



# ESSENCE

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## **(How I Got By) With a Little Help from my (Flower) Friends: A Student's Journey with Flower Essences**

Petals touch the heart,  
Water washes the soul clean;  
A new life begins

*Haiku, S Balgobin (2003)*

### ***Angel's Trumpet***



The message behind this haiku was really brought home to me over the past two years, when I was inspired to embark on a new direction in my career path. The course I chose (or rather, which chose me) was an unusual one – a Master's degree in Psychotherapy and Healing Practice, offered by the Society for Psychology and Healing and validated by Middlesex University. While the main thrust of the course was traditional enough (Jungian at heart and psychodynamic), the course looked at the more spiritual side of human life and how healing practices such as colour and sound healing, Reiki, spiritual healing and reflexology can (and should!) be part of the healing process. A course with such a different approach drew me like a magnet; I wanted to learn how I could incorporate my skills as a practitioner of various therapies into my new career path. While I knew that essences would form an important part of my life as a student, little did I realise just how much I would learn

– both on my course and as an essence practitioner. Essences provided support and direction even before my course; Bach, Australian Bush, Alaskan, Green Hope Farm (from New Hampshire) and my own Spirit of Makasutu essences all helped me to clarify in what direction I needed to move and even which course to take!

I was especially interested in how flower essences could be part of this evolution of my healing work, as I knew there was evidence which indicated the value of flower essences in therapeutic counselling situations.<sup>1</sup> I was particularly aware of the research that had been done in Cuba, which led to the approval of flower essence therapy as a valid “medical specialty” offered by the Cuban national health service and forms a part of the medical curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Even more intriguing was the fact that students at the Cuban National School of Art received flower essences during the four years of their training in order to address any emotional blocks which may have interfered with their creativity.<sup>3</sup> I was about to conduct my own research – on myself.

### ***Dutchman's Pipe***



Along with learning psychological theories and how to apply them in therapeutic situations, it was expected that I also learn about myself (students are required to undergo counselling during the course in order to look at their own “stuff” before even thinking about helping others to deal with

theirs). It was then that I remembered that flower essences were a perfect way for me to find out, in a deep way, exactly who I am. Philip Salmon and Anna Jeoffroy declared that Dr Edward Bach not only saw flower remedies as a means of removing negative traits, but as tools of self-development; in Bach’s words, “opening to the virtues.”<sup>4</sup>

Attending personal therapy while learning to be a therapist was a humbling as well as instructive experience; essences helped me to identify the shadow parts of myself, learn from those shadows and bring the lessons into the light in a positive way. I didn’t always like what I saw (and felt), but the essences were there, even in some of the darkest moments of my journey, to ease my tears and enhance my joy. During a particularly low phase – near the end of the two years when I began to wonder if I had

made a grave mistake in embarking on the course, it was counselling, essences and an angel – in the form of a fellow therapist – that gave me the strength to finish my course.

Flower essences accompanied me on my journey as a student in many ways – from providing the basis for my dissertation to calming me down after particularly stressful encounters with my tutors or sharing them with fellow students. I knew from the start of the course that I wished to write about flower essences, but I faced an uphill battle with my tutors about how to turn my vision into reality. It was at this time that a “chance” encounter provided me with the perfect way to bring together my love of essences and psychotherapy.

### ***Impatiens***



One day, while wearing my flower essence practitioner hat, I gave a talk to parents at a local Sure Start Children's Centre about flower essences. During the course of my short presentation, one of the children, a 22-month old little girl, grabbed one of the flower cards I had spread in a circle on the floor and handed it imperiously to her mother. The card little Laura chose was Impatiens, a Bach Flower Remedy - and from that little encounter came the means to bring together flower essences, Jungian

psychology and quantum theory in a 50,000 word thesis. I had found the 'hook' on which to hang my entire paper and whenever I started to get lost in theories, little Laura pulled me (and those who read the thesis) back from confusion with her clear and simple message. Essences not only saved my dissertation, but my sanity as well! During the year I spent researching and then writing my dissertation, I was encouraged and supported by essences - including several I made in between my first and second year in Jamaica while visiting in-laws (another amazing journey and another story to be told). I was slowly - and at times painfully - remembering to find the divine within me and let it lead me to the path that was right for me - as a person, essence practitioner and now as a qualified psychotherapist.

All of the frustration and aggravation of writing my dissertation has been justified, in my eyes, by the response of two friends who read the final draft; the flower essence anecdote was the perfect way to lead the readers through the thesis and make it understandable - just what I had hoped! Now I could get on with 'plurking' (play/work) and write what I wished once more. Once I'd handed in all my course work and found myself a free agent once more, I realized that I wanted to write articles about how essences helped me through my course, as well as about the

essences I made and used during my second year - I couldn't wait to get started!

### **Ethiopian Apple**



I spoke earlier of the “angel” who helped me get through the end of my course and move forward in my new vocation – from his quiet words of support I found my way to the Black and Asian Therapists Network (BAATN), which supports Black and Asian counselling and psychotherapy students and professionals in various ways. In my more recent role as a member of the team which administers the Each One Teach One (EOTO) Mentoring Programme BAATN which provides mentoring support to counselling and psychotherapy students, I realised that essences could also be of help to both students and experienced therapists/counsellors, as well as their clients. Towards this end, I am hoping to develop an introductory workshop to introduce BAATN members to the possibilities flower essence therapy offers to them.

I have also begun to look at creating pilot projects which would examine the impact of flower essences on psychotherapy and counselling students during their course of study, as well as how

essences may impact counselling outcomes. However, I'll first have to find out how many psychotherapists and counsellors are flower essence practitioners (or are interested in learning how to use essences as an adjunct to their work). As there doesn't appear to be any essence courses specifically designed for psychotherapists, I feel that's where the flowers are leading me now.....and yes, I'm using essences to help stimulate creativity as well as identify and remove blockages. The journey continues - with a little help from my flower friends!

Sheila is a native New Yorker, as well as a psychotherapist, aromatherapist, Reiki teacher and flower essence practitioner. She also produces Spirit of Makasutu Flower and Vibrational Essences, made in Gambia, West Africa and Jamaica.

Sheila would be interested in hearing from psychotherapists and counsellors who are either using flower essences as part of their practice or are interested in learning how essences could be used in their practice. She's already at work developing a CPD course focusing on therapeutic counselling and flower essence use.

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*For more on the EOTO mentoring programme, please go to:*  
[www.baatn.org.uk](http://www.baatn.org.uk)

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