

# MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

Vol XXI, No.3

June 2009

ISSN1042-2277

*In This Issue:*

## A Day in the Life of Recovery Progress, Integrating and *more...*



By Maggie S.

### *In the Sunlight of the Spirit*

In the sunlight of the Spirit  
there is no dark  
In the sunlight of the Spirit  
the clouds soon part

Follow the Light  
within your heart  
Spirit will guide  
through the night

Follow the light  
smiles on your heart  
joy you'll find  
sorrows will die

Follow the Light  
shines through your heart  
look at the sight  
Love glows so bright

In the sunlight of the Spirit  
there is no dark  
In the sunlight of the Spirit  
real growth does start

Follow the light  
share from your heart  
God will sigh  
"Why – that's my child!"  
In this sunlight of the Spirit

*By DRH*

MV

# Health and Wellness

## ...your body, your health, your life

By Denise Fletcher

Many of our lives changed dramatically when faced with the impact of illness and the inevitable difficulties that ensued. Learning how to move beyond the initial stages and moving towards healing takes both courage and perseverance. No doubt there are numerous people who have actually been helped by psychiatric medications and willingly choose to take them, but for those of us who have been seriously harmed by psych meds, we have a right to have choices in recovery. The issues surrounding forced medication revolve around the lack of informed consent, quality of life and self-determination.

The anger that arises from maltreatment and boundary violations in the mental health care system leaves countless people traumatized, feeling isolated or displaced and left hanging to struggle with their negative emotions alone. Learning how to cope with these emotions and the side effects of the medications is a very difficult process to go through and extremely frustrating when one lacks real and accessible community supports, such as a Soteria House or a Peer Support and Wellness Center, which promote a Wellness Model.

Finding Recovery Support is never easy. On top of that, the dehumanizing labels that erupt when one has physical or emotional health issues cause such stigma that many times people are ostracized in their communities. This is where the faith

communities can step in to offer love and acceptance, help rebuild trust, and develop moral treatment of fellow human beings, as demonstrated by psychiatric pioneer Dr. Peter Bryce and his wife, Ellen Clarkson Bryce

"We must realize that the church is living in a broken world. God is faithful, constant - but the church is broken....we have to create a faith community that deals differently with brokenness." ~ Dr. Ken Bussema

We can overcome the dark night of the soul and find a spark of hope, regardless of our debilitating conditions. Give yourself time to heal; Healing is possible.

The road to resilience is not an easy path, but one that takes an incredible amount of trial and error in order to find a healthy balance in mind, body and spirit. Seeking out a caring holistic practitioner for alternatives in healing is a good place to start. Also getting in touch with our own inner wisdom may be as simple as asking ourselves the question, "What do you want with your life?"

At [www.recoveryinnovations.org/leadership\\_team/lori-ashcraft.html](http://www.recoveryinnovations.org/leadership_team/lori-ashcraft.html), Dr. Lori Ashcraft suggests that we can experience "moments of recovery" by choosing new ways to respond and breaking old patterns.

- Developing a series of wellness tools
- Recognizing our triggers and learning how to best deal with trauma
- Learning our personal bill of rights

- Setting short and long-term goals and determining actions for change

- Finding our sense of purpose and ridding ourselves of negative self-talk

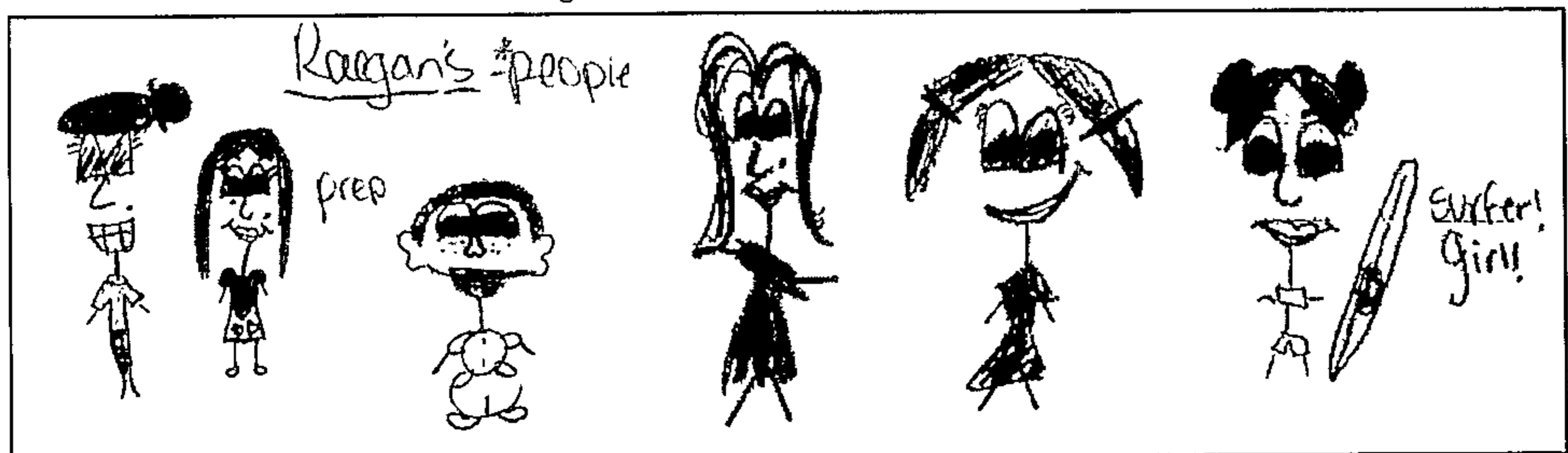
Negative thinking prevents us from achieving our goals. When we achieve goals, big or small, we experience a sense of accomplishment.

Key factors in my healing journey include: a wholistic approach with a combination of treatments and therapies, such as vitamins, herbs, supplements, medications, balanced whole foods diet, supportive relationships, talk therapy, daily exercise, music, art, journaling, poetry, humor, massage, activism, self-advocacy, work, reading inspirational materials, prayer and meditation, creative hobbies, pets, nature walks, recycling, continuing education, and listening to other Voices of Recovery.

Peer support is essential and we all need to voice our concerns to one another in order to help each other; most often friends make the best medicine.

"Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitude, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of psychiatric disability." ~ Dr. William Anthony, Director, Center for Psych Rehab

MV



## Finding Recovery

*I think it is important for peers to tap into the resources available on the internet. As a peer specialist, I would like to offer a few suggestions for fellow peers in finding the materials they need to empower and educate themselves and others towards mental health recovery.*

**\* Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery.** Recovery educator and executive director of the Copeland Center, Stephen Pocklington never fails to inspire in the Mental Health Recovery newsletter published by the Copeland Center. To read the archives online or sign up for the newsletter, visit the website at: [www.copelandcenter.com/newsletter/index.html](http://www.copelandcenter.com/newsletter/index.html)

**\* Health Recovery Center**  
The book, "Depression Free, Naturally" written by nutritionist Joan Mathews-Larson offers an in-depth look at the orthomolecular approach to mental health recovery. For more information, visit the website at: [www.healthrecovery.com/HRC\\_2006/Depression\\_06/DepressionFree\\_TheBook.htm](http://www.healthrecovery.com/HRC_2006/Depression_06/DepressionFree_TheBook.htm)

**\* Mental Health Ministries**  
Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, founder of Mental Health Ministries and author of "In the Shadow of God's Wings," offers resources for small groups and faith communities to erase the stigma of mental illness. Her book encourages peers to embrace the 'Gifts of the Shadow.' For anyone looking for inspirational materials, visit her website: [www.mentalhealthministries.net](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net)

**\* National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations**  
The recently released "Voices of Hope" cd series is produced by Dr. Daniel Fisher of the National Empowerment Center and offers over 12 testimonials of personal recovery. It is available through the NCMHCSO at: [www.ncmhcsso.org](http://www.ncmhcsso.org)

**\* Northern Initiative for Social Action**  
NISA promotes wellness and recovery and encourages consumers to write their stories via their international magazine, "Open Minds Quarterly". To learn more, visit their website at: [www.nisa.on.ca](http://www.nisa.on.ca)

"Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential." ~ SAMHSA National Consensus Statement on Recovery

By Denise Fletcher

**MV**

## MANY THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS!

### Del Amo Hospital - Torrance, CA

Call Francis Galura: (310) 784-2289 or (800) 533-5266

### River Oaks Hospital - New Orleans, LA

Call Martha Bujanda: (504) 734-1740 or (800) 366-1740

### Sheppard Pratt Health System - Baltimore, MD

Call James A. Pitt: (410) 938-3584 or (800) 627-0330 x 3584

### Timberlawn Mental Health System - Dallas, TX

Call Kristi Lewis: (214) 381-7181 or (800) 426-4944

### Two Rivers Psychiatric Hospital - Kansas City, MO

Call Nancy Harrel: (816) 356-5688 or (800) 225-8577

### Women's Institute for Incorporation Therapy - Hollywood, FL

Call Larry Spinosa: (800) 437-5478

These organizations are not affiliated with this publication and have no control over its contents. Many Voices and its staff have no influence on their operations

Does your clinic or conference need flyers? If so, please call 513-751-8020.

**MANY VOICES** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving victims of trauma everywhere. Our EIN is 20-8945881. Tax-deductible donations, volunteer help, and good ideas are always welcome! We appreciate your support! —Lynn W., Editor



## After Integration...Readjustment

By Debbie E.

In 1991, I started into therapy. I'd always known there was something different about me, but I didn't know what. Six months into therapy, I asked, "Is it normal to see other people in the mirror?" That question changed my life forever. To me, seeing other people in the mirror had always seemed normal, and it had always been there. I was diagnosed with MPD, PTSD, depersonalization, and depression. And I was told the people I saw in the mirror were my personalities.

When I was told the idea of integrating the personalities, I didn't like the idea at all, and I refused. To me, it sounded like a death sentence of the personalities. And I was told integration might not be for me, because I had so many personalities. But in 1998, the process of integration began. I fought it every step of the way. I'd been told it would probably be the worst thing I'd ever have to go through in life. To me, it *was* the worst thing.

Little healing changes happened along the way, which led to integrations. Things like realizing I didn't deserve to be abused. Things like learning why each personality was created. Learning what each personality had been through. Each healing hurt, in a way, because I had to feel what had caused the hurt. But the healing was good, too.

Besides integrations being emotionally exhausting, physical problems arose, too. I was stressed by constant flashbacks. Newly revealed flashbacks kept showing up. I felt sick to my stomach most of the time. Some days, I couldn't go anywhere, because I was too sick, or too terrified of everyone. I was so terrified of people, that I'd shake uncontrollably. I'd always been terrified of people, but some of the personalities were great at being around anyone. Whatever personality was getting ready to integrate would be out the majority of the time, working out their issues,

reliving their abuse, preparing to integrate. During that time, the other personalities said their goodbyes to the ones about to merge. They'd spend time doing special things with them, like watching a favorite movie, getting an ice cream cone, playing with a favorite toy.

After the first integration, I was in shock. I went through deep grief, like you do when a loved one dies. The first one to integrate, was the first personality created at age three. They'd been there forever, and suddenly they were gone. Each personality went through their own grief for each personality that integrated. The grief still throbs in my heart today. Each integration only came about during rare brief periods of time of feeling safe. For me, that was the key to my integrations; feeling safe.

After each integration, the grief would be there. I'd asked therapists, jokingly, if anyone had ever died from integrations. They assured me nobody ever had, but it felt like I was dying. Each time, it felt like I was being turned inside out. All these personalities I'd known forever were leaving. I felt alone, lonely, confused. After each integration, it would take me a few days to totally realize an integration definitely had happened. The confusion would be intense each time and I'd have to get used to life without them.

By spring 2008, I knew a big integration was about to happen. Integrations had been happening more frequently at that point. It became difficult to sleep, because so much was going on in my head, and I was terrified of more integrations happening. I couldn't imagine what life would be like as just one person. I hadn't been just one person since I was three years old. That was forty-eight years ago. I still saw life and people through the eyes of a three year old abuse victim.

Then July 21, 2008, when I woke

up, something happened and I felt the last thunder of personalities merging. It had always been something I could feel when personalities integrated. It was like a jolt, a crash, a thunder going throughout me. I felt it that morning, too. And I knew right away, things were different, but I had nothing to compare it to. I was in shock, in awe, and scared. Again, the grief was there- insurmountable, incomparable, paralyzing. It was as if my world stood still, and I was all alone. I wanted the personalities back. I missed the MPD. Going through integrations, I'd heard that some multiples could become non-functional during integrations. I came close at times. Then after the integrations were complete, it seemed I functioned even less during the first two months. I didn't know how to function as one person.

There are days, I ache for the MPD and the personalities to come back to me. Yet, there are moments of feeling it's ok to be one person, now. And those moments are becoming more frequent. There are days when it's difficult to deal with everything as one person. Especially during the tough times. And there are days when it seems like there's still another personality that hasn't integrated yet. But then, I realize it's just me, only I'm not used to being just me. I'm not used to seeing myself as just me. It's too difficult to fathom yet. So part of me goes back to thinking there must be some personality left, just to help me feel safe, protected and not so alone.

I tell people to imagine if everything in their life suddenly changed. To imagine if it was possible for them to suddenly get MPD, and they had to adjust to that. Their mind would still go back to thinking they were just one person. It would be unfathomable for them to think they'd never be one again. So, it is difficult, in reverse, for me to think of myself as just one. Re-adjustment to life without MPD, is a

*Continued on Page 5*

*Readjustment, Cont'd.*

process. It, too, takes time. There's so much to get used to; so much to learn. I feel like a fish trying to live outside the fishbowl. I feel like I've landed on another planet. But, I am learning to adjust.

I also tell people that life as one person isn't all it's cracked up to be. Sometimes they laugh and agree with me, so I know I'm not alone in thinking this. Life as a multiple seemed more organized, with everyone having their own things to do. Now, it's just me, learning to do everything they did, trying to handle every emotion, every memory. The PTSD, depersonalization, and being terrified of people is still here, and actually more so now as I learn to adjust. The nightmares and flashbacks are also worse right now. I still dissociate and lose time. I'd spent years thinking once the MPD was gone, those problems would go away, too. But that's not the case. The difference is now, I'm going through all those things as just me. And for each thing I go through as just me, I see I'm getting stronger, and know I'll be ok.

All my life, I prayed to die. Two years ago, I realized that I didn't want to die. I just wanted a better life. So that helped tremendously. It had a huge impact. Integration means I don't have all the internal fighting going on. There's no switching of personalities, although I do miss that. My thoughts are clearer. I am developing a little sense of self-esteem. Gradually, there are more times of my being happy the MPD is gone. There are still times I cry about the abuse. I've had to start admitting the abuse happened to me, instead of saying it happened to other personalities. That was rough. I've started feeling all the emotions and feelings. It's still strange to feel more than one emotion at once. That just seems chaotic. It feels like every thought, emotion, memory and feeling should still all be compartmentalized, and kept separate from others. That's a strange thing, too. I feel like I should have a passport to live as just one person, because it's such a foreign thing in such a foreign land. Life as one person does not feel

normal.

Life seems boring without the personalities. I'm still trying to figure out what to do with all the empty space where personalities used to be. I feel like a lone tree in the middle of the desert. This is not an experience many people can relate to. After each integration, I realized not many people could understand how I felt. I was in deep mourning, but there are no sympathy cards for people who have gone through integrations. I looked.

And the silence now, is strange. The confusion is persistent, but not as bad as at first. There are times, where something comes up that certain personalities would've handled. And briefly, it feels like they're here. But it's more like an echo of who they were. I realize it's just a mode I've fallen into, of where they used to be, and what they would've said or done. And that makes me miss them even more. Like when a loved one dies, and something comes up, where you can sense them there and hear what they'd say.

I no longer see other people in the mirror. That's strange, too. It feels like my mirror is faulty. I miss seeing the others in the mirror. And I find myself looking in the mirror longer to see if I can see anyone else there.

It feels like just about everything in my life has changed. I went into hiding at age three, and remained there forty-eight years. I hadn't been out or lived life during that time. The others lived life for me. And now, it's just me again, after all these years. Since age three, all of the over 100 personalities and fragments had lived life in their own make believe worlds. During the final integrations, going off to those worlds ended. There are still times where I'm off somewhere else, but that is just imagination. I can still go off to those inner worlds for a few seconds at a time, but that's it. I'm learning to live in reality. That's not all it's cracked up to be either.

Since age three, when the first personality was created, I had male personalities. They made the others feel safe and protected. They were the ones that were out 95% of the time, always. I'm getting used to life without

that. I'm learning to be just one person. And an even bigger challenge: I'm trying to learn who I am. This is the first time in 48 years, that I am having to be around family. The last time I was around them, I was three. I'm an adult, yet I feel like I'm three. It's a weird adjustment: life through the eyes of a child, then changing to life through the eyes of an adult, then back again.

I miss the personalities comforting me, and my comforting them. I still haven't figured out how to comfort myself yet. I had never done that before. There are times I feel paralyzed by the silence in my head and the emptiness where all the personalities used to be. I'm learning to say "me" instead of "we." It's weird to think I no longer have MPD.

There are some humorous aspects of being integrated. Sometimes, I'll find a goofy toy or picture a personality had saved. I'll find favorite toys the little ones had. I look through years of drawings and writings and think *I couldn't do that*. I find clothes the others had bought, and wonder *What were they thinking?* One of the first things I noticed after the final integrations, was looking in the mirror. I hadn't looked in the mirror since age three. It was shocking. I thought, "Boy, that person is old." Then I struggled with realizing it was me. Forty-eight years will age a person.

I am learning who I am. I remember the day I first said, "I am ME." The first thing I discovered, besides the fact that I'm old, is that I love to go barefoot. Most of the personalities hated going barefoot and found it improper. But I love it. I look at everything now, like it's the first time I've ever heard or seen anything, with the fascination of a three year old discovering things. In many ways I'm still like that three year old. They were out a good deal of time every day over all these years. Now, it feels like I went into a coma at age three and woke up from it after all this time. In a lot of ways, it's like I'm a three year old, yet I'm an adult. It's just that confusing, too. A lot of my thoughts, feelings, emotions, reactions and hurts are still like they were at three. I struggle to learn to carry on adult conversations,

*Continued on Page 6*

*Readjustment, Cont'd.*

because I'm afraid I'll goof up and make people mad. I hate talking on the phone to people. I still see people like I did back then, when people were abusing me.

In some instances, I can tell the personalities are now a part of me. I can still feel them here and see them, in a sense, but they are no longer separate from me. They are within me. They aren't gone. That is comforting.

Someday, I think I'll be ok with the idea that the MPD is gone. Each day it gets a little easier. When something comes up, I miss it a lot. But, I'm glad there's less confusion in my head. In time, I think I won't mourn the loss of the personalities or the inner worlds as much. Maybe, one day, I won't miss it at all. I'm happier more often, now. I'd been told that if I could make it through the integrations, I'd see I could do anything. I'm starting to see that. I still feel like a fish out of a fishbowl, trying to live life as a person. But I am learning to breathe in this breath of new life.

MV

## Surviving

it's been two  
whole weeks  
in this facility  
weeks of doom  
only darkness  
fear  
tears  
chaos inside  
and hopelessness

now though  
i see a light  
i even feel it

like a miracle  
again i've survived  
i guess  
that's just what  
i am  
a survivor

*by sjs*MV

# A Better Place to Be

**By Jacki**

I was sexually abused by two different step-fathers from the age of eight to eighteen. I was raped when I was 21. I never told anyone about these issues until I had my breakdown at 34. I started having flashbacks, couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, and struggled to get through each day.

My pastor suggested that I see a counselor. My initial reaction was, NO! I thought counselors were for mentally ill patients and I am not mentally ill.

It took my pastor about a month to convince me to go to the counselor. He promised me that it didn't mean I was crazy. The church blessed me by paying for my first year of therapy.

I was diagnosed with DID two years after I started seeing my counselor. She told me that she had been waiting to bring it up until she thought I could handle it. Who in the heck can handle that diagnosis! I thought she was crazy, and there was no way I that I was Sybil.

She gave me some information to read on DID and told me that it was definitely not a bad thing. She assured me that it was a defense mechanism and that without it I probably would be dead. I agreed to read the information and talk to her about it the next week.

Six months later we realized I had six littles. I didn't know it at the time

but she had a lot of experience with DID. God blessed me with the right counselor at the right time. It took about two years, but we all integrated.

My problem with my counselor is that she never wanted to talk to me. It was always one of the others she wanted to talk with and it really hurt me emotionally. I couldn't figure out who I was. I couldn't get her to realize that I hurt, physically, emotionally, and mentally also.

After working with her for about three years I decided to try another counselor—one who would recognize me as part of the hurting pieces. I found another good counselor who understood my concerns and frustrations. She helped me to heal me and accept the others, not be resentful of the others because they had been recognized and I had not.

It has been twelve years since I started the road of healing. I still see a counselor every week because I am still depressed. Some people ask me, aren't you glad that you have walked out the healing process? I have to say, no. I have hated every minute of the past twelve years. That being said, I am in a better place, with a better group of people supporting me. I am holding onto the hope that one day, I will like myself.

MV

"Dissociative wannabe!"

## Dealing with Addictions

By Meggan

We feel some of our obsessive-compulsive disorder behaviors are more like addictive behaviors, yet when I bring this up with my counselor she says "No, it's OCD." But since I/we are the ones struggling with the program, we feel that once we cross this invisible line we enter into an addictive zone. We think an addiction is a form of active behaviors that are extremely difficult to fight and stop doing them.

This includes alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, and many more rather unhealthy behaviors. It can be like counting everything you touch during the day, or excessive hand washing—one of mine that gets really annoying for us.

We also feel some of our "addictive" behaviors are healthy. It is a rare day when we don't spend time doing our arts and crafts. This has been a life-long thing. My talents have become recognized as really good and I am getting help to start our own business.

Art started out as a way to never annoy my abuser. Being quiet with crayons was acceptable, so since it kept us safe, why not just color and stay safe? When we get migraines, this message would come through my head: "We need to draw...we really need to draw. Please people in there, we need to do arts and crafts or this migraine will be so brutal."

It seems we go into a form of compelling withdrawal if we can't draw and do art. Art to us is a way of communicating things and as a kid, the never-tell rule was HUGE. So it became a way to communicate then rip the drawings up so my abuser couldn't see.

As I understand addictions, they develop to try to fix a problem, to ease up highly-difficult emotions, to fill in these voids we feel inside. I spent some time homeless in a large city and had dealings with many addicts of one form or another. The most important lesson I learned is that none

of them ever said "Gee, I'd sure love to be an addict! Boy, when I grow up I want to become an addict and compound all my problems."

What I also learned was that these people were in very difficult lives, and the addictions developed to try to shut down inner turmoil and pain. Many had serious mental illness, but there were no services open or available. It was a form of self-medicating.

My biggie is: I, we, all of us are hoarders. And this is messy, really messy. When you know that an item is really trash but you go find a spot to hide it in, so it will be there just in case. Pre-homeless, this wasn't a problem. We lost all we once owned, so now we get scared of "I might need that!"

Right now we are trying to actually put junk into garbage bags and send them out Tuesday night so the garbage truck will get it Wednesday morning.

We feel being an addict in any form is nothing to feel ashamed about. Like I said, no one ever really plans becoming addicted to something. It happens, and it's a real life-battle. I don't drink or do drugs. First, I hate the taste. Second, I don't like how my mind feels...like it's going to spiral out of my comfort zone of selves' control. We tend to be too inflexible in this. Apparently my body/brain just doesn't understand that the chemicals used are supposed to alter the mind. Just never let me near Nyquil. I could become addicted to that stuff too fast.

Some years ago when I was inpatient in a couple of hospitals, they would fill a van for 12-step programs. So I lied and said I was an alcoholic. Free coffee with caffeine, a nice doughnut and a change of scenery. But I also paid close attention to the meetings. I find it pretty amazing just how the 12 steps can be used for anything and everything. Maybe you need a word or a step to fit the kind of meeting, but the support and the healthy-minded concepts are simple—

simple enough to one day get them down and find recovery. Then, if you slip, keep coming back.

Picking us up and dusting off...checking for any emotional wounds needing attention. The most therapeutic words I know and have heard in my 24 years of recovery for D.I.D. are "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I can't go back and change my past. I can never undo what the abusers did, but there is something I can do about the past...I can change how I/we/me/he/she/all of us think and feel about the past. I can take it on as a challenge to grow more, develop better skills, and the best:

When we who have been abused in any way can recover, learning how to cope in our messed-up lives—it is the best way to reclaim our own power, and say "Well, I guess you didn't get to keep me stuck in the cycle of abuse."

We are now entering into a new and nicer stage of life. You'll know it when you wake up and your first thoughts are not about the D.I.D. and the pain in the past. When you begin to make different kinds of decisions based not always on DID, and how to hide, and begin to fit into life with other people, places and things. When you don't reach for that tobacco fix before you even fully wake up (yep, I'm a smoker.)

At first these things are so small you aren't sure of them. "Did I just do that really healthy thing? Did I just say No to a cold beer? Well, I must have, because they said "Hey, you want a beer?" and I don't have one. And I thought I heard my own voice say "No thanks. Not today."

Yes, dealing with addictions is extremely difficult but it's not impossible. To quote my grandmother, "Anything worth having is worth working for."

# A Typical Day of Surviving with D.I.D.

By Jeanmarie R.

I awake, if I sleep much at all. It's morning and my goal for the day is to make it through relatively "intact" with minimal stress or dissociation and refraining from self-abusive behavior. A very tall order given that stress most often causes individuals with D.I.D. to dissociate.

The biggest problem with dissociation is that we have absolutely no control over which alter personality might emerge and take control. It may be a more mature and functional alter—or it can be a 5-year-old. Imagine you're out in the supermarket, and in my case, doing the monthly grocery shopping. Something, be it a sound or word, triggers you, or you are just stressed out by the task at hand. One day during such an outing a can dropped from the shelf and exploded. Well, it scared me so much that I dissociated and out popped my 5-year-old who had no interest in shopping for anything on the list. She bought \$150 worth of junk food. Imagine awakening and finding your shelves were full of potato chips, pretzels, marshmallows, candy, cookies, cake, soda, etc. No vegetables. No meat, poultry, milk, bread, or any other such needed and nutritious items.

It also is a huge ordeal for me in any given day because I have an autistic daughter. She is now 24 years old, but functions on a 5-year-old level, and can often erupt into a full-blown tantrum often where she will punch herself in the face causing nose bleeds, or strike out at me or anyone who is trying to deal with her. I also have a son who has special needs and is recently married, and my daughter-in-law also has special needs, and they seem to need my advice and help often to manage their affairs.

Add on top of that two aging parents who seem to require me to manage their appointments and also chauffeur them to and from their appointments as well as explain to them exactly what the doctors' instructions were for them. Yes, as far as stress goes, I eat it for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner...and it doesn't end in sleep, because when I should feel relief going to bed, I don't, because just the mere thought of repeating it all again the next

day is enough to cause me to be so tense that it takes hours even with a lot of medication to fall off to sleep. Recently I was diagnosed with sleep apnea and have a CPAP machine. For those who have no idea what a CPAP machine is—it's a machine that you fill with water (much like a humidifier) that has a hose attached to it, and the other end of the hose goes into a mask that pretty much covers your entire face, save for your mouth. It resembles a gas mask, and is not very easy to adjust to, initially.

When I was on speaking terms with God, I often asked Him repeatedly, *Why? Why did you give me the life I have? Wasn't being savagely abused as a young girl and adolescent enough? Did you further have to give me two children with special needs? And to make it even more interesting, take my husband too, when my children were both babies?* Well, I felt and still do that God just got tired of hearing from me so much and turned a deaf ear.

It's ok. I don't talk much to God anymore. This also causes a problem in my household, since my mother and stepdad, as well as my son and his wife, are very faithful and never miss church, and in a very indirect way, seem to want to impress upon me that my life would be better if I returned to church and resumed my conversation or pleas for assistance to God.

I remember once during one of my many psychiatric hospitalizations my mother actually persuaded the parish priest to come to see me. A very, very bad idea since a lot of my abuse issues had to do with the church to begin with. My mother kept saying not all priests or nuns are evil. Well, that's true, but try convincing my severely traumatized parts that. Unfortunately for both the priest and myself, she didn't warn me beforehand of this priest's impending visit to me.

Well, they arrived for visitation. It so happened that my psychiatrist was also on the unit speaking with me when the nurse interrupted us to say I had visitors. Of course when my psychiatrist and I saw who it was, all I remember was hearing my

psychiatrist say, "Oh crap!"

He later informed me that he tried to explain to my mother and the priest that this was not a real good idea. They didn't seem to think it was a problem—mostly because neither of them believed in Multiple Personality Disorder (as it was called at the time). At any rate, they literally pushed their way past my psychiatrist to where I was sitting like a stone statue.

Thankfully the alter that decided to take care of this rather "unpleasant, unannounced visit" was a more mature but sarcastic alter. She agreed to speak with the priest but my psychiatrist insisted on being present. Well, the priest asked her, "My child, Satan has possessed you—I see the torment and struggle going on inside of you. It shows in your eyes. Have you found Jesus yet?"

My psychiatrist told me that my response to the priest was in a very calm and even-toned voice, and she simply responded back to him, "I didn't know that Jesus was lost or that I was supposed to look for him, but you know what I think? I think Jesus would much rather be found by you, since I'm quite busy at the moment attending to other satanic matters."

Needless to say, my mother was mortified and has to this day never let me live it down, but in one respect this alter did take care of the matter. Neither my mother nor anyone else has tried to persuade me to return to the church or speak with any priest or nun since that day.

In any event, I think God knew exactly what he was doing when he blessed me with my two children. Who better equipped and able to deal with children that had special needs and had problems functioning "normally" in society and be understanding, and have the patience it required. I knew what it was like to feel frustrated and handicapped by an inability to function as others do.

So you see, it was a win-win for both me and my children. They had a mother who had the understanding and patience to deal with their needs, and they in turn



kept me from vegetating and being inside my own head—which even on a good day is never a real good place to be. I have no time to sit and be self-absorbed with self-pity or the hard life dealt me or of what I endured and have to deal with on a daily basis.

I am very new to “grounding skills” which is a much-needed skill for people with D.I.D. I did receive several handouts and exercises from my last hospitalization, which was thankfully at a hospital that had a special program for D.I.D. and P.T.S.D. disorders. I had printed ten things from the skills sheet that I found helpful to me in dealing with my D.I.D. on a daily basis. Upon arising I look at the sheet and repeat these 10 things over and over. I think they could also apply to individuals who don't suffer with D.I.D. or PTSD as well. They are:

1. It is perfectly OK to want or need something from someone else.
2. The fact that someone says No to my request doesn't mean I should not have asked in the first place.

3. Standing up for myself over “small” things can be just as important as “big” things to others.

4. I can insist on my rights and still be a good person.

5. I may want to please people I care about, but it doesn't mean I necessarily have to please them all the time.

6. Keep my focus on my objectives.

7. Be patient.

8. Express anger directly: no physical or self-abusive attacks on myself or others.

9. Validate feelings to not only myself but alter selves as well as others.

10. Use a little humor (even if it's sarcastic) or smile when faced with confrontational people or situations.

As I said earlier—it's not easy. Sometimes it seems that the todays mix up with the yesterdays, where it mixes downward into last years' cupful, and further downward into a decade's quart, and it seems then that it becomes a lifetime's ocean, and the best I can do is

alternate between treading water and dead-man's float. I think often that it would be more bearable if it didn't mix into the re-runs and enlarge into what it is not, like the idea that an insect's sting feels more like a shark's neat biting off a limb. Yet I do get out of bed every morning, and start over, and plunge into the day, and put on a hopeful look, and try not to allow my fears to build a wall between me and those I love or care about, or a friend or a new friend, and if someone should happen to grasp my hand in a favorable gesture, I try to shut down the thought that an axe may unexpectedly come down and chop my hand off. Of course I never reveal these thoughts to anyone except my private journal—who tells no one unless they get brave and crawl off onto the printed page. If I fail to achieve my goals for the day, and the day turns out to be a miserable disaster, I know it's quite OK. I can begin again tomorrow. For like the line that Scarlett O'Hara says at the end of the movie, *Gone with the Wind* — “After all, tomorrow is another day.”

**MV**

## Introducing—The New MV Poetry-Book Challenge!

The other day Deb Clark emailed me this message:

*I was fooling around with words the other day & I came up with something I hope you can use. I spelled Self-Mutilation & added something to do when you feel like cutting. See what you think. I like it & was anxious to share with you.*

Stay away from it  
Eagerly write down your thoughts  
Lay the knife down  
Four minutes; wait—then decide  
Make yourself do something productive  
Usually feels good—why?  
Take a walk outside  
Invite a friend over  
Lay down for a little nap  
Ask for help  
Take a trip to coffee shop—write  
Ideas to get you through this  
Order pizza  
No more cutting

—Deb Clark

I thought this was a pretty cool idea, So I decided to try one myself. I don't have a problem with self-mutilation, but I have a problem with Discouragement... So I tried Deb's

approach, to take every letter and put a positive spin on it, a counteraction. Here's how it worked out:

Deliberately smiling at the confusing world around me  
I insist I have a rightful place in it  
Seeing my strengths grow strong  
Courage builds within me  
Overhead is a boundless universe  
Under my feet is steady ground  
Rising within is my passion and heart  
Amplified by my forever wish to serve others  
Giving myself credit for every effort and accomplishment  
Eager to share what I learn and receive  
Mindful of all those who help me grow  
Echoing the spiritual truths borne in me  
Now I find myself free to know, to do, to be  
True to myself, my dreams, my destiny.

—Lynn W.

This was so interesting and fun to do that Deb and I agreed to open up the idea to everyone who reads MV (whether or not you're a subscriber). Pick your word to use – any word that relates in some way to therapy or recovery from trauma – Place it

vertically down the page - then write a positive statement for each letter. Make the whole poem “hang together” or be as useful as you can make it. Then send it in. If we get enough of these MV will put together a booklet that can be sold to raise funds for Many Voices. Please send a permission slip along with your poem(s) so we know it is OK for us to use your work in a fundraising booklet, or in any other way to benefit MV. You can send as many poems as you want. I can't promise to use everything that comes in...but I think, with this sort of structure, most of the work will be very helpful to others. We are also open to names for this type of writing. So send title suggestions too. Here's another Deb did on *Depression*:

Do your daily routines  
Eat balanced & healthy meals  
Paint a picture  
Run a short distance  
Early to bed; get enough rest  
Sleep only eight hours  
Straighten up your house  
Illuminate your area with soft candles  
Only do what you feel like doing  
Notebook; write in it daily

—Deb Clark

I hope you enjoy this exercise as much as Deb and I did. & THANKS!

**MV**

# Driving with Intention

By Jenn J.

Over the past 25 years since I have been driving I have had more car collisions than I can count. The positive thing about this is that I usually hit stationary objects like telephone poles, garage walls, curbs, parking lot poles, and mailboxes. The other stationary objects that I have hit are parked cars and stopped cars. I have had no accidents that have injured others, but I have been injured in a couple.

Most people would say that this is careless driving. Basically, it is inattentive driving or driving without intention. We are so used to driving that many of us talk to someone on the phone, put make up on or shave, eat and drink, and even text message people. The term for this is now "Distracted Driving" and it has been said there are more accidents caused by distraction than any other factor.

If you have nearly any psychological condition or strong feelings you must be extra careful driving. My son, a normal 16 year old boy, drives "emotionally." If he is annoyed, he drives more recklessly weaving in and out of traffic. When I divorced I had 3 accidents within an 18 month period. Needless to say my insurance went up to \$2,000 a year.

I was very upset when I was in an Intensive Outpatient Program and they asked me not to drive after I mentioned I hit 3 curbs one day. They seemed to think that I was an unsafe driver and putting myself and other people at risk. They were right to an extent, but what really freaked them out was that I don't really see out of my right eye well. They requested an eye exam before I drive. I have seen like this since I was a kid so that was not the problem. I was panicked and angry. I felt attacked. I thought they were overreacting. I really didn't see a problem with hitting curbs. They said, "What if a person was on the curb?"

"I would see them and adjust so as not to hit them." I replied. (On a positive note, I did get a disabled bus

pass and saved gas and had time to read on the way into town.)

I was panicked because I felt I was left without a way to escape should I be in trouble. I expect this is a common fear among abuse survivors. I needed to problem solve and be involved in the process, not be handed an ultimatum. I came up with several strategies that I use now to avoid accidents that work most of the time.

The first thing I do when I get in the car is adjust radio, seat, mirrors, seatbelt. Next, I announce that no one can drive besides me unless specifically asked. I make sure everyone is in a comfortable place inside and they are not allowed to have outside time while we are in the car. Only when everyone is settled and agrees to the rules do I start the car. Ideally, the rules should be settled before you are going anywhere. Once the rules are in place, a quick reminder and check-in should suffice. If a part is having a difficult time, I make sure a helper is with them in our safe place inside.

I focus my attention on the task of driving. Meditating is a good way to learn to focus your attention. In meditating you learn to be mindful and that is critical to safe driving. You can also use visualization of a safe trip with all its details long before you go anywhere. Of course one should not meditate while driving!

To stay mindful, I read out loud the signs I see and say things like, "That's not our exit." "That means it is 3 miles to our exit." "We need to be careful because there is more traffic here." This helps me stay present. It seems that there is often an adult helper around. It is a good idea to have a helper run interference to prevent lack of focus. Last week, I rear ended a car because we were excited to see the ducks beside the road. I had to pay the driver of the other car \$250 to get it fixed. The damage was minor, but it was a brand new car and she wanted it fixed. Paying for the repair

prevented a rise in my insurance cost.

Knowing when you are safe to drive is very important. If you are groggy or feeling side effects of your medicine DO NOT DRIVE. I don't plan anything before 11 am because I know I will be somewhat sedated from my meds. The same is true for night driving. Do not drive after you have taken your meds at night. You may not feel the effects of the medicine when you start out on the road, but it can hit you all of the sudden and render you unable to drive safely. It goes without saying that you avoid driving if you are using drugs or alcohol.

You need to be aware of any limitations you have with driving. I do not see well at night and without thinking I hopped into the car to go to Wal-Mart to get some Liquid Plumber. We have one bathroom and the toilet was stopped up. I thought I'd just run out and be right back. The store is only about 3 miles from my house. I hit a median and some trees on that foggy night about a month ago. I had a \$4000 car repair that was paid by the insurance. This accident would have not happened if I had better impulse control at the time. If you are in a manic state, you may drive recklessly. If you are in a depressed state you may have a decrease in reaction time.

What are your options if you are unable to drive? You can ask a friend to drive you. You can take a bus if there is one going your way. You can ask someone at your church if that's available. Some transit authorities have a service that will pick up disabled individuals. This varies by city so contact your local bus system.

The other very important option is to not go at that time. You can change an appointment, but you can't change an accident.

If you are in a crisis, do not drive. If you have no one that can help you get to crisis services, call 911 and request transport to a mental health emergency center. (It is a good idea to have where you want to go written

# Healing Words

By Rhonda P.

out ahead of time so you know what to ask for.)

To summarize: Adjust the controls before you start the car. Make an Agreement that no one else drives or is out while you are driving. Focus completely on driving tasks. Be Mindful of the situation around you on the road. Have an inner helper Monitor and attend to inner parts. Do not drive if Medication is affecting your balance or consciousness. Finally, know your Limitations due to mood, physical impairments, and impulsivity.

MV

## Identity

is a word in a book somewhere It's not something about me or the uneven chorus of inner voices, some of them young and pleading reaching for candy to sweeten terror The Woman is molded to work at jobs, no matter what, for years and that's her identity She just longs to belong somewhere to someone, but doesn't trust

Walking outside, I become the other - tree, grass, hawk, pavement In town, I'm whoever I pass their country is mine It's all me melting down, fiery brain a stranger to boundaries. What do you see?

Shapeshifter she calls me her hero The other person says no one sees the pain Child that eats candy gets confused by food that others take away, saying she's too fat too slow / lazy / stupid / selfish / greedy child of immigrants who doesn't

appreciate anything Child just learns to live on candy from those who use her body to wipe their pain on / in exchange for the white lightening of tooth rotting sweetness

What do you see?

© Living Earth

MV

Learning to trust has always been a chore to me, but learning *not* to trust has also been a challenge. Identifying red flags when entering a new relationship is a goal of mine. Up until now I basically went out blindfolded into the world, But it was I who put the blindfold on, not anybody else.

I go out looking for the good in people, while at the same time, I truly miss the mark. I want to believe that all is good, but unfortunately expectations like this end up causing resentments. What I realize is that no one, not even me, can meet my expectations. I strive to be perfect because I don't want to give anyone the chance to hurt me. I want you to be perfect so that you will not WANT to hurt me. It's crazy.

There is only one person who is in charge of my life and that one is God. So why do I attract abuse and negativity? Probably because I don't feel like I'm worth anything or deserve anything good in my life. God is good, but I believe I am innately evil, some of the time. After all, there must be something wrong with me, that made the abuse happen, right?

In relationships, I am slowly taking appropriate risks. Learning to look at what is in front of me, instead of pretending that I am invisible.

Invisibility is a funny thing. It protects me yet at the same time I pray to be seen. A friend told me that I need to put the heart of mine back into my chest and let people discover it. This is instead of wearing it on my sleeve and getting walked all over. It is probably the reason that I hold on to resentments. How can I be angry at others, though, when I haven't given people the chance to be real with me? I need to be real first to myself, then to others, which in turn gives the other person a chance to get to know the real me, and me, them.

What I realize is that it's all a learning process. Taking risks is an important thing for me, on this journey of life. But holding back when it's scary is also a good goal. And guess what? Not everybody will be let in, and that's o.k. You don't have to like everyone any more than I have to like everyone. Taking it slow though, helps. Identifying the red flags in the process is very important. Practice, practice, practice. And sometimes, I will get hurt.....and that's o.k. too. Because I have people who care about me, and some that even love me, who will be there to pick up the pieces with me. I am capable. I need to throw away the invisibility cloak, and find my voice. I am teachable. I will learn.

MV



# Voices

By Living Earth

There are so many, their names are recorded on a list. Her hand moves over the asymmetrical site of the latest surgery. The other site is a river of flame, so painful that she avoids it.

She knows that she'll never work again in the usual sense. The others, the ones named on the list, always seem to be present.

Their voices guide, direct and instruct her. "Get up now. You must eat. Rest. Take a walk." They are so familiar. Still, she's sure of their separate identities. Eyes closed, she yields to the pain. The air is unusually warm for the month. Silence is a wind, rustling memory's pages. Tall pine trees sway at the edge of the forest, a few feet away.

"Everything seems vague," she reflects. "I don't remember doing it, but I know it has something to do with me. Maybe the others do these things, and then tell me about it afterwards. Or maybe my memory weakens with advancing age." She looks at her fingers, changing with arthritis. Then the others present images that vibrate with poignant vitality.

She sees a series of children. One child explains something to a group younger than herself. Another child, hearing voices in the wind, rain and rocks, is silenced by ridicule. A succession of others experience paranormal phenomena, and the loneliness of alienation. All wish to pass freely to others what they experience and learn. She notices the erratic, involuntary movements of some of the youngsters. The tics, gestures, repetitive acts, vocalizations and compulsions. The restless preoccupation with symmetry. The inner disquiet. The surges of rage.

She sees young adults and adults. All are poignantly unique, with stories of their own.

"My story is special," says Sarah, who watches over the children and always seems to be waiting for something.

"I want to tell how the teacher lets

me help the others learn," says another.

The witness to this waits as more stories and images are presented. She sees one of the young adults listening, while slowly escorting an elder to a car. She observes another holding a fellow student's badly cut hand aloft as they both run to an infirmary. She is reminded of other incidents when aid, comfort and counseling are offered. On streets. In places like hospitals, classrooms, hallways, jails, stores and alleys. She is shown how some can see and assist disembodied spirits, recently deceased.

"Very often they just don't know they've died. Even the animals. I simply explain that their bodies are beyond repair. Some express what is left for them to say or do. This relieves the shock and grief, so they can move on."

While speaking, the one with large, bright eyes smiles sweetly.

The listener looks at the forest. She is told of those who hug, speak with, and watch over the trees. She is reminded of the tears shed for vanishing wildness and wilderness. As the stories unfold, she tires and breathes deeply. She realizes that her physical pain has eased. She is intrigued by the variety of tales, and storytellers. Each is unique, yet something weaves them together. She is deeply moved, and enlivened by their vitality. Yet she still wonders what she has to offer. She feels the weight of recent life threatening illness, body altering surgeries, advancing age, and a vague sense of severe trauma. She is unsure of herself, and her place in life's tapestry.

The voices of the others remain. Their presence somehow ties her to what she sees around her. The neatly stacked dishes she doesn't recall washing. The numerous drawings not created by her, a non-artist. The clock on the wall, quietly moving time around. She ponders that blackouts and dizziness she experiences. The confusion and memory lapses. Episodes of lost time, without

knowing what has occurred. Incidents of finding herself somewhere, not knowing the location or circumstances. Being in someone's presence without knowing the other person's identity. The voices remain. These things are unexplained. There are just the constant inner noises and voices in her head.

She is not ready to know the truth. Nor are the others. Maybe it is enough that the researchers, psychiatrists, doctors, shamans and healers understand. How an ancient ability can be instinctively used to save one's life. How the mind can dissociate and enclose experience so that sanity, reason and talent are preserved. That severe trauma can open the mind to heightened intuition and awareness. That the others are separate forms and incidents in a single life.

She looks at her chilled hands, joints burning and stiff.

"How can a cold fire incite such pain?" she wonders.

She also marvels at how the others' tales of giving and helping calm and fill her. She notices the abundance of white in her long hair. A clear voice in her head says, "You've done enough. You can rest now." Looking at the trees, she decides to take a walk.

A wave of sadness moves through her. She considers how some inner strength sustains her, so she survives what some others do not. She contemplates the circle of life. The circle of giving. She recalls a deceased friend, and closes her hand.

"I cannot hold this death of one so dear. It is too large."

This thought arrives on tired wings. She smiles and opens her hand. It is empty.

## My Story

By CPK

**M**y story is probably similar to everyone else's. I was abused sexually, physically, and emotionally starting at a very young age—2 or 3—by both parents. My dissociative episodes started early—at least as far as I can remember—in kindergarten, probably earlier. I don't remember much.

In 1990 my stepson tried to kill us by torching the house while my husband and I slept upstairs. I became severely depressed afterwards and started therapy. Memories started surfacing and the dissociative episodes began again after staying dormant for the first 3 years of my marriage. In therapy, there was a smile first, then a few sessions later my therapist asked me if I just said "hello". I tried to bluff it. Didn't work at all. We agreed to videotape.

He gave me an insurance report with the DSM-III codes. I wrote them down with every intention of checking it out (that was his intent as well). I had a dissociative episode and the paper vanished permanently.

Then he asked if it was just "me" at a session three weeks ago. We knew what that meant. So did I. A voice in my head said "He knows." The secret's out.

Therapy is progressing. It's a safe place.

My husband is totally confused, angry, and trying to understand. He bought us a doll—Raggedy Ann. He has invited all of us to come and stay here. He told me that since the others are parts of me and he loves me that he wants to know them too. But it has strained our relationship. Sex is extremely difficult.

I made the mistake of telling this MPD (now DID) diagnosis to an old friend. A woman I knew when I lived in Pittsburgh. She felt it was her duty to come and see me. Her visit of 3 days duration was extremely difficult as she saw my condition as a "badge of honor" and poked and pried. Insisted she had dissociative episodes

which I knew were alcoholic blackouts from her description—not dissociation.

She knew the "buzzwords," not the feelings. could not describe anything like what we've/I've experienced. When she told me she had "seen" the others surfacing and "it was neat" and I knew they were scared of her and were hiding—that I had not dissociated during her stay...well, I felt like a freak at a sideshow for oddities. And knew she did not know what she was talking about. I felt ashamed at the whole thing. And exposed. The kids (inside) were crying all the time. The hostile one became hostile acting out...after she left, of course. No one would show themselves to her. None of us. No way. We don't need that crap.

I just felt so alone and she has helped me in the past with nurturing and support. It didn't work.

I'm not sure which one of us wrote, but I'm glad we did.

*This first section was written and sent to Lynn at MV sometime around 1994. While cleaning files, an MV volunteer uncovered it (Proof that Lynn saves everything!) so she contacted me to ask permission to publish. Permission received, but here is my UPDATE*

The original therapist decided I did not have DID in spite of everyone popping out. His take, eventually, was that the disorder did not exist. I quit therapy with him and in the intervening years, I became ill with West Nile which required an entire years' worth of recovery. This was in 2004.

In 2006, my husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, End Stage Renal Disease and Myelodysplasia Syndrome. I became depressed while taking on the role of a 24/7 caregiver for him and went back into therapy with a new doctor, (quite literally, he's just received his Ph.D.). Then the flashbacks began again. Memories,

more of them and more detailed, started surfacing. A child came out during a session and introduced herself to my therapist, Mike. The cat was out of the bag and this time my therapist believed me.

We've worked through a lot of the returning memories since then. I have been seeing him for two years now. We have a lot on our plate with the grieving process over my husband's illnesses as well as my own past returning with a vengeance. I have also learned how to do an internal roll call and conferencing.

Most all of my "alters" have become allies through working with Mike. I have learned to listen to their/our needs and try to meet them whenever possible. Even to the point of building our own sandtray. (Mike introduced us to sandtray therapy). It gives everyone a chance to play when there's time. You should have seen the look on my face when one of the dolls in the tray was positioned with a hand waving at me one morning! All unbeknownst to me.

At this point integration is not an issue. I'm not sure it's necessary. We have all agreed on a future career after my husband dies.

Of course we don't tell anyone about our condition these days, nor will we. Mike says, that in this case, lying is a good idea to stay safe. Mostly we do feel safe, but when my husband's illness makes him abusive, everyone flees inside and leaves me to handle things solo.

It's a very lonely feeling. I don't know how singletons do it. Also, most of the friends we did have left after my husband got sick.

Caregiving for someone else while having DID is a most difficult experience. If I didn't have a good therapist who actually believes me, I just don't know what I'd do at this point.

# Sky's the Limit!

By Pat M.

When I was little I could fly. I closed my eyes and up I went to be near the birds, feel the sun on my face, and to feel the breeze against my skin. At night, I reached out and touched the twinkling stars and danced under the moon. I soared high above all things and I was free.

I grew up when the Flying Nun was on TV in the afternoons. Sally Field was cute and funny and she could fly too. Then there was Peter Pan. Tinker Bell glistened while she flew. I believed everyone could fly in their sleep. I have learned recently why I could fly away from everyone and away from the pain. When my father entered my room, I closed my eyes and dreamed of somewhere far, far away. I dreamed of somewhere safe.

I have lived my life in a very unusual way: distant and away from everyday things, and from people. I have had no friends and no one I trusted in my life except four wonderful people. I met and married my soul mate when I was merely nineteen years old. We had our three children within four years, and this group has been my entire life for over thirty years. It wasn't until three years ago I learned about the sexual abuse and trauma I lived through while growing up. Because I could fly, I never felt any of the pain and sorrow the abuse caused me.

I have been working for the same small Christian school for six and a half years. We celebrate Jesus together on a day to day basis and there is true caring for one another inside its walls. The foundation for life is through God's grace. I am the school nurse and I love my position in this school. The children are great and I know I have a lot to offer each one as they step into my office. The children have someone to turn to and watch over their interests. I get paid very little but this is the best job I've ever had in my career. I had hoped to retire from this job when the time was right.

From the beginning I have shared my entire story with a few people from school because I needed support. I chose the counselor and God chose the principal. I prayed and asked God to send someone for me to hold onto in this time of crisis.

Three years ago, my life turned upside down. I dissociated and lost all my memories at the same time. I no longer knew my immediate family and when I looked into the mirror, I didn't recognize my reflection either. I have never been so lost and in such pain. I truly didn't think I would survive the sadness within me.

Each day, I forced myself to get out of bed and drive to work, knowing there were kind people on the other end of my drive. They cared for me physically and tried to understand my emotional status. Every day was different. Every day I was open and honest so there wouldn't be any misunderstandings. I had finally found a place to let the pain in and to let the pain go. Some days were very difficult and I would ask my boss if I could go home and suffer in private. We got into a routine which worked for both of us. He would see the expression on my face and knew, without words, I needed to retreat.

For a year and a half, I had flashbacks that resembled grand mal seizures. At first, they were frightening to everyone, including me. I adapted and overcame the situation, and learned to deal with the outcome of each episode. My friends at work made sure I was safe and everyone prayed for me. It took nine months to get the correct diagnosis. It was a relief and it was agony all rolled into one distinct moment in time. That was two and a half years ago and I have made wonderful progress.

Sometimes I make the mistake of asking myself how much more will the abuse from long ago reach into my life today and destroy what I cherish. The timing of this particular question seems to coincide with a new set of troubles. It happened again this past December. As the holidays approached, I felt myself getting more and more scared and lost. Trauma therapy and the holidays are overwhelming for me. I knew it was coming, yet I couldn't do anything to stop its progression into my everyday life.

The third week in December is the anniversary of me losing my life and having amnesia. It isn't a day to celebrate. It is a day I dread and mourn my losses. I look around at the faces in my family, from my mother and sister to my husband and

children. They have so many expectations of me. They remember who I was three years ago. I remember nothing. I got an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness and I panicked.

I started to get clingy with people I trusted from work. I kept quiet as to why I was in a panic. It was confusing and troubling to a few, and to others, they didn't even notice my frailty. The morning everything changed, again, the alarm on my clock sounded and I wet my pants. It was the first clue as to why I should have stayed home from work. The stress of my past and the abuse always causes me to wet my pants when I'm frightened. This day was no exception.

I got myself to work and noticed my boss had something on his mind. After his class of teaching math, I knocked on his door and proceeded to close the door for privacy. He immediately became defensive and angry. At this point in time, I realized it had nothing to do with the door. I was in his space.

The meeting was one of the worst in my life. He yelled and yelled and I sat there wondering how I was going to get out of the situation. I was rooted to my chair out of fear. I listened and he talked about my behavior for the last three years. He didn't believe I was having flashbacks but was calling attention to myself. He pointed out that I was stronger than this and I could put the abuse behind me. He shared with me co-workers' opinions of me and it wasn't very nice. I have gone through so much in the last three years, and I have thought of this person as my friend and honorary brother. He's had enough of me. After the verbal bashing, I went to my office and called my husband. We decided it was time to leave this place behind me. I packed my office and said goodbye to so many wonderful people.

It has been six weeks since that fateful day. We met with the Pastor of the church and the principal of the school. The meeting went very well but to be honest, I was still in shock. I was told I was on a leave of absence until next August. This decision wasn't made on any facts, just the need of the principal to be free of me for awhile. My husband spoke up and made it clear that I wasn't to be hurt

anymore. They both understood what the other meant. I was so proud of my husband that day. He told them of PTSD and DID and explained to them if they wanted to educate themselves, they could pick up a book on the subject or check out websites on the internet. Neither has done any research on mental health, yet I am being disciplined by these two individuals with no knowledge of my suffering.

It has taken a bit of time but now I am angry. I was desperate in the last three years and holding on for dear life. I was in survival mode. Yet, I am being held accountable for my behavior according to standards I can't possibly attain.

One great thing did happen over Christmas. My memory returned! It happened over a two day period. I remembered the first ten years of my life, bit by bit, on the first morning. I remembered clothing I wore to school and kids' names from forty years ago. The next morning the same thing happened. I slept late and when I awoke, my whole life was before my eyes. I remembered me! I wept and my family celebrated. It was the best Christmas of my life. I have calmed down

a great deal and I feel "normal" since the return of my memory. Normal for me won't ever be the same as anyone else's but no one is the same. Our uniqueness is what sets each one of us apart from the next person. I embrace all that I am.

I have been reading up on discrimination in the workplace for mentally disabled people. This past August, I disclosed everything about my illness to my boss. I gave him phone numbers of people to contact if he could see I was having trouble. I shared with him that there would be no yelling at me due to my abuse issues and for us to sit and talk with one another prior to him losing his temper and patience with me. I assured him I could do my job. He agreed to call my husband if I was having a rough time and in his space. He followed none of these guidelines. I believe he yelled at me continuously so I would leave my position. He is free of me.

We have asked to meet with him this week or next. My boss is adamant about me not working until August. This is not based on my needs as the mentally ill person but on his needs. I'm not sure if this is legal. I know it isn't fair. The funny

thing is his favorite saying is: "Nothing in life is fair." Isn't that the truth?

I don't know what my future brings. I am sad, once again. I have worked so hard at overcoming my childhood and now, it seems, I have to overcome the stigma of mental illness in the workplace. The Pastor called me "colorful". My husband and I think of clowns with this term. Am I a clown to them? It has taken all of my life but I am finally at a point where my opinion of me is what matters the most. My therapist has a wonderful saying that I have adopted: "Your opinion of me is none of my business!" When I was little I had to fly to feel free. Today I am free and my feet are on the ground. I will continue putting one foot in front of the other until I have a solid foundation on which to build the rest of my life. Who will I share my life with? The original four people in my family, of course. After all the work of the past three years, there may be room for a few friends along the way. They have to be able to see all of me and love me as I am, because I am pretty great!

MV

## BOOKS

### **Undrunk: A Skeptic's Guide to AA**

By A.J.Adams ©2009 Published by Hazelden www.hazelden.org \$14.95 US, \$16.95 Canada 120 pgs Softback ISBN 978-1-59285-720-3

Here is a sample of the "Undrunk" style, as the author refers to the 12 steps as the "mother lode of recovery from booze." "If 2 million people were rescued from any other fatal illness, by any remedy at all, you wouldn't be able to keep it on the shelves. Although I didn't see things with this kind of clarity as my drinking spun out of control, my choices were clear: Have another drink and think about AA, or give it a whirl. I chose to have another drink and give it a whirl."

This book depicts the experience of a one-year-sober individual as he enters and begins to succeed in the world of AA. It covers the heavy subject of alcohol addiction with a light touch. It goes into some depth on the history of AA and what newcomers can expect when they first tiptoe into an open meeting. It describes the 12 steps and many of the buzzwords of AA that can seem strange or even off-putting to someone who has never explored the AA program before. It's an

interesting, one-man's first hand statement of how, exactly, AA accomplishes miracles for those who are addicted. Worth reading by anyone with an addiction problem or those who care.

### **Coming Out, Coming In: Nurturing the Well-Being and Inclusion of Gay Youth in Mainstream Society**

By Linda Goldman, MS, LCPC,FT, ©2009 by Taylor & Frances (Routledge Imprint) .www.routledgejournalhealth.com \$29.95 339pgs, counting index. Softback. ISBN 0-415-95824-5

This could be considered the Mother Earth Catalog of gayness, especially regarding young people and the process of "coming out" or letting the world (or select individuals) know one's sexuality. Goldman is a certified grief counselor and experienced as a child and adolescent therapist, school guidance counselor, and is also the parent of a gay son. She has prepared a basic but thorough book that offers information and resources for people who are supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) individuals. LGBT youth are said to be at increased risk for depression, drug use, HIV infection and suicide attempts. Part of

the purpose of this book is to educate mainstream society by providing sensible information that is intended to reduce the serious stigma against the LGBT community, in schools and in society at large.

With anecdotes that show all sides of the spectrum, from rejection to complete acceptance, Goldman helps dispel the myths that prevail about the genesis of gayness or mixed sexuality. Her book can guide family members and friends, as well as therapists, toward an optimistic outlook for their loved one who is embarking on life in a mode somewhat different than the majority, but still "normal" Being an LGBT adolescent does not need to hamper the potential for growth and maturity that is every young person's right and responsibility.

Language, Guidelines for educators, parents, and students, Goals of working with LGBT youth and specific interventions are detailed here. This book also includes a vast number of resources, both printed and on-line, for continuing the process of education, understanding, and nurturing of those we love, regardless of their gender.

MV

### Thanks For All You Do!

We need more of *everything*. Art! Cartoons! Prose! Poetry! Please share your wonderful work. Also send Ideas for next year's themes! Send now!

#### August 2009

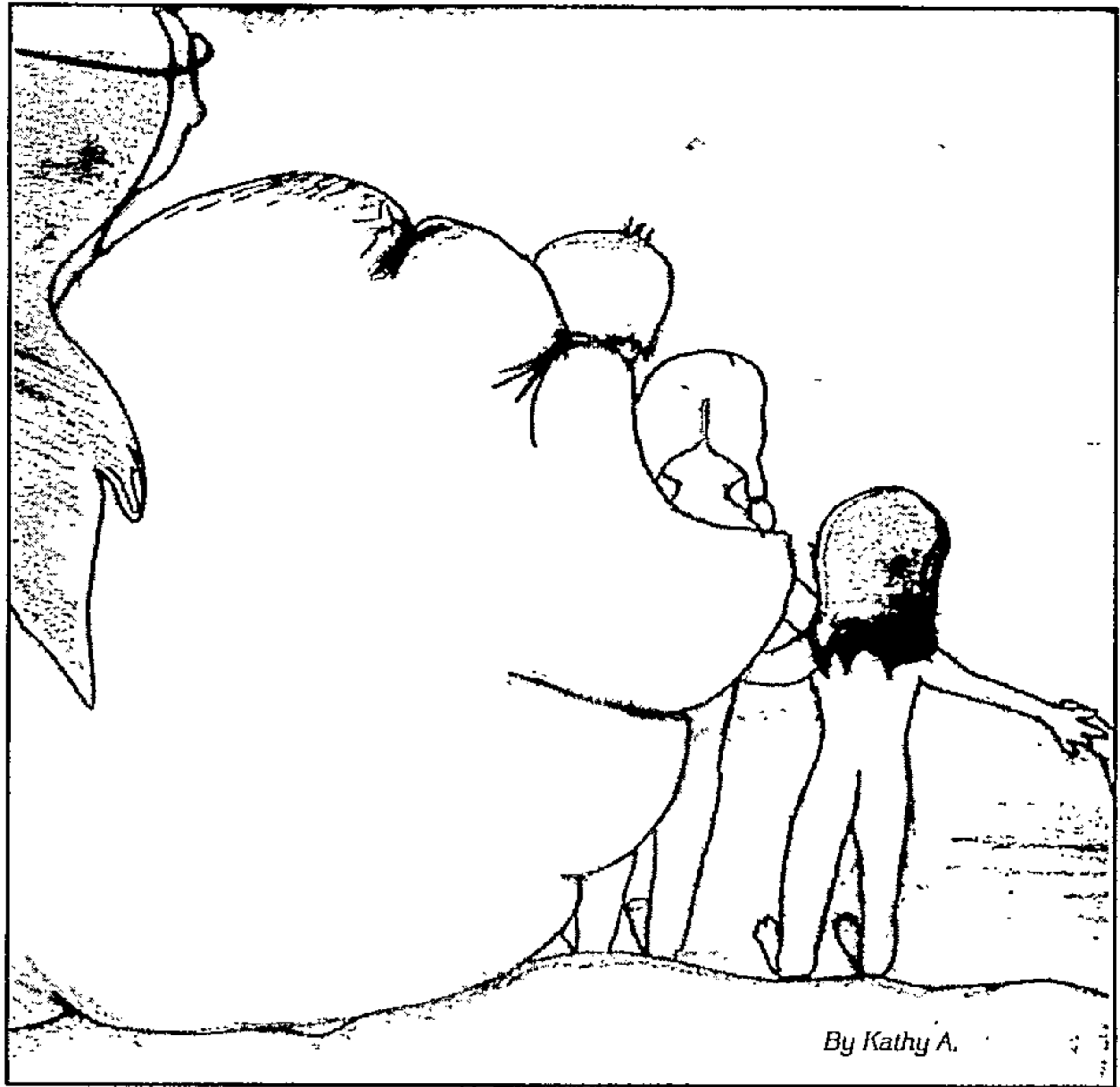
Symptom Management: PTSD - Eating Disorders - Self-injury. Surviving or Thriving? ART: Draw Yourself Healthy. DEADLINE: June 10, 2009

#### October 2009

Hospital issue. Paying for therapy. Insurance vs Private Pay. The Public-funded therapy experience. Making it work for you. ART: Cartoons about Therapy. DEADLINE: August 1, 2009

#### December 2009

Sharing Accomplishments. Moments of pride and satisfaction. Making a better world. ART: Happiness is?(for you) DEADLINE: October 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.

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. Web: [www.manyvoicespress.org](http://www.manyvoicespress.org)

# MANY VOICES

We now accept  
*American Express*  
*Visa, Mastercard*  
*& Discover!*



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 \_\_\_ '00 \_\_\_  
'01 \_\_\_ '02 \_\_\_ '03 \_\_\_ '04 \_\_\_ '05 \_\_\_ '06 \_\_\_ '07 \_\_\_ '08 \_\_\_ '09 \_\_\_ '10 \_\_\_ '11 \_\_\_ '12 \_\_\_

Donation \$: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 AMERICAN EXPRESS

Cardholder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Acct.# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp.Date \_\_\_\_\_ Total:\$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_