



Hania Withem

Speaking My Truth: My Experience of MDMA- Assisted Psychotherapy

HANIA WITHEM, STUDY PARTICIPANT

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO speak at the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) 30th Anniversary Banquet in April 2016, I said yes, I would be happy to, even though it was a very scary prospect. How could I have said no to helping an organization that has enabled me to live a happy, productive life? So I wrote speech after speech, trying to find the right tone and to convey, with honesty, the impact this gift has had on my life. Nothing I wrote seemed to work, but I figured that as time approached, I would eventually be satisfied with what I had written.

The day of the banquet, I took the train to Oakland, Calif., and halfway there met with Nigel McCourry, another trial par-

ticipant. We both had speeches prepared. We decided to write the outline of our speeches on note cards, and we arrived at the banquet venue determined to be understood. I was incredibly nervous at the idea of standing and speaking in front of a large audience, but was intent on giving it my best shot. As I was getting ready to sit at my table, I briefly met with Aubrey Marcus and, in my near panic state, asked him what he thought people would want to hear from me. Without missing a beat, and with a huge smile on his face, Aubrey said: "Truth." And so it was that when my turn to speak came, I shoved my note cards in my pocket on my way to the podium and started speaking my truth, from the heart.

30th ANNIVERSARY Banquet & Celebration

Over 900 people joined us in person at our 30th Anniversary Banquet and Celebration on April 17, 2016, at the Scottish Rite Center in Oakland, Calif. At this historic gathering, the global psychedelic science

community came together to celebrate the progress we've made since our founding, and to help build the future of psychedelic medicine with a fundraiser to support our \$400,000 purchase of one kilogram of pharmaceutical grade (GMP) MDMA for Phase 3 clinical trials and other research around the world. **Watch the live video of the event including Hania's address at maps.org/live30.**



It seemed like a simple enough notion. However, at the time, it didn't occur to me that the reason why that resonated so deeply within me was because the whole concept of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy revolves around the idea of truth. I had spent my entire adult life hiding from the truth by avoiding any recollection of my past. I had somehow convinced myself that if I denied the circumstances I experienced growing up, I would be able to move on and live a relatively peaceful life. I did not, at the time, understand that I was setting myself up for a life of struggle that would interfere with my everyday life. After more than two decades of hardship, I was incredibly fortunate to be accepted into the MAPS clinical trial of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The question I get asked most often is this: What is the process like? Imagine this, if you can: You are in a room surrounded by beautiful things, artwork and little treasures and beautiful flowers. There is quiet music playing, soothing music that makes you feel safe and comforted. You are sitting on a couch, and there are two people in the room with you. They are the two people you have been meeting with, and that you fully trust to guide you along on this journey of self-discovery. Everything is real. Nothing is hidden or mysterious.

You take the medicine, and even though you know, deep down, that you are going to be traveling back to the past, to revisit your worst nightmares, you also know that you are not alone. Every feeling you experience becomes a stepping-stone to the next feeling or thought that will reveal itself to you.

Everything is quiet, everything is felt, everything is deliberate, and the entire experience is centered around the truth of who you are and what your experience was in the past. You have the absolute certainty that you were there, that you were a part of all of it, and that you were instrumental to everything that happened then and has happened since. It doesn't mean that any of it was your fault; it simply means that you were not just a spectator, but a thinking and feeling being who at the time made the only choices that seemed possible. When you are able to see your experience for what it was, instead of your recollection of all the awful feelings and emotions that became associated with it, it becomes something that you can place into the timeline of your life. Instead of memories floating around you, to be reawakened at the slightest sound or sight or smell, your past becomes a part of your story, to revisit only when you wish.

MDMA has shown me that as long as I stay true to who I am, and speak only my truth, I will be able to live a more authentic life, free of the fear and the worry that used to guide my every step. Marcela Ot'olora and Bruce Poulter, the two therapists who have guided me along this journey, continue to remind me, whenever I forget, that the full reality of my experience is what has led me to the life of fulfillment and love I live today. 🌱

Hania Withem was a participant in MAPS' clinical trial of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for posttraumatic stress disorder and currently lives and works in Fort Collins, Colorado.

From left: A full house in the Scottish Rite performance hall; MAPS supporters gathering prior to the banquet; MAPS Public Benefit Corp Executive Director Amy Emerson addresses the audience; Phadroid performs with music and graphics by Android Jones; and Rick Doblin presents on the manufacturing of one kilogram of pharmaceutical grade MDMA.

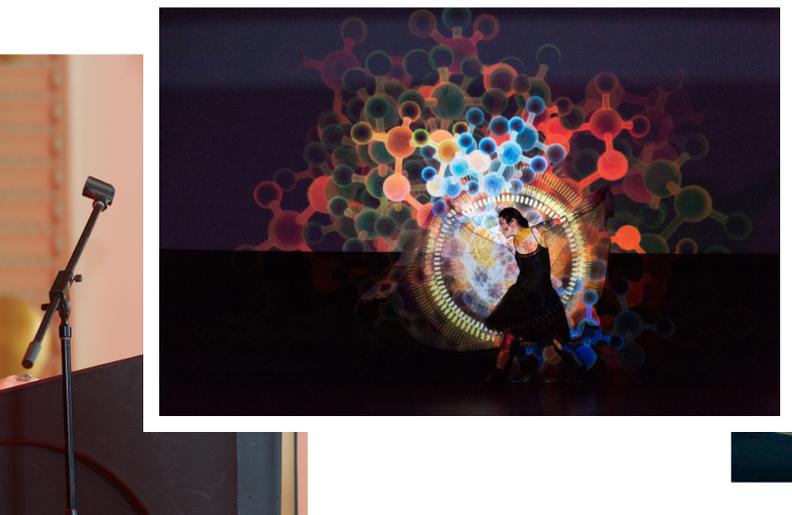


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