

Gary Lincoff – In Memoria

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It was Halloween weekend, 1999. Paul Stamets had organized an end-of-the biennium mushroom gathering at Breitenbush, a hot springs retreat center in the Oregon Cascades. Mycologists and myconauts from across North America, Europe and Asia gathered in celebration of entheogenic fungi. Ken Kesey was there with his band, the Merry Pranksters, and an incarnation of his bus, "Further." The culminating event on Saturday night was a masquerade ball. Gary Lincoff came resplendent in authentic Shaman attire that he had acquired while leading a NAMA foray to Siberia years earlier. It was then that I realized that Gary had come to the ball attired as himself, a modern day Shaman.

Gary and I first met in the 1970s when he would come to Washington State and later Breitenbush, Oregon for annual entheogenic mushroom conferences. The first conference was at Millersylvania State Park near Olympia, Washington in 1976 and the last conference was about 1986 at Breitenbush. Gary always made it out West for those conferences and he also became a central figure in the annual mushroom festivals in Colorado, first at Aspen in 1980 and soon moved Telluride, where the annual gathering of *Psilocybe* seekers continues to this day.

We shared an interest in toxicology and I soon was using his first book, *Toxic and Hallucinogenic Mushroom Poisoning: A Handbook for Physicians and Mushroom Hunters*, coauthored with D.H. Mitchel, M.D. and published in 1978. With Kit Scates (later Kit Scates Barnhart), I was writing a mushroom field guide and was still shopping for a publisher when David Arora published *Mushrooms Demystified*. Gary, then President of the North American Mycological Association, had been contracted by the Audubon Society to write *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms* for a payment of \$10,000 but no share of any royalties. Kit and I made the decision to make our photographs available to Gary and to abandon our own book in favor of his. As we corresponded, I took due note of the huge effort required to produce such a book (and low monetary returns) and resolved myself to never again tackle the writing of a mushroom book, a promise to myself that I almost kept.

Prior to 1975 when Paul Stamets, Jeremy Bigwood and Jonathan Ott arrived at The Evergreen State College, I had been blissfully unaware of *Psilocybe* mushrooms. They were not then mentioned in any of my mushroom books. As a college student in the turbulent 60s (1962-1971), I had been immersed in science. I was completely disconnected from the growing counter-culture movement, untouched by either marijuana or LSD. With the 1975 arrival of Paul Stamets, Jeremy Bigwood and Jonathan Ott as my students, I was soon immersed in studying Pacific Northwest mushrooms for psilocybin and psilocin content, beginning the transition from chemist to mycologist. I started to learn how to use a light microscope and closely followed Paul's work with the college's Scanning Electron Microscope. The SEM work soon attracted the attention of Dr. Alexander H. Smith, who visited often. At the urging of many students, after ten years of research and lecturing on these mushrooms, I decided that I needed to try them myself. My mentor, Kit Scates, was also eager to experience *Psilocybe* mushrooms.

The day I was to set off for the last of the annual Breitenbush mushroom conferences, I picked roughly 200 *Psilocybe semilanceata* mushrooms, packed my bags and drove to Breitenbush. My roommate, Gary Lincoff, and I decided that the time to try the mushrooms was Saturday night, the last night of the conference. Kit Scates (then a NAMA Vice President), another female mycologist from NAMA, Gary and I consumed 15 fresh, raw “liberty caps” each. Maggie Rogers, a founder of *Mushroom the Journal*, was present as an observer. Within an hour, Gary and the other mycologist were both giggling and laughing and took off for the main hall at Breitenbush to listen to a talk by Terrance McKenna about how *Psilocybe* mushrooms were actually beings from Mars. Meanwhile Kit and I continued taking more and more mushrooms, trying to no avail to experience mind-altering effects. When we had consumed roughly 90 “liberty caps” each, with my supply exhausted, we, too, headed off to Terrance’s lecture. Gary was in fine form, heckling the blazes out of Terrance. Kit and I were still wondering what these mushrooms were about. Kit never did find out, even though she consumed enough to get six normal people high as a kite. Meanwhile, I consumed a handful of *Psilocybe cyanescens* from a bag passed around the lecture. Later, on heading back to our cabins, I ate a double handful of *Psilocybe cubensis*, still determined to experience some hint of mind-altering effects.

Two hours later, after sharing three bottles of fine wine with another chemist who was researching other active indoles, I went to bed, deeply, but only briefly, disappointed. I closed my eyes and intense, beautiful blue visions commenced. I left my body and floated far, far away, wondering if I would ever be able to come back while simultaneously reassuring myself that there was no known LD₅₀ for psilocybin and psilocin. I opened my eyes and the visions ended. I went to Kit and Maggie’s cabin and woke them up. Kit wanted more mushrooms so she could share the experience, but none remained. We all returned to my cabin. I reclined on my mattress, pulled my sleeping bag over my head, and closed my eyes. The trip resumed. For a couple of hours, I narrated the visions for Gary, Kit, Maggie and the other mycologist. Then they all went off to bed while my visions persisted for another couple of hours. I never tried the mushrooms again. Only in 2010 did I begin to realize how important that one experience has been for me - how it permanently made me more empathetic and caring of others. Gary understood much earlier.

In 2010, Britt Bunyard had decided that it was time to feature *Psilocybe* in an issue of *Fungi* magazine (Volume 4, No 3: Summer 2011). Gary and I both wound up writing about that night at Breitenbush as part of our stories. Gary’s article was “Psilocybin – Its Use and Meaning.” He prefaced his article with a quote: “In a matter of hours, mind altering substances may induce profound psychological realignments that can take decades to achieve on a therapist’s couch” (from “Hallucinogens as Medicine,” Roland Griffiths and Charles Grob, December 2010 issue of *Scientific American*). Gary tellingly wrote:

...The general consensus of those therapists not in the “Freudian school” seems to be that the oceanic feelings often associated with mind-altering substances, like psilocybin, is not so much a return to “life” in the amniotic fluid as it is the sense of connectedness with all life, with all creatures, great and small, as well as all plants and all fungi. Is this sense of “oneness,” this strong feeling of bonding with all sentient life, real or illusory, and in what sense? Can the experience give us a window into a world otherwise denied us, or is it just a journey through the looking glass... Psilocybin is a value-free,

nonintegrated molecular strategy for developing cooperative individuals in the pursuit of social equality in a democratic society.

Later in the article, Gary included a 1963 Timothy Leary quote reported in *The Psychedelic Review*:

Three years ago, on a sunny afternoon in the garden of a Cuernavaca villa, I ate seven of the so-called "sacred mushrooms" (note: he consumed *Psilocybe cubensis*) which had been given to me by a scientist from the University of Mexico. During the next five hours, I was whirled through an experience which could be described in many extravagant metaphors but which was above all and without question the deepest religious experience of my life.

Gary went on to describe how:

Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg shared the reputation as the era's most vocal and conspicuous advocates for psychedelics... In a statement before a U.S. Senate Judiciary subcommittee on June 14, 1966, Allen asked for forbearance and sympathy in presenting his case for accepting LSD "with proper humanity and respect." ... Allen's honest assessment of the social context of psychedelics was rooted in Walt Whitman's vision of democracy - the acid revolution carried the promise of democracy's fulfillment... "journalistic panic" had exaggerated the dangers of psychedelics, that the actual dangers were minimal, and the potential for religious self-realization was inherent in the drug. In support of his plea for the benefits of LSD, he proposed 21 areas for systematic research on aspects of psychedelics and psychotherapy that included alcoholism, death and dying, obesity, depression, autism, addictions, homosexuality...

In the eight years since Gary wrote his article for *Fungi* magazine, published research on both LSD and psilocybin has shown that these two drugs are remarkably effective in treating alcoholism, dealing with end-of-life anxiety, treating depression and PTSD, increasing empathy, and facilitating religious enlightenment. In the deeply poisoned political climate of today, we need these important drugs more than ever. We will sorely miss people like Gary Lincoff who had the courage to speak out against the insanity of our current drug laws. We will sorely miss his humanity and his compassion. It is with great sorrow that I say goodbye to my Shaman.