

and I realized I could not move my feet from the earth where I stood. I felt the other human spirits around me—the old curandero, his wife, his son and the little granddaughter—and they were all giving her their full attention. I realized then that we were plants at the edge of her garden. She drifted slowly toward us, reached out and ran her hands through us, like a breeze, like a ripple, and I knew in those moments that my body was clear; that when she touched me I was in perfect order. I knew in my bones that if we ever asked for her to touch us, and we gave in exchange our most profound attention when she did, all would be well. I inhaled and exhaled her presence. She circled the garden again and returned to us. When she passed her hand through my chest a second time, I saw a tiny, ornate wooden door in my heart. It was carved with flowers and vines, and had an intricate golden filigreed handle and hinges. As her grand spirit fingers brushed it, I felt a strong breeze open the tiny door and a pocket of hurt blew away into the sweet air of the garden.

There is this enduring memory of my own face gazing out of a plant, and the dark but not unfriendly presence of the woods nearby. As she faded from view and I returned to a sense of the present, I heard the words repeatedly, in both Spanish and English: *Les muestra el borde del jardín*. “Show them the edge of the garden.” That is my work.



NINA GRABOI

1918–1999

Vienna-born Nina Graboi narrowly escaped the Holocaust, surviving bombing raids and detention camps before finding safety in the United States. She raised a family in Long



Nina Graboi. “Meditation yielded subtle glimpses; I wanted more.”

Island and ran a successful theater group, but feeling dissatisfied, fled that life and found herself, in her midforties, at Millbrook with Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, Ralph Metzner, Allen Ginsberg, Alan Watts, and other prime players in the psychedelic movement. In 1967 she was director of the League for Spiritual Discovery Center in Manhattan. She continued her counterculture lifestyle at Woodstock and later in California, publishing her autobiography, *One Foot in the Future* (1991) from which part of the following text is excerpted.



Four Score and LSD

The room is in darkness except for the candle on the small shrine. I narrow my eyes. The flame is a long narrow strip that throws off sparks which seem to dance to the sound of Iasos’s *Elixir* that

comes from the tape deck.

Today is my eightieth birthday. I have taken LSD to celebrate it.

My past with all its twists and turns, joys and sorrows, seems like a magic carpet that always had a new surprise in store as it unrolled. Not all of them were happy ones, but taken together, they make up who "I" am. Watching my body transform from young and vigorous to old and frail removes the last illusions of a me-ness confined to a physical body. In a society where "getting somewhere," "amounting to something," and "being a success" are the main purposes of life, I must appear as a solitary elderly woman. But to myself, I am infinitely more!

The young girl in Vienna, the refugee from the Nazis, the woman in love, the party-giving Long Island matron, the baby-sitter for my two children, the producer of star-studded plays, the studious, inward-looking seeker, the director of the League for Spiritual Discovery Center in New York City and the Woodstock Transformation Center, the shop-keeper, the mother-figure to the hippie baby boomers, the welfare recipient, the writer, and now the Psychedelic Elder.

Were all these persons me?

My past falls into two distinct parts: pre-psychedelic and post-psychedelic. Others my age may sit nursing memories of their youth and lost loves. I cherish most the memories of the breakthroughs vouchsafed me by the psychedelics. Thirty-four years of blindness, ignorance of the dimensions that slumber within. Then, the beginning of the search. Meditation yielded subtle glimpses; I wanted more. Finally, at age 47, came the breakthrough with LSD at Millbrook, Timothy Leary's communal estate, which was a cross between a country club, a madhouse, a research institute, a monastery, and a Fellini movie set.

When you entered, you were greeted by a sign that asked you to "kindly check your esteemed ego at the door."

Two trips are of prime importance in my inner pantheon. One took me to the Cosmic Theater where I entered the Green Room and, unmasking, watched the other actors unmask. The other landed me temporarily in a Black Hole. Together, they form the underpinning of the one certainty I carry around: that life is an instant in a timeless void. Knowing this, it is sometimes hard to muster compassion for the innumerable ills that afflict the world. Hard to take life quite seriously, yet equally hard not to.

You are the sum total of your memories—that part of the Self that is undying and unborn. A woman, a man, a wayfarer, a builder of dreams, a cosmic traveler. You pass through all the dimensions simultaneously. You're here today, and when the trip is ended, you'll be somewhere else. And now it is time for you to draw the boundaries of the Nina Graboi self around you again. Time to shrink back into the identity of a skin-encapsulated self. Write down what you have learned and share it with others. And remember, there is no ultimate truth.



SIMONE GARRIGUES

1975–

A recent graduate of Barnard in comparative literature, Simone Garrigues is a writer and translator who also works as a national park ranger. She represents a second-generation seeker, an example of the spirit of sixties psychedelia re-emerging in the nineties.