and putting

that on your back and hiking fourteen miles straight up a cliff is intense. So intense you'd hurt, and it was so much effort you couldn't even put a dollar value on it, how much effort it was. So that sort of gave us this extreme value of any of the inputs as having to be the most crucial, like actual visual effect, right? Because we didn't have testing back then, so it would only be the nose, the high, the visual. And then the botany—it's like we became extreme observers of plants and soil.

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Holmes: We talked about North Coast, South Coast, and Central Coast of Big Sur. Over your years, how did you look at both the different environments and soils of those? What was the experience of growing in each one? Were some of the elders also telling you about the different parts of the coast?

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Bates: Some of the elders were telling us about the different parts of the coast. And it definitely starts as far back as the Patrick Cassidy. A lot of the jade hunters, and some of these people that are down on the South Coast, they had quite a bit of knowledge they were acquiring year, after year, after year, as they were building this thing—breeding up for THC. What they encountered, really, it was handed down, as far as the difference of what a granite or decomposed-granite hillside might be like; or a lime heavy or a clay-heavy environment; or maybe the acidic soils of pine forest or redwood compared to a less acidic oak or madrone; and then the deadly in-betweens of Ceanothus and manzanita. It was very hands on, very visual, but there was this pool of knowledge.

And especially as I got a little older, the actual growing community was very small, and we didn't talk to anyone—but we could sense each other, you know? It's still like that for me. I can go to any country on earth, sit down at the bar, and if there's a grower, we're going to know. Don't even have to say a word, just *known*, and we'll head off on an adventure. So that was a very shared part, and around the geology, so we had a certain amount of folklore behind it all. Everybody had their perfect recipe and their perfect remedy, and everybody knew *exactly* what to do.

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From my teenage years to my early twenties, it transitioned quite a bit in the early and mid-nineties, as we were getting closer to medical marijuana. There was NORML [National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws], the big advocacy group, and there was this normalization coming, right? Cheech and Chong were already normal. Amsterdam had its High Times Cannabis Cups that were already happening. So the knowledge started ramping up a bit right there, where we could see a little bit more of like what the outside world did and try to mimic that a little bit. But under these extreme circumstances, it was very hard to ever do more than a little bit. And yeah, that's where my career once again took another turn, where I went from labor to learning again.

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Holmes: Well, I want to get to that, but before we do I want to talk about that transition. In 1996, Prop. 215 in California opened the doors for the gray market of medical marijuana, if we wanted to call it that.

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Bates: Yes.

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Holmes: But before we get there, talk a little bit about the black market. In a sense, well, it still exists, number one. But second of all, did the elders also give you tips in that learning process of how to evade the authorities and the watchful eye under prohibition?

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Bates: Yes, yes. And we're talking decades of the best smugglers on earth type of guidance. There was foundational rules. It was a different environment back then. I mean some of the rules were racist, I will say. Like we were not allowed to deal with black people or Latino people—whatsoever. It was like the first rule. Gangs were a little heavier back then, in the nineties—early nineties especially. That was like a different time, right? Rodney King—all that was happening. Gangsters were a little more real. Up here wasn't quite so nice and white and gentrified. We had a big military base called Fort Ord. There's these ancillary cities of Marina and Seaside that were Asian and black respectively, with a big Latino community beyond that. They had their own circulations.

But we had certain rules we had to follow. Certain rules like: never show the product before you see the money; do not do it at home; don't do it where you know people; don't let people you know see what you're doing. And then, there was all sorts of things. People would make weird presses into shapes of things. So my friend had a wine-bottle press, so he could take a bunch of weed and press it into the shape of a wine bottle, and wrap it all up and put it in a case, and oh—it's a case of wine. But really, it's a case of cannabis. Or like down at the bakery, right? At all costs, nothing looks like a weed bag. But oh, here's your four cups of coffee. It's actually four ounces of cannabis. Our elders, from the sixties, they were the brilliant ones. They had a pet store right in town, where there's all these dog and cat collars. And then there's a special dog collar under the counter that they'd sewn it in.

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Then there were protocols. Lots of protocols. Like don't deal with people that don't have as much as you to lose is a big one. Make sure you know where their as-much-to-lose is, so there was always a repercussion. Into the next phase, like the elders that would hire me, there were standard rules. I'd be fired if I left my front porch without boots and a gun on, and it was absolutely treated as such. The constant threat of thievery—lots of burglaries. So we had a lot of protocols around that. A lot of locked gates, a lot of wires with soda

cans, so you can hear it jingle. So there was all sorts of protocols actually. For sure, chopping up gas tanks in cars and making little smuggling parts in those, or getting the ladies to sew it all into comforters. A lot of protocol and technique to keep it just out of the purview of enforcement.

02-00:42:45
Holmes: In regards to growing too, you had mentioned techniques about where you grow that you could evade, at least, the helicopters, and other kind of surveillance by the authorities.

02-00:43:02
Bates: Yeah.

02-00:43:03
Holmes: If you didn't mind sharing, what were some of the things the elders taught you in regards to those techniques?

02-00:43:08
Bates: Sure, so like nowadays, when you look at a cannabis plantation, usually it's right out in the open in the sunshine—and it has all this trellising and caging, and everything's on display. Back then, that's just gone immediately. So actually, we used forest as cover. We would go to the unlikely places—a north end of a hill in the woods. We were trained to—like very specifically, if you were going to do it on the top or on the south side of a mountain, we were trained how to literally thin the brush and prune the trees, especially the small things like sage, manzanita, Ceanothus, thinning all the bottom layers out, leaving only the top layers, so it looks like just a sagebrush/chaparral hillside. But really, that was our trellising mechanism, and we'd grow within these plants, and within the shade of hopefully similar sizes to those plants, and prune nature as our trellising mechanism. But for sure, a lot of shade-grown, so a lot of us became really good at these. Lightly watered or underwatered/underfed, like starving weed, but it came out so beautifully. And that was only attributed to being in the shade on the north end—all the places you're *not* supposed to grow, right? That's what a lot of us became masters of; that was our target, to blend in *so* very much.

Certain things like trails—there would not be a trail to a garden. There's a common-use trail, and then there'd be like a rabbit hole through some brush, and a secondary trail, and then maybe a rabbit hole back, with a third trail, and then maybe a little scurry up a rock cliff, and then another trail up there. Those guys were savvy, from the eighties War on Drugs, because they had National Guard and stuff. They literally had military chasing them through the woods back then, so they came up with all these crazy techniques of how to absolutely camouflage yourself—go gray we called it. We were going gray. It's just like—oh, it's part of the woodwork. You could look out on that hill—oh, it's just nature. But actually, there might have been twelve people and five dope growers out there, but you would never know it.

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At that point, when I was young, it was crazy. Like there would be CAMP [Campaign Against Marijuana Planting] and all the military coming out of nowhere. We couldn't grow at home. There was no medical. If you grew at home, you would end up in prison and your home would be gone, or your parents would be gone. So we were on the outskirts of these parks, but they never, ever got more than like a half a percent of all of it—not even that. And I believe the record goes that out in the woods of Big Sur, we've only really heard of maybe one or two growers ever being caught when they were doing it absolutely illegally on National Forest land. So it's one of those things. They could run around and try and get it, but they will never catch us. They will never find us. We know it too well. We're quiet—not only not telling people, but like mice going through the woods. [whispering] Shh, shh, not even talking. "Bro, shut up." You know, that was all part of it, just melding into the environment.

I appreciate those nowadays. I still think it's brilliant to take the manzanitas and things, and turn that into your trellising system. You don't need metal cages. Nature will do it for ya.

02-00:47:05

Holmes: Let's talk about Prop. 215 and the rise of medical marijuana in California. Now, this was passed in 1996 by California voters, and that largely ended, if not erased, in some respects, the decades of prohibition and l prosecution—at least on the state level.

02-00:47:28

Bates: Yeah.

02-00:47:29

Holmes: Discuss your recollections of Prop. 215 in the Big Sur community.

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Bates: Well, I remember the push for medical happened long before it hit, so maybe around '92 through '94, there was this group out of Santa Cruz, an amazing alliance called the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana [WAMM]. What they were doing was research, but really it was hands-on relief for cancer, but mainly AIDS patients. And they had seen, since the eighties when AIDS really hit, how much suffering was going on with the people. They discovered, and really emphasized that cannabis helped them gain appetite. Not only did it relieve their pain and their anxiety a little bit, but it raised their appetite, and that was a big deal down here with the elders. Like, whoa—this plant is actually helping people that are dying, eat food and survive, which was one aspect of it. But a lot of folks also believed that it would lead to the legalization of weed. So actually, our community was pretty excited around that time, but it was really being kind of pushed in urban centers, and the movement was really in state capitals and places, far off, in a way.

And then, prior to '96, maybe '94, it started gaining steam. The feds came down on WAMM in Santa Cruz—and then they went to the Supreme Court and won. All of a sudden, there was some sort of hope, like, 'Oh my gosh, somebody survived marijuana persecution.' I remember the local community was actually quite skeptical that anything would change. And then, even as it was voted in, many of our farmers—it was very similar to the 2016 Prop. 64 votes, as in many of the farmers thought it would destroy what they had created. So, the community of Big Sur was into the concept but did not want the reality. They wanted to just go ahead and keep what they had going. The way it was; the way they felt it should be. And so then, medical marijuana hit in '96, and when it got voted in, it was very strict and darn-near impossible. Like it had to be practically federally approved—or like state approved—but through many agencies, that these patients were *truly* sick. So it was actually only available to actual cancer and AIDS patients, and some other ailments along the way. Right in the beginning, there was that factor of it.

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But myself and my friends, we saw it as kind of the wave of the future, like, 'Oh my goodness, there's this provision where if you're helping sick people, you can do it closer to home. Or you can do it at home.' And you can do it and *not* get arrested. And my friends were some of the first, in Big Sur, that just immediately attacked that. We didn't know what to do, but we read the newspapers and saw the news. So a friend of mine and myself, we went up to Santa Cruz actually, and got in touch with Valerie [Leveroni] Corral, I think her name is, of WAMM—went right to the horse's mouth. "What do we *do* for this?" And she's like, "Well, there's not a lot of doctors working in it, and you need to find someone in your area that is okay with working on this." They had somebody, maybe in Santa Cruz and in the Bay Area, and there was another doctor up north. But there wasn't really access to those prescriptions, but we saw it as very viable.

One of my best friends—we'll just call him Aragorn—who I grew with since we were fourteen really, to this day. But his mom was working at the hospital and running certain machinery in there for truly sick people, and she knew a doctor that was open-minded to this. She came from the lesbian and gay community, and they kind of really support each other, so her friend decided, 'Okay, I'll take the risk and write a prescription or two for some truly sick people,' and that's when we got our first prescriptions from a doctor. They weren't registered with the state or anything like that. There was no such thing as a dispensary. It was for patient-direct medicine, so we got our first few local patients. And actually, that took us till 1997 to get those patients. But it took till '98 before we were like, 'Okay, we've got four patients; we're going to do twenty-four plants.'

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So yeah, in our community on the north end of Big Sur, my friend and myself were actually the first medical-marijuana grow. And all the neighbors were

like—"Good luck. They're coming for you." Even at that, we didn't truly go out in the open. That first year or two we were kind of over the north side and surrounded by trees a bit, and like, 'Okay, maybe they won't see it, maybe it's not a big deal, but we're going to put our scripts out there. Then, we were able to bring so much more resource. We were able to bring a tractor, shovels, some soil from off the side of the hill, dig a big pit and plant in there, and drive stuff home from the garden store and dump it in there. For us, prior to that, a quarter pound and half-pound plants were big. But immediately, right off the bat we went to like the one-to-three-pound range. That was huge. People were like, 'Oh my God! You got one pound off of a plant?' They couldn't believe it. They're like, 'This is *impossible*. What are you guys doing?'

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I'd say that first year we did it, in '97, with those twenty-four plants, really opened our eyes. Like, 'Holy cow, if we can bring these resources, and we can do this right,' which we did—we made sure there was kind of some standardized ethic behind it. There wasn't really rules or dispensaries. But the access to this medicine wasn't supposed to be sold or shared with other patients. The patient and the grower would work out what the patient wanted. So for us back then, it was actually kind of expensive, in a way. You know, it's like, 'Okay, I'll give you my card for my six plants, but I want one of those plants.' That was kind of the trade. And we were like, 'Okay, you've got it.' We did all the work, and we got to keep five of those plants. And we know where to sell it—straight to the illicit market that we had already been working in.

I'd say it took like two or three years to really catch on down here. We were up to a dozen, maybe almost two dozen on the whole coast of Big Sur by 1999, 2000. And that really changed everything. That went from this supplemental little thing on the side, hush-hush, to 'All right, boys, let's try and do *this* for a living.' We started to feel some of the immediate consequences too—good and bad. Had some of the first thefts because it was so easy to get to. The thieves were used to going out to the middle of the wilderness to find it. Now, they could just drive down the street. It's right there. But then, the great rewards as well. Like holy cow, we just went from four pounds to seventy-five. And then how do we turn this into real money—that struggle went on for twenty years. How do we turn this into real money? [laughs]

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Holmes: You were mentioning how the techniques and resources evolved because now you're not having to hike this into the woods, it could be closer to home and more in the open.

02-00:55:59

Bates: Yeah.

02-00:56:00

Holmes: Talk a bit about the techniques and resources that developed with more open and heighten cannabis production.

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Bates: Sure, so we actually started going kind of the other way, started looking towards what we could purchase to bring in—in bulk—to amplify the effects of these cultivars in their expression. So for us, I go back to WAMM, once again—elders that were pioneering this thing. When we talked to them, we saw their farm, and it was in the ground, under the sun, appellation style. But big holes in the ground, where they would bring the finest potting soil from the nurseries. Before that, we had never had that option really. Some of the indoor guys used potting soil, but that was it.

So once we were able to do that, we started to study other plants that were similar. Of course, like for thirty years before this, everybody said they were growing tomatoes. And literally, that's what we would do, like, okay, tomato production. What do they use? What kind of soils are they building? What kind of fertilizers do they use? What kind of amendments, right? We could truck in minerals, we could truck in guanos or manure. So all of a sudden we could use cow manure, and we could use chicken manure, and we could bring in things. We started really focusing on other markets, which the indoor guys and the greenhouse guys were already better at doing because they were studying so much of the flower production in Europe since the eighties.

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But the outdoor guys weren't necessarily. It's like almost everything was appellation before that, almost everything was in the ground, under the sun, where all of a sudden we had this option to bring all these amendments and resources. We weren't quite into the full knowledge of compost, but we did know our soils from studying them so much, so we'd still mix in a lot of forest duff and mulch, and believed in all that. But being able to buy these other products, like perlite, which was like a godsend. I just think it's disgusting now. I would never use it on anything, but back then we were like, 'Oh goodness, here's this thing that'll lighten up the dirt, aerate it, hold moisture,' certain things like that. So that's where all of a sudden it was a transition from folklore to more of like looking at commercial productions. We really started looking at cut-flower industries, cut-herb industries, more of the higher-end vegetable and fruit production that happens here in California. And then we literally started targeting them, because there was no such thing as a grow store. We could do it in the neighborhood nursery, or we could go out to the farm fields and get a truckload, you know.

02-00:59:04

Holmes: How about cultivars? If we look at the name game that began in the industry, this somewhat dovetails a little bit with the rise of medical marijuana.

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Bates: It majorly does, yeah.

02-00:59:23
Holmes: Were you experimenting with different cultivars during this time?

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Bates: Yes. And so what happened, even those years before medical, there was a real big push with NORML and folks to try and federally legalize it, and there was big hemp fests and things, and so, it was gaining more ground. Like the DeAngelo brothers [Andrew and Steve] from Washington, DC. They had gotten hemp legalized, and people were wearing more hemp and everything. It kind of broadened the community prior to that, trying to legalize. When it went to medical, I really attribute it to one gentleman, whom I've never met, but his name is Marc Emery. He's from Canada, and they call him the Prince of Pot. What he did was they had already loosened regulation around cannabis production in British Columbia, up in Canada, and he connected with all the seed companies that were already going from the eighties and nineties in Europe, and literally started the train for medical marijuana.

And this is before the DEA, before regulation really caught wind of how seeds were transported—they were illegal—but it was interesting. It wasn't illegal to ship money or ship shipments from any country. So they're looking for drugs. They're not looking for seeds. And this gentleman, Marc Emery—I've heard numbers like in the first few years he mail-ordered 90 million seeds into the United States, and mainly California, with all the seed companies in the world like focused it and flooded it. I know for a fact that he's still one of these huge refugees that the DEA has been trying to extradite from Canada, but Canada won't do it because he's the Prince of Pot. But this thing just broke open right during medical marijuana, where all of a sudden, we could buy all those seeds that we heard of or that we saw in magazines. There was like a little bit of that going on beforehand, but medical marijuana made it like, 'Hey, this is medicine, and we need those seeds now.'

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So that's when some of us started playing with some things that are now in our gardens. Like I do Hindu Skunk. But the Skunk is an older strain from here—the one that I use anyway. But that Hindu Kush—like there's some Kushes, and they're from that region here, but there wasn't like this gnarly Hindu Kush, and that was one that I adopted and fell in love with immediately. Like, 'This is it! The Kush.' And I knew it before other people. Many were like, 'Ew, that stinks like fuel, or something,' long before it was okay. Everybody smoked sweet weed back then.

But the name game—yes. Growers in California, in the thousands, started ordering in the thousands. Literally, just brought millions, all the genes of the whole world into California at that point, like '98 through 2000. Yeah, so that really changed the game with strains. We started playing with a lot of things.

And for us in Big Sur, there was this traditional part, right? Where all our forefathers had traveled to get these things from the origin. So, more than the Sensi Stars, or anything, it's like people would be more into the Durban Poisons or maybe weed right from Morocco.

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We really started targeting landraces, getting more Mazar-i-Sharif in, because we also went through this phase where bad-breeding practices really dulled or weakened the genetics. Right before medical, people had been inbreeding for so long without proper technique or sharing of technique that the biodiversity became less and less. The genetics became weaker and weaker, and then they were prone to less production, less THC, more herming, less consistency, and things like that. So to bring in landraces and try to backbreed some of our original strains to their original glory was our mission. As a breeder, it's always our mission to improve the line, to improve the genetics, and make more stable, more consistent results. So that was actually a big deal—strains, around that medical-marijuana transition.

And then, the money—the money that came with it. It went from working all year for four pounds, to all of a sudden, I'm a kid making $100,000. And we were smart kids, so we would dump that right back into research and development, more or less—a lot of folks would. Into more genes, into more supplies, into more avenues of strengthening your projects and raising our yields.

02-01:04:29

Holmes: Well, what were some of the landraces that you sought to bring back in to Big Sur?

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Bates: For me and my group of friends, we kept chasing the origins of our elders' original strains. So we figured out ways to bring Khyber back in, and I'm still interested in that. 2019—the last Emerald Cup—I even found another gentleman and got more Khyber in from the same valley region, similar strains, landraces that have been grown for thousands of years. It was kind of our forte, me and the friends. Southern Mexican weed—you know, maybe we veered a little off—like middle or northern Mexico landraces, and started playing more with the southern Mexico, more the Oaxaca strains. Our purpose was, we had only gone so far with the knowledge of breeding. We knew to inbreed lines, and then mix those for F1s that are for production. But we wanted to keep those original pools viable, and try to bring some of the original traits that might have gotten muddled down back in. So our forefathers did a really great job at training us what to look for, and learning how to backbreed genetics and shore up—we call it shoring up true lines.

So that was kind of our forte, our group, where some other folks—it might have been more about those names. More about like a Dutch Passion, a Sensi Star. They were bringing in names, Skunk #1, where before that, it was just

Skunk everywhere. And I think even Sam the Skunkman had to go get recognized in Europe for it to hit the market, to go through Canada, to sell all the seeds in here. And that's how it worked really, which was an interesting thing. That's why Marc Emery, the Prince of Pot—never met the man, but I love him, I love him. By the time the DEA caught up to him, he said it's too late. And that's where the Overgrow, the Government campaign, came from. The US charges him with bringing more cannabis production to the US than it had ever seen before. So yeah, the strains were hugely important, actually, I believe.

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But then that brought a whole 'nother issue of credibility. We found out quite quickly that a lot of the guys in Europe and Amsterdam might have been breeding for indoor and greenhouse. Still taking those landraces, but kind of breeding specific traits that they liked for what *they* did, which actually made it quite weak for a natural environment. So we had to do a lot of culling and stuff. Most things that we would try, maybe a quarter of it would work out.

02-01:07:23

Holmes: Well, let's talk a little bit about coastal connections. You move, right around this time, to some of the growing communities in Mendocino. We talked, in our last session, that there was already kind of a history of this, right? The connections—family connections, logging families.

02-01:07:45

Bates: Yeah.

02-01:07:46

Holmes: As well as to escape persecution here in Monterey County, that a lot of growers and their families would actually migrate up to more friendly counties, such as Mendocino or even Southern Humboldt. At the age of nineteen, you said you were hired by some growers in Mendocino to come up there. Talk about that decision and experience—after kind of establishing yourself, getting your feet wet with the medical cannabis and the growing operations here, your decision to go up north.

02-01:08:24

Bates: Sure. So, it stems back to that original job, where I got picked up out of the pub parking lot. At the time we were silly kids. I was working as a bus boy in a restaurant. I was growing weed. These guys picked me up. We all get to know each other. Funny crowd. I was living in a burned-out redwood tree with a chef from Texas and a glassblower from Harmony, this San Luis Obispo [County] town. And we were a goofy bunch. They just liked us. We were hard-working kids, and when we did a bit of medical here, we were doing good, but we weren't so cocky like it is now. We weren't like, 'Oh, we're big weed growers.' At that point, I was working at a bakery, a little bakery full-time kind of seasonally, and I was a barista pulling coffee.

The same folks I had worked for were like, 'Hey, it's starting to get a little bigger.' I had helped them work the first of their medical crops. It was kind of funny. We all inspire each other, right? So maybe I broke the ice with the medical, but they really put the icing on the cake—they did a rather large crop. Some of their laborers did really good, and they hired me as a laborer to help. Usually it was to help harvest or help plant, was kind of like where they'd bring the labor in during the planting season in the beginning, and then for the teardown in the end. I wasn't a really great trimmer, but they'd put me on other jobs. That being the case, some of these folks did great on the middle and South Coast of Big Sur first year out. They had always been the real pushers.

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So maybe they had their medical cards, but maybe they did hundreds of plants and did really well, which allowed many of them to kind of look what was happening *north*. Around that same time up north, they had more land, bigger, vaster lands with more water. They were stretching out a bit. The land was a lot cheaper up there, many times cheaper for the acreage. And literally, working at that coffee shop, the guys I was working with at that original job were like, 'Hey, we've kind of got some big, consistent work up north. You want to start coming in seasonally? You can keep your coffee job, but we want you in the spring for two or three months, and we want you in the fall for two or three months.' And I was like—Let's do it! [claps] And I talked to the coffee shop, they were like great, have fun kids. So at age nineteen, I started going up there seasonally, and really most of our folks were concentrated to the northern Mendocino, southern Humboldt region. And so, for six years of it I was going up there seasonally to help one family that bought a piece of land.

They started as laborers as well. They were in Big Sur. He had one crop of seventy-five plants, and it was like striking the lottery. Went up and bought his family a piece of land, and they started homesteading, just like Big Sur folks. Started in with the ponds and with the barns and the vineyards and the sheep—really like going for that idealistic lifestyle. I was so impressed and so inspired. They had already had a gigantic illicit scene since the seventies and eighties—massive, like thousands-of-acres tree farms that would have plantations of just tens of thousands of plants. There was a lot of money involved, so it was kind of community-supported agriculture. Everybody was pushing—it was kind of like all these soccer teams, like all playing against each other in good sportsmanship, to do the best job they can and push those limits to see how far they could go, which really inspired me as a kid.

02-01:12:18

So I would still do our small little medical thing. We kept small for six or—maybe almost eight years, just kind of kept it small. It was something that was there. It was a nice healthy extra $20 grand apiece, $30 grand apiece, or whatever, after expenses. We were sort of figuring out there was a lot of expenses. You have to pay for labor, you have to pay for supplies, lots of

food. We'd take people out and employ people. So my transition kind of went for these seasonal workings, learning the ropes and getting to know people in the neighborhood. So it took a certain amount of time before the other locals in the region kind of agreed, 'Okay, this is a good pool of labor. Let's import one or two of your guys,' and they would do that each season. They'd import one or two of us and set us up with land they had bought and houses they had bought. There's no banking. There's never been banking—still not good banking in this. So it was actually all funded by private money, and usually the equities were within properties and ranches, and kind of homesteading/ranching/logging money, per se. And so, that's how I transition to the north, with Big Sur people.

02-01:13:37

We worked for hardcore Big Sur people too. I remember this one trimming season we were trimming in an emptied-out pool, just like Cheech and Chong's *Nice Dreams*. We were in an emptied-out pool with a tarp over the top, and they kept us trimming in a rainstorm, until the pool started filling up. We were all like—ankle, almost knee-deep in water, still trying to trim, catching pneumonia out there. It was not pretty, a lot of it, you know? We were sleeping in the mud, and me and my buddy were in the goat shed. The house was only one room, with like three kids in it and a family, you know, so it wasn't quite as glorious as it is today. [laughs]

But we still maintained that really fundamental thing of safety. Of what people don't know makes us very powerful, of keeping up the illusion. So everyone was still very much a carpenter, very much water systems, solar power. We all kept our trades going. Some people would call that a business front, but really, they were passions. They were things we were really good at, and a way to establish, within these local communities, as a community, not coming in to take from them, but one that contributes. So that was part of the Big Sur thing, right? Add value, earn your keep. And we took that same model up north, and the folks up north really loved it. They were like, 'These guys, they build houses, they're doing a great job, they're making us lots of money—this is great! Give them something.' And they'd give us more and more responsibility as we went along.

02-01:15:14

Holmes: Was there a difference in, say, the cultivars that were grown up in Mendocino and southern Humboldt? Obviously, it's a different environment, right? Talk a little bit about those differences, from the cultivars and the environment, to practices that you saw that were different than what you had encountered down here in Big Sur.

02-01:15:38

Bates: Sure. So this is where we creep out of the ground and into pots and things. Somewhere in this transition—I'd say like the early 2000s, definitely '99 through 2005, somewhere in there—it went from partial to full, out of the ground, and really *into* the sun, really into full south-facing slopes.

Their strains and cultivars were vastly different. We weren't used to them. We brought some of our own, but we were working with many of theirs. There was a lot more named stuff. But they had their own history, so they had a lot of Skunks that we hadn't experienced. We were working with a lot of Maui Wowie that we hadn't experienced. There was their own folks that probably were very much the same time, very much the same type of people in Big Sur that had their Malawis and had their African strains, and their version of Mazar-i-Sharif, and whatever their elders had picked out from up there and brought there and they worked on. But I'd say there was less Mexican influences compared to us here, you know, but Afghan was very prevalent. African strains were prevalent. And then what was built here in America was very prevalent, so we were into Hazes and Blue Dreams and things.

02-01:17:05

There was a big Grateful Dead community—a huge one actually, expat—like the whole Haight Street, I think, moved up to Mendocino I'm pretty sure. But literally, I was on the same hill where Jack Herer had a ranch, and Bob Weir had a ranch—and all their friends. They didn't necessarily grow the weed, but their families did—and everybody did around them. I think Jack Herer did, actually, some of these guys.

They had their own set of rules as well, but there was a different environment actually. It was much hotter during the summer, but then a faster-coming season. And that's where like, long before there was fast indoor strains, they would let strains go for months indoors. But up there, with these short seasons, it really became a name of the game of trying to breed fast-finishing weed, and a lot more indica influence kind of came in, even with the moisture. And so commonly, with plants in the ground, we were cutting out major amounts of mold. It was just common practice that like 20-30-40 percent of these crops would rot, because it's raining and we're pulling immediately. Up there, it was like leave it out as long as you can, and pull it at the last minute was kind of the thing. Absolute shitshows, just shitshows—pardon the French. It was always an emergency, and we were always cutting ravaged product out of it. They would grow tons more to compensate for those losses.

02-01:18:44

For growing out of the ground, folks found out with these soils that we bring in, there was much more value to kind of a looser soil and aerated earth. It was much more productive, and we started figuring that out. We started with cages sometimes, or a really popular one was taking a 4x8 sheet of plywood and cutting it into four 2x4s—2x4-foot slices, making a box out of that, and then putting four hog panels on it—and then just straight to the ground with gopher wire. And so that's where we start creeping out of the ground.

Because there were numbers involved, everything had changed as well. Maybe three, four, five years into medical marijuana, it was all about how many *plants* you were prescribed. Where before, it was like—how much

could you grow with the least input? All of a sudden it was like, 'I only have this amount of plants. How do I get the most out of this allotment of plants?' And that really changed everything as well, because all of a sudden, we were growing for maximum yield per plant, compared to maximum yield per resource no matter how many plants. And that really, really changed the game, as far as size and breeding techniques to gain weight and size, and the shortening of these flowering periods, to have fast-finishing giant weed. It turned into this completely different plant, and everybody started breeding that way. And then this is where, maybe in the mid-2000s and then before 2010, size really came on. Other states started going medical, because we were able to do so much. California is just like, 'Oh, this is great. It's all going to cancer-curing medicine.' But they forgot to tell everyone that the entire time, since before I was born, it's 98 percent export. We've got a great growing environment and supply the whole nation with weed—and it only got bigger.

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So all of a sudden, there was things that were fashionable and things that weren't so fashionable. And then there was grades—there was A, B, and C grades. All of a sudden there was more defined tastes and effects. People really like sativas, and they like things that kind of give them energy and make them alert, or some people really like the super-fuelly indicas that really just dope you down, couch-lock indicas. All of a sudden, there was this more conscious consumer with more variety, and that's when medical really started turning into more of the cannabis market we know today, where there was these varietals, there was these grades of it, qualities of it. And then, getting out of the ground, going away from little starved plants. It was like the MO for thousands of years: put it in the ground and starve it, and whatever survives is wonderful—to this, 'Oh wow, I've only got twenty-five or ninety-nine plants, and I need to make a strong living on this ranch.' It really changed the game, the numbers game, turned into this other kind of breeding.

02-01:22:22

Holmes: Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about you moving on to actually running your own place there at the historic growing place of Spyrock. But before we move to that, tell us a little bit about this change in breeding. Maybe for those who have never bred before, have never grown cannabis, you talked about some of these smaller plants in your early days of growing to this massive size by the time you're growing there in Mendocino. Talk about this difference—the difference of breeding, and of how that practice evolved.

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Bates: Sure. Well, when we were younger, it truly was about the smoke. It wasn't about the appearance, the bag appeal, the name, anything like that. It was about the *smoke*, and how unique it might taste or how unique it might make you feel. We were out in the middle of the woods. We couldn't bring anything to it. It really was a survival-of-the-fittest game, and with a minimal input. We can't have giant, thirsty, hungry plants because we couldn't water and feed

them. So that was kind of the breeding practice, maximum quality smoke output, not necessarily even the weight. The weight was always there, but it was about this maximum-quality smoke with a minimal input. Where up there, it went to the exact opposite. It went to how can we take a plant and give it the *maximum* inputs—the maximum water, the maximum soil, the maximum feed—to create maximum size and still skirt under that good smoke? It really did become a numbers game. It became about weight. It became more of a commodity than a connoisseur thing. It became more of, 'Okay, I like this strain, but how can I breed it up to size to where I can get ten pounds out of that strain,' rather than the main focus being the quality of that smoke.

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All of a sudden, there's a lot more weed around. Some people might have a lighter green, or a darker green, or a slightly purple version of the same thing, depending on where they're growing. So the market right now likes a very light green, and maybe they don't like a giant nug. They want a smaller nug. Or any number of these things. We started breeding for bag appeal—literally for bag appeal—which most people would just call the marketing value, not the smoking value, necessarily.

Some of the breeding practices also encompassed like not only the size and the look, but then these smells that would hit. There was people that always described it well, right? The Jack Herers, the Ed Rosenthals, the Jorge Cervanteses—those people are beautiful, and they've been doing it for decades, generations practically. But when it started getting fashionable on a market, when it went from that brown weed to green weed, and then all of a sudden it turned to, 'Okay, we have a few strains from here and a few strains from there,' then it went even further. Between the fruits, the skunks, something that might be fuelly, something that might be ammoniac, something that might be herbaceous—so there started being these definitions.

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And then, it depended on what region we were exporting to and what kind of crowd, you know. So Jamaican—the weed is very iconic. They really like their tropical-fruit-tasting weed, and so as reggae and all these things kind of hit bigger, like in the eighties and nineties, that became a factor. When they start sending their people out, maybe from New York City, or somewhere, those Jamaicans want something that's like from home in Jamaica, back then. So we would get specific strains. We could source them, at that point, through the Canadians and stuff. We would get our Jamaican Pearls, or Lamb's Bread, or whatever, and make sure that we're growing it. All of a sudden, we're starting to target markets; where before, we were all like, 'This is my thing, like it, hate it, or love it, this is our offering,' you know? And then it kind of veered towards this, 'Okay, we're going to start targeting some of these communities.'

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And then, of course, hip hop was a big deal with the cannabis community. That's where a lot of the fuels came out, right? It's like they had that Chemdog, which was with the Grateful Dead community, kind of a cherished secret. But when it went to the hip-hop communities in Los Angeles and was known as the OG Kush, or went to New York, known as the New York City Diesel, all of a sudden, this is what they sang about. We get into the later years of medical marijuana, where not too long ago it's like if Wiz Khalifa or Snoop Dogg sings about the Cookies, that's what thousands and millions of customers want—those Cookies. And then it's our obligation—it is fashionable on the market now, we need to breed this way to *cater* to the market and target them with smells, names, looks, all these things.

02-01:28:11

Holmes: Oh, that's fascinating. Well, is it in 2004 you started farming at Spyrock, your own place?

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Bates: Yes.

02-01:28:21

Holmes: This is, of course, a famed growing region in Mendocino.

02-01:28:25

Bates: Yes.

02-01:28:27

Holmes: Historic actually. I think it's broadly recognized as a very historic region.

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Bates: It is, and then it's part of a great region really. You know, the whole northern Mendocino, southern Humboldt, and then the very east of Trinity [County]—actually that very tight area is truly the triangle, where all the county areas take the credit, of course. And they might claim, 'Oh, I invented it.' Really, right in the woods, right where the coastal influence goes to the mountain range and it gets above the fog, right above the redwoods, or kind of intermingled, this zone is the legend of the Emerald Triangle. Spyrock was the mountain I ended up on, which does have quite the reputation for quality cannabis.

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Holmes: Well, discuss your experience there. Maybe we could start out with, what were your first impressions and observations of both the community and culture of Spyrock?

02-01:29:27

Bates: Well, first impressions were terrifying, absolutely terrifying! Like I had never dealt with anything where I'm driving up a road—*boom*, I get somebody stop me, just pulled their giant truck right out in front of me, "Who in the hell are you?" "Um, look—my name's Oliver. I'm looking for my friends." [laughs]

This is when I was starting to labor, so some years before, right? So the first impression was kind of scary. And then I go up to another gate—*wham*, there's more guys. "Who the hell are you?" With guns this time. I'm like, "Oh, I'm just Oliver. I'm trying to get eight more miles that way." And then I go down a little further around the corner—*wham*, guys on dirt bikes and quads with guns in my face once again. Like, "Who the hell are you?" And I'm like, "My name's Oliver, and I'm trying to find my friends." [laughs] You know, so at first it was terrifying, you know.

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I think the first night I didn't even sleep. I was like, 'Oh God, why did I come up here? Where am I? Why did I do this?' I had worked, actually, a little south of Laytonville there at first, with a Big Sur Cassidy family, actually, trimming. These same folks were there, but they were establishing themselves up in the Spyrock and Bell Springs areas, which were prolific—still are. But there was that part, and I couldn't sleep. I was in a goat barn with my Jamaican friend, just like, 'Oh man!' He's like, "Don't worry, don't worry. It's going to be great." And sure enough, that first day I wake up, and I'm like in this mountain kingdom—there's ponds, and there's a vineyard, and there's sheep. Then, my friend's wife invites me over, there's this hearty breakfast, and there's all these really kind, wonderful people already smoking the weed.

I very quickly met some neighbors, and other people, and realized these are real homesteaders living off the land—really to be admired. A lot of them took their crappy, nowhere cabins, falling apart, logging lands, and started building nice houses. But they were immediately complemented with things that just weren't heard of around here. Everybody ran on generators here. Up there was my first experiences with solar power and microhydro [power], and beyond-organic farming, right? Back then they were calling it biodynamics or whatever—there's all these names for these naturalistic farming styles. So I actually found out, within the first week or two, that I am among some of the most ingenious, beautiful, healthy people that I had ever witnessed, and they kind of blew my mind. Their food was better than a store or a restaurant. The women were beautiful—I won't lie. There's international people in Big Sur, but we didn't all stay together and live together on a farm, you know?

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So, getting to meet these folks from all over the world, and from different cities and different walks of life, you know. The trimming—down here it was kind of local. Up there, it was like people might be Gap photographers, Discovery Channel cinematographers, doctors, lawyers—truly distinguished people that actually take those two months off every year to go trim weed. There was money, a lot of money, but it was almost not for the money. It was for that experience of food, camaraderie, celebration, lots of wine, lots of weed, lots of good times. And you go right down the road, down to Benbow and this Mateel area—the Mateel organizes community centers and things. We'd go off the hill and go see Willie Nelson, go down and see Snoop Dogg,

go down and hang out and just smoke weed and enjoy. So I went from terrified for my life to absolutely blown away by its beauty.

02-01:33:39

Holmes: Well, discuss your experience of getting your own place and beginning to have your own farm within that community of Spyrock.

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Bates: So it was definitely like camping out in the barn and the goat shed for six years, working hard, the dirtiest jobs, without a question. It was just, "Yes, sir." And a lot of those folks, the guys I was working for, were from Big Sur, so I was lucky. But when it came to working with the others in the community, they were all blown away by our work ethic. They were like, 'These guys just go hard and say thank you, and love it.' And we did. We always were sporty that way. We would claim to be five usual laborers in one man, you know? And it was like a team sport. Who could do it gnarlier? We'd go out in the middle of the night in rainstorms and hail to harvest weed and laugh about it—cutting and bleeding and car accidents, anything. You just pick up and laugh about it, and just hook it up to a tractor and drag it out, you know? So we always had that work ethic.

But once it started doing a little better, some of these guys started getting multiple pieces of land, at which point it was harder for them to find a pool of growers that weren't attached to the outcome like us. Like we were attached to the money, I'd like to say—of course. But we weren't necessarily attached to like having our own thing and being the king of our thing. Where up north, there was like this interesting thing, we called it the hall of the mountain kings. Every mountain, with every property, everyone was the king of their property—and they all acted like kings, which was this totally wild thing. I didn't quite understand that. Big Sur was a little more humble, for sure.

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But that mountain-king issue, I think, is what drove a lot of them to go, 'Okay, we're going to take our labor and kind of do the Toyota model,' or whatever. Instead of getting more of them, we're going to *enhance* them. We're going to do more pot by breaking off some crop and some property to our labor forces. And for my boss, it was like two of us that were his labor force, where they had acquired maybe three more vast pieces of land with households. They wanted to do more, but they needed to spread the responsibility. But to do so, they had to spread the wealth. So for sure, my first year in was like under contract, in a way. But I was given property and a house to grow their strains a certain way. They'll sell it all, back then, so they still maintained control over the supply chain, but put us to work by breaking off percentages of crop and these properties.

My first one was *beautiful*! I think it was sixty acres, but there was another forty acres. And then my boss had another acreage above that, and we built a yurt. We had a three-bedroom house—and I had never heard of such a thing.

We would work hard in Big Sur and pay a thousand dollars for a chicken coop on the side of a cliff. You know, it was like so expensive to live down here, where they were like, 'Here, have a home. Have these plants. You've still got to work for us, but here, have a tractor. Here, have a truck. Oh, what do you need?' All those thousands in equipment that we would spend ten years working up to a point, they could just purchase it in cash. Go get your water tanks. Go get a truckload of soil. Go get chainsaws—whatever you need. It was just totally friendly that way, even though it was tough. We had already proven ourselves by being labor for so long.

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More or less, we just kept up the good work, in a way, and were able to contribute with a few other things. Where back then, maybe the chemical fertilizers were a little more popular, where we had some folks that were *way* more biodynamic. Long before this whole microbiome and Dr. Elaine Ingham—some of these folks were *way* into the compost teas and composting, and things like that. My dear friend was ahead of his time. And we were able to contribute by proving it on a few plants, and then they liked the results. Me and my friend actually had a little garden cart. They call it a Kawasaki Mule, and we were already on the compost teas, and people were like, 'Wow, this really makes a difference.' And they'd tell their neighbor, "You've got to try these kids and their tea." We actually had our side hustle. We had a tank in the back with a 300-foot reel, and they'd pay us like—not a lot even—$2, $3, or $5 a plant to go out, once a week, to spray their plant off with compost tea. They'd all swear by the results—and they were *cranking*. And so we found ways to be part of the community—and add value and be useful.

We were also kind of non-drama compared to a lot of these folks. In Big Sur, it's customary that even the biggest of our folks, without giving away too much—one of our residents is Ted Turner, for instance. He might show up in a beautiful Land Rover and a tuxedo, but the way he feels comfortable is going home and hopping into the old Ford truck and having just plain old jeans on. And we maintained that up north, and I think they really respected that. Because as medical happened and people started gaining wealth, there was great atrocities. Poor people getting rich—nothing pretty about it, actually. How they would display their wealth really created a lot of problems, a lot of hardship, a lot of trouble, a lot of death.

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So yeah, that's kind of the short-and-long version of how I transitioned to actually running a ranch there. But I will say, especially in the 2005-2006-2007-2008, it started getting rougher and rougher. More people coming in and buying land. More locals getting squeezed out. More hostage situations. More weird things happening. But then more really nice, beautiful established farms. That became kind of a conflict within enforcement, and then within more conservative logging and ranching communities, it really started ramping up the drama, in a way. I was around for 2005 and 2006, around in

there when they started hiring private contractors from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan to come in. And literally, they would get these grants to hire private contracting security companies to come in and start enforcing, because they felt like the sheriffs weren't doing enough. And it was pure smash and grab, and it was right back to the helicopters and machine guns, but on our heads, in our faces.

So, I was happy there, but I started having real problems with security—and just comfort and ease, lifestyle was getting more intense. So I saw that transition up there as well, the great blowing up of the Humboldt Region. One of my buddies was such a great advocate, and everything, and he had always been a hip-hop artist up there. But as I established myself there, I realized the hardships of this industry, and how just getting rich off the weed wasn't enriching a lifestyle. For many, they still have an enriched lifestyle and are there, but this is the few. This is the few, not the many.

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Holmes: What kind of cultivars were you growing on your ranch in Spyrock?

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Bates: So this is when we started getting into the OG Kushes and the Sour Diesels. There was a really cool strain by some guys that were down the hill in Laytonville that was the Black Garlic. One of DJ Short's strains that was kind of another answer to Blue Dream was called Blue Satellite, per se, and some of the older breeders started coming out. So I was a big fan of those older guys that had been there and done that, just like in Big Sur. I went right after them—started talking to them, like the DJ Shorts and people. There's this guy Bog, the beast of all growers is what they call him, but he had some cool stuff.

So we were growing strains that were made by these folks, but we would find the attributes to match the name to the market. And this is where the naming of the strains really gets muddled. If we had a fuelly smelling Blue Satellite from Bog, let's say, we would sell it as Sour Diesel, straight up, because that's what the market wanted. I know that's a lie, or maybe mis-marketing, but everybody was under the impression, 'Hey, this is what they want, that's what they get.' But they would keep coming back, like, "How do you get such good weed? How is this such a good Sour—we don't see Sour Diesel like this anywhere." I was a fan of the local favorites there, so we would try to grow those. We would try to grow the Medusa my friends created down there. But we were getting in the OG Kushes, bringing the Chemdog in, some of these more like up to date, fashionable things. Granddaddy Purps, with Granddaddy Mike. There was one called Grape Ape. They started unleashing these certain flavors that were kind of named after the flavor of the weed.

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But it was a real time of hybridization, everything hybridized, which is more the atmosphere we're working into now—just one hybrid after another, nothing stable, trying to get to that one cut. LA Confidential, which was like

the OG Kush from the San Fernando Valley and Laguna Canyon. Now SFV OG Kush is kind of known to be that, but originally, it was LA Confidential. But we were targeting hard, by then, targeting markets, because weed was fashionable and cool all over the place, across many loud mikes, right? Like the entertainment industry, music, art, certain things like that.

So we were dabbling in those strains of that region, but we kept our own there as well. My friend brought his M10, and we brought our Khyber, and we brought certain things to stay. People thought we were unique because of it. They loved it. But then my boss would ask me to grow what he needed. He was a Grateful Dead guy. He's like—"Do Chem this year. Do LA Confidential this year. But you can take this little piece over here. Keep doing your thing, because 5 percent, 10 percent of my customers, they're going to want that sativa. They're going to want a hundred pounds of this, but they'll be like, 'Hey, do you have five pounds of this shit for, whatever, my grandma or uncle, or something.'" That's kind of how it was, but we really started creating a market, at which point the dispensaries really kicked in, '99 to 2001. They actually turn into an economy, a business of scale in like the 2003 to 2005-6, somewhere in there. And so, by 2008 and 2009, it's full on in multiple states—lots of gray market, targeted brands, labels, smoking styles. Concentrates went from bubble bag and honey oil straight into crumbles and isolates and certain things, volatile extracts.

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Holmes: You were saying in 2005-2006 you began to really see this more militarization type of enforcement. One of the reasons, as you were saying yesterday, that a lot of growers from Big Sur tapped into those family connections and went up to places like Mendocino was because it was a friendlier place to do business; a friendlier environment to grow.

02-01:46:20

Bates: Yeah.

02-01:46:21

Holmes: There's a lot of talk that in some of those regions, local law enforcement did kind of look the other way, did allow growers to continue their craft because of their contributions to the local economy. Discuss that a little bit, and how you saw that beginning to change. Was it mostly from the federal level that this kind of militarization, this kind of enforcement started to come in?

02-01:46:47

Bates: It feels that way. It did. But we could also put that in a few places, right? Because there's also a bigger, more conservative federal industry that was coming from this angle—what we called "rippies" up there, redneck hippies. You couldn't tell if it was a redneck or a hippie. They all got along, and there was this kind of unspoken agreement between these industries, especially around NAFTA and the transpacific dealings of George Bush. What happened was kind of the globalization of some of these industries. So over a period of

time, in the late eighties and then especially across the nineties, the globalization of certain industries—like logging and fishing, and even minerals—certain industries really collapsed as it got outsourced. And a lot of these folks are good Christian folks. It's all about the bottom line. Just bring money home for the family—that's it. Whatever that cash crop is—cash/family—that's all that matters. So that's where the hippie movement kind of had this thing with the rippies, where they had this like unspoken agreement of, 'Hey, I'll let you do your thing over there, but I want a cut of that.' And they were kind of helping supplement each other as bigger industries were collapsing.

But literally, I feel like out in that zone that we're talking about, in the 2000s, is where it hit this, 'Holy cow, this is a big industry with millions of dollars, and these people are starting to influence and *buy* our lands.' And people that might be good, honest, kind of Christian folks, they don't smoke weed, more of the timberlands or maybe the fishing industry, some of these other industries. These people that had been there since the 1800s, started getting outcompeted by this weed industry, and there was a gigantic influx of people from all over the planet. Everywhere that grows weed, on Earth, came to the Emerald Triangle because of its fame and fortune and started squeezing on that local economy. And there became real conflict in there with the native peoples, the local people and the indigenous peoples.

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It also became a safe haven for what they would call cartel grows. But I don't like that, because they could be Mexican, they could be Korean, they could be Filipino, Vietnamese, they could be white. They could be Americans that are out in National Forests, really, at that point—just gigantic, tearing watersheds up, pumping millions of gallons of rat poisons, lots of chemicals, growing to the tune of thousands and thousands of plants. Illegal automatic weapons. People dying and killing each other out there. And then, with the nicer pieces of land getting bought up at higher and higher prices really threw a lot of the local and native peoples into poverty, and they couldn't compete with this thing.

Then people coming in and saying, 'This is Humboldt, this is our thing'—dreadlocks and reggae, and such—and these people are no, no. They were horses and cattle and timber and fishing. It created real conflict in there, so each side started flexing their might. And so these bigger industries, like logging and fishing and certain things, they have absolute and complete trust and support of federal agencies, like Fish & Wildlife, and any sort of agency that is there to regulate. The sheriffs, they thought, weren't doing enough. Some of the sheriffs might have been in on it. And this is where they really started unleashing their forces, in a way, and using their pull in places like Washington to start taking care of this issue.

02-01:51:08
Holmes: Well, that gave way to you moving further up north, around this same time, 2006 or so.

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Bates: Yes.

02-01:51:16
Holmes: You moved to Bend, Oregon, and then start experimenting and taking your craft indoors?

02-01:51:25
Bates: Yeah.

02-01:51:25
Holmes: It's kind of the interesting, you said to me one time that Prop. 215 brought the growers out of the woods. By 2006, ten years later, you're starting to experiment with taking your craft indoors with hydroponics. You've been cultivating cannabis for almost two decades, right?

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Bates: Yeah—more by that point.

02-01:51:52
Holmes: Talk a little bit about that experience, that transition of going from outdoors to indoors.

02-01:52:01
Bates: Sure. So, it was something I was always fascinated by, but there was only a couple old hippies that did it since the seventies. It was the most horrible, moldy, littlest buds I'd ever seen in my life. I was like, 'Why do they even do this?'

But I'll never forget—I was starting to feel those pressures I was talking about earlier, with the money, the helicopters, everybody's getting rich, this whole thing really was stressing me out. And it was hard, we had to do it together and it was so frickin' intense, but I ended up there on Spyrock. One of my dear friends was like, "Hey, it's wintertime." It's our usual off-season. The whole Emerald Triangle used to empty out—like a ghost town once the harvest was over. Just a ghost town. Nobody there—and then you could tell who really lives there, right? Very few people at that point in time anyway. They just kind of said, "Hey, we've got this thing that we do every year." They had made some money, and they said, "Yeah, you want to work this winter and not take off like all your friends do?" And I said, "Sure, sure, let's do this."

That was actually my first real indoor experience, where my friends had a barn. They'd light it up, just in the winter when no one was around, one run a year. I believe there were sixty-four lights, so it was rather large for that time. Most people were messing around with two, three, six lights. They had sixty-four going in the barn, and they had been studying, actually, and turned me on

to studying certain magazines on growing ornamental flowers and cut herbs and orchids—mostly European companies and international companies, Japanese companies, and learning their equipment. Where before that, it was pretty primitive really. It was like they'd take stadium lights and try to grow plants on it, and just fry 'em till they're just like beat and orange and black and yellow. But we started getting some of these nicer HPSes and metal halides, and kind of using combinations of them.

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I was truly fascinated, because there we went in with one year, with that x amount. I made a very small percentage of it. It was done in eight weeks, and it was close to what I made all the last year, which really made my bells go off. I was like, 'Oh, my goodness!' And the weed was incredible, rainbow colored. It looked fake. It looked like playdough sculptures. I was always fascinated with plants—from my first grow that I told you about, starting in the aquarium with the fluorescent lights and the corn seeds—I was just fascinated, and I was like this could really be something! At that point, especially 2005-6, where it went right off, it had already been creeping from $5,000 a pound down to like $3,600 a pound. And then it plummeted to $2,000 a pound, and kind of bounced to $2,600. Then it's in this $2,300 a pound, something like that, maybe $2,000 a pound. But we were able to sell that indoor weed for $4,000 a pound, and I was like, 'Okay, less work, less stress, done in eight weeks, lots of money, sold immediately because there wasn't enough of it really.' It was just like—wow!

02-01:55:39

Holmes: Was that bump in price with the indoor, was that largely because you're hitting it in the off-market?

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Bates: Yes. That was part of it, the off-market. But then also the abundance of indoor. Certain places that had it indoor, like quite literally catered to their communities, is what I found out over time. So there's like a big indoor scene in Los Angeles, let's say, or a big one in Oakland. There was a great indoor scene in Denver, Colorado; in Portland, Oregon; and all these places I went. But no matter how big they were, they were really supplying that local market. It wasn't some giant excess market like the outdoor grows, right, where we're selling to the whole nation and the world. They're very targeted, just selling the best weed to locals that were absolute connoisseurs and snobs, and at a very small scale for a lot of money, so it was a different game.

02-01:56:33

Holmes: Tell us a little bit about your experience. So here you've been growing for over two decades by the time you started with the indoor. Outside of say, the lights, et cetera, how did your techniques as a grower change and what stayed the same?

02-01:56:47

Bates: Well, everything changed and nothing stayed the same. Outside of maybe some of these protocols that I talked about, about being careful when you're selling or transporting weed—that's timeless and just been built on. But technique-wise, I had to rewrite everything I knew about cannabis, because there was an absolutely non-living environment with no natural buffers, and zero nutrient, or anything, unless I gave it to it. So it was truly the lab rat, like a real aquarium experience. I used to keep reptiles when I was a kid, and I'd keep tropical fish and was just always obsessed with those geeky home projects, right? The technology was starting to come out a lot more, and the Internet was there. Holy cow, that blew us all out of the back of walls—Google! You could never find anything before Google. It just like launched us into this space. When I started that first round, these guys were showing me stuff I had never heard of before, and nutrient programs I had never heard of before—and minerals and trace minerals, and things that I'd never heard of before. Mediums and media that I had never heard of before, and light considerations that I've never considered, and air considerations I had never considered. I was fascinated. It was just an absolute rabbit hole. I fell in love with the concept, and then I fell in love with the pursuit of the study.

The growers were very much different. They weren't these hardened old mountain guys, like to the death, everything's for the family. This was more like the geeky younger-brother crowd that was all excited. They're like go to work, then smoke some weed, then go surfing—it's like you could still have your day life. You're doing it at home most of the time, home projects, and it was just much more like an exploring and sharing vibration, which after all that exhausting War on Drugs and doing the medical thing, it was just so welcoming and kind of fun. The consequences were less, in a way. It was easier to keep safe and go back to out of sight, out of mind in many ways.

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When I did make that transition, two of our workers out there in the hills of Mendocino were from Oregon, actually. And so, they invited me up to come visit, and I just fell in love with the land and the people there. It was less of a career choice; it was a lifestyle choice at that point, and for this wonderful woman that I fell in love with. She was really stressed out. All the women and family in my life could not even—they just would leave. They wouldn't want to be within a hundred miles of the Emerald Triangle during harvest season—period. It was too much stress, too much anxiety, too much harm, and too rough for them. So I wanted to get back to like, 'Hey, this is weed. It's beautiful—like Big Sur. It's just part of our lifestyle. We also play drums, and we also surf, and we enjoy food. We're not just weed, you know. So I was really gearing and aiming towards that.

My friends in Oregon, they had horrible weather most of the time. Kind of a poor economy, which meant cheap power, cheap buildings. All that was a lot cheaper than California. And although the economy was pretty poor, they

were pretty ingenious. They could come up with materials and build a lot of things, and that's where it got real attractive. I was like, 'Wow, these guys have got toys, and they've got houses and garages, and they're skiing all the time, and they're rafting and fly-fishing, and they're traveling.' I'm like, 'Yeah, I want to go see what this is like for a minute.'

02-02:00:58

And that was my transition to Oregon, which had just adopted medical marijuana, I believe, maybe a few years before that. But the indoor growers, like I said, it was this amazing group of do-gooders. Generally healthy people too, people that bicycle all over Europe—rock-climbing people and kayakers, and like these super sporty, healthy individuals that were doing a lot of the hydroponic. My friends were in Bend, but the scene they introduced me to was actually Portland, Oregon, which has a bit of grit. It's a bit of a port of entry from many directions and has an underbelly—maybe a darkish side—but really bright, light nature. I was fascinated by that as well, like a complete society of people that were absolute connoisseurs of cannabis, but it wasn't in the open. None of it was in the open. All the grows were out of sight, out of mind.

02-02:02:14

Holmes: Were there certain cultivars that did better or that you specialized in or focused on in your indoor craft versus the outdoor?

02-02:02:25

Bates: Yes. I really learn that part in Oregon—and later in other places with hydroponic, but it started in Oregon. Where in Northern California we were taking cuts off of our seed strains and using our seeds to try and do it, and we had really mixed results. I won't say it's good, but a mixed bag of tricks. But just all over the place. No consistency, not really a huge new market. Where up there, they were much more precise about the cut and the exact cultivar and the exact reasons they were doing that cultivar. I started working with different things that I had never really worked with as much. Up there, common strains would be like Northern Lights, which was a legendary one. The Alaskan Thunderfuck was there. And then they had, if you go further, the Matanuska Mist and the Matanuska Thunderfuck. Romulan was very popular there. Grapefruit was very popular there. They grew some of the citrus weed, like California Orange, or whatever, and a lot of Orange Crush. It was one that tasted just like the soda.

It might have been bred here, but they really would hone in on phenotypes and then got very good at keeping healthy mom stock and doing everything indoors. Complete automation. The cuttings, being very sterile, being very consistent. They had this whole other way of looking at it, where they were really narrowing it down to one plant, one bud replicated—and they were very precise. They were adopting a lot of technology, which I thought was interesting. You'd think there would be a lot more of that starting here, and it was in San Jose and Oakland, and certain places. But Oregon—especially in

the Portland area—it was the first time I experienced a community that 100 percent had a legacy of indoor.

02-02:04:38
Holmes: Interesting.

02-02:04:38
Bates: Yeah.

02-02:04:41
Holmes: Well, a few years later you went from Bend to Colorado, I believe.

02-02:04:47
Bates: Yes. [laughs]

02-02:04:48
Holmes: Talk about that experience, and bringing your indoor craft to Colorado.

02-02:04:54
Bates: So I'd say by the time I was into this hydroponic growing, it really was one of those situations where I just walk into a bar, sit down, meet the guy next to me—and of course he's a grower. My ex is from Wyoming, and she kind of followed me on some of my adventures, from Big Sur up into Mendocino and then to Oregon. Her family was pretty bombed that she was following around a dope grower. I mean it was bad, bad, bad. Her dad—ooogh, it was like Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker sitting down to dinner or something. To make a long story short, we had taken some trips out to Wyoming, and she was entertaining going back to college. In our many trips from Oregon over the few years we were there, we were going to Colorado and visiting a college. She had checked out a couple colleges, but fell in love with Colorado State University in Fort Collins—the Rams, CSU.

The first bar I walked into, I met a group of Grateful Dead dudes that were slinging weed, and then I met some crazy gearhead Corvette mechanic that was from Huntington Beach and an absolute grower. They had quite the legacy and tradition already going out there with indoor, and we really hit it off. Like when I was in Bend, Oregon, I met some helicopter pilots, some bicyclists that would bicycle across Europe that were already doing indoor psychedelic mushrooms and doing a lot of indoor cannabis. The technology was really throttling on all ends. And then going to that Colorado scene—Boulder was just close enough that it's like this Silicon Valley of Colorado. There's quite a poor economy in Oregon, and my friends were in Portland, but I loved the lifestyle of Bend. It just felt like everything was *too* far away.

02-02:07:04
And then my lovely lady—I will say I followed a lady into the dark, on a wing and a prayer, out of love. We decided to make sure to get her to college, so she could have the good blessing of her family, and I figured I'd just find what I needed to do there. I had this tool, all of a sudden, in my toolbox, that didn't

depend on an environment, or even people, to get across. I saved up a little bit, and made sure I could come out and lease, and eventually own, a house out there. We made sure to keep it separate, because of a conservative family, so we had a couple house by the college. I had my dirty boy's house with the ping-pong table in the basement—and just a hydrogrow. [laughs]

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And that's was my personal transition to selling at dispensaries and kind of trying to veer off the illicit markets, in a way—for a higher dollar value and everything else. But there was this whole other breed of really advanced growers out there, and a lot of people that were growers across the United States that kind of liked Colorado. When I was in Northern California, I'd meet people from all over the world that grew cannabis. But in Colorado, I met people from all over the United States that did indoor cannabis—folks from Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Michigan, Chicago—all sorts of certain styles. I really got to tap into this wealth, this resource of magnificent, crazy growers, that really took it to automation even before the ag industry was being automated.

We were making our own brains and our own environmental control units, and our own modular lighting controls. Really honing in and perfecting nutrient regimens, and really smart—smart, smart, smart. The Internet was in full bloom at this point, so we were really chasing things down. If a product was expensive, we'd figure how to make it, or how it was made, chase it down and make it happen. Long before LED lights were cool, we were playing with those things. We'd create our own—brains is what we'd call them—but most people call them environmental control systems. But we literally learned how to make our own computers and take things that are similar to like Raspberry Pi and Arduino units, little circuit boards—open-source technologies that we could take ourselves and connect sensors to them for moisture, humidity, for watering, lighting controls, for air supply exchanges. I loved it. It was like the *ultimate* aquarium thing.

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Every one of us was going deeper and really innovating within that space, and then taking it to market and having a great reaction. There was only about three or five years of medical use in Colorado before they went legal. It was quite a fast transition, and we already had our expertise with being medical marijuana and patient-direct medicine, and working with strains and other areas. But there, it was like the fast track in a way—everything coming together to go towards legalization. But that's where I experienced kind of some troubles with that place too, much like I did up north, where maybe I grew a little too big for my britches too fast, and it left me open and exposed to vulnerabilities that we weren't prepared for.

02-02:10:54

Holmes: I want to get to that, but first, talk a little bit more about the technology aspect. I mean, this is where it seems, as a cannabis grower, it wasn't just another tool in your toolbox, right? It seemed like the amount of knowledge and techniques needed to perform in that indoor market far exceeded what seemed to be more in that organic knowledge of being a farmer outdoors.

02-02:11:27

Bates: Exactly. It's almost like one of those—when science-meets-religion moments. You could go so deep and *keep* going, and there was no end to the solutions to the problems that could be found in there. And then the collaboration with people that are like that is much different than people that hold a tradition forever. It's like they hold it in secret, and it's just small, and it's hidden. This was the exact opposite. This was open sharing, an exploring phase. And then actual data was something. It's like, 'Wow, farming for twenty years and never actually had data—stats, numbers, things we could truly base business on.'

And then, a really wild local population in Colorado. You go to these little towns like Nederland, Colorado, up by Vail, or whatever, and tradition to absolutely open smoke, since way back in the day. And I wasn't even quite used to that here. I mean people were burning weed 4:20 down at the Colorado University in Boulder. There'd be 20,000 people on the lawn at the university smoking a joint, just because they could. It was quite a lot of camaraderie behind it. The advancement that was going on was pretty incredible, actually, the yields—outstanding. We were quadrupling our yields. The power reduction, the water reduction—we were honing these systems, as a group I'd like to think, in Colorado. There was a big groups of us. And then scaling those systems up, which had never been done before, probably in the 2000s somewhere—not even in Amsterdam and all those places were they going after hundred and thousand-light grows. And then to be able to bounce this off the market and get stats as well, we got really excited.

02-02:13:41

The strains—out there, I was adopting from the locals too. I love kind of going with what's there, and kind of trying to make your best way. They had AK-47s, and they had the Durban Poison. They had all these Kushes and Diesels. They had all this stuff coming from Tennessee, like the Purps. One of the Purps was coming out of there. Not the Mendo Purps, but some other Purps. And they had this stuff called Bruce Banner—you know, the Incredible Hulk, when he's a doctor—wow, it made you feel like that when you smoke it too. Like all these weeds were blowing our brains out of the water. Really, the volatile extraction hit some sort of science level too, of just testing and testing. The labs—agriculture people are very open there. People can grow their own meat at home, slaughter it and sell it right to the public. Or you can drink beer in public—like everything's very hands-on. You go right to a laboratory, and they're like, 'Oh, sure, weed? Let's try it!' There wasn't these giant stigmas behind it. And for me, watching that community do that and being part of that was like—wow. It really just opened my whole world.

Once again, just like going into hydroponics, I had to eliminate everything that I *thought* I knew, and go with what we're learning. I had to eliminate a lot of that. I actually went from growing soil indoor, with these salt-based kind of chemical nutrients, to using more natural nutrients—but way less natural mediums, like rock wool and coco coir if we could. But really, that was a whole wild show. And then figuring out how to stabilize these things without constantly having to stabilize them, if that makes sense. So a lot of people have to go adjust pH all the time, do these amazing water changes all the time. We were able to get to a point to start stabilizing that into less work and less water changes, and less pH ups and downs, and more buffering and neutralizing techniques. And then, also adding biology that would eat the salt-based chemical products and turn it into a biodynamic system.

02-02:15:53
Holmes: Wow.

02-02:15:56
Bates: Yeah, so that was really quite a show, the pre-legalization in Colorado. But then there were some downfalls. Like I said, I experienced some pitfalls. Me and my buddies teamed up, got big, we had three houses. And then we got a big grain mill, silos on the side of a highway. We rented it right off of a corn farmer. He's like, "Get that money, get that cash, boys." He rented us this giant grain silo. We're like, 'Oh, this will be it, and we put all these lights in there, and we're making filthy money.' We were just dumb, dumb kids in their thirties at this point. We're a little showy, and we got taken advantage of. We were at the top of the list in many of the clubs, and people would just be watching us walk in and out of there with briefcases full of cash. It got ugly, and we got targeted by some kind of organized crime. We think it was like—local folks. They snapped off three of our houses, three of my partners, and our warehouse—all in two hours while we were out at sushi. And I can't tell you how scared I was after that. It really like flipped me out. I had been ripped off before, but never so precisely and so organized for so much money, that it actually kind of flipped me into retiring. I spent the next six to eight months, or something like that, up on a cattle ranch in Wyoming. I felt safer there than I did in Colorado.

02-02:17:30
Holmes: Wow.

02-02:17:31
Bates: Yeah.

02-02:17:33
Holmes: Well, after that time at the cattle ranch, you decided to move back to California?

02-02:17:43
Bates: Yes.

02-02:17:43
Holmes: To Santa Cruz.

02-02:17:44
Bates: Yes.

02-02:17:46
Holmes: And again, I think you—you restarted your indoor operation there?

02-02:17:50
Bates: Yes.

02-02:17:52
Holmes: Discuss that decision to come back to Santa Cruz, and the experience of restarting. Santa Cruz is known for outdoor, talk about your decision to continue the knowledge, and the new side of the cannabis craft that you had learned and perfected in Oregon and Colorado.

02-02:18:16
Bates: Yeah, I was obsessed. It was a way to have things clean and consistent, and at the highest possible price, with the most beautiful look and value—that was my thinking at the time. Going off to that cattle ranch was actually—it was my ex's, her grandfather's ranch. They were really old money. His granduncle was Davy Crockett, and he was one of the original Marlboro men. He broke me off since day one, but he loved the work ethic. Out there in blizzards, breaking ice out of the water troughs. We had to take tractors out at Christmas in a whiteout blizzard and dig 300 cows out of a drift. It was like no problem for me, when you have that Big Sur work ethic, right? I just say "Yes, Mr. Morris. No problem, sir."

But when we shut down those operations, I really got nervous. I was in a buy of a house, and I decided to let that house go. I felt like a target. And Mr. Morris could tell I was absolutely conflicted, and me and my ex were headed that way. She wanted to be a rancher, horses—she does that still, to this day. So she really followed her heart, but I was trying to follow mine—and that was a very confused place. I felt very broken down, and I didn't know what to do. I was out in the Midwest, too far from the beach. I was so scared.

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But then, I had this interesting conversation with this rancher, and he told me about how during the Great Depression his family, eleven of them, bootlegged tobacco to send one of their kids—him—through college. And he ended up marrying the love of his life, this awesome lady Norma. Her brothers founded Golden, Colorado and Coors Brewing Company. I mean these people have more money than God. But you wouldn't know it. This guy had a GMC pickup truck, blue jeans, a little bottle of Dewar's whisky. He'd carve his brand into the table at the restaurant and get kicked out. He was this wonderful man, and he was my hero. But he told me, he was like, "What's troubling you?" I'm said, "Well, there's this cash crop, and I just got ripped

off, and I've worked my whole life for it. I don't know what to do. My friends in California are starting to light up again." But with my ex, I was like, "I don't know if we're going to make it, sir." And he was just like, "Well, everybody's got to have a cash crop, son. Go get that money." He was like, "You're broken, you feel broke, right?" He was like, "Let's make you whole again." And he was this badass dude. He just gave me like a brand-new Suburban and put $12,000 in my pocket and said, "Go." And he was like, "You know you've got a place on the ranch. I hope you and my granddaughter work out, but go—go get it."

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And so I drove out to California, and I ended up with one of my dear friends—on his couch, for a month, of course. And that ended up being in Santa Cruz, California. And little did I know that my buddy that had been studying to be a doctor had spent his whole scholastic career growing hydroponic weed in his basement. And we really kind of—we really hit it off there and had some fun for that month. But then I was like—whoa, I've got to make some money. If there's one lesson I can give to anyone, and from these ranches and everything, is treat your employees like your future. Because I ended up needing some money. I had a house, but I didn't have the equipment. So I actually went back up to Mendocino, to some of the family of the Cassidys, and I ended up working for my trimmers. I ended up trimming my trimmers' weed. And I sat there for—I think thirty-six days straight and got that extra $8,000 I needed, just sat there on a couch for thirty-six days, trimming weed, got $8,000, walked away, went down to Santa Cruz.

Back then, Santa Cruz was once again this geeky, younger-brother's place. Like the ancillary of all the surfers and skaters that came out of the Silicon Valley was right over the hill, and the dot-com had already blown up. All the big companies—the Googles and Facebooks were already blown up. *All* those executives were over the hill there in Santa Cruz, setting up this player's paradise, which was so fun for so many decades, that it's been kind of like what we call a broker haven. Like some of the most extravagant sellers and buyers of weed, on planet Earth, go to Santa Cruz to play—and play they do. So it was very attractive that way.

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But I came back and connected with my old friends, and then with the surfing community and with my godmother and her family. My little brother ended up up there, with his skateboarding friends. All of us had these little grows, and it was really this idyllic lifestyle. I could have my house, and go travel and go surf, go to Hawaii, go to Mexico—live a fairly good life off of six lights. And the price was still good—it was still like $3,600 a pound or something. The technology advanced, and boom. I was describing Colorado—I guess shortly after I left, the next year or two, the legalization happened, and most of that was kibboshed by the control mechanisms of corporate structures and intellectual property rights. Where Santa Cruz wasn't quite like that. We were

playing with everything, and more than ever, with Silicon Valley backing us up and a killer ag industry on the Central Coast.

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So that's another place where it just got more interesting and more fun and more diverse, with the strains and the techniques and the nutrients and the growing styles. And getting better with the electricity loads and the chemicals, and the gross abuses, and really starting to hone in the craft—the chemists and the biochemists. There's a lot of psychedelics in the region too, for generations. There's a reason that they just legalized mushrooms and everything in Santa Cruz, and it's because it's a community *of* that. And so the laboratories and the universities, and the collaboration that started to hit there, really advanced our indoor—and our outdoor eventually. But I started in with hydroponic growing in Santa Cruz at the six-light scale.

But then it got quite competitive, like all of a sudden, there's like 6,000 or 8,000 six-light grows there. And after a certain period of time, we're like—hmm, how do we take care of *this?* So like the band of brothers, we started getting the pirate tribes together, and there's very few locals there, so they all know each other across the spectrum, east side and west side, and we all decided to pool our efforts. Labor and land and techniques and technology, and really started this *most* collaborative phase that I've dealt with to date, with the hydroponic growing in Santa Cruz. We were heavily influencing and working with areas from San Jose, and Oakland, and San Francisco, kind of urban districts. And that really changed a lot of things for me as well, the collaboration factor, where we have like eight to ten of us in households, and then we all decide to take those households and just turn them into ancillary ships for our first project, and the only real big project I did in Santa Cruz, which was a chicken farm. We got a chicken farm in the woods, in the fruit tree orchards, in the agriculture district, and we literally turned a giant chicken farm into weed.

02-02:26:31

Holmes: What was the scale of this?

02-02:26:37

Bates: So the scale of this was literally, we went from six lights apiece to 102 lights I think. It was eighty-two lights in a flowering room, and then twenty-two lights in a veg room. It took all of us, every effort we had in a year, just bleeding every penny we could. It cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars, and twenty employees, you know. There was like six of us big bosses yelling at each other about how it should be, but it was quite the collaborative effort. So in Santa Cruz, we were actually the first hundred-light grow. But then, we were also the first 200 light, and the first 300 light. At that point, we were also making high-end extracts. My friends were definitely some of these chemists and people who were onto volatile extractions in a big way. And we were really advancing and making a name for ourselves. All of it became wildly

popular in Southern California. Like *the* source of the best indoor chronic, without a doubt.

But we did that together, in big groups, in kind of social structures. Like there was our hipster kids that were brokers. I come from like the kind of older surfing community, but we have a Hawaiian surfing community. And then there was these other guys that are more into psychedelics, and were like into the Burning Man and the different alternative healing arts and Eastern-medicine crowd. And then there's this like educated, more like psychology and psychedelics, more philosophical crowd, if you will. But then, it being a brokers' paradise, it was a way for us to create the best products that we could, as a group, so we were sold at market. The whole world was competing against itself, but ours was sold at the highest end of cost every time—every time. In LA, even to this day, it's like you say you're from Santa Cruz with the indoor weed, they're going to want to see you. They're going to want to see you.

02-02:28:45

And this is where like Blackberry Kushes, and our friends up in Oakland started in with Cherry Pie, which comes from the Granddaddy Purps, and all this stuff. OG Kushes *might* come from Chemdogs, but we took it to this whole other place. And that's where we get closer to where we are now, really. That time range there, I'd say like pre-2012, is where we really started created millennial weed. In the weed scene, the popularity that we know it today, as far as the artist brands, and the certain strains, many of these dessert weeds, stem from that area and from a lot of collaboration. Once again, the opposite of how Big Sur was. It was absolute groups of us deciding to take care of *us*. So there would be hundreds of us running around Santa Cruz making a premium.

02-02:29:46

Holmes: We've talked a little bit before on this, but tell us about what you call the millennial weed—a lot of these new flavors, new strains that were coming up. What were some of the cultivars that you were perfecting in Santa Cruz?

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Bates: Well, Blue Dream for thirty—fifty years, who knows. Blue Dream was always on our menu. It sells, it's amazing. But we were definitely, at that point, honing other strains. Blackberry Kush was a really big one, because that was one of the first ones that came out and looked fake. It looked like a painting of weed. The purples and the greens didn't look realistic. It looked like somebody took powdered sugar and just dumped it on top of the thing. And we were taking Diesels: New York City Diesels; a lot of OG Kushes; Planetary OGs, which I don't know if any people remember it. It had a short life, but all the subsequent OGs were from these Planetary OGs. Platinum OG Kush is a byproduct, in a way. There was the Saturn Kush and the Jupiter Kush, and all these funny planet-named Kushes. And then, we were doing this Chocolope.

02-02:31:01

The name of the game with this indoor in Santa Cruz was that we would get the premium cut and keep it within our tribe. By the time it's released to the public for production, we're already bored with it, and that was three or five years ago. And that's always been the name of the weed game, right? So long before people had it, we had Cherry Pie, we had Girl Scout Cookies. Gelato, right when it came out. Other people were breeding these things, but we'd hone in on specific cuts as an industry, one phenotype, one plant, and replicate *that*, so it's an absolutely consistent bag, where every nug was 25 percent THC, looked the same, the same color—not one hair is wrong. And that's where we could ask and get twice as much as market rate. Yeah, it was in that consistency—one phenotype, and having it when no one else has it. That was the name of the game.

So since we were able to work with these different clubs, it really broadened our horizons. We were working in Oakland. We were working in Sacramento. We were working in Los Angeles. These folks would have certain strains they wanted at the max production with the highest quality, so they'd contract us at that point. And for us, that's where it went from selling to a club to a contract game, where the clubs already had the clientele—thousands of them. They'd sign up as patients. They'd allocate us certain numbers of patients and ask us to grow a certain strain, at a premium, and buy every single gram of it to have exclusive rights to buy all of it. And that's when we became—whatever, inflating ourselves as contract killers. It's like okay, we need x amount of Girl Scout Cookies at this rate, so we're going to get these three guys to do it. And we would just be gnarly about it. They don't get to give it to anyone. They don't even get to grow it for themselves—but we'll pay them too much money to do that.

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And that's when we started growing out of our britches a little—started to hire labor and started to hire workforces, so that we could go to other places and show people what we've learned, and contract them to grow x amount so we can sell it. They were happy, like, 'Oh, great. I don't have to worry about the risk. I'm just doing this, and it just goes to that guy.' They don't even have to leave their living room, and it's done. Even if they need labor, 'Oh, we've got that too.' It's like—whatever they need. Then it was very apparent that it's becoming a commodities market. Yeah.

02-02:33:47

Holmes: Well, on that same note, you mentioned the extracts. And this is something that also begins to develop, particularly in the 2000s, when medical cannabis matures to a point where you get a consumer base. You get a reliable market, dispensaries—to where it wasn't just the flower. It was all the other products that one could make from cannabis. Talk a little bit about that, particularly the extracts, the concentrates, the vapes and other products.

02-02:34:21

Bates: Right. Well, that's actually what transitioned me out of hydroponics. [laughs] I will say that Santa Cruz and the southern Bay Area was this magnificent scene of the geekiest, smartest people you had ever seen, that could outsource anything. The Internet's at our fingertips. We can get anything we want from China. We can get anything we want from Mexico, Korea—anywhere, right to the port, done. Proprietary research development. So especially when we got into the higher ends of hydroponic and the bigger, stronger yields, and then started extracting off of that, there was a demand for more extract products. Because they were much stronger, easier to conceal. The edibles became more and more popular. It went from a brownie, to like gummy bears and salads. I guess there was always salads and brownies, but there was never all these gummies and candies and pops and gums—and just little things that they could eat.

Then, as people were smoking this stuff, we started testing it. And it turned out that there was actually a lot of dirty, bad habits. A lot of heavy metals, a lot of pesticides that were concentrated—6,000 to 8,000 times as much, and people literally giving themselves cancer by smoking weed, which was like, 'Holy shit—this is all *wrong*, absolutely wrong.' So when we started collaborating with these labs more and started getting our test results more, we were almost making more money off the extracts, for sure, than the weed at one point. And it was a huge hit, but we realized that it was kind of awful and killing people. And at 90 percent THC, people are passing out and throwing up, and all this weird stuff. It's like, 'Holy crap, we're headed towards drugs with this.'

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That's where a lot of really beautiful things came out, because then we started doing the testing and the research, and then it turns out that there was these techniques of isolating it, and literally separating cells and molecules in labs with certain chemical breakdowns. And then playing with lots of different consumption methods, lots of different types of vaporizers, lots of different types of ways to get it into your system—from full burners to light digital heating pads to like all sorts of things. Then it got to like, 'Oh, all the best stuff is too goopy, and it's hard to handle, and you can only smoke it at home, and if it drips, it burns.' It was hard to handle was part of it.

That's what like veered us on towards we can isolate it, put it in like kind of more inert vegetable glycerine, or whatever, and then put it at a much lower temperature—just enough to have it evaporate. That was the beginning of vape pens, was off these isolates to give it an easier delivery mechanism. Where really, the pen came up too because people were getting popped with these big old rigs. The original vape machines were like boxes from laboratories, with a giant resin-filled tube, and it was ridiculous. None of it made sense, until it's like, 'Hey, we can conceal it.' Some of the first ones look like lipstick even. Or the extract containers were compacts. It was like all of a

sudden, whatever fits in your purse or fits in your pocket or your backpack was the model. And that's where these vape pens came out of—cops couldn't tell if that was a pen or what. You could flavor it. You could smoke it right in the bar and get ripped, and nobody knows you're smoking weed. You're right in front of the bartender hitting the thing, and they don't even know that it's weed-involved.

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And that's where the millennials kick in, right, for real. These kids—that's what *they* wanted. So for us, as producers, and already producing, we're like great, that's what they want? Okay, let's make this happen. Where do we find these? How do we make these? What temperatures? What concentrations? What ratios? All these different things that make it kind of what it is today. But I will say, that's a wonderful time. And off subject—DMT vape pens, which are really mind altering and life changing, and I think that's kind of a good spin off of what happened too, because it's less harsh and more fun, and like this beautiful little thing you can do with a vape pen.

But then, all the troubles that they talk about are real. We experienced them right off the bat. Water on the lung, gargling sensations because there's too much glycerine—even vegetable glycerine residues in the bronchi, and there was these side effects. People literally burning holes in the back of their throats from bong ripping and using torches to dab rigs and dab bars that are so popular—it really, really screws people up. Then they build these massive tolerances, and it kind of starts to screw with their dopamine and endorphin systems, and then we were seeing certain forms of what was starting to look like—maybe addiction or codependency to things. That's when a lot of us just kind of backed off into the couple products we know are good.

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But then taste and flavor profiles too—things started getting lost, just like the hydro. You go so deep, that you realize there's so much there that only together do they work. A full spectrum. So for me, I like extracts that *do* have the plant fats in it, and do have tons of terpenes and CBD, and all these other elements. And to me, that makes this wonderful tasting, I-can-handle-it product. I don't like a 92 percent—I like a 68 percent, you know? And I don't want to smoke that thing in a dab. No, I just sprinkle a little bit on top of a bowl, and I'm like good for the rest of the week. You know what I mean? So really, it was a lot of trial and error, and it's leading to what is now a very confusing point. Where they went so down the rabbit hole of trying everything, that they're headed back the other way, which I really enjoy. And I did too—I headed back the other way.

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Holmes: Well, that's where I wanted to turn next. I think it was in about 2012 or so you came back to your roots, back to Big Sur and purchased property on the North Coast.

02-02:40:50
Bates: Yeah.

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Holmes: Discuss your decision to come back to outdoor growing. I think you somewhat hit on it, but maybe discuss that experience and your decision?

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Bates: Well, after almost a decade—I guess it was about eight years of almost full-time hydroponic growing—but it felt like *two* decades; it felt like *ten* decades. I don't even know how to explain how crazy it is to work at night. You go in at night, you work all night long. You come out; you're tired; you go to sleep. I turned into a vampire. I had no social life. These mechanisms are so crazy and so much money involved, that I could not leave it alone for half of a second, even running crews. I was stressed out. I had a pocket full of cash, and I felt like I was going to have a heart attack. I was like losing my hair, getting older, all this stuff. I was just worn out and going only for money, which isn't enough for me. Coming from Big Sur, it's not the money, it's the lifestyle.

And then these great abuses that I was just kind of touching on, as far as feeling like people were turning things into drugs. There was misuse of money and the cannabis itself. The electricity alone was horrifying. We figured out, once we got up to a quarter-acre of canopy—like about 10,000 square feet of indoor—was quite literally well over a hundred households worth of power and carbon footprint. And the chemicals we were using—salt-based chemical fertilizers, the pesticides we were using are neurotoxins, like straight up systemic neurotoxins that can paralyze people and have multi-life generation. Oh, we could get it off the weed, so it's not on the weed, but they were being used, and they were *in* these places.

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All these things really, really corroded me after a while. I was like—this isn't beautiful anymore. This isn't it. This isn't right. The weed's great, but there's these horrible excesses. And I really missed that loving feeling I had in the beginning, in Big Sur, with the small crop, where it was just like part of the lifestyle, it was a supplemental income. It treated me good, I treated it good, but I also had my life and I had my family, and I had all these other things that I did with my life—music, art, surfing—that I could be equally as involved with and not even talk about it. Where when I had reached the height of that hydroponic game, I just ate, breathed, slept weed—that's it.

I'd worked my way up a chain, as well. It was pre-legalization here by some years, but we were already dealing with venture capital, and we were already dealing with pharmaceutical companies, and we were already dealing with big, gigantic grows with poor standards in places like Mexico and elsewhere, where we were starting to head towards that end of the business. They were preparing us for the big one, and with my whole heart I said no. This is not

who I am. That's not my lifestyle. I'm not willing to sacrifice my ideals for money. And then also, missing the love of it, and like it became this obsessed, gnarly job. I lost my ex. I could only be with a woman for a few months before she discovered that it's a dangerous, wild, crazy pirate ship. Screw that! I'm not risking my life for that crap. And I'm like, "Sorry, it's my lifestyle." It took me a while to realize that I had chosen and created that lifestyle. And I craved home. I felt lost. I craved home, even though it's just right across the bay, I just craved the quiet, the ocean, the longer view, you know?

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And in Big Sur, it's different. The whole Monterey area, I'd say, there's this real kind of multigenerational community, building foundations. People are building families. They have this long view. Where like in the Bay Area, even in Colorado where I was, and really in Santa Cruz, they want it all. They want it now. Work hard, go across the world, blow it up, giant raves, the Coachellas, and we're on top of the world with the girls and the designer drugs and big cars and everything. Want it for now, but it's gone tomorrow and got to get more. So it was like—two different lifestyles, and I really knew the whole time, with some of that, that sure, I might be sitting there in a $100,000 truck at a giant show with 10,000 hot chicks. I had a hole in my soul that just wanted to get in touch with nature and get in touch with my heart. And I was starting to feel that stuff. When you get a little older and you're not as young, you miss the warmth of family and friends and leisure time and things like that.

And then these gross abuses, I was starting to gain a real conscience. I already knew—I always grow vegetables at home, my whole life. But I had a real deep sense of purpose at that point, that I cannot do this, and I have to *help it stop*. That is almost what it felt like.

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Holmes: Well, discuss setting up a new farm, back home in Big Sur. You took these into account. Maybe talk a little bit about the cultivars and the practice—the cultivation that you undertook there?

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Bates: So coming back home *was* coming back home. I wanted to dedicate the way that I knew how to dedicate. So I came back home, and I had some edges compared to many of my local community, where I had the experience, and I had some money. But I knew, out of respect, that I did not want to do what I did in Santa Cruz or Colorado, for instance. So my main objective was to come in quietly, get reacquainted with the community, and see where I might fit in, if it still feels the same. So I kind of took a slow approach. I stayed in Santa Cruz; I stayed growing. I got a place here, but most of the people around here didn't even know, for the first year or two—even my neighbors—didn't know I had already gotten a place, started establishing like a dozen plants on the hill. Kept it quiet, kept working up there. I didn't need the money at all, and I worked one day a week at the bakery. I hadn't done that in like—

whoo!—I don't know, twelve years or fifteen years, or something. I went down and pulled coffee, just to like get in touch with my people again, you know? And it felt really *good*. And I was like all right, this is cool. This is transition I need.

What propelled it is the year I moved to Colorado, and my ex and I had broken up, and that whole transition we talked about earlier, I actually wasn't around for my dad dying. I came out for a month when he was in his hospital bed and got to talk to him a little bit. There was no regrets there, but his hospital experience took a year and two months, hospital to hospital, after having a heart attack and a stroke and multiple complications and being in that position. And I was deeply sad. I wanted to be there for him. I had this place, and I was still easing in, and then my *mom* got sick. My mom, she spent the last twelve years of her life in India, since the eighties. She went from kind of atheist, expat Catholic, Irish Catholic like most of my family, to Tibetan Buddhist. She loved it, and she learned how to read, write, and speak Sanskrit and Tibetan, and she loved it so much. She would visit Tibet a lot, and then visit India a lot. And then when those two towers fell on 9/11, my mom called me and my brother up and said, "Hey, you boys are doing pretty good. You can take care of yourself. I'm out of here." And she moved to India.

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We had visited a couple times and had some fun, but in 2012 she let me know that she wasn't doing so well. I got my place in the northern part of Big Sur in 2012, but maybe six months before the end of the season, you know? It's like maybe in July I got the place, I think. I did a little crop, and then it was done by September, but started like two dozen plants the next year but still growing in Santa Cruz with the hydroponics. Then I got the phone call. My mom's like—I'm feeling kind of sick. You should probably visit. And then her friend called me and said, "Hey, her body is already gone, but she's waiting for you boys, so make something happen." Luckily, I still had the good job.

Me and my brother get to India as fast as we can, and I'm so grateful I got to spend the last three days of my mom's life with her in India. It was this very beautiful eye-opening death. It wasn't like my dad's death, where it was depressing and loss. What she said to us was live life to the fullest and live without regret. It really pumped me and my brother up, and we were there every step of the way. It felt so solid. I wish we could do it in America. I went down, and I burned mom in an ancient temple in Chamundi, on the top of a mountain in Mysore, India, with the Tibetan monks doing the pujas and all the chanting, and we went into the monasteries. My mom's death is a whole other book—it's a whole other oral history. [laughs] But I will say that it just like overtook me. That was the first time I ever felt that life was short.

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And then I came back, and I quit my job up there and said, "I'm going full-time to this place. Everybody out." I even had a crew here trimming a friend's

weed. I got back from India—I fired fifteen people. I'd never done such a thing. I just started really grabbing life by the balls and heading forward, you know. I decided I'm not going to live with regret. I want to live a beautiful lifestyle, and I want to treat the environment correctly. I'm kind of sick of abusing the environment with this—it's not about the money, it's about the lifestyle. But to maintain a healthy lifestyle, you need a certain amount of money, so I started heading down this route, where I really was livid. I'm pissed—my whole life of being on black markets, and the violence and the crime, and the constant helicopters and the cops, and all this stuff. I was just at my end with all of it.

So I decided to scale down, go more respectful, be part of a community back home. Get reacquainted with my family that's in the area. Not blare the loud mic, you know? When I was in Colorado, I had a truck that was lifted to the sky with a bumper that said "Mendo" on it. Of course, I got robbed. I immediately traded my Dodge truck in for an old shitty Chevy truck and it was just smooth sailing from that point on. [laughs] Really decided that I want to come back to the seeds, come back to the land, come back to the stuff that I had originally learned—this in tune with nature, this out of sight, out of mind. This beautiful thing that's like whispered and heard of but never seen, and when people try some, it's like always the best weed they ever smoked in their life.

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Holmes: Well, talk about the strains that you decided to grow.

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Bates: Well, there are just a couple that I had kept. But then some, I literally went back to my old buddies and recouped, and then some I had to start over. But I tried to go back to my roots with it. So Holy had disappeared, at that point. I mean there is Holy, but it's all diluted down, coming from other people. You can look up all the seed companies that carry it—not one person's from here. Although SoCal Seed Company, I will say, the dad that passed away, the old man that started the company, he was there at the right time. I got some of our elders—Patrick Cassidy's wife, the old widow, Bunny—to grill his ass and make sure he was on the right mountain at the right time, and make sure he could even say he had that strain. But it was inbred in a back yard in Southern California, and that's where it survived, where it had gone long extinct, in the late eighties, early nineties here, as far as we know.

So my mission was to do what we did with medical and with Northern California, I was going to chase down these original strains that our parents and our forefathers had brought. I wanted to honor our traditions by going to a source of origin, and then clarifying those strains to our region, and then hybridizing for myself with a little bit of market targeting. I didn't do much, but I did do one, Khyber Cookie, and I got offered a huge contract. It's one bit of weed where I just didn't know what to do. I was going legal. The clubs

were falling apart. I sent ten pounds down to LA and told these people—give it to whoever's cool, or whatever. But I guess one pound of this was taken to the Grammys, and it was a huge hit. And now some major artist offered me some contract if I can get that to market, and that's why I've been on this legalization trip more recently here. But yeah, it was all chasing the roots.

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So like with Holy Bud, chased down some friends that were in Mexico City, to get as close to that Dolores region as they could. But it's pretty hard, because it is weed and gold mining, so they got some from San Miguel and other areas that are close by, so I got an origin strain from there. This guy Fritz, and then my other body Anurian, he had his Khyber. I made sure to get a Khyber right out of Khyber. Went to Maui and collected Maui Wowie from an old Big Sur man that breeds the seeds for these guys. I could tell he was only wearing a sarong, because I was there. Spends his life naked, making seeds. So I started chasing down the origins of what was done before, and trying to bring it back and replicate—but not really replicate as much as create my own art out of that.

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Holmes: Well, you mentioned legalization. So of course, Prop. 64 passes in 2016 and I want to hit two things. First, discuss your reaction, and the community's reaction here in Big Sur, to legalization. And then second, let's talk about your role and recent advocacy within that.

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Bates: All right. Well, reaction—mixed bag, actually. It was either 2008 or 2004, they had a Measure B to legalize cannabis, and all the cannabis community got together and shot that one down, shot it out of the sky, for fear of corporate interests and law enforcement taking it over, making the rules and kicking all the little people out, right? And just consolidating it all into giant corporations and industrial agriculture. So we were terribly fearful of that and shot down that first one. But there was enough business done, enough people with medical, that by the time the vote for 2016 happened here, it was kind of a mixed bag. It went from fiercely against to about fifty-fifty. And a lot of people were growing directly for patients right in town that couldn't grow their own. There was still this beautiful system here. It wasn't quite as crazy black market as everywhere else. It was more like family people would come out, maybe from another area, and grab it. But it was kind of in the family or right to the patients. And so, it was a fifty-fifty reaction.

But I was at a point where I had done enough business through these dispensaries where we could really make a living out of this. It was hard to file federal taxes, so most of us—I'm an open book now, so I don't mind—other people would mind talking. But I don't mind talking about myself, where I had been just a well-paid handyman that made cash for a long time. This was the way we could filter it in, all our chainsaws and our tractors and our equipment, whatever—or fire-prevention crews and maintenance and

water guys and solar guys. And so we were filtering our money in, and actually being able to live a life and have insurance and all these things, so that was kind of my thing. Like I'd love to be insured and bonded and have a line of credit, and not be treated like a criminal, and actually make some money and go into business. I think there was a big crowd of us that felt that way—and most of California felt that way, actually.

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I know for a fact in town, in our county at least, that there was this real drive to decriminalize it, so not only the growers could be normal, but the smokers could be normal. People thought here's a way that everybody can stop being a criminal. We'll just have this beautiful weed that we already got, and we could shine it—like good wine that we have, or good citrus that we have. Maybe it'll be an agricultural product that we can be proud of. We'll have our little vineyards, and we'll give it to the next generation. And like us, they can be proud generation after generation but make an honest income. And so there was all this hope in there, you know, for all the right reasons. Everybody—even our most conservative members of the community are like, 'Yeah, it's been fifty years of cops and robbers. Let's just like cool this out and get these guys to market.'

The dispensaries were like—we have this beautiful system. We're making millions of dollars. Please, enjoy your tax money, and we'll just open this up to the public. So the whole goal of Prop. 64 was to take that medical market and transition it to a transparent, regulated recreational market. So it was this beautiful thing, where across California it had a lot of support. A lot of support. Most communities supported it, I'd like to think.

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Holmes: Well, in that same year, you also helped found what became the Big Sur Farmers Association.

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Bates: Really it's kind of more towards the end of that year. But here's where it gets interesting, right? It was voted in, in 2016. And we were working on that before the vote, right? The vote takes place in November. But unfortunately, on July 22, we experienced—my north region of Big Sur here—one of the first megafires in California history, the Soberanes fire. So right when we were gearing up, prepping up, getting ready, we had a giant wildfire that burned down all my neighborhood's farms. It burned me down. I kept the house, but I lost all the crops, lost a lot of money.

So as the legalization happens, and it gets voted in—people were really excited—there was this reluctance, because they decided to leave it up to local jurisdictions to make the rules. And most jurisdictions said no right off the bat. This was coming from their district attorneys, their judges, their sheriffs, law enforcement—all the people that had been throwing people in jail for generations. And our county was one of them. But while they were going

through their politics, here in my area the fires was really rough. We lost most of our residents' households, but everybody neglected to tell us about the flood part afterwards. So it started this slow decay, where that winter of 2017, as they were figuring out the regulations, we had floods that shut down all the highways of our regions. And so the fires and floods really kind of took us off the map as far as like what was going on.

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By the time we came up for air at the end of '16 and during the floods, we had realized that they started entertaining a cannabis ordinance for Monterey County because so many people voted it in. The local politicians decided that the appropriate place to do this is within the industrial agriculture community, so they immediately started building the legalization of cannabis, in our county, with law enforcement and the industrial agriculture in Salinas. And they were lobbied to immediately disallow outdoor cannabis, and any cannabis outside of industrial districts within the Salinas Valley. So they said no to the whole place, except for the giant, commercial companies within the Salinas Valley, and that's where the show starts.

Our Big Sur Farmers Association was actually going to be called—oh, what we'll call the Apollo Association. But it was literally eleven of us farmers here, that have been burned and flooded, and had spent hundreds of thousands on our properties and infrastructure to enter the legal market. Had all of our paperwork and our doctors' recommendations—we thought we had our business together. After being burned and flooded, we didn't have much to lose, where the rest of the community was still like—uh, should we hold on? But we were angry farmers, and we decided okay, we're going to go to the courthouse with our burning stakes and our pitchforks and tell them, "You, how dare you. This is where weed comes from, and for seventy years we've suffered the War on Drugs. This is wrong." We quite literally realized, right away, that's not how politics work, and our angry little group of eleven turned into a more united group of sixty, from Carmel Valley down to the very end of the county in Big Sur—and that's where it began.

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But we were thrust right into threats of law enforcement, and sheriffs that hated us, and judges that hate us, and district attorneys that take pride in throwing us in jail for the last thirty, forty years. And as they're building this huge thing, we're also dealing with venture capital flying in from around the world. There were certain provisions under Prop. 64. They weren't supposed to do over one acre in a canopy for any company for the first five years. They were supposed to not allow any sort of venture capital or foreign investment in for the first five years, and all this other stuff. They threw it out the window day one. Yeah, the first year they threw all that shit out the window and just went, 'Go for it everybody.' And we've got like Jordanian princes and Saudi Arabian money and corporate dudes coming in from New York. We had police chiefs and district attorney investigators retiring and going straight to

work into cannabis. And then they all created and lobbied the industry we know now, to very specifically destroy the illicit market by flooding that gray area, right, this provisional gray area. So that's where I obviously began in the David-and-Goliath battle.

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But we were able to come across pretty hard and strong right off the bat. They, at first, refused to believe that there was a history of cannabis in California—or in Monterey County. They said no, this was illegal. That wasn't the cannabis business. What we're creating *here* is the cannabis business. But then we came out with our first articles, and there was these movies and things coming out with some of our elders. We were able to bring them the empirical evidence that you lie, you cheat, and you steal. And then, we were this angry group of farmers—I was quite proud of everyone. We went in and just discussed everything they didn't want to talk about, including, 'please look at the illicit market is what you're creating.' They knowingly had this gray area where it didn't need to be tested or regulated for the course of the last four years. And as they built this money with venture capital, and with all sorts of questionable labor practices, they destroyed the illicit markets by flooding them with their cannabis illicitly. But they don't talk about this, of course. They will call me full of it, but we just watched as this happens, so we started playing politics. And there's actually an article out there called, "Potheads Play Politics" It's about our group, and that's what it was. They say a loosely run group with a loosely run meeting, and a loosely languaged proposal. [laughs]

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Holmes: Well, I know this group has worked with other state organizations, such as the Origins Council to push for appellations, right? Just like we would see with other agricultural products, particularly say here in California, Napa Valley wine. Discuss the importance of this for the legacy regions, not just here in Big Sur, but other legacy regions in California.

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Bates: I feel like we can relate it to any product from any region, especially as we're dealing with this globalized world, when all of this politics happened to our cannabis after twenty years of hope in building for this future. It really crushed most of us and thrust us right back into the War on Drugs. We're still dealing with helicopters and busts and machine guns and everything—everyday. It really crushed the hearts of many. But we noticed that if we come in numbers and we do the work, it's actually a civil liberties issue, and we ended up getting a civil rights attorney as well. The first couple of people that we met were coming from way up in Santa Cruz and from Oakland, and their whole social justice movement, and their equities thing they brought across in the urban areas. They really let us know that, 'Hey, no, if you come across as an organized group and you go through these certain processes, you are their constituents, and it is actually their obligation to hear you, to understand you, and to speak on your behalf to try and figure this out.'

And as we started navigating there, we realized that the enforcement wing was horrible. For sure, our local politicians and the judges, the district attorneys and the sheriffs, were 100 percent our enemy. They were so happy to destroy us, and they just want the paycheck. So we went even a little further, and we started finding that actually, the ag industry didn't understand, and the vintners didn't understand, and the cattlemen don't really want it, but they didn't understand. They're like, 'Wait a minute, this is an agricultural crop, and this is a craft. This is very small scale, with very few people doing it small scale.' They didn't understand why they could thrust us back into the War on Drugs and take millions of dollars in foreign investment to grow weed that people weren't liking. Product value, right?

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But there was no way to explain this. There was no quantified data, like there is behind crops like grapes and citrus and avocados and olives, and everything else in California. We saw that right away, so we started working first with the ENGOs [Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations] locally. Like Fish & Wildlife, that's the only felony we can get, but we have the gold standard of land use. On the whole coast of California, we're considered the gold standard: the only clean source-to-sea water systems. And through that, that led us down the agriculture pipe. The commissioners were like, 'We don't want to work with you, but we respect you as farmers, so please try to go beyond this and try to figure out your quantified data and your added market value.'

We knew nothing of marketing really, and all of that, so that actually led us to the CDFA, the California Department of Food and Agriculture. And they were so cool. They're real farmers, you know, and they work for farmers. So they're like, "Okay, listen kids. We'll come down to your zone. We're going to tell you what we're going to do with weed. But this is mostly for the greenhouses, but we're more than happy to talk with you about what needs to happen." This is where we start learning policy, because all we had experienced is like the horrible War on Drugs policy that they were recreating for us. We didn't understand that there was positive policy backed by quantified data that turns into really truly environmentally sound and socially sound policy, and that's when we started learning policy. So we were already advocating for two years before we even figured out what policy was.

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The CDFA had brought to our attention that our folks at the California Growers Association, who's no longer with us, but we already knew they were the big force out of the Emerald Triangle that went into Sacramento to make sure that the little farmers got in, which they did, in a way. And then, these really great people from the CDFA had mentioned there's been this push around appellations. In 2016, Cal NORML—and some of these guys that came from out of state to do the greenhouses—said, "Hey, you're in a unique region. Outdoor is what you should do." And they proposed an appellation

program, more like an AVA [American Vinicultural Area]. It wasn't really terroir-based, which is about nature. AVAs are a little more loose. You can use products from other places, manufactured in other places—not so handcrafted, you know, more mechanized, or what have you. But we had heard this, and then we really started to do the deep dive, looking at France and everything they did. It absolutely blew our mind.

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So we said, "Yeah, we'd like to participate in that one part." Like out of all the licenses, all the metrics, all the taxing, all the policy, everything—we were like, "We want to check out that appellation part." Because we like the history and we understand—how do you quantify and qualify an added-value product, because we know it's so much harder work. It's such a better quality, how do you quantify that for more money on the market so we can survive? And then we realized that this is the sharpest marketing tool on earth! And that's what led us to these initial meetings. I feel like it was the one miracle that happened in California politics for the legacy weed farmers that were here, because most of the outrageously cool organic certifying OCal, CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers] and working with Napa Valley Vintners, all this stems from this one group that met with the CDFA.

We were burned and flooded here, so we were even broke, underfunded, five of us in a one-bed hotel room in Sacramento, sleeping on the floor, to go into this big California Department of Food and Agriculture meeting, not even understanding how or why we're there. But what they did, is they really did pinpoint the best legacy regions in California, and put us all together in one room with the most qualified scientists, biologists, IP law attorneys, that they had at their disposal. And really, a lot of this stems from the people in the north, and the great organization they did. Like with Genine Colman in the Origins Council—they were speaking appellations early. Some of their folks that are organizers actually went to UC Berkeley law school, and Stanford Law School, so they were already working together. And that's where Richard Mendelson came to really explain to us the value, without all the fancy talk, right? We're simple farmers.

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Holmes: Well, once you really were able to wrap your head around appellations and what it could do—and particularly from your own experience with cannabis, with indoor and what cannabis had become within the laboratory if we want to put it that way—what did appellations really mean for you?

02-03:14:07

Bates: Well, appellations doesn't only mean small business, but it is the uniqueness of these plants, wherever they're grown on earth. And there's always been that. Like people would swear they could taste Big Sur in the weed. And I even saw a *Forbes* magazine article with a blind tasting, and some lady saying, "The best weed I ever smoked. It tastes like the redwoods and I could smell the moisture and the duff of the redwoods, and I could smell the sage." And

it's like we always swore that we could—that was part of it. And it's these terpenes, it's the smells, it's the taste, it's the flavor that gets you off. It's not the THC count. We never had any of that on paper, and all these people that do have things on paper are like, 'No, this is how a corporate farm works. This is how a corporation works. This is how venture capital works. This is empirical.' And they're like, "Whatever, kids. You're just talking." All of a sudden, we found ourselves in this place of where we could prove it.

And just like when they started studying cannabis for cancer and for health issues, and for pain and aches—and all these other things—right when we hopped into studying this there was profound evidence of unique expression of these cultivars due to their geographic location. And to go even further, these unique expressions of cultivars were creating more and different spectrums of different cannabinoids that they hadn't seen. And that mixed with the terpenes, these different expressions—all of a sudden we're getting into real cancer-curing medicine. Where these certain combinations of all of it together is what can target skin cancer or lung cancer, or breast cancer or a topical muscle pain or a digestive issue, and is actually what they call an entourage effect. As they narrowed it down in the big industry, they were narrowing down cultivars, but they weren't expressing themselves the same way. They actually had less diversity, which means they had less use. The science that is coming now is amazing. They literally narrowed the genetic diversity to the point that they're experiencing the same thing that the GMO [genetically modified organism] agriculture system, where they're literally having crop failures due to genetic bacterial infections and viroids that past generations, cut to cut, that they can't get rid of. That spread through the air on bugs or water or anything, and are literally destroying the genetic value, destroying the crop's value and production rates and quality—everything—because of their lack of biodiversity.

02-03:16:59

Holmes: Well, it's going to be an interesting road to see where this goes.

02-03:17:01

Bates: Yeah! And then when we go into appellations. The one bit I'll give you about this is I was sitting at a table with Richard Mendelson, distinguished law professor, and a CDFA biologist, and scientists, and these world social advocates, and stuff. I had to ask him, "Why am I sitting here? I'm just a dope grower from the woods that got angry on some asshole cops. That's what I am. I don't understand why I'm here. [laughs] You're the experts! You tell me." And Richard said, "This is what appellations are. Appellations are the authentic thing. It's a real thing. This is what people want." He's like, "We don't question that you know what you're talking about. Your people voted you in because you are the one that knows what they're all talking about." He said, to go even further, they don't question if I'm the authentic thing. They *know* I'm the real thing, so I'm actually the subject-matter expert in the room. He said, "Without that, we are nothing in an appellations project."

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And then, to go even further than that, he's like, "This is your greatest marketing tool." He really started explaining to me this work that they did in Bordeaux, and in France, and with the government of Cuba and their tobacco, and with different regions of South and Central America, and with Africa, with their chocolate and their coffee. And how the origin of these things, and where they're grown, and how they're grown, and what strains they use, and their standard—all these things boil down to their standards or practices and their cultivars within a very specific unique space, and there's only so much produced. You quantify all of that with the numbers, with the science, but also with the culture, with the people, and with the place. So not only is it just really good for small farms, it's a powerful marketing tool to differentiate products on the market. And then even beyond that, it's a way to preserve best practices and biodiversity.

02-03:19:11

Holmes: Oliver, this has been great. I've really enjoyed our conversations. I wanted to just have you reflect a little bit. You've been in cannabis cultivation for decades. If we're looking back from thinking here or the illicit market of your youth, to even medical cannabis, Prop. 215, to now recreational cannabis under Prop. 65. How have you seen the craft and culture of cannabis evolve, particularly here in Big Sur?

02-03:19:52

Bates: Well, the way I've seen it evolve is it went from this very secret thing, to this very public thing, to this almost extinct thing. And at this point, we're fighting for the few survivors, so it may soon be like a thing of the past. We're often asking our politicians to give us a protected status like the condor. We're going extinct. But there is something beautiful as well, as far as the exposure of the truth. And in the work that you do—through your oral histories, even if they're stories, they're personal stories to people, and they're personal stories to regions and communities, and they're very, very important. These corporations, they went big, made millions, and now they're falling apart. It seems like some sort of strange prophecy—almost like it had to happen.

When I reflect on it, I feel like it's only part of a more beautiful future. Where now, with the appellations in cannabis, it's giving this powerful tool to wine and other forms of agriculture. It's just like when we found out that it can cure cancer, and it helps with epilepsy and seizures. It's only getting more beautiful, but it is kind of funny that it needs to get worse before it gets better. We're not out of the woods yet. But I do see this beautiful, beautiful unveiling of the truth and exposure of best practices and kind people. And at the end of the day, it's high quality, unique products that the market's going to want. So I'm actually quite hopeful that the markets of the world, and especially the ones interested in cannabis, that once they really unveil, with the Internet and other developments, I hope we have a much more educated, much more health conscious, much more safe consumer base. And there, I know we can shine, once they realize where the products come from, how they were cultivated—

literally, what they're eating, what they're drinking, what they're putting into their bodies, I see a better future. I see a bright and better future.

02-03:22:25

Holmes: In looking at how things have changed, particularly thinking, even from your earliest days to now, what continues to make Big Sur a unique and special place, particularly for cannabis cultivation?

02-03:22:38

Bates: The people. Everyone else on earth would say oh no, it's the land. I mean this is an OS system, right? Big Sur mac systems, and all they show is the land. And everybody is like I go to Big Sur because of the land. No, it's the people. No matter how much they try to dumb it down or sell it out—right now the billionaires are squeezing out the millionaires, but still, the people survive—against all odds. Unimaginable odds. Pure bankruptcies, all sorts of death, loss of everything—they survive. Some of the hardest people on the earth—they're kind people. They have a lot of love. They're open, they care, they're very sensitive. So to me, it's the people.

02-03:23:27

Holmes: What kind of legacy, if we think of particularly how cannabis has changed and evolved—and again, as we've documented in these oral histories how much you've been involved in those and taken part in that development and evolution—what would you like people to remember about the heritage, and particularly if we think of Big Sur Holy Weed?

02-03:23:49

Bates: Well, once again, we come to the people. I want people to also remember that the big industry that they see now was built on the backs of us—even to this very day. One part we didn't get too deep into the woods about though is during this legalization, as I was doing the advocacy, I was also consulting with very big, kind, amazing agriculture corporations. And I've been in most of these greenhouses. And all the guys that built the technology, all the guys that do—the electricians, the plumbers, the laborers—those are us. Those are still the legacy people within there. And they created it, not some fancy label, not some far-off money—whoever it is. And to always remember that somebody that claims to be the most badass grower of marijuana on earth, most definitely is *not*.

02-03:24:48

Holmes: Well, Oliver, I thank you so much for your time. It's been so wonderful to spend these two days with you to capture the history of this important region as well as your own story. Any final thoughts before we sign off?

02-03:25:00

Bates: Just thank you. A final thought is that the work you're doing, the documenting of the histories, documenting of the information, and then making that available to people is probably some of the most important work that's going

on in the cannabis industry. And really—thank *you*. Thank you, Todd very much.

02-03:25:22
Holmes: Oh, my pleasure to be a part. All right, thanks so much.

02-03:25:25
Bates: Thank you.

[End of Interview]