



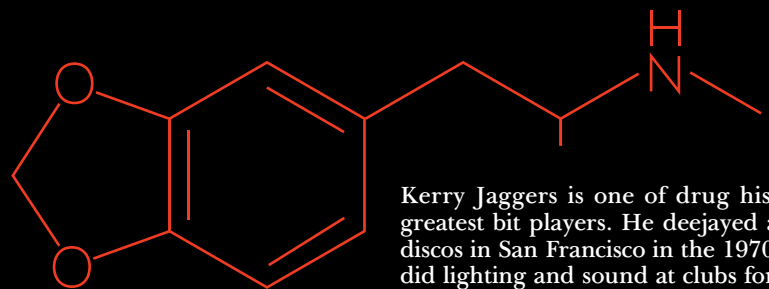
NEW ORDER



GRACE JONES

# PURE ECSTASY

THE WILD LEGAL DAYS OF THE BEST DRUG EVER AND HOW IT ALL ENDED BY PETER SIMEK



Kerry Jagers is one of drug history's greatest bit players. He deejayed at gay discos in San Francisco in the 1970s and did lighting and sound at clubs for New Order, the Smiths and Moby in the 1980s and 1990s. Over the years he has come to know everyone—a sort of omnipresent, Forrest Gump-type character in the club world. In turn, everyone loves him. And so it was not out of the ordinary when, on an otherwise unremarkable morning in May 1984, Jagers received a phone call from Grace Jones.

The disco diva was in Dallas. Along with Stevie Nicks, Jones had headlined the opening of a flashy new club called the Starck the night before, but the

house DJ never showed and the club had no one to spin the second night. Now she was doing the owners a favor by ringing her friend in New York. Jagers was the one DJ she knew who happened to be from Texas and who would fly halfway across the country if she snapped her fingers. Sure enough, Jagers hung up the phone, packed his bags and headed for the airport.

On the way, he swung by a friend's apartment on Washington Square. The two were regulars at the Saint, a superclub in the East Village that served as the city's mother hive of gay culture before being snuffed out by the heavy onset of AIDS. Sex was found on the balcony,

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Scenes from club playgrounds around the world, 1988 to 1999, including New York's Tunnel nightclub (right).



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**YOU WANTED TO FEEL HANDS ON YOUR BODY, THE BREATH OF A STRANGER IN YOUR EAR AND THE THUMPING OF BASS IN YOUR RIB CAGE.**

drugs in the locker rooms. A carefully managed diet of PCP, cocaine, LSD, Special K and quaaludes drove the night through peaks and valleys.

His friend dealt drugs, and Jagers needed supplies for the road. The dealer produced a fist-size sandwich bag of a new designer drug called Adam. A teaspoon of the white powder—often dissolved in a cup of coffee—was enough to flood your brain with serotonin and dopamine. Physical sensations intensified and thoughts became crystal clear. Your jaw muscles seized up and your body rapidly dehydrated, but you felt more honest, confident, powerful, compassionate, joyful and sexy. You wanted to feel hands on your body, the

breath of a stranger in your ear and the thumping of bass in your rib cage.

Jagers stuffed the bag into his luggage. He had no idea that the powder he carried, as inconspicuous as cornstarch, would spread like a contagion through Texas and turn frat boys into drug dealers, sorority girls into sex fiends and the rich sons of oil barons into dance-club freaks. He didn't feel like a drug prophet on a mission to unleash a new cultural and sexual revolution.

Jagers touched down in Dallas with his little bag of whatchamacallit three months ahead of the Republican National Convention where Ronald Reagan would accept the presidential nomination. When Jagers arrived at the club, a thousand people were already lined up outside. He met one of its owners, Christina "Sita" de Limur.

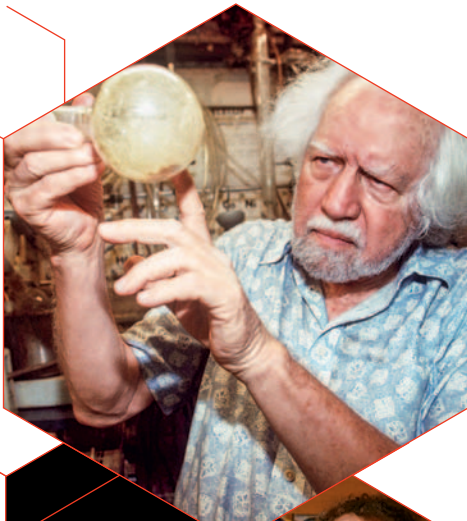
"Here," Jagers said, handing de Limur the bag. "Have some fun."

The drug Adam would go on to be rebranded as ecstasy and banned by the Drug Enforcement Administration, but in 1984 it was entirely legal. A chemical compound originally synthesized in 1912 in the labs of the German pharmaceutical giant Merck, ecstasy was rediscovered in the 1970s and circulated through psychologist circles as MDMA (an acronym for its chemical name, methylenedioxy-methamphetamine) before landing on the

doorsteps of such New York clubs as the Saint and Studio 54. But it was in Dallas, at the Starck, that the drug truly turned into a phenomenon. If you could tap into the core of the Starck and liquefy its mood into substance, ecstasy would flow out like sap. By 1985, rumors out of Texas trumpeted that MDMA had gone recreational in a big way. Gays mingled with straights on dance floors. Parents panicked over dilated pupils. Politicians demanded action. Soon, DEA agents turned away from cocaine cartels to chase a new substance they privately derided as "that kiddie drug."

On July 1, 1985, the DEA classified ecstasy as a Schedule I substance, officially making it illegal. On July 9, just a year after the Starck's opening, Dallas cops made the nation's first ecstasy-related arrest. Those charges were later dismissed because police had misspelled the 29-letter chemical name, but more arrests followed, including a massive raid on the Starck that left its floors littered with a collection of pills and powders.

Thirty years later, the popularity of electronic dance music has catapulted ecstasy, now known as molly, into the mainstream once again. Today's global EDM business boasts an estimated value of \$6.9 billion as massive music events attract more and more attendees every year. Between 2007 and 2012, attendance at the five largest EDM festivals grew by 41 percent. Las Vegas's Electric Daisy Carnival drew 400,000 fist-pumpers in 2014 alone—an 8,000 percent *(continued on page 114)*



Ecstasy advocates and architects of psychedelics research Alexander Shulgin (above) and Rick Doblin (right).





PURE ECSTASY

Continued from page 94

increase since the fest began in 1997. From August 2014 to August 2015, the world's top DJ, Calvin Harris, raked in \$66 million.

The rise of EDM culture has in turn caused an ecstasy resurgence. A 2013 study showed that one in 10 people between the ages of 18 and 25 have tried some version of molly; with that, the DEA reports a 100-fold increase in arrests, emergency-room visits and overdoses attributed to the drug between 2009 and 2012. The number of molly-related deaths has also risen.

And yet, the DEA reports that only 13 percent of the molly it analyzed in New York between 2009 and 2013 contained traces of actual MDMA. Most of what passes for ecstasy today is a cocktail of drugs that may include cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, Sudafed and God knows what else. In fact, for all its popularity, pure MDMA, the stuff that sparked a national hysteria 30 years ago, is almost impossible to find.

"It was Dallas. I expected two-by-fours, plywood, black paint, crummy lights and crummy sound," says Jaggers of pulling up to the Starck for the first time in 1984. "But this was beautiful. I was shocked." The hottest new nightspot in Dallas had been carved out of an old warehouse under a highway interchange and named for Philippe Starck, a French designer whom a group of wealthy Dallas 20-somethings hired to create the most lavish club in the world. Indeed, the Starck looked as if it had been plucked by a helicopter and flown in from France. Everything was impec-

cably appointed. There were push-button flushers and automatic sinks in the unisex bathrooms, alternating rows of black and white matchbooks on the bar and an endless supply of Romanian crystal champagne glasses. "We chose them by listening to which one sounded best hitting the terrazzo," says Starck manager Greg McCone. "At one party we lost \$7,000 worth of champagne glasses."

Edwige Belmore, a veteran of the London and Paris punk scenes, guarded the front door. She was part of Andy Warhol's inner sanctum at Studio 54, had been photographed by Helmut Newton and counted Yves Saint Laurent as a friend. You had to meet Belmore's standards to get into the club, and few in Dallas at the time could. Those who did walked through a pair of massive, half-moon-shaped black steel doors

baggy pants, shoulder pads, purple skirts and oversize T-shirts lined up outside and waited for hours.

The Starck's dance floor was too small for a club its size, but that only added to the sweat and fervor. It was a pit of throbbing music and bodies driven by a new drug that accentuated every dancer's touch and every beat of the steady soundtrack of synth pop, New Wave, Euro techno and Italo disco.

A month after opening, the Starck overflowed with ecstasy. Bartenders kept pills for sale in the quarter slots of their registers; at the end of the night, management would notice \$200 tabs with \$800 tips. They knew their staff was selling ecstasy, but it was legal, so there was no reason to stop it.

Stories seeped out of people having sex with strangers in the unisex bathrooms and

coked-out Republicans running around the dance floor with drag queens. Management relaxed the door policy and began to stay open till eight A.M. People of all sorts—gay hairdressers, young Texas punks, rich debutantes, West Texas oil tycoons, Luxembourgian princesses and, eventually, Hollywood celebrities—flooded in. Rob Lowe was a Starck regular, as was the cast of *Dallas*. Oscar-nominated actor Thomas Haden Church was a college student at the time, working the concierge desk at an upscale Dallas hotel. When celebrities visited town, he would drag them to the club. Julian Lennon, Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, Dee Dee Ramone and members of New Order were all spotted at the Starck. "I was there at nine P.M. on a Saturday night one time. I look at the bar and

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and entered a room of polished black terrazzo floors, shimmering gauze drapes and a grand staircase that led to a sunken dance floor. The room was lit like a movie set—no disco balls here—and the air was thick with cigarette smoke, sweat and cologne. There they found ecstasy—and plenty of it.

For six months, Jaggers flew back and forth between New York and Dallas to play weekly gigs. Each time he brought more and more ecstasy with him, and as the drug spread, the notoriety of the Starck grew. On any given night the scene looked as if Whit Stillman's urban haute bourgeoisie were auditioning for a Pat Benatar video. A cacophony of shiny animal-print jackets, wide-brimmed hats, blonde pompadours,

John Paul Jones and Jimmy Page are standing there, drinking Heinekens," McCone remembers. "Hey, half of Led Zeppelin, this is cool, I thought. Half an hour later, Robert Plant comes walking in, and I'm like, Fuck."

When Ronald Reagan came to town in August 1984, there was so much ecstasy in Dallas, one thing was certain: It wasn't all coming from Kerry Jaggers.

Michael Clegg stood under the stars on a beach in Tulum, Mexico and slipped a pill into his mouth. His brain flooded with serotonin and dopamine, his body tingled and his mind cleared. As he looked out across the black-molasses mass of ocean heaving

under the glittering night sky, Clegg knew his life had changed forever. It was 1978.

"The night I took my first hit on the beach in Mexico, I said to myself, My mission in life is to get this to the entire world," Clegg remembers. "If anyone was ever ordained with a mission, I was that night."

How Clegg came to be standing on a Mexican beach, so moved by a drug that he would appoint himself its prophet, is a strange story of all-American self-realization and personal reinvention.

Clegg grew up on the South Side of Chicago; at the age of 12 he entered a Catholic seminary, where he studied Spanish, theology, psychology and tennis. In 1965, when he was 26, Clegg decided the priesthood wasn't for him. Former priests often find it difficult to readjust to society, but Clegg was likable and funny, with a breezy demeanor and a keen mind. He had a natural feel for people. He shed the collar but couldn't shake the priestly impression he left on people, a shamanistic charisma characteristic of natural-born salesmen.

Clegg also had a knack for spotting opportunity. After reading about a new technology, he built a security company that sold motion-sensitive alarms that automatically phoned police. To boost business, Clegg paid a night-watch captain in the Los Angeles Police Department to slip him burglary reports. Whenever someone was burglarized in L.A., Clegg's sales staff was on the phone with the victim the next day.

He sold his business for \$3.2 million in 1968 and spent the next few years drinking and screwing his way through a small fortune. When he ran out of money, he found ways to earn it back: a mercury mine in Nevada, imported microwaves from Japan, resorts in Texas and Mexico.

By the mid-1970s he was teaching yoga and tennis at an upscale residential development in tony north Dallas. Rich, attractive, bored housewives perusing the Yellow Pages found a photo of a spry, good-looking man with rosy cheeks and athletic legs offering "Zen tennis therapy." Clegg promised clients more than a workout, but he didn't know he was also building a network of people with untapped appetites for a pleasure-inducing designer drug.

Clegg was splitting his time between a condo in Dallas and his yoga resort in Mexico when a friend insisted he try a new drug called Adam. He immediately understood what a powerful product he had on his hands. "For the first time in your life there is no fear of anything," Clegg says. "That is such a freeing sensation. You aren't concerned with the details of life on earth. Health, business, relationships—none of it matters. Everything looks beautiful."

After trying MDMA, Clegg wanted more. The only source of the drug, however, was the Boston Group, an underground legion of medical chemists in Massachusetts who produced the drug primarily for therapeutic use. So Clegg decided to make his own. He tracked down Alexander Shulgin, a towering figure in the history of psychedelic drugs who had rediscovered MDMA in the 1970s and turned psychologists on to it, but Clegg couldn't win an introduction.

He did, however, make contact with someone who had access to the formula. Then he found a chemist. Armed with those, Clegg purchased a house in the remote mountains of northern California and had his brother-in-law learn how to make the compound. The lab began to produce MDMA, and Clegg threw parties in his Dallas condo where he handed out the drug for free. But there was a problem—it needed a name.

"When I first got it, I remember calling it Adam," Clegg says. "I thought, This isn't something I can market. What is the true experience of this? I had to convince people who didn't do drugs to try one no one had heard of. I was telling people it would let them see God. Then it came to me: It was pure ecstasy."

He invited friends, psychiatrists, former yoga pupils and tennis students to his place, where he coached them through their first trips. It wasn't long before everyone wanted in on Clegg's tantalizing experiments. "We had a big Jacuzzi," he says. "People who were uptight and modest would suddenly shed their clothes. There was something freeing about it."

By 1984, production at his California lab had ramped up to a million pills a month and still couldn't meet demand. As soon as a batch came off the pill presser, it was packaged and sent out via UPS or FedEx. The pills landed in clubs and psychologists' offices, but they also filled the mailboxes of average, middle-class Americans who'd heard about the drug through an ever-widening word-of-mouth network. Clegg's was a multimillion-dollar drug operation, and cash poured in quickly. He stuffed it in suitcases and shoved it in his garage rafters. He even bought a Cessna jet he piloted solo, flying shipments of cash to depositories in Switzerland.

Michael Clegg never went to the Starck. He never met the club kids who were passing out pills or the bartenders who openly sold his product over the counter. But by February 1985, he knew things were getting hot. Ecstasy had taken over Dallas, and it was spreading.

Saxon Hatchett was 14 in 1984 when he started going to clubs in Austin and first heard about ecstasy. There weren't a lot of options for punk alternative kids like Hatchett, who felt out of place in the city's beer joints and redneck bars. Hatchett and his friends gravitated toward the music and attitude of gay bars and clubs in Austin's Warehouse District. They started doing ecstasy, which produced more than a high. It changed how he and his misfit friends understood their place in the world. "It was almost like the needle got picked up off the record player and put back down," Hatchett says of the drug. "As corny as it sounds, it solidified us with a common identity."

One night someone handed Hatchett a pack of 20 ecstasy pills and told him to pass them out to his friends. He sold the pills for five bucks apiece and ended the night with two or three for himself—and a pocket full of cash. Hatchett wasn't the only club kid selling legal ecstasy. Student dealers

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popped up on the college campuses in Dallas and Austin. The drug spread from clubs to fraternities to college parties and eventually trickled into high schools. Concerned parents began calling the Dallas Police Department, asking about the new drug.

In February 1985, Phil Jordan was reassigned to take control of the DEA's Dallas office. A decorated agent from El Paso, Jordan had tracked Mexican cartel networks through the streets of Guadalajara and Juárez, but now ecstasy, the "kiddie drug," was his top priority. Even though it was legal, Jordan cased it like any narcotic. His agents went undercover, looking for dealers and buying large enough quantities to work up the distribution chain. The drug wasn't difficult to find. *The Austin Chronicle* had ads for mail-order doses on its back page. But Jordan's distribution trails led only to amateurs, club kids like Hatchett selling to large networks of friends. As far as Jordan could tell, the vast majority of ecstasy was coming from outside Texas, from a lab somewhere in California. He notified the DEA's Los Angeles office, but nothing came of it. Once it left Dallas, Jordan's ecstasy trail went cold.

The country was in the throes of Reagan's war on drugs. In October 1984, Congress passed an amendment to the Controlled Substances Act that gave the DEA emergency power to temporarily reclassify a drug as Schedule I. Seven months later, in May 1985, Texas senator Lloyd Bentsen asked the acting administrator of the DEA for an emergency ban on ecstasy. Citing a study that linked a related chemical, MDA, to brain damage in rats, the DEA announced on May 31, 1985 that MDMA would be illegal on July 1.

As Saxon Hatchett saw it, the DEA's ban was good for business. He recognized a production vacuum and decided to set up his own ecstasy lab. He recruited an organic-chemistry graduate student from the University of Texas and over the next four years built one of the largest ecstasy production operations in the state. At its height, he moved 50,000 pills a month. Hatchett bought a new car, skied in Aspen, lived in a downtown condo and hung out with members of New Order, who liked to spend downtime on Lake Travis outside Austin. "I was the first kid I knew with a cell phone," Hatchett says.

But finding the ingredients to manufacture MDMA had become increasingly difficult. The DEA tightened restrictions on key chemicals such as safrole oil, and as demand for Hatchett's product increased, he was forced to outsource production to Mexico, which meant dealing with drug traffickers. "I didn't watch *Scarface* and think, This is what I want to be," Hatchett says. "I remember the first time I went to a meeting, there was a gun in the room. For three years it was great, but I woke up one day and thought, This isn't fun anymore."

By 1989 Hatchett wanted out of the business. Then a cash drop with some cocaine dealers in Houston went wrong. It was supposed to be simple: 120,000 pills

for half a million in cash. But the dealers' runner took all of it. Hatchett wanted to brush it off. It was a big loss, but it didn't put him out of business. His two partners, however, insisted they get their money back. Increased contact with the cocaine dealers landed Hatchett's group on the DEA's radar. In April 1989 Hatchett was arrested and served seven years in jail.

With the DEA focused on ecstasy, Michael Clegg knew it was time for an exit strategy. He purchased an old pharmaceutical company in Brazil and retrofitted it into a giant lab. To shore up capacity, he secured 15 55-gallon drums of safrole oil. "It was enough oil to produce ecstasy forever," Clegg says. From Brazil, he continued to produce and export to the European market. Clegg's ecstasy flooded Ibiza, England, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.

By the time the DEA banned MDMA, in 1985, Clegg had already shuttered his lab in California and retreated to the Cayman Islands, where he purchased a yacht and sailed it through the Panama Canal and up the coast of Central America to Costa Rica. There he bought some land on the top of a mountain and settled down, well outside the grasp of the DEA.

Illegality hardly curbed ecstasy's takeover of the club scene. By the winter of 1987 the drug had made its way to Ibiza, where British DJs discovered it and brought it back to London. There the happy little "hug drug" helped spark Britain's so-called second Summer of Love, in 1988. The drug followed the youth-culture trajectory, becoming synonymous with the emergence of acid house, the Madchester dance scene and warehouse rave parties on the outskirts of London. In the 1990s raves were eventually reimported, along with ecstasy, to New York, where it became the drug that defined a generation of club kids. Now a knockoff called molly is attempting to do the same.

A few people can still get their hands on the same kind of legal MDMA that took the country by storm 30 years ago, thanks to Rick Doblin, an advocate for the psychedelic wonder drug.

Doblin first encountered MDMA in 1982 in the secluded confines of the Esalen Institute, atop the cliffs of Big Sur in northern California. Esalen was the birthplace of the New Age movement and a coastal highway for true believers of the 1960s psychedelic revolution. It was there that he heard about a new drug called Adam that had piqued the interest of psychotherapists at the institute. Adam was all the buzz, but Doblin was unimpressed. "It just looked like people were talking to each other," he says. But when he tried Adam himself, he couldn't believe what he had stumbled on: a powerful psychedelic that didn't create hallucinations. It made his mind feel crisp and clear. It also offered a vision of what he should do with the rest of his life.

He formed a nonprofit, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, that conducted research intended to prepare for the inevitable legalization of the drug. Part of that included sending

letters and samples of MDMA to Polish rabbis, Austrian Zen Buddhists and American Benedictine monks. In the summer of 1984, Doblin conducted his first clinical trials of MDMA, keeping the results secret while quietly building a network of advocates.

When the DEA published its intention to ban MDMA in July 1984, Doblin flew to Washington to deliver a petition that would force a hearing on the ban. "Previously I had only thought of myself as a counter-culture drug-using criminal," he says. "But this was my movement into the mainstream. The American legal system allows nonprofit organizations to exist, and you can use them to fight the government." He drove the issue through the courts in an effort to reclassify the drug as a Schedule III substance, which would allow doctors to use it for therapy. A federal judge ruled in his favor in May 1986, but after a series of appeals, the DEA ultimately overruled the judge's decision and kept MDMA on Schedule I, citing its lack of FDA approval. In the process Doblin realized that his passion lay not in the psychology behind the MDMA experience but in the fight to change the legal structure around drug prohibition in the United States.

Doblin earned a doctorate at Harvard, and MAPS became instrumental in organizing clinical studies of MDMA. In 1992, the FDA approved the first clinical trials of the drug. Today, MAPS oversees much of the research, which involves Iraq War veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and people suffering from clinical depression. A study in 2010 found that 83 percent of subjects with PTSD who underwent MDMA-assisted psychotherapy expressed a significant drop in their symptoms. A follow-up study in 2012 showed that these benefits were sustained on average for 45 months.

With these kinds of results, Doblin hopes his organization can steer MDMA toward legalization the same way medical marijuana has become legal. He believes MDMA could be approved for PTSD treatment by 2021 and dreams of total legalization by 2032.

I ask Doblin if there is a place where fringe believers in MDMA therapy are continuing their work in secret, quietly and illegally. Doblin chooses his words carefully. "There are still underground therapists doing a lot of work," he says.

It's 2015, and I'm with Kerry Jagers backstage at a concert in Dallas. I also meet Hatchett, who earlier in the day palled around with New Order's Peter Hook, working out together at Life Time Fitness and catching up over smoothies. Hatchett, like Hook, is now sober. He's married, runs a tattoo-removal business in Austin and has a teenage daughter. As far as Hatchett is concerned, there is no more MDMA—at least not the pure stuff he made back in the 1980s. But you can find the culture he believes the drug helped spawn: the music, the sense of style and a certain sensibility, an increased sensitivity and broad-mindedness he doesn't remember seeing in the world as much before. "If you weren't there, you don't get it," he says. "We were the creators of this movement that's no longer a subculture."

The Starck closed its doors in 1989, killed not by the outlawing of ecstasy but by the natural entropy of cool that eventually claims all hot spots. The shell of the space still stands underneath that highway overpass, mostly vacant but occasionally used for nostalgic parties at which former Starck regulars seek to recapture the feeling, if only for one night.

As they had with Hatchett, the feds caught up with Michael Clegg. In 1992, after more than a decade running what was perhaps the largest ecstasy-production company in the world, Clegg was arrested at an airport in Palo Alto, California. Federal agents slipped a tracking device onto his plane before he left Costa Rica, and when he landed to refuel on his way to Vancouver, they were waiting for him. His plant in Brazil, his cash in Switzerland and his barrels of safrole oil were all seized by the DEA. After a complicated legal battle, Clegg managed to save his resorts and reduce his sentence to four years in a federal penitentiary.

I find Clegg at his home in northern Georgia, overlooking a wooded ravine in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We sit in overstuffed leather chairs, drinking espresso from ceramic cups and listening to a New Age music station on DirecTV. Clegg says that jail—not ecstasy—was the best thing that ever happened to him. It prompted an authentic epiphany. When he left prison, he was no longer Michael Clegg, ecstasy kingpin, but Satyam Nadeen, an enlightened spiritual teacher on the path to spiritual awakening. He hands me a copy of his book, *From Onions to Pearls*, which boasts a Deepak Chopra endorsement on the cover. After years of drugs, he explains, he has found a spiritual happiness that far exceeds anything any drug produced.

"I spend eight hours a day blissing out now," he says.

After lunch on the porch of his yoga resort up the road, Clegg takes me back to his house, where he produces a pyramid-shaped crystal tied to a string. He waves it over a piece of paper printed with black numerals. When the crystal comes to a halt, he tells me encouragingly that my consciousness level—the extent to which my inner being is tied into the all-infinite being of the universe—is above average. He won't tell me his own reading but suggests that it approaches Buddha levels. Toward the end of the day, I ask him the question: After manufacturing millions of MDMA pills, the purest, most perfect ecstasy the world has ever known, does he know if there's any left?

Clegg doesn't think so. He tells a story about a woman in Seattle who, right before ecstasy became illegal, purchased 10,000 pills and buried them in her yard. Maybe they're still there. Then he tells of a time a few years ago when his brother-in-law showed up with a handful of pills he'd been saving for two decades. They took them together, and to Clegg's surprise, the quality hadn't waned one bit.

"It was pure bliss," he says, "exactly like I remembered."



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