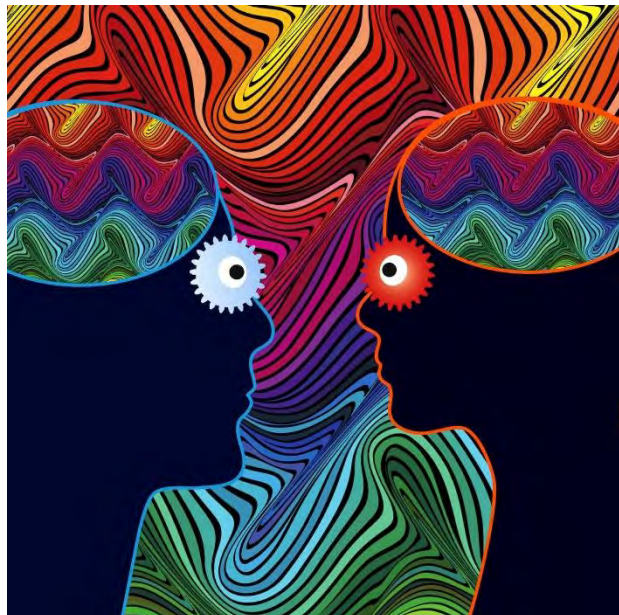


Challenges, Berkeley-brewed LSD and New Mexico

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December 31, 2022



This section might well be controversial, and for good reason. I'm ambivalent about sharing it here. Still, these things did happen, were often formative, and I'll trust my readers to make wise choices.

First things first. For a while there, I did try out some drugs. No hard stuff, injections or snorting or addictions, however it was illegal and potentially quite harmful.

When certain friends came up from the city, they'd bring along certain substances to try, in particular Berkeley-brewed LSD.

I had seen schoolmate Richard B almost die from a bad LSD trip, and heard all too many warnings; yet also read glowing accounts from Aldous Huxley and others; including Carlos Casteneda, who was later shown to be fraudulent. Supposedly he'd been

guzzling *datura*, which is poisonous enough to scramble the brain permanently!

Finally I did try LSD several times, along with peyote and its concentrate mescaline, also psilocybin. (Nobody had any MDMA, at that early date.) This was out of curiosity, to see if these things had any of the purported benefits. (As opposed to trying to escape from something in my life.)

What can I say? Nobody brought a contaminated bad batch. Nothing went terribly wrong. I lucked out.

Most people lead boring routine lives. Many people are frustrated and struggling for answers. So, damn near any change is welcome, or seems like it in the run-up. But those potent drugs contain no wisdom, guarantee no insights. Maybe it's helpful to have a different glance at life, but there are also side effects, some of which can linger for years.

I'd already learned to have intense experiences via Kundalini yoga, and what might be described as self-hypnosis, and that's with no risky chemicals. A few times and done, I'd learned and experienced all I was going to from that source.

Many of those intense experiences happened in the woods surrounding my cabin. At first I was somewhat afraid of the dark, so I made a very simple lantern out of a long candle and a punctured soup can. This seemed wimpy, so I hatched up an idea; what others (independently) now call immersive therapy.

One night I walked slowly up to my cabin, in the dark, looking all around. Whenever I saw something disturbing or scary, I paused. Stared at it, then walked slowly to the spot. Very close.

I saw some gorgeous things, like a hollow log glowing with a white luminescent fungus. But no monsters, not even any nocturnal fauna. One time and no more fear, not then and never since. I have sometimes gone jogging in the dark, quite alone in the countryside.

On a few cloudy moonless nights, the path to my cabin did get rather dark. Like, can't see your hand, waved in front of your own eyes, dark. But I'd make it up there. As usual I'd be barefoot, so I could feel the trodden path, and my arms find any encroaching branches. I had to do this alone, once, and then another time showed my sisters the way to their little cabin, in the rain.

Finally I tried this deliberately, one night, shutting my eyes tight and making the quarter-mile-or-so walk in self-imposed darkness.

Daytime allowed for different challenges. When in the city, what with television and lots of movies, I'd see action heroes and skilled monks and other characters doing all sort of amazing feats. I do not mean superpowers, rather the result of halfway-plausible training and great focus.

Could I do likewise? Only one way to find out!

Behind my grandparent's house was a disused railroad line, now a bicycle path. The elevated BART train

follows that same course. So, again barefoot, I'd walk along those tracks, to see how far I could get while balanced on one rail. My best was several blocks.

Along those city streets, in that pre-plastic-bottle era, there was plenty of broken glass. On some unbuilt stretches, you'd see massive amounts of the wicked stuff. Coming upon one such block, I decided to run. Go as fast as I could, and scan ahead, placing my feet on any available clean spot.

This I did, and without a scratch. Nowadays it's not glass so much as larger rocks, on our Kansas gravel roads, upon which many a walker has twisted an ankle. So I continue to do the same, always scanning ahead, to miss those dangerous spots.

Earlier, during family visits to Yosemite, I'd done something similar, but with an added dimension. The Merced river bisects the valley, and its flow varies all year long. Rounded granite boulders cover the bottom of certain stretches, and at times of low water they become exposed.

The water flows beneath, but along the edges, even all the way across, those boulder tops are dry. So I'd get up on one boulder, and then step to the next. Then jump to another, and finally take off running. Once in a while I'd land on a loose boulder, which shifted and threw me off balance. So I'd make a quick adjustment, and land a different way, then continue onward.

I never missed a step. My ankles, along with the rest of me, came through unscathed.

I've always loved natural swimming places, such as rivers and lakes. So, jumping in from a height. Knowing things were clear, of course, down below, then jumping or diving in. Not as far as I'd seen Ted do at Mooney Falls, but from perhaps twenty feet.

It wasn't all physical. I tried challenges that were more intellectual, such as tournament style chess. That's done with a timer, and certain formalities. Sheldon, a rated player, showed me the ropes. Turns out I could do fairly well, however I did not continue. Somehow it just wasn't appealing, maybe too formal.

All my life, every year or so, my family would visit an ice rink. I learned to skate forwards and backwards, turn and curve, but nothing all that impressive. Still, a wonderful experience and a good skill. Same thing with bowling.

We'd done snow and water skiing, not often, but another confidence builder.

I continued with yoga and meditation. A few simple poses, such as standing on my head, became possible. To be clear: steady on my head and two elbows. I'm no Cirque du Soleil gymnast!

As inferred previously, I learned to meditate. I could get to a point where my autonomous nervous system, breath and heartbeat, synched up. From there, the next step is to alter one's breathing, and hence, heartbeat also. I never pursued it that far. No big reason to, a little bit scary, and anyhow I've got the understanding that it really is possible.

Later on, as a father, I would take my son on some challenges, but nothing quite that immediately dangerous. Not to be deterred, he would join the US Marine Corps, and do some things very much more dangerous. Yet, for sure, maximally worthwhile.

As a grandparent of toddlers I'm different, quite protective. I'll let those two kids do all kinds of things, within reason, and literally be right behind them in case anything goes awry.

Parents and youth who read this can, I am sure, think of similar, yet less blatantly dangerous, physical challenges.

New Mexico

A new phase entered my life quite suddenly, at least in an external sense, however my life quest continued, beyond what I could experience in isolated Whale Gulch.

One friend-of-friend who'd stayed with us was a young lady named Terry D. We hadn't met her boyfriend, Greg M, a Hispanic man who worked as a uranium miner, however they lived together in New Mexico.

Out of the blue a letter arrived, in which she thanked us for our hospitality, and invited us to come visit them in Albuquerque. This would've been in early December. My response was immediate, a strong desire to do this. Also, the son of my Uncle Clarence of Sioux Falls lived there, practicing as a veterinarian. I wanted to visit him also.

A more responsible person, an older version of me, would've notified people (despite having no phones, and the internet not yet existing), and made certain that things would go smoothly for the Big House and goats and everything. In the event, I simply told the folks staying there that I planned to visit friends in Albuquerque, and would be leaving shortly. They expressed surprise, and how could I blame them? Still, I was determined, and never looked back.

Later I learned that things do go all right, and that eventually Doug O regained ownership of the property. I hadn't dealt with the finances at all, however assume that mom ceased making payments at some point.

I gathered my very few belongings, and some (keepsakes especially) ended up at my grandparent's and at Eric's homes. They would hold on to the stuff, through fifteen tumultuous years, until I had a stable residence to store things myself.

I left behind the Tinker toys and telescope, also the little stove and various fixtures. Later I heard that another young man moved in there. I never heard his name, but later he brought away whatever was useful. Which is good, and I'm glad someone made use of the place. Eventually, left unattended, the plastic side-wall sheets tattered, the soft oak and alder poles went rotten, and at some point the place literally collapsed. There is no picture of the cabin, since none of us had a camera back then, however in 1991 I took a photo of the ruins.

My memory is fuzzy, as to the beginning of my journey. I headed to either Sheldon's or my grandmother's house, where (within limits) I'd always been welcome. Back then, some of the local radio stations maintained Ride Boards, a very handy arrangement for travelers. Instead of hitchhiking, or picking up random strangers, folks simply posted where they were driving, or seeking a ride to.

I quickly found a businessman, a middle aged guy from the South, who was driving that way, and was happy to bring me as far as Albuquerque. I'd pitch in for gas money, though I still didn't have a driver's license, and could not help in that department.

How could I pay? Mom would give me some cash, and also, we'd gone beyond USDA Commodities food to those newfangled Food Stamps. Back then, actual coupons you'd tear out of a booklet. I don't remember, if I ever knew, who exactly was the official recipient, but I ended up with some. Back then, Food Stamps quickly become an alternative for cash, and no grocery store ever asked about such things. A pocket full of those came in quite handy.

Off we drove, chatting about mutual interests, and of course, I helped the driver stay awake. When we got about halfway, it came up that I hadn't actually told Terry that I was coming. Part this was youthful naivete, part confidence in a larger hand of fate, and partly just because it was a big adventure.

It seemed obvious when stated, like what if they were out of town, or were in the midst of some big problem? Anyhow, in that era of pay phones I did get hold of Greg and Terry, yes they were at home, and though a big surprise, yes I could stay with them.

The next day I arrived, to a humble one bedroom apartment. This was a one story house, which, I think, had been divided unto rental units. I'd never been to New Mexico, and loved it immediately.

I bought a few small items, such as a Pueblo style necklace made by a local woman, which as she suggested, I wanted to (someday) give to my soulmate. Unfortunately it got misplaced, at some point, though my friend Eric did loyally hold on to my Marklin train set, for those upcoming 15 long years.

Near Terry's house was a place I'd read about, famous in counterculture circles, known as Zome Works. They worked on solar energy devices, and other handy items, for small scale usage. They invented, and improved upon, a wide range of items. I would walk over there, and just watch, a welcome observer (though not a direct participant) for hours at a time.