

Tripping With Jim Morrison & Other Friends

by Michael Lawrence

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Introduction



The 60s in America was different and difficult for all of us. It was a time of fast thinking, profound shifts of direction, and a lot of fun. *The Doors of Perception* were glued together by many souls. And we had in common a need for mutual dignity, freedom and passion.

This story is about a young man at 20 under the influence of art. He is in rebellion with his parents, Hollywood, America and the Arts. Growing up in Europe, meeting history on the walls of the Etruscan frescoes, walking the Tiber, and finding the fountains of Rome erotic and funny prompted his first calling to become an artist. His parents were artists in the film world. They were sympathetic to Michael's odyssey. His picture of the eternal city was transposed from a Hollywood upbringing.

The book begins in Venice, California on an LSD trip with Jim Morrison, who is also looking for his identity. Their friendship helps define each of their paths. Michael's world view, like Jim's, tries to be hip. Where Michael's optimism fails he finds his bravery and his imagination. The world feels in flux and his affection for people and their art forms become his faithful companions.

I identified with this naïveté. The riddle of life has several options, and Michael has the time to sort out his lot. He is lucky. We can study his boyish charm at leisure. I wonder if many young people today have the time to consider their privileges. Michael owes his parents a part of the freedom he explores.

This is a sweet story which suggests that the ultimate resolutions may not be the answer. This is no surprise. However, here is a wealth of impressions! People, places and events, famous and personal, sit side by side in curious metaphors that softly draw the reader into meditation.

This Lawrence trip catches something of this passion or faith and the landscape of the 1960s. It is, as a book, an interesting guide to a path we are now returning to. 'Sight and setting', or the organising of how to view reality, affects how we see the wonderment of creation itself.

The sight and setting focus around art provides subtle shifts that are illuminating, pleasurable and often funny. An adventure of rich feelings and a sense of human growth evolves.

The book ends with the word, 'go'.

Timothy Leary

1

Pancakes with Jim and Mom



I am a voice, an experience at Jim's grave. They will be coming to find the spot, the James Douglas Morrison spot, so tightly wedged between the stones. The tourists are like hounds, they can smell the odour of Proustian roses. If I'm in an expansive mood I'll bring along flowers and some incense but it is enough for me to bring my bronze. My portable memorial portrait, my James Douglas Morrison. It is not that heavy; it affords me light exercise. I have rented a room near the cemetery and when the weather is good, I lug out my bronze and place it atop a neighbouring stone so that it peers down as if Jim were looking at his own grave. His fans are not content with it alone, they want to know how we darted about like two flickering spirits in the grey afternoon, the warm drizzle, the milkwood path, the adventure story.

Bronze! How it glows in the afternoon. No need of spirits. The sunlight never bleaches a word from the sculpture. I have to supply that. One important thing is not to appear too anxious. As far as that goes I am happy for the air and the peace and quiet of the place. It feels as if I have virtually moved in. Some days I will bring my typewriter along. I have found a spot not too far away from this hub of activity that permits me some peace of mind. Very important for the serious artist!

I have written reams of stories in the company of varied geniuses who have never minded my presence. Often their spirit will add a touch or two. Baudelaire is good for that! I'm glad he has not lost his critical sense entirely.

Morrison, on the other hand, seems to be forever restless, poor dear. He does, however, approve of my presence and he gets a big kick out of his bronze mask, which is now providing a living for me. I made this bronze for Jim. I wanted to have it installed at his grave. Carrying it back and forth makes me a vendor of tales; the bronze face welcomes his admirers and adds grace to his resting place. His grave is an unattractive, cramped space.

My arrangement with posterity is not as grandiose as the tomb of Oscar Wilde. There is a great deal of space around the small building that houses his remains, but it is only since my presence at the cemetery that his tomb is noticed. I have a certain affection for the works of Mr Wilde as well, whose own vanity, a faith in beauty and knowledge, destroyed his health and brought to a short conclusion a life that had been so rich in poetic invention. Certainly I shall have to weave a tale wherein these lost souls gather to compare their lives' battle against the constraints of social behaviour. Modigliani, a beautiful young Italian, came to Paris and painted his nudes with such sensual richness that his only solo exhibition was closed by the police the day it opened. He died of drink, hashish and as the contemporary expression goes 'life in the fast lane'. He was thirty-six. His mistress leaped to her death upon learning of his demise.

Even after death their accomplishments are not always safe from vandalism. Oscar's tomb was designed by the American sculptor Jacob Epstein who fled America for England. But he did not escape my admiration, his carving of a winged figure, a floating Babylonian pagan god with an erect penis provided Mr Wilde with an appropriate carriage to the afterlife. This penis, his magic wand, was knocked off...so you see, even in memory he continues to be emasculated, misunderstood. This winged creature of Mr Wilde's transported my feelings to his fairytales, so remarkable in their detail, his knowledge of gems and flowers were like a flight of affection...for children. This is what Jim's grave required, a poetic touch. My story is drifting, forgive me! I am merely trying to show that it was through affection for Jim that I wrote to his parents. I enclosed a photo of my memorial portrait; it was the first version I had made. It was an attempt to create the mask of his face when it had been lean, sculpted by the use of LSD at the zenith of his sexy days. Jim's gift was that he could make reality intimate and public at the same time. He took a clear cultural step forward, a song made in current history. The sculpture that I would actually present to his parents I had reworked, adding some of the fatigue of continually being in the spotlight on the train to fame. The expression matured, the face filled out.

Jim's parents agreed to come to see my sculpture at an exhibition I was having. It was the unveiling of this version. They would come early. I went to greet them in the parking lot. His father, Steve, a thin frail man moved with the same grace I first noticed in Jim's walk. I imagine Jim also inherited his sense of strategy from his dad who had been an admiral during the Vietnam conflict. Clara, Jim's mom, thrusting her bosom forward with the air of authority, followed me and led her husband into the gallery. I sensed it was from her, ironically, that Jim's reserve of strength to rebel had blossomed. They had marched in rapidly and, having quickly glanced at the bronze from a distance, they announced their verdict.

"This is not Jim." Clara Morrison spoke with anger. She shot a look to her husband. "This is not my son!"

"Is this the same sculpture? The photo you sent was different."

"Yes, it is a new version, I'd hoped that you would like it. But, if you prefer..."

"Well, we don't like this one, it is not our Jimmy."

The idea that the bronze could be changed hadn't penetrated the shock of seeing this one.

"This is not the same sculpture you sent us a picture of, am I correct?" The admiral wanted to know if he had the story straight. It was as if I had betrayed them. I had only wanted to surprise them with the 'Jimmy' they had in mind. That was the only time I ever heard anyone call him 'Jimmy'.

I wasn't able to reassure them, tell them I'd do another version, because they rushed out almost in a panic. The admiral placed a map on the hood of his car and asked me in a distant tone of voice as if I were a stranger, did I have any recommendations on the best way to get out of Pasadena. I went over to examine the map, but Mrs Morrison became impatient and ordered her husband into the car. I hid my disappointment out of respect. There was a brief

symbiotic feel to the admiral's request, like wanting to get close to Jim through his friend who was also an artist. I think he felt guilty for not spending more time with Jim, growing up as he did under his mother's domineering.

Alone for a moment, knowing I'd have to face my parents who would want to know Jim's parents' reaction, I felt robbed of the pleasure of the unveiling of my new sculpture. My mother also liked the first version better. She had commented that Jim's eyes had a quality of looking out and in at the same time. That hadn't changed. The angelic, androgynous, innocent expression, which was a passing phase, was what everyone wanted the boy-angel who sang *Light my Fire* to be.

My mother knew Jim as a college student, a young polite guy in khaki pants studying film at UCLA. She had made us pancakes one morning. She understood by his natural cool manner a form of intelligence. She liked him immediately; this pleased me, and gave her a chance to tell some of her stories. She could be the centre of attention as we had the house to ourselves. My father was away, busy with a film. We were used to entertaining ourselves when he was away. My mother was a writer. And so was Jim. I had my notebooks as well.

"Do you know the work of Paul Bowles?" My mother pulled from the air.

"Ah, he lives in Tangiers, writes about foreigners, how they are changed in Morocco removed from the familiar, other behaviour comes into play."

"Perfecto!" Mom put her thumb to her forefinger, signalling that Jim had hit the bull's eye. This was not surprising, as Jim had taken a course in set design in high school. He had conceived of using a spotlight, which would grow bigger as the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams unfolded. The growing light was to symbolize the growing cancer inside of Big Daddy, the patriarchal figure whom everyone wanted to please. Tennessee Williams was a popular celebrity in the early 60s. Paul Bowles had done the music for his plays and it was known that he wrote. The 'beats': Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, had visited Paul in Tangiers. This scene is also familiar to young people interested in avant garde literature.

"We threw a party for Tennessee in Rome, in the early fifties. Has Michael told you of our stay in Italy?"

"I didn't go into Paul Bowles, Mom." I had liked Jim's idea for the play, but I hadn't told him about my mother or that she wrote plays.

"Paul brought the hashish." My mother liked to shock. Jim uncrossed his legs and looked into the hazel eyes and pixie face that had addressed him. "The Sirocco wind was blowing that night. We had a large terrace and the gathering included many old friends: Richard Basehart and his beautiful Italian bride, Valentina Cortese, who was a star then, and Paul had a few friends, and of course Tennessee Williams. The warmth of the Sirocco can put you into a trance, get under the skin, make you crazy. It is an unpredictable force."

Jim's head had tilted and it was clear that my mother had an audience. She liked to paint moments and took her time selecting the colours.

"All at once Ten's laughter would cackle through the air. We were smoking hashish in cigarettes, which had an effect like the wind, unpredictable. Large eucalyptus trees across the street swayed, their leaves made a rustling sound. They looked like strange gigantic creatures, rattling our subconscious with vague suspicions. Under the influence of our smoking, the occasional passing car added a kind of B-movie element of suspense. Basehart, who had been sitting next to Valentina holding her hand, got up for a drink to quiet his nerves. He had recently finished a film for Fellini which hadn't as yet been released. My husband was jumpy. He wanted to play the lead in the film Richard was discussing, Fellini's next project, *La Strada*. Basehart was fond of Marc. My husband's desires can be overwhelming. It is his intensity. He knew he would be perfect for the part that eventually Tony Quinn played."

Jim nodded. My mother's voice had slipped into a southern accent giving her description a theatrical touch.

"Tennessee was playing a game with Richard, suggesting that sex appeal was a fragile commodity; like perfume it could evaporate or drive people away. He can be a little devil, that Tennessee. He was clever never to suggest that Dick had a problem, but with the hashish and Paul's Moroccan friend who was wearing a burnoose, a surreptitious atmosphere was created. Tennessee was reading fortunes, looking at the cards. Then abruptly his laughter would break loose. It's a high-pitched hyena's cry, electrifying. 'For Christ's sake Tenny, write me a play and stop torturing, Dick,' my husband said in a menacing tone.

"Tennessee released another volley of laughter, pleased with himself." My mother was smiling, recalling the night. "I wrote a play in the next two days. I couldn't sleep, it poured out."

Was Jim fascinated? We were familiar with the dreamy realities of grass. I had heard the story. She had told it well for Jim.

"Michael smokes in his room, I can smell it. He listens to that terrible Indian music," she shot me a glance of 'oh well' and faced Jim. "Do you enjoy smoking that rubbish?" Her statement was in odd contradiction to the benefits she had just spoken of but there was no tone of malice to her voice, rather a sort of bemused acceptance of youth's experimental period.

Jim was gazing out the window. He turned, smiled and then addressed my mother speaking slowly. "It's research. Sometimes I write a lot under the influence, I can be happy to watch what is happening around me... it changes the point of view. You look at yourself looking. That is what is neat. You look at yourself looking and so what you observe is something which you are also creating. It's kind of... what I think Wittgenstein said about observing reality, that it responds to your looking like a whistle a guy gives to a pretty girl; reality is winking back at you or winking because you are looking at it." Jim was smiling and then he added, "I'd like to read your play." I was glad he had sidestepped what is a boring subject of conversation.

"Well, it's another kind of game now. I don't know... read it!"

"I like the forces you play with Mrs Lawrence. I'll write down my observations for you to read." Jim wasn't trying to be presumptuous, he merely wanted to put his scholarly side to some use and mom was pleased by his offer.

"I think that would be fine, but it isn't necessary to address me as Mrs Lawrence. We aren't that formal around here."

My mother began to talk about her own youth. She had taken her own father to court because he had thrown her boyfriend out of the house. Edward Dahlberg, a writer, was several years older and he wrote about the sexual habits of animals and insects and their strange affection. My mother had secretly married him. She was a bohemian herself.

"Well, Mrs Lawrence, I'm real pleased I've discovered a new friend."

My mother laughed at Jim's over-playing at being polite.

"You know Jim, I can remember being three years old... I found a jar of cherries soaked in liquor. When my father Noah came back, he found me sitting on the kitchen floor, schicker... you know, drunk. We both started to laugh."

There was a pleasant pause in the conversation.

"Ah, I guess we should be going," Jim said.

"I wrote a novel about this period."

"Was your novel ever published?" Jim asked at the door.

"It was optioned for the movies, but sadly the war came and it was never made. *Ask No Return*. I have it somewhere, but read my play, it's much more contemporary."

“I’ll look after it.” Jim held it close. “Thank you again for the pancakes and the lovely conversation.” Jim politely extended his hand. We walked to the garage and to my car. I could tell Mom had really enjoyed talking to Jim. He was a good listener. I think it was also neat for Jim, a hip mom, with whom he could be himself. Of course how is one to know all of this if I don’t tell you? But then who is to say if the differences of our upbringing didn’t also give us something in common and focused us to go our different ways? But I won’t talk about that part first. The important thing is that we fell into life’s tavern and knew we had mutual friends even if they existed mostly in books.

2

Blake’s Little Lambs



I have spent my life alone, filled with sensation, privilege and pleasure—to that inheritance I salute and respect my parents and all the happy thoughts, alive in the ever-expanding cosmos of my mental universe.

The tourists would be arriving at Jim’s grave. Poets take up the paintbrush, words conjure spirit, paint puts it on the tongue. It helps to appear a touch mad under these circumstances. I have to be careful, however, not to scare them off. To lighten things up, I throw in bits and pieces of *Tropic of Cancer*. The important thing is to keep their attention. And to be graceful about collecting funds. Sometimes I say that it is for the Blake Society. This is indirect enough so that they never think of themselves as having been taken. It is easier for them to give to Blake than to me. I would merely be throwing away more money buying tubes of watercolour and luscious Arches papers upon which I paint. I’ve got a knack for painting, they say. Well, I’ve been doing it a while. I can remember my gluteus max falling quite asleep whilst I diligently rendered a quaint façade round the corner from Campden Hill Square. That’s when I was living in London, going for long walks, learning to smoke a fag or two. The atmosphere there was invigorating after living amidst the soft orange terracotta

colours and flowing feel of Rome. London sharpened my sense of life with cool steel grey tones and the crisp angles of her architecture.

In London I saw the film *Moulin Rouge* about Lautrec by Huston, *The Horse's Mouth* by Alec Guinness and *Lust for Life* starring Kirk Douglas.

After three continuous years in Rome, to hear English spoken everywhere was a thrill, a luxury. I read *White Hunter, Black Heart* about John Huston in Africa with Humphrey Bogart making a film. My dad had worked for Huston in *Asphalt Jungle* and so I wanted to be up to date with my dad's world. I had no time for school; I painted street scenes sitting on the curb feeling the hard realities of suffering for my art, becoming a painter, a sculptor, and a storyteller. These were my passions. Seeing the lives of three artists was too much of an experience not to get moving on my own development. To supplement my income, I worked selling antiques with an older lady at a flea market. I discovered that I could buy subway tickets with antique coins at a fraction of the real price. I tried to turn in my tickets for real cash. The police did not approve of my ingenuity and I was taken to the station with my father where I pledged to discontinue my brokerage firm. I have never stayed in any one place long enough to become thoroughly part of it. Often, when people meet me they are hard pressed to guess where I am really from. It never suits them to learn that I was born in California, but they let it go in the interest of hearing all the details of my adventures with Jim Morrison. The format is simple: in life you become a star or his friend. The story may make a good movie. The problem with movies is that they often miss the full literature of life, the sequence of thoughts behind the actions.

My father is an actor, a cinema character actor who makes the stars look good. That is the way it was in the 1930s when, leaving New York and the theatre, he bummed his way to Hollywood. Character actors were eventually typecast and my father's face, which is well known, having appeared in 178 films more or less, eventually became recognizable as the gangster who stood by Bogart. He was in the original Dillinger gang. Indeed he was once mistaken for Dillinger, and was held at gunpoint in Kansas, until he proved he was an actor, not the true Dillinger. Growing up I wasn't permitted to see him in the movies because his presence was brutal and menacing and so I always imagined him to be someone like Hopalong Cassidy, a hero, one of the good guys, just as all dads are heroes in their sons' eyes until that critical point when they fall from grace and become people. In fact, I may have been a teenager before I actually saw him in a film: *Key Largo* with Bogart and Edward G. Robinson and a ravishing Lauren Bacall. I saw the film for the first time on TV when I was fifteen, living with my mother and uncle and aunt. My father wasn't there, he wasn't always around. When I was four or five I developed eczema and asthma, nervous disorders as I missed the warm tones of his voice, which used to tell me stories. Paco, the wise donkey, who could answer all questions, was the Aristotle of my youth. When Paco wasn't available I made up my own stories, like the giant wolf that lived in the backyard and guarded my safety. Being near-sighted, I listened carefully for his special signals. And there was my cat as well. We got up one morning and discovered a sea of large spiders in the den, so I just stepped on them. I hated being alone; I learned to manoeuvre my crib into the living room down the hallway. I was even younger then.

Oh, for a grain of understanding! What was Morrison to me or I to him, that I weep these crocodile tears? How to express muted adoration, how to express joy... throwing his legs around my waist. For whom is this memory? For what purpose? But the thought that there is purity, that we were Blake's little lambs, makes all this research worthwhile.

Are you getting lost in my storytelling? Don't worry, it is I who am jumping around. Don't be annoyed by this, take what I say in good faith. My story is being presented surrealistically by the atmospheres I feel I should show you before you begin to put the puzzle together. Perhaps it's a way to create an LSD experience without the drug? It doesn't matter where I

am, only the sequence of my thoughts. Come on, come on, follow them, you'll be OK. I won't abandon you. Watch your own thoughts happening, looking in my mirror. You may sometimes fall into it and come out the other side, where reality has its own logic, a different bridge of association, the view more psychological than chronological. Why something happens seems more interesting to me than when, but it is all an excavation site: the treasure may last only a fleeting moment. Well, let us continue with the narrative.

Am I a coward?

Who pulled out the drugs and threw them in my face? I'd rather not say that I took those drugs... but that would be a lie, and when all is said and done did they not give me back the truth, an understanding of myself and my fellow man? "Don't hit that plant." "Be kind to yourself, Harry." Do you know that Allen Ginsberg gave a radio interview at the Plush Pup, a hot dog stand on Sunset Strip, or that Carol danced on the rooftop at Lenny Bruce's funeral gathering, which was held impromptu at a tract home nearby because the cemetery people did not trust us to behave?

In the 60s I collected my poets' souvenirs, discovering the talents and imaginations of other rebels. They seem more courageous than myself, confronting the world as they did face-on, taking a stance and chirping from their own platforms. I had no experience of Ginsberg's poem, *Howl*, yet I wanted to see his pain, sense what that experience had been. It was frightening to think, to feel that void, that lack of security. Painting and writing somehow filled that space with something concrete. It's not so bright and cheery to dig up the past, more fun to explore into the future. I met Jim Morrison in Holmby Park near UCLA. He was starring in a student film. It was 1964, a warm day, I saw him in the distance standing on a hill listening to the director. He collected his stance between pure attentiveness and lazy musing. With it all, never a sloppy gesture. He fainted for them with great style, passing out in the mode of a great and graceful conductor, bidding adieu to the last sound of the orchestra like a Zen monk stopped in meditation. So easy for him to have the girls come running. Jim was cute; he didn't have to say very much. I was born a month and a day before him; we were the same age. He showed me his notebooks by reading from them. He had a small apartment on the second floor in Westwood, on Goshen Avenue. There were several collages on the walls, figures in space that gave a feeling of great distances and sunlight.

"Whose collages?" They were neatly put together.

"Mine," Jim answered softly. "Ah, let me read you something, okay?" He was distracted, anxious to share something with me.

"Sure." He disappeared into his closet. I peeked over his shoulder. There were no clothes, just books and papers.

"Where are your clothes, man?"

"On my back," Jim responded shyly. I didn't laugh. I flashed onto a guy I remembered from camp in Switzerland. He had worn the same clothes for three months; I always wondered how he kept them so clean.

"Sit down, I'll be right out." As I pulled out a chair from his kitchen table, I noticed a print of a Francis Bacon painting. The Pope dissolving in a booth.

"You like Bacon's work?" Jim didn't answer. I liked the aesthetics of joy better.

I liked paintings that gave pleasure. But I wasn't going to argue about aesthetics; I was happy just to have the company of a fellow outsider. I wanted to see what Jim had to offer. He had some papers in his hand.

"Let me read you something. It's short." He sat down and looked at me. I was ready.

*"As violet dawn wings are placed
TV races me over the sea
I have played with the Gods in darkness"*

*A calculated risk
Teenage girls shake pompoms in the sunlight.
I will die a hero in their eyes."*

Jim looked up, slowly.

"I like it," I said firmly.

Jim wasn't satisfied, he looked at the paper and let it drop, floating to the table. He got up and went to the door. Outside he began climbing up a ladder. I followed. Above was a small roof terrace exposed to a vast expanse of blue sky.

"I like being up here next to the sky," Jim mused.

A police helicopter appeared. Jim became excited. He started running around the terrace like an Indian on the warpath. He was shooting imaginary arrows at the helicopter. When the copter disappeared Jim turned off his act.

"When did you write that poem?" I asked. Jim began calling to an imaginary dog.

"Hey, fella, here, boy." He was getting excited again.

"Woof, woof!" Jim was now the dog and then the helicopter appeared again.

Did they like playing with him, too?

Jim aimed an imaginary rifle at the helicopter. "Bang."

The helicopter left. Jim went to the side of the terrace. He looked down to the street. I don't know what he expected to see. He turned to me. The expression on his face was that of a small child. He looked into the sky. It was empty.

If there was a secret here, I didn't expose it. We never tore at each other's personas. We shared our philosophical baseball cards, just happy to be trading. We were counsellor to each other's camp. I never thought of survival in those days, I mean, my own getting on with life, raising a family, having kids, being a father. I only thought of being an artist. All of my activities were potential material for works of art. I felt close to Jim as I sensed his art activities were as important to him as mine were to me. The difference was that he made no effort to present them. It was up to me to open things up for discussion. Jim was concerned about other things, like would I give him a ride to the Lucky-U, this being the bar he liked to hang out at.

"I'm meeting Donna at four. Come along. It's a light thing."

The three of us sat in a booth. I remember this because it was the first time I'd ever sat down in the afternoon with two friends in a bar to drink beer.

"I'm not doing graduation," Jim announced out of the blue.

Jim never announced his moves. So he had something special to say.

"I only have brown shoes." Morrison offered gently.

We laughed.