

## Magic mushrooms 'helped to cure me'

**A** former dotcom businessman whose life had been ruined by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder has brought a show to the Edinburgh Fringe that tells the story of his miraculous "cure" — an intensive exposure to psychedelic drugs (Mike Wade writes).

Adam Strauss, right, describes his experience of "psychopharmacology" as harrowing but enlightening and claims that the results were impressive. He has not taken hallucinogens for two years, but his OCD, manifested in a chronic inability to make decisions, is under control at last.

His experience places Mr Strauss among a select group who have tried psilocybin, the psychoactive ingredient in "magic mushrooms", a class A drug banned on both sides of the Atlantic. Research at Harvard and Johns Hopkins University in the US and at Imperial College London has suggested that the substance could help to relieve conditions such as depression.

Mr Strauss, a New Yorker, said that he had twice decamped to Martha's Vineyard to try his unusual therapy. The first time, with a psychologist friend, he took a cornucopia of substances including psychedelic cacti, containing mescaline. The second time, over

the winter of 2008-09, he was alone on the island when he first tried mushrooms. It was initially not a happy experience.

"It ended with me calling 911, not because I wanted the police to come to my house, but because I had some burning existential questions to ask them," Mr Strauss recalled. "The call opened with asking the operator if she was God."

Ultimately, these events had led to acceptance that he did not have the power to control the world around him. "Once you have realised your own limits in controlling yourself, there is relief from OCD," he said.

Until that moment his life had become dominated by his disorder. "I would make a decision, then immediately feel a strong compulsion to reverse it," Mr Strauss said. "I'd often give in, and then think, 'Wait, I got it right first time' and reverse the decision again. I could be tied up for weeks on more significant decisions, to the point of not leaving my apartment and not meeting professional obligations."

Simply getting dressed became a daunting task. If he decided one shirt was his best shirt, he would go out and buy a dozen exactly like it. Then, once he had worn them and washed them, he would notice tiny differences, stains or shrinkage, and the whole process would begin again.



DOMINIK TARABANSKI

"It started to swallow up every aspect of my life," Mr Strauss said. "It wrecked personal relationships, not being able to commit."

He had tried prescription drugs, analysis, yoga and acupuncture before a chance encounter with a graduate psychology student caused him to take his new, more colourful course. His new friend had found that hallucinogenic cacti had helped to alleviate her own clinical depression.

These experiences are in line with research. In April, David Nutt of Imperial College described an experiment in which healthy volunteers were treated with psilocybin. It works on a brain circuit called the "default mode network" that appears to cause some people to suffer continual depression. "We found that, even in normal people, the more that part of the brain was switched off under the influence of the drug, the better they felt two weeks later," Professor Nutt said.

Mr Strauss, 39, said that he could relate to these findings. "Psychedelics showed me the futility of OCD," he said. "The overwhelming fear I felt gave me a sense of powerlessness, [it was] almost a crash course in opening up to experience."

The medical establishment may take more convincing. In 2009 Professor Nutt was asked to step down from his role as chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs after claiming that alcohol and tobacco were more harmful than LSD, Ecstasy and cannabis.

## ScotRail set to increase fares in line with inflation and freeze off-peak travel costs

Nick Drainey

ScotRail will keep its promise to restrict peak-time rail fare increases in line with inflation, the company said yesterday.

Whereas those travelling from Scotland to England and Wales face a 4.1 per cent increase in regulated rail fares from next year, ScotRail managers said that prices for travel within Scotland would increase by the same amount as inflation, going up by 3.1 per cent in January.

ScotRail also confirmed that off-peak fares north of the border would be frozen at their present level next year.

Keith Brown, the Transport Minister, had announced the pricing plans at the end of last year.

A ScotRail spokeswoman said: "We are pleased to have frozen fares for 40 per cent of journeys and limited others

to an inflation-only increase. This means we continue to provide better value for money for customers in Scotland, especially when fuel and energy costs continue to rise steeply.

"We will also continue to invest. We are committed to making rail journeys more pleasant as well as delivering high levels of punctuality.

"This is striking a chord with customers, with nine out of ten saying they are satisfied with their rail journeys."

Increases in rail fares are determined by the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure of inflation.

While travellers in England and Wales are facing fare increases of RPI plus 1 per cent, ScotRail fares will increase only by the level of RPI in 2014 and 2015, provided this remains below 3.5 per cent.

Off-peak fares will not be raised at all, provided that inflation remains be-

low 3.5 per cent for the remainder of the ScotRail franchise, which ends in March 2015.

In England, there was widespread condemnation of the Government and the rail industry after it was confirmed that the most expensive train fares on the network were yet again to increase by more than the rate of inflation.

Prices for regulated fares — covering peak-time commuting season-ticket holders — are to rise from January. Unregulated fares could increase by as much as 9.1 per cent, according to estimates.

The latest price rise will, according to official figures, mean that fares and season tickets on the busiest routes into London, which account for a large proportion of train usage, will be 58 per cent higher than where they were in 2000. Fares are nearly 20 per cent higher in real terms.

## Heroine's hanky goes on sale

Nick Drainey

A handkerchief that belonged to the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald is attracting worldwide interest before it goes on sale at one of the largest collections of Bonnie Prince Charlie artefacts to come up for auction.



Flora entered folklore after the escape

Flora MacDonald helped Charles Edward Stuart, "Bonnie Prince Charlie", to evade capture after the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

The auctioneer Lyon and Turnbull in Edinburgh, anticipates telephone bids from around the world when the lots are sold.

The handkerchief is expected to fetch £400. Colin Fraser, of Lyon and Turnbull, said: "The hanky is certainly one of our more unusual items. But having belonged to Flora MacDonald there has been a lot of interest in it."

"Many people are very interested in the period and consider it the most romantic in Scotland's history."

The handkerchief is part of Lyon and Turnbull's Scottish silver and accessories sale in Edinburgh on Monday.

Other items for sale associated with Bonnie Prince Charlie came from Moy Hall — home of the Clan Mackintosh chiefs — including a fragment of tartan and a silver jacket button, previously exhibited in 1931 and valued at £1,500.