

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

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**Dissociation and Parenting
Calming Techniques
*and much more...***



Families

We are born
we are molded
sometimes in supportive
loving homes
into playful
care-free children
growing up confident
and at peace
with our worlds
there are those of us though
who are not so lucky
we are mistreated – abused
and that is ingrained
throughout our young
immature minds and bodies
shaping us
molding us
into scared
distrustful
unhappy children
and we grow up
into shadows
of who we could have been

SJS

MV

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Parenting and D.I.D.

By JoEllen Smith

When I first entered treatment for D.I.D my four children were teenagers. The oldest one had just graduated from high school and was not home much, so he was spared. My second born child, a son, suffered with so much anxiety he had to drop out of college. We had him in counseling for a few years as well. He is still on meds but now has a successful career and family.

My two younger girls, I think were affected more than their older brothers. My switching from one personality to another was not healthy for them even though I really tried to keep a consistent front when dealing with them. I wasn't always successful. I had a young adult alter in charge of running the household, preparing the meals, cleaning, driving the children etc.

I had many other child alters. I regrettably remember one of my child alters going to the park with my teen girls. They were aware I had switched and invited "me" to the park to swing with them giggling all the way. I hate that I lost control and exposed my children to a mother who acted like a child.

Another problem was I spent too much time sleeping off those debilitating therapy sessions or locked in my room journaling. I was so wrapped up in my pain I was not "there" for them. Consequently my older daughter ran away from home for two weeks, abused drugs and alcohol and attempted suicide. As I watched my little fifteen year old get her stomach pumped by insensitive nurses, I hated what my pain caused her. We also spent the summer in family oriented outpatient substance abuse treatment.

I found myself angry at the parent who supplied my daughter with drugs and arranged for her to run away. A school guidance counselor helped me understand, "Your problem is not with Mrs. ____; the problem is in your family." She was right. My life had fallen apart. I was suicidal, losing time

and nearly catatonic. My husband was so worried he spent all of his time with me and the children were neglected. And I was often not "present." My troubled daughter moved out as soon as she graduated High School. She is now a successful Para-legal, caring wife and doting mother. She is still angry at me, though we have repaired some of the damage. She even insisted I be with her as she delivered her baby. I have felt like I had to earn her trust over the years since she moved out.

The fall-out of my inconsistent parenting attempts also affected my younger daughter. She started having debilitating migraines, became seriously insecure, had panic attacks and has been in therapy for several years. We now have a close relationship. She was still living at home as I recovered enough to develop a healthy relationship with her. She understands and has worked through her issues with a good counselor.

I am angry at my abusers who caused all this fall-out down into another generation. One of these is my own estranged Father. It was not my fault. I do wish I had been able to wait to heal until after my children were grown....but the pain would not be contained any longer and began leaking its toxic waste into my psyche. Had I not received counseling at the time I did, my children would be motherless. The pain and shame of my past would have killed me. I think my children would rather have a mom, however ill, than have none. I did set an example for them. I braved through the tough healing and have become a much more sensitive and present Mother and now grandmother. I have now shared in my children's weddings and births of their children. My grown children can now depend on me when needed. I have shown them how to tough out the hard stuff.

My children, my husband and I are still working at restoring what was lost during my therapy years but despite

all my children have suffered, I am very proud of each of them. They have all turned out better than most. I am sure they enjoy the support I can now give them. I can't repair the past but I can make today and tomorrow much better for them.

There is hope for children of D.I.D parents. I think children are reassured by their D.I.D parent's commitment to recovery. My husband told me when asked why he didn't leave me, that he always knew that deep down inside me was someone who loved him and wanted to get well, and that gave him the hope he needed to stay with me.

JoEllen's blog, which features her creative artwork and writing, can be seen at cocooncreationsonline.net

MV

Mother

When I pack her clothes I hold them tight to my body. I have her scent. Should I keep something? This is the smell I always thought was bad. Now I want it. I put it back in the pile. I must surrender her in every way. It's been too long. I must find more of me...more, more.

Then in the morning I take out a blouse that was put away for the season and I wear it. I notice it smells like my Mother. I'm a little surprised. I thought I had nothing of hers. So wrong I am. A great deal of her is me. So it is when I accept her, I accept me.

By Sara M. **MV**



Our Heart Opening

By a Survivor

If this entry seems "adolescent" it's because it's coming from an alter who is 17 years old.

My body is 35 years old. My son is 3 years old.

People who know me say I should be dead. I am called brave, and courageous.

I was diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), Major Depressive Disorder, and Fantasy Prone Disorder. I also recovered from a touch-and-go bulimia for 2-3 years. I've had two abortions, at least 44 moves, and over 37 perpetrators, most from my birth to 17 years old.

At 17 I stood up for myself. This is when my fear and anger dissipated and I felt my rage at the world. I became fearless until I was attacked in a women's public washroom by a bricklayer. Next, my special cat died. So—more suicidal attempts. Seven or ten, I don't know...it's like it was always an option in the back of my mind, until I had a child when I was 31 years old.

I was terrified of the birth—of giving birth, that is. During the nine months my body literally trembled and shook as I quit alcohol, cocaine, and cigarettes for my baby. I had been a raging alcoholic cokehead on a self-destructive, suicidal path...transforming to a sober, yoga-doing mom-to-be.

I gave birth to the most perfect, beautiful boy. I couldn't believe it, he was so beautiful.

During this pregnancy I also faced and healed from memories of previous pregnancies begun and terminated by those perpetrators who created the mess I was in.

I began therapy in 1991. Memories which I had suppressed poured forth in an unruly way when I was 19. My partner at the time, a platonic boyfriend, maintained our friendship for 15 or 16 years. I felt he suffered alone in a private hell until he committed suicide 3 years ago.

I kept living for my son. I have had to give up my "suicide crutch" as I have made a commitment to my son

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to always be here for him.

But it has not been easy. In addition to past suicide attempts, I stayed in a battered women's shelter, and now I'm working on recovery. My tools for recovery are time consuming. They include psychotherapy, hypnosis, yoga, meditation (which gets noisy and emotional), aromatherapy, many forms of art, writing, drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, video, sound.

Though I hold two university degrees, seven years of art school, diplomas in Early Childhood Care, suicide helpline training, yoga teacher training, and am widely read, I have mostly been unemployed for the past 8 years, living on a disability check. My income averages about \$5,000-\$6,000 per year. That means food banks, addiction counseling for hard drugs, alcoholism, and poverty,

poverty, poverty.

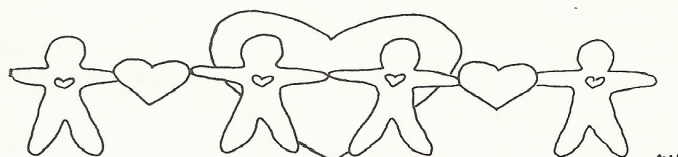
I am trying out this idea of Opening My Heart to Money Income. I have never considered myself of value enough to receive the healthy salary I studied so hard to obtain.

I am learning to love myself, and open my heart up to trust and love. I am with the man I want to spend the rest of my life with. So, I am working extra hard to heal and be kind and loving to each other.

There is hope. I have worked very hard to get where I am now.

I believe forgiveness, acceptance, and release are essential components of healing. I want to offer my compassion and optimism for all families, relationships, and parents who created this amazing strategy the therapy world has named Dissociative Identity Disorder.

MV



The Dilemma of Parenting—Looking Back

By Mara

Parenting-while-dissociative is a dilemma no matter how you look at it. It's tough raising kids when you've got the diagnosis—but that also means you have a therapist, and/or a clue about what is going on to cause your peculiar behavior. You can ask questions and get answers.

Some of us did not have that "luxury" – we found out we were dissociative after the kids were grown, or nearly-so. That's what happened to me and mine.

So what follows is a brief description of what "parenting" meant to me, as a person with a traumatic history who did not yet have the vocabulary to describe it.

My goal, as an adult and parent, was to be the 180-degree opposite of my folks. This was not a well-thought-out plan, because though intelligent, I was not particularly good at seeing life in perspective. Throughout childhood and preteen years, I was desperately unhappy. I realized at a very young age that I did not live in a "normal" home. So I was completely focused on becoming "normal," studying "normality" by observing everyone outside my family, and doing my best to imitate them. This resulted in my copying not just "society's norms" – but also "society's stupidities." I totally disregarded my parents' good ideas, as well as their wide range of dysfunctional ideas and behaviors. If the idea came from mom or pop – fuggedaboutit. It wasn't for me.

For this reason, I ignored my parents' insistence on studying hard and doing my best. Other people didn't do that – so I wouldn't do it either. In fact, I deliberately missed questions on tests to avoid being viewed as different by my peers. (They still thought I was different.) I refused to learn French or German as a child, though my mother taught languages. (I didn't want to talk funny.) I also ignored my parents' preference in religion (none) and went hither-and-yon seeking this faith or the other. I ignored their taste in choosing my

companions—despite living in a hovel, they had high intellectual and cultural standards—so I looked to the local delinquents for company. ("Normal," right?)

Dad—the outrageously authoritarian, alcoholic, undiagnosed psychotic center of our home life—died when I was 15. I got pregnant, then married as soon as possible—within a year of my father's death—to a young man he had forbidden me to date. (However, the young man in question came from my perception of a "normal" family.) I was really blessed in this regard. My husband was not one of my delinquent associates. He was already in his early 20s, had a steady job, and was not a drunk nor a druggie. I really lucked out—at first.

We had a beautiful daughter within 6 months of our marriage—and I adored her. But—I had NO CLUE about how to raise a baby. I was barely 17 years old and my head was not screwed on right. Of course I couldn't ask my mother how to raise kids—she'd been an awful mother (in my black vs white adolescent view). And my mother-in-law? Well, already I was beginning to realize that "normal" comes in different flavors, and her idea of "normal" was not mine.

So I went to the library and borrowed books. This was around 1960, the late Dr. Spock era...and at that time, there were chapters in the Spock book that talked about "Scheduled feedings" vs. "Demand feeding." I was breast-feeding my daughter, but the warnings about creating a "spoiled child" via feeding on demand worried me. Naturally, I didn't want my baby to be spoiled! So I valiantly put my tiny baby girl on a "schedule" – feeding her every 4 hours. No surprise—she screamed bloody murder in between. (Colic? That was my expert conclusion, after reading the book.) I walked her, cuddled her, carried her everywhere trying to soothe her, stayed up half the night – but of course, I wouldn't feed her off schedule! That would be

spoiling!

When we took her to the pediatrician for her checkup, tho, he had a different answer. She wasn't gaining weight fast enough. He felt she was starving—and insisted I put her on a bottle part-time. Which, of course, I did—but then she really didn't get anything from the breast-feeding. So pretty soon, breastfeeding was done, it was bottle fed all the way. And she never did eat up to expectations of those around her. Including her father. Meals became a real battleground. He'd tell her "Eat your green beans or your skin will fall off!" I'd say "Don't listen to him, that's not true!" We'd yell at each other while she screamed at both of us. She was right.

So that was screw-up #1. Another problem was discipline. I was dissociative, though I didn't know it. All I knew was that one minute I was calm, and in a flash, I'd be bouncing off the walls. My temper was not well-in-hand, and my daughter was on the receiving end. My parents rarely-if-ever spanked us. (There were other punishments, not to be discussed.) So of course—I did the "normal" thing (or what was considered normal in 1963). I swatted my little girl. I didn't use a paddle or hairbrush—just my hand. But I used it often and not just gentle love-taps. I still remember the time she liberally applied lipstick to my white hobnail bedspread, her stuffed dog, and the bedroom mirror. She still remembers that time, too. Today we can laugh about it together, but it's a source of guilt for me and it should be. I did not demonstrate good parenting skills.

My son came along seven years after my daughter – and he got a different parenting routine. By the time I was pregnant with him, I was older, calmer, and read better books. I'd studied up on birthing methods, practiced deep relaxation, and needed zero medication throughout labor. I also read up on proper breastfeeding, and knew this time around that one

had to follow a demand-routine at first, to get the milk to flow properly. I enjoyed breastfeeding my son until he started drinking from a cup.

Discipline changed, too. My daughter was and is a tough cookie. When I went after her, she remained defiant (as I was, when young) and took whatever I dished out. My son had a different personality. He was scared when I turned into Awful Mother and came after him ready to spank. The turning point is still crystal clear in my mind. I'd gone after him for some infraction and he crawled, whimpering, behind the toilet to escape me. I stood there, startled. He was really afraid! Afraid of ME! I did not want my kids to be afraid of me. So—that was the end of the spanking.

Then there was school. My parents were insistent on grades, homework, rigorous expectations. So once again, I took the 180-degree position. I decided to leave all schoolwork alone. It was an issue between my kids and their teachers. They had to work it out together. I wouldn't interfere. If kids didn't do their homework—it was their fault. I was not going to get freaked out by Bs or Cs or...well, I did get a little freaked-out with Ds. In retrospect, again, I would handle this differently. I would have had some expectations and some requirements. I would have required some time spent on homework. I just would not have done what my folks did, when I brought home a paper with 99 right out of 100, and they'd look at me aghast and say "What did you get wrong?"

The kids did receive one major advantage from my quest for "normalcy" though. I had been raised in an isolated environment with few visitors. Neighbors were shunned. I had no one to play with except my sisters. My kids got to have friends and visitors and overnight slumber parties, and pizza and the joys of my husband's extended family, which included about 100 aunts, uncles, cousins etc. in regular contact with each other. That was great, and I enjoyed it as much as my kids did.

However, as seen by the green-bean discussion, my husband and I were poorly matched in personality type. We had a power-struggle going

on between us, and the kids became the centerpiece. I could not stand to raise kids the way he wanted to, and he couldn't see my point of view at all. So—driven by this and many other differences—after 16 years of marriage, we got a divorce. And it may sound far-fetched, but I sincerely believe we both became better parents by being apart than we were together. It was actually better for the kids, too. Neither of us had really believed in divorce. For years we had tried hard to stay married, through all sorts of counseling efforts. By the time we actually called it quits, we were past all blaming and anger...we were worn out. And neither of us wanted to continue the battle. So there were no arguments about visiting or custody—it was whatever worked for the kids. Divorced, we lived right across the road from each other, so the kids came and went as they pleased. They learned to behave "this way" at their Dad's house, and "that way" with me. So they actually learned flexibility skills and realized that people are different and that's OK. I think this has been a great benefit for them in the long haul.

I'm skipping over my own angst in those years. I kept most of my anguish inside, where I was tormented by horrible visions of graphic violence. I didn't know the source of the horror in my head. I assumed I was crazy. I didn't tell anyone for fear I'd be stuck in some institution (and I probably was right.) The few times I went for individual counseling, I quit as soon as anything got close to a "problem area." I read a zillion self-help books and practiced "building on my strengths." Thus it was 14 years after my divorce, after I'd moved to a different city, when my mother was in a nursing home in the final stages of dementia, that I learned about "dissociative disorder" and how it applied to me.

Lucky for me and the kids, I had DD-NOS, not full-blown DID. I was fortunate enough to be functional in many ways. I'd been lucky with my early marriage which kept me out of the drug scene of the '60s. I'd had a financial support, with my steady-earning husband. I was also smart enough to read books, and keep reading books, and kept trying to

"improve myself" —believing it was possible to improve. I felt different, but I didn't feel hopeless. I almost always have been able to find hope, somewhere, even when things were rotten.

So despite my having no good parenting skills and being dissociative, my good intentions plus good fortune kept me from completely screwing up the kids. They're mature adults now, and they claim I wasn't all that bad as a mother. Mostly, they say, I was "boring" and too cautious. I have three grandchildren, a wonderful daughter-in-law, and my daughter's partner is terrific. Though we don't live in the same city, I talk to the kids regularly on the phone and visit as often as we can. They are hard working, productive citizens. They like me. It amazes me, sometimes, that they came through our family turmoil so well.

Over time I realized that though my parents' behavior in certain areas was despicable, especially when I was quite young, they gave me advantages as well. Their gifts included intellectual curiosity, a zillion books, a strong work ethic, and a belief that we all should give back to the world as much as we can. The good parts of their parenting don't erase the negative—I'm not denying the bad stuff. But at least I now can say that my upbringing wasn't a complete and total disaster.

So to paraphrase Tiny Tim, "God Bless us, Parents, Every One" ...we do our best. And sometimes, as in my fortunate case, blundering is good enough.

MV



Therapist's Page

By Gil Shepard, MFT

Gil Shepard, MFT, is a licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and member of ISSTD, who practices in Walnut Creek, CA. Shepard has studied Eastern and Western Spirituality extensively. He works regularly with clients who have Dissociation including those who have been abused through Ritual Abuse. He is trained in EMDR, Hypnosis, two forms of bodywork, and also uses some EFT in his work. Contact him at 925-937-3337.

Rapid and Effective Ways to Calm From Trauma

The following are ways that use the physical body to center. They usually work very quickly, even when in a flashback. These methods use the body to help you focus in a way that feels natural, using the principle of focusing your mind on your body. This neutralizes your emotions and body, mind and emotions naturally balance.

Please try all these methods as different people find some are more effective for them than others. Because you may not be able to think of any of these when you are overwhelmed you may find it helpful to write a very brief list of these on a small piece of paper and put this list in your wallet or purse.

FOR ALMOST ANY AWFUL FEELING INCLUDING PANIC, ANXIETY, AND FEAR

Rub your feet back and forth (bare or with socks) on a carpeted floor. The friction on the soles of your feet will help you focus your mind on your feet instead of whatever thoughts or feelings you may be overwhelmed by. That balances mind, body and emotions, usually within 20 to 30 seconds. No equipment needed – you carry your feet with you! You can do this anywhere, in your car or a seat in a shopping mall, even at work. This is very effective for calming and centering

CURLING INTO A BALL FOR FEAR, LOSS OR OVERWHELM

Loss tends to hit you in the gut and/or in the heart. When suddenly frightened you may find you automatically curl up in a protective position. Curling up is your body's automatic way to protect the most vulnerable parts of your body. The following exercise simply goes with the way you naturally feel at those times.

Sit on the floor and pull your knees

up to your chest. Let yourself experience how protective this feels. Continue to curl even more tightly into a ball by putting your arms around your knees to pull your knees tightly together and against your chest. Bend your head toward your knees. You will feel protected and safe with the bony parts of your body on the outside.

Holding tightly releases tension held in your muscles and you want to release all the tension you can, so hold as long as you can. When you can't hold any more, gradually relax and just sit quietly for a few minutes. This can leave you calm and centered. In this state whatever is ready to be released will release. You may have relaxing tears, inner knowing, or a delightful calmness.

If you can't curl up in this position because of a bad back or weight you can cross your legs and curl up the best you can, again squeezing yourself as tightly as you can to get somewhat the same experience.

FOR FEELING SHAKY

When you feel shaky it is often because when you were traumatized you could not move for whatever reason. Your body then held in your desire to run or fight and your muscles now are stuck holding in that urge to move, so they shake. A long time ago freezing helped you survive. That time is no longer here so you can release your muscles safely.

Simply stand and begin by shaking your hands, arms, and gradually include the rest of your body and your head. Let your body shake the way it likes to and as long as it wants to. Continue until you come naturally to a stop. Experience the anxiety shaking off your body. Let yourself shake as vigorously as you want to.

RIP PAPER – FOR ANGER

Here is a technique I learned from a teenager. He came to my office on a first visit and asked for a piece of

paper, which I gave him.

Concentrating intently he slowly and deliberately ripped it in half, put those two pieces together and ripped them in half. He continued until the paper was in tiny pieces. Then he said, "Now I feel better."

As I didn't have a clue as to what he had done, I asked and he told me he had been very angry and taken it out on the piece of paper! He followed the principle I noted above by focusing his attention on the physical act of ripping that piece of paper. His angry emotions were harmlessly expressed and dissipated. When he was finished his body, mind, and emotions were balanced and he was calm.

SING A SCREAM – FOR ANGER

When angry or distraught with anxiety you may find you want to scream. The scream you want to release will be at the pitch your body feels. Screaming may give you a temporary release but it will not make you calm.

Instead, try singing the pitch you feel in your body. This way you have conscious control over this "scream." Sense how your very high singing resonates with the pitch you sing. Gradually bring that screaming pitch down a note and then go back up to the higher pitch to see which feels right for you at that moment. As you feel like it go down two notes then back up one and gradually proceed downward as you want to. Don't hurry; take your time.

Continue to follow the notes you feel until you find yourself humming your own tune in a free, calm, perhaps even playful way. By now the anxiety you felt will be gone and you will be singing in a resonant, peaceful and calming tone.

POUNDING ON A BED FOR ANGER

Expressing anger by pounding on a bed can be helpful at times, but the

exercise – KARATE CHOP – is much more effective. Pounding on a bed or a couch will use your physical body to release anger and it will probably make you tired. Under guidance of a therapist it may help you release and may change the way you feel about someone. For example, one client was suicidal because of fears of her mother, who had often molested her as a child. Her mother was now long dead.

I had her imaginatively pound and stab her mother to death on the couch. This released the stuck fear she had that had made her feel suicidal and expressed that as appropriate anger, which gave her strength. When she was done she sat exhausted on a chair and said, "I finally killed my mother and I don't have to go to jail for it."

It is important to stress that this was in her imagination; she did not really kill her mother. Her suicidal urge ended and this was successful.

However, this was an unusual circumstance. Since she was suicidal I had to do something. Usually pounding on a bed or couch will not bring you to a centered place. In the case above this client would have hurt herself on the couch if I had not held a cushion at the edge of it while she pounded. That is not a good outcome. To simply yell and scream and express anger does not resolve what is stored in the body.

KARATE CHOP FOR ANGER

This may be rather difficult to understand by a written description, but if you get right it is extremely effective. Stand with feet at shoulder width and parallel to each other. Feel yourself in a very solid stance, well balanced on the whole of each foot, as if you were a martial artist. Then squat down so your butt is low but your upper body is upright so you still feel solidly grounded. If someone were to push your shoulders they could not make you lose your footing or unbalance you, though your shoulders might move to transfer the energy of the push.

You do this move when angry, so let yourself feel anger. Clasp your hands strongly and angrily together.

Place your hands below your knees, keeping your butt low so you remain feeling solid on the earth with your hands clasping each other strongly as you proceed.

Then, while raising your arms, still pressing hands hard against each other, breathe in noisily raising the anger internally from your abdomen. As you raise your hands over your head feel the anger rise up in your body, as if gathering itself to strike angry blow. As you do this, rise up a little on the balls of your feet so you can use all of your strength on this chop, but remain solid.

Then, with a strong growling noise, a visceral sound that comes from your gut, rapidly bring your arms with clasped hands down between your knees in a chopping motion, as if you were breaking a board there with a karate chop. Follow through with this chop forcefully, going right through that imaginary board, while maintaining your solid footing.

If you are furious and you do this exercise as noted you may become instantaneously centered and calm. I remember someone who was furious with his wife about something. He did this move and instantaneously realized how foolish that anger actually was – it was about nothing important at all. He reported that he immediately smiled at how silly he now felt that anger was. The move released anger that was in his body in a way that went with his feelings, resulting in calmness. Being centered he found truth.

EPSOM SALTS BATH – DEEP RELAXATION

A hot Epsom Salts Bath is wonderful if you are anxious, not sleeping or cannot eat. This bath does several things at once. It draws toxins from your body (you may find the water even gets dark from this) and it provides you with Magnesium, which is often depleted from stress and trauma and not easily absorbed in pill form. Lastly you will become deeply relaxed.

This is how you do it. Fill a tub full with hot water and 4 or 5 pounds of Epsom Salts, available in drug or grocery stores. Keep the water as hot as you can stand for twenty minutes

to a half hour, adding hot water as the water cools. Submerge as much of your torso and upper body as you can in the water.

Bring a pitcher of water with you as this bath can dehydrate you and you may get quite thirsty. Take this bath just before bedtime because you will feel deeply relaxed and will want to sleep. This is an Edgar Cayce remedy and he suggested one take not more than one such bath a week.

AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy is also an excellent way to calm. Many health food stores have a variety of concentrated aromas. Some are individual like Lavender, Frankincense and Myrrh; and some are mixes with names like "Anxiety Relief," "Stress Relief," "Calm," or "Sleepy Time." Lavender is a general standby for most people, but sniff from the sampler bottles that are often available and see what you like best. That is the one for you at that time. At other times you may prefer another.

Shake some on your wrist and rub your wrists together or onto your neck so you can smell the aroma longer. This works so gently that you may not even notice it working, you will just feel more like yourself. Because you use only a few drops each time, a very small bottle lasts a long time and is therefore an inexpensive way of helping yourself. Relief is usually within minutes.

You can find these at Health Food Stores, or do a Google search under "aromatherapy." Whole Foods has a brand called Wyndmere with mixes such as I mentioned above. There is a mix called "B Wise" that I have found very helpful for anger or agitation that is available at Aromatherapeutix.com. I suspect many other companies have mixtures that may work as well; these are the ones I have most experience with.

You can also find atomizers that let the aroma permeate the air in a whole room. With these you put six or seven drops in a mix and the atomizer sprays it into the room. Or you can put some on a candle and burn the candle so the aroma permeates the room. You can even put a few drops in your bath.

Living with DID

By Pat Middendorf

The last four years I have dedicated myself to finding a cure from childhood sexual abuse. I've come to realize there is no cure because the damage is extensive. I believe I found a way in which to live my life freely and peacefully. I have Dissociative Identity Disorder. For many people, this is a mental illness. For me, it is my normal.

I diagnosed myself, at first, because my therapist at the time didn't want me to dwell on the actual diagnosis. I felt relief when we could talk of this out loud. I spent countless hours searching the internet for something that would match my symptoms, and after a thorough search, I understood how child abuse affects the mind, body, and spirit. I was left completely devoid of emotions at the age of five because the people I trusted turned out to be monsters in disguise.

I often wonder how loving parents change into something else completely. I can't for the life of me figure it out. For now, and maybe for always, I am letting this go. It isn't anything I can change and it isn't anything I'll ever understand. What I can do is allow myself to heal. I am fifty two years old, and I am wonderful. I haven't always thought this. I have worked nonstop for the last four years trying to find some balance in my life. Grief had taken over and I was lost. I had to relive my childhood in front of my family and my peers at work. This cost me greatly. I spent endless hours in the fetal position, crying because there was an unexplained hurt inside of me.

After years of therapy and getting nowhere, I had a day that changed everything. My boss raised his voice to me and stated he thought I did this for attention. I sat there stunned, hurt, and motionless. Did I hear him correctly? I had shared my childhood abuse issues with my coworkers because I couldn't handle any misunderstandings. I had enough to deal with. I asked him to repeat what he said and unfortunately, I had heard

him correctly. I walked to my office, called my husband, and walked away from my job, my church, and all my friends. It wasn't safe to be there any longer.

It has taken exactly one year to recover from this episode in his office. I had more grief to deal with than I could handle. But moment by moment, day by day, I began to use the strength inside of me to recover from not only those hurtful words, but my hurtful childhood. I went to a new therapist who specializes in abuse and trauma. The first time I met her all my parts inside liked her. She spoke to all of me. This was the first time they were spoken to and the first time they counted. It began my journey into healing. I still talk with her when I need support and she is always available to me by email. I am thankful I found her. She holds me accountable for all of my behavior no matter which part it's coming from. Believe me; my little parts try to get around the rules as often as possible. They don't like to follow the rules but I have learned things go smoother if we do.

This last spring, I met another therapist who worked with me once a week in addition to my regular session. She taught a course on DBT, Dialectical Behavior Therapy. This course teaches new learning tools and skills to live your life as effectively as possible while living with DID. It's a way to find a balance to maintain a healthy life. It teaches mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. She teaches these skills in a group setting, but at the time, I was the only one who signed up for the course.

She listened to my story before we began with awe. We all have a story to tell. When I was a child, I had no idea I was dissociating. I did it over and over again to get away from the pain. By the time I was sixteen, I met my future husband and began a new life. This life lasted for thirty years. Four

years ago my mother returned to town. It was at this moment, my life fell apart. I didn't have any problems in my life to speak of; no alcohol dependency, no drug problems. I have three children and I was a school nurse. Without looking too deeply into myself, I felt as normal as the next person. I think of this now and laugh. I was able to overcompensate all my life to keep things "normal" for me. These classes lasted for four months. I did work books and I had homework. I had field trips out into the world to practice my skills. This has helped me find a way to understand and react to my surroundings as an adult, not an abused child. I still have times where I hear things as a child and react accordingly. It's ongoing work.

This summer I had done enough work to be able to take a good look into my past. I had many sessions of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing—EMDR. This helps people suffering from trauma, anxiety, PTSD, or other emotional problems. EMDR uses bilateral stimulation; both right and left eye movement. This process helps the mind and body free itself of blockages and helps to reconnect the body and mind together. I had no memories of the abuse in my mind, but my body remembers everything. I met with my therapist for a longer session and held a pulse in each hand. She gently talked with me to get started and then my mind traveled through time. I was a little girl again. I saw everything very clearly from my clothing, to friends and classmates, to my family. I saw and felt what was done to me by my father. This allowed me to process the memories at a very fast pace and to lessen the pain surrounding this time in my life. I have done many sessions of EMDR and have advanced further into my healing journey. I looked into the past for short snippets of time. The pain is real and intense. It's not anything I can handle for very long. For several weeks after a session, the pain lessens and fades away.

I have begun something new this past week to rid my body of pain. I have carried this pain deep in my cells for a lifetime and now it's time for me to let it go. I have found a Reiki therapist to work with. We are meeting once a week. I've had two sessions and so far, I feel great. Reiki is a Japanese relaxation therapy that releases and moves energy inside the body. This is especially helpful to trauma victims. It gives a person an overall feeling of calm and empowers you at the same time.

I have been willing to try anything and everything to find a place where I can live in peace. I was on medications for awhile because of the overwhelming grief I experienced. Right now I am medication free. This may or may not last. I am willing to go wherever this takes me and if I need help, this is OK. I have a kind psychiatrist I see every few months. He also is a great listener. My support system keeps me headed in the right

direction.

My husband and I have found a new church. I am a substitute nurse and I work as often as I want. If I need some days off, I can decline the work. I have found a good balance to living with DID and living my life out in the open. The minute I decided to live freely, the healing spread within me. I continue to learn to take care of the small parts inside of me. I feel their anxiety and pain every so often. I stop, listen, and talk with them. I think they've been waiting to have a voice for a very long time. I close my eyes during my Reiki sessions and little Pat is smiling at me, holding her hand out. We join hands and we are one, if only for a few minutes. It's a start. It's up to me to nurture this part of me.

It's been four years since my life fell apart. My therapist, Susan, believes life is filled with highs and lows. When you are a victim of sexual child abuse, the lows are even lower still. You're left with nothing. I can attest to this. As a

child, I was alone and empty, abandoned. The human spirit is strong and can make it through even the worst of trials. My lifelong vow has been to never let my parents beat me. This still holds true, but I've changed this to never let anyone beat me. I am thankful I had the strength to walk away from people who didn't believe in me. It was the healthiest thing I've ever done for myself. There's only one person I have to listen to—me.

My faith has blossomed during this difficult time in my life. Once again, it reaffirms good and bad things go together. Thankfully, God's love fills me with hope, love, and forgiveness. I continue my journey of faith as well as my lifelong journey of hope. I pray child abuse will be openly discussed so many more people can heal from this silent epidemic. I vow to live my life openly and honestly. By doing this, I pray others have the strength to find their truth.

MV

Special or Loved

By Jeanette R.

Growing up I always felt "special," you know, "loved." My circumstances were such that I knew I was "special." First of all, I was born a twin. I always had Jean with me. Then I was "special" at the cult because I always performed well. Being "special" actually saved me from death. So, "special" was quite important, a life-saving tool. I worked hard at being "special." The strings attached to "special" were thin and frayed. I had to assume what people wanted from me and then do it. That was the trump card—knowing and performing without even being prompted.

Integrity was not part of my make-up. My insides didn't even know what my outsides were doing. I learned how to dissociate in order to perform and be "special." My parts performed and I lived in a shell, not knowing about my parts or my performances. I didn't feel shame or guilt. I assigned those feelings to certain parts. It worked—I survived.

Today I am very much aware of my parts. They all had their specialized assignments in order to keep me alive. They did their jobs. All they know is how to be "special." I want to be "loved" for who I am, a child of God. My parts don't know anything about "love." They are fearful that I will abandon them. The fear reveals itself as doom. As I feel the doom, I assure my parts that I "love" them and they are mine—they are me! I assure them that I will not leave them. I invite them to become willing to give up their specialized tasks and come join me as one. This new concept of separating "love" from "special" is baffling and interesting and very painful. I want "love." My parts want "special." I want my parts to feel loved by me.

MV



Lucky Feather Poems

Charles has suffered from PTSD ever since returning from Vietnam in 1971. His life has been difficult, and he is currently in prison. He finds these feathers during outside recreation, dropped by migrating split-tail swallows, that catch bugs under the floodlights. Here are two of his "lucky feather" poems.

Lucky feather from the east!
Bring me luck, bring me peace.
For you will be my lucky charm
Keep me safe and free from harm.
Keep this feather day and night.
help to keep me in the light.
If I could bring myself to say
Lucky feather be mine today.

Lucky feather from the south
Bring me luck, I'll close my mouth
Keep this with me day and night
I'll never lose it from my sight
If I may only say
Lucky feather bring luck today!

By Charles M.

MV

Keeping My POD Close to Me

By Diane & the POD

I was first diagnosed with multiple personalities some 20-odd years ago, and when I was first diagnosed all I wanted was for these other voices and all time-consuming people inside to get out of my head. The doctor said something about integration, and I was ready to start that day. Let's get this over with! Will they be gone by tomorrow or next week maybe, if I work really hard? Or will it take a whole month? Then to my sad realization I learned it was going to take years and years of intensive therapy with a therapist that I had never heard of. A Psychoanalyst who is also an MD. Well, fat chance of this healing thing happening over night.

In the many years I have spent in therapy I have learned that those kids and adults inside saved my life and yes, my sanity.

I now have come to love, really, the only family I have now. Special things have happened over the years and I would like to mention a few so maybe you don't have to spend years and years like I did trying to get rid of them.

For example, one Christmas the oldest personality (Jenny) and the rest of my family (I call them the POD) all sat down and made a beautiful scrapbook for me. The oldest helped the kids with their special page and then Jenny put it all together. Each page has their favorites and least favorites in the categories of color, food, places, people, animals, drink, candy, things and season. Then they went to the paint store and all got paint samples of their colors and cut and glued them to the bottom of their page. The page also had their name and age and sex at the top. On the opposite page they cut people and things out of magazines and glued them in a collage-type thing. It was mounted on a piece of scrapbook paper and then put all together. Someone had taken a photo of the river where we used to go, to be safe after a day of abuse. It was in a secluded place, surrounded with trees back in the woods. Back then it was

the safest place I called my own.

Another part of the book has a page with everyone's name on it, their age and now, their integration date. Then a computer-generated page of kids with a big welcome sign over their heads. After that are 2 pages of different faces in a collage, all with different expressions on their faces. On the next page someone took a bunch of scraps of wall paper and made round faceless heads with armless and feetless bodies and put them in a group. On the next page was a short letter to me from Jenny, saying what they had done for me and what year it was done. It was put together 12 years after I had started therapy. They also put one together for my Doctor.

Over the years they have come to know me and my friends and sometimes they get me out of stressful situations. One year I took a trial computer program, and with a graphics program (Smart Draw) I made the perfect home for my family. Each of us got our special rooms with our favorite things and colors in it. It was our dream house. The sad thing was because I didn't buy this program I couldn't print it without it saying DEMO across the page. I had put days and days and hours into this project and I sure didn't want DEMO across the pages. So I called customer service and told them I had done this very extensive design and I wasn't ready to have demo written across the front of it, but at the same time I couldn't afford a \$200.00 program. So the nice guy in customer service said "Go ahead and buy this program; print your project, make lots of copies and then call me back and we will write it off your card and just say you were not happy with the program. We will refund the cost and it won't cost you anything."

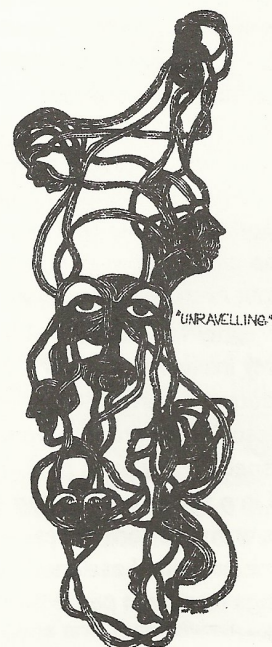
I told him he was the best and that is what I did. I took it to the print shop and made big copies of each page, had it framed and hung them in the upstairs of my home.

This year I have decided to make a

necklace in memory of all my POD (personalities of Diane). You will notice too that we are like a pod of Orcas, because like them we stick together for life. Integration is the hardest emotional stress we have gone through, and after losing both my parents it's like a death in the family. I grieve just like it's a death.. For all those years, all I wanted was to get rid of them and now I wish I was with all of them together! If I could, I would get them all back.

Integration sounded like a scary word for the kids, so we call it *going to the beach*. Everyone liked the beach and the water and the sand, so that was where they go now that they find themselves without a purpose. The necklace will take a long time to finish because of the cost of charms. I do beading and so I thought that I would get any kind of string, lace, cord, rickrack or ribbon that represent each POD member with some crystals and their initial and put it all together with a couple of special charms and then wire it all to an open chain necklace. I guess I am trying desperately to build a shrine for each one of us so they are always close to me even tho they are at the beach.

MV



M.T.

Tell Me a Story Mama

**Note: This poem is written for parents with young children as a Valentine's Day Tribute. Every line in this poem contains at least one or more titles of a Children's book.*

Happy Valentine's Day, Little Critter!
My mama had a dancing heart
She likes to wake me with a song
Good morning Maisy
Guess how much I love you I ask
More than anything else she guesses
Sitting in Chato's kitchen
when the wind stops
Rosa and I do the Carolina Shout!
We're going to plan a rainbow party
and we aren't just whistling Dixie

Come Sunday we are going to meet our
Granny
She lives on cold shoulder road
and she knows how a house is built
Living in the little house on the prairie
and growing up in coal country
fancy Nancy was either going home
or on a train to somewhere
That's where she met the orphan train
rider
that trout summer
This land is your land the young boy sang
Our Granny always has a story to tell

Where once there was a wood in the
secret garden
When birds could talk and bats could sing
There stood the alphabet tree and the
singing tree
Hiding out were the boxcar children
with Charlotte's web near the giving tree
Brown bear brown bear what do you see?
Black swan white crow bear replied

with a color of his own
Are you my mother?
You silly goose mama says
Poetry speaks to children chides our
Granny

On the way to market to market
Maisy goes shopping in alphabet city
Over there is a store with caps for sale
Another sign reads jelly beans for sale
Down the road I see
Officer Buckle and Gloria
make way for ducklings
I hear street music as the paperboy
Curious George rides a bike
Woof! Woof! — The dog chases his wheels
Go dog go

Valentine's Day is here
Stone soup is on the menu
at the birchbark house
along with green eggs and ham
sweet corn and fig pudding
There's the cat in the hat watching
the city mouse and the country mouse
Stuart Little perks up his ears
It's teatime Maisy! mama says
Where are Maisy's friends?
I invited children just like me

Heidi brings the decorations
carrying the red balloon
Anne of Green Gables
has blueberries for Sal
The Lemon Sisters remember

Dora loves boots
Alice in Wonderland
Rhymes for Annie Rose
Rapunzel says I can share to
Harold and the purple crayon
That's what Valentine's Day is all about

It's pajama time! mama says
Maisy takes a bath
Tell me a story mama
or sing me to sleep
Where has Daddy gone?
Why do I have two homes?
Let's talk about it
I don't want to talk about it
It's not your fault, Koko bear
Where's my teddy?
Read to me

You read to me, I'll read to you
'The Little Engine That Could'
or 'The Going-to-Bed Book'
Mama chooses 'When Sophie Gets Angry'
I love you mama
Mommy hugs me goodnight
I start counting kisses
looking out the hello, goodbye window
for a place to call home
wondering where the wild things are
and whisper goodnight moon

By Denise Fletcher © 2006-09

MV

Mom or Multiple?

By Kristen

In my experience every multiple is a parent. All of us have littles and need to learn how to take care of the very smallest of our parts to help the body make it day to day.

When I learned of all my parts, I already had a physical son who was just about to turn 4. He is an amazing and sensitive creature, and I worried so often about how to hide my littles from him. How do you make his life seamless? And one day when I was really struggling with an older part of me who didn't want to be present, but was trying to do so for my son's best interest, we all realized that we were cheating all our children: our insiders who needed to be here, even if just for a few minutes, AND our Son who was stuck with the "unfun" adults all the time.

So, with the help and guidance of our therapist we decided not to keep him in the dark. We would enrich his life and also the lives of our littles.

It started as role playing and now it is just a part of our everyday life. He knows all of them by name and their ages. He knows how to call for his Mom at any time. He knows that his mom will always be there and will always love him. He knows which personalities are allowed out for different daily activities. He loves our parts in ways that they weren't allowed to be loved when they were little. Every relationship we ever had before was sexual in nature it felt like. But our son can be our friend with no ulterior motives.

Now no one should worry about

the welfare of our son. He comes to Therapy with us, and has his own therapist. He doesn't spend time with the littles alone; our Partner is always with us. Everything is supervised, and he also has emotional outlets besides the littles.

He is now almost 6 and quite an amazing creature. He got the littles a large doll house for Christmas so that they could play together. He loves each of them as individuals and loves his mother as a whole.

We all are Mothers in our own way and our Littles need that love and affection that a mother can give, and also the love and affection others can give, especially other children.

MV

The Roller-Coaster of Disability

By Midge

When I first applied for disability, I was still a teenager and had not yet been diagnosed with PTSD or DID. I'd tried and failed to get an education beyond high school, and I'd tried and failed to hold down a job, both for reasons of health. My parents provided for me, but despite my physical and emotional limitations I wanted to pull my own weight and pay something for rent and groceries. A bit of pocket money wouldn't have hurt either. So, I applied for disability.

I had no idea what I was in for.

It's standard procedure for them to deny your claim the first time. (Official statistics read something like seventy-five percent of all initial claims are denied, but I've neither met nor heard rumor of anyone within that mystical twenty-five percent.) This routine denial helps weed out those who are merely looking for easy money and focus on those who truly need the income. To further help the elimination process, they send you stacks of forms to fill out. Trust me—only those truly in need will be able to withstand the onslaught of paperwork!

Not only do they want all the intimate details of every physical and psychological problem you currently have, but they also want the names of every single doctor you've ever seen, every medical procedure ever done to you, and the precise dates that each symptom appeared. Now, I don't know about you, but I never actually made a note in my diary that said, "Today I felt the first shadow of depression," or "Today I had fibromyalgia pain for the first time," or even, "Today I saw a dermatologist: Doctor Smith. He has no idea what's wrong with me, but says it isn't my skin." Fortunately, they have no way of corroborating this sort of information, so if you need to invent some of the dates, so be it. Really, they just want to be sure you've been suffering long enough that you're not likely to get better (and go back to work) anytime soon.

To verify your health issues, they require letters from each of your

current doctors, along with copies of your medical records. They also ask for a detailed report on exactly what you are and are not capable of doing: how many pounds you can lift, how many minutes you can sit or stand without pain, whether or not you can kneel, stoop, crouch, or bend. Who knows why they ask all of this, because they clearly don't believe a word you or your doctor says. Instead, they insist on you visiting both a physician and a psychiatrist on their payroll, both of whom conveniently find nothing wrong with you. Somehow I didn't find this surprising, considering that the doctor they sent me to still had equipment in his office from the 1950s!

It's fairly standard for them to also deny your second attempt, and when they obligingly did so, I couldn't face the harassment of another appeal and quit. They won that round—but a few years later, and several health conditions worse, I applied again.

This time I was prepared for the mountains of paperwork, the invasive questions, and the pseudo-medical exams. And this time, when they denied my second appeal, I got a lawyer and took matters to the next level—a hearing.

More paperwork, more letters from doctors and therapists, and then we sat before the judge. Though trembling inside, and feeling guilty of some yet-unnamed crime, I raised my right hand and testified about my physical and mental health and my failed attempts to work. The judge seemed impassive and uncaring, but he asked a few pointed questions and took extensive notes, so I felt hopeful. That is, until he listened to my mother's testimony. She'd had to sit by, helpless, as I grew up plagued by frequent migraines, muscle pain, and later, depression and social anxiety. As she described my lack of a normal childhood, she began to cry—and the judge detested this flagrant display of emotion. After all, everyone knows that only liars are capable of mourning their children's pain.

While my mother recovered from her moments on the witness stand, the judge consulted with a vocational expert and asked her what jobs existed that I was capable of doing. This flabbergasted me, because he quoted my limitations as being much different than I'd given—i.e., he said I could sit or stand for several hours, when I clearly could not do so for more than 30 minutes without severe pain. The vocational expert listed the available jobs that I qualified for, including a restaurant dishwasher, which involves standing up to four hours without break.

Given this exaggeration, I should not have been surprised when the judge summarized the testimony from my psychologist. During our therapy sessions, we'd talked about my optimistic desire to take a class—something easy, perhaps cake decorating or oil painting—one day a week, and failing that, to find a simple part-time job where I could work just a few hours a week. I'd brought up my longing to be a mother, along with my realization that it would be impossible without the complete support of both my parents, with whom I then lived. And I'd happened to mention a recent visit overseas to be with family—a trip where I'd spent most of the time in too much pain to leave my brother's apartment. Somewhere between my therapy sessions and the disability hearing, my nebulous desire mysteriously grew into a solid plan to attend university full-time while juggling a career and becoming a single mother! My brief family reunion became a full-fledged European vacation, extravagant and condemning.

Nothing I said could convince the judge of the truth. He had the "facts" from my therapist's files—files which painted me as a lazy, carefree youth with a mild case of unspecified depression and psychosomatic pain. Of course, I should have expected such a report from a therapist who insisted that all my problems would vanish if only I began dating

frivolously. . . .

Needless to say, I lost that disability claim.

My lawyer was stunned at the judge's decision, knowing full well that it was based on misleading information. But he advised against appealing, since the "facts" were already in record and I couldn't dispute them, no matter the truth.

To vent my frustrations, I wrote a long letter detailing every piece of information that the judge had got wrong and placed it in a folder along with copies of all my medical records and all the forms I'd filled out. Perhaps someday I'll venture into that arena again, and perhaps that letter will be read by a compassionate judge who understands how facts can be twisted. By then, I'll have much more evidence to submit regarding my physical and mental health.

It's been ten years, but knowing how easy it is to be painted a liar, I doubt I'll reapply anytime soon. It's enough to know that I have truth on my side, even if justice failed. Now I have a physician who understands my physical limitations and has given me a handicapped parking placard—a grand consolation prize. I also have a therapist who has seen beyond "Depression—Not Otherwise Specified", right through to PTSD and DID. I have a husband who makes enough money for us both, and who is helping me along the path to recovery. I have endured, despite their efforts to deny my pain.

MV



Ami K.

Getting to the Basics

By Jan T.

I have been in therapy for DID from horrible childhood abuse since 1992. I have recovered the memories, been through many types of therapy, and have successfully integrated all my alters. However, the one "message" from childhood which keeps being triggered is: "You'll get what you deserve." In other words, no matter how happy, or successful I am in life, I will eventually have to kill myself.

Now, currently, I feel I am a competently employed nurse, a wonderful wife and mother, a loyal friend to many, a talented artist, etc. But, whenever something "bad" happens (i.e. a minor mishap with my car, or I burned my hand while cooking dinner), I am certain this is my mother's old message to me kicking in that "I'll get what I deserve."

I can go for many months being happy and not thinking about this...until a "bad" thing happens - then, "poof" - I'm suicidal.

At any rate, for the last several months, my therapist suggested I write letters to my dad about my feelings regarding this. (Both my parents are deceased.) These letters have helped me tremendously. And through these letters, I have come to learn and understand several things. First: My mother always used examples of tragedies in the neighborhood to prove I was bad...It was my fault a neighbor's house burnt down, so she would lock me in the garage...or someone's illness was my fault...etc...and she then used the double bind of saying: "You're bad no matter what you do, and you'll be punished."

But, through my letters to my dad, I remembered that he said to me: "She didn't mean it...she was just upset."

Remembering that was PIVOTAL...NOW I had the evidence that maybe mom wasn't right. Someone else DIDN'T believe I caused these bad things to happen and deserved to die. So, my therapist

said: "Let's get to the Basics."

What was my TRUE CRIME as a child that I should deserve to die for? What did I actually DO as a child that I need to kill myself for? If these tragedies that my mother blamed me for were, in fact, NOT my fault, and she was just trying to CONTROL me...then, what WAS my crime? The answer?

"I was not the child she wanted me to be."

My therapist and I discussed this in depth, and I realized...I was MY OWN PERSON. I was a rebel. I did not go along with my mother and I opposed her at every opportunity - BUT, not because I was "Bad." Rather, because, as my therapist said, "I was a Hero."

My mother was abusive, she was psychotic, she was involved with the occult. And I knew, from a very early age, that what she was doing was wrong. So, I rebelled. Somehow, I knew right from wrong. AND, THAT WAS MY CRIME. That I would not follow in her footsteps.

The basics became clear to me. The only crime I committed as a child was to not follow in the footsteps of an abusive woman. So, my therapist asked me, "Do you deserve to die for that?"

The answer to all my guilt is not to forgive my mother, or forgive my father, but to FORGIVE MYSELF. I need to finally "Let myself off the hook."

I was and am A Hero. And, once I can forgive myself for my "crime" of standing my ground as a child, then, maybe, I WILL get what I deserve, what I have fought for my entire life...which is happiness.

I think all readers of MV "Deserve" happiness, and I hope what I have learned has helped.

MV

Let the Children Play:

Ways to stir creativity in children

By Denise Fletcher © 2009

Whether it's a holiday, special occasion or just an ordinary day, anytime is right to plan a special event or activity around children. If you are a mother, you might think twice the next time you want a break from your own children. Maybe planning a creative activity is just the thing that will bring your family closer together. The children in your life will help you renew and revitalize your energy.

You don't have to be a mother to love and care for children. Although I don't have children of my own, I make a point to surround myself with children whenever possible, because children have a way of keeping me young at heart. Children are an abundant source of blessings, filled with boundless energy, joy and love. It is important to encourage children to get involved in interactive play that promotes skills that will help them in their future. Who says learning can't be fun? Following are examples of effective and creative activities that will stir creativity and encourage growth in children, along with age-appropriate educational toys.

Infants and Toddlers (Newborn - 2 years)

Activities: playing with unbreakable toys that rattle or squeak, stacking plastic blocks, water play with floating plastic toys, squeezing stuffed animals, pushing buttons
Toys: rattles, washable dolls, stacking ring cones, cloth books, brightly colored objects, push and pull toys, musical toys

Preschool (age 3-5 years)

Activities: coloring with large crayons, putting large pieces in peg boards
Toys: dress-up clothes, dolls, play dough, balls, cars, books that rhyme

Kindergarten (age 5 years)

Activities: visiting pets at the zoo, dressing up dolls, making doll furniture, puppetry. Toys: animal picture book, dollhouse, puppets, books, finger paint, construction set

Grade school (age 6-12 years)

Activities: nature hike/crafts, playing t-ball, visit omnitheatre, planetarium or museum; swimming, baking holiday treats, campfires, designing with Legos, growing plants, treasure hunt

Toys: puzzles, dominoes, art supplies, board games, bicycle, roller blades, books, modeling clay, kites, tool set, hobby materials, ice skates, cards, science book, Uno, Skipbo, Rummikub.

Junior High (Teenage 12-14 years)

Activities: building models or rockets and shooting them off, fishing, hobby crafts (beading, jewelry, painting, drawing, sand art), organizing photo albums, learning a new sport, writing poetry. Toys: beading or jewelry kits, camera, tennis racket, diary, stamp or coin collection, train set, soccer ball, chess set.

High School (Young Adult 15-17 years)

Activities: Encourage teens to be in charge and host a drama or game night for their friends to play interactive games, including Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary, Risk, Scrabble, cards and other favorites; visiting art and history museums, visiting elderly relatives to discuss family genealogy
Toys: poetry book, journal, music CDs, game system, baseball and mitt, movies, board games, computer/games, musical instruments, magazines, scrabble, romance novels, sports equipment, brain teasers, How-to books, history books

If you don't have children, there are numerous ways you can reach out to children, be it sons and daughters of siblings, friends, neighbors, relatives or the surrounding community. Spending quality time with children on a one-to-one basis is a very rewarding experience.

There are countless opportunities available to give your time and talents

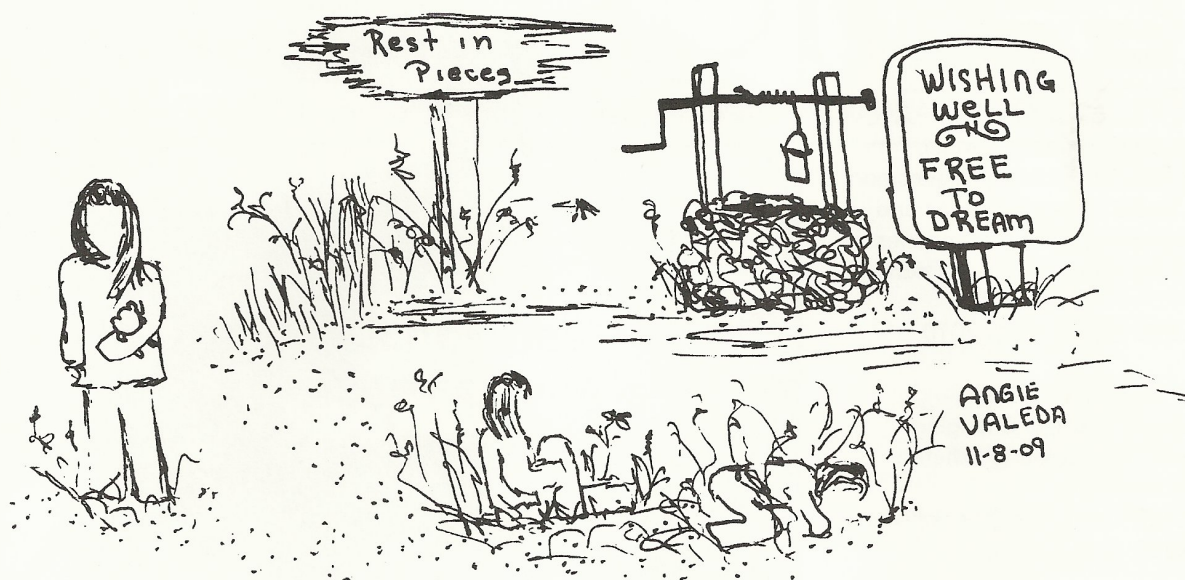
or goods and services to charitable organizations serving underprivileged children in transition. They include:

- Big Brothers, Big Sisters - mentoring
- Camps
- Children's Homes - foster care, adoption
- Children's Hospitals - bring stuffed animals or balloons
- Crisis Nurseries - babysitting
- Day Care Centers
- Food Shelters - share food
- Humanitarian Organizations - sponsor a child
- Head Start Programs - donate books
- Homeless Shelters - bring clothes, toys, books
- Libraries - donate books
- Orphanages - give clothes, toys

Children in crisis need unconditional love and emotional support. Even more important is the fact that you are making a difference in the life of a child. My maternal grandmother shared her love by taking the time to teach me arts and crafts at a very young age. She remains my inspiration.

MV





BOOKS

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction

By Gabor Maté MD. © 2008, 2009, 2010
by Gabor Maté. Published by North
Atlantic Books, Berkeley CA
www.northatlanticbooks.com 430 pgs
(illus) + appendices and index.
\$17.95 US, \$22.95 CAN Paperback

This is a compassionate book about addiction I simply couldn't put down.

Gabor Maté is a staff physician employed by the non-profit Portland Hotel Society in the Downtown Eastside drug ghetto of Vancouver, BC. Its residents are among the city's most troubled hard-core drug addicts, alcoholics, and mentally ill. The PHS is a place where they can live and be cared for without being constantly harrassed by a judgmental society.

Maté's opening sequence of chapters develop eloquent and touching portraits of marginalized people and their complex interactions with each other. Blending these stories with equally-candid descriptions of staff and his own motivations and quandaries, Maté carefully erases the fictitious lines typically drawn between "Them" and "Us," demonstrating that those fortunate enough to live outside this harsh environment are not so different

from those within it. He persuades the reader that early trauma—particularly early sexual abuse, violence, and neglect—are major factors in triggering self-destructive addictions. He also shows how our stressful, materialistic world fosters a human disconnect and a variety of addictive behaviors across all sectors of society.

The middle section of the book provides an extensively-researched, well-crafted summary of the latest neuroscience involving addictive processes and brain development. This part, though not as lyrical as the opening chapters, is accessible to the lay reader who wants to understand what scientists currently believe or don't yet know about addiction.

Although the doctor says in his introduction that this book is not "prescriptive" in providing specific answers to overwhelming social problems, Maté does offer his own opinions about the futile and wrong-headed "War on Drugs." He points out that, thanks to draconian drug laws, the US claims 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prison population.

Maté suggests a more humane approach, of decriminalizing amounts held for possession (not resale). He does not support straight-out legalization of hard-core drugs like

heroin, morphine, or crystal meth. But if maintenance doses were offered to addicts via clinics, similar to methadone distribution, he envisions a great reduction in the criminal acts of robbery, prostitution, and worse that addicts use to obtain sufficient money for a "fix". And he points out that Dr. William Stewart Halsted, who pioneered modern surgical practice at Johns Hopkins University early in the 20th Century, was an opiate addict for more than 40 years. Throughout his career Halsted never used less than 180 mg of morphine per day. Yet, according to the Common Sense for Drug Policy Web site, www.csdp.org/ this man with an ongoing morphine addiction was able to be productive in spite of this habit. Quoting the site: *"Today we would send a man like that to prison. Instead, he became the father of modern surgery."*

I highly recommend this book. Its stories, though not always ending happily, are universal. As Maté states: *"...No human being is ever beyond redemption. The possibility of renewal exists so long as life exists."*

Thanks for Sharing!

Artwork & Articles (any topic)
are especially needed! YOU
make MV the best it can be!

APRIL 2010

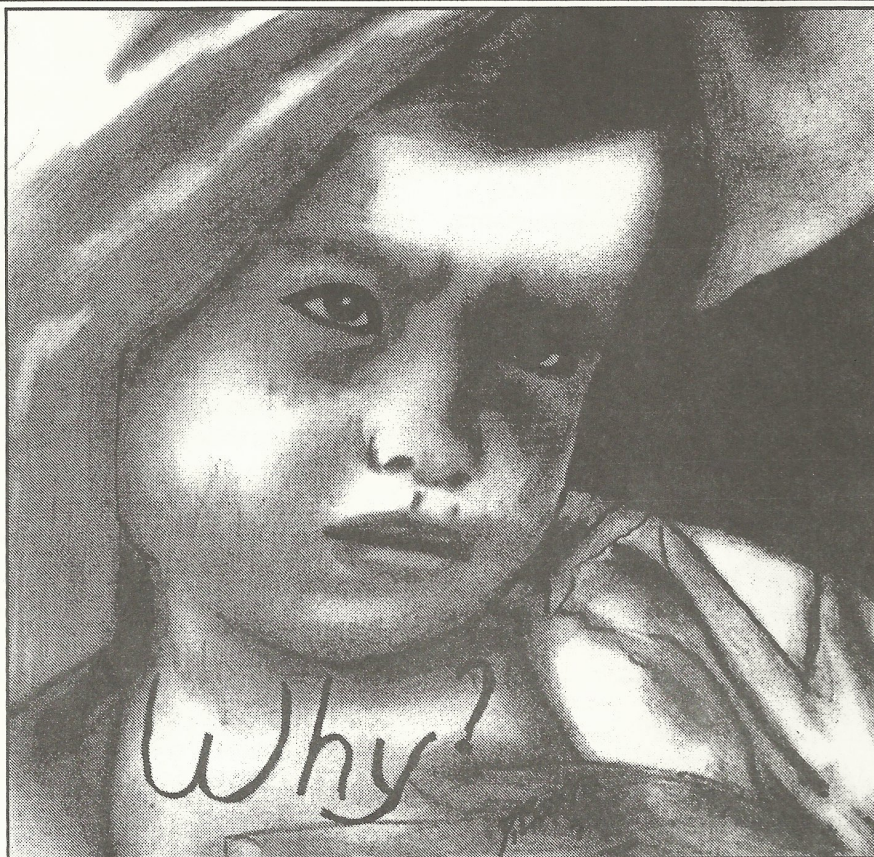
Online Safety. Spotting Danger.
Making Friends. Avoiding Cliques and
Abuse. Social Networking pros and
cons. Describe Healthy Boundaries.
ARTWORK: Your Computer: Friend or
Foe?
DEADLINE: February 20, 2010

JUNE 2010

Life Without Therapy. Changing
Therapists. Coordinating Different
Therapy Modalities.
ARTWORK: Caring for Your Self(ves).
DEADLINE: April 10, 2010.

AUGUST 2010

Sexuality: Choices & Dilemmas. Is Your
Partner Involved in Your Therapy?
Safely Opening Up About Abuse.
ARTWORK: Loving Yourself & Others.
DEADLINE: June 10, 2010.



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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