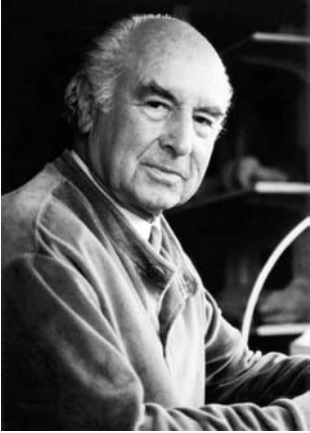


## “To Be Read at the Funeral” By **Albert Hofmann**



By Albert Hofmann, Ph.D.  
Translation from German  
by Elisabeth Riccabona

LOOKING BACK ON MY LIFE, I presume that the constellation of stars—or that whatever could determine one’s fate in life—indicated good fortune when I saw the light of day on January 11, 1906 in Baden, Canton of Aargau. My father, Adolf Hofmann, and my mother Elisabeth, born Schenk, met in Münchenstein, near Basel, where my father worked as a locksmith for one of the subsidiaries of the mechanical engineering group Brown-Boveri. Soon afterwards, he was transferred to the company’s headquarters in Baden.

Although my father rapidly progressed to the position of foreman, and then master in the tool-making division, our family had to live a rather modest lifestyle as wages, even for such a position, were low at that time. Together, with my younger brother and my two younger sisters, I lived a childhood which was not always free of worries but on the whole quite a happy one.

**MY** FIRST childhood memory is an image of large red strawberries in the garden where my mother used to carry me around in her arms. Another image I remember: It is night time, many people are standing in the street. They are pointing towards the sky in excitement. There is a comet in the sky. It was the Halley’s Comet in 1910.

Another striking memory I have is of the day we moved from Schönau Street to Martinsberg Street. I am standing in front of the house, holding my little brother’s hand and looking at the new neighborhood, where rowan berry trees glow golden in the autumn sun.

Between the age of five and ten we lived there, beneath the hill upon which the remains of Stein Castle were standing. On the opposite side of the street was a farmhouse, next to it a blacksmith’s shop and a wainwright’s. I played with the farmer’s kids in the barn and was in the stable when the farmer milked the

cows. I was riding along with the farmers on carts, pulled by cows or horses, to the fields where the animals could graze. I rode with them to make hay, and in autumn up to the Allmend which lay high above town. Up there you could often hear the distant roaring of guns sounding from the Alsace; it was at the time of the First World War. I also spent a lot of time at the blacksmith’s, watching how the blacksmith shoed the horses and wound the red hot iron hoops onto the wooden cartwheels.

The area surrounding the remains of Stein Castle was a wonderful place for us kids to play. I can still remember hearing my mother calling out from the kitchen window for us kids to come in for lunch or dinner when we had forgotten all about time while playing up in the ruins. The way to school, which led through the old town gate and through alleyways of the old town, always brings forth many fond memories.

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It was like the banishment from a child's paradise when we moved away from Martinsberg Street to Dynamo Street, to a hideous apartment building directly across from the factory entrance. We were forced to move due to my father's illness – he was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis – which had deteriorated, and even the short way from Martinsberg Street to the factory had become too strenuous for him.

Whenever I could, I left the grim and dreary factory quarters and went back up to Martinsberg, into the forest, to the meadows and fields. During these expeditions I experienced the magic and charm of the Jura landscape, which was in constant change with the seasons.

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**A**FTER finishing elementary school I had planned to attend high school in order to be granted entry into university. However, considering my father's serious illness, my parents thought I should ensure my own income as quickly as possible, and so it was that they sent me to start a commercial apprenticeship with Brown-Boveri.

After dutifully completing the three year apprenticeship, and obtaining security regarding my future professional life in the form of a diploma, my dream to go to university eventually came true. My dear godfather Hans Kühni, founder of the Kühni machine factory in Allschwil, paid for the tuition fees at the Minerva private school in Zurich. I absorbed the knowledge like a dry sponge and passed the general qualification for university entrance in Latin after only one year.

Fascinated by the mysteries of the subject, I decided to study chemistry at the University of Zurich. As a citizen of Weiningen in the Canton of Zurich I received a scholarship from the university. Living with my parents in Baden with no money for any distractions I immersed myself completely in my studies as my only enjoyment. Professor Paul Karrer, Director for the Department of Chemistry at that time, soon found me a position as an assistant to the professor. At the age of 23 I had already finished my Chemistry studies, after only eight semesters and received my Ph.D.

My father passed away three months before I finished my studies. However, before his death I was still able to show him my employment contract which I had already signed with Sandoz Pharmaceuticals.

In May 1929, I started my professional life, joining the Basel-based Pharmaceutical-Chemical Department of Sandoz Laboratories, whose director was Professor Arthur Stoll. At the laboratories we were studying the properties of medicinal plants, the kind of work that entirely fulfilled my love of plants. I found complete satisfaction in my work when isolating, elucidating the chemical structure, and synthesizing the active substances of medicinal plants. So it was that my whole professional career evolved all around the Sandoz Pharmaceutical Laboratories, starting off as a coworker with Professor Stoll, working my way up to become team leader, and eventually being appointed Director of Research for the Department of Natural Products.

Valuable drugs like Methergin, Dihydrergot, and Hydergine derive from substances I produced during my studies. By research and chance I discovered the psychoactive agent, which became known worldwide as LSD. In my book

entitled *LSD: My Problem Child* I illustrated the history of LSD and its relation to the Mexican magic mushrooms. During lecture tours and conference visits I formed lasting friendships, mainly with colleagues from the United States, Mexico and Sweden.

The shining light that guided me through my professional career also accompanied me in my private life. In Anita Guanella I found the partner who gave me great happiness in marriage and in my family.

**WE** MET in 1934 while on skiing holidays in Arosa. The first five years of our marriage we lived in Basel in Holee Street. Our two sons, Dieter and Andreas were born there. Several times during the war I had to go to Ticino for a few months to serve in the army.

During a holiday in May 1946, we moved to the countryside, to Oberwiler Street in the municipality of Bottmingen. For the next twenty-seven years we lived there, in our own house with its beautiful garden standing amidst a then still entirely rural area. My family soon grew bigger. We were blessed with two daughters, Gaby and Beatrix.

Only some of the many fond memories I have of that wonderful time, the middle of my life, I shall mention here: Our holidays in the Engadin valley, where Anita felt particularly happy as she originally came from the Canton of Graubünden, the home of her parents. While hiking and mountaineering together we experienced the magic, grandeur and sublime beauty of this high mountain valley. One of the highlights was certainly our ascent to the Bernina peak.

I also very fondly remember the great trips to India, Thailand, and particularly the expedition to indigenous Indian areas in Mexico. These trips were part of my work and Anita used to always accompany me.

Shortly before it was time for me to retire, and after the formerly rural and quiet municipality of Bottmingen had developed into a busy suburb, we decided to move further out into the countryside. In the village of Burg, at the very end of the Leimen valley, we found the ideal place to live. According to the plans and ideas of each family member, we build a house up at Rittimatte. There we lived happily for many years, particularly enjoying the many visits from our children, grandchildren and friends. While Anita found her love and joy in caring for flowers in our garden and house, like she already did in Bottmingen, I spent my time in the silence of my "hermitage," writing literary works, publications and dissertations, partly associated with my former occupation, as well as writing down my personal understandings and thoughts on natural philosophy.

It was also up at Rittimatte that my circle of life closed itself as I found the paradise of my childhood again, the same landscape as on Martinsberg, where I used to be blissful as a boy, the same meadows with the same flowers and the same view into the far distance.

Paracelsus described nature and creation as a "book that was written by God's finger". During my life I was given this exhilarating and entirely comforting experience: The one who understands how to read this book, not only with regards to scientific research but with marveling and loving eyes, will find a deeper, wonderful reality revealing itself--a reality in which we are all secure and united for ever and ever.

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