

I'm Not Going to Hide Who I Am

a teen talks about her use of psychedelics

The following is from an interview conducted for the Erowid website's "Families & Psychoactives Vault" (www.erowid.org/psychoactives/families/families.shtml). Erowid kindly allowed us to publish this adaptation. At 17 years old, the young woman interviewed was not a legal adult when this interview took place. Because of this, her name has been changed to respect her privacy, as have the names of other minors that appear in this interview.

In the spring of 2003, Becca's father invited her to attend the Mind States IV conference (www.mindstates.org), where I had the chance to meet her. At her father's suggestion, she agreed to talk to me about herself and her attitudes about psychedelics. I wondered what had led up to the point where a father would be inviting his teenage daughter to a conference about altered states of consciousness. The following interview was conducted a few weeks before her high school graduation. The interview happened at Becca's best friend's house, where I had the pleasure of learning about her high school years and the grace with which she successfully navigated them.

HIGH SCHOOL WAS a mixed experience. I went to a private elementary and middle school, with 24 kids in each grade. After that, I went to Berkeley High, and there were three and a half thousand kids in the school—a thousand freshmen alone. So there were a lot of people; it was a much bigger school. In freshman year I was on crew, and I made some friends there. It was my "preppy" period.

Then sophomore year, I started hanging out with kids in the park. They were called "the parkies." Hanging out with these kids was when I really got into expanding my mind. I made a lot of friends. I had some great experiences. But it was mostly outside of school. I didn't go to class very much. Nevertheless, I feel that I learned a lot about social skills and taking care of myself during that time, which was important for me. However, I didn't get much of a formal education there.

After my sophomore year, my parents pulled me out and sent me to Albany High, which is smaller, with perhaps 1,500 kids. The change was kind of a shock. Even though it's among all the suburbs, it's a small town. Everyone stays there, and has been there since kindergarten. It's very cliquy, and I didn't get along with most of the kids there. I was a free thinker and I wanted to experience life. They all just sat and studied, and did

schoolwork. They had a different way of thinking about things, that I considered more close-minded. I didn't make as many friends there, but I did end up focusing more on my schoolwork. For the first semester of my junior year, I was on the honor roll, and for the second semester I was on the Dean's list, which requires a 3.5 GPA or higher. So I really shaped up at that point. The first semester of my senior year—this year—I was also on the honor roll. But then the second semester, I kinda of just went and did my thing again [laughs]. But at least I know how to be academically centered now, so I'm excited to go to college. I'm going to start strapping down again at that point. I had a lot of fun in high school. Well, not *in* high school: it was aside from high school.

Tell me a little bit about when you started hanging out in the park. You said you learned social skills, and you were expanding your mind. That's got to mean something. [laughter] What was that about? Have you tried psychedelics?

Yes. I've taken acid and mushrooms. And I recently tried *Salvia divinorum*, although I didn't get to the heights that some people talk about. But I didn't take a lot of it, so that may be why the effect was mild.

I've just met you. To me you're this cool teenager who has tried psychedelics. It sounds like you've been responsible about it. And you've been communicating with your dad, which is an interesting perspective. You are about to graduate from high school and go to college. You successfully navigated the world of high school, which is kind or rough for some people. There are kids who are so straightedge and studying so hard that they are a bit maladapted because they're not really engaging in social activities. Then there are kids that go to the other end of the spectrum—smoking too much pot and cutting too much, and they're not doing well in school. Ultimately, that approach affects their potential if they're

not motivated in other ways. So I'm interested in hearing your story. Tell me a little bit about the social scene when you first got involved with Cannabis, and what went on at that time.

I started getting high with my friend Carley, who I met in 8th grade. I smoked pot twice in 8th grade. When I got to 9th grade, I focused in on crew. I was really successful in that. I had broken up with my boyfriend at that time, and he had this really cute friend. I was hanging out with his friend a lot at the time of the breakup, and his friend frequently smoked pot. I thought, "Yeah! I'll smoke pot!" I liked smoking pot and I was smoking a lot then. But when crew finals came up, I stopped smoking completely so that I could really get my strength and my lung capacity up. Because I could feel it in my lungs when I smoked. So I stopped smoking up until sophomore year. That's when I met all my friends in the park.

I had this close friend Lisa, who introduced me to everybody. One time I was stoned off my ass, chillin' and lying on the grass, and this guy comes up to me, and he's like, "Hey, what's up?" We start talking. His name was Jay. We clicked, and we were together for the next two years. He was my dearest boyfriend.

In January, I went to my very first rave. It was called Electric Allstars; it was this incredible rave. I hadn't ever been to one, but the people I was with said that it was the coolest one they had ever been to. That same night I dropped E. I took a green clover. I remember when it came on, I was like, whew! Everything got brighter, the lights looked like they were all coming towards me. I almost felt like a higher being. I was talking, and I was all close and touchy with the new boyfriend, it was a really great experience. All my inhibitions went away. I was kind of scared at first, because I'd never been to a rave. I didn't know the people there, and I was afraid to dance and let loose in front of them. Obviously the E loosened me up a little bit. [laughs]

I can't really describe what it was like, but I felt as though I had found something important. For the next couple of weeks, I dropped E every other weekend or so. We'd go to raves at night and during the day I'd kick it with all these kids in the park. They were free thinkers. They had a different way of thinking that I'd never experienced before. They were all genuinely happy. I learned a lot from them. For example, it doesn't really matter how other people judge you, because as long as you believe in yourself, who is someone else to say what you

are? You shouldn't worry about what other people say. During this time I picked up on a lot of concepts that I hold dear. I think that I'm a much more confident, whole person than most teenagers my age are.

That was your sophomore year. Did you say you were cutting school to go hang out in the park?

Yeah, I eventually ended up cutting school. A lot of it was just to go be with my boyfriend. He didn't smoke weed. Even though I did, I'd do it when he wasn't there, because I kind of felt weird about doing it around him. He just didn't get it.

He didn't get how you felt or he didn't get that you wanted to smoke?

He didn't get that I wanted to smoke. He'd act aloof about it. So I didn't do it around him. I just didn't feel comfortable. It's no fun to do if you don't feel comfortable about your smoking.

When you took MDMA the first time, what contributed to your decision to take it? How did you approach the topic of recreational drugs in general? Had you been through the DARE program? Did you expect that there was going to be Ecstasy at your first rave because you'd heard about it? Did your boyfriend talk to you about it?

Ever since I was really young, I think I was meant to do drugs. I always had an open mind toward them. When I was about seven years old, I had my tooth extracted at the dentist office and they gave me laughing gas. I vividly remember the car ride home with my dad. I told him, "It feels like I am on a cloud! I want to get more teeth pulled!"

And he was like, "Uh, no, I don't think so Becca."

I started smoking pot fairly early for the kids who were in my school, especially because it was a private school. I was the only person in the entire school who ever got high, except for Carley. I was always really curious. I never went through any DARE programs, but I got a lot of drug education. Although they tell you all the bad things, when I heard them I would think, "Yeah, but you can die from taking too much Tylenol." It's all subjective.

I've kind of established the idea that you should do everything in moderation. For the most part if you're smart about the circumstances when you do it, and you're responsible with how much you take, and how often you do it overall, not a whole lot can really go wrong. Just get it from safe people, go through the right motions, be smart

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about yourself, and I don't think that anything too bad can happen. It seems like common sense for me. I tend to think about things pretty logically. I don't let myself get carried away. I have a loud voice in my head telling me what to do. It's kind of like my intuition—I can feel out situations. I've always been really open about trying all these drugs, and I've always been very interested. Basically, I knew that E was going to be there at the rave. Jay asked me if I wanted to roll and I said, "Yeah! I do wanna roll." I came in with the mind set that this was going to be my first experience taking E, and what better place to do it than a rave, because that's where you hear about it. However, I eventually realized that I actually prefer taking it with only one other person, whether it's a girlfriend or a boyfriend. You can just talk, and you connect one-on-one. But at that point I'd heard, "E and raves," and so I thought that since I was going to the rave, I might as well do the E. I was open to it and I'd already wanted to take it beforehand. It was basically my decision, no one really pressured me into doing it. But with the change in social group, it became available to me.

My first experience taking acid was a couple months after taking E. I'd been hearing about acid, and I'd heard mixed things about it. From what some people told me, it could be a scary thing. But I then got on-line at Erowid, and I read some of the good experiences. The idea of being able to see things that your mind can create sounded really cool to me.

Lisa, my good friend at the time, and me had a day off. We didn't tell my parents about it. I said I was going to school. Instead I went to Lisa's house, because her parents were going to be gone all day. We each took two hits on a sugar cube. I took it in the morning and I went over to her house soon after. By the time I got there I was feeling, "Oh, this is interesting." We locked ourselves in the house, because we had heard all these horror stories about people taking half a vial and flipping out in public. We knew we should stay inside the house for the first time because we didn't know how we were going to react to it. We stayed in her room, talking and exploring the new world that we were in, because that's what it was. It wasn't so much the hallucinations. It was more like exploring everything again. It was a psychological trip for me, at that point. We kind of had our own kingdom going. Perhaps it sounds silly when I talk about it, but it was so great at the time. Lisa and I totally connected, we saw things eye to eye. It

was a really fabulous experience and it brought us a lot closer together as friends. There were no problems. I didn't have any bad trips. Things were kind of moving around, doing their own thing, and we were talking with each other. Later on in the afternoon we went out and walked around. That first time was the best experience I had on acid, for sure.

After that, I would take it with my boyfriend, Jay. But Jay had a different way of taking acid. He took it just to get "messed up." He didn't really see the psychological side or the emotional side. You know how you can kind of get an emotional high, too? Jay isn't very emotional; he's one of those people who is objective and logical. When he'd take it, he wouldn't see things the same way that I did. When I'd say stuff that didn't make logical sense, he'd kind of shun me for it. Like, "That doesn't make any sense, don't say that!" I can't tell you how many times I took acid, but it's probably 20 or 30 times. The more times I did it, the more insecure I felt when I would take it. Although I loved the experience, and I tried to enjoy it on my own, it wasn't the same. I didn't have that loving emotional connection that I had experienced with my friend Lisa. I guess I got scared. I'm not sure how long ago it was, but probably a year into taking acid was the last time I took it. And it has probably been about two years now, since that last time. I had taken two hits of this really good acid, and I was having a great time. For once, Jay was being nice. It was kind of like, "All right!" I guess what I was thinking was that I wanted to continue it, so I asked for another hit from the guy who had it. Which proved to be a mistake. It got to be too much—I couldn't see past the hallucinations. I don't remember what happened, but I heard afterwards that I was acting really weird, and off in my own world, doing my own thing.

I didn't "wake up" until the morning. It was basically nonstop hallucinations. While I was in it, I was having a great time. But when I came out, I was standing next to Jay, and he was pissed. Apparently I had kept him up all night, talking to him. I think that if I had been in his situation, I wouldn't have minded. If your friend or your girlfriend took too much, you stay with this person and make sure that they don't have a bad trip. But he did the opposite. He basically said, "I don't want to deal with her." I felt bad afterwards and I stopped taking it at that point.

I've taken mushrooms since then though, and every time I've taken them, I've felt this really strong sense of

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insecurity. I don't feel comfortable talking to people, I always think that they're judging me. I don't see Jay anymore, but even with the people I consider friends, who I would normally be comfortable with, I still worry, "Oh my God what are they going to think of me if I say something that doesn't make sense?" If I say something weird and they question me, I feel like they're judging me. I just don't like that feeling. If I'm not having fun, if I don't feel that same sense I felt the first time, I don't see the point in taking it. Why take it if I'm not going to have a good time? I'm not saying I'm never going to do it again, but I'm going to wait for the right time. I'm going to wait for the time that I have a girlfriend with me, when we can relax, and when I will be able to open myself up to it again. I'm going to wait until such a time that I have all these insecurities and this questioning out of my mind. I think it's going to be after my teen years. I hear that one's teen years are the most insecure and confusing time, and I want to wait until I can really enjoy it again.

I still roll on E once in a while, but only very occasionally. I heard Ann and Sasha Shulgin remark that after about your 12th or so time, it stops working as well and you lose some of the magic. And I've noticed that. I didn't really realize it until I heard them say it, but that's kind of like what it is. It stopped really having the magic for me. When I take it now, it's a different experience. It's not so much of my thing at this point.

I'm so thankful for my experiences with each of them. Although I've had bad experiences, I still was able to expand the way I think about things. I realized that there were doors that I hadn't unlocked—entirely new things in my mind, which I didn't even know were there before. It changed the way that I thought about life in general—it changed my outlook. In those experiences, I was able to explore previously inaccessible parts of me. I was able to deal with a lot of things that I probably wouldn't have been able to deal with before.

I was a bad kid, in the sense that I wasn't getting along with my parents at that point. My parents are divorced. I was living with my mom. I would go out of the house in the middle of the night to party or hang out with friends. I'd go and explore. I was cutting classes. How my mom—and I think my dad at that point—saw it, was that I was this out-of-control teenager. I got this boyfriend and all of a sudden everything went to hell. I ran away from home several times. I got taken home by the police once. I was just bickering with my mom. But I wouldn't really

attribute that to the drugs. It was more of my choice. I didn't believe in what my parents believed in. My dad was on my mom's side at that point. They didn't "get" what I was going through and they didn't understand what drugs are really like. They saw what is on TV—kids going crazy on drugs; it ruins their lives, it ruins their brain, and they won't be able to think the same. So my parents were like, "Oh my God, what are we going to do with her." They would threaten to send me to Thunder Road—an adolescent treatment center.

Although all of this was going on at home with my parents, I didn't let it affect my life. I knew that what I was doing was right for me, because I could just feel it. I also knew some of the things I was doing were bad. I wasn't going to school, and I probably should have been attending classes more. I was being defiant to my parents, but that's just part of me. I think that the problem was that I wasn't going by my parents' agenda. They didn't like that, so they were coming down on me. It's part of my makeup to rebel. The more someone tries to stop me, the more I'm going to do it—that's just how I am. In a lot of situations, I think that's a good attribute to have; but maybe not so much when it is against your parents when you're 15 years old.

Nevertheless, I'm thankful for everything I've been through, because it's made me into the person I am today. My parents say it jokingly, but you know they kind of mean it: "Parents know everything. We know better. You think you know everything as a teenager, but you don't. Just wait until you learn how things really are." I realize that parents are human too. But just because they were older didn't make them right. I questioned them a lot more. I feel like I got to understand that you can't just assume that they know what's best. You have to go with what's right for you. When

all is said and done, I didn't get held back a grade. I took some summer school classes at college, but I liked those too. They were better classes because they were more to the point than most of high school classes.

I'm a smart kid. I haven't lost any brain power. I don't think I'm dumb. And I feel like I'm a lot further than many kids are, because I got the mix of the social experience along with the academic stuff. When I was in class, I absorbed what they'd say. I wouldn't necessarily do the homework, but I got it ideas.

I did get out of control in 10th grade. I got into other stuff. I was smoking and snorting methamphetamine. I did coke. I took some pills like Vicodin, but nothing too serious. It was when I got into speed that things went

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really wrong. But I realized that and I stopped. I don't do it anymore. When I was on speed, I'd stay up for days. I'd pick at my face. I was too young to be doing it. I tried it at 15—that's pretty young to do speed. With the E, and the acid, and the mushrooms, it was all about expanding my mind and learning about myself. However, with the powders, I ended up with the same mindset as my boyfriend: "Let's get messed up!" But I didn't like that approach. I didn't like coming down the next day and feeling like complete shit. I didn't like that at all. I did it a lot for about three months, and I continued to do it on rare occasions for about a year or a year and half after. The more I did it, the more I realized I didn't like it. I couldn't really think of a good reason to continue doing it. I wasn't learning more about myself, I wasn't making myself happier, I was actually making myself depressed when I did it. I began to notice that I felt horrible when I took meth. I could feel how bad it was for me. When I'd been smoking meth, I'd cough up stuff, which I didn't like doing. I could just feel my body getting weak, my muscles would ache. I didn't need that. It worked against me. So I just don't do it anymore.

You mentioned that your best friend Carley hasn't tried acid. How does that play out in your friendship?

She is a little less mentally and emotionally stable. I'm pretty stable. I'm kind of into it. I like the idea of expanding my mind. When Carley was younger, she had a history of depression. Neither of us knows what the acid would really unlock. It could unlock the bad with the good.

What about Salvia divinorum?

I didn't want to take *Salvia divinorum* at first, although I did eventually try it. I knew it was psychoactive. My last experience with acid caused me to shy away from it. I also had a bad trip on mushrooms, in which I thought I was sick and that I was going to die. I was with the same boyfriend when I did it [laughs] and he reacted in the same way. So I thought, "I don't think I can handle psychoactives right now." Because I get that insecurity. If I can't control myself I don't want to put myself through it, because I don't want to ruin it forever. I want to be able to experience these types of things later if I want to. I'm okay with waiting for a few years if I have to. I have my entire life ahead of me to do it if I want to. So I'm just kind of taking a step back. But I bought some *Salvia divinorum* from a friend. He has an approach toward psychedelics

where he will read just a couple of reports on one of them and then he'll do it. If other people have done it and been okay, he will take whatever he becomes interested in. I don't think that's the best idea. If I'm going to do something new, I like to know *everything* about it. I like to know what problems could happen, what problems *do* happen a lot, if there are any. But in the past, I've read these reports and they don't always accurately describe what I feel when I take something. This was the case with *Salvia divinorum*, although I think that perhaps the mild effects I got were related to the low dose that I took.

What is your situation with your father, with regard to your interest in and use of psychedelics?

After the fiasco of my sophomore year, my mom and me had the "Big Fight." She ripped up all the pictures that I had on the wall—all the pictures of my friends from the park, all the kids from Berkeley High. I don't have the pictures anymore. It's okay though, I still have the memories. At that point, she told me to go live with my father. I had never wanted to live with my father before, because I didn't get along with him. But since things were so bad with my mom, I agreed. I was determined to make it work. He knew about what had been going on. So I went to live with him, and then it was just me and my dad.

My dad has sides that I don't like about him. He's kind of manipulative sometimes.

But if you just try to deal with a person, especially if it's your father... well, you can get along with anyone if you really try. So I went to live there, and we started really talking to each other. The rules at his house were simple: if I did certain chores, I'd be allowed to go out with my friends. Which was at that point all I wanted; I cherished the time with my friends. Not even to go out and get high or anything—just to *be* with my friends was the biggest privilege for me. I'd do whatever I had to appease him, and I'd be able to go out. He got what he wanted. He got the sense that I was being responsible and that I could handle the chores that were given to me. I got what I wanted: the happiness of being able to be with my friends as much as I wanted, or at least enough to make me feel comfortable.

So we were both happy, which allowed us to talk to each other objectively. We shared experiences with each other. I told him about the time he took me to a parade, a big Mardi Gras festival, when I took acid. One night I told him, "I was frying, and you had no idea!" He was like, "Wow you can really handle yourself." He'd share stories with me about when he'd go to camp-outs. He kind of

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understood. After I talked about it a lot, he understood I was a smart kid about this type of thing. We both realized I had gotten out of hand earlier on, but that such things were in my past. He realized that I was responsible, and he wouldn't punish me for taking drugs—certainly not acid and E. He was mostly just concerned about my health when I would take E.

If someone gives me a chance, I'll talk with him. It goes back to what the friends at Berkeley High taught me—I'm not afraid of what people are going to think of me. I'll tell my dad some things he may not want to hear about, but it makes me feel comfortable. If I was going to go roll one night, I'd tell him. I'd say, "I'm going to this rave." And he'd ask, "Are you going to party?" That was his question, "Are you going to party?" I'd tell him truthfully yes or no. Because my father knew he could trust me to tell him the truth, he always knew what was going on. Since he knew that I was responsible, in some ways he felt okay with me doing that type of thing. As a parent, he could never say, "Oh it's okay to do that." He feels that as a parent he's not really allowed to say that it's okay. But he understands. And he knows that when it comes down to it, he can't really stop me. So he accepted it. It brought us a lot closer together, because he was able to see the real me.

With my mom, I always have to lie. No, I'm not smoking any pot. No, I'm not drinking at all. No, I'm not going to see boys. It gets tiring to lie all the time. But if I want to do what I want to do, and keep peace at home, I have to lie to her. Since my dad allowed me with talk to him about it and he didn't punish me for the experiences I wanted to experience, I was able to tell him what was actually going on. He was able to see the real me. My dad and I have a much closer relationship.

When the second semester senior year came, and I started slacking off in school, me and my dad were getting into fights. We got on each others' nerves, so I've been back living with my mom for the last couple of months. Although my dad and I are not getting along great at this point, we still have love for each other—we still have the connection there. Just last night we went out to dinner, and I was able to talk openly with him again. This time it was about what I really want for college. By opening the door to letting me feel comfortable talking to him about drugs, I really feel like I'm able to talk to him about anything. I know that if I'm really messed up on drugs and I shouldn't be driving home, that I can call my dad and have him pick me up. He'll be happy that I called and I

won't get in trouble for it. That's probably one of the best situations a kid who's going to use drugs can ask for.

If you parents just say "don't do it," you're going to do it anyway. If you really want to do something, you're going to do it. But you're missing the guidance from your parents. They've been through it before. A lot of kids' parents have done drugs. They can share their experiences with you. Letting your parents really know what is going on can help keep you safe. So if a parent is open to hearing it, and is willing to not just punish a kid, they'll get to know their kid a lot better. Because they actually *will* know the kid.

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Although my dad knows that I sometimes do bad things, he also really knows the good parts of me. He knows I actually take care of myself in situations where a lot of kids wouldn't be able to, because I'm able to tell him about the whole experience. Yes, in some situations the experience may have included that I took E. But he can hear about my adventures too. And usually it's a pretty good story, in which I took care of myself, even though bad situations may have presented themselves. With my mom, she misses out. And I miss out on letting her know about those things.

What about college?

I'm ready to leave the Bay Area. I've lost all of my friends at Berkeley. Actually, a lot of them got too much into speed. Some of them got depressed from taking too much E. Some went to jail for stealing cars when they were all tweaked out. Many of them weren't able to be as responsible as I was. So I lost the friends from Berkeley. At my new school in Albany, the kids just don't understand. They haven't touched any drugs. They think I'm a crack-head for even trying E. It's okay that they think this, because they really don't understand.

Do all the kids know you've tried E? Do you have a reputation?

Sure. I'm not going to hide who I am. This is a part of me, and this is what I've done. If they ask me, I'm going to tell them. In all truth, I don't really need their friendship, because they aren't my people. I still have my girl Carley. [laughs] We've been together since 8th grade. We have plans for the future, when we both get out of college. But I'm ready to go to school. I'm ready to try something new. I'm going to go and see how it works out for me. •



NAOTO HATTORI

Tripping Girl, 2004, acrylic on board, 4.1" x 5.9"



Above: Little Huichol girl, two years old; her grandmother is the family shaman of the rancho.

Left: Same little girl at eight years old, with her shaman grandmother's feathered power wand. This child has been on the pilgrimage to the peyote desert at least once with her grandmother and extended family, and has consumed peyote at her family rancho on numerous occasions, when family members who are peyoteros return and perform a ceremony to mark their arrival home.

Below: Little boy who accompanied parents on the temple members' pilgrimage to the peyote desert. He received peyote throughout the pilgrimage and subsequent ceremonies, via his mother's milk. Yellow face paint indicates that a person or one of their family members has been on the pilgrimage.



Photographs by
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