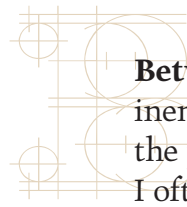


Psychedelics and **Bodywork**

Ellen Watson



Between 1938 and 1958, my maternal grandmother, the wife of a prominent pharmacist and co-owner of O'hanlon Watson Drug Company, was the president of the North Carolina Apothecary Society. As a child, I often heard her and my Mother referring to this group as "the Drug Club." Much of what was available to consumers during these years were compounded through alchemy by the pharmacist.

As I entered my teenage years, the three women who represented the maternal in my life were beset with different varieties of spiritual emergencies. My mother, diagnosed first as bipolar, then as chronic undifferentiated schizophrenic, became a guinea pig for the new antipsychotic procedures and pharmaceuticals as they were developed. Her sister, diagnosed first with clinical depression, then bipolar disorder, also began a sixty year dependence on antidepressant, antianxiety, and finally antipsychotic medications. Granny was simply diagnosed as addicted to both alcohol and the cocaine in the small bottles of the original Coca-Cola.

From my mid-teens onward, I vowed never to touch a pharmaceutical preparation intended to "balance my brain chemistry." Over a twenty year period, my mother was hospitalized against her will over eighty times, received over sixty electroshock treatments, and either through self-abuse or neglect was near death numerous times. She repeatedly threw all of her medications into the trash, toilet, or out the window. During the 1970s, I personally interviewed over fifty psychiatrists in the Carolinas and Georgia, looking for answers to these women's dramatic and traumatic lives. The paradigm, at that time, didn't include an understanding of the importance of honoring ones' spiritual heritage/beliefs as part of the problem or solution. The attempts by well-meaning, helping professionals were for psychological and sociological adjustments/therapies, looking only to biological history for insight or answers.

Exhausted from my first thirty-six years of life and the choices I'd made in marriage, and needing healing for mind, body, spirit, and emotions, I arrived at the Esalen Institute, in Big Sur, California, during July of 1984. My very soul was raw. Stanislav Grof, M.D., was the scholar-in-residence, this being his eleventh of fifteen years at Esalen. Stan's focus as a research psychiatrist had been schizophrenia and manic depressive illness. Immediately, upon feeling his hand on my shoulder, I knew that he knew something that I wanted and needed to know. My studies with Stan and

Christina (eight Esalen Holotropic Breathwork monthlongs provided the foundation for my certification in Holotropic Breathwork in 1988), with Terence McKenna, and meeting Rick Doblin all contributed to the remarkable path that included healing through the use of entheogens, empathogens, and psychedelics.

David, the editor of this *Bulletin*, asked me to write specifically regarding my experience combining MDMA with massage and bodywork. For this *Bulletin*, I've chosen to write about my own experience receiving, over a period of four years, periodic two to three hour



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sessions from a chiropractor and bodyworker, who calls her practice “Chirossage.” I inherited a challenging spine from my mother, including lordosis, kyphosis, and scoliosis. X-rays of my spine showed what an M.D. called “arthritis of the spine.” Calcified spurs had formed on the anterior surface of my thoracic vertebrae. After seeing these X-rays, I had a visual image of what needed to be corrected. My eighty-five year old mother’s spine is so twisted that she can neither walk nor stand without help. Due to the challenges of schizophrenia, she has been unwilling to accept any help or do any physical exercises.

Whether in yoga classes, on the dance floor, in clinical hypnosis trainings, or in giving and receiving massage, I focused on moving my spine. During my immersion in the work of Continuum Movement, I focused on embryonic and amniotic movements, inviting my spine and the paraspinal muscles to adjust to new ways of moving. Knowing that bone follows

energy, and that soft tissue will shorten or lengthen to support the shifts in bone, I studied and practiced energy work, engaged visualization, and affirmation. Vibrational healing through sound and singing have also proved to be valuable tools in support of creating an opening along my spine’s path.

I approached Nikki to begin working with me, beginning one hour after ingesting a hundred milligrams of MDMA. Our sessions began with soft tissue massage, extending my limbs, opening my joints, from toes to fingers. As Nikki worked to create space where there was density, I remained present in my body, aware of sensations, and affirming the agreed-upon desired outcome. After about an hour into the session, Nikki began working on my anterior spine by working deeply into my viscera. The openness supported by MDMA allowed her to move her fingers around my organs and locate the specific vertebrae in need of twisting and turning. She was able to work with ligaments and tendons, as well as bones.

Using breathwork, visualization, and affirmation, as well as sound and movement during these sessions, allowed remarkable physiological shifts to take place. We completed the sessions with full body attention, again extending energy from my torso outward to my arms, hands and fingers, legs, feet and toes, neck and head. After completing the chirossage session, I spent an hour at the Esalen baths immersing myself in the spring waters, engaging in the movements that we now call Watsu, Water-Dance, or AquaCranial. I firmly believe that my ability to walk upright today, with a long and tall spine, is due to the combination of the body/mind/spirit practices I’ve spoken of, and these remarkable sessions. In follow-up X-Rays, the calcifications have been reduced by over eighty-five percent, and with continued spinal awareness and attention, I foresee my spine continuing to grow younger each year.

I founded MovingVentures School, a 501(c)(3), in order to share my appreciation of the somatic arts with anyone interested. Our specific mission is to educate women in developing countries, or in developing parts of the U.S. While still on the Healing Arts staff and faculty at Esalen, I am doing due diligence in the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. •

