Obit: Robert C. Randall

August 1, 2001 By Denny Lee

Pop of Patient Pot
1948–2001

Eyes on prize: Refusing to pay street prices for the grass that alleviated his glaucoma—a discovery he made by chance while toking up with a pal—Randall grew cannabis on the sunny balcony of his Washington, DC apartment. In 1975, the police discovered the plants and arrested him; a year later, Randall's courtroom challenge—that pot had medicinal powers—led to a landmark ruling that made him the nation's first legal pot user. "Bob was, in essence, the father of the medical-marijuana movement," says R. Keith Stroup, head of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

Seed the Cause: In 1981, Randall founded the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics, one of the first groups to push for patient-pot laws (www.marijuana-as-medicine.org/alliance.htm).

Federal dealings: Soon after his 1976 victory, Randall successfully petitioned the FDA to provide him with 10 joints
a day as part of a research program. He often quipped that he never got high from the marijuana…because he smoked so much of it. In 1990, he started the Marijuana AIDS Research Service, helping some 35 HIVers get packages of pot from the feds. Former President Bush killed the program in 1992.

Lazarus days: In 1994, diagnosed with AIDS—and 22 CD4s—Randall retired from activism. Falling sick, he moved home to Sarasota, Florida with his longtime companion, Alice O'Leary, and began popping protease between tokes of pot. His health improved dramatically until last year. On June 2, he died after a series of nasty HIV-related complications.

Plant a Legacy: In 1999, Randall and O'Leary collaborated on Marijuana Rx: The Patient's Fight for Medical Pot, in which he recounted his battles against "government betrayal." Five days before he died, Randall and O'Leary wed.

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