

**f**OR A WEEK EACH MONTH, I am buffeted by emotional storms from the hormonal fluctuations that many young women experience. Those days sometimes remind me of the sense of isolation and gloom I felt most acutely as a teenager, and the alienation I perceived between myself and other people, especially my parents. I wasn't much of an experimenter—I tried pot once when I was 16, and it just made me feel mildly anxious. It didn't occur to me to try it again, although some of my favorite friends were stoners. In retrospect, it's easy to imagine that a well-planned, therapeutic MDMA experience might have provided a powerful sense of equanimity and self-acceptance that I desperately needed. Yet most of my peers and I had no reference point, social milieu, or familial context that would admit a balanced, intentional use of MDMA or other psychedelics.

The issue is complex. After we settled on "Kids and Psychedelics" as a topic for the *Bulletin*, we repeatedly got feedback that this button was too hot to touch. Frequently when activities involving minors were discussed, people expressed their fears of criminal liability or extreme public disapproval. It has been striking to me that this topic is taboo among some of those who openly discuss the adult use of psychedelics. Perhaps these people are concerned that even *talking* about the issue could bring more negative attention onto the psychedelic community.

We are very far from the picture Aldous Huxley painted of Pala in *Island*, where young adults use a psychedelic "moksha medicine" as part of a rite-of-passage into adulthood. Even though we are aware of some traditional cultures' initiatory ceremonies, it can be difficult or of limited relevance to try to integrate these practices into our own lives. Most youthful experimentation with psychedelics (usually beginning with *Cannabis*) is done among peers, with little formal ritual. Some of these minors—often independently of family, but sometimes within a supportive family context—have experiences with psychedelics that contribute to their growth and their knowledge of the world. This idea is vigorously condemned and feared by many adults who can't handle the complexity surrounding the human motivation for using psychoactives. It can be hard to talk about without getting mired in discussions of failed drug policies and the ongoing damage that the Drug War

inflicts on teen culture. There are many open questions about how to reduce underinformed, impulsive use and help kids to make healthier choices. For this reason we've included several articles that discuss drug education and touch on the problems faced when trying to direct youth to act wisely and with restraint.

This issue doesn't include much about the potentially harmful, addictive, and sometimes life-threatening experiences that can result from reckless use. However, it

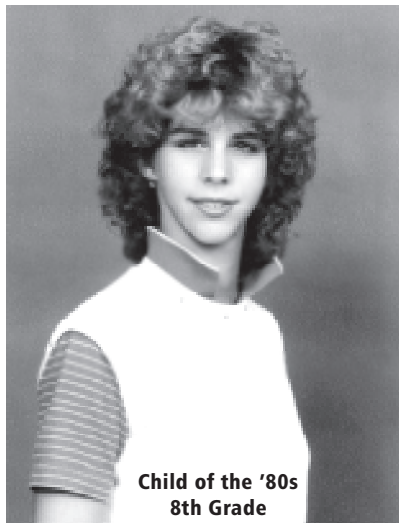
is important to note that confronting fear is often

a valuable aspect of psychological and spiritual transformation, and a symbolic death experience is part of some rites-of-passage ceremonies. Although the darker side of psychedelic use is not featured in this issue, it nevertheless deeply informs my reasons for focusing on the positive. I am inspired by people like Becca (see pages 39–44) who generally use good sense, healthy curiosity, and an increasingly comprehensive set of informational resources to make thoughtful decisions about what they consume. And I am equally alarmed by the "under-intentional" use of psychedelics by some kids. However, if as adults we can't offer a vision for that which is possible and beneficial, what kind of role models are we?

From the vantage point of a former neophobe, I have heard and read the stories we have collected with a sense of wonder. Through my professional work, I contribute to the growing body of information about psychoactives. I'm not a parent, educator, guidance counselor, or mentor for any teens. I simply have concern and compassion for their experiences growing up in an often scary and confusing world. I think of how in the film *Bowling for Columbine*, director Michael Moore asks Marilyn Manson, a favorite musician of some disenfranchised teens, what he would tell the kids and community of

Columbine, Colorado who witnessed the tragic 1999 school massacre. Manson replies, "I wouldn't say a single word to them. I would listen to what they have to say." Perhaps what we need to do most of all to help kids form reasonable and healthy relationships with psychedelics is to talk less and listen more.

— Sylvia Thyssen, Editor



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