

## Gaynell Rogers

TREEHOUSE GLOBAL  
VENTURES

as told to Lisa Gabor, BPCM Cannabis

She's a "Woman to Watch" (MJBiz), a "Top Woman of Weed" (The Green Market Report) and a force of nature who's been setting the stage for the legal cannabis industry since 2009. These days, Gaynell Rogers is focusing on funding the cannabis industry that she wants to see thrive. Here, how her life vision has taken shape and the way she's moving it forward.



THE WAY BACK TO THE AMERICAN DREAM IS WHEN PEOPLE WITH CAPITAL, AND WITH CONSCIOUSNESS, RAISE THEIR HANDS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

“ I was very vocal about not using medical cannabis when I was diagnosed with breast cancer, in 1997. I was scared to death I'd be dropped by my health plan, even though Prop 215, legalizing medical cannabis, had recently passed in California. When I was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2007, I decided to try it. Colon cancer surgery was brutal. Cannabis transformed my attitude, my hunger, my weaning off all the opioids I'd been prescribed.

My local newspaper caught wind of my cannabis story

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and published an article—how I'd grown up a Space Coast kid in Florida, from a conservative family, my dad a NASA engineer. Cannabis was hippie stuff and we didn't touch it when I was in high school or even college. A Silicon Valley talent recruiter saw the story. She'd known me from my days in marketing and publicity—promoting music greats, doing publicity for Pixar, consulting for Lucasfilm and working with lots of independent directors like Errol Morris who directed *Thin Blue Line* and David Byrne who'd done *True Stories*. So, when this recruiter found me she said, 'This gentleman, Steve DeAngelo, has a dispensary in Oakland, one of the first of six licenses in the country. It's called Harborside and he's fashioned it after a Swiss health clinic.' She said she had four people in mind for the job and he's too big of a personality, but for me...this opportunity could be huge, a chance to be part of a movement, to bury the slang and propaganda around cannabis.



For the next ten years Steve and I were great partners. That's how I had a hand in what became the first New York Times Page One story, the first (and then second) Fortune cover story and the first CNN piece. Together, we did the TV show, *Weed Wars*, for Discovery Channel and the book, *The Cannabis Manifesto*. The mandate was as much media as possible—national and international voice.

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Because we were so visible, Melinda Haag, the US Attorney for Northern California at that time started civil forfeiture proceedings against many dispensaries, including Harborside. The Department of Justice got wind of that and we ended up in all kinds of media. We took on the DOJ for at least three or four years and were in federal court many times. People were very, very surprised that Steve wanted to fight it. Eventually, in 2013, we got the case dropped. Meantime, the IRS chimed in with its 280E tax code, which was developed during the Reagan years for cocaine drug lords. The code says: You're trafficking drugs. You cannot deduct usual and normal business expenses, like rent and payroll. Seeing Steve DeAngelo on the stand in front of an IRS federal tax court judge for six and a half hours was dramatic, but when he walked out the door and I said, 'How do you feel?' He said, 'I think that's the most fun I've ever had.' Steve and Troy Dayton, who'd been at had been at Marijuana Policy Project, cofounded the ArcView Group, the private investment network, in 2010. The first meeting was in a Seattle legal firm, 12 people around the table. The thought was, banks won't work with us, the industry, as before cannabis is federally legal, so we need our own investment network to get companies off the ground.



I met my co-founders, Lori Ferrara and Lindy Snider, at an ArcView meeting. We were individual investors and had started hearing about these funds. 'I have a \$10 million dollar fund.' Or, 'I have a \$50 million dollar fund.' We looked at each other, like, why weren't we invited to participate? So, we said, If we're excluded by this boys' network, let's create our own fund. Let's focus on women and minorities and male led companies that are inclusive to women and minorities.

As an activist who sits on the local hospital board and mentors young entrepreneurs, I think the way back to the American dream is when people with capital, and with consciousness, raise their hands in their own communities to make a difference. Now, with the pandemic, there's a big opportunity to get back to the purpose the cannabis industry was originally founded on: Wellness. This plant has qualities that can change the lens through which people live their lives. Not just treating illnesses, but depression and mental illness issues. The plant is not for everyone. And I like to say that every time I speak to people new to cannabis or even just curious. It's not for everyone...but it does work for a lot of people. It takes some good guidance and good education—and that's what drives us.



GAYNELL WITH HER HUSBAND, SLIDE GUITAR HERO AND RECORD PRODUCER, ROY ROGERS

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