

Reclaiming My Senses and Myself. A Firsthand Account of **MDMA-Assisted Therapy.**

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Editor's note: The following article is a firsthand report by a woman regarding her underground MDMA therapy to heal a traumatic event in her life. The original story was four times as long. I edited the text to conceal the identities of those involved, to soften some of the graphic details incorporated in the original writing, and to fit the text within our publication. I am sorry that I had to edit out so much of this tear-jerking, yet heart-warming, story. It was never my intent to censor the author; I hope that she and the readers will appreciate and understand the magnitude of her story in this truncated format.

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I WAS RAPED. That is the beginning of this story. No one jumped out of a dark alley and held a knife to my throat. It was more insidious, more calculated than that. I met my assailant at an arts and music festival, where I gleefully gave and received a sensual massage in the shade of a beautiful fabric structure in the heat of the day. He seemed nice, spiritual, respectful, and sexy. We talked for a long time, until I wanted to go back to my camp. I didn't know it then, but I have since learned, that he was "grooming" me. When he learned I was studying yoga, practicing 4-6 times a week, it was such a wonderful coincidence that since he was Indian, he had studied yoga from childhood, with an important guru in India, experienced mystical Hinduism in ways I could only read about. Wow, he was truly a budding guru in his own right. I was mesmerized.

A few months prior to the rape my father lost his life to cancer and my mother was battling cancer. I had a very estranged relationship with my parents. My father was a minister. He was strict, repressive, abusive, and unable to give us love in any way. My father was a hero in the small town I grew up in, but he treated his family like dirt. It was a double life and a hypocrisy that I realized as a young girl, and I rebelled against him my whole life. In the week before his death, after falling into a condition where he could not move or speak, my mother and I went through his drawers and made the horrifying discovery that he had not only hidden and cashed several of her disability checks for himself, but he had tried to cash out her life insurance policy while she had lain in the hospital almost dead from an over-dosage of chemotherapy.

Sanjiv, the rapist, said he sold insurance when not practicing yoga. His business opportunities had led him from India to the U.S. Later I learned that these were all lies, but at the time of our acquaintance, I had no signs of warning, no red flags were signaled to my instincts. I told Sanjiv my camp location as we parted ways in the late afternoon.

The next night he showed up at my camp. He insisted on kissing me. OK, I thought, it's not the worst thing in the world, and we have plenty of time before setting out. Sanjiv wanted sex, and I was open and frank in dealing with the sexual act. I just wanted to get it over with, so I told him we could have sex as long as he brought a condom. He replied that he didn't have one, and it didn't matter to him. I had condoms in my bedside chest. As I reached up to get one, he grabbed my arm and said he refused to use one. The next day I would discover many bruises covering my arms, breasts and thighs that would bear witness to the struggle that ensued. I told no one what happened. I was ashamed of myself. It was my fault. Suddenly all the sermons I heard in my youth came to life: I was sinful. I was a hussy. I was a whore. I deserved to burn in hell. I became extremely fearful.

In her book, *The Rape Recovery Handbook*, Aphrodite Matsakis writes the most powerful description of the effects of rape that I have read to this day:

“My personality is like a house with many rooms. Being sexually assaulted was like lightning striking my house. The fire destroyed my bedroom and some of the adjoining rooms, and the rooms that escaped the fire smelled like smoke. So I couldn’t be anywhere in the house without remembering the assault. The rooms that had reflected my security, sexuality, and self-confidence were utterly gone, as were my hopes for the future. The rooms left standing were like my relationships, damaged but not completely ruined. My cats survived and my computer was intact, but all I could focus on was the smell of stale smoke.”

A few years after I was raped, Sanjiv was arrested and convicted. He is now serving 20 years to life for two counts of sexual assault. After I watched him get handcuffed and taken to prison my journey seemed to come to a resting place. I was no longer tormented by images of his face when I made love to my boyfriend, I was calmer and less fearful than in the past. Still, I would have inappropriate reactions, such as suddenly running and cowering in the corner after my boyfriend playfully surprised me from the back with a loving nibble at my neck. I would experience bursts of anger arising from perceived slights. I had nightmares of being shot multiple times. I had an intense mistrust and almost perverse perception of all things as somehow evil and underhanded.

I happened to read an article about PTSD of 9/11 rescuers, and just about fainted as I read down the list of symptoms.... that was me! I finally had a description of all the things I couldn’t quite put a finger on. I was suffering from PTSD. Somehow this made me feel better. It became clear that it wasn’t my failure to heal because somehow I wasn’t trying hard enough, or that I wasn’t worthy enough to get better, but that I was suffering from this disorder.

This past summer I had the amazing opportunity to have an MDMA-assisted therapy session. A friend organized a session with a co-ed team of psychedelic therapists - I will refer to them here as Bob and Mary. The three of us sat and spoke of different ways to approach my session. I have done a lot of work using visualization in the past and felt comfortable using visualization as the primary technique for the therapy session. When the effects of the

MDMA came on, I naturally slid into a state of visualizing the thoughts that were coming to me. I felt that I wanted to lie down and close my eyes and fly right into what was to come. With Bob on my left and Mary on my right, each held my hand, and I felt my mind open up.

One of the first images I had was of myself as two distinct people. There was a young me, a little girl in a blue dress, and an older me, a big strong protector me. The little girl stayed in a black box. It wasn’t scary or oppressive, but comfy and protective. Bob asked if the protector me would help the little girl me out of the box, if she would come out. I said yes, and I saw that happen in my mind. I saw a big hand reaching down and a small hand grasping it willingly. The protector held the little girl in her arms. The lines differentiating them as separate entities began to fade and sometimes they seemed as one, sometimes seeming to share one body between them. Mary whispered in my ear, “that’s beautiful,” and Bob asked if I could now go to a place where I first felt frightened. What came to my mind was something I did a lot when I was young. I hid under my bed when my father got angry. I was suddenly there, under the bed, frightened. “Why is he always mad at me?” I asked out loud. “I’m just a kid, I was just being a kid.” Bob said that now we would go there, all of us together and my protector me reached under the bed and drew me out. The protector me stood up between my dad and the little girl me. The protector me told my dad to back up. “This is your child,” she said to him, “you need to love your child.” At that my father evaporated and I was left there, the little girl me who came out of the bed and the protector me, and I felt Bob and Mary holding my hands.

I started talking about my father, about how since I had been in therapy, I realized that he was simply a damaged person, that he could only give so much. He came from an abusive background himself. Bob then asked if I would go to a place in my father’s life when he had been traumatized. An image came up, and we went there. The two me’s, Bob, and Mary were there to help my father, who was about 6 years old. We held him and showed him that he need not be afraid to accept love. At that moment I began to cry. At that moment, in the part of my mind that I can only describe as being conscious and present in reality, I realized for the first time that I could come to my father from a place of love. I felt amazed that I could find this now, and I really felt that I needed this place of love for my father.

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Bob asked if perhaps we could all go to the night of the rape. He said we would all go together, the four of us and I replied that I was ready. I sank into the scene, and went to the tent where I was raped. I was lying in a fetal position on the floor. Both of my selves reflexively got down on the floor, cradling the just-raped me. I heard Bob say that first we needed to rid the tent of “him” and reclaim the space as my own. It took a few minutes, but eventually I was able to do this. I watched as the rapist floated away, pushed away by my energy like a ghost fading through a wall. I said out loud, “this is my space now! You are not allowed here!”

Bob suggested that I had spent a lot of time on that floor, trying to comfort and protect that me. It was time to help her to stand and realize how strong she—me—really is. I was ready to embrace how much we had to live for and to give the world. My two selves then took the hands of the me on the ground, just as Bob and Mary were holding my physical hands. I saw myself stand up for probably the first time since that night in reality four years ago. In what I can barely describe as a triumphant moment, together my three selves rose and walked out of that tent. We walked on to the desert floor, in that very same place where my life had fallen apart. We reclaimed the space under the amazing stars and I saw that I was golden. I fearlessly strode out into the night.

This was the seminal moment for me. As I rode up out of the wave, I again looked into the supportive, loving faces of Bob and Mary. I felt a joy and a peace that I hadn’t known for so long. I really felt it, throughout my entire mind and my body. Deeply and effortlessly this feeling became integrated into my being.

We did much more work during the session, some of which is a bit too intimate to write about. We explored some visualizations that helped me to realize on a deep level that every cell in my body is new, that not one trace of that man remains inside me, that my bruises are gone and my yoni is clean. I need have no more shame, no more fear of intimacy with the man I love. No more shame. Wow, what a discovery! Finally, one thing I grew to know, to realize, is that the

“old me” I had been longing for can never be recovered. The “new me,” the me who went through this trauma and survived, the me who uses my experience to help and reach out to others, this “new me” is stronger and wiser than before. This me is beautiful and worthy of love. This version of my self is a wonderful woman who has so much to give the world.

This is where I was on the morning after my therapy session. I finally opened my eyes and saw that the sky was getting lighter. A new day was dawning. I felt lighter, clean, clear, and had a true sense of what I can only inadequately call “calm.” I knew I was finished and felt a strong desire to

venture outside. I thanked Bob and Mary, hugged them, and told them that I was ready to go to see the sunrise.

The process of integration continues. At times I feel I am floating through the moments, sometimes feeling free to relish the company of others, sometimes seeking solitude in my thoughts and new feelings. I feel free to dance with pure joyful abandon. I feel connected enough to cry. I feel calm and open enough to comfort the grief of others. I have re-lived the events of my session over and over in my thoughts, each time owning the revelations more deeply. I continue to note subtle changes taking hold in my life. For the first time since the rape, I can really enjoy sex. I move, I make noise, and I can truly feel. Somehow I have reconnected with my physical body, my skin, and my yoni are receptive and sensual. I can feel sensual sensations again. I can’t begin to express my joy and thankfulness for this gift.

I’m proud of myself for doing this and owning the experience. I only wish that this treatment, this gateway to recovery, could be available to all those who are suffering from PTSD. I hope that my testimony can help the process of making MDMA-therapy readily available soon. This is a medicine that will help heal so many people who are hurting today. Thanks to MAPS for the brave and dedicated work you do. I hope that as a result of your efforts, the world wakes up soon.

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