



Sara Tonin

E-ticket to Dharmaland

I was living—if you can call it living—in Los Angeles at the corner of atheism and agnosticism. It was the end of 1990. I had just moved to the “left coast” from a tiny hamlet in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a rural area filled with Amish people, horses and buggies, and lots of mullet hair and ill-cut acid wash jeans. As you could imagine, I had to get out. I found myself sitting at a coffee house I frequented on La Brea on open-mic night to kill some time rather than myself. The guy I’d run away with to La-La-land had just dumped me, but I was getting over both him and the devastation. I couldn’t help but notice over the bad poetry, the intense eyes of a dark, curly-haired artsy dude who bore somewhat of a resemblance to Tim Burton staring back at me. During the intermission, I slid onto the stool next to him at the bar.

We struck up a conversation and somehow landed on the topic of MDMA. I expressed my interest and my fears. I’d heard about Ecstasy in college, but Nancy Reagan and McGruff the Crime Dog, as well my staunch Republican, right-wing, evangelical Methodist local magistrate of a father all conditioned me to “Just Say NO!” I was 23 and I hadn’t ever even smoked weed. I barely dropped Tylenol when I had a headache! However, as he described his experiences with the substance, I was intrigued.

“And the best place to do it,” he said, slyly smiling, “Disneyland.”

We exchanged numbers and continued to converse and hang out over the next couple of days and soon set a date to go to the happiest place on earth and get happier.

That day in Disneyland was a much-needed reminder that there was an unseen world around me. I felt a oneness with not only the crowds of people waiting in line at Space Mountain but with the universe-at-large. Ingesting MDMA was a gift that put me on the neon yellow brick road to self-discovery and renewed my lost lease on spirituality.

Rather than hoping to find through faith a belief in someone else’s story in a

long out-dated Sunday school myth, I finally opened up to my own numinous experience. To paraphrase the great Rudolf Otto, the “Numinous” can be described as a distinctive experience of God, ineffable and transcendent, the primary source of beauty and love. Feelings of awe, fascination and elements of overpowering-ness, urgency, and that which is “Wholly Other” are present in the psychedelic experience.

Fate would have it that I quickly met more folks in the underground that enjoyed entheogenic compounds. I began experimenting and researching. Soon I was off to my first psychedelic conference, ironically held on the conservative Christian campus of Chapman University. It was there I met several mentors and friends that would pop up again and again in my life, among them the late Terence McKenna, who dubbed me “The Shamanatrix.” Before leaving, I picked up a publication called *Psychedelic Illuminations*. In it, I found an article written by Rick Doblin, talking about his experience as a subject in a psychedelic study. In the same issue, I found an ad seeking subjects for an upcoming MDMA study at UCLA, sponsored by MAPS and headed by Charles Grob, MD. Inspired by Doblin, I myself became a subject in the study.

Ingesting MDMA
was a gift that
put me on the
neon yellow brick road
to self-discovery
and renewed
my lost lease
on spirituality.