

# MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

Vol XI, No.1

February 1999

ISSN1042-2277

*Inside:*

## Childhood Dissociation Parents Who Dissociate

*...and more*



Estrella (Child of the Stars)

*By Living Earth*

## The Crystal Tears

the sun streams the tears down  
my face  
and dries the rivers on my  
cheeks.

i'm crying again  
and i don't know why.  
this feeling just comes  
and overwhelms my eyes.  
it twists my face  
into that weeping visage  
and gives that strange curl to  
my lip.

it seems absurd  
to look so much like a smile.  
it's raining outside now  
and it feels as if i just dove  
into a sea of pins and needles.  
the tears leave my body  
in such a torrent  
it's more like i am bleeding.  
and bleeding i might be  
for the pain it takes to cry these  
tears

is more unbearable than the  
deepest wound.  
but tonight, i will not bleed.  
i will only shed these tears.  
just this salty liquid falls  
onto my open palm  
and i'll close my fist so tight  
these tears will turn to crystals,  
and the crystals turn to stars,  
and i will watch them  
fade back into the night.

*By Vickie*

MV

Many Voices (ISSN1042-2277) is published bi-monthly at Cincinnati, Ohio. Copyright 1999 by MV Co. All rights reserved. Editor/Publisher, Lynn W. Send all subscriptions, manuscripts and correspondence to P.O. Box 2639, Cincinnati, OH 45201-2639. Phone (513) 751-8020. E-mail: LynnWatMV@aol.com. Subscriptions in U.S.: \$36 for one year. Canada, \$42US. Elsewhere, \$48US. This publication is designed as an information exchange for treatment providers and survivors of trauma and dissociative disorders. Neither its editor nor its layperson contributors are engaged in the practice of medicine. This publication should not be construed as medical advice concerning any specific facts or circumstances. The contents are for general information purposes only. You are urged to consult with competent professionals concerning your situation and/or specific questions.

# Being a Parent and Multiple

By Four Dragons

**H**ere's what I've learned about being a parent and being multiple:

**1. I told my children** that I'm multiple. It was one of the best things I ever did. It was part of an honest relationship between me and them. They were shocked at first, but then they realized I was the same Mom they always had. Only now they had an explanation for why I had been in the hospital so much and why I acted the way I did.

**2. I did not tell them** until two years after my diagnosis. There were several reasons for this, but one of the main ones was that I needed to know what it meant to be multiple before I could tell them.

**3. They quickly learned** who some of my alters were and began asking for certain alters to come out. This hurt the feelings of other parts inside. We had to set limits. That meant some work on my part. I had to be able to be the one to decide who was out. I told my real kids that they could ask, but we would choose. Just because they asked did not mean we had to comply. Discussions about how they were hurting certain alters' feelings also helped.

**4. I learned that we** had to keep the Good Mom available at all times. Even if one of my little ones was out and playing with them, the game could degenerate and I needed to have an adult on hand in the background to step in and manage things.

**5. I have to pay attention** to how the kids' sometimes try to manipulate me through the use of various alters. At first it was outright asking for them by name. Now it is more subtle in the form of triggers they consciously or unconsciously manage to trip. I have to take my own time-outs from certain situations. I tell the kids that their behavior is not acceptable and that I need to be alone for awhile before I deal with what the consequences will be. Usually I take a walk. That's when I'm too mad and too triggered. I talk to

the parts inside who are having difficulty and work towards calming the system down. In the beginning, we'd even call our therapist from a phone booth if things in my house were too disruptive and had my system too off-balance. Now we can usually manage the situations as they arise and run it by our therapist in the next session if we're concerned about our judgment.

**6. My real children do not** hear the details of my therapy sessions. This needs to remain private. It's part of appropriate boundaries. However, we do tell them general things that they need to know. When I was distraught because my long-time therapist suddenly dumped me, I let them know so they wouldn't think it was about them.

**7. I let my children support me.** They know that sessions are hard on me. If I need to sleep for an hour after a particularly exhausting one, they let me do that. This works because they know I'll be available to them when the hour is up. They have seen my progress. They feel my increasing support as I get better. They want me at my best, and I want to be at my best with them. They treat me more gently when I'm depressed. Sometimes it's scary for them, given all my hospitalizations. I respect their fears. They know how hard I work to get out of the black hole. Does this hurt them to have me this way? Maybe. But I also think they learn to work hard for themselves and their identity when they watch me work on mine. I try not to beat myself up for whatever limitations I have. That does not benefit me or them. Then they can learn not to beat themselves up for their limitations and hopefully, they'll have a much more joyous life than I have had.

**8. I have certain groundrules** in my house. These would probably be good in a household where Mom is not multiple too. First is to say what I mean and mean what I say. This translates into being very mindful about

consequences for behavior. If I cannot implement it or I'm not willing to follow through with it, then don't say it. When I do state a consequence, it's always about what I'm going to do in a given circumstance. I cannot control others, so I stick to what I will do. They know my limits are real because they know I will follow through. The second rule is that all subjects are open here. No topics are swept under the carpet. Issues that are floating in the unspoken background are exposed because I will say them. Third, is no dirty fighting. This means no malicious verbal warfare. Verbal abuse is out. I went to the hospital for three weeks because I refused to live with violence to my person or to be present while they harmed each other. It caused me to decompensate. But more than that, I'm no longer willing to live under these conditions. It was hard, but we started family counseling while I was in the hospital, and continued it for one year to address this problem. We'll go back to family counseling again if needed. (Note: the family counselor was not the same as my individual counselor. This would create severe confidentiality and trust issues between all concerned. It's a boundary violation on the part of the therapist who attempts to do both roles. And soon boundaries between all involved are broken.)

**9. My house needs to be safe.** I am no longer living with an abusive partner. Neighbor kids, boyfriends, friends of the kids, friends of friends, etc., must be physically and verbally respectful or they cannot stay. I will not hesitate to call the police for escalating violence that I cannot stop.

**10. When I need to go to the hospital,** I take the extra time required to find places for my children to stay. I do this just as I do for them when I go out of town. It's disruptive and hard on everyone when I have such a situation. Luckily, my hospitalizations are getting fewer and shorter. (Maybe no more?)

Is all this worth it? Yes! I do not take parenthood for granted. My children

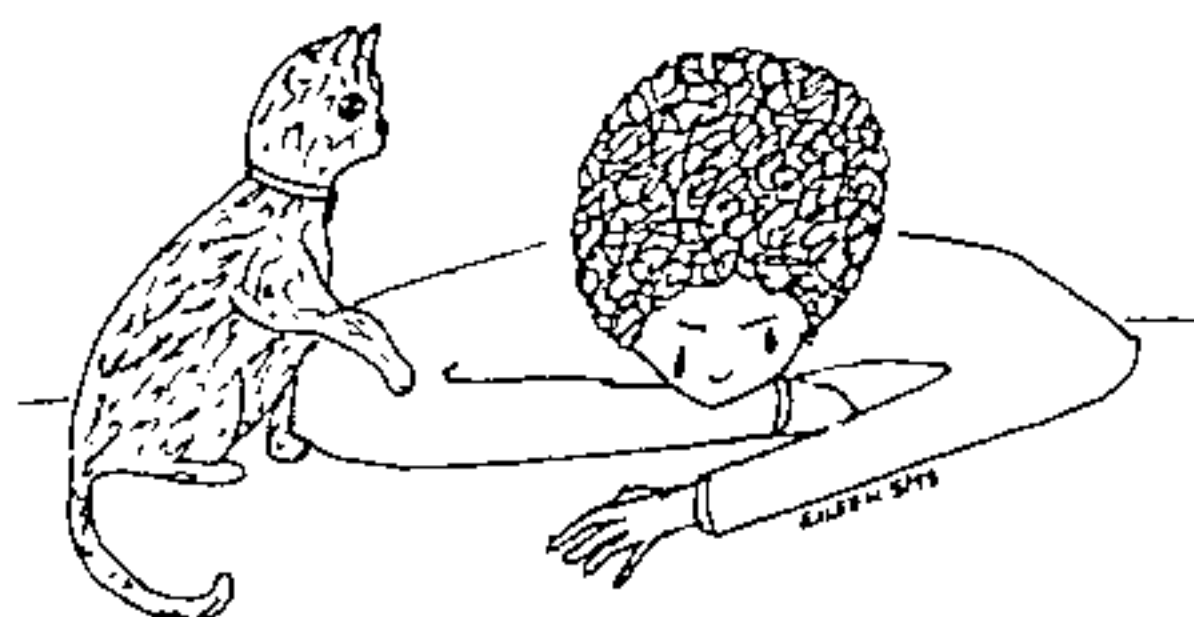
*Continued on page 3*

*Being a Parent, Cont'd.*

were little when I left my abusive partner. I did not know that I was multiple then. My system decompensated and we found ourselves in the hospital for the first of many times. My children were placed in foster homes. After more court appearances than I care to count, they were eventually placed with the partner whom I had left. After seven years of nonstop court proceedings, all four kids were with me. Now I have four teenagers, a son-in-law, and a grandson who I love to be around. I don't dread going home every night like I did when I was married. Sometimes I think I'm lucky. But I know I worked for it. The atmosphere in my house feels warm, caring, safe, and comfortable. I like being with my kids. They were away from me for so long that I see it as a privilege to be their parent, and not a right. The kids still have healing to do and I have years of painful therapy still ahead of me, but I have the family I've always wanted to have. If you want it, don't give up. Even if you just want an inside family that cooperates, don't give up. A lot of these parenting principles apply to inside families as well as outside families. My inside family is getting easier to live with too. Maybe I'll read back over this on the inevitable black hole days to come. Maybe it will help. I hope it helps you.

MV**Comfort**

Only a small black cat is Annie  
 Yet on the bad nights when  
 memories tear my soul apart,  
 it is her paw on my arm and  
 the feeling of her snuggled next to  
 me  
 that pulls me out of my past  
 and back to the present.

**MANY VOICES needs an Angel or Two!**

Please think of us when you can! And if you know people who could benefit from *MANY VOICES*, or know of clinics or conferences that could use flyers, please pass the word. Thanks very much.

Lynn W., Editor.

**Improving Internal Communication**

By Diana Barnum

**H**ere are some tips my therapist taught me to improve internal communication among the "parts" (or selves):

1. Put the healthiest part in charge.
2. Have the older/more mature parts take charge over the minor ones.
3. Remember that even though others may not have been responsible with us in the past, we must take responsibility for our own "self"/ "selves" now and act accordingly. Obey the law!
4. Stand tall, shoulders back, no slouching, and take deep breaths, focusing on the body as a whole, wonderful, alive Being.
5. Allow internal parts to communicate externally with each other through writing, journaling, painting, clay sculpting, etc., so that there is bonding, trusting, and fun being shared. This promotes healthy interaction and respect, which is a good foundation for improved communication.
6. Plant your feet firmly on the ground, and press on the floor. Focus on the here and now, and slow the breathing. Closing the eyes can also be helpful here, as they are constantly working while open.
7. Keep a log of different internal arguments going on. Then try to create solutions—gradually. Remember, there's no rush to become healed! For example, maybe while trying to decide which part gets to choose what to wear, possibly focus only on the color of clothing that day. Maybe the next day decide whether it's

pants or a dress. Or maybe one can select the top, another the shoes, jewelry, etc. Be creative and let many parts help create the ensemble. This log will let everyone keep an eye on the progress, and know that all sides are being "heard" and considered. Let everyone jot notes about their feelings associated with these compromises, so growth will take place along with maturity, as each learns to give and take. Share!

8. Strive to keep stress at a minimum. If one part is feeling too overwhelmed, look for an area to cut back. Maybe get more rest, turn off the answering machine, eat healthier, etc.

9. Don't isolate. Contact with others, especially with those not as far along on the healing path, can greatly improve our self-esteem, causing more positive interaction among the selves.

10. Follow the golden rule: do unto others...not only to other "selves," but other people. Even those who hurt us in the past. Read literature about society during the time in which you were abused, and read about people who did their best, but abused another anyway. Read why they did it, and see how you would have handled things in their shoes. Try to understand that they weren't perfect, as we aren't either, and try to treat them as you'd like to be treated anyway. If it's really not possible to be kind to the abuser, at least don't be mean, because negative actions tend to have bad effects on the selves on down the road. It's an action/reaction issue, and the inside does reflect the outside.

MV

# Child-size Poems

## Storytime

John: "The big book."  
 Lee: "The story book."  
 Jim: "The baby one."  
 Tom: "The animal book"  
 "The shape one."  
 "Da sheepy dun."  
 Sitting down  
 Some lying down  
 All excited but  
 resting, too.  
 Teacher Sally  
 reads slowly  
 and clearly.  
 The children smile,  
 laugh, make noises,  
 kick at each other.  
 Mommy Sally: "Stop that or you're  
 in the naughty box.  
 Thank you for legs  
 quietly on the floor."  
 Cathy falls asleep.  
 So does Jennifer.  
 Jeffrey snores.  
 Jeremy wiggles toes.  
 Genevieve plays with her nose.  
 Kieyeses points fingers up and down.  
 Adolph cracks his knuckles.  
 Cherub smiles sweetly.  
 Gracie C. stares straight ahead.  
 Stories are a special gift.  
 The God of stories must be good.  
 All the children are sleeping now.  
 Except Michael—who cries  
 till I hold him close  
 and softly tap his toes  
 with my fingers.

*By Sally B.*

## Mystery

There once was a lady named nona  
 who discovered a dark persona  
 she searched all around  
 but finally found  
 that she was the persona's owner

*By nona*

## Remember Your Heritage

Little one so filled with tears  
 How beautiful you are!  
 Born in time  
 You are so much more  
 Remember your heritage  
 Bruised and battered and broken  
 Are not the parents of your spirit  
 Earth bore you from her gentle womb  
 Air fathered you in sustaining love  
 Ev'n before you knew betrayal  
 By the surrogates who raised you.  
 Remember your noble birth  
 A higher power than any flesh and  
 Blood could conceive  
 Forms the center of your being  
 Cradling your inner child with love  
 And tenderness.  
 Remember your divine spark.  
 The sun who enlightens your day  
 is the brother within you named  
 Courage  
 Who brings to light  
 The dark secrets of your abusers.  
 Water who cleans and purifies  
 is your sister within named Healing  
 Who brings peace and refreshment to  
 Your troubled soul.  
 Remember your family line.  
 Incest is not my father  
 Nor abuse my mother at all.  
 They were a heritage of people  
 Not big enough or little enough  
 To be my parents.  
 I remember my heritage:  
 It is of nature.  
 I remember my lineage:  
 It is most human.  
 I celebrate my origin:  
 I am of God.

*By Nita K.*

## You Were There

When I fell  
 You were there  
 When I was violated  
 You took control  
 When I was hurt  
 You made the pain yours  
 When I left  
 You stayed and cared  
 In the days to come  
 I'll help you stand  
 In the days of memories  
 I'll hold your hand  
 In the days of pain  
 I'll keep it mine  
 I will not leave again  
 We're safe, we can have  
 peace of mind  
 The strong inside still long to hurt  
 Listen to our hearts  
 They beat as one  
 Each one important to the body  
 One stops and all are gone.

*By Sandy B.*

## Fragmentation

Shattered mirror  
 broken glass  
 metal cage surrounds me  
 you left me  
 taking the key with you  
 I am alone  
 in a cage  
 with my fragmented self  
 reflected in the glass  
 not whole  
 alone  
 pacing  
 with no key  
 no door  
 no escape  
 no self

*By Jillian*

## Popcorn

WE forgot our hugs yesterday  
 I need a hug  
 they want a hug  
 I can't feel love  
 Mitzy wants a kiss from a woman  
 Little wants to hold on tight  
 Sis wants cheese and a coloring book  
 Someone wants meat,  
     someone wants milk  
 Sally where are you?

We want freedom from all this pain  
 nowhere to turn when everyone is  
 hurting.

We all need to calm down  
 We only have one body, one mouth  
 Many souls have emerged from the  
     depths of survival

Everyone shut up!

You're making me feel shame, and  
 not feel at all.

How can we go on this road?

Get in line and take turns!

Who am I? Where am I?

It's like popcorn in here.

*By Maria & herfam*

## The Shield

Little one  
 so vulnerable and fragile  
 able to survive  
 the painful violence.  
 Come  
 I will take you  
 under my wing,  
 putting my arms around you,  
 holding you tight.  
 While your heart cries  
 in hopeful silence,  
 I will keep you  
 from harm,  
 helping you trust.  
 You are safe now,  
 little one.  
 In my embrace  
 no one will come near  
 or hurt you.  
 My arms  
 the shield  
 against them.

*By Cherie Knust*

## How Many Lives?

How many eyes do I need  
 So that I may see?  
 How many ears do I need  
 So that I may hear?  
 How many words should I know  
 So that I may speak?  
 How many lives do I need  
 So that I may live?

*By Gina Lori*

## Withdrawal

Right now I feel small  
 I'm curled up in a ball  
 Like no one at all  
 I try to disappear  
 Will you find me here?  
 Will you draw me near?  
 I can't reach out now  
 I really don't know how  
 Can you reach in somehow?  
 I'm like a tiny dot  
 Or an accidental spot  
 Do you love me...or not?

*By Judy G.*

## I'm Not Eatin That

"I'm not eatin them green things!"  
 "You like green beans."  
 "No, I don't eat green stuff!"  
 "Why don't you let someone else  
     eat it?"  
 Someone pops up with,  
 "I'll eat em  
 but they're touchin that gravy.  
 I don't want nothing to touch."  
 "But it is stew;  
 we all like beef stew."  
 "Not if it's all touchin!"  
 Separate the meat and potatoes,  
 the carrots and beans...  
 Scrape the gravy off the beans.  
 "Can we eat now?"  
 "Yeah, but  
 I'm still not eatin those beans!"

*By Echo  
 for the Coalition for Joy*

## The Wall

As an infant is born  
 The baby is shushed  
 The wall begins  
 As the child grows  
 So the wall is built  
     —brick by brick  
 As the adolescent develops  
 With every unexpressed feeling  
 The mortar fills in the space  
 If the adult grows  
 The wall begins to break down  
     —bit by bit  
 To truly mature  
 One must no longer compromise  
 The wall must be shattered  
 Each emotion must be felt  
 Each memory understood  
 Each child must re-learn to love  
     themselves!

*By Laura F.*

## Loneliness

I am many, but oh so alone.  
 There is no one on the outside to hold  
 and comfort me. (Would I even let  
 anyone try?)  
 Tears are not allowed, so my insiders  
 must suffer in silence.  
 We will never fully reveal how deeply  
 we are hurting.  
 We must always behave ourselves, and  
 never risk upsetting outsiders.  
 They are pleased because we are  
 doing so well, but in reality our  
 torment increases.  
 We cannot tell what we were forced to  
 do, what is happening inside, or  
 worse, what was done  
 "willingly" to protect someone we  
 loved.  
 These should not be the memories of  
 a child, yet this is what haunts my  
 children within.  
 One will not speak. Her pain is the  
 most intense.  
 We are scared, hurt, and so very much  
 alone.  
 Will we ever feel safe?  
 Will there ever be a grown-up who  
 sees the real us?  
 I am many, but oh so alone.

*By Linda*

# Therapist's Page

By Joyanna Silberg, Ph.D.

Dr. Joyanna Silberg works with children and adolescents in Baltimore, Maryland. You can reach her at Sheppard-Pratt Hospital, 6501 N. Charles St., PO Box 6815, Baltimore, MD 21285-6815.

## Parenting the Dissociative Child

Over the last ten years my practice has been devoted to the evaluation and treatment of children with severe dissociative disorders. These children come from every social class, race, and family circumstance. Some have been adopted or placed in foster families after years of cruel and sadistic treatment from their original families. Some are living with original families and were abused by babysitters, "friends" of the family or extended family members. Others have congenital birth defects or illnesses and have required repeated and painful medical procedures to ensure their survival. Some have experienced stressful life circumstances of a milder nature, including personal losses, parental conflicts, or disappointments in school. Others have observed interpersonal violence in their neighborhoods or homes. Whatever the source for the particular child, I have found that it is always important to work with the families to help them provide the child hope and optimism, loving protection, and the structure of increasingly challenging expectations within the framework of empathy and understanding. All of this may be easier said than done, but I have found that the vast majority of families that I work with are quick to understand on an intuitive level what the children most need, and are able to provide the kind of environments that can be healing. My research shows that the consistent availability of at least one parent during the course of treatment is the best predictor of a successful outcome for a dissociative child (Silberg & Waters, 1998).

The first thing parents want to know is how much they should interact or develop relationships with the different alters, or the separate aspects of the

self. During the early parts of treatment, I find that it is very important that the parent make some kind of connection with those parts of the child that they have not known about before. However, this can be done very subtly. I ask the parents, for example, when hugging the child, to gently whisper in the child's ear "Remember, I am hugging all of you." It is important that the child perceive that the parent truly accepts the child in his/her entirety. Sometimes I ask the parents to write letters to the child that express appreciation for the whole self. For example, a parent might write "I love how well you protect yourself when you are mad, I love the part of you that can be so cuddly, I love how independent you can be..." In this way the parent can make a connection with all of the fragmented parts and can reframe all of them in positive ways. With children who are adopted, I find that sometimes there are parts of the child that do not feel they have been adopted. In these cases sometimes we will have an adoption ceremony in the therapy in which a doll might be used to represent part of the self, and I have the parents affirm her/his love to this part of the child as well.

Adoption rituals can only go so far, however. It is important that the parent behavior also reflect in day-to-day interactions that the "whole self" is loved. Sometimes parents make inadvertent comments that are shaming to the child such as "Where's that good little boy I know is there?" which can invalidate the child's feelings and again encourage dissociation. One child I work with taught me the metaphor of the "blood pressure cuff" which I often now use with families of dissociative children. This child was afraid of blood pressure cuffs, and we finally traced this fear to a stay in an emergency room, where the child was terrified and the nurse was putting on a blood pressure cuff that was

automatic. The more the child resisted in fear, the tighter the cuff became. This became a metaphor for the child of all experiences in which her genuine attempts to escape from fearful intrusions or to express her real feelings were met with worse intrusion. It became clear that the child perceived her mother as "blood pressure cuff" on certain occasions, particularly when she was angry about something her mother had done, and she got punished for expressing her anger. I teach parents to notice when they are being "blood pressure cuffs" and let children have an opportunity to express their real feelings, even rage, safely without punishment or consequence. Parents need to learn to make the important distinction between a feeling and a behavior, and allow free expression of the feelings that are often very intense with dissociative children, particularly in the early stages of their treatment. The parents' ability to validate the children's feelings without being defensive or punishing is the biggest key to success in helping dissociative children heal. For example the child might shout in anger, "I hate you when you do that." This is time for the parent to quietly listen to what is upsetting the child, not to correct the child.

I do not encourage parents to have direct relationships with different parts of the self or to call them by other names. Instead they can refer to them by descriptors—*that part of you that gets so angry, or that part of you that likes a lot of attention and acts so young*. This is more normalizing to the child. I never encourage the parents to purchase separate items for the different aspects of the child as this can breed competitiveness among the parts and produce more fragmentation and dissociation.

Parents need to learn to help the child access the appropriate states at

the appropriate times. Sometimes families have developed code words that help serve as reminders to the child to have a more mature state present during homework time, for example. The simple phrase "It's time to get it together" can serve this function well (Waters, 1998). Bed time is the best time for younger parts of the self to emerge as it is common for children to regress at bedtime and want cuddling and story telling. Normal children will often regress at bedtime. I tell the child that whatever part of the self presents, they must learn to experience their life with their whole self at all times. This is easier for dissociative children than adults, and they do readily learn to dissolve the barriers with gentle encouragement and practice in therapy.

Some parents feel concerned about setting limits on children for destructive behavior or aggression when the children seem to have really forgotten what they did. Parents should not fall into this trap. Dissociative children need firm limits and even though they may feel sometimes that they are punished for something they did not do, this serves as a learning experience which will ultimately lead to the co-consciousness or full memory that they need. The child can be instructed to discuss the unfairness with their therapist who might provide the environment that will allow the child to remember the behavior that is not acknowledged. However, I do not encourage punishing children for expressing anger, for using curse words, or even for throwing things, if it is done safely with soft objects. Frank destruction of other's property or hurting other people should receive a consequence.

Some adolescents that I treat have

not told their parents about their dissociative fragmentation and prefer to keep it private. If I judge this to be safe for the child and family, I often go along with this, and explain to parents in a general way that the teenager has difficulty with mood control, and that I will be helping the teen learn to manage this more effectively. This seems to work alright and discourages the playing of the "sick role" which can severely prolong the treatment of some teens.

It is important for parents to respect the child's pace in dealing with the traumatic memories of their past. Some children do not want to get deeply into this, and it is not the parents' place to push or force the child to explore things they are not ready to. On the other hand, sometimes, particularly at bedtime, children may want to talk about a fresh memory they just recalled, and it is good if parents can provide an empathic ear at that time. Some children like the opportunity to write things down at bedtime in a journal. There is no right pace or amount of traumatic work that any child should do. The therapist and parent should respect the child's choice here. Clearly if the child is experiencing repeated flashbacks and is flooded with a painful memory, it is an important time to intervene therapeutically to stop that process. I have found that at those times, when more traumatic material emerges, there is always some current stress in the child's life that has stimulated it and maintained it and this is important to investigate and understand completely.

It is easy for the dissociative disorder or the child's past to become a distraction from the real job of childhood, which is to learn, to grow, and to play in a safe and loving

environment. The parent should protect any and all opportunities that the child has to accomplish these goals, and see that the child's unfortunate life experiences do not lead to an overemphasis on what is "wrong" rather than what is "right." I encourage my patients to get involved in hobbies—sports, music, horsebackriding or other extracurricular activities. Parents need to provide the kind of expectations that will encourage growth, keeping in mind that special accommodations will need to be made for the intensity of feelings that the child will display. When scared, the child may get very panicky, but they can learn to modulate this. When angry, the child may feel rage that has been stored up for a long time, but if accepted, this rage will lessen over time. At times, the child may be overwhelmed with sadness, but in time children can learn techniques for restoring themselves to a more even mood. It is important that the parent not overly personalize when the child is expressing intense emotions but see this as the child's adaptive emotional system getting turned on to work properly and welcome this as signs of growth and correction.

Dissociative children in treatment should be getting better. If things are getting worse, it is important to look at whether the family is resistant to the kind of changes that are important for the child's growth, or whether the child is trying to communicate that he/she is still not safe. Family therapy may be needed.

If the child continues to do worse rather than better during treatment, get another opinion. Childhood is too precious. All children deserve a time when they can grow and enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

**MV**

Silberg, J. & Waters, F. (1998) Factors Associated with Positive Therapeutic Outcome. In Silberg, Ed. *The Dissociative Child*, 2nd Edition, Lutherville, Maryland, The Sidran Press.

Waters, F. (1998) Parents as partners in the treatment of dissociative children. In Silberg, J. Ed., *The Dissociative Child*, 2nd edition, Lutherville, Maryland, The Sidran Press.

#### Books about Dissociative children

Silberg, J.L. (ed.) *The Dissociative Child*. Lutherville, Maryland. The Sidran Press.

Shirar, L. (1996) *Dissociative Children*. New York. Norton.

Putnam, F. (1997) *Dissociation in Children and Adolescents*. New York. Guilford.

Wieland, S. (1998) *Techniques and issues in abuse-focused therapy with children and adolescents*. Thousand Oaks, California. Sage Publications.

## Partner's Page:

## Silver Linings

By Richard

*(Warning: This article contains graphic descriptions of abuse, a suicide attempt, and hospitalization.)*

**M**y wife's first suicide attempt didn't go anything like I imagined.

The bedroom door opened and she stood backlit by the hallway light.

"What happens if you take 20-and-a-half Ativan," my wife asked.

I sat bolt upright in bed. "Well, I think it kills you," I half-yelled in anger and horror. "Is that what you've done?"

"Yes, I think so," she said calmly. "All the little boxes are empty."

"This is the most stupid stunt you've ever pulled!" I rolled out of bed and yanked on the light. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"I don't know," she said. "We just felt like it was something we should do."

"Well, this time your damned feelings were wrong!"

"Do you want me to go throw up?"

"Yes, that would be a real good idea right now!"

While my wife retched in the bathroom, I raced around pulling on clothes and trying to plan for an emergency I had hoped would never happen. I knew I was acting like a bastard, but this was my wife's first suicide attempt, and I wanted her to know I was scared and angry, and that this was not okay.

And the evening had been so ordinary. I had watched a science fiction movie on TV in the living room; she watched "Touched By An Angel" in the basement. When her show ended she came upstairs, kissed me goodnight, and went to bed.

An hour later she was up, saying she couldn't sleep. In rapid succession, she wanted to quit therapy, order two pizzas and eat them all by herself, jump in the car and run away, chain-smoke a pack of cigarettes, or get drunk. Each time I argued with one form of self-destruction, she chose another, all in a flat, poker-faced tone.

A different alter came out of the bathroom as I called her therapist and

psychiatrist (medications doctor) and left shaky, too-fast messages on their answering machines. "I'll just sit on the couch and stay out of your way," she said, clutching a teddy bear.

I probably should have called 911 first, but I had never faced this before. I knew she needed to go to the emergency room, but I didn't want to tie up the paramedics and their ambulance if I didn't have to.

Her psychiatrist called back first and confirmed my wife had taken a dangerous overdose and would need to go to the hospital. After the psychiatrist checked with my wife, she agreed that calling the paramedics probably wasn't necessary.

I started packing my wife's bags because I knew the emergency room would admit her to the psychiatric ward, probably for several days.

"Why am I being punished," asked a teary little voice from the couch. Another alter was out. "Why are you making me sit on the couch?"

I explained the situation, gently this time, in simple terms.

"I feel funny, like I'm all dizzy," said the little girl.

"That's the drugs in your system," I said. "That's why I have to take you to the hospital so the doctors can take care of you."

Her therapist called a few minutes later. She agreed with what the psychiatrist said, and added that my wife should be admitted to the psychiatric ward for safety. While I finished packing, the therapist talked to my wife to calm her down.

After her therapist hung up, we jumped in our aging, smoky car and I drove us out of town as fast as it can go...

...Which must be plenty fast enough, because about halfway to the interstate the blue!red!blue!red!blue!red! lights started flashing in the rearview mirror.

"We don't have time for this," I muttered as I pulled out my driver's license and opened the car door.

My wife yelled, "Don't get out; it's not safe!" But I rolled out and walked back into the glare of the police cruiser's lights.

The cop ordered, "Sir, stay in the car!" I stopped, held up both hands and my driver's license, then kept walking and met him halfway to the cruiser.

I explained about the overdose and going to the hospital, then waited a few minutes by my car while (I guess) the cop ran a check on my license and car tags. Then he walked back and said, "I'm gonna take a chance and let you go, but slow down, okay? And you'd better not be lying to me!"

I thanked him and hopped back in my car. "I can't believe you did that," said my wife. I couldn't believe it, either. That was the first time in my life I've ever tried to talk my way out of a ticket. I don't recommend it except in an honest-to-God emergency.

We drove on out of town and down the interstate no faster than usual. It was a chilly autumn evening, but we kept the windows down so the cold air would help my wife stay awake.

Things went smoothly in the emergency room. Despite my wife being awake and coherent, triage took the overdose seriously. Within minutes they wheeled her back to a bed.

A nurse hooked my wife up to a monitor, took her vital signs, then brought her a big cup of charcoal solution. (And I thought of the old song *Love Potion Number Nine*— "It was black as night and looked like India ink...") My wife had to drain that whole cup of gritty black stuff, then relax while it counteracted the drugs in her stomach.

While I watched the green squiggles on the monitor, we began to piece together what happened. It took until the next day to get it all because, in my



wife's memory, she had watched "Touched By An Angel," kissed me goodnight, went to bed and right to sleep, then woke up in the psych ward at 3 p.m. the next day.

It's true what they say—a trigger can be the most unexpected thing. You wouldn't think an innocuous family show like "Touched By An Angel" could trigger a self-destructive frenzy. But a character had remembered how his father had whacked him with a wooden spoon, something that also happened to my wife. That put her child alters in an uproar she wasn't aware of and, when she went to sleep, an alter came out who deals with emotional turmoil by being self-destructive. When I argued with her, she decided the only way to get safety was to attempt suicide and go to the hospital. (In my defense, it would have helped if she had explained what was going on, but she refused.) So she gobbled down two weeks' worth of pills, and one of the child alters told on her.

I had planned to wait until they admitted my wife to the psych ward, but I had to go to work the next day. At about 1 a.m., my wife felt she was out of danger and sent me home to get some sleep.

The drive home was dark, and not just because of the time. I wondered, not for the first time, if all this was worth it.

This was my wife's third hospitalization that summer, and her first suicide attempt. In eight years together, we've been through every food issue from anorexia to obesity to vegetarianism. She lost her job, so we

pinch pennies 'til they fold double and yell. I get very little sex. I've accepted about a zillion personalities. And family therapy and group therapy and couples therapy and my therapy and her therapy and more therapy!

And now this. Dark thoughts for a dark night.

I finally got in bed after two a.m. and I definitely did not feel better when the alarm went off at five and I had to drag myself to work.

Every support person has that end-of-your-rope feeling now and then. I've learned to hang on, trust my wife, and wait for the sun to come up...

...Which it always does.

My wife called her family and friends the next day to let them know she was in the hospital. Later that day her mother, Alice (not her real name), called me at the office and asked for my side of the story. I gave her a quick replay of the night before, and when I told Alice about the wooden spoon scene on "Touched By An Angel," I heard a change in her voice. I think that might be the first time Alice realized that my wife has emotional problems partly because of what Alice did as a mother.

A little while later, Alice called again, asking if she could visit my wife in the hospital. It's a long trip from the Midwest to Virginia, and she hasn't come out for any of my wife's other hospitalizations. Alice said she just wanted to give her daughter a hug. I said it was okay with me, if my wife felt she could handle it, which another quick phone call confirmed.

So Alice drove all day Friday, spent Saturday visiting my wife, and drove

home Sunday. My wife says the understanding and healing that came out of that one day equaled a couple of years of joint therapy.

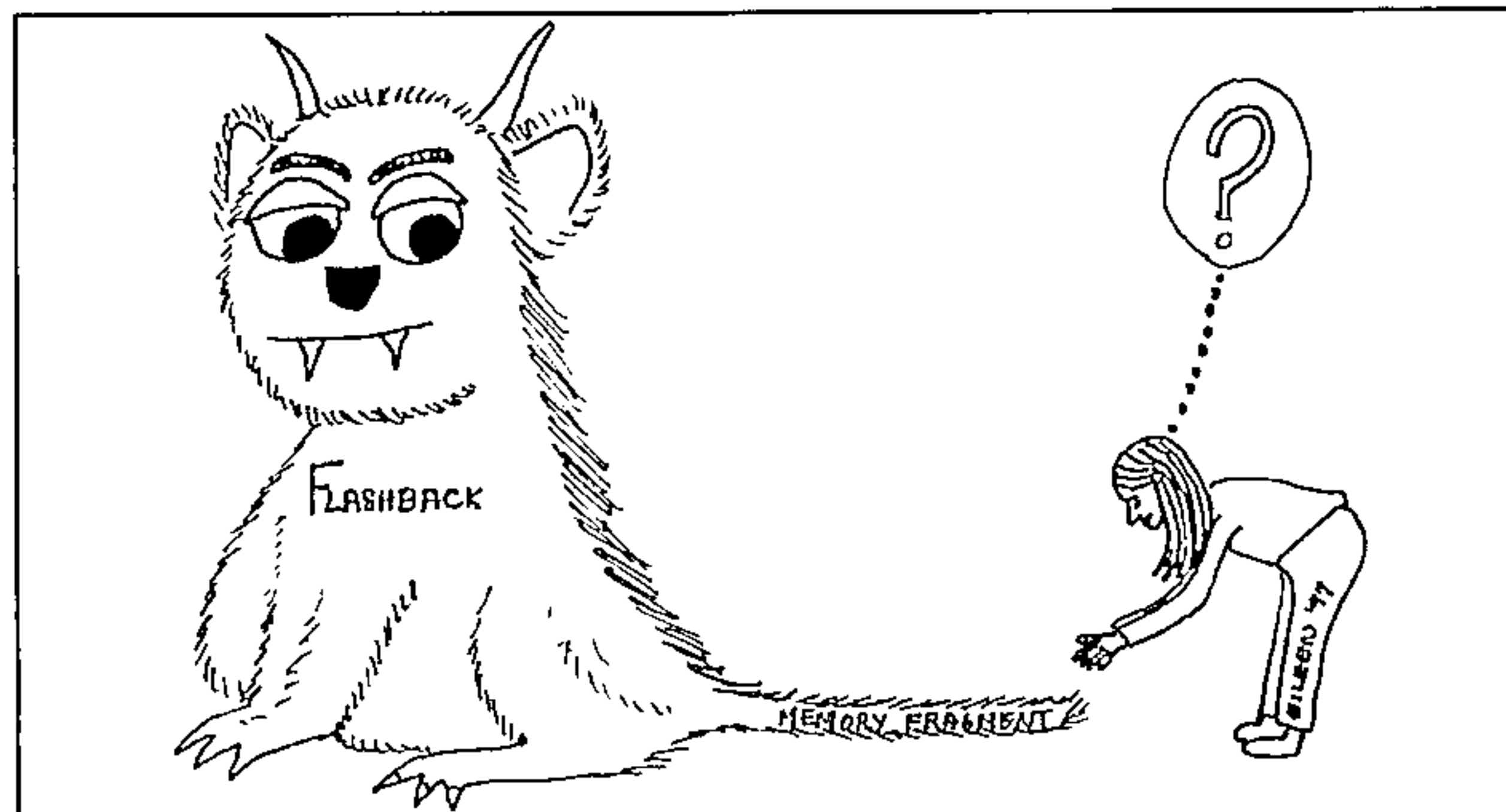
The hospitalization also helped my wife commit to finding saner ways to deal with her feelings, which led to Bible study and journaling. The Bible study increased my wife's sense of worth, and helped break down the Satanic cult programming by showing her how the cult had perverted Old Testament rituals. The journaling gave her deeper insight into her behavior, which helped her break old patterns and adopt healthier ones.

Multiples also tend to live chaotic lives, and the regular Bible study and journaling provided structure, a reason to get up at a regular time with a plan for the morning. And getting up earlier led my wife to drink coffee, and the caffeine partly counteracts the dulling effect of her morning medication, which gives her more energy and better focus during the day. (Her meds doc okayed the coffee.)

As a result, her third level of alters integrated earlier than expected, and we spent the calmest Christmas season we've ever experienced together.

I would never have guessed, when my wife (or whoever it was) came to the bedroom door, that so much good could come from a suicide attempt. It's a lesson I've learned often in this relationship with a multiple—sometimes things do have to get worse before they can get better, and clouds often do have silver linings.

MV



# Safe-Cracking Therapy

By Candy, Ellie's Friend

I've been thinking about therapy and "joining together" and I've been trying to explain it to myself. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? If we do do it, how do we do it?

I used to be a bank teller. I think what we're doing is like opening the vault door in a bank, except that we don't know the combination. I suppose that makes us like safe-crackers! You can't run a bank very well unless you get into the vault, and you can't run a life very well unless you get on the other side of this door we're up against.

Vault combination locks have lots of numbers that have to be set in just the right order to unlock the door...the dial spins, the tumblers turn, and the pins fall into place one by one. We often feel like we're spinning and tumbling and falling, too. We don't know what number is up half the time, or whose turn it is, or how all these people will ever line up and accomplish anything. We turn the dial and listen quietly, try to feel our way slowly, nothing seems to be happening, then, out of the blue, something suddenly just feels right. A number lines up and slips into place. From the outside, you would never be able to tell (at least not at first) just like the outside part of the dial on the vault door doesn't give any indication that you've picked the right number. Everything happens on the inside of the lock. Everything happens on the inside of us too, but when something happens, we know it, even when no one else does. Of course, just as soon as something or someone gets lined up, you go spinning off in the opposite direction, but I guess that's the way it's supposed to happen. (you know—5 times right, 4 times left, etc. etc.)

Even though we end up going in opposite directions all the time, each movement takes us a step closer to our goal.

An important thing to know about vaults (and therapy) is that the timing has to be right or nothing will happen. A bank vault will not open until a certain time, even if the combination is set properly. It's a safety measure. Timers protect the precious insides from intruders and people not authorized to work the combinations. We spend hours and hours getting the combination just right, and then we learn that we need to be patient and wait for the right timing, too.

Another important thing to remember is that if you mess around too much, and try to force the locks or timers...then the alarm will go off. It happens at the bank. The alarm is triggered accidentally. The police come. The blood pressure goes up. You feel embarrassed, but you deal with it. When alarms go off on the inside of us, it's even more uncomfortable, but we deal with it and keep going. This therapy thing cannot be forced.

We are up against the door. The trying different numbers and combinations, and the spinning and the falling, and the waiting, and the accidental alarms, all seem pointless and lead us to believe that we are attempting to accomplish an impossible task. It often looks like nothing is happening on the outside, but we keep going...because we believe the stuff on the other side of this door is worth fighting for. We might be safe-crackers, but we're not bank robbers! We're only claiming what should have been ours in the first place! *We will not give up!*

MV

# Earth Woman

I am. Oh, yes, I am. I am a child of the earth. The earth is my mother. A long dark path to here.

How full I feel, of this spirit of life. Thank you, mother, for showing me how to feel, to be, to live.

How long others tried to suffocate that life; stifle those dreams. "You're stupid." "You're worthless." "You're not lovable!" Oh, those messages were loud. They were big. They lasted a long time. Until. Until the true mother showed me the power. The power to choose what dwells within. That in all the world, this little bit of space, inside my head, is *my* space. *Mine*. I get to choose who and what lives in here.

When did I notice? When did I become aware? Did I know in those special, fleeting moments with me and my sled? Dashing through the snow on some grand adventure? Was it when I felt the wind blowing in my face? Was it when I heard others expressing fear at thunder and lightning, and I wondered, "how is that" "why does this feel upside down?" Fear and terror were my steady companions, except in the face of mother nature; connected to the energy of thunder and lightning. Connected to sunshine, and rain, and wind. Momentary feelings of power and freedom! Momentary feelings of peace and calm!

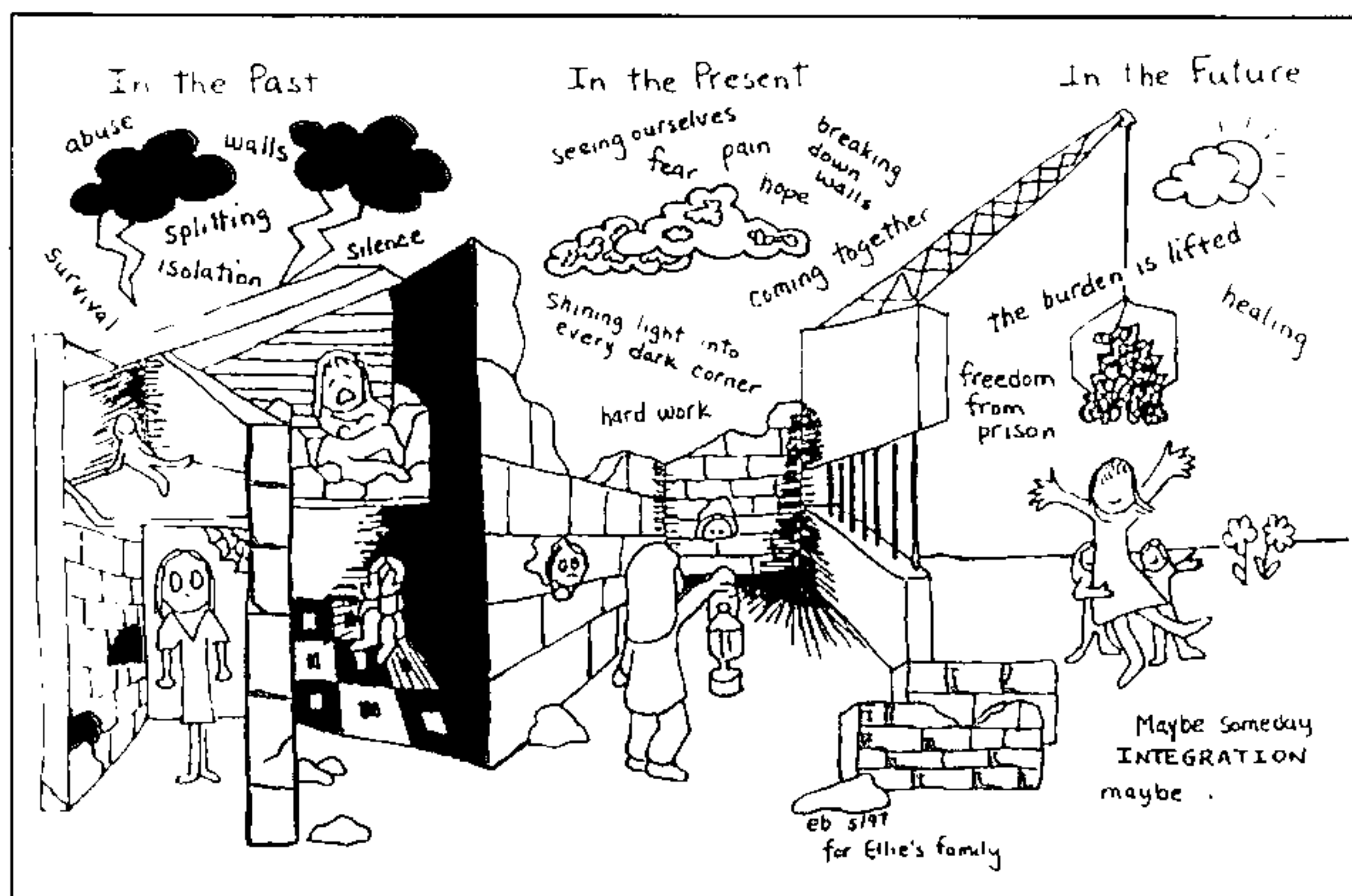
Was it when, many years later, I began the daily ritual of going outside and submerging myself into warm water? What was this compulsion? Only slowly did I begin to understand. These basic elements: water, wind, night sky turning to dawn. Mother, sharing herself with me, nurturing and fulfilling me. Allowing me to feel, truly feel, what was never learned from the other mother. And I thought I'd simply learned how to mother myself!

Was it when I learned of that mistaken zygote theory of Clarissa Pincola Estes? When I could imagine myself as one of those eager little zygotes, jumping up and down in her basket, and oops! Landing in the wrong place. A harsh and barren place. A place that nearly killed my spirit. But it didn't. I survived.

And now, when I sit out there in the pre-dawn dark, I luxuriate in the warmth and love of my mother—earth. Peaceful. Tranquil. Connected. Renewed. Thankful for the journey.

By Connie Porter-Richard, a psychotherapist living and working in Melbourne, FL.

MV



## Healing Acts

By Elly in Ellie's family

This might sound silly to some people, but we have found that little things can mean a lot. Go out and buy some lotion...the best you can afford. (We like the smell and feel of Victoria's Secret Garden Silkening Body Lotions) and then pamper yourself. I am learning that it is okay to be nice to myself, but even more important to "healing" is the being nice to my "selves."

There are parts of me that are seven year old little girls:

Emma & Abby & Emily.

I close my eyes and pretend that I have one of their little feet in my hands while I rub in the lotion. They love it. They love feeling "grown up" and the pampering and attention. Emma loves toe nail polish with sparkles in it, so sometimes we do that or other polish. So what if eventually another

alter who thinks polish is stupid takes the polish off...even She will have to admit that she enjoys the "feelings" that filter through the system while the pampering is taking place. I think She is just afraid to trust yet that good feelings can last.

I also like to concentrate on my little finger on each hand. Look at your little finger...doesn't it remind you of the finger of a little girl? This helps me get in touch with each of the little ones inside...It helps me realize how small they were when they were hurt long ago, and it makes me want to be nicer to them (which helps the whole system

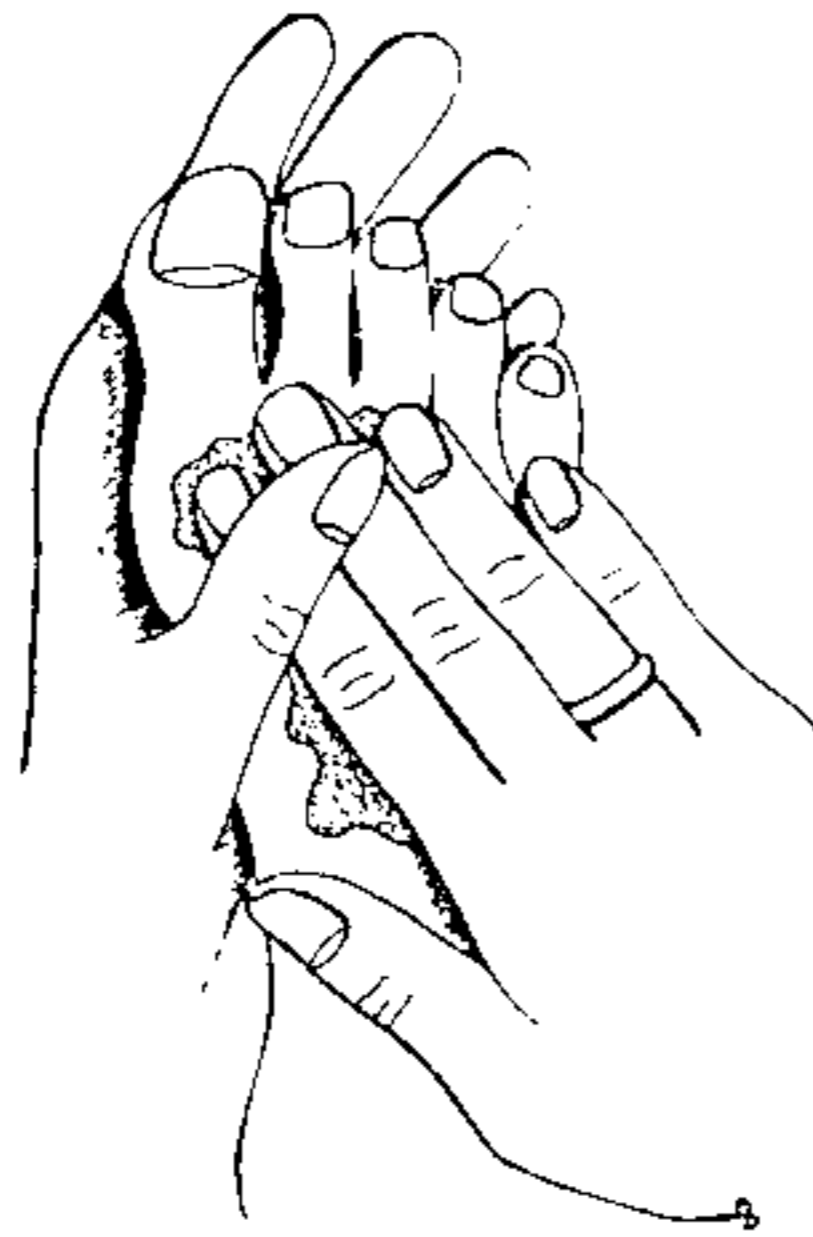
work better in the day-to-day life...we cooperate more, and there is less screaming and chaos).

Sometimes I will rub a little lotion into each and every scar left by past self-inflicted actions of another...we do not deserve to be punished any longer. In fact, we never deserved to be punished like that. We are not bad. It is okay to take care of our self. While I am rubbing in the sweet-smelling and soft lotion, somehow I am

learning to understand how it all happened (when I never did before). I could not understand why one of us inside would hurt the body on purpose after all we'd been through, but now I think I do. Somehow this caring for each other helps to break down the walls which had made things so confusing for us in the past (when we didn't even know each other, let alone understand each other). We

understand each other better now, because we are learning to trust each other more; and we have learned to trust each other more by being nicer to each other.

It's the little things that I think are making the difference, day by day, even though they might seem silly or insignificant to some people. It is okay to want to feel precious and cherished...to smell and feel good...it is not wrong to want these things. Close your eyes and pamper the feet and the fingers and the scars of your inside people. Powerful things can happen.



## Dissociation

Dissociation is sometimes like a coma. The mind shuts down while the body moves robot-like through life. Emotions are not felt. Life is not felt, simply endured. Dissociation is a rest from feeling. It is being able to disconnect the nerve endings in the fingers. They wash the dishes and scrub the floors but do not feel the scalding water or the sore blisters from the scrubbing. I can shut off emotional power to my being as instantly as the electricity can be disconnected from my home. And suddenly inside is all darkness and quiet. The mind can rest and sleep while the body functions through its roles.

When this heaviness drapes me in its protective covering I feel death is freed to pounce through the open unguarded door. Death comes easy when it cannot be felt. Death sends hopelessness ahead. Hopelessness leads Life to the door to shake death's hand. Life cannot feel Death's icy grip with feeling shut-down.

Feeling is the alarm system protecting the life, and its lines have been severed. I don't want to "feel" anymore. I long for this escape into numbness, into my lifeless coma. I breathe, I talk a little, I function in my roles. Even functioning soon requires too much energy and Death's invitation to join him lulls my senses into peaceful slumber.

Some aggravating annoyance pokes relentlessly at my spirit. "Wake up! Wake up!" she torments. She doesn't stop her persistent poking until I have fully awakened, finding myself curled into a damp sewer pipe. I alert my senses once again to feel. Cold, dampness, sends chills up my spine. The night's quietness now seems frightening. I ask my body to take me back from where it came. Back to my home, my family, my Life, and back to reality.

By JoEllen & Co.

MV

MV

## Finances

I have discovered a hands-on way to organize how I spend money. Something that's much easier for me to understand. And so much less bother than saving and entering receipts.

I have decided that each month, I will allow myself to spend X-amount on Groceries, Things I can Hold, Things I Can Do, Giving to the Church I Attend, Counselling, Stuff About Multiples (like this newsletter, books by multiples, books about multiples) Special Treats for Selves, and Gifts to Others. That's eight categories. I also have eight envelopes. Each envelope has the name of one of these categories. At the beginning of each month, I fill each envelope with the specified amount of moeny for that category. Once the money's gone, Hey! Too bad, so sad. Maybe next month. And that's that. It's so simple. I love it.

I have also switched to duplicate cheque blanks. I'm hoping to fight the missing check syndrome.

By ????

(Thanks from MV to this unknown contributor. I need to fight missing-name syndrome. Please help by putting your name on all submissions—ed.)

MV

# Suicide—To Hell and Back Again

By Kathryn A.

If survivors of abuse are truthful with one another, we will admit that somewhere along the path to healing we have had serious thoughts about or have attempted suicide. It is a difficult issue to discuss, but one that we often overlook as an important turning point in our lives. For those who are in the deep wells of despair, there really is hope. Yes, you really can get through this dark period of your life! And believe it or not, you can grow stronger and learn a great deal about living

We all know how it feels to be depressed day after day, week after week. We need to ask ourselves, *where are these feelings coming from?* Do we feel worthless and without hope? Are these feelings the leftovers from our perpetrators? While we were abused, we inwardly denied being the worthless (you fill in the blank) that our abusers called us. We knew it wasn't true then and we fought back in our minds. We let a fragment of our-selves take the abuse and stayed protected deep inside. Our survival demonstrates that we are not the despicable character we were labeled then

Now we need to find that little sliver of denial and nurture it. We are worth while and worthy! We now have choices and we can choose to live just the same way we chose to live through the abusive period of our lives. Believe it or not, this is a denial that is healthy! We can deny the negative feelings that were communicated to us so long ago. We can escape the feelings of killing our-selves.

Sometimes our suicidal feelings can come from our other "parts." Our little ones have trouble dealing with all of their pain. They can feel the pain of remembering is so bad that dead would feel better. Dead is dead, the opposite of life. It is not an option. Our survival is maintained by staying alive, both then and now. We know if we accidentally cut our finger, it will hurt momentarily, need an antiseptic, perhaps need stitches, or maybe even need a bandage. We also know that the pain from the cut will diminish over time as it heals. The same is true of our remembering and dealing with memories. The inside people have a great amount of unexpressed pain. They were created to deal with trauma and separating the feelings is a new concept. To a little one inside who thinks dead would feel better, it sounds good but is unrealistic. Being in crisis does not mean we need to die. Each time one of our parts remembers and shares across the whole system, we get one step closer to healing and to life. Staying alive is the goal; healing is the goal; and death does not help us meet the challenge.

Feelings cannot kill us. Memories cannot kill us. Both feelings and memories are things that will pass. It's like riding the crest of a wave—you know the wave will eventually dissipate. Go with the flow and make the voyage through the feelings or the memory. Do not fight it. Realize there is an end in sight can keep you going. The idea of survival got us this far, why not allow it to continue keeping us alive?

Try to name the feeling, perhaps beginning from a simple list of sad, mad, glad, and scared. If you or your inside person want to go further to define the feeling, try a thesaurus or dictionary. I started a list of feelings and kept adding to them using just the sad, mad, glad, and scared words as headings. Making a list of feelings will be surprising—at least it was to me. I was not aware there were so many ways to perceive the emotions. Somehow, defining the emotion I was experiencing helped me understand that this really is a feeling and it will pass. Naming and facing the feeling helps to relieve it.

What does suicide represent in our healing process? Is it a fantasy solution? Is it necessary to know our own value and self-worth? Could it also be a part of self-discovery? When we look at an alcoholic, we know that the person must hit rock-bottom before the willingness to survive and change kicks in. Is it possible that the same is true of multiples? We have to be willing to put the past in the past, before we can think of living again. We must look inside our-selves to see that we are valuable and we can survive. Is our process of change and healing really that much different for recovery? Deciding to live is the turning point.

Personally, I came close to attempting suicide several times, but I did not follow through on the idea. Why? First, I had contracts with my inside parts to stay alive for their sakes and mine. Our therapist helped us understand that if one of us killed "our-self," then all of us die too. There is no negotiation for suicide if a survival contract has been signed not to do it. All of us in the one body are bound to the legality of the contract. The contract should be prepared and signed before a crisis arises. (Ask your therapist about a survival contract. There is a copy of a really good one in the book *Living with Your Selves: A Survival Manual for People With Multiple Personalities*<sup>1</sup>).

A good contract leaves space for signatures of those (inside and outside) who will call for help and keep calling until someone is reached. It is important to keep the body safe from harm. Second, someone within my system stepped

forward and volunteered to make calls to hot lines, therapists, friends, and so forth, and continue to call until we obtained help.

How do you keep selves from harming the body while awaiting help? One method to deter "cutters" is to keep red marking pens available. The red "magic marker" is used as a knife to "cut" for the ones who want to self-destruct by cutting. I had huge bruises where they pounded with the marking pens, but apparently the red ink (as a representation of blood) was sufficient to keep me alive until help arrived. The bruises hurt, and eventually the marker ink wore off. The important thing was, I was still alive. Each crisis is different. Each is still handled the same—with a need to survive. Once, in a moment of hopelessness, one of my little ones, named Sara, asked if she would still be able to draw and enjoy daisies if I carried out my plan. The realization of what I was about to do—end it all not only for myself, but also for Sara and my other inner parts, hit me hard. It stopped me in my tracks and made me think. Why would I do this to all the fragments of my-self, when they had all worked so hard to keep me alive? It was a turning point for me. I still had my down moments of depression, but never again the desperation. Granted, anti-depressants were and are helpful for me, but it is the turning point that is the most important ingredient I am trying to explain. When I understood that killing myself would not be the cure I was seeking, I could move forward in my healing. I truly believe it is a process we go through to discover our own self-worth.

People are there to help us through the tough times if we only reach out and accept their offer. Suicide should never be an option for anyone in our inner systems. We all fought so hard to live through our abuse. It is wrong to lose it now. Stay safe. Get help. You really are important. One day you maybe able to reach out and touch another survivor. Make it a goal. Together we all make a strong network called *living and being*.

1. Hocking, Sandra J. and Company. *Living With Your Selves: A Survival Manual for People With Multiple Personalities*. Rockville, MD. Launch Press, 1992.

## My Tablets

I like to draw  
 on big paper now  
 and a little tablet too  
 And I can use  
 As much as I want  
 And so I usually do.

There's a pretty case  
 filled with coloring things  
 there's many things to find  
 I can use them all  
 in the pictures I make  
 Every different kind.

Crayons and pencils  
 are the regular stuff  
 and there's a whole bunch more  
 Boxes with  
 a thousand shades  
 and paints inside a crayon color.

There's a box of chalk  
 with five hundred colors  
 and greasy chalk that smirches  
 There's fancy pens  
 with feathered ends  
 Black messy stuff that smudges.

I like to try  
 the different things  
 to fill up all the sheet  
 I mix them up  
 and make it bright  
 and then it looks real neat!

Today I looked  
 at all my pictures  
 and some I knew I made  
 My teddy bear was there I saw  
 And a page with kites and kids  
 and flowers on parade.

Lots of the pages  
 are filled up now  
 with the colors from my case  
 But some of the pictures  
 look much too real and feel  
 mixed-up and out of place.

Many eyes looked  
 back at me  
 and some I didn't know  
 A crowd of me  
 and many more  
 splattered in a row.

My tablets mixed  
 me up today  
 but it feels like I should know  
 The people on  
 the tablet page  
 but if I do—how so?

I didn't want to  
 see them there  
 I wanted to use my stuff  
 I didn't want  
 to go away  
 but staying got real tough.

Two tablets sit open  
 on the ground  
 and I can see the eyes  
 My face is there  
 among the crowd  
 my voice among the cries.

Someone's been drawing  
 in my books  
 and I know it's nice to share  
 but it scares me to find  
 the faces and feelings  
 that I did not put there.

I'll have to pretend  
 that I made them all  
 No one will know there are many  
 But people will know  
 I can't draw so good  
 I can't pretend there aren't any.

Maybe the tablets  
 aren't really mine  
 and the pencils and colors I see  
 Maybe I'm dreaming  
 or playing a game  
 and maybe I'm not even me.

That's silly—I'm here  
 I'm five and I draw  
 there are even pictures of me  
 So I'll draw what I draw  
 and feel what I feel  
 And just be surprised what I see.

*By Kerry (with some help, I think—  
 Karen V.)*

MV

## Negotiating with Alters

Although I am more than eight years into my healing process, I am still working on negotiating with my alters. I realized within months of the first memories bursting forth like a tidal wave that I had a lot of stuff to deal with. By the time I learned how many alters I have, I knew that if I truly wanted to heal from the mountain of garbage my father dumped on me, I was not going to have time for conflict among my alters. I was not going to be able to go in mental circles because of my fear of the truths my alters had buried.

I have had experience with versions of consensus process, and feel most comfortable with that form of government. I have introduced those ideas to my alters, and for several years we have practiced sharing conscious space while determining our action through a consensus process. This means that if someone objects, we find out why. If an alter is confused or deluded about something, sharing information usually helps clear up her confusion. If she knows something the rest

of us need to know about a situation, sharing information helps us to protect ourself. Either way, treating each other's input with respect has kept us from getting impossibly bogged down in the sheer weight of what we have to deal with. It has also lessened the risk of alters feeling suicidal; once they find out what great stuff we've been accomplishing, they get excited and want to join in the fun. For you who are too busy fighting with your alters to take time to heal—you're missing the time of your life. There is nothing so fine, or so powerful, in my experience, as working in joyous harmony with my alters. I can't yet do this with all alters at once, but I believe we can eventually accomplish that goal. I can't imagine it, but I do look forward to it. What a rush! I wish the same—working together as a time—for each and every one of you.

*By Julie of Julie et al*

MV



RAGE

©  
 3 24 96  
 GERALDINE  
 BRJA

## Letters

It has been difficult for us to find a therapist. In 1992 the diagnosis of MPD was attached to us. We had therapy with a therapist whom one of the alters fired in 1994. This therapist will never take us back. At the time our therapist was fired (she is the only therapist in this town that treats MPD/DID) the diagnosis was changed to schizoaffective disorder by the psychiatrist. Now we are pumped full of drugs and there is no one to talk to. I have tried several therapists. They have been skeptical, rude and patronizing. I don't know where to turn for help.

Your newsletter is a lot of support to us. Thank you.

I've learned to be silent about my symptoms because every time I mention something to my doctor, he pumps me more meds. I want to be alive, not lethargic. All we want is someone to talk to without being ridiculed. We've reached out to what is called the "helping profession." Yet it seems like the "hurting profession," when there is so much skepticism. I don't care if the skeptics call us schizoaffective or MPD/DID. What I do care about is the hour I'm paying for. There has been enough hurt in our lives. We don't need more.

Once our angry alter fired the therapist, we were all out in the cold. The therapist won't take us back. All I've been able to get since then is surface talk from counselors.

We began journaling and that really helps. Our home is a safe haven and that helps. Can anyone suggest anything else that might help us?

Thanks—Jennifer R.

### Roaming Dragons

When storms have forced out  
the light from without  
and from within,  
in darkness, I write.

To give the demons  
form and boundary and  
to quench their power,  
in desperation, I write.

Since dragons never roam  
in light of day nor  
in peace of mind  
in fear, I write.

By Rosemarie W.

(Roaming Dragons previously appeared in *Psychopoetica*, Spring 1991)

MV

(The following was a reply to a letter in *Many Voices*. It's good information for us all! -Lynn W)

### Friendship Tips

How we make friends tends to determine a lot about the future friendship. If you are searching for friends, I would suggest volunteering to do something you really love. This is a way you can meet lots of really good-hearted people who value contribution and kindness in life. Another way is to attend women's camping trips or book reading circles. From there, you might meet one or two women who really resonate with you.

The most comfortable way I have found is to talk about post-traumatic stress and abuse in ways that illustrate your strength and courage. You might share a little by sharing a poem or a drawing that you have completed, or say in a casual way (when the timing is right, for example, when dreams or psychology surface in the conversation), that you are in therapy or recovering from post-traumatic stress (leave dissociation for later) in an understated, non-dramatic way. There are two reasons for this. First, you get to test the waters. If a woman is really supportive of your healing and creativity, chances are better that she can deal with knowing more in the way of dissociation. If this sends her around the bend, then you have protected yourself from going further. Second, you get to illustrate that you are taking care of yourself. Even when a woman is sympathetic, she may be overwhelmed if she perceives that you need care-taking or tend to be dependent, and may withdraw from a friendship.

My general observation has been that if there is a response of silence or no response at all, the person is not ready to deal with what is being said (sometimes this kind of response is a polite way of saying, "I don't want to hear this." A little better than an angry outburst, but still difficult). I'd be careful about saying too much, too soon. It can also go the other way. Some people jump into the water all at once with declarations of full support.

only to realize that they have over-invested themselves for reasons of their own. When these people finally decide that they have made a mistake, they may abruptly leave or decide to minimize your experiences.

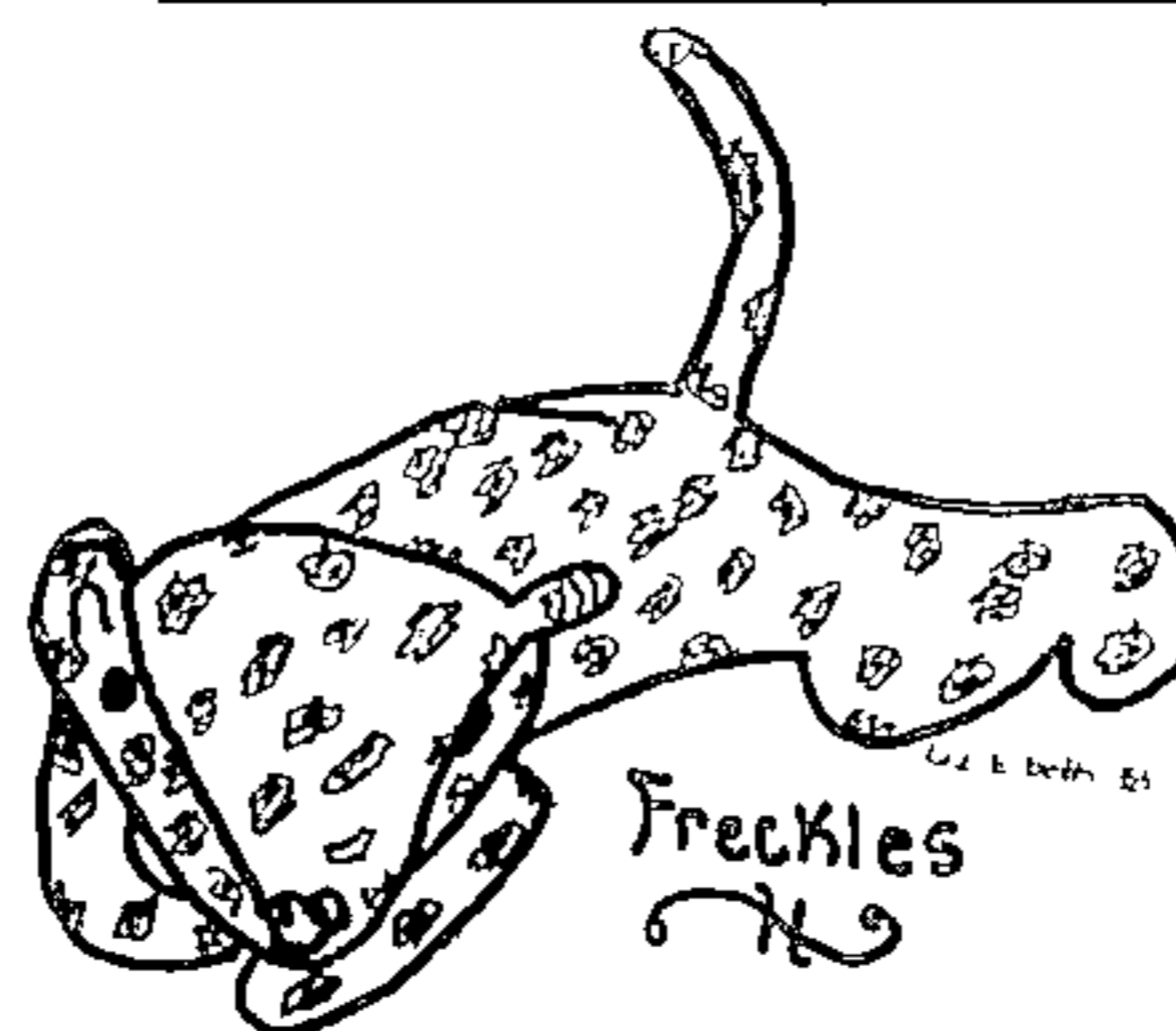
The best thing I can tell you is not to build friendships on the commonality of having been abused, unless both women have undertaken substantial healing and have many other things in common as well. Chances are, if you meet enough women, you will meet some other survivors of severe abuse, many of them creative and committed to healing as a long-term goal. I have a rule of thumb that I have found helpful: gravitate towards those women who have succeeded and gotten better, who are healthier than you are. This way, it is easy to stay motivated and not get stuck in pain and anger from the past. Mentoring is one of the healthier ways to create a bond. Be wary, though, of women who are "doing healing better" than you, and seem to have a lot invested in seeing you as not capable. You are capable, and good friends will rally behind you and encourage you, accepting you where you are, with occasional nudges in the right directions.

Your therapist and husband are probably your best resources for the really tough stuff. They can hear the details and dynamics and may best know how to help you. Your child is probably the best reason for moving ahead. You need to be able to nourish, protect, and care for that precious life to the best of your ability. For your friendship needs, just try reaching out a little at a time, in activities that you really enjoy. Friendships are built little steps at a time.

Sometimes inviting a woman over for dinner or a day at the beach, offering to give her a ride home from art class, or hosting a women's book circle in your own home (you could post an ad in a local women's center or YMCA) can all be ways to tippy-toe into the waters. Just be real aware of your own expectations, to be sure you are ready to be a friend, as well as have one.

By Gwen

MV



### I love Beanie Babies!

They help me a lot. My favorite is Freckles. I think he is a jaguar. He is so cute. I tried to draw him for you but it was very hard. Freckles is here when I am scared, lonely or just bored. I curl him up on top of my stomach and somehow I feel more loved. Try Beanie Babies, just for the fun of it.

Liz-E-Beth & Angel



## Books

### **The Dissociative Child: Diagnosis, Treatment, and Management (2nd Edition)**

Edited by Joyanna L. Silberg, Ph.D.  
Foreword by Richard P. Kluft, M.D. ©  
1996, 1998. Published by Sidran Press,  
Lutherville, MD. (410) 825-888 or  
www.sidran.org. 400 pgs. \$45 paperback.

I was very impressed with this book. It's not just well-organized and comprehensive. It's also largely understandable to lay readers, such as myself. And it made me wish again I was about 40 years younger, and in a different type of home environment, so I could have reaped the benefits of early treatment for my dissociative tendencies. Silberg and her contributing authors repeatedly stress the value of dealing with dissociation early, preferably before adolescence (a chaotic time for nearly everyone, and doubly-so for dissociators). Also, I wish I'd had the knowledge in this book when my children were young. Dissociation may not be "contagious" in the usual sense, but the contradictory behavior of dissociative parents, coupled with a possibly-inherited tendency to dissociate, leads to more dissociative

risk for children raised in such households. However, in Chapter 6, on treatment outcomes, Silberg states that children living with DID parents had outcomes just as positive as those in non-dissociative households. This may be important information for DD parents with good parenting skills who face custody battles. I'd say this book is a must for clinicians working with families or children, and a wise investment for every dissociative parent. Even those of us who are no longer actively parenting our children can find useful guides here for understanding our own history, and clues to methods we might use to help reconnect inside parts. I especially like the cautions about not over-investing in alters, insisting on "total" responsibility, and using language that encourages both positive self-regard and eventual unification. In her preface to the 2nd edition, Silberg also brings up the interesting view that dissociative disorders, while usually caused by what the average person would call "severe trauma," may sometimes appear in people without objectively-severe trauma histories. This theory has been hinted at in the

past, but is rarely stated so clearly. Her thought is that individual perception of pain or distress may sometimes lead to the extreme avoidance that underlies dissociation. There's much in this book that made sense to me. I recommend it, and if you can't afford to buy it yourself, talk to your local library. Perhaps they'll order a copy.  
—Lynn W.

### **The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond.**

By Patricia Evans. © 1992, 1996.  
Published by Adams Media Company.  
ISBN-1055850-582-2. 221 pages. \$9.95  
paperback.

Mostly aimed at women's experiences, this book is excellent for men also. It defines what is verbal abuse, describes different types of verbal abuse, and gives examples. From trivializing of your emotions to abuse disguised as jokes, Evans clearly explains the damage this type of abuse does to the victim. Part Two of the book gives concrete examples of ways to take back your power and how to respond safely to verbal abuse. I found this book very helpful. —Eileen

**COMING SOON!**

We need LOTS of writing, art and ideas for our coming issues. Themes or not-themes, send it in! We love to see your work!

*THANK YOU!* -Lynn W.

**April 1999**

What are you afraid to tell your therapist? Attachment issues. ART: Courage and freedom. DEADLINE: Feb. 1, 1999

**June 1999**

Building healthy habits, discarding others. All addictions and obsessions discussed. ART: Your center of power. DEADLINE: April 1, 1999

**August 1999**

Embracing joy and laughter in our lives. ART: Cartoons and silly stuff. DEADLINE: June 1, 1999



By J.B.

**October 1999**

Multiple Issues: seizures, Attention deficit, traumatic medical procedures, infertility, scars, aging. ART: Health and recovery. DEADLINE: August 1, 1999

**December 1999**

Forgiveness. How to release what we don't remember. Dealing with fears of intimacy. ART: Loving yourself, sharing with others. DEADLINE: Oct. 1, 1999

**Share with us!**

Prose, poetry, and art are accepted on upcoming issue themes, (and even on NON-themes, if it's really great.) DO send humor, cartoons, good ideas, and whatever is useful to you. Please limit prose to about 4 typed double-spaced pages. Line drawings (black on white) are best. We can't possibly print everything. Some pieces will be condensed, but we'll print as much as we can. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return of your originals and a note giving us permission to publish and/or edit or excerpt your work.

Subscriptions for a year (six issues) of *MANY VOICES*: \$36 in the U.S., \$42US in Canada, \$48US elsewhere. Back issues always available, each issue 1/6 yearly price. Enclose the form below (or a copy) with your check, and mail to *MANY VOICES*, P.O. Box 2639, Cincinnati, OH 45201-2639. Phone: (513) 751-8020.

**MANY VOICES**

**NEW!**  
**We now accept Visa & Mastercard!**



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

I have a Dissociative Disorder  Professional/therapist  Relative/Friend

Subscription type:  New  Renewal  Gift Send full list of past themes: \_\_\_\_\_

Full yr. (6 iss.) '89 \_\_\_ '90 \_\_\_ '91 \_\_\_ '92 \_\_\_ '93 \_\_\_ '94 \_\_\_ '95 \_\_\_ '96 \_\_\_ '97 \_\_\_ '98 \_\_\_ '99 \_\_\_

Specific issues or preferred start date: \_\_\_\_\_

1 year: \$36 in U.S.; \$42US in Canada; Elsewhere, \$48 in U.S. currency drawn on a U.S. bank. Make check payable to *MANY VOICES* & send with this form to  
*MANY VOICES*, PO Box 2639, Cincinnati, OH 45201-2639

**CHARGE IT!** (Please print clearly) (circle one) VISA  MASTERCARD

Cardholder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Acct# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp.Date \_\_\_\_\_ Total:\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_