

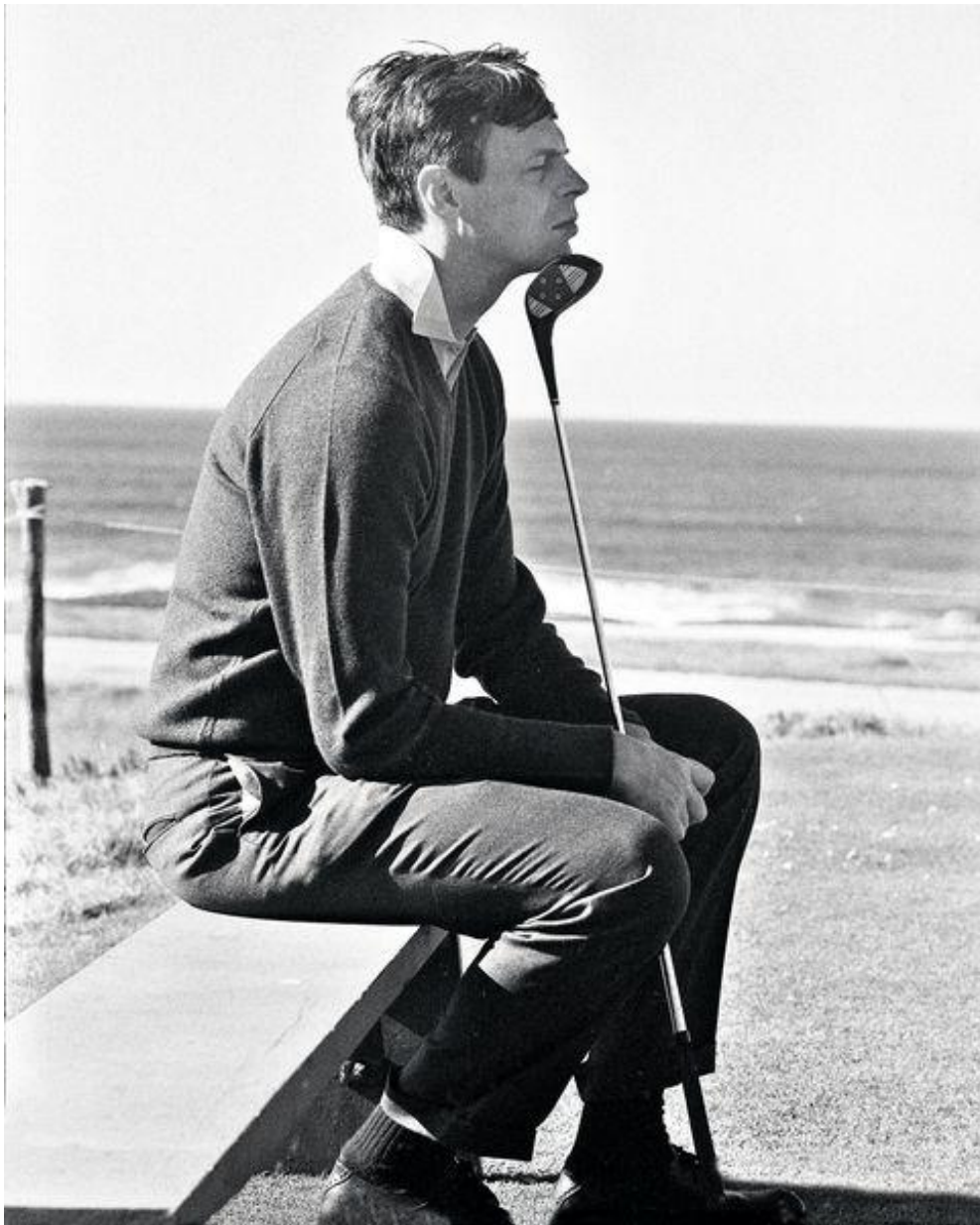
Playing Golf on Acid with Hunter S. Thompson

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*There was once a time in every serious editor's life when he had to play 18 holes zonked on acid with Hunter S. Thompson. An exclusive excerpt from The Accidental Life, by former Esquire editor in chief **Terry McDonell**.*

George Plimpton and I decided to visit Hunter after he sent me a photograph of himself sinking a 30-foot putt at the Aspen Golf Club. He signed it to me with *Res Ipsa Loquitur* across the image, and there was a message on the back: *Come out and play golf with me sometime—bring George—and money; I will beat both of you like mules.*



George Plimpton at the Bing Crosby Pro-Am in 1966. Russ Halford

Photo by: Russ Halford
Hunter's Owl Farm had seen numerous visitations far more exalted than ours. Jimmy Carter and Keith Richards, among dozens of others, had passed through, sometimes shooting clay pigeons and improvised targets in the meadow next to the house. After all, Owl Farm was designated a "Rod and Gun Club" on Hunter's stationery. Bill Murray had come close to moving in when he was preparing to play Hunter in *Where the Buffalo Roam*, and Johnny Depp actually did before he filmed *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Hunter liked to play host—even picking you up at the airport in the '71 Chevrolet Impala convertible he called the "Red Shark." When John Belushi died and there were rumors he had been visiting Hunter, the wires quoted him saying John was "welcome at Owl Farm dead or alive."

"Friends of friends can't bring friends" was taped to the refrigerator; but they did. Hunter complained, but when you saw him playing his games with new guests you knew he loved it. They would tell him how much they were influenced by this or that in his work and he would ask them to read a little of it aloud. Just a paragraph to start, but it would become a page and then a chapter. "Slower," Hunter would say. "Slower." Some people wondered if they'd ever

get out of there.

I had visited Owl Farm before and told George there would be distractions, but we arrived hopeful about our connected missions. My plan was to get Hunter to write a piece for the premiere issue of *Smart*. George was there to interview him for what he planned to be the first interview for the "Art of Journalism" series for *The Paris Review*. Hunter said first we had to play golf.

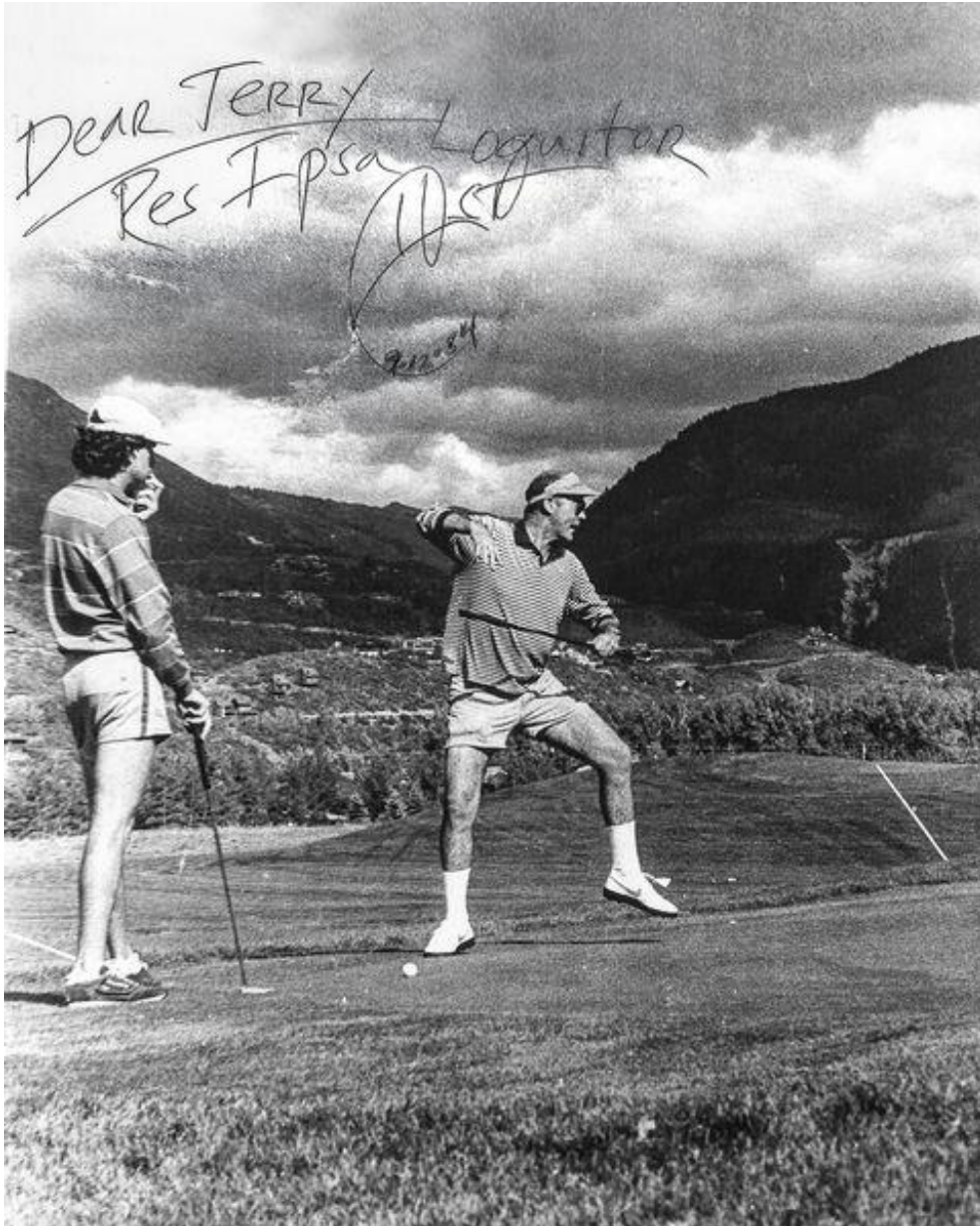


Hunter S. Thompson at the Aspen Golf Club in 1984. Acid worked wonders for his handicap.
Jodi Cobb Photo by: *Jodi Cobb*

We played that first evening, in the dying light, at the municipal Aspen Golf Club, which was closed. Hunter just waved to a guy in the pro shop, who brought us a bucket of balls. Hunter had a 12-gauge shotgun in his golf bag and we had Heinekens in a cooler on the cart—also a

fifth of Chivas, a fifth of Jose Cuervo, limes, a fifth of Dewar's (for George), and an extra cooler of ice.

"Here," Hunter said, holding out three white tabs of blotter paper with an unfamiliar red symbol on them. "Eat these."



Thompson's personalized golf invitation to the author.

He put one on his tongue and stuck it out at us. I took my tab and did the same back at him. When George said he wanted to concentrate on his golf, Hunter licked the third tab. "Ho ho ... last of the batch!"

Following Hunter's lead, we used the first tee as a driving range to warm up. His swing was explosive if not smooth and his third drive was solid and long. George had a fluid swing and drove each of his balls successively farther. I had never played but wasn't pathetic. Hunter accused me of sandbagging. After we had each hit five balls, Hunter said it was time to get

serious and we rode the cart to his favorite hole, the 14th—a short par-3 straight shot over a large pond. The Aspen course is a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and the pond was full of geese.

"Goddamn geese," said Hunter.

"*Branta canadensis*," said George.

"You'd like George's bat trick," I said to Hunter, remembering how George once attracted bats in New Mexico by throwing his T-shirt in the air.

"No fucking bats!" Hunter said.

"Alas," George said, and made himself a Dewar's and water.

Hunter always said that his acid-eating experience was *limited in terms of total consumption, but widely varied as to company and circumstances*, and that he liked the *electric atmosphere* it put him in, especially when taking it with the Hell's Angels.



Terry McDonell quail hunting with Jimmy Buffett in Georgia in 1992. Jean Pagliuso *Photo by: Jean Pagliuso*

They just swallowed the stuff and hung on ... which is probably just as dangerous as the experts say, but a far, far nuttier trip than sitting in some sterile chamber with a condescending guide and a handful of nervous, would-be hipsters.

We, on the other hand, were playing golf. And gambling. Each of us would hit five balls in a row off the tee and then proceed to the green to putt. Only our best ball would count. We were all in for \$1,000, Hunter said.

George put all five of his balls on the green, three close enough for makeable birdies. Hunter put three in the water and two on. I managed one on the green but didn't care. I didn't know golf, but I knew a little about acid. My college roommate for a year was Steve Lambrecht—Zonker of Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters*, the suave stoner portrayed in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* as getting "higher than any man alive." Zonker talked me into going to class on acid, which turned out fine. Tom had also written that LSD made the Hell's Angels *strangely peaceful and sometimes catatonic, in contrast to the Pranksters and other intellectuals around, who soared on the stuff*. I was now peacefully soaring.

When we got to the green, George put two of his balls in for birdies. Hunter had one ball left to tie, if he could sink a 30-foot putt like the one he was celebrating in the photo he had sent. He walked back and forth between his ball and the hole several times. I was on the other side of the cup, holding the flag. It was dark now, as dark as it gets in Aspen on summer nights, and although the sky still had a glow, I could barely see his ball. George was by the cart, making another Dewar's and water. The ice tinkled in his glass.

"Silence!" Hunter shouted. "I know your tricks."

Hunter took at least another two minutes lining up his putt, then struck it quickly. He missed the putt by about a foot and, charging after it, let out a howl as he winged his putter into the pond. The geese started honking and Hunter ran back to the cart, pulled the 12-gauge from his golf bag and fired over the geese, and they lifted off the pond like a sparkling cloud of gray and white feathers. It occurred to me as I watched the glitter blend into the fading sky that having a story to tell about acid golf with Hunter and George was probably good for my career.

Hunter looked at me and said, "You're higher than I am, goddamn it." I started laughing. Hunter seldom laughed, but he did then.

"Maybe I should have, well, 'eaten' some myself," George said.

On the way back to Owl Farm in the Red Shark, George told us that playing ahead of Arnold Palmer in the San Francisco pro-am had been like being chased by a migration. Of geese? I wondered. George also said that when he'd played in the Bob Hope Classic at Indian Wells, his ball had almost hit Hope and the popular comedian Phyllis Diller in their cart at the 14th. He remembered that both comics had been wearing "sullen frowns."

"Fuck Bob Hope," Hunter said.