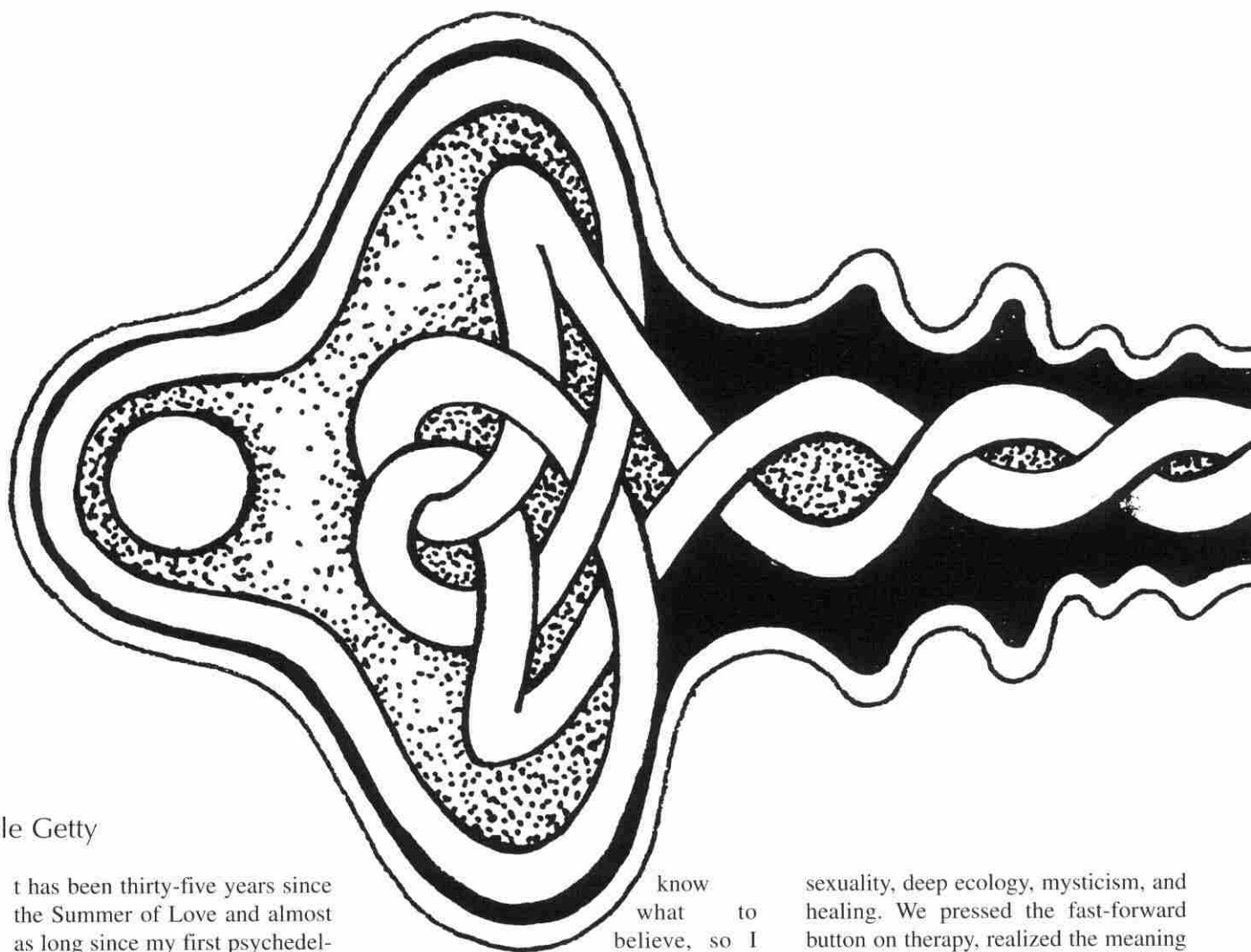




Adele Getty

It has been thirty-five years since the Summer of Love and almost as long since my first psychedelic journey. I was perhaps more cautious than most. I needed to first observe my friends as they tripped to see if what the newspapers said was even remotely true. Were they going to jump out of a third-floor window? Would they stare at the sun until they went blind, or begin murdering innocent people in their homes? I didn't

know what to believe, so I watched. I liked what I saw, and I took my first trip. At the end of it I knew it would not be my last.

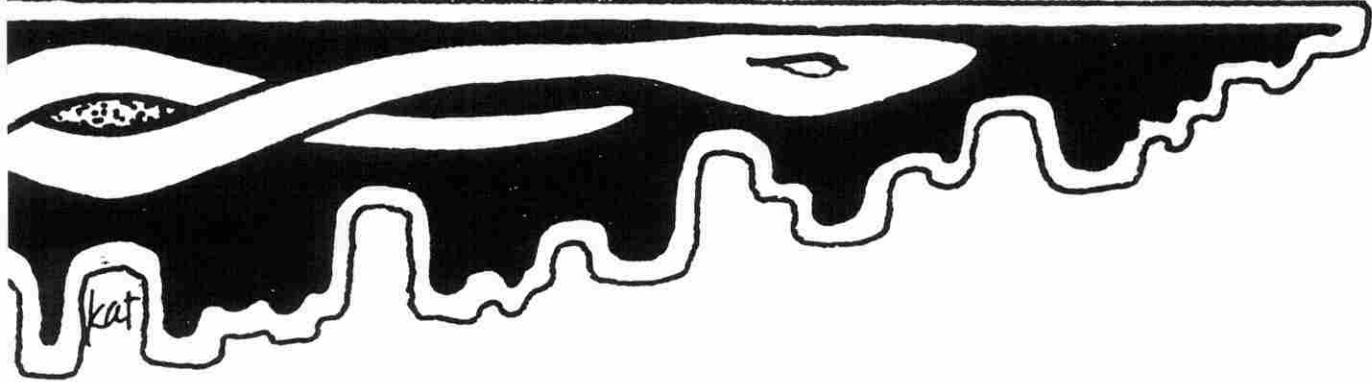
I was not alone on this journey: tens of millions of us went on the ride inside our own minds. We found connection, beatific vision, religious luminosity, perennial philosophy, women's consciousness raising, shamanism, ecstatic

sexuality, deep ecology, mysticism, and healing. We pressed the fast-forward button on therapy, realized the meaning of forgiveness and compassion, and began to ask some mighty big questions concerning the nature of reality and consciousness.

As a writer, I am always connecting the historical dots. How can I write about women and psychedelics without addressing the times into which we were born? We did not just appear like

Twists

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Athena, out of our father's head, fully formed and ready to drop.

I begin by asking what forces were at play in the cosmos at our inception. When I look at the circumstances around the conception and birth of the baby-boomer generation, who pioneered the latest phase of psychedelic exploration, I can't help noticing some curious synchronicities, some simple twists of fate. We were conceived in a post-Auschwitz concentra-

tion camp of the soul and ushered into the world under the dark star of an exploding nuclear mushroom. It was our parents' generation that fought the monster Adolph Hitler. The horror of it all must have deeply saturated the psyches of those who returned home from World War II. It is almost as if an aversion to war, fascism, and genocide bled through into our genes, unwittingly passed from father to mother to fetus.

In April 1943 as the deadly Manhat-

tan Project was reaching what it called its "clearlight" (nuclear fusion) goal, the great god Shiva and the goddess Shakti were dancing their eternal dance of destruction and creation and saw fit to balance the scales by giving Albert Hofmann the most famous bicycle ride in history. Through this synchronicity Sandoz laboratory became the scene of a Manhattan Project of the mind. The project engendered an explosion of cosmic consciousness that would not be

of Fate

dropped on innocent civilians on a far away island, but instead on sugar cubes, blotter paper, little orange barrel tablets called Sunshine, and gelatin window-pane LSD that was so bright it, too, was known as Clearlight.

Back in 1943, no one could have predicted that Hofmann's synthesis of LSD would become a vehicle for the radical initiation of an entire generation, or that by the 1960s Harvard University professors Leary, Alpert, and Metzner would break with the establishment and encourage the youth of the world to explore their own minds and neurology. If Aldous Huxley could have had it his way, he would have done it more elegantly, and perhaps more successfully. His idea was to follow the pattern of previous successful revolutions of the mind: turn on the intelligentsia first, have the mistresses of male leaders carry it to places of power, and then let it trickle down to the masses. In this way there presumably would not be a backlash from conservatives resulting in draconian legal oppression. We will never know the truth of this for the Fates made it otherwise. On the very same day in 1963 that President Kennedy was assassinated, Aldous Huxley died from cancer, but not before requesting two intermuscular injections of LSD, then legal, during his last twenty-four hours. Another one of those curious twists of fate.

Thirty-five years later I can look back on it all with a woman's perspective. I am pro-choice on everything. I believe that we as women and as human beings have a right to do with our bodies as we desire. We have a right to an abortion, a right to die with dignity, a right to clean water and healthy food, a right to alter our consciousness, a right to question authority, a right to protest our government's foreign policy, even a right to be alcoholics, drug addicts, and cigarette smokers. Do I want myself or those in my community to be addicts or drunks? No. Do I support the war on drugs? No. The war on drugs is a travesty that breeds corruption, international drug cartels, secret CIA slush funds that trade cocaine for arms, and provides a way to wage war on blacks and inner city communities.

Over the years I have had time to

reflect on all of these issues, particularly the use of psychedelics. I know from watching those around me that not all drugs are good. Cocaine is a disaster. I have watched families fall apart, good people become thieves, and worse. I knew people who died from overdoses of cocaine, crack, speed, and heroin. I also saw people who never used illegal drugs ruin their lives with alcohol, prescription drugs such as valium, sleeping pills, diet pills, and mood altering pharmaceuticals. I see children introduced to drugs such as Ritalin and Wellbutrin. I question a culture that medicates its children and whose adults look for quick fixes with Prozac. Most people who are depressed have very good reasons to be unhappy. They are, in fact, often having a very sane response to living and working in an insane world that is out of balance. Mood altering prescription drugs become a means for multinational pharmaceutical companies to keep the wheels of corporate culture rolling.

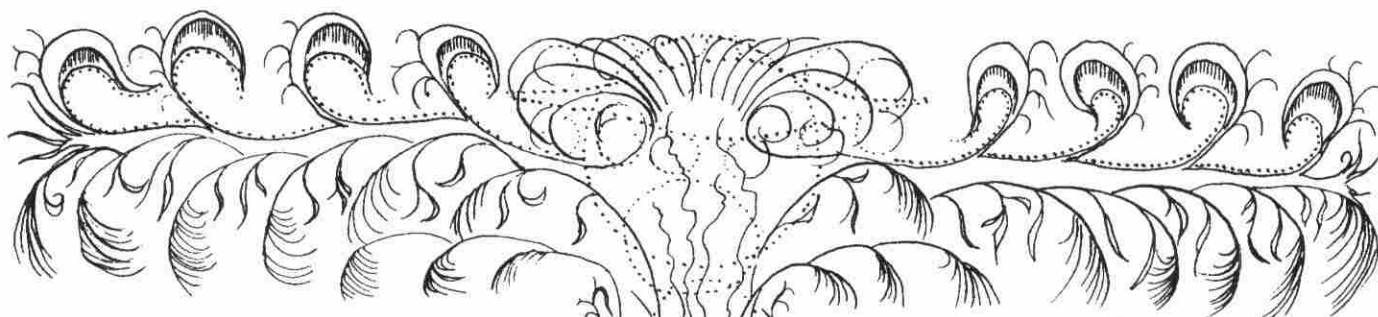
Psychedelics (LSD, psilocybin, peyote, ayahuasca, and designer drugs such as MDMA) constitute a unique realm. But these medicines are not for everyone. Psychologically, you need a well-developed ego before you go about dismembering it. Tender, half-formed egos or certain New Age types who are already hearing voices, seeing auras, communicating with spirit guides, and channeling should probably think twice before embarking on a psychedelic journey. Psychedelics work best for those who have a firm grasp on their own inner reality. I am of the belief that millions of people worldwide are still using these substances. The substances never went away; people just became more discreet in their use of them.

During the 1980s, in the midst of the conservative Reagan era and the rise of yuppies, another twist of fate occurred. A chemist on the CIA payroll began exploring the therapeutic efficacy of MDMA. At the time, MDMA was not a scheduled, illegal substance. Therapists around the country began to use it in their counseling sessions and found it to be most helpful in facilitating honest, compassionate communication. This drug, popularly known as Ecstasy, created a psychedelic revival. Although not

a true psychedelic, MDMA engenders a heightened state of empathy with others. As a result of MDMA, people who missed the '60s, or were not yet even born, got turned on to their own minds and bodies. Older people who had never taken psychedelics were now interested in taking them under safe and guided conditions. The younger generation discovered the joys of ecstatic trance dance and created the rave scene.

One of the things that makes psychedelics unique among other drugs is that they are not addictive. Users of psychedelics are never arrested for robbing their local 7-Eleven in order to support their mushroom habit. One trip goes a long way. Most people who trip do not get up the next day and immediately want to trip again. As a sacred medicine, psychedelics provide a lot of food for the soul to digest. Over the years I have seen nothing but beauty come from the conscious use of these medicines.

For myself and other women who find themselves on auspicious occasions partaking of a sacred medicine, it is sometimes difficult to find a forum in which to speak about this part of our lives. Over the years there have been large conferences that address in great detail various aspects of psychedelics. They are usually organized by men and most of the speakers are what I call "Molecule Men." These men are scientists or at least explorers who have come to understand the complex neurochemistry of any given psychedelic and the human brain. They can rattle off long chemical alphabets and even longer polysyllabic terminology explaining neurotransmitters, MAO inhibitors, frontal lobes, and every other aspect of the brain, making you realize, as Leary once claimed, that the brain itself is a drug dealer, transporting drugs back and forth across the corpus callosum every second of the day. Many of the Molecule Men have worked long and hard inside the system. Their dedication is beginning to be rewarded in that there are now a few human-subject experiments being conducted with government approval. Considering the times we live in, this is a wonderful accomplishment, and these scientists should be congratulated and supported. But as women we often find these conferences



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unfulfilling in that they rarely address *why* people enjoy psychedelics. Yes, there is the long anthropological history of the use of various mind altering substances in indigenous cultures: Maria Sabina and her famous mushroom ceremony, the Native American Church, and others. And often there are a few women speakers who address experiences from other cultures, their own or that of various shamans. Yes, we are wired for psychedelics, and their use may have brought us language, religion, and much more, but what about the voice of the women who are mothers, grandmothers, professionals, artists, writers, teachers, business women, and gardeners?

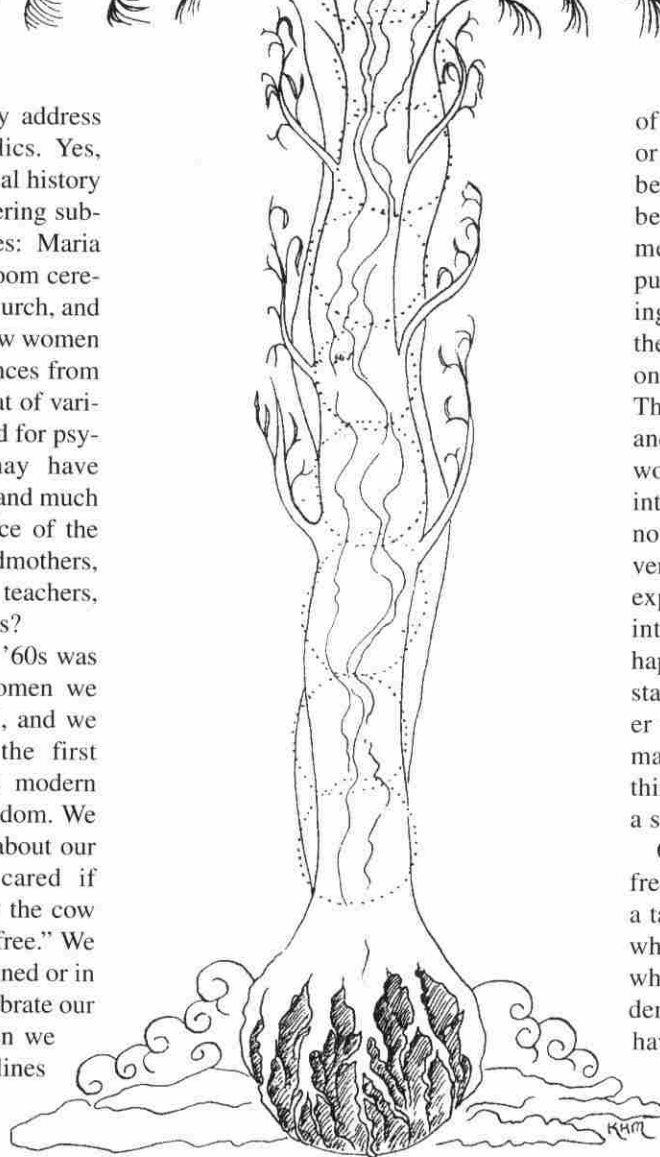
One of the mandates of the '60s was "Make love, not war." As women we were armed with birth control, and we were dangerous. We were the first women in the history of the modern world to have such sexual freedom. We took lovers without worrying about our reputations. We no longer cared if someone did not want to "buy the cow because they got the milk for free." We were not interested in being owned or in being a cow. We learned to celebrate our bodies and our sexuality. When we burned our bras it made headlines around the world. Can the generations of women who followed after us imagine that not wearing a bra was a newsworthy, radical act? Psychedelics helped us burn our bras, but more importantly, they helped us burn through generations of repression.

For many of us, becoming sexual and becoming psychedelized happened together, a wonderful, pleasure-inducing freedom. Making love on psychedelics transports lovers into a cosmic dimension beyond time and space. They experience kaleidoscopic visions of colors that dissolve into

tastes of sexual nectar, melting into sounds of skin against skin, and synesthesia, where the deck of the senses is shuffled into entire new ways of perceiving. They watch as the beloved is transformed right in front of them, his or her face dissolving into the face of all lovers, a past-life cornucopia of wonderment and sometimes terror. The psyche works its way through Freudian moments of Eros and Thanatos. They discover the gender-bending pleasure

of not knowing whether one has a penis or a vagina, or who is penetrating or being penetrated, the ecstasy of becoming a single-celled creature merging with another, undulating, pulsing, throbbing, merging, separating out again just long enough to relish the sublime divine anguish of not being one, only to plunge back into merging. They stop knowing where one stops and the other begins, going back to the womb and oceanic bliss, shooting out into the cosmos and becoming a super nova exploding, creating the entire universe in a single, unified orgasm. They experience the extension of the senses into a supersensuality where sex is happening with flowers, trees, sea, sky, stars, moon, and Earth. Lovers discover the erotic nature of Nature, the ultimate peek behind the veil where everything is pulsing and looking back with a sexy wink of the eye.

One thing leads to another, and sex frequently leads to babies. It is almost a taboo subject, but there were women who consciously conceived children while on LSD, and others who accidentally conceived. Over the years I have met a number of young adults who were "acid babies." They all appear to be exceptionally fine human beings. They are not deformed physically or emotionally. In fact, I would say they are especially beautiful, open, sensitive, loving people. I do not have any idea of how being conceived on LSD might have affected them, except to say that they were obviously not damaged by it. They also had parents who raised them with love and kindness. I am sure that there are also others out there who were acid babies of parents who were spaced out and reckless. I imagine these children bear the scars of neglect and pain.



Now that many people from the '60s are becoming grandparents, there is an opportunity to reflect on them as parents and on their grown children. As women, we seem to carry an inherent concern for the children and their potential drug problems. This topic has been an ongoing conversation among us, as well as a source of worry and sometimes heart-break. Since there has been no longitudinal sociological study, I can only subjectively report on what I have observed over the years. My perspective on these matters is that of a white, middle-class woman. I cannot attempt to make sense of what took place in the inner cities or, for that matter, on back-to-the-land communes.

I often refer to the children of the baby boomers as the "second generation." The children that I know were raised in middle-class, professional households. Their parents cared about their education, and they played sports, went to soccer camp, took martial arts classes, went skiing in the winter, and spent hours in front of computers. Often, they were raised in a social culture in which drugs played a role.

I began with the assumption that they must have tried every drug by the age of twenty. To my surprise, I discovered through open dialogue that a large number of them have not even smoked marijuana. I have met many second-generation kids who are quite mature and responsible in terms of substance use. They do not drink, smoke pot, or take

other kinds of drugs with any regularity, if at all. I once asked a young man why he had not tried marijuana or other substances, and he said, "I don't think I have the temperament for it." I have seen a maturity in quite a number of second-generation kids. They are not reckless or naive, but deeply thoughtful

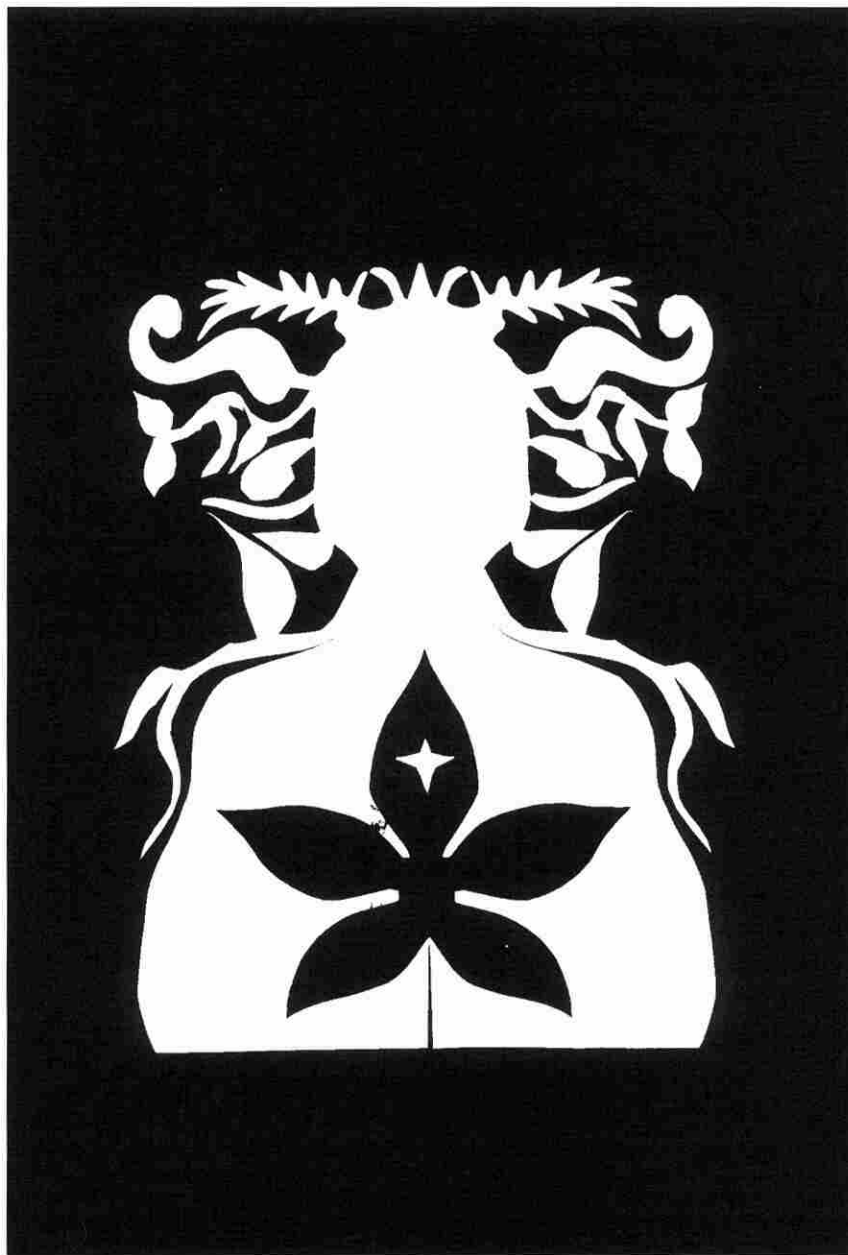
stance-abuse problems with alcohol, speed, pot, crack, and heroin. As women and mothers this has been a painful and heartbreaking process to watch. There is much guilt and concern around how to get these kids back on track. Embedded in the self-destructive and escapist behavior of these young people is a cry

for help, a plea for meaning, a longing for something more real, a desire to connect with the *mysterium tremendum*. The despair and helplessness that many young people feel toward the world at large is a heartfelt response to a world out of balance. Progress, Western civilization, and technology have dropped a number of stitches, and the garment does not fit our soul. It scratches, binds, and annoys, sometimes to death.

As women we have journeyed through many psychedelic landscapes over the last thirty-five years. We have grown and matured, married, divorced, developed careers, become middle aged, become mothers and grandmothers. We have taken the wildness of the Summer of Love and sanctified it into something far richer and deeper than a youthful escape from reality. I cannot speak for all women who have ever taken psy-

chedelics, but I can speak about what I have seen and heard over the years.

For many women, psychedelics have become a sacrament. The plants in particular are medicine. The spirit of the plant is not a metaphor but a living entity, one with which a working relationship has been cultivated. The plants



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and responsible toward their bodies and minds. They really don't need drugs to be high. This is one side of the story that most people would not expect.

But, although I have encountered many young people who are remarkably mature and responsible, there are a certain percentage that have huge sub-

have become allies who inform, reveal, and heal. The healing aspect of psychedelics is ancient and traces its roots back through our genetic memories, into indigenous tribal cultures, around the fire with the drum, rattle, and song of the shaman. Contemporary psychedelic women have become, like all the ancestors worldwide who lived before organized religions, practitioners of animism. Animism has its conceptual roots in the writings of Pythagoras and Plato, who hypothesized the existence of an immaterial force animating the universe. In animism, all things, animate and inanimate, are experienced as possessing an innate soul.

As animists, these women have opened themselves to a truly shamanic energy. They meet and honor their totemic power in the form of animal allies. They receive *darshan*, holy blessings, from the spirits of their ancestors, and they feel that power as a living force that guides and directs them toward what is essential and meaningful. In the deep interior spaces of their remembering, they dip their minds into a fresh flowing river and

come into relationship with the power of the four directions, the elementals of fire, water, wind, and Earth, the thunder beings, and earth magic. The fire becomes the candle, Earth the altar, the plant resins the incense, nature the cathedral. The body becomes the sacred vessel, the cauldron in which the brew is stirred. They pay homage to the Sun and the Moon, the stars in the night sky, all of living nature. They shake their rattles at the lies and the corruption, praying for transformation and for purity and truth to abide. This is their religion, as ancient as the first fire.

There are stories, the things that myths are made of, about the hand of the Spirit reaching out and touching, healing, revealing what is most needed. Remissions of every kind imaginable occur quickly and completely, from physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual maladies. We find cancers gone, sick hearts made whole again, scars on the psyche made smooth. Those who cannot be healed are sheltered in the comfort of laughing midwives, a circle of friends who travel to the end of time

with the departing and wave fare thee well at the door. Like Aldous Huxley, the intrepid travelers approach the final gateway of death with their minds expanded and the doors of perception cleansed. Shhh! We must not speak of such things; there was no funding to implement or document it. Shhh! This is not scientific; it is irrational. Shhh! They are illegal, all these things.

To do such things we must travel out of the country and find a reputable shaman, or gather with friends in far away, friendlier places where it is safe to do such ancient work. Many are called, and all who go have been chosen. Yes! This is most certainly a religion. Shhh! Women have burned at the stake for much less.

Adele Getty is a cultural ecologist, singer, ceremonialist, and the author of *Goddess: Mother of Living Nature* and *A Sense of the Sacred*. Her ongoing work is with ceremonial rites of passage. She was a member of the Ojia Foundation and training co-ordinator for Rites of Passage, in Marin County, CA. She has also served on the board and is a former director of the Permaculture Institute. She travels extensively and resides in California. She can be reached through e-mail at <animistic@yahoo.com>.