

The Journey to MAPS: A Supporter's Story

ALEX

AS AN INFANT, ALEX MOVED with his family from St. Louis, Missouri, to Stanford University where his father, a scientist, had been invited to set up a new department. Alex grew up in the world of science and academia at the highest levels. His home life was active, loving, and based on science and knowable truths. There was no religion or spirituality; the household was devoid of any knowledge except that which could be proven.

At an early age, Alex was drawn to the edges of the knowable universe. He became fascinated with space and planets, especially Jupiter, and asked questions that stretched the imagination and science at the time: What is beyond space? What is the world made of? He played piano, joined the swim team, played water polo, took acting classes, painted, drew, and embraced chance, mystery, and the unknown.

As a teen he became a radio DJ. His new friends were mostly older, and he developed an interest in the music they listened to: Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, the Beatles. He began to experiment with drugs and had many excellent experiences. LSD completely changed who he was. It opened his consciousness, and gave him the experience that the human being is small, but always connected to the larger, infinite universe. He also had the experience of knowing beyond empiricism; he had knowledge in the realm of spirit and feeling.

He only had one difficult experience. One day in the station, a woman offered him an orange barrel-shaped pill. She said it came from ten-year-old Owsley stock. She didn't know if it was still good. So Alex waited until he had a show from midnight to 6 am, and took the pill at 11 that evening.

Nothing happened at midnight, or one, or two. At four AM the universe opened up around him powerfully. When he left the studio at 6 in the morning, he barely made it home. As he laid down in his bed and pulled up the covers, he thought he might be dying, and the worlds of hell—doubt, terror, and self-hatred—rose up around him. He got out of his bed, and made it to his parents' room. He told his very rational, traditionalist father not to be mad, but that he took LSD, and he was afraid. His father embraced him and talked with him for hours until Alex fell asleep. Later, his father had some critical words for his son, but those hours, which many might have called a "bad trip" was a time that cemented the bond between the two men. Even with all their differences, Alex knew that his father supported him and loved him deeply and fully. That bond kept their connection through other challenging times and is still with them.

After high school was Penn State, then graduating at Stan-

ford with degrees in drama and creative writing. Then back to the east coast to study theater at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City. There were years of "putting on the suit" of different careers: performing and touring with a rock 'n roll band, being a swim coach, acting in a variety of places, a "good job" in 3D computer graphics at Pixar, a marriage, and raising a wonderful daughter.

Then one day he found a lump. Lymphoma. "While I would never wish it on anyone, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. The healing completely shifted my orientation from "What can I get?" to "What and how can I give?" With that shift in awareness, yoga found him. Teachers of mediation and yoga appeared, encouraging him to become a teacher. Alex realized that as a teacher of yoga all his various skills could be used to help others. He learned and studied for many years with dedication and eventually opened a yoga studio.

After the studio was established, Alex began to feel a calling. He wondered what it would be like to experience psychedelics again, and he began to learn what others had said about them currently. In an internet search he found MAPS. "It was so very exciting! An organization that actually studies these substances seriously!" He found articles, links to other sites, and visionary artists he enjoyed. It excited him to find others who were talking about the legitimate potential power of these substances to change consciousness and the world.

He decided that LSD was not the way to go, as it is pretty impossible to ensure purity. As he learned more, about the dangers of analog drugs and "research chemicals," he decided that although there was a huge body of literature showing the benefits of these

substances, that it was not worth it to buy them on the street.

One day in talking with a friend, he mentioned his interest in learning about psychedelics and yoga. His friend said that she knew a psychotherapist who sometimes used psychedelics in the work. Introductions were made, therapy began, and Alex had his first experience with MDMA-assisted therapy.

"The experience is beyond words," Alex said. "But I will try to describe it. In the last seven months, I have felt like I am finally living. The substance, used in a ceremonial way, allowed me to begin working on the grieving, suffering and trauma that I have carried with me. There is no way to adequately describe the dimension of clarity it gave me. MDMA therapy seems to be an emotional "collator." Everything finds the perfect place. I was living in a toxic stew without clear boundaries regarding my feelings.

Someday people will be able to go to a therapist, and have this experience. Supporting MAPS seems like some of the most important work I can do.

“With the medicine, I saw why I was connected to the pain and suffering, and I had the ability to decide that I was done with that. During the session, we looked at photographs of my life. When I found a picture that connected me to sadness or held any kind of emotional charge, I saw clearly that I was holding on, attached to feelings. It was my decision. It seems the chemical gives the ability to see clearly, to be reasonable, logical and communicative, while feeling profound love.

“The drug wears off, but the clarity remains. In one afternoon, I found freedom from torture, from self-torture. I found the grace and self-care to lift the burdens easily and magically.

“The work with MDMA is similar, but at a higher level, to the work with yoga and meditation. The destination is the same; there are many different vehicles. The profound session provides substance for yoga and meditation months, or years, afterward. It is a gift that someday the world will understand.”

Alex made the decision not to tell his parents about his MDMA therapy initially. But after he began to be happier, emotionally stronger, after his anxieties lessened, his parents began to ask questions, noticing profound changes in his attitudes, behavior, and tolerance, and he told them about the therapy.

In addition to significantly reducing his fears and anxieties, he found that the sessions changed his relationship to cannabis. He no longer finds it helpful. Alex said, “This MDMA therapy work, along with yoga and meditation, clears the window. Cannabis, for me, fogs the window.” It also changed his perception of relationships. “It is phenomenal that something can open us up to such love, such self-love, and with that the ability to love others. I now have the ability to enter into relationships without a need to be healed, but with the desire to share love with another.”

Alex feels sad that MDMA was abused recreationally, because now it is not available as a legal medicine. “I never tried it recreationally, and I can’t even imagine doing it that way. My experience was a ceremony, an offering, very reverential. It is not a chemical, it is a sacrament.”

“I support MAPS, because the work that MAPS does leads people to these realizations and healing. Someday people will be able to go to a therapist, and have this experience. Supporting MAPS seems like some of the most important work I can do.”

Begin with the end in mind
 then work backward to plan for reaching ambitious goals
 —Ashawna Hailey, who left \$5.5 million to MAPS in her will

Help create a world where psychedelics are integrated into society by including MAPS in your end of life plans. If you tell us about your plans, you can join our *Next Horizon Society*, and we will invite you to receptions, learning opportunities, and other special events.

Please contact MAPS Development Director Virginia Wright to discuss your plans.
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