I am writing this report in July 2016, about eight years since I first took ecstasy in June 2008. Although many minor details have been lost to time, I have replayed this night countless times in my head over the years and the key moments have remained. Fortunately, I also kept a journal during that period of my life and have reviewed my notes in preparation of this report.

Most of this report is about my first time taking ecstasy, but I also try to provide some retrospective analysis at the end. Enjoy!

My background: I grew up in a pretty normal middle-class household in suburban Southern California. Both of my parents did not drink, smoke, or do other drugs, and were overall very supportive of my interests. My main focus in life was doing well in school and I never got into any significant trouble. Fortunately, my close friends in high school were focused on school as well and did not tempt me to deviate from my studies.

There were a lot of opportunities to drink during my first few years of college, but I always declined because the smell of alcohol was very offensive to me. It wasn’t until I was 21 that I decided to get drunk just to know what the experience was like. I soon realized that the feeling of being drunk can be quite nice once you get past the harshness of the alcohol. During the next six years I drank quite a bit (sometimes way too much) as people in the 20s often do, but the drinking was kept in check by my desire to do well in school. After finishing my undergrad degree at age 22, I immediately went into graduate school.

While in graduate school, a couple of my friends would often go to clubs and raves. I knew that they used drugs at these events, but overall I was very ignorant of the entire scene and did not press them for details. I just wasn’t interested. The idea of going to clubs was unappealing because I disliked listening to very loud music, had a stereotypical negative view about trance music, and I felt awkward dancing. I also was brainwashed by society to think that all drugs were extremely dangerous and had no potential benefits.

Then something inside of me changed when I was 27. I don’t know exactly how or why it happened, but I gradually became more curious about mind-altering substances. I found out about smoking salvia through watching YouTube videos and decided to purchase some 10x extract online. The fact that salvia was legal made it much easier for me to try it – if my experience was terrible and
I had to be hospitalized, I wouldn’t worry about getting in legal trouble. One evening, two friends (who I will refer to as ‘N’ and ‘H’) and I smoked the salvia and it was both a thrilling and terrifying experience (for a short while, I was completely unconscious and had scary hallucinations where my world was continuously dissolving before my eyes... but that is a story for another time). Despite my harrowing experience with salvia, I was still curious about other substances. I told N and H that I would be interested in joining them the next time they go to a rave and try ecstasy. Soon after, they let me know about a rave that would change my life.

The event: On the day of the rave, N, H, and a few others met at my place around 5pm on a sunny June afternoon. They all were experienced ravers and wore decorative clothing, while I wore plain shorts, a tank top, light jacket, and running shoes. I naively inquired about many things, such as if shorts and running shoes be okay for a rave. At 6pm we got in our cars and drove toward LA. After 45 minutes of surprising smooth LA freeway traffic, we arrived at a hotel about four miles from the venue where one of N’s friends had a room. We hung out at the hotel room for the next couple hours to pre-party. Both alcohol and cocaine were available, but I declined because I wanted my experience to be pure and I had never tried coke before (“one new drug at a time” I thought). The only items I consumed at the hotel room were granola bars I brought from home and a lot of water. The rave began at 7pm and I was very eager to get going. I started to get a little frustrated at how long it took us to leave the room, but I trusted that N knew what he was doing.

Around 9pm, N, H, and I left the hotel and drove closer to the venue to try to find street parking. The last mile near the venue was congested with cars, but after circling the area for a while we were fortunate to find a parking lot for $20. During the 15 minute walk to the entrance, the bass became louder and louder, and my excitement grew and grew. We were joined by many people wearing elaborate outfits, plain clothes, or hardly nothing at all – I had never seen such an assortment of party-goers. It was a very festive atmosphere and I felt like we were headed toward something epic.

My optimism quickly turned to frustration when we arrived at the only entrance to the venue – it was a complete clusterfuck. The event staff were channeling thousands of people, many of whom were high or drunk, toward the security checkpoint. There were no barricades to form an orderly line. Instead, we were packed like sardines in a massive 20-person-wide line that slowly inched forward. Although June nights are often very cool in Southern California, it was quite warm in the middle of the crowd. Some assholes occasionally would push their way through the crowd to the front and I was surprised that no one got punched. I am normally a very reasonable and nice person – I have never been in a serious fight in my life – but I was reaching my limit. It was a tragedy waiting to happen; if someone would have yelled ‘bomb!’ dozens could have been killed in a stampede. N saw my frustration and tried to calm me down.

It took us an hour to move the 200-300 feet to the security checkpoint. N held all the pills, so I wasn’t worried about security. After a quick pat down, we were free of the crowd and the temperature dropped by 15 degrees. It was a relief to be able to move freely again and my mood slowly improved.
It was 11pm. Fortunately, the rave ended at 4am so we still had a lot of time to have fun. In order to get inside the venue, we had to hike up a steep flight of stairs, then walk through a long tunnel. As we made our way along this path, the music continued to grow louder. I saw lots of people who had been partying for a while. Many appeared sticky and were wearing minimal clothing. Everyone appeared to be enjoying themselves.

When we emerged from the tunnel, the interior of venue opened up before me and I was amazed. Absolutely amazed. It was an enormous football stadium and there were so many people and lights throughout the venue. Thousands of people were sitting and dancing in stadium seats, with thousands more on the field doing the same. Many thousands of colorful vibrating points of lights were visible throughout. On one end of the field, big bright lights were emanating from the stage. At the other end of the field, partygoers were enjoying large carnival rides that were decorated in thousands of light bulbs. I had never seen anything like this in my life. How did I go my entire life without knowing about events like this? How is an event like this even legal?

As we walked down the stairs and descended toward the field, I started feeling a bit anxious. This was really happening. I believed that N would not put me in a dangerous situation and he assured me that he tried a pill from the same batch in the past and was fine. At that time, I didn’t know anything about pill purity, test kits, etc., but I knew N and trusted him. We stepped onto the field at 11:15pm and N handed me my first pill – an Orange Buddha. I quickly swallowed the pill hoping that it would salvage the night, then N, H, and I started walking around the field to find friends. The cell phone networks were overloaded and it was almost impossible to call or text anyone, so we wandered around while waiting for the pills to do their magic. Our progress was slowed by the presence of numerous e-puddles, groups of people who sit down (often in the middle of high-traffic areas) to enjoy the rave. Many people in these e-puddles were enjoying light shows – at the time, I didn’t understand why anyone would want lights so close to their eyes.

Occasionally N and H would ask how I was doing. 30 minutes passed, 45 minutes, then one hour... I still felt normal. I had consumed the pill on a nearly empty stomach, so they had expected it to kick in by now. As we moved through the crowd I felt a mixture of anticipation and curiosity. I was like an anthropologist observing the customs of a strange civilization for the first time. There was a sense of separation from the crowd and I felt like an outsider catching a glimpse of a culture that was not mine. I was not familiar with trance music yet so I did not know any of the DJs or songs. Although I would later love that genre, I was still fairly indifferent to it at that time.

At 12:15am, the first pill still had not kicked in yet, so N gave me another half. Both N and H were already feeling the effects of ecstasy, but I was still lagging behind. Then suddenly, around 12:30am, it finally hit me. A gentle surge of energy flowed through my chest and I felt lighter. Something had changed. Over the course a few seconds I felt good... very good. I informed N and H about my sensations, and I started to feel comfortable swaying to the music. In fact, swaying is all I wanted to do. I felt like I was slowly blending in with the other ravers and I suddenly understood why everyone in the crowd was acting in a particular way. The droopy, unfocused eyes, the mouth and jaw in a tense state, the bodies swaying back-and-forth – it all made complete sense. I understood why the stage lights were bright and flashing, and why trance
music is repetitive; the music and the drug perfectly complemented one another. It was as if a veil had been lifted from my eyes and I could finally see what everyone else was seeing. It was wonderful. I thought of a slogan that I would use often in the years ahead... “everyone at a rave is an asshole, until you drop.” N gave me another half pill soon after to make sure that I would be nice and high for the remainder of the rave.

From this point onward, my memories are scattered and I cannot remember the exact order of events during 12:30-4:00am.

I saw other ravers without shirts and that seemed like a terrific idea. For an unknown amount of time I bobbed back and forth in place, without a shirt on, rubbing my hair over and over underneath the June night sky. My inhibitions dropped to almost nil and I was completely liberated. N took very good care of me, getting me water and keeping an eye on me. He offered me a menthol cigarette, which I normally would decline as I really dislike the way cigarettes burn my lungs, but the ecstasy made me willing to try almost anything. I took one puff and was shocked at how easy it was to inhale – it was like breathing air. There was no pain, no coughing. Later, N offered me something to sniff. Based on what happened in the hotel room earlier, I thought it was coke. I was taken a little off-guard since I had not been expecting to try a second drug that evening, but again I was up for anything and sniffed. I felt incredible – I instantly felt like I was even higher. Days later I would find out that N had actually given me a menthol stick.

My arms felt as light as feathers and were often in the air. At some point I accidentally elbowed someone in the head and apologized profusely to him. He looked at me, gave a smile, and told me to not worry about it – he was rolling pretty hard. I completely understood his reaction as I felt only good feelings toward my fellow man.

One of the most beautiful memories of the evening was when the music suddenly changed from pounding beats to a melodic, repetitive, airy sound. At that exact instant, the stage emitted bright, warm yellow lights. I was blown away by the entire scene and the crowd was completely entranced for the minute or so that it lasted. To this day I have never experienced such an amazing moment at a rave or club.

At one point, H saw me clenching my jaw so strongly that a vein was popping out of my cheek! I must have been clenching since the ecstasy kicked in, and when I relaxed my jaw I noticed that it was very tight. After becoming aware of my clenching, I periodically forced myself the open my jaw and massage my cheeks. In retrospect, I was very surprised that N and H did not warn me of this very common side effect of ecstasy. The next morning I would discover that the inside of my mouth was torn up pretty badly. For the rest of the week I would suffer the pain of many mouth sores, but at the rave I was completely immune to the pain.

Both H and I agreed that the word ‘clarity’ or “contentment” would be a more appropriate name for ecstasy. Although I did indeed feel happy, I also felt completely free of the normal background worries that make up a large portion of my daily thoughts. There was only the here and now. One of the most amusing parts of the night was trying to read my phone. I could read text that was very far away, such as giant lettering on the stage, but I could not read text that was right...
in front of my face. A stranger could have offered me a million dollars to read a text message on my phone while I was peaking and I still could not have done it. My eyes simply would not focus, and it reminded me of the shaky visuals in the movie The Butterfly Effect. During our wandering around the stadium, another raver asked H to read a text message on his phone. H laughed and said that she could not read it either.

I wanted the rave to last forever, but of course it couldn’t. At 4am, the stadium lights were turned on and the disappointment throughout the venue was palpable. Tens of thousands of zombies exited the venue in a slow, orderly fashion. One of the ravers stood on a port-o-potty and started singing happy birthday to a friend. Myself and hundreds of others happily joined in.

There was a faint flow of the morning twilight in the east as we walked along the streets of LA back to the parking lot. We had partied the entire night and I felt like I had participated in something incredible. When we arrived at our car, N said he was fine to drive as he was well into the comedown phase and his alertness was very high. I trusted N to drive us home. 

While sitting in the backseat of the car, I reflected upon the entire experience and felt a tremendous afterglow throughout my entire body. I was both exhausted and excited. Although I could have partied longer, I was also completely satisfied. We returned to my place by 5:30am and N and H decided to crash there until the afternoon. I stayed up until 9am talking to H about random topics until she was ready to sleep. I felt like I still wanted to do something...anything...but decided I should try to sleep as well. I drifted in and out of consciousness for a couple hours, dreaming of the big bright lights.

The aftermath: I wanted to go to a rave and drop again as soon as possible. Over the next year and a half, N, H, and I went to almost 10 large raves and went clubbing dozens of times. Every week I followed a predictable pattern: Saturday was for clubbing/raving, I recovered Sunday through Tuesday, and by Wednesday I could feel the desire to drop building again. I had an insatiable appetite for partying and would research upcoming events frequently online. The thought of using ecstasy again consumed a significant fraction of my daily thoughts. I craved the feeling of freedom and euphoria...I was hooked. There were two influences in my life that kept me in from completely going over the deep end. First, I was finishing up grad school and could not afford to do any more partying than I already was doing. Second, my girlfriend would not have tolerated it (I was already pushing it).

I became obsessed with trance music and soon it became the only music that I enjoyed listening to. I voraciously devoured as much music as possible, listening to multiple podcasts per week (A State of Trance and Trance Around the World were my favorite) and older trance albums on YouTube. I became interested in DJing and bought a mixer, which I practiced for countless hours at home. I started to get decent and even DJ’d at a club.

By early 2010, my friends and I gradually started leaving the raving and clubbing scene. The magic was fading and I was getting older with more responsibilities. During the next couple years, I noticed that I felt more and more out of place and no longer enjoyed the clubbing/raving
experience. It became harder to stay energized late into the evening and there was a feeling of “been-there, done-that.” As I write these words, it is now 2016 and I no longer have a desire to go to a rave or go clubbing. Every once in a while I will feel like having one last hurrah, but inevitably I will come to regret it when at the venue. I am not sad about this, I simply feel that I have moved on to other things in my life.

However, this does not mean my relationship with ecstasy has ended. Nowadays, I take ecstasy once every 3-6 months with friends, but usually at home where I can be comfortable. I have a successful career and I cannot afford to do it more frequently because the recovery period would impact my work.

Reflections: I look back on my first time taking ecstasy mostly with nostalgia. It was one of the most incredible moments of my youth and I will keep the memories of that night close to my heart until senility or death take them away from me. At the same time I also view that night with a slight tinge of uneasiness because I know it led to a year and a half of excessive partying with unknown long-term consequences for my health. Since that magical night eight years ago, I have thought a lot about my ecstasy use and would like to share my reflections.

1) You never know which drug will sink its teeth into you until it is too late. I was perfectly fine before trying alcohol and ecstasy, but once I tried those drugs I spent a long time over-indulging. In fact, I still struggle with alcohol use even today – although I do not believe my alcohol consumption is impacting my work and relationships significantly, I still feel like I drink too much. In contrast, I have tried cocaine, marijuana, mushrooms, LSD, and ketamine during the past eight years without a compulsion to over-indulge. Coke and weed have not been very interesting to me. Mushrooms and LSD have been very interesting, and ketamine with ecstasy can be amazing (too amazing). However, I probably could go my entire life without ever trying those five drugs again and be perfectly happy.

I struggled to keep my ecstasy use under control and was lucky that I had other factors in my life that kept me from going over the edge. If I have kids one day, I plan on telling them to be very careful before they take any drug as you never know what drug you could become addicted to.

2) Ecstasy showed me what it is like to live completely in the moment without worrying about the past or future. It also made realize that all great feelings will eventually fade (the peak will not last forever) and that all bad feelings will eventually pass (the comedown will not last forever either).

3) Ecstasy helped me get out of my social shell. I am now much more comfortable meeting new people.

4) I now realize what it is like to be addicted to a drug. Although it did not ruin my life, I could imagine scenarios in which I would have gone off the deep end. People who are addicted should not be treated as criminals, but rather should be given as many opportunities as possible to get help.

5) Purchase a test kit and use it before you consume anything. I’m so incredibly serious about
this point. On one occasion I foolishly took a pill purchased at a club and found out the hard way that it was not ecstasy. It was a terrible experience and I have not repeated this mistake since.

Final thoughts: If you are reading my story and trying to figure out whether you should try ecstasy for the first time, you probably are going to do it anyways. Just take as many precautions as possible such as staying hydrated, testing your pills with a test kit, consuming in moderation, and being around friends who will watch over you. Good luck!