

Interview with Larry Thomas, March 2008: Deceased 2010

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IN THE SPRING of 2010, MAPS member Larry Thomas passed away from diabetic complications. Stricken with illness for the last few years of his life and having no children to consider, Larry willed nearly half of his estate to MAPS. I had the pleasure of conducting an interview with him as part of a graduate research project in the spring of 2008. We sat on his beachfront porch in La Jolla, California, while military helicopters from nearby Camp Pendleton conducted training exercises, and discussed the intrinsic value of psychedelic experiences and why people might feel compelled to donate to MAPS.

Larry's legacy gift of approximately \$400,000 is a substantial contribution that will likely have a profound impact on the future of psychedelic psychotherapy. I think we all owe Larry a debt of gratitude for planning his postmortem generosity.

What follows is the transcript of our conversation. We conducted the interview twice because my audio recorder failed the first time. The text below is from our second round and is presented in the conversational style we used. I've edited out speech disfluencies and modified some sentences to make the transcript more fluent.

Larry: I have to sit down and rest all the time, my legs easily cramp up as if I had just run ten miles. You know when your muscles burn and you can't even use them anymore because they're just going to be spastic? This happens to me now just from walking from here to the bedroom and back. Even chewing food, if I eat a regular meal I have to stop because my jaw muscles start burning like they're tired.

Randy: And it's all from diabetes?

Larry: Yeah, I have diabetes. Type I. So I inject insulin all day long, and then it goes fine and then all of the sudden it goes crazy. So it's just constant work. But I

basically have no energy. I can sit here, but if I go try to do something, I have to constantly stop and rest. My doctors say I'm fine and blah blah blah, but when it comes to medical procedures or operations, they get honest and they say, "No, you're not going to live through that. You're not strong enough."

Randy: What kind of operation could you get?

Larry: All I wanted...I was down in Brazil and I got mugged. It wrecked my shoulder, it broke off a piece of bone in my shoulder, dislocated it. And I wanted them to take that piece of bone out, because it hurts when I try to raise my arm up. And they said, "You're not strong enough for that operation."

Randy: Here is my first question for you: please share with me what brought you to become a donor to MAPS.

Larry: What brought me to MAPS? I originally took LSD at UCLA after having a really horrible childhood. I had a depressed yucky life—really terrible, yet I came from a wealthy family. I had all of the material stuff, so everybody in my life was going, "Oh, I wish my life was like yours." And I'm like, "I don't even want my life." Then I got suicidal and I went to a shrink at UCLA, and then LSD came out and I tried it. I did it with Tim Leary's *Tibetan Book of the Dead/The Psychedelic Experience*, and it just changed my life! It changed everything about my life! So in 12 hours a little pill changed my life. I was studying psychology at the time, and I was learning the different theories that we had about therapy and everything—before psychiatry took over years later and began medicating everybody with Prozac and who knows what else—back then they were trying to do talk therapy and different types of behavioral therapy and that kind of thing. And basically, after studying it all for a long time, I learned that statistically it's not valid. That people who get therapy or get treatment improve equally well as people who get no therapy or treatment. So it was like I had studied all this for nothing. And right about that time is when I took LSD with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and saw all of the possibilities that these entheogens can offer to people who have mental problems, or spiritual problems, or just live in today's world and are kind of lost.

The news is it works! [Larry laughs]. If you are having problems, you want to go meditate? Enjoy yourself. If you are frustrated and you want to find God, go ahead and seek. You probably will not find a hell of a lot. Do a heroic dose of entheogens and you can see God—you can literally see him. That's a pretty big deal.

So, now I'm older, I'm ill, and I've got money. MAPS is doing all this great work and promoting studies on entheogens and other types of things, and being responsible about how they do it, and really bringing these illegal miracle drugs out of the closet. So I'm for everything that they can do in that respect. I believe that this is the answer to mankind's 21st-century problems, which are that we have created governments, like the capitalistic United States, whose goal is just to keep producing, consuming, producing, consuming, and all it's doing is making a few people very rich. We've now found that, yeah, that produces the most successful culture, successful in the sense that everyone has more cars and other objects. But, what we have actually become is mass-consumers and now we're globalizing that, and the planet just can't sustain it! So what we're trying to promote is a system that doesn't work. We've got the military behind us—we've built up the biggest military force in the history of the world, bigger than everybody else in the world combined. And we're forcing our values on everybody.

Entheogens answer all those problems, very quickly. You know, with entheogens you can have whatever you want and realize that everything is really beautiful. If you take a good hit of acid in your crappy little apartment—your apartment is going to look like the Taj Mahal. You could probably fall in love with a piece of dog shit as a work of art. Really. It's amazing stuff.

Randy: You are choosing to give MAPS a good sum of money. Do you feel they represent you? Do you feel that there is some part of your identity that is represented in that organization?

Larry: Oh yeah! They are doing what I think is the most important thing that could be done! So, I've lived 60 years and I've done all this stuff, and now I look back on it all and I go, "Oh, this was the important part!" These entheogens that I was spending my life experimenting with, going to South America and Central America, and doing all these things, that's the most important thing. It wasn't important that I developed that business or made that money or that I did a lot of different business things. That's irrelevant, that's just off of the map. What I did with the entheogens is what was important. And MAPS is promoting that and trying to get it out in the open. So yeah, they represent me very well.

Randy: Do you believe that you represent MAPS? Or rather, how do you represent MAPS when you are just being you?

Larry: When I find other people who have discovered some of the things that I have, or are enthusiastic about them, I let them know that I think MAPS and Erowid are good places to give

money and I promote them. We need to do that. These things in this country are illegal. You know, they've been made illegal in the whole world, except for Brazil [Larry is referring to using ayhuasca in Brazil]. So I can go down and live in Brazil and live free like that, but the rest of the world doesn't know anything

about this. We've already got the answer! But it's in a box, and Erowid and MAPS are trying to take it out of the box, they represent exactly that idea. They don't represent everything, but they represent the part that will get it out of the box and make it legal.

Randy: How would you describe the mission of MAPS?

Larry: Well, I am sure it is on the Internet and they probably have a thing about it, a sentence or two, but I didn't read that. So I would just guess that the mission of MAPS is to professionally explore the possibilities of psychedelics, and do it in a way that we can reintroduce them into the mainstream culture legally. And, of course, just like medical marijuana, the way is to help people with posttraumatic stress disorder with MDMA. Excellent! There will be soldiers coming back from Iraq. The government says they want to help them. If we find out that MDMA really helps a lot, the government is going to have trouble keeping it under cover and keeping it illegal and not offering it to those poor soldiers. So MAPS is doing exactly the things that are smart and right, to bring this thing up, because so much can be done.

Randy: If I were somebody who didn't care one way or the other about psychedelics because they never happened to fall on my radar, how would you describe MAPS to me?

Larry: Well, I would just tell you that MAPS is investigating the possibilities of the use of certain new drugs, just like Prozac, and old drugs, old shamanic drugs maybe, to see what help they can be for people, medicinally and psychologically. And sure, some of these solutions may be illegal—but we can make them legal.

If you haven't done psychedelics and you're depressed and you want an answer, I could say, "Well, maybe the answer is Prozac," or maybe I could say, "MDMA" and you'd probably think that the MDMA is the same as the Prozac. But if I then told you that MDMA is a psychedelic, then you would go "whoa." Well, now it's got a different tone to it, doesn't it? You're told that you should be afraid of psychedelics, so that's how you're going to respond, with fear.

Randy: How do you perceive the communication between you and MAPS?

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Larry: Great. I was thrilled that I could just give away money to different places that I thought could use it after I die. And I've gotten responses from MAPS and different organizations. Of course, I'm giving them money, but the response has been great. I get to speak with people who are into the same things as me and who know even more than I know, and they keep me updated on all the things that I find so exciting! To me, this is like porno when I was a kid. Getting an e-mail from MAPS saying that this study has progressed to a certain point and it looks like the results are saying this, I mean that's like when I was 16 and reading porno. It interested the fuck out of me. It really is a big deal to me. You know, as you get older, your values change. I still love porno and everything, but for me this is so important, so thrilling, and so incredible, that sometimes I just want to cry. I see what they're doing and I say, "Damn! They're doing it! They're really doing it!" And because of my background in psychology and the disappointment of everything being shut down legally – the fact that someone is opening it back up again—for me it simply couldn't be better. It could not be better. So if we're talking about communication—MAPS is great in every way. I get as much information as I want, or as little as I want.

I was supposed to be in Basel this week but I'm not. I'm supposed to go there but if I can't walk very far, everything becomes drudgery. Just getting from the hotel to the convention center is life-threatening. What I did, I had some money set aside for that and I couldn't go, so I gave that money to MAPS so that they can use it.

Randy: That's very nice of you, thank you. Why do you think that you are willing to give money in the first place?

Larry: Because I have more money than I can spend. Every year I look at how much money my money is making for me and I make a note "you should spend more money," because my life is really sitting at the beach, walking on the beach. I don't even like restaurants because I have to prepare my own food that's perfect for diabetes. I've got all the art that I would ever want. I have collections of 4,000 year old shamanic art. I've just got all that. I have the best car that I ever wanted. There is nothing left worth buying. I've bought the stuff I wanted and I've learned that stuff wears out. Like I said earlier, shoes are great when you first buy them and then a month later, they're just shoes. And then they kind of lose their value. So why do I want to give money away? Because there are people like MAPS that are doing things that are really worthwhile, and, that's the place to put my money. And, it gives the best value for my money. When I think about what my money can do when MAPS has it compared to buying another piece of art, this feeling that I am actually doing something is a big payback for me. To know that somebody's child, your child even, may grow up and need psychological help or be suicidal and that something that I am helping to pay for now may save that kid's life.

So giving money away to people who need it is the most enjoyable way to spend my money. I get the biggest payback!

Randy: Is there anything that you think we've touched on that you would like to expand upon?

Larry: I would like to see a study done specifically on the Terma Cycles. There are a bunch of them. I worked with three of them. I want everyone to know that this is called *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, what Tim Leary did with the book *The Psychedelic Experience*. Give people who have a terminal illness and who are nervous that they're going to die of cancer or whatever, give them a heroic dose of entheogens and guide them through that book and you can help them live an extra 10,000 years in a single day. If you're afraid of dying and someone has given you 10,000 extra years of conscious life, you're going to be pretty grateful. If you're going to die and you wonder what's going to happen after you die, you'll find out. The value of what is in those books combined with entheogens is incredible. It's not just going to help that cancer patient, it's going to allow Rick [Doblin] and others to compare the response of people using Buddhist literature combined with psychedelics to how they've seen people respond to just heroic doses of psychedelics.

What I want other people to know, what I just got lucky in finding out, is that those Buddhist cycles combined with the entheogens give a reaction that is a trillion times more intense than just the entheogen. It takes you directly into the world of the spirit teachers, and in a gigantic way. And just from talking to people, I realized that people just don't know that. They think you take a big dose of whatever entheogen, and that's all there is, they don't realize that there are written words that can magnify that experience a trillion times. •



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