

## mdma: a catalyst for healing my fears and depression

by Carolyn

My symptoms

have ranged

from clinical

depression

to high anxiety

to having

delusions.

I AM THIRTY THREE YEARS OLD. I have had serious problems with depression since I graduated from college in 1983. I have been hospitalized twice and have been on various psychoactive medications between the years 1986 and 1995. These include Elavil (or Amytriptaline), Parnate (an MAO inhibitor), and currently, Novane (an anti-psychotic) and Sinnequan (also a tricyclic, similar to Elavil). I have been through four psychiatrists and two psychologists in addition to several therapists and doctors in the hospitals.

My symptoms have ranged from clinical depression to high anxiety to having delusions. The delusions started two years ago and only lasted for two months at which point I was hospitalized and put on Novane, which was effective in getting rid of them. However, when I was released for the second time from the hospital a year and a half ago, I was in a terribly depressed and fearful state. It took many months, a new job, a great boyfriend and a good therapist to bring me up to a level where more than half of my waking hours were not hell.

I took MDMA for the first time (and only time so far) several months ago. I was fortunate to have a good friend from college and her husband with me. We were hoping to help me get over my fears and depression so that I could feel better during the day, at work mostly. I was very unhappy in my job as a computer programmer. I felt extremely insecure, and just plain hated being strapped to the desk doing this eight hours a day. I was hoping that MDMA might help me to resolve this unhappy situation.

### The experience begins

The actual experience itself was not earth-shattering. I took one capsule total: half to start and then two hours later I took the other half. It started out, as my friends related to me later, in a classic fashion. It was light, about 7:30 PM in May. We were in the living room of my home in New York. All the lights were off, the many windows were open and the T.V. was on. We were kind of watching a re-run that we had all seen. I felt kind of funny watching it, and asked if I should turn it off. I felt like a

child who didn't know the "rules of the game." My friend's husband said it probably would be best to turn it off. I turned it off and in the silence felt self-conscious. For a brief moment I felt a little nauseated I think, or something weird, not very pleasant. And then it passed.

We kind of talked, I think. I don't really remember that part too much, just that the room gradually got dark and none of us thought to turn on the lights. There seemed to be a mutual mood of just letting things unfold. By the way, neither my college friend nor her husband took MDMA: my friend, because she was breastfeeding her daughter, and her husband, because he was very experienced with MDMA and was waiting to be my "mentor" or "therapist" in case he was needed.

### The experience deepens

I felt myself becoming uninhibited. I began talking. I don't remember what I talked about in the beginning. I remember my friend's husband falling asleep. I talked to my friend and she talked back to me. She was an excellent listener. I began to relate to her my deepest fears and feelings. She had never heard this stuff before and I had the most wonderful feeling that she really wanted to hear about me. One of my biggest problems has been low self-esteem; thinking that nobody cared about me. It stemmed from growing up in a large family with only one parent, and that one parent being completely emotionally unavailable. In psychobabble terms, I was a victim of severe emotional neglect. The deep fears and insecurities that this created in me were hidden from the people around me until I broke down in 1984. My friend knew me in college, when all of this was held at bay. The loss of a built-in social network and daily routine (school), the lack of *real familial ties*, and the end of the one relationship in my life triggered the breakdown.

All of this stuff started to come out. I've talked at length about almost everything that I brought up with my friend with other people: mostly therapists and some close friends that I started making after 1984. Different people heard different portions. But the feeling that I had while on MDMA while talking to my friend was unique. I don't feel adequate in my

descriptive abilities and my memory is not all that great, but I'll try to explain it. I felt confident. I felt loved and accepted and more than that, I felt that she really wanted to know. She really cared. And it was so NATURAL, not like talking to a therapist. Not to say that I don't love talking to therapists. I do and I always will, because it is my nature, because of the way I grew up; I crave attention. But when I talk to a therapist or even a friend about myself I sometimes have these brief feelings run through me that I am being selfish or self-centered and it inhibits me from just letting it all come out. Also, with a therapist, you are paying them to listen to you. This experience was new. I felt so free and so safe and so accepting of myself, all of me, all of my feelings and thoughts. Nothing was shameful or ugly.

#### Life review

I talked for hours. We watched a video of my grandfather and my sister. I read letters my father had written to one of my sisters when she was little. He passed away when I was nine; all my feelings about him and the death and the impact it has had on my life were discussed. Paintings that I did when I was in analysis, bizarre things I had done and what was going on in my mind when I did them were talked about. I literally said everything that came to my mind immediately. There would be comfortable silences during which I would process things my friend brought up and things I had brought up. It was like I took everything that was available in my conscious mind and brought it out for reevaluation and reprocessing. This is probably something we all are constantly doing. But this was far more intense. I believe what happens is the MDMA lessens or eliminates your experience of fear, thus you are able to delve into areas that you might normally not go into. When you're in these areas, you can stay longer. You are not afraid of your own feelings and thoughts and you are not afraid to express them. You are not afraid of other people's ideas or suggestions. It's been said so many times in so many different ways but it is still profound: Fear is man's greatest foe (and perhaps his only real foe).

We talked late into the night. By 4 or 5 AM, my friend was beginning to fall asleep and I was feeling like I might be able to sleep. That was the end of the actual drug experience. The after-effects are still being experienced. A week and a half after the MDMA episode I saw my

therapist. I did not tell him that I had taken an illegal drug. I knew he would strongly disapprove. About 20 minutes into the session, he seemed a little disconcerted. He said something about how he had been gone for two weeks and instead of me getting worse while he was away, which would have been normal for me, I seemed better. He said that there was some new quality about me that he couldn't quite put his finger on, but I seemed stronger. It was hard for me not to share with him. I only commented that I had evolved.

#### Long-term effects

My job situation which has been the source of so much pain is finally changing. Because I had the courage to finally act, by threatening to quit, I have opened up many doors. Together, my managers and I are coming up with positive alternative ideas about which I am very hopeful. My therapist told me two weeks ago that I don't seem to be very open with him anymore and maybe that was a sign that I didn't need him and that I am strong enough to go "solo" (for the first time in 11 years). I am still open with my boyfriend and my close friends. I feel less alone than I've ever felt in my life. I'm still on low doses of Sinnetuan and Novane, but they are the next to go.

I plan to take MDMA again, but only if I can talk my boyfriend or a close friend into taking it with me.

I thank my friends for changing my life. •

## LSD research update

Our protocol, "The relationship between peak experience and outcome in (LSD) assisted psychotherapy with substance abusers, a double-blind controlled study" has received final approval from the FDA. Our facility has been approved for securely storing LSD, and we are negotiating with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) for a supply of LSD. Progress on the study will be reported in an upcoming issue of MAPS. •

---

Richard Yensen, Ph.D., ryensen@orenda.org  
Donna Dryer, MD  
Orenda Institute

I felt so free  
and so safe  
and so accepting  
of myself, all of me,  
all of my feelings  
and thoughts.  
Nothing was  
shameful or ugly.