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search

advanced search



CC Home

go!

[backissues](#) -> [CC60](#) -> **Aussie Bush Paradise 2**

by Joe Walsh (13 Apr, 2006)

Overgrow BIG or go home!

Welcome back! After the first season had been finished (as [covered in CC #58](#)) my father and I thought that with preparation, the next year could be really enormous. How could it not be? We had the money, time and experience, so there was no reason why we couldn't pull off a 2,000-pound season, and go for the big one ton!

Season Two

Using half a dozen different names, my partner and I ordered seeds from the late, great, lamented Emery Seeds Company in Canada, and had them sent to different safe addresses. The seed catalogue was pored over with fine attention paid to traits such as tolerance to mold, outdoor acclimatization, and potential for high yields. We also got a few varieties we were curious about, and ended up with \$5000 worth of seeds being sent over. Every single seed arrived on time, and germinated.

We decided that the work would be too great





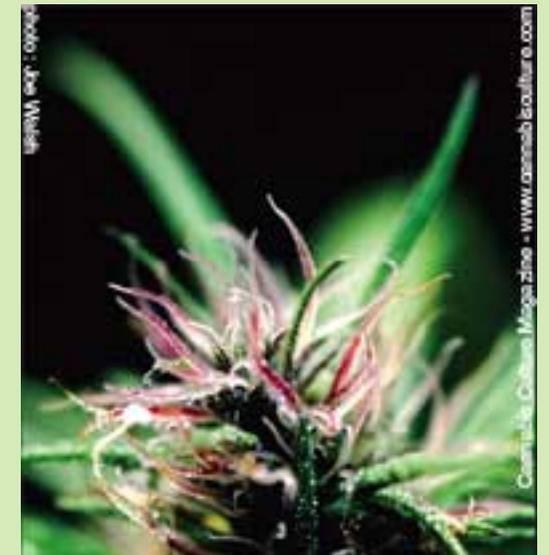
with two separate patches, so concentrated on growing in one location. First we needed a stable and reliable water supply, so we hauled in a piston pump and two kilometers (6,500 feet) of 1.5-inch water pipes along with it. The wider water pipes fed into one-inch flexible pipe with half-inch sprinklers attached, and when it was set up it really worked fine.



The seeds were germinated as described on the packets, individually planted in seedling pots, labeled and grouped by variety. As we started planting the little seedlings in September and early October, it was smack in the middle of a serious drought – what we now refer to as the ‘Big Dry’. There was no rain from April until the beginning of December, and as the months wore on the creek dried up to a point where we couldn’t pump from it. This was a serious problem, and there was nothing to do apart from pray! As a result the yield from season two suffered tremendously. We came out with a total of 100 pounds, just \$200,000 Australian dollars between us. You might think that would have been enough but it wasn’t. It put an enormous amount of strain on things but fortunately we had interbred a couple of really nice plants to get seed for the next season.

Despite the pitiful return on round two (as compared to the very successful first crop) I did learn some useful things. Our security was excellent and our patch was not discovered, much in part because we used 4-stroke motorcycles to get to the patch. In Australian marijuana growing regions, people on motorcycles are common and blend in naturally. Wearing a helmet and riding clothes obscures your identity, while in a car you can be seen and observed.

Things were okay for myself at that time, as I had low overhead, just paying rent, food and fuel. My father had a wife and five other kids, so it was very tight for him. I ended up giving him most of the money from my share. \$70,000 in fact, leaving me \$30,000 to live on ’til the next season.





May - black from the cold

Season Three

Season three rolled around and there was finally some rain, putting moisture back in the soil. We had realized by now that individually planting specific strains as clones was a waste of time. At the end of the previous season everything got jumbled while drying (and very much so during the manicuring) so we decided to just sow seeds into the soil and be diligent at de-maleing as they came up.

The season progressed well. We had planted as much as we could; well over 25,000 plants over 900 square meters. Although it was divided among a main patch and smaller ones nearby, if you put it together, that's one big patch – half a mile on each side! Over the four seasons we grew in that area, we pulled in an average of six ounces per square meter, excepting the second season, the 'Big Dry'. Once males were all pulled out, there were 10,000 to 12,000 females. Dad helped, but it was mostly me who put plants in the ground non-stop until January. My father had not been working the patch much in recent months, as some property had come available to him at the right price, so his attention was largely elsewhere. It basically came down to me to run the crop, so I did a 90% share of the work.

In the first week of January, I had domestic girlfriend

problems. It had been my routine to be at work in the patch for two weeks then return home. Almost always there was a huge mess in the house: the beer would be all gone, the petty cash spent, and party remains strewn all over the house. I would spend the next couple of days



cleaning it all up, and then I'd go back to work.

I was paying all the bills on this place, so when I returned home to the same mess week after week, I got very upset. I told her if she didn't clean up her act, then we were over as a couple. She reacted badly to this; when her party-hearty friends found out that I had offered this ultimatum they threatened to tell the cops about my profession if I didn't let her do what she wanted. It took me five days at home to sort out the mess and ensure that her "friends" did not snitch. I had barely got the dodgy girlfriend situation cooled when I got an urgent phone call from Dad telling me to drop everything and get out to the patch, as there was an emergency. I made my way out as fast as possible, and what greeted me was truly terrible.

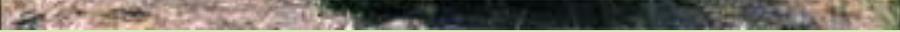


Watering



In the week that I had been away a heat wave hit, and simultaneously every male had decided to show. Many had spilled their pollen and everything was covered in a yellow haze! We got right into pulling every one of those bastards out, and it took a full week of the two of us pulling for 12 hours a day to get them all. Tragically, the damage had already been done. As the season progressed all we saw were seeds, seeds and more seeds. It was enough to make you cry! My father was furious, from my arrival that January day to the end of the harvest. "Why didn't I have control of the situation?" he raged. I told him about the domestic drama, and reminded him he hadn't been out there for over three weeks. Alas, it was my responsibility, and with a heavy heart I worked in the patch for the rest of the season.

After the disastrous early showing of males though, the season progressed well. I had brought a large 5.5 kilovolt



Patch #2 - yielded 200 lbs

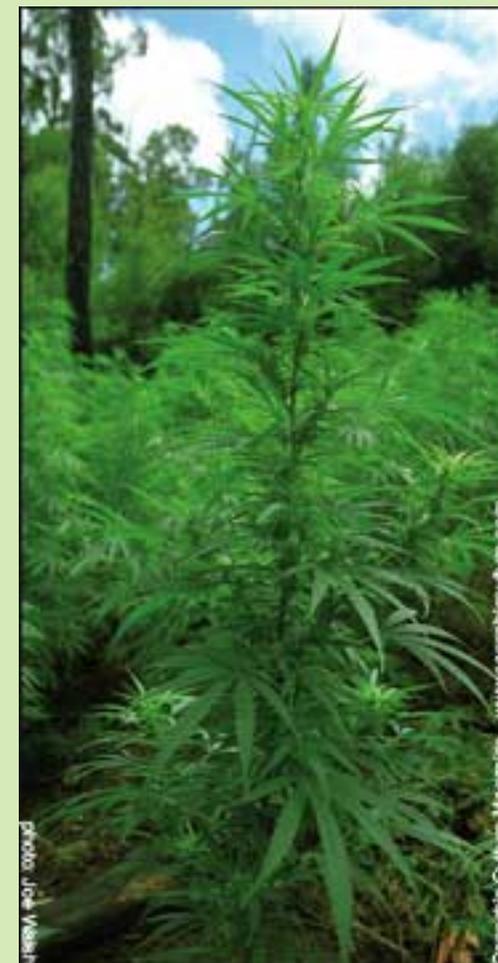
wrong time and lost about ten pounds due to mold. So I built the drying shed and installed the generator to avoid that trouble.

We had kept about 650 pounds of crumble (shake) from the previous year's harvest in the hope of turning it into 'isomerized acetate oil', as described in the book Cannabis Alchemy (D. Gold). This kind of clean weed oil has not been available in Australia for many, many years, so we set up an outdoor lab and started accumulating the chemicals needed to make isomerized acetated oil.

Isomerization was easy and we could do it well, especially being in an outdoor lab, which provided necessary ventilation to prevent explosions. Getting the acetic acid ($C_2H_4O_2$) and fuming sulfuric acid ($H_2SO_4 \cdot SO_3$) needed to make the final product was difficult though. Australia is not the same as North America where manuals are written. First of all, the common names are different, and if you walk into a chemical wholesaler and you don't know what you are talking about, then it is a short amount of time before the cops are calling.

Desperation set in. We needed to make money, and we had the crumble. So we read up on the chemical jargon required to place orders, and planned to use false names, false addresses, false phone numbers, and cash as payment. The acid had to be ordered from Europe and arrive via ship as it was too dangerous to send by air, and therefore it would take at least three months to arrive. That was too long for us, so we decided to use the 99% acid (H_2SO_4) available locally. The problem is that the fuming acid actually had a different chemical structure to normal acid, which is not without impurities.

generator and built a shed on-site for the pot to be dried in, because in the first season we had a wet spell at just the



January



We trolled and trolled the net finding half a dozen different ways to make acetic acid (after all, it is just concentrated vinegar, right?) and they all involved



February

either chemicals difficult to get hold of, or really risky methods. Eventually we found a doable recipe, checked out through a few different sources. As a matter of curiosity, could have made 44 pounds of TNT in the lab with the materials we had, and TNT is actually considerably easier to make than the properly done oil.

We finally did the alchemist's job and produced acetated isomerized oil. I left it black to gauge the strength and see the reaction of my customers when I took it to my main outlet. On the first test it was strong, but certainly not anything to write home about. So we took it out to the community but much to our disappointment they said the same. We figured that the fault must be in the fact that we didn't use the fuming sulfuric acid as directed. This was a real blow financially, as we were hoping that this would give us some highly needed funds.

I had taken an amount down to a good customer who had expressed an interest

over the phone. When I gave it to him he put some samples out and the reaction that came back was very interesting. It seemed the people who regularly smoked large amounts of hydro (indoor) pot and took speed/coke/pills reported almost no effect, whilst the people who just socially smoked weed reported that it was super strong and was different to other oil they had tried. Unfortunately, the customer couldn't justify outlaying money on something that only some customers liked, as it could not guarantee his return in the foreseeable future. As I was in a hard spot, he lent me \$10,000 till my crop came in. This loan really saved us, as we were up against the wall at this stage.



Kitchen

Later I had an idea that if we could combine DMT with the weed oil then maybe it would create an interesting high. However, this is not the type of thing you want to put out onto the street and have unsuspecting people smoking; there would be no end to the problems! DMT is extracted from the commonly found acacia tree bark. The idea of the DMT-oil came to me as it is readily available in the Australian bush and easy to obtain, but the consequences were fairly unknown so that idea died there.



Television & Fridge

As season three came to an end it was painfully obvious that there was going to be a lot of seed in the crop. Across Australia in 2004, a bumper crop came in with everyone pulling off big loads. Finally our crop was ready for harvesting. I ended up in doing most of the work myself, but with the drying shed on site, life was made considerably easier. I had constructed the shed at 6.5 meters long by three meters wide; two meters high and covered in builder's concrete plastic, which kept it airtight. Inside were six strands of hi-tensile fencing wire running the length of the shed, from which the pot would hang while drying. When fully packed the shed could hold 1,100 pounds of wet pot at a time.

Near the drying shed was the generator shed, built underground to keep the noise to a minimum. Connecting the two sheds were two lengths of 300-millimeter air conditioning ducts and electrical cables. Inside the shed were three twin 36-watt fluorescent light fittings, two industrial circulating fans, four small circulating fans, and a dehumidifier. At the ends of the ducts were fans; one pushing air from the drying shed to the generator shed, the other drawing dry heated air from the generator shed into the drying shed. That generator was very hot, so this was a perfect exchange of cool moist air converted into warm dry air on the return. In the middle of a wet spell we dried 1,100 pounds of wet pot in the bush in four days, perfectly.

For fuel we had 1,000 liters of petrol on hand at all times, as the 5.5kva generator used 40 liters each 24-hour period. To do this, we set up an intermediate depot where we stored five 200-liter fuel drums. Late in the evening we would pull up on the road in a pick-up truck (called a 'Ute' here in Australia) with 400 liters of fuel on board, then run 3/4-inch poly pipe down through the bush and siphon into the drums using walkie-talkies for communication. This would take at least an hour, and the whole time we were nervous, on tenterhooks, because it would be disaster if someone drove by. From the five-drum depot we would siphon down to the 'house' for the generators so after three trips there would be 1,000 liters of fuel available in case a big spell of wet weather came around. Around here, when clouds roll in, the mountains trap them and they stack quickly, staying for long periods of time.



The Lab



Radio and Command Centre

The Compound

In the bush I ended up building a house, drying shed, underground storage shed, the oil lab, a tool shed, a pump house, and a generator shed.

I started with the house. That took about three months to build. The area chosen was free of trees that could fall or drop branches. The ground was flat; close to the creek but not compromised by possible flooding. The house consisted of a pole frame with a combination of timber logs and black plastic/tarpaulins making the walls and the roof. To this day it stands – but it won't be for long as a

fire will go through the place, or a tree will fall onto it. However, it has stood for three years so far. As my first solo

effort, I take pride in it, even though it is as ugly as hell.

A table and two beds were elevated off the ground. I carried in a gas fridge, a gas burner, heavy-duty batteries and some fluorescent lights (both 12 volt and 240 volt). I also had a TV, DVD player, two-way radio, broadband scanner, conventional radio, and cell phone! I also had a little 800-watt generator. I could watch the evening news, put a movie on, cook dinner and drink a cool beer! The fridge was a real killer to get in there; it took me a week to bring the bugger in. It was big and very heavy, and moving it up those hills really put the pressure on – but once it was in the house, it was worth its weight in gold. A 20-pound Liquid Propane Gas (LPG) cylinder would last exactly a month going 24/7. The generator, going for an average of three hours per night, would consume twenty liters every two weeks. My ability to monitor the radio waves really did away with a lot of paranoia. When a helicopter went over I could listen to the pilot talk to whomever he worked for. When the bush fires came it saved my ass knowing the locations of the fires, and where the fire brigade was working. I had a detailed map of the area and could track the fronts via colored pins, and it really works. One bush fire, incidentally, ran itself out only 200 meters from one of my patches!



December Morning

The generator shed was next. I needed to get rid of the enormous noise of the machines, so a pit was dug to put them underground. That pit took four days of backbreaking shoveling. The generator pit was covered with poles cut from dead trees and enclosed in thick dirt with a plastic covering, with more dirt and a camouflage net to make it invisible from the air.



The underground storage shed took seven days to construct, and in the same manner as the generator shed.



From afar

It had shelves and a central walkway access, with a set of steps to get out. The whole thing was covered with beams and dirt, plastic and more dirt, and camouflage netting over it all. I actually brought in a person who could be trusted to help me. I brought him in blindfolded in the dead of the night. He helped me for a week and we dug the biggest hole I have ever made in my life; but the work was too much for this guy. My urging to keep up with me nearly killed him, as he was overweight and I didn't stop at all. He very nearly had a heart attack! Needless to say, he was paid and never wanted to see the bush again.

After that I set to the shake/crumble oil lab. That was a real bugger, as Dad and I wanted a big area with good airflow because we'd be working with some pretty volatile chemicals. It also needed to be high up in mountains so the ambient temperature would be as low as possible; in the middle of a bush-summer it gets very hot – about 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). The lab took about a month to build, but once we finished, you would be hard-pressed to make a better one.

Water was delivered with the piston pump. It was housed in a small waterproofed and camouflaged pump house created in the side of a hill on the banks of the creek. The foot valve was discreetly routed into the source, and the piping was buried so it was out of sight in the area. When finished, you could walk by the pump house and not even know it was there. At the main house I set up two 44-gallon plastic drums on top of an old stump, with piping going to an outside tap and into a sink inside. To get hot water I just boiled a kettle. And in the bush... who needs a shower?



When the pump was turned on the two drums would fill in ten minutes; it would take me three weeks to use all the water. After diverting the water from the house it would go to the patch. One tank of fuel would last eight hours of watering. It took three nights to water all the patches. In total, I had seven different patches each season, connected by the watering system. It took a lot of work to lay that pipe!

Looking closer

The tool shed was last, and I managed to get most of the 'furniture' from the living quarters, which really made it feel like a home. The old man used to joke that it was better than home, as the wife had no idea where it was and he could actually relax without her nagging at him to do something. In some ways, it was great to be working out there with my father, as we really got to know each other and we worked well together. We sorted out some long-standing issues and generally became a lot closer than we had ever been before.



Problems arise

The troubles really only surfaced at the end of the third season. We harvested 200 pounds of pot (after removing the seeds), leaving us with 220 pounds of seed!



The reason things got a little sticky was we had decided that to grow pot in a proper commercial way we needed to have road access to the patch. That meant we needed to buy property. It needed to be of big enough size that no one would realize what was happening; and had to look legit. That meant big size and remote location, and the property had to be able to generate an honest income. Thankfully, we found a perfect place. There was a hidden valley up the back, and the front was full of cattle. Perfect... except for the price tag of \$250,000 Australian. Dad already owed me \$70,000 that I had given him to secure the house he was then living in, which had actually appreciated in value by 75%. By doing that, I had left myself very short and only just made it through 'til the beginning of what would be the seed-ridden third season.



The crop from that fateful harvest was all finally bagged and ready to



be manicured, and Dad was picking up the last of it from the forest. After we had finished loading the pot into the Ute he said, “I’m going to need all of the product.” I said “It’s alright, I don’t want any of your share” and he responded “No, I’m going to need all of it”. And what about me, I asked. “You’ll just have to get by until next year somehow.” His rationale was that I was just a single guy, he needed it to buy property, and he had a wife and five kids to look after. I pointed out that if I gave him the majority of the harvest, then how would I be able to get ahead? I already had nothing due to giving him most of everything the previous year! He responded that as the crop was seedy, “there will be a very low price received for the stuff and it’s your fault it happened!”

It was tough! I was upset by this news – actually I saw red. I actually knocked the thumb break off my 9mm and nearly pulled. I was very, very angry; I realized that he had been using me for his own gains. So there were two options. Reclaim what was mine, or walk. To reclaim it would mean to kill him, as he would not give it to me.



So I chose to walk. I took 20 pounds and left. I cleaned it up and left the country backpacking. The twenty pounds was sold for \$18,000, less than a wage for a years’ work! So I traveled, trying to put it behind me. Whenever I stopped to think about it, my blood would boil with anger. There I was, having done all the work, now living like a bum going from job to job, country to country.

In November of 2004, I received an email from my father, saying to call home. I called and he informed me that in winter (which is in June/July in Australia) he had thrown several thousand seeds into the old patch, and he had recently gone back to see – they were very happy indeed. If I got my ass over there I could have that patch. He had secured the property we wanted with the last years’ proceeds, was growing a mega patch of his own, and had no time to take care of the old site as well. As he had thrown





Hermaphrodite

in the seed, he said I could keep the first 100 pounds and then anything over that would be split 50/50 with him. We had brought in 200 pounds the last time, so I figured this should net me with at least 150 pounds.

I was there within three days. I stayed at his place overnight, then he dropped me off at the patch. He was right about the plants; there were 26,000 in all, growing very happily. I set to work straight away, thinning and pulling out the little males, looking for the telltale balls that appear at the intersection of the stem and shoot before the males actually flower.

For two months I never left the patch. In January, the old man invited me to his new property and I was greeted by the biggest series of patches I have ever seen. They were huge, all well over an acre in size. About 100,000 plants! But he had the same “old” problem with his eyes, meaning the males were beginning to show and Dad was only seeing and ripping them out, almost late. I have found in the humid climate where I grew the pollen didn’t really travel, but it was super dry where the old man was and the pollen would definitely spread. I expressed alarm that if he didn’t get on top of it, it didn’t matter how much he had – it would be full of seed. He said that I didn’t have to worry, because his kids would help him; they had great eyes and could do the job just fine.



A male plant

The kids did work hard but they were teenagers nonetheless. Pulling out male cannabis plants on a 35 degree Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) day is painful on the hands and arms. The stalks have rough surfaces and cut tiny little abrasions in the skin. As you continue to work with these scratches and cuts, the sweat gets in and it hurts, big time. The kids couldn’t work many hours like that, so I started helping. The plants were getting to be eight to ten

feet tall! I helped as much as I could, but my own stuff also needed to be taken care of.

The teens managed to miss a dozen big males in the thousands of plants, and so eventually all were heavily seeded. I certainly wanted no repeat of the seedy year in my patch! By diligently watching my own patch for males, there were none to survive to blow pollen. Pure Sensimilla!



Mid-April

Dad and the kids had dry conditions so the plants were cured with no worries about mold, though it was painfully obvious the crop was full of seed. The sheer volume made sure that no matter what price he got for it, he would be very well off – especially if he moved most of it when the commercial supply went dry, starting December (eight months from then). We guesstimated that there was easily a thousand pounds – at least \$1,000,000 Australian!

When he asked me how much I thought I had in my patch, I answered truthfully, “around 300 pounds” and he said, “don’t forget to put aside my hundred”. I was expecting this as we had made an agreement, so I suggested that I couldn’t forget the fact that he took my share of the last years’ crop, and the \$70,000 owed from the season before that. I thought that from his point of view it was a great deal. He did not.

“How dare you try to rip me of what’s mine fair and square,” he said heatedly. It followed along the line of ‘he had done everything for me’ and what do I do but ‘try to swindle him’. He insisted I had to pay him what was his. As for the previous years, it was me that ‘had screwed up the third season’ so I had to pay, according to him.

Well, I had been taking photos of all the patches as they grew and he had let me do this, with concern that I not capture any identifying landmarks. I assured him that I wouldn’t, as it would also land me in trouble. So during our dispute about the money, he demanded I give him the hundreds of photos, saying that he could no longer trust me, and the pictures were his. I said that as he had given me permission to take the photos, they were mine and there was no way I would give them up. I gave him his pot and said I would never work with him again.

Responsibilities

To this day my father holds me responsible for the failed season. He claimed he couldn't understand why I wasn't happy with my season two and three sacrifices for him, and because I'm his son I ought to do as he says without question.

So he got the crop portions as he saw fit. But the photographs I regard as mine. To this day my father has disowned me for keeping my photos of the four years in the bush. Sadly, my brothers and sisters will grow up not knowing that they have a big brother who really wants to have a relationship with them. There's bad blood between Dad and I, because we each feel let down or ripped off by the other party.



Looking for lunch

Even though I made a lot from the growing, I have also given a lot back to the community. I'm aware how lucky I am to be able to do this. I regularly give financial help to people I know who are having difficulty. I made donations to the local people in Nimbin who suffer from various diseases and rely on charity. (Editor's note: I verified several of the claims made in this regard of charitable giving) I fully realize I made a profit from something that has value only because of prohibition, and in light of this I pay my dues in various ways. I actively support local businesses that, due to their size, need to charge more for goods or services. I don't mind paying extra as it keeps the locals alive. I help mates as much as possible with either cash or pot.



For manicuring my crop I spent \$25,000. To get it done in a safe and speedy manner I rented a house for three months, then fully furnished it for up to eight people to live



March-April

there full time. Then I had to recruit the manicurists. This was actually easier said than done, as I wanted to get people to stay for at least four days at a time. Finally I found a total of fifteen reliable and quick manicurists. It took a total of four weeks to get all of it done! I paid for everyone's food, drink, smoke and any other desires while they were working for me. As a result I had a really good team of people who worked hard and kept their mouths closed, so we all ended up with what we wanted. There were three guys desperate for money; at the end of the job they each walked away with around \$4000 cash,

enabling them to pay their bills and buy what they needed.

As well as cash, I gave everyone generous amounts of kif and small buds, amounting to about \$10,000 worth of weed. They are all doing well now, as they have reinvested their money to stay ahead. Although it cost a lot for me it kept everyone happy. It's better to pay someone well to keep them happy than to underpay them and have them feeling ripped off – who knows what could happen! My hope is that in writing this story you can see it's possible to make a decent living from weed. It is hard, unpredictable work fraught with risks and will not necessarily give you what you want or need. I found it difficult to trust people to be reasonable and to follow through on commitments. I am more cynical now than I was before growing.

I am aware that I may have offended some people by my methods and things that I may have done, but for that I make no apologies. I am not trying to gloss over things to make them seem better than they really are. This is life and the trade. I never poisoned pot with any sprays, I never under-weighted deals, I never lied to or scammed anyone (except the government). At the end of the day, I must be the one who can sleep at night.

The best thing I can take away from my four years in the bush is that I was able to spend wonderful hours honing my photography skills. I hope you enjoy my pictures. There are thousands in my collection now, and as the months go by you may see more of them in Cannabis Culture or even in Ed Rosenthal's calendar projects. I hope to put together a book about my life in the bush as a cannabis grower. I certainly want these images to be seen

and my story to be heard.



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