CHAPTER TWELVE

Red, White, and Blue

...The time has come for you to seek new levels of reality.
Your ego and the game are about to cease.
You are about to be set face to face with the Clear Light.
You are about to experience it in reality.
In the ego-free state, wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky.
And the naked spotless intellect is like a transparent vacuum.
At this moment, know yourself and abide in that state.
(From The Psychedelic Experience by Leary, Alpert, and Metzner.)

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dialogues, scenes, and the people I had encountered on my voyage. And if there was any truth in the power of the LSD experience, my wife had to join my adventure because we wanted to stay together both emotionally and spiritually. So on a Sunday morning at 12:45 a.m., my wife Donna and I very nervously ingested 500 micrograms of LSD each in a special cup of tea brewed for the occasion.

We had prepared for this episode in my research rather assiduously. In addition to a broad examination of the voluminous literature in the LSD field, we both read the “Bible” of the movement, The Psychedelic Experience. We were reasonably aware of the potential agony or ecstasy of the trip and had a great anticipation about new vistas of thought and communication that might open up for us.

We chose our guides based on the directive in the book to “select good friends—who would not play any ego games.” We had known Arnie Stonehill and his wife Lyn for over a year. During this time we had become very close friends through their participation in a weekly psychodrama group I ran and through many long evenings of very personal and intimate discussion. Both Arnie and Lyn, prior to our friendship, had had several LSD experiences.

Ann, 18, had been living with us for over a year as our foster daughter. Our close friendship had become a loving family relationship. These three people were the guides we had chosen to be present during our trip.

Twenty minutes after ingesting the bluish-purple “high quality” LSD, we were sitting casually talking with our group in the living room of our home when the acid hit. My first sensation was that a finely wound super watch spring of enormous tensile strength was in my gut, had burst loose, and had begun to unwind.

The next set of flashes involved a feeling of sharp crystals bursting in my brain. Everything began to look like sharp-edged crystal snowflakes breaking into arrows. I was filled with awe and became panicky with fright. “Arnie, what have I done? This isn’t for me.”
I tried to maintain self-control by saying my name to myself, and I tried to stay in the room. For about ten minutes that seemed like a lifetime I fought the power of the LSD. (It was now about 1:15 a.m.) My attempts to maintain control were met with a clear feeling of melting into the floor. I literally felt my backbone, my arms and legs melting like hot lava into the floor. I clutched at my head with my now flickering hands. My head literally felt caved-in! I continued to dissolve into the floor. Waves of nausea and panic engulfed me.

On wobbly legs, with Arnie's help, I staggered into our bedroom, off the living room, and fell onto my bed. I was then alone with Arnie. I began to thrash on the bed, moaning and mumbling. "This is a place I never want to be. What's it all about? I want to be Lew Yablonsky. What's happening to Donna?"

Arnie told me that I must go with it wherever it was trying to take me. I fought a desperate and losing battle. Finally, I let go of Donna, Lew Yablonsky, and a conscious image of the room. This happened partially from the magic phrases that Arnie read to me from *The Psychedelic Experience*.

That which is called ego death is coming to you.
Remember: This is now the hour of death and rebirth.
Take advantage of this temporary death to obtain the perfect state—
Enlightenment
Concentrate on the unity of all living beings
Hold onto the clear Light
Use it to attain understanding and love.

I distinctly remember Arnie's reading and my facetious comment: "You're the first Hindu I ever heard with a Brooklyn accent."

Two swirls appeared to be available to me. One was an absolutely magnificent, brightly colored red, white, and blue swirl. I saw it somehow as the masculine swirl. The other was darker and I was convinced it was feminine. I made the decision to go with the Red, White, and Blue, and it encompassed my conscious mind as I melted into it, in a kind of free fall.

At the core of the incredibly vivid and beautifully colored red, white, and blue swirl, I could see the flicker of a shining white light. I wanted to go there because I knew that there was the center of the Universe—My Universe. I traveled through ages and eons of further swirls. The word Excalibur (a word I had never consciously thought of in my life) seared my thoughts. Excalibur became my theme.

I decided to ride on an available silver space ship. (Arnie later told me I distinctly said, "I'm in a silver space ship. Now I can walk among the stars." He also told me I spoke in the Universal Tongues of glossolalia.) Now in space, I floated with great velocity toward the light. My space ship had a brilliant red, white, and blue flag emblazoned on the front.

My voyage was consummated when I arrived at the white light. Its brilliance was astonishing—but I could look directly at it. It flickered between being a shining diamond and a light. The two finally melted together into an almost overpowering bright light. But I felt it was one that I now had in my control I felt omniscient and omnipotent!

I rose from the bed and informed Arnie that I was one of the greatest patriots of all time. I had Excalibur. I loved America. I loved my friends. I loved Synanon. And I would fight the enemies of my country—those committed to war, false super-patriotism, bigotry, and discrimination.

I kept repeating the word I had never consciously used before in my life—Excalibur!

I realized that I had let my wife go into her spiritual feminine trip and I had been to the peak of my red, white, and blue masculine swirl. I was now ready to join her in the living room. (About 2:15 a.m.)

Our living room, which is a large 25' x 25' room, contains a Persian rug and a large fireplace. The room looked remarkable. All of the colors in the room were marvelously brilliant
and alive. My wife was more beautiful than I had ever seen her in my life. Her hair was jet black and flecked in the daylight. Her eyes were very oriental. Her eyes and face were framed with startlingly beautiful diamonds and emeralds. Her body and face swayed with a magnificent smile. I could only try to tell her how much I loved her. I chanted what seemed like a thousand times, "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever known in all the worlds I have ever experienced in all my lifetimes."

We sat on the floor together staring into each other's eyes and I repeated that phrase a hundred different ways. She found me younger and more handsome than she had ever seen me.

The room became the inside of a Turkish-oriental mosque. There were no sharp corners. Everything flowed together like oriental architecture. Everything swayed with the rhythm of the Ravi Shankar sitar music that was (actually) playing. We danced each other with enormous electric sensations of touch and sight. If our friends hadn't been present at the moment, we would have made love. These feelings went on for about an hour. (3:15 a.m.)

Suddenly I stood up and declared that I had seen a flash of dawn break through our windows. I pointed out to the rooftops of Paris that shone from our window. It was a very rich and beautiful sight.

Then, for no reason, I shifted to the 1930's. I declared, "Let's all go back to the '30's." I flashed on to thoughts I had had during the opening of my trip. Thoughts about Jack Oakie, Ronnie Reagan, George Murphy, Dick Powell, and Ruby Keeler appeared visually to me. In my mind I saw the movie Vitaphone production, "42nd Street," the swishing girls in movie scenes of the '30's, and especially the college pictures. I wanted some college cheerleaders. It was all gay and magnificent. I was part of the '30's. I was a writer in the '30's.

I began to talk excitedly: "I see all those fantastic college movies with Dick Powell, Patsy Kelly, and Ronald Reagan. Then, of course, Ronnie was really a 'mensch'—he was Reagan at his best, a laughing college boy with a big letter on his sweater. How did he get cast in this new role of governor? He belongs back there singing with Dick Powell in front of the girls dorm the night before the big game." We were all happy and laughing about these thoughts.

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, my focus and mood changed over to merry old England. I said in a mock British accent, "Let's trot along" and demanded of Arnie, who began to look like a devilish circus ringmaster, that he bring me a blowzy Middle Ages "British tart." Arnie presented Ann in this role. She looked beautiful to me—but was too slim for my image at the moment.

Arnie, in the ringmaster role, smilingly produced a variety of images. At one point he parted the room curtains, pointed to his Mercedes parked outside and said, "You want to see a great car? Look!" His car seemed sparkling and magnificent.

Everyone and everything in the room looked fantastic. The colors were deep and pulsating. Donna looked unbelievably beautiful and we decided to return to our Turkish mosque. This move happened several more times. (About 4:00 a.m.)

Nothing in the room had any sharp corners. Everything was curved, carved, rich, and ecstatically beautiful. The fire in the fireplace was brilliant. All of the people were shining images. Despite this enormous high feeling, several times during the night I panicked about being out of control. Part of me resisted being high on a drug.

At several points Ann looked frightened about something. When this happened her arms and legs seemed to shrivel and she appeared like a frightened rabbit. I tried to assure her that there was nothing to fear and she then returned to her original beauty.

Donna and I began to talk very rapidly about our love for each other, our child Mitch, and our friends. At certain moments we conflicted. When this happened her face began to
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sharpen like a witch’s. I would bring her back to her beauty by changing the subject. Apparently there were areas of conflict I didn’t want to pursue.

Arnie and Lyn left about this time (about 4:15 a.m.), “now that they knew we were OK.” Ann, Donna, and I began to talk about the love we had for each other. Although I had known of my affection for Ann, I realized enormous waves of love for her as the daughter I had never had. At one point the three of us were hugging each other, crying and talking about the home we had all found with each other. It was sad, yet enormously beautiful.

All of our feelings were tremendously sharpened. It seemed rather amazing that Ann, who had taken no drugs at all, could stay with all of our feelings and emotions. She wasn’t patronizing or removed from our condition. With the exception of the hallucinatory effect of pulsating images, she was emotionally tuned-in. She apparently had what was called, in the LSD world, “a contact high.”

We looked at a picture of our 3 1/2-year-old Mitchel, and it began to pulsate with life. He was exquisite.

We went back to our bedroom, where I previously had had my spiritual trip. Donna, Ann, and I began to discuss it. We all agreed I was “true blue Lew—a sincere American patriot.” Donna looked at me and said seriously, but with joy, “I really can see it. You love this country.” I told her it was true. I was a patriot of the old school. Not a Bircher or bigot, or necessarily an admirer of Johnson’s Great Society. I was a patriot in the Tom Payne sense. I wanted to help right the wrongs that existed in the country I loved.

We looked at flowers and oranges that pulsated with life. Donna and I focused on an orange and mutually saw molecules, feruses, and electrical live pulses.

I looked around the room and became aware of the rich beauty of some of the furniture and the shabbiness of certain things. “That TV and that table are crap. Let’s get rid of them and that terrible-looking clock. The rug is awful.” I snapped to a game and a battle that Donna and I had played.

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with each other many times in reality. I played the role of a boorish, unesthetic, unmaterialistic male disinterested in the home and the beautiful things Donna had brought to it.

I “copped out” to the fact that on a deep level I shared her values and appreciation of handsome objects. I said I would never play that game with her again!

She “copped” to poking at my work, my writing, because of envy and a lack of understanding. She told me that now that she knew of my “sincere patriotism” she would no longer play “the heavy game of subtle interference.”

We began to analyze and interpret other frames and imprints in our life. The thirties was for me, we discovered, a period of romance when writers like Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald were kings. Excalibur!

Also I flashed on a scene in my childhood back in Newark, N.J., where I would wait for my mother to throw a dime wrapped in a newspaper to me from a third-story tenement window. The dime was my key to the beautiful movies of “42nd Street” and noble Dick Powell standing patriotically on the deck of a U.S. Navy ship wrapped in red, white, and blue, singing the corny, but beautiful song “Shipmates Stand Together, Don’t Give Up the Ship.”

Everything seemed corny and magnificent. We looked out from our balcony as the dawn seemed to break, about 5:30 a.m. I literally felt myself in the center of a fantastic Swiss chalet looking over the roofs of a magnificent green countryside. The view was the actual one from our balcony, but it was enhanced a thousandfold.

At dawn I could begin to feel the drug in the pit of my stomach churning as the sharp coil continued to unwind. I felt control of it. We were now about six hours into the trip and I began to feel that I could turn the acid on in order to focus on an idea or a thing at will. I felt that I knew how much was left and that now the amount was finite.

I thought about the book I was writing. And I had a distinct feeling that the carnival, newspaper, flower-child nature of the hippie scene was ludicrous and irrelevant within
the framework of the enormous power and potential use of LSD. I felt that acid was wasted on that scene and that it should be in the hands of more responsible people than the kids in the movement. I felt that some of the flower children were destroying themselves with this powerful drug. It was unfortunate because under proper conditions it could be an enormously valuable instrument.

This tripping out on that subject was interrupted by Donna entering and telling me about the resolution of her life-death conflict. She and Ann had discussed Donna's great fear of people dying.

Donna talked intensely and eloquently about not living and loving fully because of a great sadness with the fact that "all this love and devotion disappeared with death." She had flashed on a new thought or insight that "all love goes on into the mainstream of life and that it is never lost." She saw the unity of all things and her own connection to the cosmos.

We discussed the male-female delineation and agreed that men and women have a different total life trip. Women have the power of creating life, and this is an area that men will never understand. We agreed that men were more superficially creative than women. Even men intellectually endowed involved in writing books and philosophy were insignificant compared to the power a woman has of giving life through childbirth. She dropped out the idea that, as a woman, she didn't fully understand and probably never would how men could focus for long periods of time on intellectual matters.

We happily agreed to let each other do our "own things." We agreed to help rather than to hassle each other. We were now a grand and harmonious duet. (About 6:00 a.m.)

Ann went downstairs to sleep. Donna and I returned to Turkistan and made love to the exotic sounds of Ravi Shankar, the LSD, and our hearts.

About an hour later we took a bath together, ate lightly, and, high as kites, drove the five minutes from our house to the Pacific Ocean.

My car (actually a silver gray 1967 Chrysler sedan) literally felt like a silver space ship zooming over the earth's surface. We cracked up laughing when I truly noticed for the first time that my car's hood emblem was a red, white, and blue cylinder. I simply said, "Excalibur!"

We stopped for coffee at a small all-night coffee shop one block from the ocean. The scene was unbelievable.

Two hood-like motorcycle "wino" young men appeared to me as more evil than any violent delinquent I had ever seen in my life. Despite the fact that I felt they eyed my wallet and money, I had no fear of them because I felt omniscient in my understanding of their plight and problems. I felt enormous waves of compassion for them. Yet I was conscious enough to know that if we spoke to them they would put us down.

An aged woman at the counter looked like a sparrow talking to an old man two seats away. I could actually see the blood coursing through the veins on her gnarled hands. The man was very bent with age but the two of them seemed beautiful together.

We went to the beach. Here we found one of the most awe-inspiring and astonishing sights of the total experience. We both saw the sand as a tan and gold rainbow-colored mosaic of the finest oriental rug in existence. Our bare feet were caressed by the soft, exquisite feel of this grand, pulsating carpet. We looked back and forth at each other and then at the sand, laughing and smiling for what appeared to be ages of time.

We sat near the water. The ocean blended with the sky and both had every color in the rainbow. The air was clearer and crisper than we had ever known it. The fresh air was intoxicating.

This was the magic carpet. We saw the same thing simultaneously together and we blended with the unity and beauty of our world.

With this good feeling we went to visit our dear friends Chuck and Betty Dederich and Reid Kimball at Synanon, a few miles farther up the beach. They all looked marvelous.
They tuned-in to our electrical vibrations and we talked at length about our insights, feelings, and experience. Chuck taped some of our conversation.

We went home about 10:00 a.m. and sat in our back yard. An enormous, bright, very blue bluebird perched on the oleander tree in our yard. We both felt he was chirping a message to us and we tried hard to understand it. Donna talked to it. It was friendly and flew around the yard for an indeterminate time.

We went back to our bedroom to rest and couldn't sleep. Our minds were too alive and active. For literally hours we discussed many old and new facets of our relationship and our marriage. We talked into the afternoon, as our high and hallucinatory visions faded out of existence.

In the early evening we knew that we had returned to a non-drug reality. We had dinner and then went to sleep around 9:00 p.m. I had not slept as deeply as I did that night for many years. We woke up the next morning at 7:00 a.m. to what we both felt was a new and better world.

Random Notes on the Voyage

This account of my LSD experience was written a week after it happened. I have left the report of the event almost in the original form in which it was written in order to convey some of the flavor of my emotions at that time.

The experience was enormously important to me in a way that I find difficult to communicate. It did produce some insights, essentially related to the strong love my wife and I felt for each other. We further had insights into our roles as woman and man. Whether or not this increased self-knowledge will permanently affect our future behavior is an interesting question.

Another issue that I had never consciously pondered in depth was my red, white, and blue patriotism. Somehow my role as a sociologist was clarified. I could better understand how I found it absolutely vital to merge my personal self with my work. The experience also affected my viewpoint as

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a sociologist. I am more than an observer; I have to assume the responsibility of action to change the society I love.

None of these insights (and many others I see no point in discussing here) may seem enormously important on casual inspection. Yet there was a spiritual and almost mystical quality to the examination of personal problems and issues under the LSD effect that I had never felt in many other "therapeutic experiences" I had in the past.

In spite of the fact that my wife and I apparently had a profound trip, at this time (about a month later) I have no real interest in taking LSD again. I feel that the one experience gave me a considerable amount of personal and philosophical material to work through, and that it will take me a long time to digest the impact of the trip.

I have a resistance against electrically vibrating and shocking my body in this manner. I feel, too, that I can have a similar intense experience in reality without a drug by participating in group methods like psychodrama and the Synanon Game. I enormously enjoy my natural state of being without drugs. I feel I can learn more about my world in a natural state than under the artificial conditions of being high.

One of the most important characteristics about myself and my wife, which was vital to our positive experience, was the fact that we both had some structure of psychological, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual background for constructively framing the powerful experience. I can readily see how people (particularly the very young) who do not have these personality resources would have a "bummer." And I can further see how the ego-smashing dimensions of LSD could produce suicide, homicide, or psychosis in a delicately balanced person.

My personal experience, the issues just mentioned and whatever scientific research information I have absorbed, brings into focus and intensifies two viewpoints I had about LSD usage before my own acid trip. I am even more apprehensive and fearful of the destructive impact of this very powerful drug as it is taken randomly and irresponsibly by
people who do not use it in any proper frame of reference. The hippie child’s “fun and games” use of acid may produce mind and body shock waves that may be irreparable. (There are, of course, many hospitalized psychotic cases resulting from bad trips to validate this point.)

A second view of mine that is intensified is that if it is properly used (not necessarily under medically controlled experimental conditions), LSD can be a most significant tool in helping many people in a therapeutic fashion for positive personality change. One use that I think would be an immediate boon would be to give people who clearly are dying, like the very aged and people with clearly terminal diseases, access to the chemical. After a careful period of education and preparation if the person voluntarily wanted this experience, I feel it could prove beneficial. The LSD quality of tuning people into an oceanic feeling about the cosmic flux and unity of man might make their immediate lives happier.

I also see LSD as a valuable aid to various kinds of formal and informal therapeutic situations. It might help people engaged in personality change and self-exploration move faster.

I can especially see the use of LSD as an adjunct to psychodramatic therapy. A psychodrama, briefly described, involves acting out in a group with the aid of certain techniques a person’s actual core life situations. The increased focusing quality of the LSD effect might place a subject more deeply into his critical life drama and help him work it out. For example, in psychodrama with an individual who had a problem with his father, we would have someone role-play his father. In a regular psychodrama, the subject usually feels more or less that he is encountering his real father. With the adjunct use of LSD, I believe he would more intensely accept the auxiliary ego role-playing his father as his real father. It was my observation under LSD that I could almost at will (and at times did) change human forms before me into the images of people I wanted to talk to, like my brother, mother, or father.

Combining LSD with psychodrama is, of course, only one of the enormous range of possible uses of LSD within the field of therapy. Research into this and other avenues for helping people with LSD should be instituted and developed.

On the hippie scene I can more clearly understand the value of LSD use by the hippie high priests, philosophers, and some novitiates. In fact it does appear to be a vital instrument for tuning-in to the world they are seeking and trying to develop. In the light of my personal experience I can now more clearly and rationally understand the emotional and spiritual feeling states that people like Leary, Gridley, Sonny, Stan, and Gary were trying to communicate to me. I now am more aware of “where they are at” intellectually and spiritually.

In spite of my clearer and greater recognition and appreciation of the leaders’ personal trips, I am concerned about the lax manner in which the leaders assume responsibility for the way in which their followers use LSD. There are many thousands of young people following their leaders in a self-destructive way. And despite their disclaimers about being “leaders,” they are role models and responsible for thousands of youngsters who might be better off if they were tuned-out now and made a reentry into the larger society with all its faults.

On the basis of my knowledge and personal experience with LSD, it seems to me that more hip youngsters than not simply lack the emotional and intellectual framework for properly tuning-in and using the drug constructively. It is my observation that the majority of hippie youths are using the considerable power of LSD in a self-destructive way. This is unfortunate, since, with proper controls, knowledge, and intelligent use, LSD could become a very valuable vehicle for emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development.