Timothy Leary

Megan Stafford
Timothy Francis Leary

- Born to Abigail Ferris and Timothy “Tote” Leary
- Conceived January 17, 1920 – the day after prohibition made alcohol illegal
- Born October 22, 1920
- Named after Saint Timotheus like father and grandfather
Abigail Ferris

- Devout Catholic, attended mass daily
- From a farm out of Indian Orchard, Massachusetts
- Family practiced no drinking or dancing, men were not to be trusted, and sex was too horrific to contemplate
Timothy “Tote” Leary

- From Springfield, Massachusetts
- Family rich and sophisticated, veered towards hedonism
- Practiced dentistry after a time at West Point Military Academy
  - Became General Eisenhower’s dentist during WWII
- Became an alcoholic after son, Tim, was born
- Poor father but strong influence
Childhood

- Only child and lonely in early years
- Was raised strict Catholic – attended mass and was a choirboy
- Had an imaginary friend, real people didn’t interest him
- Avid reader
- Felix the Cat was favorite cartoon character
- Discovered sports and girls and became more sociable
Death of Grandfather Leary

- Grandfather Leary died when Timothy was 14
  - Discovered expected wealth to be inherited had disappeared to stock market crash, family loans and poor management
- Father went out to get drunk and never came back
  - First person to “Drop out”
High School

- Attended Classical High School in Springfield, MA
- Became editor of the school newspaper, The Recorder
  - Helped him win the interstate award for excellence
- Was popular, involved in extracurricular activities, but had poor attendance
- Attendance and some controversial editorials in the paper led to a confrontation with the principal
- Left the school with the principal shouting “I never want to talk to you again. Just stay away from me and this office”
College Career

- Attended Holy Cross Jesuit College
  - dropped out during his second year
- Was accepted into West Point Military Academy
  - Accepted on July 1, 1940 into American armed forces
  - August 1941, after 9 months of silencing, was approached by officers and asked what his terms would be to leave
- Enrolled in the University of Alabama
  - Started studying psychology
  - Was found spending the night in the girls’ dormitory and expelled
Return to the Army

- 1942 returned to the army
- Hearing was damaged and was forced to wear a hearing aid
- Met his first wife, Marianne Busch, during diagnosis of hearing problem
- Was given a clerical position in an army hospital and was able to complete his psychology degree
- Left the army shortly after the war, honorably discharged and was awarded the standard certificate signed by President Truman
Move to California

- September 1946 became a doctoral student in psychology at Berkeley
- Worked as a consultant at Berkeley, an instructor at the University of California’s Medical Center, and in private practice
- 1954 became Director of Psychology Research at the Kaiser Foundation and published nearly 50 papers in psychology journals
- 1957 Published *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality: A Functional Theory and methodology for Personal Evaluation*
Move to Spain

- Moved to Spain in 1957
- Became very ill in 1959, Spanish doctors didn’t know what was wrong
- Leary was in so much pain and gave up, later wrote
  - “I died. I let go. I surrendered. I slowly let every tie to my old life slip away. My career, my ambitions, my home, My identity. The guilts. The wants. With a sudden snap, all the ropes of my social life were gone.”
- The next day he started healing
- Met with Professor David McClelland, Director of the Harvard Center for Personality Research
Harvard Center for Personality Research

- Began teaching at Harvard end of 1959
- Joined the White Hand Drinking Society
- Vacationed to Mexico with Richard Alpert and colleagues in 1960, tried mushrooms for the first time
- “In four hours by the swimming pool I learned more about the mind, the brain, and its structures than I did in the preceding fifteen as a diligent psychologist”
- Returned to Harvard and started the Harvard Psychedelics Research Program
Harvard Psychedelics Research Program

- Began setting up the program with Richard Alpert and the advice of British Novelist Aldous Huxley
- Allen Ginsberg, beat poet, was one of the first artists to join the sessions
- Set up a program to work with inmates in the Massachusetts prison system
- Worked with Dr. Walter Pahnke from the Harvard Divinity School to compare the psychedelic experience and “true” religious ecstasy
Introduction to LSD

- November 1961, Leary was introduced to LSD
- Originally hesitant to try because of CIA military experiments
- After taking it he was a changed man

  “It was the most shattering experience of my life. It has been 20 years since that first LSD trip with Michael Hollingshead. I have never forgotten it. Nor has it been possible for me to return to the life I was leading before that session.”

- 1962 faculty member Herbert Kelman began trying to shut Leary and his Psychedelic program down.
- Began widely spreading the word about LSD
Parents were concerned about their children’s education at Harvard
Kelman organized another meeting against Leary and Alpert
The FDA declared LSD was dangerous and should only be administered by trained medical physicians
Leary and Alpert started a non-profit psychedelic organization called If-If
Leary and Alpert were fired from Harvard in 1963
Millbrook House

- Began living at the Millbrook House – home welcoming people taking psychedelics
- Met Rosemary Woodruff
- December 1965, took a family vacation to Mexico with new love Rosemary and the kids
- April 1966 the Millbrook estate was raided
Political Works

- Spoke to committees about making the drugs legal again.
- Once cleared of the charges and sentence to prison from 1966, decided to run for governor of California in 1969.
- Didn’t put a lot of thought into his platform but was backed by many influential rock bands and artists.
- Notable speech of “Turn on, Tune in, and Drop out” was given.

https://youtu.be/IPSzTBP5PAU
Laguna Beach Bust

- Was busted with Rosemary and Jack in the car.
- Total of 20 year sentence for charges
- In September 1970, seven months after incarceration, Leary escaped prison
- Was given a fake ID with the name William McNellig
Traveling

- Tim and Rosemary traveled to Paris and then to Algeria to meet with Eldridge Cleaver and his chapter of the Black Panthers.
- LSD reports went international.
- Panthers were lying for Timothy. After traveling and being discovered in Lebanon, relations between Cleaver and Leary soured.
- Cleaver put the Leary’s on House arrest but easily escaped the Panther’s prison.
- Was able to leave Algeria to Switzerland where he received sanctuary until 1972.
Back in the US

- Timothy was held in solitary while awaiting trials for his escape.
- Was sentenced and held in Folsom Prison.
- Used this time to work on his manuscripts.
- After 31 months he was released from the California prison system where he was serving for his escape and the Laguna Beach arrest.
- Was placed in federal care to serve his sentence for the arrest at the Mexican border.
- Was released in 1976 by Governor Jerry Brown.
After talking to the feds during his time in prison, Leary’s reputation had suffered

FBI claimed there were death threats and put Leary into witness protection

Continued work on manuscripts and theories

Still was interested in drugs but kept it downlow

Nancy Reagan started the “Just say no” campaign and Leary hijacked it with “Just say Know”
Technology Generation

- 1980’s introduced new technologies and computers
- Leary became fascinated by computers and the internet
- Designed computer programs and wrote articles for computer magazines
- Advocated for personal use of computers vs corporations
- “The PC is the LSD of the 90s”
Later years

- Reunited with old friends
- Continued writing books and expanding his previous thoughts
Death

- In 1995 Timothy Leary was diagnosed with prostate cancer
- He died at 75 on May 31, 1996
- Film Timothy Leary’s Dead was made in 1996
- Influence:
  - Authored and co-authored more than 20 books
  - Early influence on Game Theory and Transactional Analysis
  - Prominent figure of the counterculture
Discussion Questions

- President Nixon had called Leary the “most dangerous man alive,” and Presidents Hoover and Reagan didn’t have kind words either. What about Leary, do you think, made officials dislike him so much and believe him to be dangerous?

- Do you think Leary could have taken different and/or better actions to advocate for the legalization and usage of drugs?

- Do you believe drugs should be scheduled and policed as much as they are today? If not, what changes should be made?