

## spreading the good news in atlanta and los angeles

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**On** APRIL 2, 1994, MAPS was represented at the Fifth Annual Great Atlanta Pot Festival. Rick Doblin was invited to speak about the developments and objectives of medical marijuana research. Unfortunately, Rick was unable to attend. However, taking courage in both hands, I agreed to represent him and MAPS on the stage in Atlanta. I would chalk up my debut public speaking occasion to experience, I thought, rattled at the prospect of speaking to the 30,000 people scattered across Piedmont Park.

### Speaking to a crowd

For the purpose of disseminating news of MAPS and the two medical marijuana studies that MAPS is supporting, a small informational flyer was prepared. (This same flyer was also distributed by a MAPS member at the Ann Arbor Hash Bash held on the same day.) I spent most of the day at an information table answering questions from whomever stopped and looked quizzically at the newsletters and books on display. The word "psychedelic" was eliciting sly grins and giggles among some festival-goers. Several newsletters and books were sold, and the 50th Anniversary LSD t-shirts were very popular. I spent time explaining to people the therapeutic potential of MDMA, LSD, and marijuana. Young people, in particular, were astonished to learn of the early LSD research. It was an educating experience for me, as well; I experienced first-hand some of the myths and misinformation that is circulated about psychedelics and became familiar with responding to frequently asked questions. It was surprising how much attention the book *LSD Psychotherapy* by Stan Grof was receiving. Many people perused it and wanted to buy it!

The day culminated in the "public service announcement" about Dr. Donald Abram's FDA-approved study comparing the effectiveness of smoked marijuana with the oral THC capsule in treating people suffering from the HIV-related wasting syndrome, and about MAPS' water pipe/vaporizer study. I went

onstage in the late afternoon, and briefly yet firmly declared to all the people on the lawn that there was something to rejoice about in the wake of all the vigorous complaints about the government. I repeated my litany, "though scientific inquiry was prohibited for years in this country, governmental restrictions ARE lifting!" I feel it was essential to share the message of hope. A few people who had not already decided "the government sucks" listened and took note. When I remembered that the crowd to which I spoke was a supportive one, I was much less frightened than I'd anticipated.

### A skeptic stops and listens

Rick and I also attended the April 30th Los Angeles Hemp Rally and spoke onstage there. This was a more vigorous declaration of the role that sanctioned scientific research plays among the disparate marijuana agendas. In the parking lot, when I was putting flyers under windshield wipers, I gave one to a woman who was standing near her car. She looked at it and replied tersely "I don't think there needs to be any research, I know it's a good, safe medicine." Here was an avid cannabis supporter who could use her horizons expanded. It was essential to listen to her strongly held belief and address it. I looked at her and kindly agreed with her, while suggesting that there are many people who can't relate to an assertion about marijuana's safety and efficacy until it is firmly established by scientific studies. It is also important to explore and address those risks that do exist with smoking. The feeling that I got when she looked up and said "yes, I understand now that this is a good thing" was truly inspiring. I took it up onstage with me and felt much more comfortable about communicating to the people attending the rally. If you are interested in becoming an advocate for medical marijuana, familiarize yourself with marijuana's history and give it a context among other medicines. Comfort comes with familiarity with the facts. Honest information and the relief of suffering are understandable to most anyone. ■

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