

# Cannabis Healed My Cancer

By Michelle Aldrich

*Editor’s note: Michelle Aldrich, 66, has been working for marijuana legalization —which she defines as “the right to grow it for free in your backyard” — for most of her life. She and her husband Michael live in a comfortable old apartment near the San Francisco Marina which they moved into 40 years ago. The following is adapted from a talk Michelle gave in July to the Women’s Visionary Congress.*

I had smoked cannabis since 1967 but early in 2011 I kept saying I could not get high. I was smoking a lot. I now believe that THC was going to the tumor and lymph nodes, which is why the cancer did not spread more than it had.

On November 15, 2011, I was supposed to have lunch with Diane Fornbacher from the NORML Women’s Alliance. I was too sick to go. I felt like I had the flu.

That week I got a call from Linda Ward, who is now my therapist. I had been looking for a new therapist since 2009, when I got off all the meds that I had been taking for 20 years for depression —Prozac, Lamictal, and Trazadone. Rick Doblin [director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies] found Linda for me just when I really needed to talk to someone. The start of synchronicity.

I felt well enough to go see the doctor on November 22. It was my first visit with a physician’s assistant named Sally Holland. The first thing I told her was that I smoked marijuana. She asked if I vaporized? I told her I didn’t. Then I said my husband and I got the lifetime achievement award from *High Times* Magazine last June. Her response was that her brother was the general counsel for *High Times*. I knew at that point that Sally and I would get along and I could trust her and didn’t have to educate her about cannabis. Lovely...

Sally said that I had bronchitis, which I usually get at least once a year. She asked when was the last time I had a chest x-ray. I said a long time. She sent me for a chest x-ray and gave me antibiotics. The next day Sally called to tell me I had pneumonia.

I saw Sally again on November 30 for a follow-up. I was still sick and was given more antibiotics. Sally informed me that the x-ray showed a growth on my right lung, which would need to be checked out. My first response was “cut it out” if it was so small. I wanted to be aggressive. I saw Sally again on December 9. She sent me for lab work and said the doctor wanted to see me.

On December 21, I saw Gary Feldman, MD, my primary care physician, who gave me a thorough workup. I told Gary about the heat I had felt in the middle of my chest for almost a year. The tumor and lymph nodes were right on my heart chakra. He sent me for a CT scan on December 23.

The CT scan showed that the tumor on my lung measured 23 x 28 millimeters.

[25.4 millimeters = one inch.] There was also a growth on my left kidney.

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, I had another CT scan to evaluate the growth they had found on my kidney.

On January 5<sup>th</sup> I had an echocardiogram, a procedure using ultrasound to show a two-dimensional picture of the heart.

On January 6<sup>th</sup> I had a CT fine-needle aspiration biopsy of the lung. Tissue was taken for analysis in a lab.

The results of the biopsy were supposed to be available on the ninth. They weren’t.

I saw the kidney doctor on January 11, and he said he thought the growth was a cyst and was not related to the growth on the right lung. This was seemingly good news.

On January 12<sup>th</sup> I got a call from Dr. Gary Feldman. He said it was cancer on the right lung. It was “poorly differentiated non-small cell adenocarcinoma.” He referred me to an oncologist, Dr. Ari Baron at California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC).

I was fortunate to get on MediCare when I turned 65.

I decided immediately to seek support from my network of friends in the medical cannabis community. I announced my diagnosis on Facebook.

I called Clint Werner, who had recently released his book *Marijuana Gateway to Health: How Cannabis Protects Us from Cancer and Alzheimers Disease*. Clint, being a macrobiotic chef, told me to avoid sugar since “sugar feeds cancer. Avoid red meats and processed foods, no dairy and no wheat. Eat lots of fish, especially salmon.”

I needed to change my eating habits. I had already avoided wheat for years — now, more restrictions.

Early that evening Dr. Donald Abrams called. A friend for some 20 years, Abrams is chief of Hematology and Oncology at San Francisco General Hospital. I told him that Ari Baron would be my oncologist. Dr. Abrams recalled that when Dr. Baron was a resident, he had taught him how to tie a bow tie.

Dr. Abrams recommended that I add supplements: 3,000 milligrams of Vitamin D, two Ultimate Omega fish oil capsules, and two 1,000 milligram Stamets 7 mushrooms to increase my immune system. He wanted to be kept up to date and offered his help throughout the oncoming struggle.

Dr. Abrams had been working closely with Andrew Weil, MD, the founder and program director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, Tucson. Dr. Weil called me on Sunday. He offered sympathy and support, and also asked to be kept up to date on my condition. I have known him as Andy for 40 years. He was a Trustee of the Fitz Hugh Ludlow Memorial Library; Mike and I had been on the board.

And so I had my Dream Team of doctors. On the morning of January 17th I emailed



MICHELLE ALDRICH WITH LINDA WARD...

Jeannie Herer — Jack’s widow — to tell her about my situation. Then I went to see Dr. Baron for the first time. He wanted me to undergo more tests to determine the stage of the cancer. He referred me to Dr. Peter Anastassiou of CPMC, who would be my surgeon.

I saw Dr. Anastassiou and found out he was the doctor who had operated on Jack Herer, when he first needed heart surgery. He was also a friend of Dr. Tom O’Connell and had taken over his practice. More synchronicity.

When I got home Jeannie Herer phoned to say that I should do the “Rick Simpson oil” — a highly concentrated cannabis extract that, taken at high doses, has reportedly had an anti-cancer effect. I had read about it but didn’t know where to get it or how to take it or —the biggest question of all— if it would work. Jeannie told me to call Valerie Corral from WAMM.

I talked to Valerie the next day and she brought me the first batch of what she calls “Milagro Oil” to a California NORML board meeting on January 21<sup>st</sup>.

On January 19<sup>th</sup> I met Dr. Charles McDonald, the head of the Pulmonary Function Lab at CPMC, who would be my pulmonologist. Michael and I supplied him with several research studies on smoking cannabis and lung function, since he would be doing an inservice training on the subject for the hospital staff. He scheduled me for a pulmonary function test and he would be doing the bronchoscopic ultrasound, which would tell us how far advanced the cancer was. He would focus on the lymph nodes.

I had the pulmonary function test on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Dr. Anastassiou would not do surgery until he knew that the function test was satisfactory. It was.

*Either the PET scan showed a better picture or the tumor was growing.*

After the January 24<sup>th</sup> PET scan, the tumor measured 30x31mm. Either the PET scan showed a better picture or the tumor was growing. The PET scan shows inflammation in the body. It lights up the parts where the inflammation is. The tumor, the lymph nodes and the colon lit up. So I had to have a colonoscopy.

McDonald did the endobronchoscopic ultrasound fine-needle aspiration biopsy on January 25<sup>th</sup> to finish determining the stage of the tumor. He said the lymph nodes were “big.”

The final diagnosis was “Stage 3A poorly differentiated non-small cell metastatic adenocarcinoma of the right lung with bulky lymph node involvement.” At least three of the lymph nodes were cancerous.

January 26<sup>th</sup>, I had an MRI to make sure that it had not spread to my brain.

I saw Dr. Anastassiou and he mentioned bulky lymph nodes. He said he wanted to take out two lobes of my right lung but that he could not operate until the lymph nodes had been reduced in size or sterilized. I would need chemotherapy to reduce the lymph nodes.



WITH DIANE FORNBACHER

did not work, I might be dead by Christmas.

I needed to set a new course. A course correction. I needed to change my destiny. I did not want to die of lung cancer. I would do everything possible to restore my health: diet, chemo, acupuncture, and Cannabis oil. I knew I had a wonderful support group and a dream team of doctors.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, I saw Ari Baron. He explained that they could not do radiation since the lymph nodes were so close to the trachea. Chemo was scheduled every three weeks for four sessions.

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, I had the last test, which was the colonoscopy. Three polyps were removed and it showed diverticulitis. I had now finished all the tests to prove I had cancer and where it was. Now I could start the oil and no one would be able to say “but you didn’t have cancer to begin with so how do we know it was the oil that worked?”

*The doctors had not heard about cannabis oil and its potential for healing cancer.*

We are very lucky to live in San Francisco where many doctors know about cannabis therapy and accept it as a part of the process of treating people with cancer, AIDS and other illnesses. But —except for Donald Abrams— they had not heard about cannabis oil and its potential for healing cancer. They accepted my use of the oil but were dubious that it would get rid of the cancer. I gave them the protocols from Israel. I would show them that it did work.

The “milagro oil” that WAMM provided me with was made by distilling an extract of cannabis until it contained 63% THC. Because the psychoactive effect can be so strong, Valerie recommends that patients start with a 10:1 mixture of hempseed oil (which is nutritious but not psychoactive) and milagro oil, then go to a 5:1 mix, and finally to pure oil as THC levels in the body build up. It took me 34 days before I worked up to taking the oil undiluted.

My regimen was going to be one gram of oil a day for 60 days. I could not stand the taste of it, so I put it in gel caps.

Another knowledgeable friend recommended that I use a CBD tincture if I felt anxious from the oil. I followed that advice and it did help.

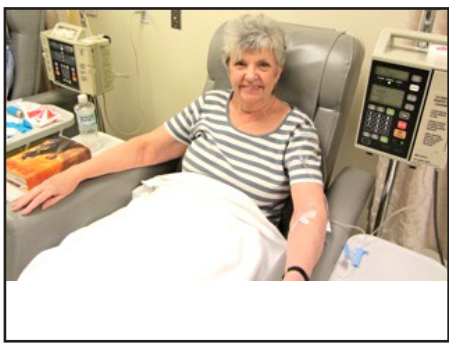
With each of the ratios, I started with five drops of milagro oil in the morning and five in the evening. I then increased the pm dose to 10 drops. I then increased the am dose to 10 drops until I finished each ratio. I finished the 10:1 oil on February 17<sup>th</sup>. I finished the 5:1 oil on March 5<sup>th</sup>. I started the pure with oil that evening and woke up on the 6<sup>th</sup> with massive dry mouth. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, I started using a half of gram twice a day until I did the last oil on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Seventy-two days of using the pure oil. I did not get high at all.

WAMM’s Full Extract Cannabis Oil was

*continued on next page*

**THE LUNGS**, with the heart, fill the cavity of the thorax (chest). They rest on an arched muscle called the diaphragm which separates the thorax from the abdomen. The trachea (windpipe) is a flexible pipe that runs down the front of the neck from the root of the tongue to the top of the breast bone, where it branches into two bronchial tubes. These tubes divide and subdivide until they form very small closed tubes which, before they terminate, bulge out to form respiratory bronchioles. The object of respiration is (1) to supply the blood with the oxygen necessary for the numerous oxidation processes constantly occurring within the body, and (2) to remove carbon dioxide and other oxidation products formed within the body. As blood passes through the lungs it comes in contact with the air, which removes impurities from it.

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AT CHEMOTHERAPY

made with from both Sativa and Indica plants (mostly Indica). It is made by taking cannabis — buds, leaves and small stems — and distilling it down in an enclosed container using Everclear as the solvent until it becomes a concentrated oil. February 2<sup>nd</sup> was the date of the first chemo. Michael stayed with me. I was given Alimta, Carboplatin, Avastin and a shot of Neulasta. I would sit in the chair for three or four hours with the drugs dripping into my veins.

It went well except that I was a little nauseous for a couple of days and constipated. The food had started tasting strange. I showed the nurses the Omicron vapor pen. They liked the no smell, no smoke and discreet delivery system. It could be used in hospitals.

During the second chemo session on February 24<sup>th</sup>, Diane Fornbacher stayed with me. She had come out from the East Coast to interview me about taking the oil and surviving lung cancer. The adverse effect this time was just constipation plus the strange taste of food.

I started acupuncture on February 28<sup>th</sup> at Quan Yin. SPARC, a San Francisco dispensary, provides low-cost acupuncture for patients through Quan Yin. It is drop-in on Tuesdays.

The third chemo session was on March 15<sup>th</sup>. My friend Freddie from the South Bay spent the time with me. The constipation was better but the food taste was getting hard to deal with. I did not feel well and it was hard to eat.

The fourth and last chemo was on April 5<sup>th</sup>. My friend Andie, who is a nurse, spent the time with me. This time I was nauseous for days and could not keep food down. My mouth started burning when I drank water. I finally used the vaporizer to help with the nausea. It worked.

At every chemo I tried to educate the other patients and the nurses about the oil and cannabis in general. I gave them a copy of Clint's book for the library.

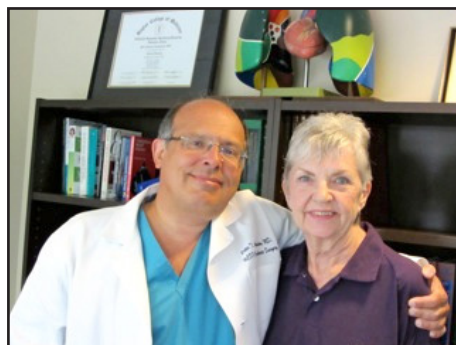
Not knowing if I was going to live or not, I started collecting Social Security. I made a will, a durable power of attorney and other medical directives.

*It sounds okay, but when you eat the same thing every day for five months, it gets very unappetizing.*

My appetite was fine until the beginning of April. But the diet I was following on the advice of Donald Abrams was unappealing: no dairy, no sugar, no wheat, no meat, chicken only once a month and only organic. I ate a lot of fish (salmon, mainly). I ate fruit for breakfast, a salad for lunch and salmon and vegetables for dinner. It sounds okay, but when you eat the same thing every day for five months, it gets very unappetizing.

#### An Adverse Effect

Something happened to my mouth after the last chemo on April 5. I stopped producing enough saliva to help the food go down, plus everything tasted horrible. On the way to the Patients Out of Time conference in Tucson, even drinking water burned my mouth. The doctors at the conference told me to take Biotene. It did not help.



WITH PETER ANASTASSIOU, MD

After I got back from Tucson, I needed to eat, so I basically threw out the diet and ate anything that I could get down my throat, which was not much. It was very important that I got all the nutrition I could so I would be ready for surgery.

It was not until the beginning of July when I went to the acupuncturist that I was able to eat again. I had been surviving on anything I could get down to my stomach (milk shakes, soups). I survived the hospital on ginger ale. I was 172 pounds when I started and now weigh 137.

I had known Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi for more than 20 years. I had seen her in early April at a political event at City Hall. I took her hands in mine and told her I had lung cancer. "Please stop the feds from taking my medicine away," I said. I could tell that she was dismayed by my news and urged me to meet with members of her staff.

On April 16<sup>th</sup> I met with members of Pelosi's office and urged that she take a stand against the federal intervention that was threatening my health, my recovery and my life. It may have helped that she could put a name and face on someone who would be helped by using cannabis. A week later she issued a press release calling for an end to the raids. It was the strongest statement she had ever made in support of medical cannabis. The Speaker of the House also got 73% of her fellow Democrats to vote "yes" on the Hinchey-Rohrabacher amendment to the appropriations bill that would defund DEA raids on state medical marijuana providers. One day it will pass.

On April 17<sup>th</sup> I had a CT scan. At 6 pm Ari Baron's nurse called to say the tumor had shrunk by 50% and the lymph nodes were significantly reduced. No new disease. The doctor, she said, was "ecstatic."

Peter Anastassiou said it was a great response to the chemo and I reminded him that I believed it was mainly from the cannabis oil. He said the key thing is the lymph nodes, which had totally regressed. He wanted to do a biopsy. If the lymph nodes were negative, he said, then we can remove the tumor. He was thinking that he might be able to remove a small section instead of removing two lobes of the right lung. I wanted to wait until I finished the oil, plus I was going to the conference in Tucson.

The pathology report from the April 17<sup>th</sup> CT scan reported "significant interval decrease in size of primary middle-lobe lung cancer with marked regression of medias-



WITH A SYRINGE OF MILAGRO OIL.



ABOUT TO UNDERGO A PET SCAN

tinal and right hilar lymphadenopathy suggesting response to therapy."

*Chemo does not touch diverticulitis... it had to be the oil that healed it.*

The CT scan of April 17<sup>th</sup> showed a few scattered diverticula were present in the colon but no evidence to suggest diverticulitis. It had disappeared. Chemo does not touch diverticulitis... it had to be the oil that healed it.

The trip to Tucson for the Patients Out of Time conference was a disaster. My mouth burned every time I drank water. I had extremely sore inner lips and mouth. I could hardly eat. I was nauseous, starving and had cramps in my intestines. I became very anxious and had several panic attacks.

I came home very depressed and just wanted to die, if I could not even eat. Linda came over when I got back and convinced me to "Not make any decisions right now, you're in an altered state from not being able to eat." Her advice saved my life and I was willing to be aggressive again.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> Ari said he didn't understand why I was still having mouth problems and did not know if it was from the chemo. We scheduled a PET scan on May 10<sup>th</sup>, which would tell me if I could have surgery or not. He said the chemo drugs were long gone from my system. Anything that happened between then and surgery on May 18<sup>th</sup> could be attributed to the oil.

On May 10<sup>th</sup> I signed on to participate in a clinical trial involving stem cells that might help shrink or kill tumors. The tumorous tissue removed from my lungs would be given to the researchers.

The report on the May 10<sup>th</sup> PET scan said "Disappearance of previously described subcarinal nodal conglomerate and the right middle lobe mass has nearly completely resolved." Dr. Anastassiou called and said "Spectacular... Active cells light up and nothing is lighting up... No tumor was visible on the PET scan."

The lymph nodes had completely shrunk and there was "virtually complete resolution of the tumor," which was pretty remarkable. In other words the cancer was gone. Peter could not say there was no active disease yet because of the high recurrence rate of lung cancer and a resection was warranted.

*We had learned a new word in Tucson —apoptosis— which means reprogramming the cancer cells to kill themselves.*

In the pre-surgery report Dr. Anastassiou wrote: "homeopathic therapies including hemp oil had putative benefit of directing apoptosis by stimulation of the cannabinoid receptors on the tumor cells." We had learned a new word in Tucson —apoptosis— which means reprogramming the cancer cells to kill themselves. It's a wonderful word for a miracle.

I finished the oil on May 16<sup>th</sup> and had the surgery on May 18<sup>th</sup>. It took three hours. Dr. Anastassiou removed six lymph nodes and the (2.5cm) remains of the tumor from the right middle lobe. The residual tumor was a thin rim surrounding a necrotic core.



WITH HUSBAND MIKE

What was left of the tumor turned out to be dead tissue. He used VAT (video-assisted thoracoscopy), a surgical procedure that allows for a quicker recovery time since it is minimally invasive. But two ribs got broken during the process.

Even though the surgery went well, I was sicker than a dog. Thank goodness that I don't remember much of it. I was allergic to dilaudid. I threw up for days even after they switched me to morphine. I was released on May 23<sup>rd</sup> even though I was still nauseous. That was the wrong thing to do. The pills they gave me I could not keep down. I was back in the emergency room on Friday for four bags of fluid.

They readmitted me and the next thing I remember was them asking for permission to install a stent in my heart. They thought I was having a heart attack. I wasn't. It is called stress cardiomyopathy or Broken Heart Syndrome. They thought it was probably from all the vomiting and loss of fluid. It is reversible but it takes time. I was finally discharged on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Fourteen days in the hospital. And they sent me home with a bladder infection. So much for hospitals...

*He had never seen lung cancer totally eradicated by chemo, much less in four months.*

Dr. Anastassiou had visited me every day in the hospital. I finally asked him if he had gotten it all. He said yes, that I was now what they call NED (No evidence of disease). They use that terminology for lung cancer. Other cancers they say you are in remission. He had never seen lung cancer totally eradicated by chemo, much less in four months. I assume cannabis oil was the factor that made the difference.

It has been a long road back. The hardest part of the whole process was the restricted diet. For weeks I experienced sweats and the chills that alternated all day long. The whole month of June was spent getting my system back to functioning normally. Finally, after acupuncture treatment on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, I wanted to eat. At that point I decided to eat anything I could. This gave me enough energy to be able to walk. I started with four blocks in 10 minutes. By mid-July I was up to 12 blocks in 27 minutes. When I told my story of illness and healing at the Women's Visionary Conference on July 28 I was still weak and lacking stamina, but getting better day by day.

*continued on next page*



AT THE WOMEN'S VISIONARY CONGRESS.

**Michelle Aldrich** from previous page

Michael says that this is a magic plant. It counters cancer and if it was the flowers of a petunia plant that killed cancer it would be all over the front pages of newspapers round the world. But this is cannabis, which the government maintains there is no medical use for (no matter what the science says). I believe I have proved them wrong.

My cancer was healed by a combination of milagro oil, chemotherapy, healthy diet, acupuncture, brilliant, empathetic doctors, and loving support from many friends. I am truly blessed.

I want to thank my husband, Michael for being there through all the ups and downs of this journey. He has been

my support, my scribe, my driver, my cook and of course the love of my life.

I truly believe that if it wasn't for Valerie and the oil I would not be alive today.

Every day I read about people dying of cancer and I know I was able to heal my body of cancer. Why is this health-giving plant not available to everyone?

People should not have to go through the suffering that cancer brings. We need to get this information out to the world.

Cannabis is a healing plant and can even heal cancer if we let it.



photo by Sam Szetzer

MICHELLE WITH DONALD ABRAMS, MD, AND CLINT WERNER — charter members of her supportive "dream team."

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