

without stopping, “ But when I ask about art he’s straight about it. “I’ve been paid for my music, and for my writing, and even for my graphics and copy, but creating corporate entities is what I do best,” he continued. He was talking so fast I could listen or take notes but not both.

The art of Laurie McKinney is the creation of original businesses. Amazingly, each was founded to sell or distribute something he’s created himself. In the 30 years I’ve known him, he’s never short of ideas.

When I first met Laurie his *business du Jour* was [The Creative Learning Group](#). **The Creative Learning Group**, a multi-media publishing venture, sold the first drug education curricula to everyone from schools nationwide to the Army and Navy. When Nixon pulled funding for drug education, the firm failed, but since one of the specialists they had met ran the first government pot farm, their mutual interests led to the nonprofit Cannabis Institute of America and the first cannabis research journal. Progressing from research done on the government farm, he then founded the **Cannabis Corporation of America** to extract pure THC from the plant. After giving Harvard University 1,000 shares and then getting them back when they learned in Boston Magazine, McKinney gave one single share to each of his Harvard Business School classmates. Over two hundred responded with the legal documentation and after his crowd of millionaires got postcards from Nepal, he raised over \$150,000 to start the company. Soon [Perdue Pharma](#) was talking partnership.

The major asset of Cannabis Corporation was Laurie’s patent. In 1971 he realized that it was possible to use a laboratory process to activate every bit of latent THC in the plant prior to extraction.

The process had actually been tested with a device, sold through “head shops” called the Maximizer. The drug paraphernalia law put an end to its sales, but the same patent let them extract pharmaceutical grade THC. The FDA was satisfied with 95% pure, but the DEA had a cow because

extracting legal THC from marijuana could place the plant in a legal category. When they learned the 5% impurities were made of over a hundred plant molecules, they insisted on testing each one. Perdue Pharma gave up and made [OxyContin](#) instead of the first natural THC.

Getting an original pharmaceutical patent and nearly legalizing marijuana after flooding head shops with a pot intensifier is par for the course. His smaller endeavors are jewels. In 1974, after helping found **New Age** magazine Laurie started **University Antiquaries Inc.**, which sold Louis Agassiz's hand blown specimen jars which he'd bought from Harvard. It was a good business, but there were only so many jars. When he ran out, he closed his Newbury St. Jar Gallery and went to Harvard Divinity School for a year. He had become fascinated with the mind, and began to write a book to tie it all together. Then Cannabis Corporation took off.

His travels and periods in India and Nepal lining up partners for his ventures had allowed him to deepen a love of Asian culture – he plays sitar as well as guitar. He'd also started a small foundation for a Tibetan lama, and became adept at their complex mental practices. With the THC company over, Laurie wrote his tour-de-force "**Neurotheology**," which is succinctly summarized in [Wikipedia](#). The book, still available on Amazon.com, literally created a subsection of theology so now there's lower-case neurotheology. In a nutshell, the book suggests many religious experiences are actually neurologically based and that death itself, although described many ways in many religions, is a peaceful slow fade of consciousness as the mind unwinds.

I have always suspected that Laurie would rather gain [kudos from the Dalai Lama](#) than from the Pulitzer committee. What is very readable is his eminently informative (and downloadable) "[The Last Ten Seconds of Eternity](#)," an exposition on death as viewed from the unique perspective of Neurotheology. McKinney says that the concept of a reality based in the mind itself is actually classic

Buddhism. “Neurotheology could be seen as a Western expression of what Buddhism is really all about. Some would call it [American Buddhism](#). I prefer [Western Reformed Buddhism](#),” he continues, musing.

His worlds are always evolving and weaving. It was the sister of his sitar teacher who provided the formula for Oil of Tara, and for a time he was married to an excellent website designer. Marriages work best with the steadily employed, and one thing that so far has eluded MBA McKinney, like so many artists, is financial security. The essence of Buddhism seems to be poverty, so to use his wife’s website skills, Laurie looked, once again, to Harvard. Harvard couldn’t force the Coop to pay its license fees for the “Harvard Chair” and felt powerless to get control over its famous furniture. Laurie, with help from the trademark program, set up a Harvard insignia website called **EverythingHarvard.com** and contracted a furniture company to make the first new Harvard chairs in a century. The chair venture was the profit behind www.everythingharvard.com. Unfortunately the Coop decided it wanted to stay in the game, knuckled under, got their own authorization, and used their influence with a Harvard official to approve a cheaper chair. That was the end of the Harvard chair business, and his marriage, but it gave him a breather to write the novel.

Between Oil of Tara, real estate investments and an occasional consulting client through [McKinney & Company](#) he keeps himself whole. What does he do in his spare time? Besides planning the next great project, he’s always been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to ask a question or get a pointer from some one famous. The famous range from [Robert Frost to Mother Teresa](#). To be fair he is also listed among the “[favorite authors](#)” lists of others, nestled in between John Maddox, editor of Nature magazine and Judith Miller former New York Times correspondent. He seems to enjoy getting up close to anyone who’s made an art of anything. On the other hand, from publications to patents, from antiques to pharmaceuticals, head shops to websites to action novels to serious metaphysics read all over

the world, skin products to magazines to media, McKinney makes an art of anything he touches. How many people, after all, have designed an appliance, patented a drug process, and started a school of theology on the side of writing, music, and art?

Laurence O. McKinney is one of those characters usually immortalized in novels but rarely encountered in the wild. Some words that come to mind are polymath, autodidact, and professional amateur. The New York Times made him into a cartoon character covering a half a page in 2005 and he's a Lifetime Member of the Harvard Entrepreneurs, but his first and abiding desire was to be a writer. He could have been. He has an immense collection of unpublished poems and short stories. When I pressed him for something new to include in the Wilderness House Literary Review he sent me these short aphorisms. He says they're actually harder than you think.

Wisdom is simply eloquently expressed common sense.

Life is the present time gives you.

Everything that happens is the first time.

Every thought changes the brain.

Ultimately we're totally alone, but we can all share that.

And his little Buddhist ditty –'

Only in your mind will your dreams come true
'Til your heart has learned what your mind can do
Respect all thought, whatever it seems,
Even Shabhala was a place of dreams
And when your mind is a friend to you,
You won't mind when your dreams come true.

Laurie McKinney dreams big dreams. Some crashed and burned, some never broke even, but every attempt was creative, vital, and completely original. Life is art and he's getting good at it.

