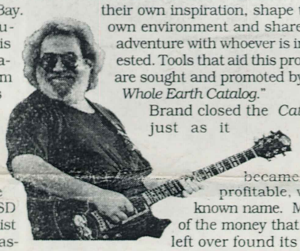
'The Sixties won't be over till the fat lady gets high'

Those who celebrated the summer of love are now in their 60s — but they're not giving up yet. **Andrew Brown** has found them in cyberspace

BEAR lives in Queensland now, to be safe from the coming Ice Age. When he was known as Augustus Owsley Stanley III, in the Sixties, he made more and better LSD than anyone outside the Sandoz labs where it was invented. Owsley acid was the benchmark of quality: it was what the Beatles did.

Eventually he served a jail sentence — who didn't? — and after that worked as a soundman for the Grateful Dead. Towards the end of the Seventies he became convinced that the Northern Hemisphere was a dangerous place to be. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which holds that Ice Ages come on gradually, he decided that they were brought on by a single tremendous cyclone, centred on Baffin Bay.

The supporting arguments can be found on his web page, with an explanation of how he has kept slim and healthy for 40 years by eating no vegetables at all.



A surprising number of the revolutionaries who brought us the summer of love 30 years ago are still with us, not least LSD itself. Ken Kesey, the novelist and hero of Tom Wolfe's classic tale of psychedelia, *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, is still thriving, as is Stewart Brand, the man who founded the *Whole Earth Catalog* and gave the revolution its finest slogan: "We are as Gods, and we might as well get good at it."

Timothy Leary, the greatest apostle of acid, died last year of cancer.

The people who survived the Sixties experiment are entering their own 60s now. Like most of those who lived that long, Leary became a convert to personal computers; and though he withdrew his threat to die live on the Internet he moved much of the process online. You could, for example, log on to his website and examine his daily drug intake: morphine, marijuana and a little cocaine, the last time I looked.

As soon as I started to look for the survivors of the revolution, it became apparent that they had all moved into cyberspace. Indeed, though the term was coined by Canadian science fiction writer William Gibson, it seems to have been first applied to existing computer networks by John Perry Barlow, lyricist to the Grateful Dead, who was another early adopter of LSD.

"We were trying stuff," wrote Stewart Brand, "reinventing civilisation." Brand may turn out to have been the most influential hippie of all. His *Whole Earth Catalog*, a huge paperback list of things that could change the world, from wood stoves to massage, marked one point at which the focus of the movement changed from chemistry to physics, from pills to tools.

"A realm of intimate, personal power is developing," Brand wrote in 1968, "the power of individuals to conduct their own education, find their own inspiration, shape their own environment and share the adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the *Whole Earth Catalog*."

Brand closed the *Catalog* just as it became a profitable, well-known name. Much of the money that was left over found its way into a project to use computers for community building.

This marked an important shift: computers had started off as a symbol of everything LSD was rebelling against but somehow they became assimilated to the human side of the war instead of the machine's.

Brand went to the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where many of the most important features of the personal computer revolution first surfaced.

The psychological innovations were as important as the technological ones. The hacker culture which emerged enabled the intoxicating mix of hope and hucksterism which had fuelled Leary's enthusiasm for drugs to move over into computer networks.

At MIT, Brand wrote a book about the Media Lab and then moved back to the West Coast, where he was one of the founders of the Well, a computer bulletin board that attracted almost everyone who had survived the Sixties with anything interesting to say.

Twenty years after the last *Whole Earth Catalog*, Brand wrote in the foreword to the *Millennium Whole Earth Catalog*: "The personal computer revolution was initiated and carried to fruition by youthful long-hairs, on purpose, with striking consistency between what was intended and what was accomplished.

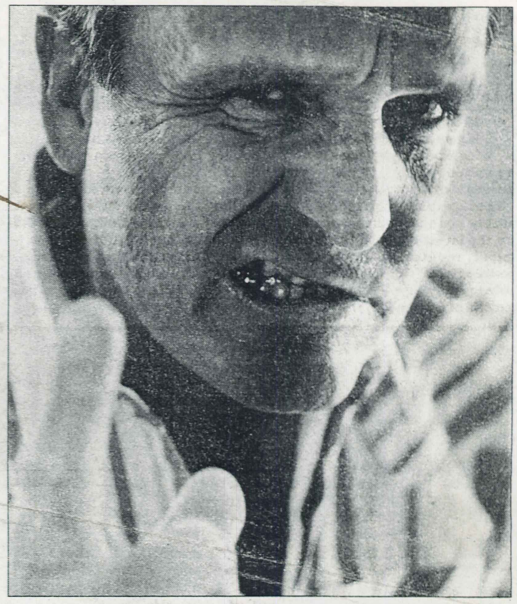
"The impulse was to decentralise society — to undermine the high priests and air-conditioned mainframes of information technology and hand their power to absolutely everybody. There were a few inspirers but no leaders and no books to follow. Only years later did the movement-defining battle cry emerge — Fast, Cheap and Out of Control." The Well itself has seldom been either fast or cheap but remains fairly much out of control.

But the Well grew to be less of a private club. Once it was connected to the Internet, so that anyone anywhere in the world with $15 a month could plug in, it lost its confessional intimacy. By that time, Brand had moved on.

Meanwhile, Ken Kesey is still farming in Oregon, writing and working with video. Of his later books, few have had the success of his first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but he remains a writer of considerable power.

The psychedelic bus on which he and the Merry Pranksters crossed the United States to visit Leary's group in New York has just been inducted into the rock and roll hall of fame in Cleveland.

"I think the Web is returning storytelling to the camp fire," says Kesey. "It is not 10 000 people talking to each other, like at a rock concert: nor is it one to one, like a novel. It is a group of about eight or 10 voices together. We are developing a thing we call a cyber-jam, where anyone can pitch in. We did it a couple of times with Timothy Leary."



Ken Kesey: His influence lives on

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SILLITOE

He is still optimistic about LSD: "When this stuff first came out, I had never even drunk beer. I was trying to get on to the Olympic wrestling team. And I didn't think of it as a drug at all. I thought of it as an exploration, like we were trying to reach the source of the Nile or the far side of the moon. I thought that by now there would be classes and lectures in it.

"But we were never hippies like the media portrayed us. We were all college graduates and had families. I feel like we fell into the cracks between the hippies and the beatniks. I call us crackers sometimes: what we are now is cyberhicks. And all our old bus buddies live within half an hour of each other here in Oregon; we've raised families and seen them through college."

John Perry Barlow reckons 25-million Americans tried LSD: "Some of these are hopeless crystal worshippers or psychedelic derelicts creeping around Oregon woods. But far more of them are successful members of society, chief executives, politicians, ministers and community leaders."

The first great link between psychedelic drugs and money was the music industry. But cyberspace has created bedfellows nearly as odd.

Stewart Brand founded a network of futurologists and consultants called the Global Business Network (GBN), with the help of a couple of senior executives from Shell. The list of GBN "associates" included Laurie Anderson, Peter Gabriel, William Gibson, the palaeontologist Niles Eldredge, one of the discoverers of the evolutionary theory of punctuated equilibrium, and Mitch Kapor, a former acid head and teacher of transcendental meditation who made millions from writing the first successful spreadsheet for the IBM PC.

The links between the heirs of the hippies and corporate money can get even stranger. Kevin Kelly's book, *Out of Control*, is advertised by the legitimate wing of the global drugs industry, on the Absolut Vodka web site.

But Kesey's still optimistic. When they took the bus to Cleveland, he says, the surviving pranksters were astonished at their popularity. "Everywhere we went, we met these huge battalions of young volunteers for the revolution: sharp, clear-eyed healthy young teenagers. What happened in the Sixties was that we all got arrested; and when you get arrested, you get held back. But the Sixties won't be over till the fat lady gets high."