

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

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In this issue:

Creating Safety Inside and Out Leaving Abusers



Feeling Safe by Cocoon

Unspoken Needs

As I gaze out into the world around
my being
I sigh and wonder where is
the place for me?

Is it behind the rock or out
in the belly of the sunshine
Heart beating wildly

so excited at all I see around me
so breathless at all the gifts
that adorn my sight

I stop and let my soul expand at
the scope of such that eclipses
my vision

How exciting to be a part
of such wonders and
deafening jubilation

I hold my breath at the vitality of the
earth's secrets that close
around myself.

And I raise my hands
in joyous exuberance, mouth open and
scream out in excitement

And I yell *This is for Me!*
The Me that was
meant to be a part of this countless
world and its wonders

I have been given permission to finally
see the Me that I have kept hidden
before
but am encircled in wonders now...

By Kathy A.

MV

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professionals concerning your specific questions.

Leaving the Abusers: No More

By Kathy Gulliver A.

For forty years of my life I was amnesic to events in my childhood. At that age I started to remember. I mark that age because that time of my life was my new beginning. Before that I had been given a smorgasbord of diagnoses, numerous hospital stays, years in day treatment, and was also trying at the same time to parent five young children. At this time it really was extremely difficult. It was then that I was contemplating suicide for the umpteenth time. I called my sister out of desperation and she said, finally, after almost a lifetime of silence and watching me deteriorate, "I think I know what your problem is. Dad Had Sex With Us All Of Our Childhood." (Incest, SRA, and Prostitution.) My memory started opening up. And gradually over the next fifteen years our/my mind opened up and reams of gut wrenching experiences surfaced, and within that time, many others within came forth also.

But let me regress and explain what happened after my sister and us shared that day. Well, when I spoke out loud, my family turned on me. I confronted my parents and they denied everything and turned on me. It felt like I was experiencing evil personified when I looked back at them after they yelled and berated me. My siblings, those who shared with me their experiences with the incest, would not leave my parent's side. I will never know why. He (the father) did threaten he'd kill himself if anyone spoke or left him. I'm not sure of the dynamics of my siblings; it's a shame.

I know that kind of behavior does happen, to identify with the abuser. I pulled away, too traumatized to continue the charade that was my family's existence...always the perfect family. At one point, as I was beginning my walk away from them, my sister sneaked my infant son to see my parents. I was horrified. Exposing myself anymore to their sickness was one thing, but bringing

my children to it was unacceptable to me. I wrote a letter to each of my siblings explaining my decision to leave the family, which included everyone.

It's been twenty years since that date, and I have never gone back. At first it was very difficult creating my own happenings with my children. They had been used to big events, holidays, birthdays etc., as was I. In the beginning it was very lonely without my siblings. Despite everything we had been close. Our first Christmas without my siblings, my children, my significant other and I had a big gap where it usually was filled with the big celebration with my family of origin. There was nothing, so we all went to the movies to fill the time. It was not what we were used to, but it got us by.

I also spent a lot of time grieving over the fact that I never truly had a mother or father. We—my significant other and our children—started creating our own new memories. Over time, it got easier being without my family of origin. But let me be clear—it was very hard.

I think now, one reason that helped was meeting the others I had created to deal with the abuse. They started showing themselves. They were gradually feeling less afraid to share their reasons for being, now that I had left my family. I realize my true family was within. There were small ones, older ones, safe mothers and males—a big family within. Let me assure you, not everyone within was willing to get along with the others.

I will confess it's been a torture to grow. I can relate to so many of MV's contributors, facing years of trying everything and getting nowhere. Now as I work on myself, I have very little motivation to work on life's errands. But I am getting stronger.

Oh yes—last year one of my sisters came forward to meet with me. She confirmed over and over my memories and what also happened to my younger sister. Because I need

health around me and because she still visited my perpetrators, I could not continue my relationship with her. I needed to separate fully from my torturers. I wished her well and pray for her strength to finally get angry enough to leave also. I would welcome her back with warm arms open.

Our continuing health is paramount to us, so any connection in any way to my perpetrators was not to be. I would love some of my siblings back in my life, to share my healthy self, my grandchildren, my days, but alas, for my health and the others within to feel safe, it is not to be.

Today I am mostly integrated, not really pleased with the results but, I know, on we go to healthier days. MV

Puzzled Pieces

You break the seal, open the box
Corners, colors and edges get
segregated
Overwhelmed, hundreds, thousands,
millions of pieces
Fit those together, tear those apart
Group the like together,
scatter the rest
No photo on the cover, no help,
no hints
Blindfolded, you see with your heart,
your hands
They won't fit together,
none of them will.
Will they ever?
Will they fit together,
will they match each other?
Will they hide, will they fight,
will they come out at night?
Eventually, with corrosion and time
They form a masterpiece
A classic portrait
The struggle of life.

By katiekay

MV

MV



Safety

By Paul T. - www.mindparts.org

I have read MV off and on for the past 18 years. Wow! That means for at least 18 years I have been on some sort of healing journey. That's a little less than half my life. Mind boggling when I think about it because sometimes it feels like I've accomplished absolutely nothing. I still have flashbacks, body memories, I switch and struggle with self-harm, but rarely act on the urges. However, everything is different now.

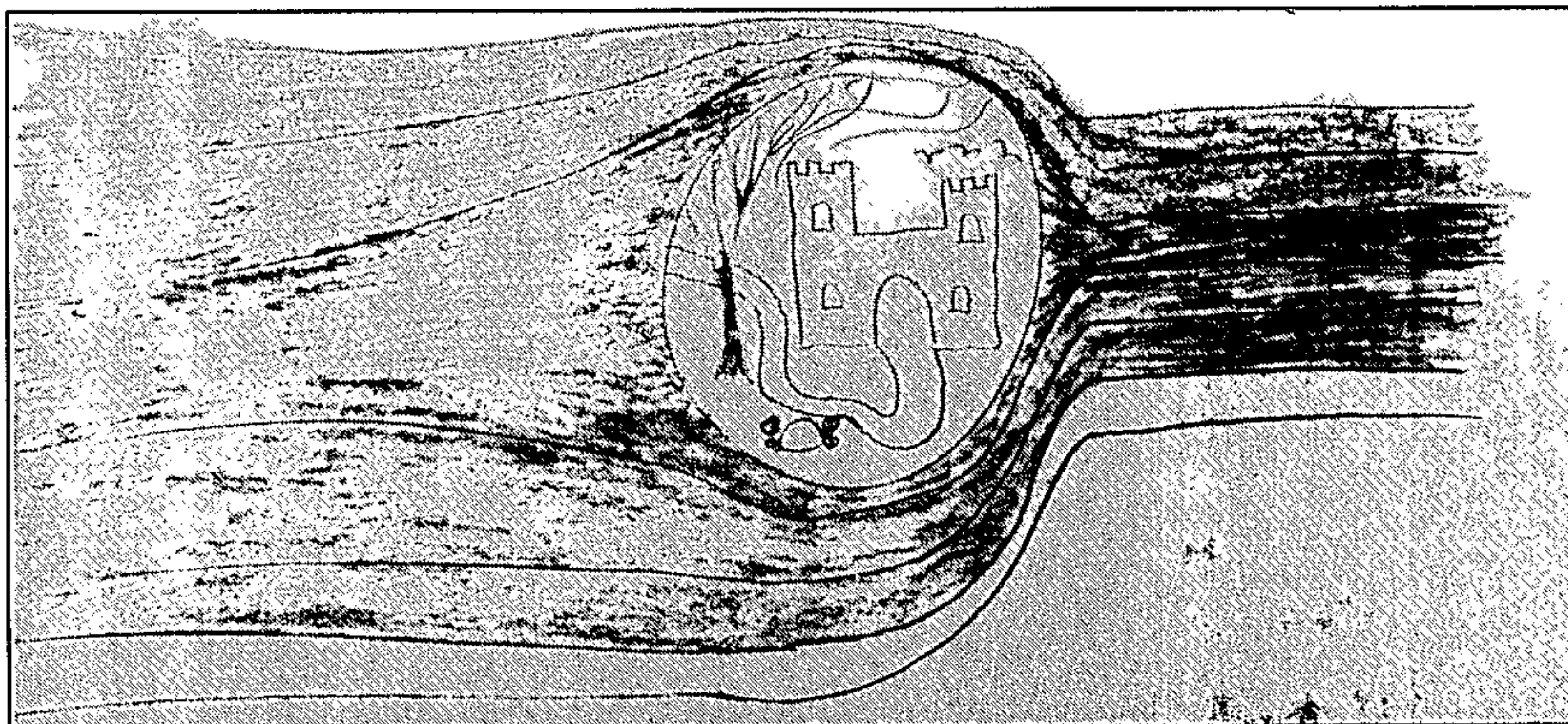
The biggest change is that I've made a commitment to be alive. When you can honestly make that level of commitment, you will know you are on a different, more sturdier

that, things will get better. But none of that made any sense until I found my own way. I didn't used to think I could communicate with parts of me. I never really believed I was in it with some of the darker parts. A lot of times I didn't even believe in parts or that I was abused.

Flashbacks and body memories are sometimes more debilitating now that I don't "act out" and because they are attached to feelings. But I have new skills. I can sometimes say to myself that this is a memory and not be too caught up in it as much as I used to. I can curl up with my stuffed animals. Be comforted by loved ones. I can

used to stay with the parts? My answer is that I am stronger now and able to experience them in a more whole way and not be destroyed. I guess that means I'm healing. This is why it's important to take a step back and assess. My knowledge that I am healing gives me the strength to go on.

Healing, though, goes hand in hand with safety, which is the topic of this issue. I have done more over the past year to create internal and external safety than at any other time in my life. I have finally been able to recognize triggers and take steps to keep myself safe. I recognize my



This drawing represents my safe place. The striations are in different colors in the original and represent energy flow from right to left, and how the safe place deflects everything and keeps the inside protected.
Paul T.

path to healing. Suddenly you are forced to deal with the pain of all of you (yourself and your parts). You are forced to find healthier ways to push through, like breathing or drawing or writing or crying. You are forced to learn about all the parts of you and not just push them away. And you do it because you know it's the only way!

Healing from trauma, though, is kind of like learning. You don't start out knowing how it is that $F=ma$, you build up to it. I have had many helpful people tell me that if I just do this or

change my plans and say to myself that it's okay.

The largest area of growth is how I deal with my somewhat fragmented internal structure. I often denied that my "system" existed. I still do that to a degree, but I am beginning to empathize with parts and the result is increased sharing and communication and trust. The barriers, I am finding, don't need to always be so severe. So while I ask myself why, if I am getting better, do I have to experience so many bad and painful feelings that

awesome responsibility to my wife and two young children (and to myself and the children within). I do things now that I never would conceive of doing. I let my parts have time to experience what makes them feel comforted. This could be playing piano or writing or drawing or talking. And I take my internal work and therapy much more seriously now. I don't go back to work after therapy. I sit in the safe library for a few hours before therapy to write and draw and to figure out where all of me is at.

All of this change has come quite quickly for me. And this is what I want to tell all you MV readers. Only recently did I find a new therapist who was able to work with me in a very different way. This therapist works with all of me and she uses a range of methods, from talk to drawing to music. It's not been easy. The commitment is huge! But I now know everything is about safety. I finally found a safe place inside, after many years of being "told" to do so. Last September, I experienced an incredible state of consciousness, not unlike I suppose what people hope to achieve through meditation or yoga. I saw and experienced the infinite nature of the universe and my whole being was bathed for several weeks in a rich energy. That experience was my awakening. A gift, I said, for all the hard effort I had made and for the way in which I shifted my healing focus. I have not stayed at that place, but have achieved glimpses of it since. I now have something to reach for.

A few weeks ago, in a dream, my inner family took me on a journey to show me their safe place. It is a wonderfully rich place not unlike "Camelot." Now when I meditate with myself, in a safe place, I can close my eyes and go back to this place and stand alongside my parts who have finally let me in. Sometimes I do it by being quiet. Sometimes soothing music helps me get there. This is not, by any means, the end of my journey. In fact, in many ways, it's only the beginning. My parts inside are finally trusting me enough to share. We are beginning to gain a sense of family. Even darker parts that I have wished away many times are being accepted and accepting others in return.

It can be remarkably healing to accept your inner structure. But you cannot just stop there. You have to accept and make an effort to change. Only then can you experience healing.

MV has been a reality check for me over the years. I have read about survivors who have immense struggles. And survivors who have integrated. Sometimes I cannot understand what I read. And often I say "These people aren't me!" But I am here to say that you are me! You

are my sisters and brothers. I, like many of you, have suffered inexplicable childhood trauma. Denying is such a barrier. And today I am not ashamed to even say I have parts inside.

I also want MV readers to know that, if you haven't already, you can find a path to healing. My awakening experiences were gifts that come with a responsibility. I am here to tell you that there is a safe place. You can find it. Trust yourself, work hard, and open your heart. It's right in front of you and it's incredible.

Shortly after I wrote this contribution, I had to go inpatient for nearly two weeks. My hospitalization was extremely difficult for me as I began to come to terms with the body memories and the pain. The words I had written above finally sunk in and I realized that sometimes you need to ask for help. Sometimes the pain is too much and you need pain medication in order to just keep going. But above all, I came to fully accept that the abuse I suffered has had a major impact on me and I sustained a major life threatening injury. My work is about healing from that massive injury, by keeping me safe, my parts inside me safe, and those loved ones around me safe. Then quite suddenly, I began to grieve for the first time ever. My therapist said this is "monumental." I now am truly healing.

MV

Our Secret Safe Place

We have a secret safe place we go inside
that no one knows about but us.
We go there sometimes to clear our minds and to set old memories free.

It's a field filled with wildflowers where their sweetness has a chance...
Where we are free to look inside,
and alone to learn life's dance.

A garden grown of honesty and blossoming in trust.
Brought about by dreams and wishes that once started out as dust.

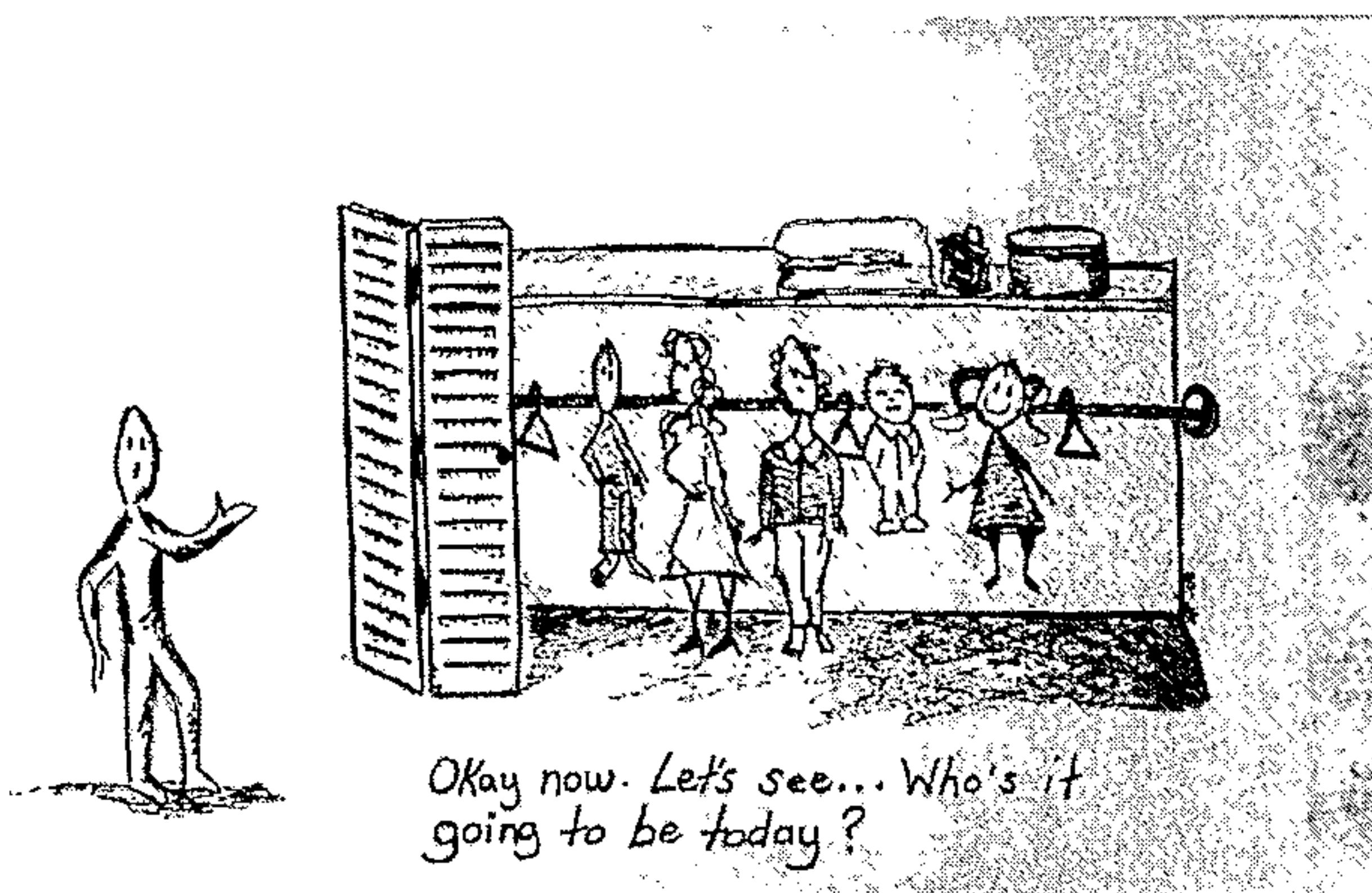
Solitude is such splendor and the hope becomes a flame,
making our souls so wild and free
There's no place so serene or safe.

To walk and play in this field
Alone in quiet peace.
it fills our spirits with such clarity
That all bad things shall cease.

This is our secret safe place inside
where all our dreams shall be.
And patience waits our sweet return
to this place we made for us.

By Jeanmarie R.

MV



By Hilary T.

Safety Before, During and After Therapy

By j. jones

For more than twenty years, since the time I was abused, I have dealt with safety issues. I attempted suicide for the first time in 7th Grade after my father made me feel ashamed of my grades. It was the "I'll show him" type of attempt. I tried to cut my wrist with a razor and it hurt so I stopped. I can't count the number of times I have attempted suicide. Fortunately, it never worked.

You may be surprised that I am glad I never succeeded. I know that a little over a year ago I would have thought different. People did not understand the pain I was in. They would say stuff like, "Be glad you are still breathing." I wasn't glad. "There is so much more to life, nothing is worth killing yourself over." I didn't believe that from my place of torment. "You should be grateful for the things you have. So many people in this world have much less than you do." I thought that was crap. "You have two beautiful children, how could you ever think of doing that?" Suicidal thoughts are not rational. I was in a personal hell that only one who has been there can understand. For 20 years I planned that I would kill myself after my kids were grown. That was the one thing that kept me alive. I didn't want to screw up their childhood.

For my safety during those 20 years I was hospitalized at least 10 times. I agreed to go in the hospital because I didn't feel able to survive a crisis. I never had to be convinced to go. Sometimes I went to the hospital to work on specific trauma in a safe way. If I had had a supportive husband, I would not have had to go in the hospital a couple times. [Not only was he not supportive, he was also emotionally and verbally abusive. One time when I thought about killing myself and had a gun, he told me, "You can't have had that. There's no way to reach it." I told him how I got to it and asked him to put it somewhere where I didn't know that it was. He put it back in the same place.] He got angry with me when I

felt suicidal. He told me I would lose my job since I was in the hospital for so long. He told me no judge in his right mind would give me custody of the kids in a divorce. Every day seemed to be a struggle to survive during the last six years of our marriage.

My safety was in jeopardy as long as I stayed married to him. Every time I got out of the hospital the staff would ask me, "What are you going to do about your husband?" They recognized he was abusive and belittling me, which negatively impacted my emotional and personal wellbeing. So I took the first step toward long term safety and I divorced him. I did have to wait for the kids to be pretty much able to care for themselves if I wasn't able to do so at times.

I felt immensely better on my own, yet I still had major depression most of the year as I worked in therapy. [I'd tell my therapist this is a bad time of the year for me in March, April, May, summer and fall. She said that every time of the year was difficult for me. During this time, I was still working and commuting an hour each way. My children were left home alone a lot and I felt guilty about that. They were 9 and 6 years old.] My safety during that time was kept by having a "safety contract" with my therapist. Safety Contracts don't always work for people. For me they were a binding promise that I had to abide by. I only broke it one time in my 20 years of depression and therapy.

When creating a safety contract with my therapist, I had to be very specific. Some of us were sneaky and would try to find a way to hurt us that wasn't in the contract. We had to promise to not do anything until we talked to our therapist. We had to add all the ways of self harm to be explicit in our promise. We also put dates on our contracts and often could only keep them a few days when things were rough. We would email our therapist a new contract when one was up. Later we found out we

needed to have our alters agree to keep the contract. Not all signed, but the older parts formed an alliance which allowed us to keep the contract and prevent any part from breaking it. It was important that our therapist sign it. She kept a copy and I took the one I wrote home with me. It wasn't always easy to stick with it, but it has worked for me for the last 12 years.

A good Safety Contract with a therapist looks something like this:

I promise not to attempt to harm myself in any way without talking to you first. I will not take more medicine than is prescribed. I will not inflict any bodily harm to myself or others. I will not allow destructive parts out before I see you again. I will not drink any alcohol or take any illegal drugs. I promise not to purposely cut, bruise, or engage in any self harm behaviors.

If I cannot keep this contract for any reason I will call you at 111-1111 And will wait to speak to you until you return my call. If I cannot reach you, I will call the Women's Center Crisis line at 123-4567.

If I am in immanent danger, I will go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911 to have someone take me there.

This contract is in effect until June 15, 20XX.

Date _____
Signature of all parts _____

Therapist Signature _____

Therapists' Phone # _____

Another safety tactic involves building safe places inside and out. This is an important foundation for many aspects of safety. In the hospital we were taught to create our very own safe place which we could use whenever we needed to feel safe or calm down. This place is full of details involving all five senses – sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. It takes a lot of descriptive writing, but it is your

place. You are the one who determines what is safe and comforting.

After writing your place the next step is to draw a detailed picture of your safe place. Mine is an island so I drew a beach with palm trees, kids, sand castles, gentle waves and sunshine. I could see the beauty of this place. I could hear the waves come on to the shore and see the foam on the sand. I could taste the salt in the air and feel the wind on my face blowing loose strands of my hair around. In the hospital we were told to practice going to this safe place three times daily to cement it into our mind. Over the years I have added different areas to my island as needed. I have a home with a healing room in it and a yard for the littles to play in. I have a healing circle and a healing beach. I have a strengthening place as well. I have recorded descriptions of these places and put gentle music in the background. I listen to the tape every night as I fall asleep. This has really helped my feelings of general safety all around.

We use our safe place as a foundation for every therapy session. Whether we are doing EMDR, hypnosis, or just talking we start with everyone who is working in our safe place. Generally we begin in our Healing Circle. The part that needs healing will be there with any other supportive parts we need or want there. We end the session with containment of anything not resolved and having the part that was working go to a healing, comforting place on our island. This makes a huge difference in therapy for me. The therapy is much more gentle than it's been before and I usually walk out feeling better than when I walked in. This was amazing to me, since I had been sharing abuse stories with my other therapist and having to recover from the trauma after every session. The therapist I am working with now is much more structured and the work is targeted to a specific event. Since working with this therapist, I have not been suicidal for more than a few days in the past year! I never thought this could happen.

Containment is a huge part of staying safe for us. Generally, we

contain our feelings or memories in a box and leave it in our therapist's office. We originally used a paper maché box that we had painted and made an inside model of sorts. Now we are capable of using our imagination to contain things. We even made a chute in our safe home that goes to our therapist's office. We fill up our containment box, and put it down the chute. We remind ourselves that the feelings will be there when we are ready to work with them with our therapist. I recently thought of a new container. It is a wine cask barrel with a spigot on it. We can regulate how much comes out of the barrel. For now, it's just a few drops.

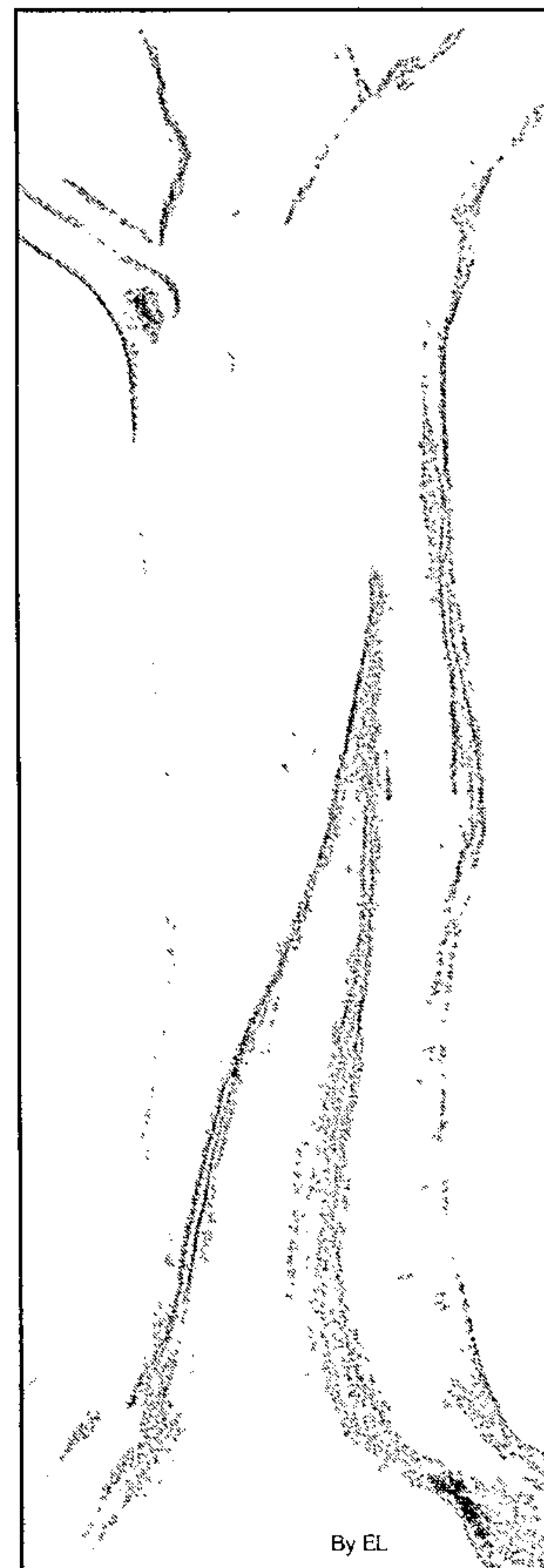
The last part of safety for us is to try to avoid triggering events. This is often easier said than done, but as we learn what our triggers are it becomes easier. We make sure that we don't have things around to harm us if we do get triggered. I don't keep any razors in sight to avoid the temptation of cutting. I also give my meds to my therapist if I am not feeling in control of my safety or going through a rough time.

If we need to schedule an extra session with our therapist we do that as well, but for now we are good for once a week. I believe the creation and practicing of safe places inside has been very effective for me. My anxiety is way down with this type of planning. I also have some of the "effects" outside that are in my safe place. The main thing is my healing blue comforter. I got one to put on my bed. It is described thoroughly in my healing room. So every night as I sleep, I listen to my safe place description under my blue comforter. I go to sleep feeling safe. I also surround myself with a white healing light when I go to bed.

I believe safety is a critical thing to work with your therapist on. I think the bottom line here is two fold. First, you don't have to be feeling suicidal your entire life or after every therapy session. I am proof of that. I have improved my mental health to the point that I can see my progress and do more than sleep all day. Secondly, you don't need to be retraumatized after your therapy sessions. If you are not feeling safe when you leave your

therapist's office, it is important to discuss it. It is possible to do effective therapy without feeling awful all the time. You deserve to have a therapist that has your interests in mind. My therapist of 2 years told me one day that what we were doing wasn't working. She recommended another therapist for me and my healing is much improved. Referring me was the most kind and professional thing she could have done for me and I really appreciate that. Not only has working with a different therapist kept me safe, it has allowed me to participate in life again.

MV



By EL

Hope House

By Crystal-MyLove & Co

This is the story of our "safe place." It is the place in which we have shared our lives and hid away from those who tortured us. The "Inside-Family" and I co-created this home in Gossamer Grove, somewhere this side of Heaven.

Secretly tucked away from the world, you follow a cobblestone path thick with wildflowers, and trees as far as the eyes can imagine. Once you reach the circular clearing, you will find yourself looking up at a most interesting sight.

Before you towers the Oak Tree of the Ancients, upon which is nestled an enchanting two story house within its branches.

At the base of the tree is a majestically carved wooden door that is painted white. Open the door and you find a set of carved stairs winding their way upward within this great tree. Ascend the winding stairs. Once you arrive at the top of the stairs, you will find a door beset with panels carved to represent the seasons. Notice also, that there is no door knob. Why do you think there is no door knob?

Because this is our safe place, only someone from the "inside" can let you into our home. Once inside, you will notice that this home is huge. It needs to be. Our "Inside-Family" has 42, unique, amazing, authentic individuals living around and about in here.

The Great Room in which you first find yourself is most welcoming. It is full of light and love, and is designed with a Frankl Lloyd Wright look. The ceilings are vaulted, and there is a stone fireplace that goes from floor to ceiling. The walls are white, as is the carpet that is teddy bear soft. There is enough room for everyone to watch a movie, read, play board games, snuggle, play Barbie's, listen to music, and process our day.

The kitchen is my favorite room! There is always something baking in the oven, warm chocolate chip cookies or artesian bread. We never run out of food. Josef (my Twin, our

equivalent of Mr. French from Family Affair-1966) runs not only the kitchen, but the entire household. He knows where everyone is at all times, he keeps our "switching schedules" organized. Whatever Josef imagines, we eat. There is a giant island bar that runs the entire length of the kitchen, with 42 different colored stools and coordinating dishes/silverware. Most importantly, we are allowed to eat whenever we are hungry. It has taken years for many of us to understand that it is OK to eat.

The remainder of the first floor include the additional rooms of the Art Gallery (displaying the "Inside-Family's" healing process in everything from crayon to collage—kiln fired pottery to glass—photography to textiles), Healing Art Therapy, Music Room, Play Therapy, Laundry, Library, Green House, Room of Silence, Toy Room and a Multi-Faith Chapel complete with a full size Chartres Labyrinth.

Upstairs are the bedrooms. Each bedroom has a private bathroom. These rooms are the ultimate safe place! Herein, like Hope House, you must be invited in for a visit. Everyone designs their own room: interior walls, flooring, windows, bedding, furniture, etc.

My bedroom is painted a worry free butter color. My bedding and carpeting are rich with earth tones, which are very calming and centering to me. I guess it sort of has a Grandmother's Lake Cottage look, vintage. It is filled with candles that smell like Macintosh apples and cinnamon. The bathroom is designed in muted wildflower colors, with candles that smell of vanilla. I have a huge claw foot bathtub and a pedestal sink to match. My windows have no coverings, so that I can let in as much sunshine and moonshine as possible.

The most unusual thing you might observe at Hope House is all the attention that is paid to the sliding glass windows in the Great Room. When the sun rises in the mornings,

they fill the room with light that is breathtaking. If you look out of these windows, what do you see? What is everyone looking at? Well, that would be the body.

Alters/Inside-Family can view what is going on with the body and whomever is residing within: doctor's appointment, school play, flute recital, being locked in the closet, hospital procedures, being abused by the mother, playing with our grandchildren, eating dinner with my husband/best friend, building Barbie dioramas, etc. Someone is always watching to make sure that "you" are safe. If necessary, a "switch" will take place. It's nice to know that someone literally always has your back.

So if you can find your way to Gossamer Grove, look for that Ancient Oak Tree and stop by for a visit. Peace be with you on your journey...

Hope House, our "Safe Place," has been our saving grace over the years. Multiple Personality Disorder/ Dissociative Disorder, as we were diagnosed, calls for us to have a safe place. Most of us at one time or another in our lives did not feel safe, and had "not nice" things done to us. Trust was broken, and we were literally shattered into pieces.

I have never viewed my MPD as a disorder; it has been the way that I and my alters coped with the chaos that surrounded us as a very young child. It's a coping mechanism that even after integration, I've grown to understand that I still need, to have healthy boundaries, in order to feel safe with family, friends, medical care professionals, etc.

MV



Steps in the Healing and Grieving Process for Survivors of Sexual and Ritual Abuse

By Kim Kubal — www.strengthtoheal.com

This is a unique set of steps for survivors of sexual and ritual abuse as they go through the intense experience of healing from severe trauma. Please note these steps do not necessarily follow in this order, and vary with each survivor. Typical spiritual questions are in parentheses.

1. DENIAL (God, this isn't happening to me)

This is characterized as shock and disbelief. Survivors are taught from an early age they won't be believed which feeds directly into their own desire for it not to be true. Then the reality and shock of the abuse starts to permeate one's entire system and shatters one's world view, familial ties, relationships and relationship to oneself and one's environment. Added to this dynamic, is the fact that there is little or no community support. This stage can produce severe forms of anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive sexual

feelings and thoughts, loss of appetite, compulsive eating. Emotional distress can cause distractions such as addictions, self-harm, dissociation, keeping busy.

2. ANGER (God, where were you when this was happening?)

Outward expressions of anger can cause hostility, rage, explosive behavior or turned inwards can cause depression, fear, self-mutilation. Guilt/self-blame (God, if only I had..... I wish I could have)

3. BARGAINING (God, I'll do anything if you make this go away)

Buying time to accept the reality of the situation.

4. DEPRESSION (God, I don't care anymore)

Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, withdrawal from friends, family, society in general, loss of pleasure, avoidance, extreme anxiety, preoccupation with death, panic, confusion, fearfulness. Depression can cause the survivor to self-medicate through addictions and self-harm in order

not to feel. Survivors take on the responsibility for what happened and blame themselves.

5. GRIEF (God, I can't handle this pain)

The survivor starts to experience the many losses associated with abuse— loss of a safe childhood, loss of love, loss of friends and support from the community. Grief can again cause the survivor to self-medicate through addictions and self-harm.

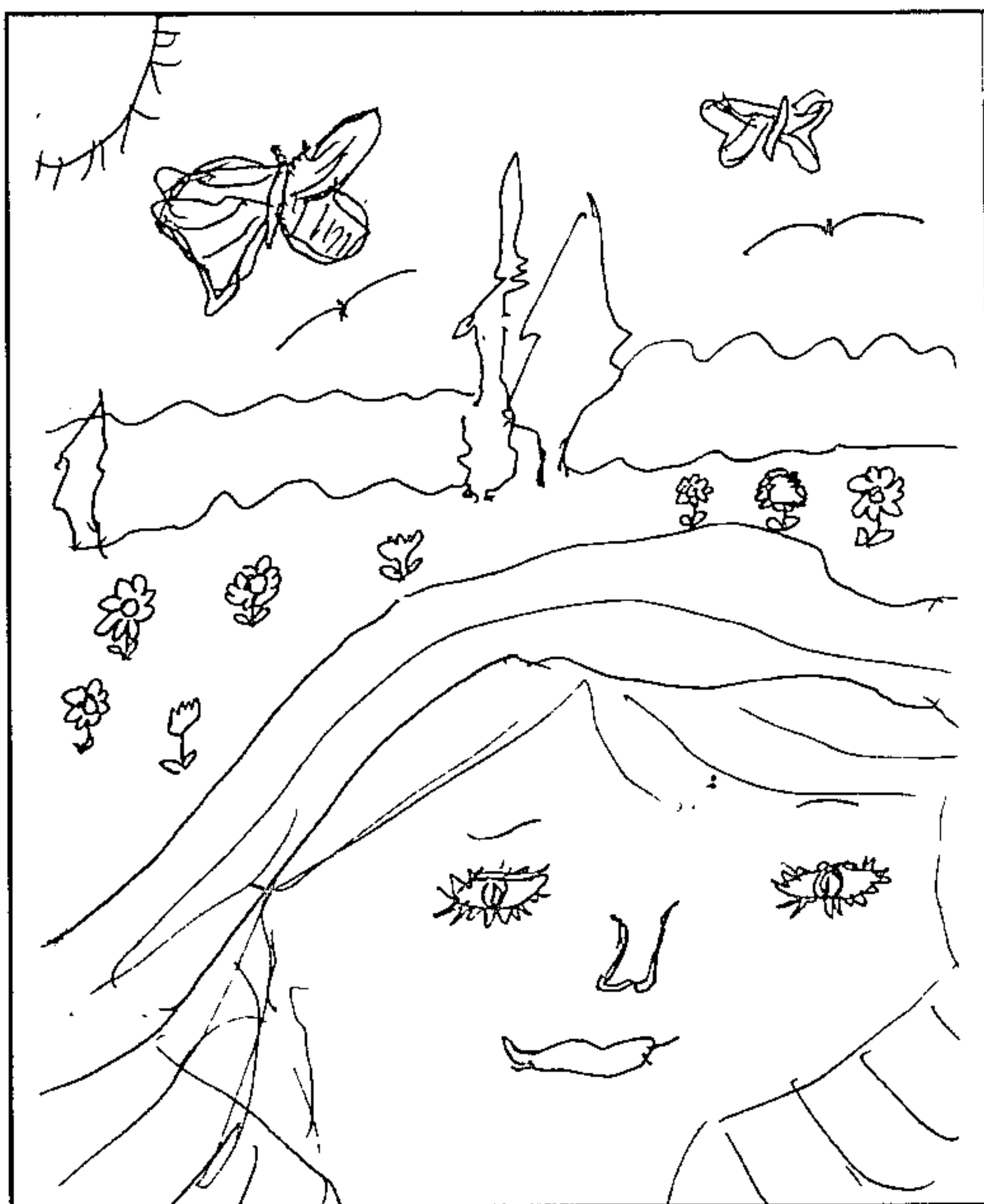
6. ACCEPTANCE (God, I'm ready for whatever comes)

The survivor's personal identity and belief system becomes integrated and the survivor finally lets go of the past, including working through the memories. The survivor becomes an empowered individual with deep compassion for oneself and others, who can overcome any of life's obstacles and challenges.

My Best

I think about
Where I began
Where I am
Where I plan
to go.
I think about
All
Those who
Love us
My friends
My kitten
I say
Abuse is over
I'm my future
So hey
Is this really
such
a big deal?
If not—
let go
If so
work to make
changes—
Then
simply grow.

By ?? (No name)



No name on this either! Please identify your work so we can give you credit!

MV

Leaving Abusers . . . Safety for the Sake of Sanity

by Lynda W.

Alone again . . . naturally. It seems that line from the old Gilbert O'Sullivan song has been my motto these days. Except for my sons, my pets and a few friendly acquaintances, I'm pretty much on my own. And I know that for now that's the way my life needs to be in order for me to heal and actually, at least for now, that's the way I prefer it.

It was in early January of 2006 that I began to clean house in the way of relationships and the first one to go was my relationship with my mother. After spending some time in a psychiatric hospital, I figured it was time to confront her on some issues, issues about my abuse and her inappropriate rage toward me for what had happened in our family.

"You hit me in the head with your shoe," I asserted, "over and over and over."

Her response was cold and clear. "I was hurt."

And so forty years after the beating that almost killed me, I was still to blame. Knowing there was nothing I could do to change her mind, I walked out and ended all contact with my mother. I'd like to say that it wasn't easy but after what I had gone through during my breakdown, the decision came without struggle. The hour long drive home, however, was not as easy. Needless to say, I cried. I cried and sobbed, my body trembling as I released the long held energy that had tied me to my mother and to all she insisted was true. Looking back on that day, I'm certain that all of my "girls" felt triumphant and were able to mature several years in just a few hours. Before that, they were each one held frozen in time by the weight of my mother's contempt and rage.

A few months later, I was about to attend my first Incest Survivors Support Group meeting. Not an easy task under any circumstance but knowing what kind of man my husband was, the task was made even more difficult. You see, my husband was addicted to pornography, teen

pornography his preference or in his own words, "as young as I have to go to get a virgin." (Horrific I know, to be married to such a man but not so unusual when you look at how the psyche will often repeat a certain type of trauma in an attempt to heal it.) In any event, I had come to a crossroad: although I had never had enough respect for myself to leave, I knew that I could not face the women in the support group married to a man who was so similar to the perpetrators who abused them as children. Not knowing where else to turn, I asked my subconscious mind for a dream to guide me. Miraculously, that very night, the dream came and so, with no job and still struggling with the aftereffects of my breakdown, I told my husband not to come home. Again, I'd like to say this wasn't easy but after all I'd been through and with how determined I was to heal, this decision too came without struggle.

It was the very next day when I arrived home after the support group meeting that my brother called. Needless to say, I was anxious and excited to tell him about the huge steps I had taken in my effort to heal. Unfortunately, he was not as enthusiastic as I had hoped.

"Oh, no," he responded when I told him about the meeting. "Oh, no. That's not good." Confused, I decided to tell him instead about separating from my husband.

"But why?" he asked, "Why?"

"He's a porn addict, for God's sake!" I replied.

"But you never told him to leave before," my brother argued (actually, in my defense, I had). After tolerating a few unkind expletives from him, I calmly and resolutely pushed the "end call" button and hung up the phone . . . And so ended relationship number three in my life . . . all in a span of just two months!

Over the next few weeks, I went on to end a relationship with a former ex-husband and ex-sister-in-law as well, all in the name of healing. Was it

worth it you might ask? You betcha! In the three years since ending those relationships, I've recovered more memories than in the ten years since I first started remembering my abuse and without this remembering, this remembering and releasing, I know that I would not be here today. I would not be here writing this article, watching my sons graduate high school or walking my dog. I don't know what the future holds for me as far as relationships go but I do know one thing: that I will no longer tolerate abuse, abuse from others, or from myself, by allowing perpetrators into my life. Little by little I am learning how to love and care for myself, to eat well and sleep well, to exercise within reason and to rest when I am tired; but above all else, I am learning to believe in my value as a human being, as a mother and as a woman. I cherish these days of being on my own, days that I can devote to getting to know myself and my "girls." Heaven knows, it's been a long time coming . . . a LONG time coming.

Do I get lonely sometimes? You know, I really can't say that I do. I have my sons, my pets and my friendly acquaintances and I know now that what I was clinging to in the relationships I had before were only illusions of love, illusions that, in the end, came at much too high a price.

Wishing each and every one of us hope and wholeness on our journeys.

MV



Flight

By Phoenix

To leave the house where my father knew where to find me was the hardest thing I ever did. I could only do it because he didn't care that his contact with me was physically disabling me, because my therapist and all my close friends backed me, because my brother had killed himself while close to my father, because a previous therapist had recommended I only see him once a year, because he had treated my mother so cruelly and because I could no longer sleep. It took all that to get me to disappear, and it presented so many physical, emotional and financial challenges I am lucky to have survived.

Packing up, I was totally spaced out, knowing I was not going to see my family again. At that time, aged 55, I only knew about incest, nothing of the scale of the horror I would later learn. A determination to live, and constantly doing jigsaws between packing, got me away—and the memory of a quote from George Eliot about letting fear be your guide.

It was hard to know what to say to who. I stupidly confided in a helpful neighbour, besides my closest friends. It was deeply painful to just vanish and say nothing to most people. I had an awful time trying to find a new place, being a very light sleeper, and my therapist wasn't tough enough to keep me afloat. I almost broke down in the horror of our bombing of Afghanistan, and then found a new, tougher therapist who pulled me through.

At one point in the early days of rootlessness, everything I'd need in boxes in my car, I weekendend in a country B&B. Sitting by a river, on a seat of bracken, I remembered reading about the patron saint of the town I'd left, who fled to a wooded convent to escape a pressurising powerful suitor. It made me realise how many women had taken flight all down through history, and that it was part of women's heritage to run for safety. To have somewhere to place this experience gave me strength, as I

knew no one who'd disappeared as I was doing.

Although I had the luck of wanting to live elsewhere, it was like a new beginning. Many old friends dropped away with my tough situation and the gradual revelations of therapy. I changed my name for safety, for £50. The new name seemed to project a tougher person and my old one to reek of slavery. Tho old friends mostly refused to use my new name, I saw less and less of them so it hardly mattered. However, two old friends became supporters, and without one of them, I'm not sure if I could have managed. Both, incidentally, were devout Christians. It was during this time that I began to learn how most people cannot cope with experiences out of the usual, and just pretend they are not happening. The few people who can and will emotionally cope are like gold.

Letters came to my new place, forwarded by the neighbour, though I asked her not to. Each time I was shaken, at first for days, panicky and hysterical. Each time my father or different relatives would urge me to communicate, hurt or preachy or guilt-tripping by turns. As the therapy began to reveal the atrocities of a ritual abuse gang childhood, I was less upset by the letters, but next became convinced I would be killed by them, as I clearly knew too much about very ruthless and powerful people.

My therapist kept reassuring me I was safe. All they did, she said, was try to frighten the escapee back by letters with triggers in them. I went on getting upset by the letters for ages, even though I stopped reading them. Then my neighbour was visited by cousins who turned her against me by their 'respectable' shockedness at my deserting my aged father. She began to pressure me and at last a friend found me a safe address to give the relatives. My father also called close friends and some of them tried to guilt-trip me and I became afraid they would tell my father where I was.

People behave oddly under pressure. I was lucky my one strong supporter friend chilled out the wavering ones. Slowly I began to build a new life.

Although it later emerged they had known all along where I was, I have never regretted my action of flight. It provided a basis for healing and cutting contact with father and relatives. It was a real beginning.

MV

Love Beyond Multiplicity

When Sara lies down to sleep
She quite often starts to weep.
And sometimes sleep never comes,
When John's alters are on the run.

A baby suckling its mother's breast,
Got her attention and there was no rest.
One night a wee boy of two or three,
Called for his "mommy" he hoped to see
An older boy spoke out one night,
Crying "Ma-Ma" with no ma-ma in sight.

The reason for this if you want to be told
His mommy died when he was a few days old.
So daddy made his choice of the two,
He'd rather have ma-ma than his boy so blue.

The little boy grew to become a man,
Dodging the love/hate with a fist or a hand
His escape was learned at an early age,
By dissociating from his father's rage.
The alters he bore one by one
While they took on the pain of this father's son.

And, oh, how Sara aches to hold him so tight
When their chatter wakes her in the night.
Yet she knows in her heart all are not bad,
They rescued him from his diabolical dad.
And she doesn't know if he knows her plight,
When they wake her in wee hours of night.

But she does know this—no matter what
They are part of him and she won't give up.
So Sara has adopted them as her family too,
While all of this time her love for him grew.

By Joanne A.

MV

My Journal of Survival

By Jeanmarie R.

We are born with luck and innocence. We are born and that ought to be enough. We ought to be able to carry on from that. However, some must learn about evil. Learn what is subhuman, learn how to scream in silence.

People naturally have a need to express themselves. I remember when I first started to express myself. I received a diary with a golden key as a gift for my 5th birthday. It provided me an invitation into a private world where I could express my dark secrets and longings of my childhood heart and talk about the things that I dared not express to anyone else.

Later as I matured, it became a safe place to reveal my emotions. It was and is still my companion.

My abuse started at age 5, which was when I was subjected to ritual cult abuse of a physical, sexual, and emotional nature over several years duration. As the years and daily abuse continued, my true self became buried under mountainous twisted lies of my childhood. Each physical, sexual and emotional attack and trauma cast upon me, sent me messages of untruths about who I was, and who I could be in this world. I came to believe that I was insignificant, wrong, and unworthy of anyone's love or caring. I felt wretched and used, believing the very worst of what my various abusers drilled into me over the years. Believing that if only I was better, if only I had been a good girl, if only . . .

Some special individuals who came into and touched my life at the most appropriate and needed times, implanted a small spark, a glimmer of light and hope, and a voice of truth that would instill in me a strong desire that would not be denied, even in the face of the depravity and cruelty that deeply scarred me.

At age 12, I was again sexually abused by a step-uncle. It was my late psychiatrist who diagnosed me as DID and with whom I spent over 20 years in therapy, who was relentless in insisting I had to do more than merely

survive; I needed to truly live. The big question was how? How was I going to achieve this massive feat of turning ruins into gold, and an empty shell of a person who had endured a lifetime of pain in my short 33 years into a reasonably functioning person. how could I battle the destructive thinking ingrained into me as a young child and adolescent, that I was a worthless piece of trash who caused nothing but misery to her mother and family, and also the deaths of my first therapist, husband, and father, as I perceived it then, that it was I who caused their deaths. How could I learn to trust and believe in others again?

It was with my late psychiatrist Dr. Rosen's urging, that I again began to write in my diary and journal . . . my long forgotten companion and confidant of years' before. To write not only poetry, but to vent out all the anger and pain that burned deep within me instead of resorting to self-abusive behavior. One day in a session with Dr. Rosen, when he was aware I was angry, but couldn't express the anger out of my fear of my losing control and hurting not only myself, but him as well, that he said to me:

"Jeanmarie, you write so well and are great at expressing your feelings and emotions on paper. I want you to write a letter to all your abusers. I want you and all the alter parts to contribute to this letter to your abusers. I want you all to confront them as if they were all standing in a line before you and tell them how you feel about them and what they did to you."

I argued that I didn't see any point, since all of them except for my step-uncle were now dead, and my step-uncle moved out of the state to the other end of the country, so it was highly unlikely I would run into him again. He told me:

"Well, pretend they are still alive and near you."

So I did, and this was my letter to my abusers:

Dear abusers: Childhood is supposed to be a time of innocence

and fun. I have spent so much time trying to figure out what I did so wrong that would have provoked you all to do the things you did to me, and I have finally realized that it was never my fault, for that solely lies with all of you. Your actions produced countless nightmares, flashbacks and triggers that have followed me and made my life a living hell. I fantasized that I killed you all over and over, thinking maybe it would return to me all that you stole from me, but I have come to realize that what you took from me was power, as well as my innocence. By writing this letter I am taking the power back even though I hate the fact that I will never regain or get back my childhood or innocence. I will never have any happy childhood memories to reflect back upon. All I have are bits and pieces of sheer torture, if I have any memories at all. My other selves hold those painful memories. They too have no happy childhood memories to reflect upon. Yet taking back the power you all ripped out and stole from me will make me stronger, and I will survive and not just survive, but one day find peace and have the life I deserve and am entitled to, and will no longer be haunted by any of you. I speak now for the little girl and the young adolescent girl who still cry daily inside of me, and constantly as I do ask Why? What you did changed who I became; who I trusted; and how I would walk and live in this world. You changed how I could relate to people, even those I most cared about and loved. For years I've felt guilt over not being the affectionate daughter, wife, and mother to my family. You did that! You don't deserve that kind of power.

Now with this letter I choose to reclaim the power you took from me. I release my shame and guilt. I release the sadness over not being protected and not being able to protect myself.

I release my anger and hatred of all of you, knowing that it will take

time to let it all go. As of today, I embrace the woman that I am and have a right to be. I embrace my divine right to love my selves. I choose to take back the power and relinquish yours.

From now on I decide who I will trust, who I will love. I decide how I will walk and live in this world. As for all of you—you are all dead to me whether you all are dead or not. Yours is, or was, a wasted life that could have been a light to others, given your professions and standing in the community and our family. You could have been great role models instead of being evil monsters. There's the pity and the shame. As your innocent victim I now look back and see how robotic I was, and how guilty and ashamed I was. Even now as an adult there is this emotional confusion despite being absolutely clear about who was at fault.

I spent years beating myself up about why I didn't react or resist. How could I have been so trusting? I blamed myself for my step-uncle sexually abusing me because of the earlier abusive experience. I felt I should have known better and not been so trusting. But how does one know or tell the difference when someone smiles and is gentle and seems to be sympathetic and understanding, whether or not it is

Silence

Silence holds the family secrets.

Silence keeps the skeletons in their closets.

"What goes on in this house is our business!"

"Don't you ever tell anybody about..!"

Silence breeds fear and teaches shame.

Silence protects those who hurt us.

"Keep your lying mouth shut!"

"Who'd believe a dumb kid like you?"

Silence leads to self-blame and guilt.

Silence hides the tears and the pain inside.

"Be quiet, you little brat!"

"Don't you dare make a sound!"

Silence breaks that heart and injures the spirit. Silence leaves us alone in confused agony.

By Lynne Marie

genuine or a fake disguised ploy to take advantage and violate and abuse you.

Even now I am unsure of people's smiles and empathy . . . expecting the axe to fall and strike me once more.

In retrospect I can see where I was conditioned early in my childhood to respond a certain way, to not question authority, to accept abuse, to take the blame. I was schooled well and tortured into passivity. By the time I was an adolescent, it was already an ingrained trait making it very easy for my step-uncle to abuse me. I had already learned to stay very still and give quietly into submission. I was already a primed recipient when my step-uncle came around

I never wanted to get into trouble, or make things worse for my family. As a survivor of ritual cult and physical, sexual and emotional abuse, I am continually uncovering the hidden wounds of my childhood, and I suspect that I will always be in a constant state of healing.

What I have to undergo just to feel "normal" or to leave my home is like trying to navigate a mine field.

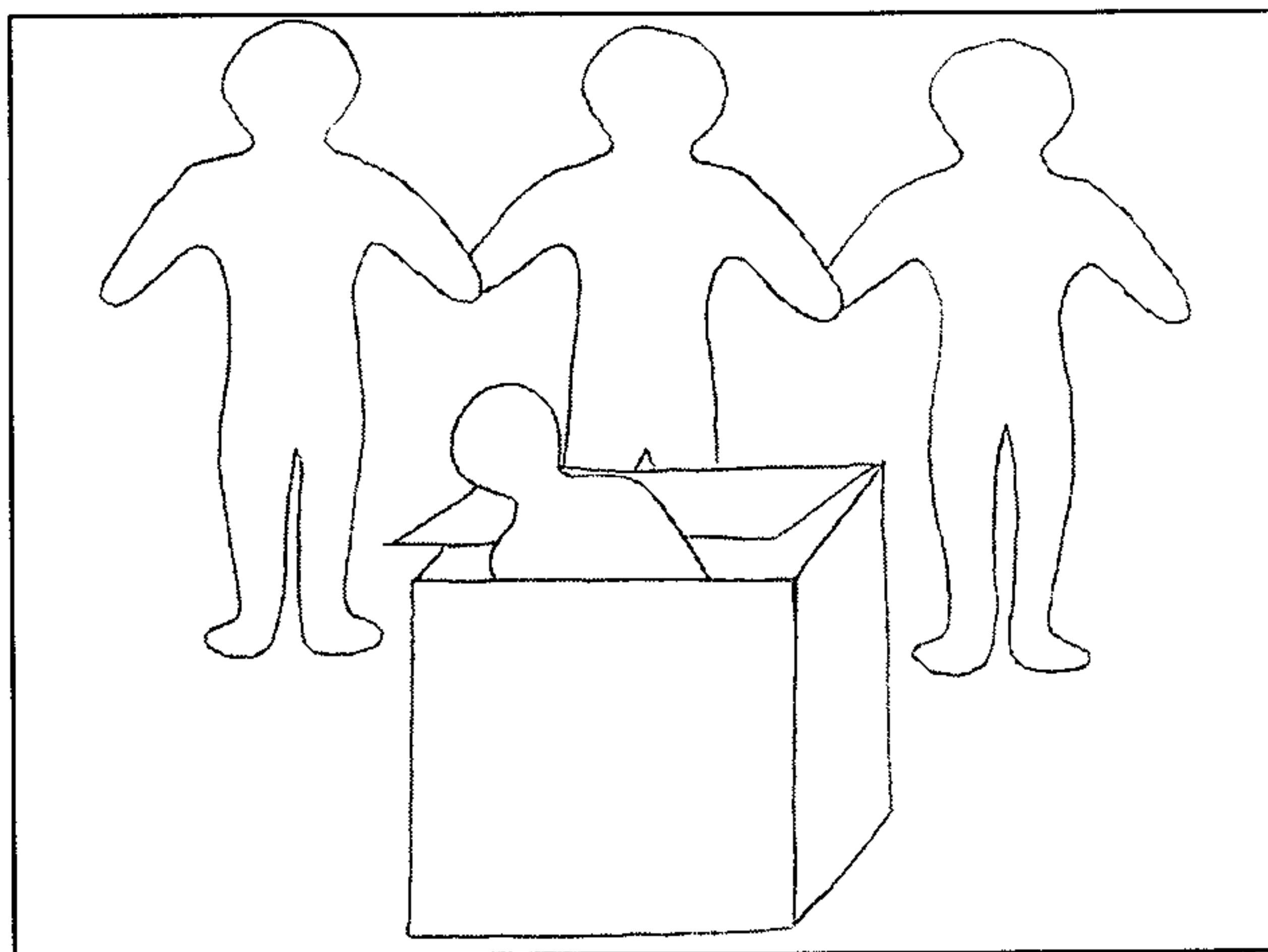
I find writing and journaling a very therapeutic tool which helps me to function in this area. I was fortunate that my late psychiatrist was weaning me towards my present therapist, Joy R., as he had indicated to me before his death that he had taken me as far

as he dared, and it was time someone who knew more could take me the rest of the way toward recovery. I am thankful Joy was in place when Dr. Rosen passed away. She has been able to keep me in one piece, and helped me not lose entirely what I had gained. I also have a new psychiatrist, Dr. Mandelstam, who has experience with DID as well, and is able to help me manage my medications, and understands the chaos in my life.

I know now that no one can ever harm me again unless I again relinquish that power to them. Still, it's a frightening world outside, despite this knowledge and my defenses. My daily writing and journaling helps me not only take baby steps to do the "normal" things, but also reflect back upon how far I have come, and how far I still need to go towards my goal of recovery. I have Joy and Dr. Mandelstam and a fantastic medical physician, Dr. B., and some few select others who are also understanding and patient.

Most of all I have my two children who despite their own special needs and issues when I'm having a bad day, smile at me and say "I love you, mommy." This is how I survived and manage each and every day, as an individual with DID.

MV



Each personality slowly emerging to reveal themselves to family & friends. - By LM

MV

No More Beer Bottles

By Fran

Father's gone. No more invading into my body from the father. No more destruction by his belt on my body. The terror of the destruction of our home and things, our bodies, would be over after all these years since memories began for me/us. Mother told us, "He would not be coming home any more." Things would be okay now. Things would be different because the father would be gone. This is what she told us.

But before this had happened, my two sisters and myself had spent some years in the prison, a girl's boarding school. It was a Catholic boarding school; we were the only non-Catholics, where there were hours upon hours filled with prayers, harsh punishments, and extreme strict rules.

My sisters and I were in different age group dormitories. No seeing or talking with my sisters while we were there. There were to be no toys or anything personal. No anything familiar to connect to my past.

Get up in the morning at the same time, wakened by the dormitory nun, and go through the same, day after day. Everything at the same time schedule and space boundaries that had been set up from the day the school had been opened a million years ago. Well, maybe not a million years ago; it just seemed that way to a nine-year-old. Day after day after day. No contact. Just sterile, dead, day in and day out for years. There were high walls all around the school, with only one way in or out. It was through a parlor that had locked doors in the front of the school to the outside world.

Then freedom came, but with a price. We were just removed out of the boarding school after one violent beating with the belt that left cuts and black and blue marks over my back and legs. Now nothing was ever the same except the daily terror of brutality and insanity from the father and the mother.

So today mother had promised us

things were to be different, because they were getting a divorce. Father would be gone and couldn't hurt any of us any more.

Mother's always had her beer. It was her right. It was our right to take the bottles to the Little Store for refunds, for any treats that we wanted. Yummy. Life was good.

But things, little things at first, started to change. The belt came out and the loss of control beatings began again, only it was by mother. Yelling and the breaking of home and body and mind began again. Mother's boyfriends trespassed on our bodies. No one cared. Just do it so her boyfriends would stay with her.

Soon we couldn't find food, clothes, and shoes to wear. We would go to the Little Store and get milk and bread on credit because the beer bottles were gone. Where did they go? Why weren't they there anymore? The look on the Little Store's owner's face when he said we couldn't charge anymore, because the bill wasn't being paid. Where to get some food?

Ah, hah, I found some crackers and peanut butter, but soon it was gone. Hungry. The apricots on our tree weren't ripe. Eat them anyway. Where is mother? She'd come and go sleep here sometimes. Poor animal pets, they were hungry too. Oh, well, nothing to eat. There were some beer bottles when mother was home. Take them to the Little Store, not for treats but for milk and bread. No cereal for breakfast. Oh, well. Go to school and the hungry just would go away most of the time. No one cared anyway.

Then the day came. No more beer bottles. No more mother coming home. No more memories to remember, to build on, to dream on.

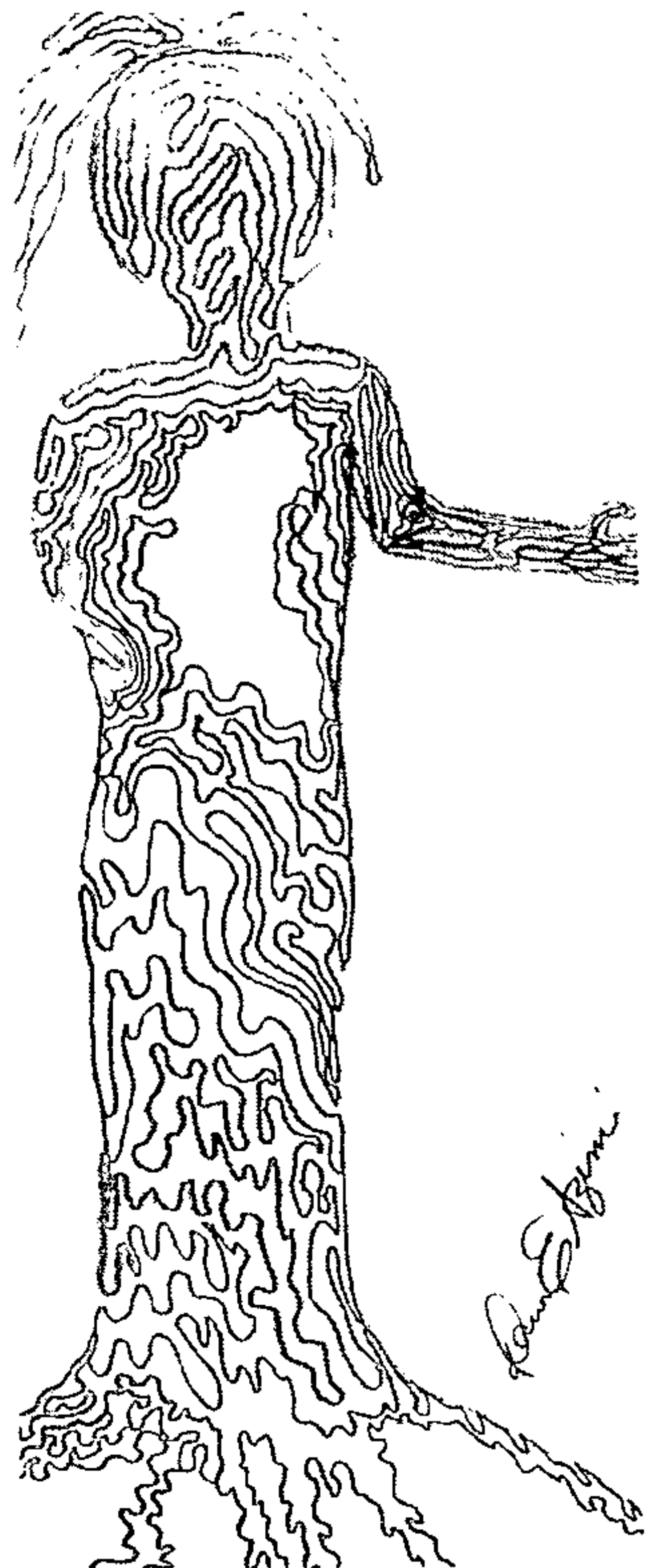
Father came back along with his special ways and needs. "You don't tell the teachers or people who ask if I'm here all the time, that I'm not. If they find out that I'm not staying here, they'll take you away and put you in Juvenile Hall. The boarding school

was easy. Anything here is easy. Juvenile Hall is worse than anything that you've had here or whatever you've had before."

No More Beer Bottles for Treats.
(epilogue)

I'm seventy-two years old now and have been in therapy for thirteen years. Life is good for most of us and will be good for all of us in the future. Guess what? We have control over getting our own treats, food, shelter, and love without the beer bottles!

MV



Pieces of Person by Dawn A.

Painful Sex

By Midge

It's an uncomfortable topic for many, but the truth is that most survivors of rape or sexual abuse experience difficulty of one kind or another during sex. For some, the problem is purely emotional, while for others, it's physical. In particular, many women have trouble with pain during intercourse. There can be different reasons for this, but one cause of painful sex is a condition called vaginismus.

Vaginismus can have a physical origin, such as urinary tract infections, childbirth, menopause, or pelvic trauma; it can also have emotional roots, stemming from fear, anxiety, or traumatic memories. Regardless of the cause, the end result is the same—the body fights against penetration by sending the vaginal muscles into spasms. This can be quite painful, which reinforces the body's notion that penetration hurts. It's a vicious cycle, but one that can be broken.

Unfortunately, a lot of gynecologists are ignorant of this disorder. As I moved from one doctor to another, I was told that my pain came from either constipation, fibromyalgia, or a tipped uterus, and that there was nothing to be done for

it. It took five years, but eventually I found a gynecologist who knew what she was doing; she needed only a few minutes to diagnose the problem . . . and offer a cure.

Because vaginismus is a disorder that affects the pelvic muscles, there are physical therapists trained specifically to treat it. It counts as physical therapy so most insurances cover it, and it only takes 4-6 weeks. It's not as scary as it sounds, either. When I first made an appointment with the physical therapist, I envisioned an hour-long gynecological exam, the thought of which frankly terrified me. That's not the case, thank goodness! You do have to lie down, undressed below the waist, but there are no uncomfortable stirrups to expose you to the world. And while there is some touching involved, most of the work is done externally, with only an occasional internal exam to demonstrate certain exercises and to test your progress.

It's vital for your body to learn that penetration is possible without pain, and that's the goal of physical therapy. They teach you how to use heat and massage to relax all the muscles involved, then how to strengthen and stretch the vaginal tissue. At home,

you do exercises that retrain the muscles so that they'll stop going into spasm on physical contact. Eventually you need to include your partner in the exercises—the idea being that your body first learns to trust your own touch, and then it learns to trust a touch that comes from someone else.

From personal experience I can tell you that it does work. You have to keep with the program, doing the stretches and exercises on a regular basis, but the end result is finally being able to have sex without extreme pain. As an extra benefit, it also makes gynecological exams easier, since they'll hurt less.

If you cannot afford physical therapy, or are uncomfortable with the idea, there are kits you can buy online that claim to provide education and step-by-step treatment of vaginismus. I cannot endorse any of these since I haven't tried them, but they might provide a less-expensive alternative if you don't have insurance.

Of course, not everyone who experiences painful sex has vaginismus. There are other disorders that can cause pelvic discomfort, but it's worth looking into. For me, it made a world of difference. **MV**

BOOKS

Healing Together:

A couple's guide to coping with trauma & post-traumatic stress

By Suzanne B. Phillips, PsyD, ABPP, and Diane Kane, DSW

© 2008. Published by New Harbinger Publications, Oakland CA.

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\$14.95. Softback

What happens when you reach out and your partner can't reach back? This book has thoughtful answers for those couples where either partner (or both) suffered trauma, whether from family violence, crime, war, natural disaster, accidents, or death of a loved one.

The writers of this book are experienced clinicians who worked with the families of firefighters in the wake of 9/11. They show, step by step, how it is possible to heal together from the most agonizing of tragedies, and move forward, together, with love.

This is not an easy process, but there is hope for renewed or even enhanced understanding as partners learn to listen to each other and respond appropriately to their partner's needs.

The section on improving communication skills, listening, and finding new ways to communicate is probably worth the price of the book itself. These techniques could potentially be used by single

individuals to negotiate with internal parts, as well. It also provides good ground rules for establishing new relationships for those who are venturing into the dating scene.

Topics include developing a couple's anger management plan, reclaiming sexual intimacy, honoring the differences in what one remembers and how one responds, reconnecting with resilience as individuals and as a couple.

This clear, well-written book points the way for partners to rebuild hope and mutual life-goals as they grow through the traumatic experience, together.—Lynn W.

MV

We have more material coming on Safety in June! Also, see the themes below for other topics. Send Artwork, Writing, Resources. MV Readers LOVE to hear your thoughts and feelings!

"A Day in a Life of Recovery."

ART: Favorite Hobbies

August 2009

Symptom Management:

PTSD – Eating Disorders – Self-injury

Surviving or Thriving?

ART: Draw Yourself Healthy

DEADLINE: June 1, 2009

October 2009

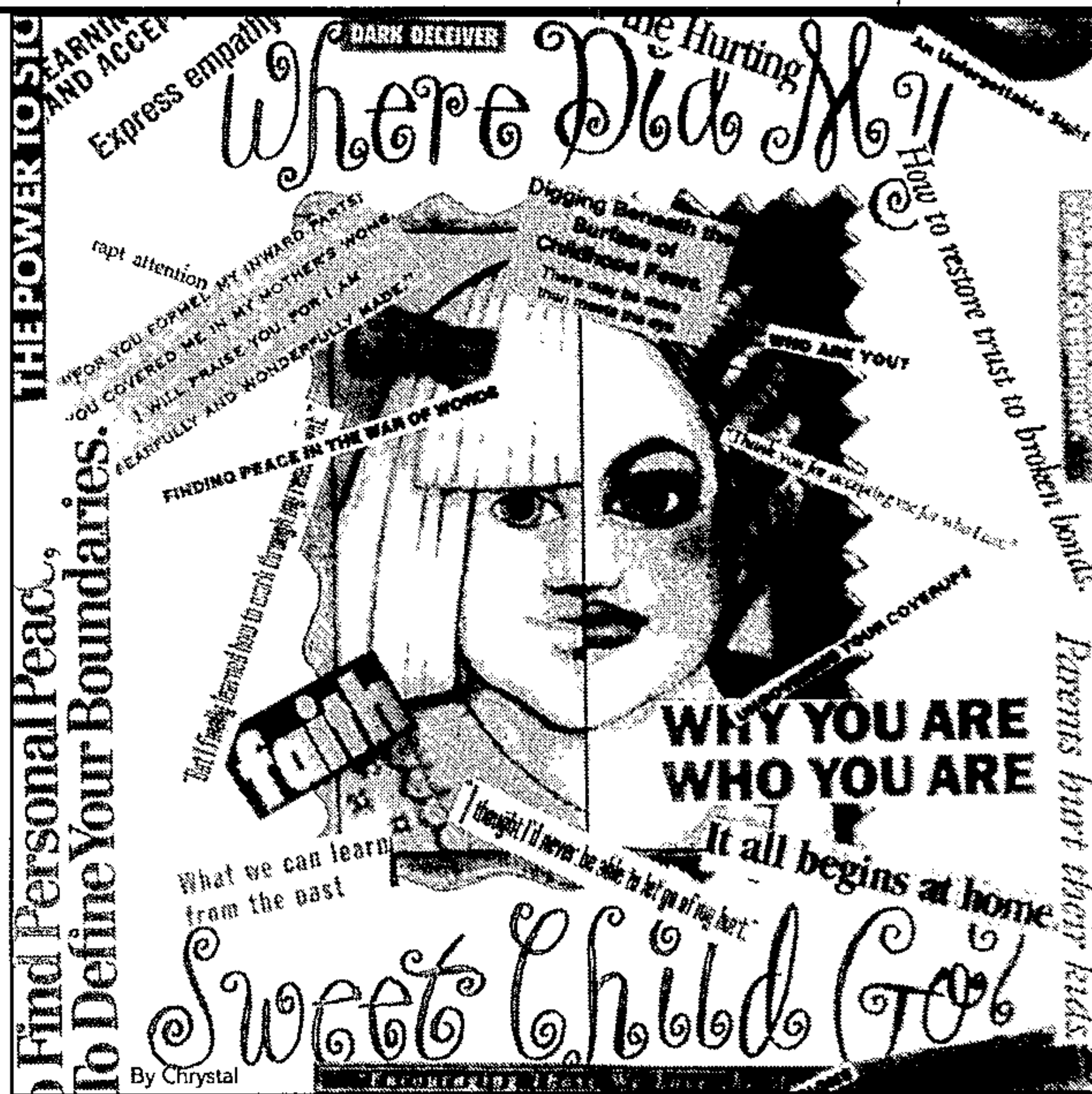
Hospital issue. Paying for therapy:

Insurance vs Private Pay.

Public-funded therapy—making it

work for you. ART: Cartoons about

Therapy. DEADLINE: August 1, 2009



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.

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