

Geoff Watkinson

## Fathers, Guns, and LSD

Before I did LSD for the first time, Foachman, one of my five housemates, made the drug sound like a religious experience. “Dude,” he said, “it’s so pure. You’ll never be the same.” Foachman called everything “pure”—it was his favorite word—so I laughed and told him that was ridiculous.

It was an uncharacteristically warm Saturday for late September in New York’s mid-Hudson Valley. I was a senior in college and since I didn’t believe in God, I needed to find spirituality elsewhere. LSD sounded like just the place.

Foachman was, as far as I knew, the most prominent drug dealer in the area. Throughout college, he’d been picking up pounds of marijuana from Boston or New York City and distributing the goods locally. He ran the business out of our house, the Green Briar, which stole its name from the apartment complex that shared part of our gravel driveway and bordered the back yard. When Foachman wanted to make a lot of money—to go on a “baller vacation,” for example—he’d up the ante and pick up a couple of pounds of cocaine.

Foachman had acquired a special supply of acid for all of us to try on that September day. It came from a friend of his in the small New Hampshire town where he’d grown up. Wearing a backwards DC Skate hat, he placed ten acid-saturated sugar cubes in a pitcher, which he mixed with Jack Daniels and Coca-Cola. We rationed the mix between the six of us, drinking it slowly, sitting in beach chairs on our crumbling brick porch, looking out on the three acres that separated us from the local highway.

When the acid started to hit, we tossed a Frisbee between the oaks that rose up towards the sky like stoic warriors. When the Frisbee came towards me, I saw the vibrations of its tail linger behind like

a boat's wake. A sparrow sang, sounding like the "Bridal Chorus" I'd heard at the couple of weddings I'd been to. I could taste the leaves that fell from the trees, as if I was sucking on cardboard. My hands didn't seem to belong to my body and it felt incredible to scoop the flying saucer coming towards me out of the air. It was as if I was experiencing the world for the first time.

A few hours later, as the sun began to set, Luke, who lived in the bedroom across the hall from me, came into my room and we listened to Neil Young's *Live at Massey Hall 1971* on vinyl. Young's voice made the walls tremble. Posters of the Doors and the Beatles came to life. Like me, Luke was a scrawny twenty-one year old. Typically, he was sarcastic or passionate. Those who didn't know him had a hard time telling which. He was from Carolina, but prided himself on what he called his non-regional dialect.

As we sat there in the dark, smoking a joint, Luke told me a story. A couple of summers earlier, Luke's father—a renowned doctor who was also an addict—had held a gun to his head for half an hour. They were at his family's lake house, drinking beers on the deck overlooking the lake, the only two home. The doctor went inside to relieve himself. When he came back, the moon shined down on the murky lake and the silver .32-caliber pistol that he pointed at Luke.

"I didn't know it until he came back with the gun," Luke said. "He was off his rocker on coke. Every time he'd been going inside to take a leak, he'd also been blowing a couple of lines. He was so damn good at masking it that one minute he'd seem fine and then—bam—all of a sudden he wouldn't be making any sense and he'd get aggressive."

We lit cigarettes. The smoke curled up to the ceiling, around the lights, and then out the window. It reminded me of the fake gunpowder from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* ride in Disney World I'd been on when I was small.

Luke rolled up his sleeves, exposing a couple of burns on his arms from where his father had put out cigarettes when Luke was growing up, and rubbed his eyes. I didn't want to interrupt him. Even if I had, I wouldn't have known what to say.

"So he sat next to me, with the gun a couple of feet from my head, and started telling me how it was my fault that his marriage was falling apart. The girls' fault—you know, my sisters. I was thankful they weren't home. He made me say it. That it was my fault. Finally, after he rambled on about his childhood and the nature of love and psychology

and some other bullshit, he started crying and put down the gun. You know what the sickest part was?" I shook my head. "He hugged me at the end. The motherfucker hugged me."

I couldn't relate to that. My father and I, like many of my friends and their fathers, had a strained relationship, but he was good to me and good to my family. I didn't see him much growing up—he worked long hours as an attorney in northern New Jersey.

I remember my little league baseball games, when I was so nervous to swing the bat that I either struck out or took a walk. I was so scared I'd swing and miss and everyone would laugh. Mom was almost always in the stands, but I can't remember Dad ever being there. I'm sure he was there, sometimes, but when I see myself on the field—the sweat underneath my cap, the brown sandy dirt on my left knee, and me looking to the stands from second base after sliding in safely—I don't see him. When he was there—where he stood or sat—is as mysterious to me as one of the first games when I did swing the bat when I was twelve, the ball ringing off the top rail in center field, almost going out of the park.

Dad wasn't there for that.

I knew that fathers were flawed. I knew that I was flawed. But flaws were something different from a father sticking a gun in his son's face. I couldn't imagine how Luke felt as he sat in my recliner, on LSD, having to bear that burden. In the quiet dark, we passed the joint back and forth, the walls trembling in unison with Young's voice.

Foachman was right. Nothing was the same.