

MAPS EVENT – Annika’s speech at fundraising event in Ojai, 2026

My story began with a gift my Finnish family calls Sisu—a deep resilience, the determination to keep going no matter what life asks of you. From childhood I found my greatest companions in nature, creativity, and an unwavering belief that there was goodness in the world. Even when life was difficult, I learned to smile through pain and keep moving forward.

As a young woman I pursued my dream of becoming an art director. I worked my way into the advertising world, eventually working alongside some of the most creative people in the industry. I felt completely alive. My future seemed limitless.

Then, in one night, everything changed.

I survived a brutal home invasion and sexual assault. Physically I survived, but trauma has a way of continuing long after the event is over. A lack of support from my those around me, a stressful criminal trial and a name change for protection.

My body began telling a story that no one could see.

Panic attacks, migraines, anxiety, and a nervous system that never fully felt safe again. I was able to continue working part time for a while, but internally I was simply surviving.

For more than twenty-five years I searched through therapy, spirituality, nature, every healing modality I could learn or find. Some helped for a while, but nothing brought me fully home to myself.

Then in 2015 I learned about MAPS.

I applied to every clinical trial I could. Eventually I was accepted into an MDMA-assisted psychotherapy study in Los Angeles.

What happened over those months was not magic.

It was something much more extraordinary.

For the first time in over two decades, I experienced what safety actually felt like inside my own body. I could breathe again. I could imagine a future again. I wasn't simply managing symptoms—I was recovering parts of myself I believed had been lost forever.

The medicine mattered.

The science mattered.

But what changed me most was something profoundly human.

I experienced compassionate presence. I learned that healing doesn't happen in isolation. It happens in relationship. It happens when someone can stay with you while you rediscover yourself. Which is what my 2 MAPS therapists gave me.

That experience changed of my life.

Instead of asking, "How do I survive?" I began asking, "How can I help others find this same possibility?"

While the assailant was released from prison after serving 18 years, after 26 years MDMA and MAPS finally opened the door to setting me free as well.

Today I devote my work to helping others heal from trauma. I continue to study, to learn, and to support people who have lost their sense of safety, because I know what it feels like to believe there is no way home—and I know that there is.

Which brings us to why we're here today.

Thank you Rick for 40 years of Sisu carrying a vision that many people believed was impossible....facing skepticism, political resistance, financial obstacles, and decades of persistence. Yet because you refused to give up, thousands of people like me have been given another chance at life.

This film is not simply about one remarkable individual.

It is about what becomes possible when courage meets compassion, when science joins hands with humanity, and when one person's vision changes the lives of countless others they will never meet.

There are thousands of stories like mine that will never appear on a stage. Veterans. Survivors of violence. First responders and others. People who quietly carry invisible wounds every day.

Thank you to Nirvan for recording our stories.

Thru stories we can get the word out, change policies and hopefully reach those who need it most.

This film can give those stories a voice.

It can help replace fear with understanding.

It can help people discover that healing is possible.

I often think about the younger version of myself—the woman who survived that terrible night and had no idea whether she would ever truly live again.

If she could see me standing here today, she would know that hope was always waiting.

And that hope exists because people believed in a vision before there was proof.

Today, I'm asking you to do the same.

Your support is not simply funding a documentary.

It is helping tell a story that has the power to change how the world understands trauma, healing, and human possibility.