

# Back to the Future

*“The beginning of the next mandala is in the end of the last one,”* was a refrain from Joan Kellogg founder of the MARI Card, Mandala Assessment Research Instrument. In Stan Grof’s book *The Ultimate Journey, Consciousness and the Mystery of Death*, with introduction by Huston Smith there are pictures of Stan at Spring Grove and Helen Bonny in front of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. There was a person there in those years that collaborated with Stan and Helen that is not pictured, Joan Kellogg.



So many have gained so much insight from the processes that these three persons formulated and taught. Stan and Christina founded the Holotropic Breathwork®, Helen Bonny a specific process of Guided Imagery, GIM®, and Joan Kellogg who interacted with both Stan and Helen developed the MARI® Card, Mandala Assessment Research Instrument. What a powerful group of shared synergistic associations between these three researchers and teachers.

As a Certified Holotropic Breathwork Practitioner, MARI Mandala Assessment Practitioner, and student of Helen and her son in GIM, I came to experience the value of all three processes in synergy as well as independently.

From my very first Holotropic Breathwork mandala in 1988, soon to be twenty years ago, I saved all forty-three of them. I frequently visited their images over years. Each time I had a new awareness I annotated the mandala on the back or in the margins. It took years for the significance of some of the images to disclose their fullest meaning. This process of integration and recurring gateway to re-imagination of each breathing experience proved to be among the most enlightening processes of all my experiential personal growth work.

In Holotropic Breathwork there is no on-the-spot interpretation projected onto anyone’s mandala by a practitioner or anyone in the workshop except by the ‘experiencer’. It is absolutely right to have a no crosstalk guideline, for all the reasons given in certification training. The power of being listened to intently, without judgment, works miracles in creating safe space for intimate disclosure of special experiences.

As I was trained in MARI I knew the power of the descriptive language that this process uses and its effectiveness in bypassing the intellect and bringing forth conditions of one's psyche at any given point in time.

One of my clients brought 23 mandalas to me at the Change of Heart Center. We taped them to the breathing room wall in sequence. For a while we simply viewed them in their entirety walking up and down the room. Then we sat down at a place that we could see them all. I asked her to begin with the first one and give it a spontaneous one-word name. "What one word comes to you from this mandala?"

About half way through the 23 mandalas and after much new information had come forth; the person would not name the next mandala. I waited for a long time. I asked her, "If this mandala was in an art gallery, what would be a title for it?" Still no response.

So I asked, "If you did know a word that this mandala brings to you, or a title it would have in a gallery, what would that word or title be?" More silence.

Then she responded. "I know the word and the title, but I'm not going to name the mandala, because if I do, it will become real! Wow. What learning in that experience.

So when I evolved my own mandala viewing processes for squeezing all awareness possible out of them, I should not have been so surprised at how powerful a mandala slide show set to music would be to let for my images become real—at new depth.

As I was downloading the most recent version of Apple's iPhoto it occurred to me to make a slide show of the total body of mandala art I had produced during holotropic experiences. I did not dream of the power of discovery in the first viewing.

After photographing all the mandalas I cropped them tight to the image without the annotations showing. I made two copies of each mandala, then numbered and dated the images so I could arrange them in the order that I drew them. I sequenced them from 1 to 43, and then repeated 43 and went back to 1. I put a ten second space between images and used a dissolve that I really like as it merges images one from the other. I mixed music with the slides and set it to repeat the entire show until I clicked out of it.

Joan's words leapt to my memory, "The beginning of the next mandala is in the end of the last one." Joan used to also have her students in MARI teacher training put a mandala on a lazy susan and spin it to see if they could visualize the image in three dimensions.

So, if you have saved your mandalas, a group of them or everyone ever drawn as I did, you are likely to gift yourself with a great integrative psychic experience. For me the power of Holotropic process to integrate experiential episodes into life-altering behaviors is the single greatest benefit I have gained from the Holotropic Breathwork. Not a single other process was as powerful or useful or had the integrative grasp of the Holotropic Breathwork. I did in fact not only move toward wholeness but also achieved more than I had dared to believe possible.

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