

Terence McKenna, 53, Dies;

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Terence McKenna, who so playfully and persistently pressed his message that psychedelic drugs are mankind's salvation that Timothy Leary himself christened him "the Timothy Leary of the 90's," died on Monday at a friend's home in San Rafael, Calif. He was 53 and lived on the South Kona Coast of Hawaii.

The cause of death was brain cancer, said a publicist for his books.

"If psychedelics don't ready you for the great beyond, then I don't know what really does," Mr. McKenna said in December in one of his last public speeches, at the Esalen Institute. Death, he said then, felt close.

Mr. McKenna combined a leprechaun's wit with a poet's sensibility to brew a New Age stew with ingredients including flying saucers, elves and the I Ching. The essential seasoning was the psychedelic mushrooms that transformed his life and that he recommended — in "heroic doses" — for virtually everyone.

He lived on the wild side of a wild generation. He dropped acid in San Francisco in the 1960's, smuggled hashish in India and searched the jungles of the Amazon for the magic mushrooms. He told interviewers that he had smoked marijuana every day from the time he was a teenager. In the 1990's, Mr. McKenna gained fame by delivering his drug pitch to a new generation at nightclub "raves."

"My real function was to give people permission," he said in an article to appear in the May issue of *Wired* magazine. "Essentially, what I existed for was to say, 'Go ahead, you'll live through it, get loaded, you don't have to be afraid.'"

In lectures, in recordings and in five books, Mr. McKenna made his case for illegal substances that many experts consider highly dangerous. He had a grand theory: that psychedelic mushrooms are the missing link in the story of human evolution. Not until our primate ancestors began eating hallucinatory psilocybin mushrooms, he contended, did they begin to acquire human qualities.

Mr. McKenna, a lanky man with a salt-and-pepper beard and deep-set eyes, also professed to know exactly when the world would end: Dec. 22, 2012. He came to this conclusion through a mathematical construct he based on the I Ching, the ancient

Living on the wild side of a wild generation, he still wrote five books.

Chinese book of divination.

The package he pushed struck a chord, at least among the usual suspects. Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead called him "the only person who has made a serious effort to objectify the psychedelic experience."

But experts on drug treatment attacked Mr. McKenna for popularizing dangerous substances. "Surely the fact that Terence McKenna says that the psilocybin mushroom 'is the megaphone used by an alien, intergalactic Other to communicate with mankind' is enough for us to wonder if taking LSD has done something to his mental faculties," Judy Corman, vice president of Phoenix House of New York, a drug treatment center, said in a letter to *The New York Times* in 1993.

Still others had big trouble with his self-consciously cosmic literary style. "I suffered hallucinatory agonies of my own while reading his shrilly ecstatic prose," Peter Conrad wrote in *The New York Times* in a 1993 review of Mr. McKenna's book "True Hallucinations," published by Harper San Francisco.

But many marveled at his stream of novel thoughts. "To write him off as a crazy hippie is a rather lazy approach to a man not only full of fascinating ideas but also blessed with a sense of humor and self-parody," Tom Hodgkinson wrote in *The New Statesman and Society* in 1994.

Terence Kemp McKenna was born on Nov. 16, 1946, in a Colorado cattle and coal town, Paonia. He was a youth given to memorizing passages of James Joyce and reading Carl Jung's "Psychology and Alchemy," and his main satisfactions percolated from his fertile imagination.

"I think my first encounter with psychedelics was looking at Colorado and trying to understand that it was once the shores of an ocean with hundred-foot-long sauropods tromp-

Patron of Psychedelic Drugs

ing through the mangrove swamps," he told *Details* magazine in 1993.

He found his way to San Francisco in 1965. According to the April 1993 issue of *Details* magazine, Barry Melton, the guitarist for Country Joe & the Fish, introduced him to marijuana in 1965. Soon he tried LSD.

He enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley that year and was accepted into the Tussman Experimental College, which emphasized self-direction. After the two-year program, he embarked on travels around the world.

In 1971 he and his brother, Dennis, journeyed to the Amazon jungle in search of psychedelic plants. In a tiny mission settlement in southern Colombia, they encountered, for the first time, what drug enthusiasts call "magic mushrooms."

In 1972, Mr. McKenna returned to Berkeley to finish college. He completed a self-tailored degree in ecology, resource recovery and shamanism. His mind was focused on, and certainly by, mushrooms: No one had yet figured out how to cultivate the mushrooms in the United States, but the McKennas brought the South American secrets home. They published them, and in the 1980's were growing 70 pounds every six weeks. The operation ended when a friend was arrested for his fungi farm.

In 1975, the two brothers published their first book, "The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens and the I Ching." Mr. McKenna began to lecture both to old hippies and converts to the emerging New Age.

According to *Wired*, he drifted into the role of "charismatic talking head." He wrote four books in the early 1990's. In addition to "True

Hallucinations," they were "Food of the Gods" (Bantam, 1992); "The Archaic Revival" (Harper San Francisco) and "Dialogues at the Edge of the West," written with Ralph Abraham and Rupert Sheldrake (Bear & Company, 1992).

Mr. McKenna met his wife, Kathleen Harrison, in Jerusalem in the mid-1970's. They settled in Occidental, a small town north of San Francisco. They had a son, Finn, who now lives in Jersey City, N.J., and a daughter, Klea, of Santa Cruz, Calif. He is also survived by his brother, Dennis, who lives in Minneapolis.

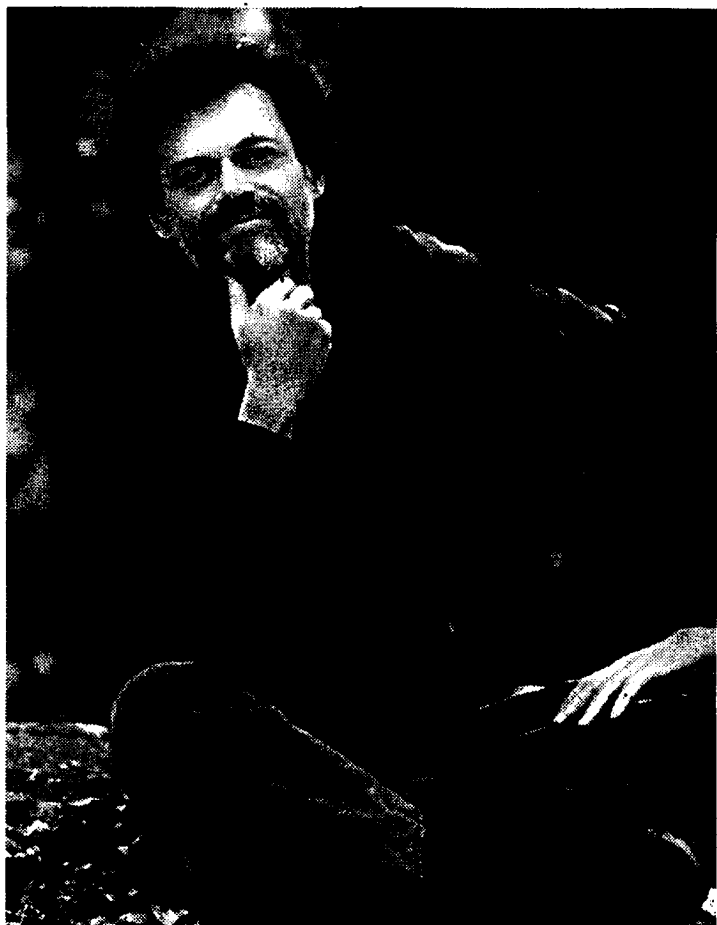
After a divorce in 1992, Mr. McKenna moved to Hawaii, where he and his former wife owned property. Mr. McKenna built a modernist house, which is topped with a huge antenna dish for the Internet communications with which he became enamored.

"Without sounding too cliché, the Internet really is the birth of global mind," he told *Wired*. "That's what a god is. Somebody who knows more than you do about whatever you're dealing with."

When he fell ill last May, Mr. McKenna was enjoying a new life with Christy Silness, a young woman he had met the year before at an ethnobotanical conference in the Yucatan. He had medical treatment for glioblastoma multiforma, a rare form of brain cancer, while friends and followers added more esoteric touches.

A self-styled "grand kahuna of Polynesia" biked up the mountain to meditate at his bedside. A Nevada disk jockey, Art Bell, asked his 13 million-listeners to send good vibrations.

Wired said Mr. McKenna, like



Terrence

Terence McKenna, shown in 1993, was quoted as saying, "Essentially what I existed for was to say, 'Go ahead, you'll live through loaded, you don't have to be afraid.'"

many others, wondered whether a lifetime of drug use might be to blame for his brain tumor.

"So what about it?" he asked his doctors. "You want to hammer on me about that?" They assured him there was no causal link.

"So what about 35 years of dope smoking?" he asked, pointing to studies suggesting cannabis may shrink tumors.

"Listen," Mr. McKenna told them, "if cannabis shrinks tumors, I wouldn't be having this disc-