

# Better Living Through Chemistry

filmmaker:  
Connie Littlefield

*Meet Your Psychedelic Godparents*



## Digital Press Kit

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A Documentary Feature Film

'Better Living Through Chemistry is an 89-minute theatrical release documentary about Ann and Sasha Shulgin, and the psychedelic chemistry they created.



# CREDITS

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| <b>TITLE</b>                               | <b><i>BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY</i></b>   |
| <b>Writer/Director</b>                     | <b>Connie Littlefield</b>   |
| <b>Producer</b>                            | <b>Connie Littlefield</b>   |
| <b>Executive Producers</b>                 | <b>Michael MacMillan<br/>Peter van der Heyden<br/>Tas<br/>Jordan Nahmias</b>  |
| <b>Director of Photography</b>             | <b>Sue Johnson</b>  |
| <b>Director of Photography 2002 - 2006</b> | <b>Kyle Cameron</b>   |
| <b>Editor</b>                              | <b>James Yates</b>  |
| <b>Composer</b>                            | <b>Andy McNeill</b>   |
| <b>Post-Production</b>                     | <b>Jaxx Creative</b>  |
| <b>Sound Design</b>                        | <b>Eva Madden</b>   |
| <b>Cello</b>                               | <b>Kevin Fox</b>  |
| <b>Story Editor</b>                        | <b>Siobhan Flanagan</b>   |
| <b>Key Characters</b>                      | <b>Ann &amp; Sasha Shulgin<br/>Myron &amp; Jean Stolaroff<br/>Paul Daley<br/>Mariavittoria Mangini<br/>David Presti</b> |

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<https://www.facebook.com/BetterLivingThroughChemistryTheShulginFilm>

<https://betterlivingthroughchemistry.org/>



## SYNOPSIS

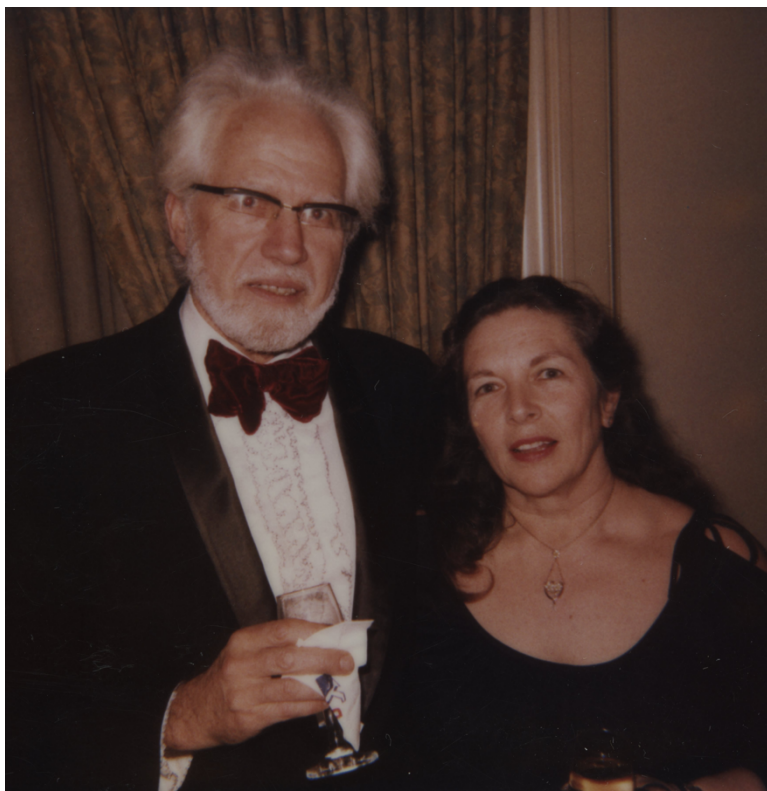
If it weren't for the hypocrisy of drug prohibition, everyone would know these names: Sasha Shulgin (1925 – 2014) was a chemist who discovered nearly 200 psychedelic substances, including MDMA and 2CB. His wife and co-author, Ann Shulgin (b. 1931), is a lay therapist and a pioneer in the field of psychedelic psychotherapy. Sasha's revolutionary approach and scientific expertise established a gold standard in psychedelic research, but it was Ann's skills with people and words that spread these ideas to the wider culture. This is the story of how Ann met Sasha, and how the chemistry they created has given humanity a chance to evolve.

Many have christened this moment a psychedelic renaissance: Vice, The New Yorker, and Psychology Today have all used the phrase. The history of psychedelics in mental medicine did not suddenly stop 50 years ago; Ann & Sasha, with the help of a few friends, kept the research going through those years. For many people, this renaissance is based at the Shulgin farm, on the outskirts of Berkeley, California. The community gathers every year at the Shulgin's 4th of July party.

The ball is certainly rolling again, and it's worthwhile reckoning with the history and interpretation of such drugs. Ann and Sasha Shulgin do more than represent that history: they personify it. Sasha invented almost 200 substances and was the re-discoverer of MDMA; a.k.a. Adam, Ecstasy, Molly, or The Love Drug. Ann helped pioneer methods of using these drugs in psychotherapy. Their work provided the foundation for the research that is being done today, all around the world.

Ann and Sasha did a pretty good job of living happily ever after. They lived happy, healthy, sexy, funny, productive lives well into old age. Surrounded by family and friends in a beautiful place, they contributed a great deal to psychedelic research, perhaps more than anyone else. Sasha created so many substances, most of which we've barely begun to explore. These new drugs could address a vast number of illnesses. This is work that needs to happen.

Everyone wants sick people to have their medicine-- yet that is not the limit of the utility of these materials. In addition to healing the sick, psychedelics can contribute to what has been called "the betterment of well people." "Better Living Through Chemistry" explores that potential.



## BACKGROUND TO THE FILM

I was introduced to Ann and Sasha by our mutual friends, Myron and Jean Stolaroff. Myron was one of the psychedelic researchers that I profiled in my film "[Hofmann's Potion](#)," which came out in 2002. I asked Myron what film I should make next, and he said, "I want you to meet my friends, the Shulgin's." I liked the idea right away since Ann and Sasha were clearly "living legends."

Because Myron introduced us, and because they had seen "Hofmann's Potion," Ann and Sasha were open to the idea of working with me. I made a few trips to California for the filming. We filmed at the Mind States conference in Berkeley, in 2003, and at Albert Hofmann's centenary in Basel, in 2006. Filmmaking is a very expensive endeavour, and unfortunately, I couldn't find support to keep working on the film. After Basel, I reluctantly put the project aside and moved on to other things.

Time moved on, too. Myron passed away in 2013, and Sasha in 2014.

Another idea I developed became "[The Sunshine Makers](#)," a film about underground chemists Nick Sand and Tim Scully. It played at the "Psychedelic Science" conference in Oakland, California, in the spring of 2017.

While at the event in Oakland, I ran into Ann and her daughter Wendy. It was wonderful to see them after all that time! Ann invited me to the farm, and when I got there, we talked for a while, and then Ann said: "The time has come for you to finish your Shulgin film." She was right... so I did!

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"Better Living Through Chemistry" tells the story of Ann & Sasha Shulgin, a married couple who were pioneers of the psychedelic revolution. More than a profile of two people, this film is also a glimpse into a future that includes psychedelic exploration. It's also a meditation on chemistry, on connection, on growth.

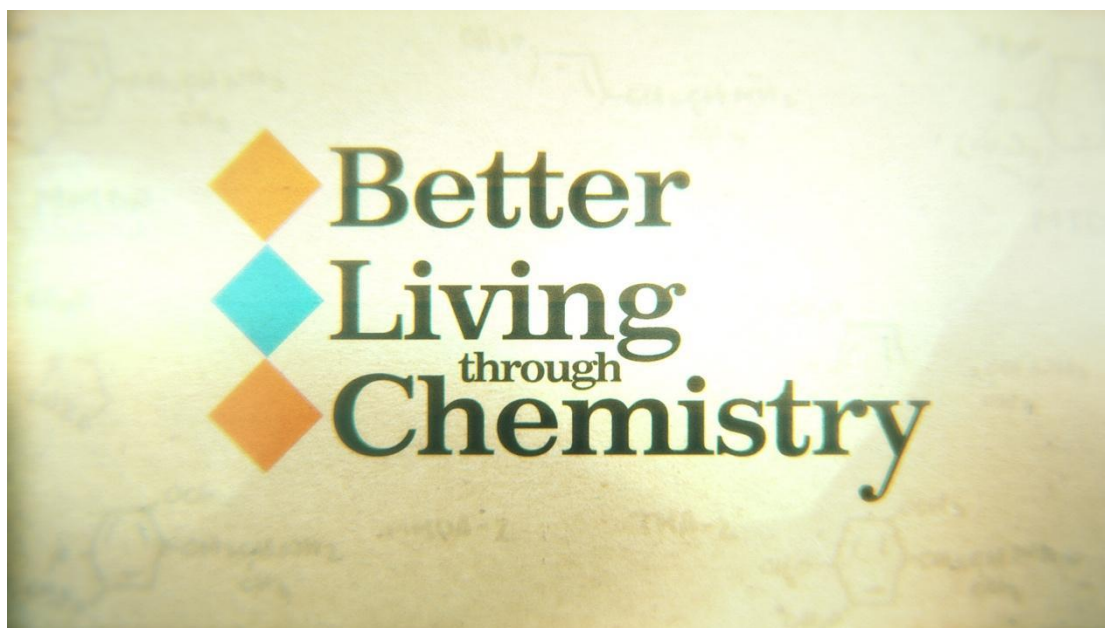
I started making this film in 2002, but I was unable to find support for this story at that time. I returned to it in 2017. It's very different from the film I had originally planned, but I think it's much better as a result of the wait. The story changed, I changed, and the world changed around us. Especially since the pandemic, humans are craving confirmation that we are all in this together, that love is real, that there is hope for humanity. I hope this film will provide some reassurance in this direction.

-- Connie Littlefield



## MUSIC

The score for this film was composed by the very talented Canadian composer and multi-instrumentalist Andy McNeill. The theme song is a rendition of "Love is the Drug" by Brian Ferry and Andy Mackay, with cello played by Kevin Fox. Another song, **9/11**, is written and performed by Tibetan artist Yungchen Lhamo.



## CREW AND CHARACTERS

[Filmmaker Connie Littlefield](#) wrote and directed "[Hofmann's Potion: The Early Years of LSD](#)" which came out in 2002. This film has been credited with changing the way many people think about psychedelic drugs.

2015's "[The Sunshine Makers](#)," which she wrote and produced, currently plays on iTunes, Sundance Now, and Youtube. "...there's no question that hanging out with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn on acid has its appeal," said Manohla Dargis, in [The New York Times](#).

In 2006, Connie made a film about L.E.A.P.: Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, called "[Damage Done: The Drug War Odyssey](#)." The Vancouver Sun said it was "the smartest documentary yet on a divisive subject."

[Cinematographer Sue Johnson](#) has over fifteen years of filmmaking experience and an MFA degree in Documentary Media from Ryerson University. Primarily working in documentary cinematography, Johnson has recently completed projects for Al Jazeera International, Nike, and a range of independent documentary directors and producers. She is the recipient of the Innoversity Summit's Digital Storytellers Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts, and the National Film Board's Filmmaker Assistance Program grant. She maintains her own production company, Still Silver Productions, in Toronto.

After studying filmmaking at Niagara College, **editor [James Yates](#)** moved to Toronto where he began working as a film editor. In 2016, Yates co-edited the feature documentary "All Governments Lie," from executive producer Oliver Stone, which had its world premiere at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival, and for which he was nominated for a 2017 Canadian Cinema Editors Award. James also edited "The Corporate Coup d'État" and "Toxic Beauty," released by [White Pine Pictures](#).

**Sound Designer [Eva Madden](#)** has been working in documentary and dramatic film and television for over fifteen years. With a BFA from Concordia University's Film Program, Eva has also created and told many stories shown on television, DVD and in film festivals. Now living on BC's Sunshine Coast, Eva sound edits from her studio in the woods. Her client roster includes the National Film Board of Canada, CTV, CBC, Discovery Channel, Netflix, ABC and Disney.

**Designer [Nick Sewell](#)**, of Toronto-based graphic design firm [We Are Together](#), designed the visual elements of the film. Working in broadcast design since 1999, Nick has created work for a diverse range of clients including MTV, Cartoon Network, Comedy Central, Warner Bros., Sports Center, and PBS. His film work includes title design for David Cronenberg's Spider, Irvine Welsh's Ecstasy, William Shatner's The Captains, Fight Like Soldiers, Die Like Children and Sugar Coated. Nick's design work has appeared in numerous graphics and post-production publications such as Stash, Design In Motion, and Applied Arts Annual as well as media outlets such as Rolling Stone and NME. His animation and editing work has also earned acclaim internationally, including over 16 Broadcast Design Awards.

**Composer [Andy McNeill](#)** is based in Toronto. His list of film and television credits is extensive. His music was featured in the award-winning feature documentary, 'The Corporation.' In October 2007 he composed the score for the PBS Frontline/ CBC documentary 'Darfur: On Our Watch.' In October 2001, he received a Gemini nomination for best original music score in a documentary program for History Television's Turning Points In History "Cloud of Death".

Andy's recording project The Maple Mountain Sunburst Triolian Orchestra released their first recording in 2010. The album featured actress Isabella Rossellini as a special guest. It received a four-star 'Disc Of The Week' review from The Globe and Mail and was named one of the ten best of 2010 by Laurie Brown of CBC Radio Two's The Signal.

**Cellist [Kevin Fox](#)** has worked in the studio and on stage with a variety of artists, from Celine Dion to Katharine McPhee to Olivia Newton John. He has spent much of the last seven years touring extensively with award-winning Canadian artists Chantal Kreviazuk and Steven Page. As a composer/arranger, Kevin has composed music for film and television as well as arrangements for artists ranging from Tom Cochrane to July Black to Justin Bieber.

Kevin is also a singer/songwriter in his own right, with a continually increasing fan base that began with the release of his first album COME ALIVE and has continued to grow along with the critically acclaimed SONGS FOR CELLO & VOICE and most recently with his latest release, SET RIGHT.

**Story Editor [Siobhan Flanagan](#)** has worked as a scriptwriter and consultant on award-winning documentaries for the BBC, CBC, PBS, National Film Board of Canada, and National Geographic. She has immersed herself in a wide variety of subjects, including space warfare, naval warfare, wildlife, the Arctic, spiritual activism, aspects of death, classical music, and astrophysics. She has lived in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Peru, Iran, India, the UK, the UAE, and Canada, and finds documentary films satisfy an ingrained appetite to explore, discover, and understand.





*Connie & Ann Shulgin, July 2018*