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ON THE EATING OF MUSHROOMS

a true story...

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No one knew what kind they were. They had been picked from the wilds two days before, and were uncommonly large with thick, meaty stems. At the last moment, the neighbor did call and warn not to eat them as they were no longer fresh and might be suspect. Yet, many the time was when I had eaten mushrooms even a week old; and besides, these were grand by any measure and too tempting to ignore. I ate four.

Within fifteen minutes it started. First my bowels emptied like running water, then dizziness came followed by vomiting. It lasted twenty minutes. All the while there was no pain. I seemed to separate in consciousness, floating out above my body and watching the whole episode from a lofty vantage point - noting each reaction my body made, laughing at the strangeness of it while feeling deeply satisfied and grateful my body was behaving so admirably. It was emptying as fast as it could and I marveled at its speed and efficiency.

Heavy sleep followed. When I was awakened four hours later, I could hardly talk. My words were slurred and it was like pulling taffy to form sentences which made any

kind of sense. I could laugh, though, and laugh I did. It was all so funny. Before long, I was asleep again. This time for two more hours. When I finally woke with any sense of brightness, I stood to walk. I swayed like a drunken sailor and nearly fell, but managed with shuffling feet to totter around. I scolded my self for getting drunk on mushrooms. How absurd - yet my scolding became even more laughter. A brisk walk in the night air and a hot supper changed nothing. I was flying high and having a great time.

This was October 24, 1983. I was in northern New Jersey, having come as a conference speaker; but my eight-hour drive back to Harrisonburg, Virginia, had to be delayed. The next morning, I tried again to pack for home but was still tipsy. I made it though - and found to my great surprise, I was more alert and more careful than usual. Driving was effortless and easy, and I was home before it ever occurred to me the drive might not be safe for someone in my condition. The day after that, my head was heavy and I felt groggy.

My after-effects lasted a total of nine days. There was never a time during the whole episode when anything seemed distorted to my view; although colors did seem brighter and the air filled with sparkles of light. My thought process, though, was very different. Ideas ran rampant through my brain and my abilities seemed heightened and unusually clear. I do a lot of writing and with several deadlines facing me, I poured out copy like wonderwoman.

After the nine days were over, my mind seemed suddenly to click back into place. When I read over what I had previously written, I was shocked! It was drivel, just so much junk and trash! It's like for nine days I had been living almost totally in my right-brain or my subconscious, which is great for ideas or imagery; but without benefit of my left-brain or conscious mind, I was unable to translate those ideas into anything meaningful or logical. Other tasks and projects had been shoved aside, so my net output for nine days of work was zero!

Come to find out those mushrooms I had innocently eaten were what the teen set calls, "Magic Mushrooms," and they grow in the wilds across the U.S. "Now you know what I've been going through, Mother," cautioned by youngest daughter. "You only ate four mushrooms. I had four years of drugs, sometimes taking them three and four times a day, especially marijuana." I looked at her with sadness, remembering all those years when no one could reach her, no matter what we did. She wouldn't listen then, or maybe she couldn't. It does no good now to recount all the horrors she lived through. She is twenty now, off drugs, married and actively rebuilding her life; yet she still has trouble concentrating for any length of time and bores so easily it is difficult for her to maintain employment. Her mind flies away so often her husband becomes impatient with her and she tires of all the struggles at self-control. Yet she is one of the lucky ones.

It is almost impossible for most people to understand the after effects of drug use. It is one thing to kick the

habit, hard as that may be; but it is quite another to regain any ongoing mental discipline and self-controls. I am proud of my daughter. She came back and is making progress. But what about all the rest, especially those who have no idea what they are doing to themselves or how they are damaging their own brain?

I couldn't tell. For nine days my mind was so expanded, I felt I could do anything. It was only when I "landed" that I discovered all my so-called accomplishments were really just so much slop. How do you warn people about the lingering danger and sometimes permanent setbacks from drug abuse? I never really understood my daughter's complaints about her "slow" mind and how hard it was for her to think straight. It was enough the nightmare we all lived through until she was finally able to kick the habit. But now, even after it is over, it isn't over. She struggles still, and sometimes my own mind "misses." It's frightening. The cost of drug abuse is much too high! Even magic mushrooms . . .

[Return to Main Page...](#)

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