In Memoriam

Dr. Richard Rockefeller  

On June 13, 2014, at the age of 65, Dr. Richard Rockefeller passed away while piloting a small plane that crashed in Westchester County, NY.

Richard was a generous man concerned with improving the world. “Mr. Rockefeller was what is commonly called a Renaissance man, a Harvard-trained family doctor who could, among other enthusiasms, play the bagpipe, take polished photographs, carve wood, and ski, hike and sail expertly. But he devoted himself to a half-dozen causes, among them healing the wounds of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), curing sleeping sickness in Africa and saving the seas,” wrote Joseph Berger of The New York Times (June 23, 2014).

Richard worked closely with MAPS Executive Director Rick Doblin, Ph.D., over the past three and half years to further our efforts to develop MDMA-assisted psychotherapy into an FDA-approved prescription treatment for PTSD. “Richard and I became a well-matched team and were building a strong friendship,” said Doblin. “My email account says we exchanged 2,379 messages. His passion for exploring the potential of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy to heal PTSD matched my own. He realized that new approaches to treating PTSD were needed to avoid ongoing cycles of multigenerational traumatization, and that human suffering cuts across artificial boundaries of nationality, race, religion, and class.”

Richard wasn’t put off by the fact that making MDMA into a medicine is a long, uphill battle. Paradoxically, it may have been part of the appeal—along with the way having these tools available to physicians might have given his chosen profession something it felt it lacked. Coming to terms with his unique family history, being a fourth-generation Rockefeller, Richard was willing to utilize what he called “his name” and his most precious possession, his time. Richard’s moving speech at the San Francisco Commonwealth Club (December 9, 2013) about the use of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy to treat PTSD was just one example of his willingness to lend his time and reputation toward this cause.

During his talk at the Commonwealth Club, Richard gave the audience some insight into his motivations. “One of the reasons I care so much is because I am hopeful. With major policy changes affecting availability of AIDS treatment and the eradication of smallpox we have seen that something of enormous danger to the world can be changed very quickly,” he explained. “In the year 2000, I was diagnosed with a form of leukemia that had no effective treatment. It happened that the most effective drug ever produced for cancer became available within six months of my diagnosis. My life would not have been saved without accelerated approval of that drug. My work here is paying forward my gratitude.”

Richard was the person most responsible for moving the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from resistance to collaboration in the effort to explore MDMA’s potential as an adjunct to psychotherapy for PTSD. Richard’s fundamental accomplishment has profound consequences that will bear much fruit over the coming years. DoD and VA involvement in MDMA/PTSD research brings with it mainstream acceptance and credibility, connects us with the leading PTSD researchers, and creates the possibility of future DoD funding.

Only very recently, aided by Richard’s passion, hard work, wisdom, warm and insightful manner with people, as well as his connections, have we been able to move forward in partnership with the VA and DoD. We overcame barriers together that MAPS alone had been unable to surmount for over 20 years. “Richard would create the opportunities for dialogue and shep-

Richard Rockefeller was instrumental in building conversations between MAPS and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD.
herd them to a successful resolution,” Doblin said.

As a direct result of Richard’s intervention, the potential of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy to treat veterans suffering from chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD is now being explored with the full cooperation of the VA and DoD. Last year, the VA spent over $5.5 billion in PTSD disability payments to over 275,000 veterans, numbers which are increasing each year. “While that staggering sum and the human misery that it represents would seemingly have been enough to motivate the DoD and VA to explore all possible treatment options for PTSD,” Doblin continued, “it was only when Richard began his efforts to help us overcome the political resistance that this potential is finally beginning to be explored at the DoD and VA.”

VA National Center for PTSD Executive Director Paula Schnurr wrote to Doblin after he informed her of Richard’s death. “I think everyone who knew Richard even a little felt the loss. He had an exceptional humanity that touched people immediately,” she wrote. “Sadly, I have been learning more about him through his death than I had learned from working with him on the MDMA project. His legacy is far-reaching.”

Richard’s obituary in The New York Times (June 23, 2014) included a quote from his younger sister Eileen Rockefeller Growald, who “recalled how during the birthday celebration, she and Richard had talked about his latest passion: calling attention to a drug for post-traumatic stress disorder, MDMA. ‘When I asked Richard how is it going, he said, “It’s going incredibly well,” ’ she recalled. ‘‘And the strangest thing happened,’’ he said. “They told me they didn’t need my help anymore. They’ve gotten the word out.”’

In a tribute to Richard, Doblin described a recent dream. “Yesterday morning, I dreamt that Richard and I were meeting at a restaurant with Stuart Feinhor, talking about the progress we were making with our Boulder MDMA/PTSD study. Richard left the table for a moment and Stuart and I continued our discussion. Richard was gone for some time. Slowly, a terrible feeling started to dawn on me that Richard wasn’t coming back and that I had to carry on without him, a feeling so many now have in our waking lives.”

“PTSD is never a solitary event for the person who has it; like an infectious disease, the ripple effects go on and on. The suffering spreads to their family and their communities.” —Dr. Richard Rockefeller

Begin with the end in mind then work backward to plan for reaching ambitious goals
—Ashawna Hailey, who left $5.5 million to MAPS in her will

Help create a world where psychedelics are integrated into society by including MAPS in your end of life plans. If you tell us about your plans, you can join our Next Horizon Society, and we will invite you to receptions, learning opportunities, and other special events.

Please contact MAPS Development Director Virginia Wright to discuss your plans.
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Alexander “Sasha” Shulgin, Ph.D.
June 17, 1925–June 2, 2014

On June 2, 2014, at the age of 88, pioneering psychedelic researcher Alexander “Sasha” Shulgin died surrounded by friends and family at his home in Lafayette, California. In addition to discovering hundreds of novel psychedelic compounds, Sasha was best known for introducing the world to the therapeutic use of MDMA. If it were not for Sasha’s work, MAPS—and much of the worldwide psychedelic research community—would not exist.

After an early psychedelic experience with mescaline, Sasha had an epiphany. “I understood that our entire universe is contained in the mind and the spirit,” he said. “We may choose not to find access to it, we may even deny its existence, but it is indeed there inside us, and there are chemicals that can catalyze its availability.”

It was in 1976 that he first made MDMA in his home laboratory, after finding a relatively easy way to make the compound that had been patented by Merck in 1914. He wrote that he was “overcome by the profundity of the experience” and later passed along a small amount to Leo Zeff, encouraging its use in a therapeutic setting.

Sasha published, along with his wife Ann, two books in the 1990s: PiHKAL: A Chemical Love Story and TiHKAL: The Continuation. The books describe his work creating and experimenting with psychoactive compounds. He encouraged their use for personal growth, cautioning readers to “Use them with respect as to the transformations they can achieve, and you have an extraordinary research tool. Go banging about with a psychedelic drug for a Saturday night turn-on, and you can get into a really bad place.”

In 2011, his life’s work was published in The Shulgin Index, Volume 1: Psychedelic Phenethylamines and Related Compounds. While the first volume contains over 1,300 compounds, there is more to come. The Shulgin Index, Volume 2 will be published in the near future. Sasha understood that the exploration of novel psychoactive compounds—and ways to use them—would not be completed in his lifetime, so he preserved his research in these volumes for future generations.

Sasha lived to see a worldwide renewal of psychedelic science and medicine, and our gratitude for his life and work is limitless.

Sasha Shulgin’s Laboratory by Geneva Photography (sublime-visions.org).
On June 15, 2014, at the age of 72, Christina Grof passed away unexpectedly from pneumonia. Along with her husband Stan, Christina co-created Holotropic Breathwork, founded the International Transpersonal Association (ITA), and founded the Spiritual Emergence/Emergency Network (SEN).

In Memoriam of My Beloved Christina
by Stanislav Grof, M.D., Ph.D.

Now, several weeks after my beloved Christina’s unexpected and untimely passing, I can see more clearly than ever before that I enjoyed for almost four decades that we spent together the rare blessing of having a true soulmate. As expected in an intense relationship like ours, our spiritual journey in tandem took us occasionally into stormy waters, but cruising through life we hardly ever encountered doldrums and boredom. We experienced countless extraordinary adventures in the inner world as well as crisscrossing the globe and doing our work on all the continents except Antarctica. And it seemed that our relationship actually grew deeper, stronger, and richer after we had encountered and overcome various challenges on the way.

Christina belonged to the rare breed of people who walk their talk. Spirituality was not something that she reserved for her lectures, workshops, and books; it constantly penetrated her entire life, including the most mundane everyday activities. She did not miss an opportunity to start conversation with little children in parks, people walking dogs in the street, or employees checking-out merchandise in grocery and department stores. She usually found something beautiful about them to make a compliment about. But her special attention belonged to homeless people. Being aware—on the basis of her own experience—of the menaces of alcoholism and addiction, she never gave these people money, but bought them a sandwich and fruit juice or took them for a meal in a restaurant. She was also the major inspiration for our family trips on Thanksgiving Days and Christmas holidays to Glide Memorial Church to prepare and serve meals for the homeless.

Another important channel for Christina’s creativity was art and appreciation of beauty. Early in her career, she was a very gifted, resourceful, and original art teacher who cultivated and nourished in her pupils their natural talents. Later she became an accomplished painter who used art for pleasure, as well as an important tool in her healing process and self-exploration.

One of the powerful forces in Christina’s life was her unconditional love for our daughter Sarah, son Than, daughter-in-law Debora, and our five wonderful granddaughters. It was very interesting to witness the ingenious ways in which she was able to lead her children and grandchildren lovingly to desirable behavior without using disciplinarian method.

I feel deep appreciation for the role Christina played in my life as a Muse, who directed my attention to various areas in which I would not have otherwise been interested. On her 50th birthday, Roger Walsh said something that I believe best characterized Christina’s role in this lifetime: “I do not know any other person who has been able to transform major problems in his or her life into projects that serve humanity.”

Christina and I cooperated in many endeavors—from our early psychedelic training sessions for the staff of the Donwood Institute in Toronto, Canada, through thirty Esalen monthlong workshops, and a number of International Transpersonal Conferences to the development of the concept of “spiritual emergency” and of the method of Holotropic Breathwork, including workshops and training worldwide. Our cooperation was so close that it was not always easy to separate our individual inputs from each other. Unfortunately, because we live in a patriarchal society, Christina often did not receive any credit for projects that she had created single-handedly such as founding the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) or bridging between the addictions field and transpersonal psychology, as well as those to which she made substantial contribution, such as Holotropic Breathwork, Esalen monthlongs, and International transpersonal conferences.

Because of her modesty and humility and in spite of major appreciation that she received from our workshop participants, trainees, readers of her books, and professional colleagues (including three honorary Ph.D. degrees), I do not think that she realized the extent to which she positively influenced and even transformed thousands of human lives. I will certainly remain forever grateful for the blessings she brought into my life. In spite of all the hardships and challenges that we encountered on the way, it was a wondrous and magnificent journey that I would not trade for anything in the world.

Christina resting in her and Stan’s Buck Creek House in Big Sur: memory from their Esalen days.