

# **T**he **H**ard **C**hoice

Marijuana Cultivation in Appalachia



DANNY LEE BREEDEN

This is the story of Joe, a poor, middle-aged block mason from Appalachia who decided to try his hand at a life of crime. He wasn't cut out to be a bank robber or thief. However, when his cousin John returned to town with stories of the huge amount of money being made in the marijuana cultivation business, Joe was intrigued to say the least.

*The Hard Choice* chronicles seven years of Joe's life as he stumbles through the sometimes unglamorous world of a pot grower. Joe's story exposes the human side of this shady business. If you have ever been curious about marijuana cultivation, or wondered why any "normal" person would want to try this, then *The Hard Choice* may offer you some answers.



ISBN 1-60474-564-9



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[www.PublishAmerica.com](http://www.PublishAmerica.com)

# **The Hard Choice**

**Danny Lee Breeden**



PublishAmerica  
Baltimore

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First printing

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ISBN: 1-60474-564-9  
PUBLISHED BY PUBLISHAMERICA, LLLP  
[www.publishamerica.com](http://www.publishamerica.com)  
Baltimore

Printed in the United States of America

*This book is dedicated to the memory of my  
good friend, Don Beaver.*



## **About the Author**

Danny Breeden was born in Charleston, West Virginia in 1949. In his early twenties he worked as a guard in a maximum-security, juvenile prison in Ohio.

After thirteen months, two riots and several dozen fights with the inmates he moved to Florida looking for a more peaceful life building motels and shopping malls.

After many years of hard work, health problems forced his return to the somewhat less strenuous field of corrections. Dan spent four and a half years working at a Federal Halfway house in West Virginia. This is where he acquired his knowledge of marijuana cultivation.

When guarding Federal prisoners grew tiresome and the cold winters near unbearable, Dan again moved south. While recovering from a broken ankle he started writing to help pass the time.

Although he had no formal literary training, Dan did have the good fortune of moving next door to a patient, published author and Pulitzer Prize nominee from Kentucky who encouraged him and gave his efforts direction.

### *Acknowledgements*

*I want to thank my wife Brenda and my sons Steve and Sean for all their support. A special thank you goes to Russell Rice for his direction.*

## INTRODUCTION



Marijuana has been used throughout history by many diverse cultures. It is purported to have effects ranging from increasing creativity to possibly invoking mystical experiences. Some primitive tribes of India, Africa and South America used marijuana in their religious ceremonies. The ancient Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans also found the drug useful to help control indigestion, reduce pain and to treat muscle spasms.

Marijuana is popular today because of the mind-altering drug Tetrahydrocannabinol, or “THC” that it contains. Marijuana is believed to be second only to alcohol as the drug-of-choice for “recreational drug” users.

“Pot,” the common name for marijuana, is most often smoked in pipes or rolled in cigarette paper to make a “joint.” It can also be taken orally in beverages or foods, such as brownies. At one time the majority of our “Pot” was smuggled into the United States from other countries such as Colombia, Mexico or Jamaica.

Today, more and more of the market share of Marijuana used in this country is produced within our own borders. Professional criminals do not normally make up this new generation of “Pot growers.” More often as not they are just your average “Joe” types, who happen to be down on their luck.



## FOREWARD



The sun was warm on Joe's face as he drove the four-wheeler swiftly across the grassy pipeline trail. The fresh mountain air flowed over his body as a giant wave that cooled his sweat-soaked T-shirt.

This was what life was all about, Joe thought as he rode along, the trees, the birds, the fresh air and best of all, the freedom. He was unaware that cruising high overhead at that moment was a Drug Task Force helicopter or that his carefree ride through the woods had attracted someone's unwanted attention. But I'm getting ahead of myself; let's go back a few years to where this adventure begins.

The year was 1989. Joe and his wife Mary Beth had recently returned to Appalachia after another failed attempt to set up a permanent residence in sunny Florida. They had tried to make a living there several times. Unfortunately Joe and Mary Beth always seem to run out of money before they could get firmly established.

That's why this couple was now back north living in a cold, musty, run-down apartment. They really had little hope of things ever getting better. Joe was not getting any younger and he was in poor health for a man his age. A lifetime of hard labor had taken its toll on his body. Others around him seemed to be making it fine with hardly any effort.

Several of his old schoolmates had even gone on to college to become doctors or lawyers and what not.

These folks were doing well for themselves, with nice big homes and shiny new cars to show for their efforts.

What had all these years of hard work given Joe? He was now just an older, broken-down block mason who could only work part of the year because of bad weather. Joe owned a few old pieces of mismatched furniture and a worn out pickup truck. He had patched the thing together so many times that he was uncertain if any of the original truck still existed; hidden somewhere under all those layers of gray primer and patching compound. This junk and the few bucks he had in the bank made up the sum total of his wealth.

He couldn't remember the last new anything he had been able to buy his wife. All the clothes they now wore had already been worn by someone else. Mary Beth did almost all her shopping at yard sales and secondhand stores. She always tried to stretch what little money they had as far as she could.

Joe realized that this self-pitying attitude might cause him to start thinking seriously about a new direction for his life. One that he wouldn't let himself even consider if things had gone even a little better. Hard times can make you start to fantasize about taking any easy way out of your problems. No more working at low-paying, back breaking jobs. A bank robbery or even sticking up the corner liquor store seemed like a better choice than simply wasting away in a dead-end life with no hope.

If you got caught breaking the law you would at least then know from where your next meal would be coming. Prison food had to beat eating out of a dumpster behind some fast-food place or not eating at all. Mary Beth and Joe had not yet sunk to that level but they actually were not far from it.

Mary Beth was a good hard worker, yet her lot in life was really no better than Joe's. She worked at a little neighborhood market for five bucks an hour to help keep the household going. As usual Joe could do nothing but wait for spring to start yet another grueling, thankless season as an underpaid, nonunion block mason. He hoped this year might be better than all the others but he didn't really expect it to be. Mainly he prayed his body would just hold up to another year of punishment. If his old body gave out on him then what would they do?

Mid-winter is the most depressing time of the year and the winters here in Appalachia seem to drag on forever. The days are drab, gray, nothing happening affairs. The cold goes right to your bones as if they had been laid bare to the elements. It makes them ache, until they long for the soothing warmth of summer. It had been so long since Joe had last seen a clear blue sky that he had almost forgotten how one even looked.

Joe would often sit by his window while Mary Beth was at work and stare blankly at the cold falling snow for hours. He would be remembering his warm days on the beach with a surf rod in one hand and an ice-cold beer in the other. There his fishing and drinking would only be slightly distracted by the occasional passing of a thong clad bathing beauty. He really missed Florida. If he stared hard enough and squinted his eyes a bit he could almost make the blowing, drifting snow look to be beach sand in his mind's eye.

Unfortunately this daydreaming would often be cut short by a violent shiver caused by the chill radiating through the cheap, single-pane window. He kept putting off covering it with plastic as he had all the other windows in this dump. This one opening to the outside world was the only way he could stand the confinement of this small apartment. His mental flights out this one window was all that kept him sane. Even with these brief escapes from reality his will to go on lessened considerably with the gray dawning of each new miserable, damp, dreary day.

Once one starts feeling they haven't much good left in their life, that person can become susceptible to about any temptation that offers the slightest bit of hope. If this hope comes in the form of a slick,

smooth-talking cousin with tales of easy money and excitement, one's fate may well be sealed.

A few years earlier Joe's Cousin John and several of his buddies were nearly caught while growing marijuana on a small rented farm in a neighboring county. John's "friends" were the good old boys types that seemed to always be getting themselves into trouble. He believed that it would only be a matter of time before one, if not all, would get caught breaking the law again. If this did happen John felt strongly that his pals would make any deal with the Law that would save their own worthless necks. If it meant turning John in as their accomplice in exchange for their own freedom, then he was sure that would be their preferred course of action. Honor amongst thieves is definitely a myth.

This fear of betrayal by one of these so called "friends" led John to the decision to flee to the sunny south. Now, after a few years of hiding out and working under several assumed names, he believed enough time had passed for his safe return home. It seems we always miss the things that have become most familiar to us in our lives, even these cold, dirty mountains. Mostly though I think he was homesick for his family. It's hard being away from loved ones.

Shortly after his homecoming John paid Joe and Mary Beth a visit. He had been going around to all his relatives catching up on old times. Joe and John had always been close as children. From the worn appearance of his clothing and by the poor condition of the rusty, dilapidated old truck that he now drove it looked as if John was doing about as well as Joe. However, right now Cousin John talked a good game and at this point in his miserable life Joe really had no game plan to speak of himself.

That evening John regaled Joe and Mary Beth with tales of big money just waiting to be made. He talked for hours about the exciting world of crime and pot growing. John made it all sound easy. The way he explained it the whole thing seemed to be an uncomplicated process, even to Joe. Apparently you just throw some marijuana seeds on the ground, then come back in a few months with huge plastic trash bags and harvest a fortune. Needless to say John had left out a few important particulars.

Even though his training had left much to be desired, John did provide Joe with enough marijuana seeds to start his new pot empire. The rest of John's whirlwind "Let's Get Stinking Rich" training course consisted of telling Joe that you grew marijuana as you did tomatoes. He also stressed the importance of no one finding your plants before you harvested them. The importance of this last bit of wisdom became painfully obvious to Joe on several occasions later in his pot-growing career.

Little did he realize what adventures awaited him in the coming years. Had he known all the facts from the start it's doubtful that Joe would have taken this path down life's highway.

Unfortunately, in life, we can't always tell where we are going until we get there. Let's follow along now as Joe tells us about the many things that happened to him in those years that followed his reunion with Cousin John.



If these words have gotten your attention or piqued your interest in this strange, new journey on which Joe is about to embark you can order the paperback or download the e-book to find out where it all leads him.

*Daunte Brown*

