

HURRICANE



ILLUSTRATION BY PHILIP BROOKER

The Florida Keys, 50 years ago tomorrow: a hurricane leaves a thousand dead, mostly down-and-out World War I veterans who had been sent by the federal government to work on the overseas railway, for \$45 a month.

When we reached Lower Matecumbe there were bodies floating in the ferry slip. The brush was all brown as though autumn had come to these islands where there is no autumn but only a more dangerous summer, but that was because the leaves had all been blown away. There was two feet of sand over the highest part of the island where the sea had carried it and all the heavy bridge-building machines were on their sides. The island looked like the abandoned bed of a river where the sea had swept it. The railroad embankment was gone and the men who had cowered behind it and finally — when the water came — clung to the rails, were all gone with it. You could find them face down and face up in the mangroves. The biggest bunch of the dead were in the tangled, always green but now brown, mangroves behind the tank cars and the water towers. They hung on there, in shelter, until the wind and the rising water carried them away. They didn't all let go at once but only when they could hold on no longer. Then further on you found them high in the trees where the water had swept them. You found them everywhere and in the sun all of them were beginning to be too big for their blue jeans and jackets that they could never fill when they were on the bum and hungry.

I'd known a lot of them at Josie Grant's place and around the town when they would come in for pay day, and some of them were punch drunk and some of them were smart; some had been on the bum since the Argonne almost and some had lost their jobs the year before last Christmas; some had wives and some couldn't remember; some were good guys and others put their paychecks in the Postal Savings and then came over to cadge in on the drinks when better men were drunk; some liked to fight and others liked to walk around town; and they were all what you get after a war. But who sent them there to die?

They're better off, I can hear whoever sent them say, explaining to himself. What good were they? You can't account for acts of God. They were well-fed, well-housed, well-treated and, let us suppose, now they are well-dead.

But I would like to make whoever sent them there carry just one out through the mangroves, or turn out over that lay in the sun along the fill, or tie five together so they won't float out, or smell that smell you thought you'd never smell again, with luck.

But now you know there isn't any luck when rich bastards make a war. The lack of luck goes on until all who take part in it are gone.

So now you hold your nose, and you, you who put in the literary columns that you were staying in Miami to see a hurricane because you needed it in your next novel and now you were afraid you would not see one, you can go on reading the paper, and you'll get all you need for your next novel; but I would like to lead you by the seat of your well-worn-by-writing-to-the-literary-columns pants up to that bunch of mangroves where there is a woman, bloated big as a balloon and upside down and there's another face down in the brush next to her and explain to you they are two damned nice girls who ran a sandwich place and filling station and that where they are is their hard luck. And you could make a note of it for your next novel and how in your next novel coming, brother writer?

There are no buzzards. Absolutely no buzzards. How's that? Would you believe it? The wind killed all the buzzards. You can find them in the grass that's washed along the fill.

And so you walk the fill, where there's any fill, and now it's calm and clear and blue and almost the way it is when the millions come down in the winter except for the sand flies, the mosquitoes, and the smell of the dead that always smells the same in all countries that you go to — and now they smell like that in your own country. Or is it just that dead soldiers smell the same no matter what the nationality of who sends them to die?

Who sent them down there?

I hope he reads this. How does he feel?

He will die too, himself, perhaps even without a hurricane warning, but maybe it will be an easy death, that's the best you get, so that you do not have to hang onto something until you can't hang on, until your fingers won't hold on, and it is dark. And the wind makes a noise like a locomotive passing, with a shriek on top of that, because the wind has a scream exactly as it has in books, and then the grip goes and the high wall of water rolls you over and over and then, whatever it is, you get it, and we find you, now of no importance, sticking in the mangroves.

You're dead now, brother, but who left you there in the hurricane months on the Keys where a thousand men died before you in the hurricane months when they were building a road that's now washed out?

Who left you there? And what's the punishment for manslaughter now?

Excerpted from a 1935 magazine article. The full text appears in *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebellious 1930s*, International Publishing Co.

By Ernest Hemingway

DOUG



GENE WEINGART

He was tall and leonic and ugly in the women kind of like and he drove his grey MG like a crazy man and had a fun girlfriend and he was quite plainly the coolest person I had ever known.

We met as freshmen in college. NYU had a rule of freshman had to live in dormitories, but Doug did cotton to dormitories. So he strode into the administration office one day and informed them that the conditions in their campus residences were unacceptable and that and I would be moving out into an apartment on campus, and damned if they didn't say OK.

And so we became roommates. It was quite a year from Doug I learned about cars and girls and the importance of collecting experiences like souvenirs, and learned about drugs. He taught me that drugs were OK you knew how to handle them.

He didn't preach. He was simply an object lesson reassuring antidote to the terrifying stories we were hearing about drugs: that psychedelics scramble your chromosomes; that narcotics wither your soul; that spunk kills. Doug had an encyclopedic knowledge of the drugs, their properties and their composition and their side effects, and he took them all, in astounding quantities and he was fine. He could handle it.

He did well in school, did well in love, had a big MG and I was along for the ride, wedged into the back of his MG, roaring through the South Bronx and a freshman year in college, almost as cocksure as he.

When the year (was it really only a year?) was over Doug moved away to another school in another city, my life quieted. From time to time I would hear from him. He was doing fine. He had lost his girlfriend but found another, the sister of a well-known rock singer. "I just met Mick Jagger at a party," he told me, and could not suppress a smile. He was in his element.

That was the last I heard from Doug for a long time. Three years or more. The phone call, when it came, to me by surprise, because I had almost totally forgotten him, and because the voice on the phone was so foreign had never heard Doug sound subdued, or so stiff formal.

"I am trying to rebuild my life. I'm calling because I need to know, to make things right. You're my first call."

"You've got nothing to apologize for..."

"Remember your Pentax?" My camera was stolen from the apartment that freshman year. I had suspected the building superintendent.

"Well, I took it," Doug said. "I sold it for drugs."

"I didn't know..."

"You didn't know me at all," he said.

It was an old story. Doug had worked himself into hellish addiction. He had never been able to handle drugs, he said, not when I knew him, and certainly not afterwards. His indestructible image was a house of cards, jokers all. He had spent half his time at NYU racing around from doctor to doctor, coaxing them out of prescriptions.

And finally he had ripped off his best friend.

And now he was seeking absolution, which I gave him, and he was seeking also to find something of value in himself, something to hold on to. I couldn't help but there. He was right. I had never really known him.

You will read today about a young man named R. D. Dublin, a Sarasota college student who thinks he has found a psychedelic drug to end mankind's pain. It is a miracle drug, he says, a drug people can handle.

I would have been a willing believer a few years ago. Not now.

Dear Editor,

September 5, 1985

Last week, you told a story about your youthful friend Doug, and his problems with drugs. You concluded with a cautionary statement about the article on Rick Doblin and your inability to believe that there is a miracle psychedelic drug that can end mankind's pain. I must say I totally agree with you. Drugs are not panaceas, and are medicines only when used in the proper setting and with the proper attitude. The non-drug factors are much more important than the simple fact of ingesting a drug. We as a society place unrealistic hopes and fears on the drugs themselves, which are simply tools offering varying degrees of opportunity and danger.

Furthermore, mankind's pain can never be ended nor should it be, since pain is an integral and necessary part of life just as surely as is joy. When psychedelics are used in a therapeutic context, people are encouraged to go deeper into their pain, and come to terms with it. The pain and sadness don't ever really go away, they just assume a more balanced place in one's experience. Taking drugs to escape psychological pain is drug abuse, when medically prescribed as well as "recreational." When drugs are used with the attitude of accepting whatever the unconscious brings to mind, and a willingness to explore both the pain and the joy, they may lead to significant healing and can be called medicines.

Though sensationalized, I did recognize myself, Rick Doblin, in the article. A few clarifications seem important. The opening story about the family with a suicidal nineteen year old, and a delinquent troubled sixteen year old left the impression that the mother just gave the MDMA to her children and then, presto, she said they were better. Actually, they experienced the MDMA under supervision in a therapeutic context, were monitored for several days afterwards, and are doing better only because every day they choose to act in a responsible manner. The MDMA experience was both catharsis and inspiration, but difficult daily work is required for any change for the better to truly take hold. The MDMA experience is valuable only to the extent that the normal state of consciousness grows more healthy.

Also, a small point, but I have not been a student for 14 years. That boggles even my imagination. This is my fourth year. During the years of my construction career, I was not a student.

Another more important concern of mine is the use of the word Ecstasy. I do not ever use that word, and think that it is both irresponsible and dangerous to create such unrealistic expectations from a drug. Ecstasy is both a marketing and a media created word, one which I have constantly but unsuccessfully attempted to eliminate. I am concerned that people will unwittingly expect ecstasy, and be taken off guard when the painful emotions surface, as they most certainly can and often do. This could lead to situations of panic, exaggerated self-criticism and needless suffering.

MDMA, like aspirin, penicillin, cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, is just a drug. No more and no less.

Sincerely,
Rick Doblin