

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

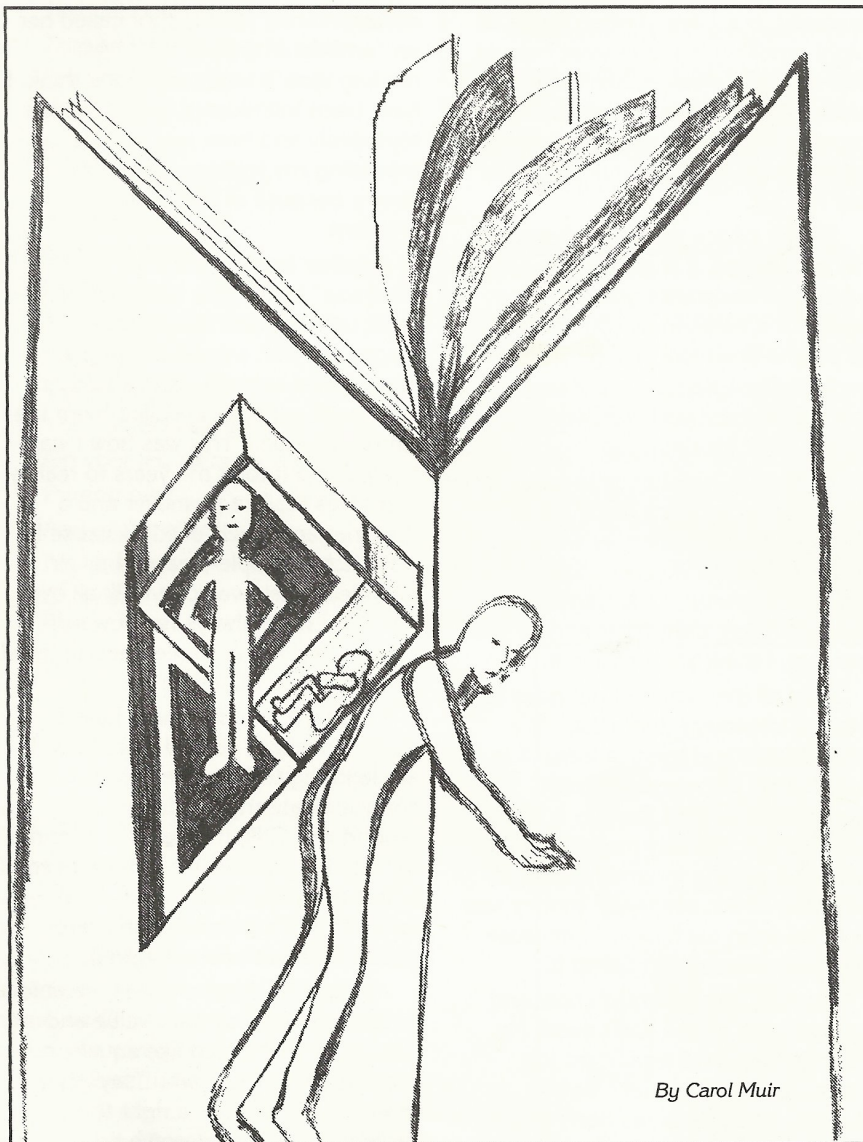
Vol XXIV No.1

February 2012

ISSN1042-2277

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**Enjoying Life. Fun in Winter.
PLUS Comments on
Clutter & Finance!**



By Carol Muir

Remember the Children

The children of the light
So free
of heart and mind
and hugs.

The children
of the darkness
cry alone
at night.

The children
of the light
laugh out loud
Eyes sparkling gems
Illuminating.

The children
of the darkness
know many things
and cry alone at night.

Oh, the tales
they could tell,
These children
of the light-
and the darkness.
The pictures
they could draw.
The poetry.
The songs.
To dance
hand in hand
Together...
Across the pages
of my soul.

By Carol Muir

MV

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Comments on Finances

By MaryK

Basically, even with "great" insurance paying for treatment has cost a fortune. I have severe bipolar, PTSD, and mild cerebral palsy (something I didn't used to talk about) and would not have recovered without intensive treatment.

I grew up in an upper-middle-class household but it didn't mean much in some ways because my father was very strict about money, to the point of being abusive. So beyond whatever I made I really didn't have much access to money. He did pay for my education but abuse and early mental illness meant I had to work really hard. After some short-term jobs, I got a job in the environmental protection agency.

After 9/11, I like too many other people started doing worse, and after trying everything (day treatment, inpatient treatment, going part-time, going on leave without pay,) I applied for disability retirement in 2008. The retirement was granted quickly.

Disability is kind of a catch-22 because you have to demonstrate deterioration to have a solid case, which means you actually have to have deteriorated. However I think I waited about 6 months or maybe 1 year too long. My former boss said the entire last year I was employed, I didn't accomplish much (and I was having a lot of manic symptoms at the time). Looking back I would have seriously thought about applying in 2007 or maybe spring of 2008. I think there would have been enough evidence at that point. My retirement applications came through quickly, within 6 months, and they were both approved (OPM and SSDI) without me needing a lawyer or any other kind of assistance. I didn't even have to meet with anyone except to fill out the initial form.

That was not necessarily good. My psychiatrist wrote a report that said at that time, everytime I saw him I was inconsolable over some psychotic symptom or other. That was pretty much his direct wording. He did not know when (or if, but he didn't quite say that) I would recover, and he had

no plans for me to return to work. This is from a doctor who is fairly conservative about doing what you can and not sitting around. For example, he encouraged me to do chores, do volunteer work, exercise, and get out of the house.

I am now doing a lot better than I used to but still not well enough to return to work. I had another major manic episode after my uncle died. These are pretty quiet because mostly what I do is get agitated and email my therapist, but I would often be up all night emailing her, and what I would say, logically, would make very little sense. Probably about the last six months I've been doing better. I do intend to go back to work someday, but not yet.

So my advice would be: based on my experience, if there is any additional assistance you can get, apply for it as soon as you can. A lot of people don't like taking "welfare" such as food stamps, but if you qualify I would suggest you consider applying. That's what it's there for.

Another suggestion is to apply for whatever is out there (food bank through church/charity or whatever else) as soon as possible. Dealing with illness and running a business is a heavy burden and whatever help you can get, I think you deserve it.

Most of the income I get goes to pay for treatment (therapist, psychiatrist, and medications). It is taxed and I also pay for health insurance, which is the way it should be. Doing it this way meant I could continue getting treatment without worrying about where the money was coming from each month, because my husband couldn't afford it.

I'm also going through now and trying to sell what I don't need. My husband has had significant job insecurity. That can take awhile, though, because items don't always sell quickly. I've had the most luck selling books on Amazon. I've gotten income that way.

MV

Things are Not Always What They Seem

By Anonymous

Two books that I read in the past really opened up my eyes to how I was being perceived in my family compared to how I perceived myself. I have nearly always done whatever I could, growing up, to help others and always be there for my family, but after reading these books, I realized that I was being treated like a doormat.

The book *"Some Kind of Miracle"* by Iris Rainer Dart had a character in the story that was diagnosed with schizophrenia. The author called her an "emotional cripple" and after reading that, it really made me think. I have been intimidated by my mother repeatedly and have had trouble expressing my feelings around my family, because of the constant criticism.

Another book I read was *"Pure Madness"* by Jeremy Laurence. This book talked about how people diagnosed with mental illness are many times exploited and abused by their loved ones, who called them the "family drudge." This was how I was treated and it took me years to realize that I was really a pushover and a doormat and easily used, because I was such a people-pleaser. I never intended to let everyone walk all over me, but I have always had low self-esteem and felt unwanted and unloved by the people closest to me.

I am now realizing that I have a choice in what I do and what I say. I am learning to be more assertive and communicate my needs to those around me. Still, it is very hard for me to trust people, because I have been betrayed by my family when they force-drugged me and didn't care about the health risks involved.

My point is, I hope others are able to know that we all have value and deserve to be treated like equals; not mistreated by those who "say" they love us. We all have a right to self-determination and deserve time to grow and change the way we choose.

I realize I have many character defects and need to change, but I don't need others forcing their way on

me, or forcing their views on me.

I am constantly struggling with self-doubt and am now learning to accept myself more, and realize that not everyone is going to like me, but I appreciate those who do.

It's nice to know that I am a valued person and that others accept and love me just the way I am. I hope all of us can find true friendship. It is a real gift.

MV

Cat with Sleeping Boy

Sitting on a child's bed,
Jazz cat purrs ever so
Through the walls and doors.
Snug against a boy's body
Perfect rhythm.
Fur and flesh
So rich a pair as this:
A boy who knows
a cat in bliss
Is ever after
Most convinced that
We are here
To remember how
The cat feels sleeping
On your leg all night,
Purring over
And under other
Night noises
Such as this.

By Unknown

MV

(I apologize, but this poem got separated from its envelope and it has no name on the back, so I cannot identify the author. PLEASE when you send material, put your name and/or address on the back so I can make sure you receive a copy if we use your work! It is very difficult to keep all pieces together in a single envelope and I get tired writing your names on the back when a pack of material comes in. That's YOUR job!)

Lynn W.

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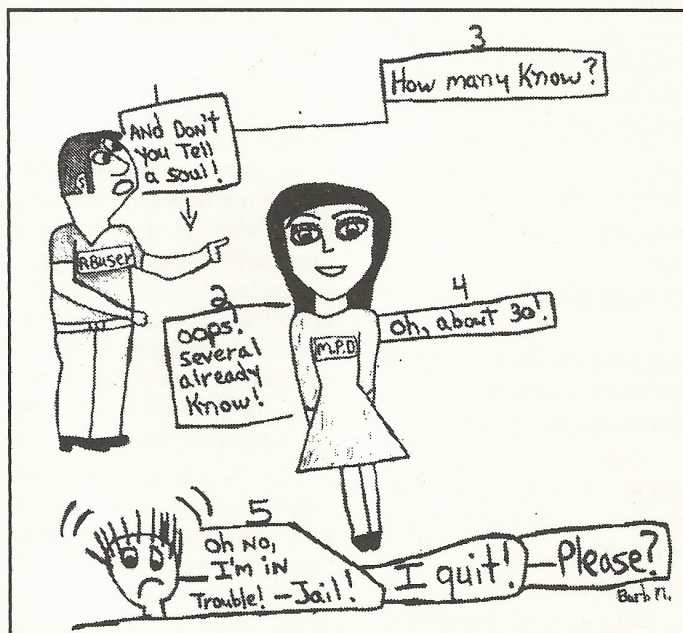
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Does your clinic or conference need flyers? If so, please call 513-751-8020. We also would like to help publicize your events. Tell us what's happening!

MANY VOICES is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving victims of trauma everywhere. Our EIN is 20-8945881. Tax-deductible donations, estate bequests, volunteer help, and good ideas are always welcome. Let us know what we can do better, too. We appreciate your generous support!

—Lynn W., Executive Director/Editor



Hiking God's Creation

By MySong

I didn't call this article the psychological benefits of exercise, because no one would read it, including myself. So instead of calling it exercise, I like to just call it activity.

I think we can all find that thing in our life that not only gives us exercise, but also is fun and gives us joy. I think everyone knows the physical benefits of exercise, but many don't know the wonderful psychological benefits as well. There has been quite a bit of research in this area, but interestingly, much of it has been done in the UK. Maybe it's because they walk more than they do in America, but that's just a guess on my part. But what I found not only from my research, but also from finding something in my own life that was fun, was an amazing revelation. I hope you will find something in your life that can give you as much fun and happiness as it has given me.

We all know that exercise helps protect us against coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis and even some cancers, but it has a large effect on our mental health as well. I wanted to give you a list of the emotional effects of keeping active and then tell you why it has this effect, or at least why they think it does, because the jury is still out in some of these areas. They know it does these things, but they're not altogether sure why.

1. Improves self-esteem
2. Decreases symptoms of depression
3. Decreases symptoms of anxiety
4. Reduces stress and increases your ability to cope with it
5. Helps concentration and focus
6. Helps you cope with cravings and withdrawal symptoms from alcohol or smoking
7. Improves your sleep
8. Less likely to have problems

with memory and dementia

9. Pride in physical accomplishments
10. Decreases anger
11. Increases feelings of energy
12. Increases satisfaction with oneself
13. Improves body image
14. Improves your confidence in your physical abilities
15. Improves social connection
16. Gives you a sense of empowerment

I was surprised at all this, so I'd like to focus on why some of these things are occurring when you are more active.

People suffering from depression frequently withdraw from other people and pleasurable activities. The more you are depressed, the less active you become, sometimes finding it hard to even get out of bed. Thus you become more withdrawn and even less active and this becomes a vicious cycle.

If all you can do is get out of bed and walk around your yard, do that, then maybe the next day you can walk down the block. The psychological mechanisms are not fully understood, but activity causes an immediate release of hormones called endorphins, which are the feel-good chemicals in the body. That is what gives runners their "runner's high." Endorphins block feelings of pain (which my knees appreciate) and create feelings of euphoria (which my head appreciates). Some of the recreational drugs release this same chemical. The antides present effects of activity start even with the first session and increase as you keep active or increase your activity, thus you can break free of that cycle.

Anxiety is frequently a problem for those of us who have been abused. People who suffer from PTSD frequently live in the constant state of "fight or flight" and have no way of releasing the stress hormones that

this produces. They think that activity helps you release them, but they are not sure why. So it can help you have freedom from a racing heart, muscle tension, shortness of breath and aches and pains. It also shifts your attention from your anxiety to something positive in your life. Yoga has been found to help anxiety a great deal, especially with PTSD. At the Boston University School of Medicine, professor of psychiatry and Trauma Center medical director Bessel van der Kolk recently published an eight week study that showed patients with PTSD were helped more by doing regular yoga than psychotherapy. But if you're in therapy and it's helping, I would not quit, I would just add this to your life. If you have less anxiety, your sleep will also improve.

When you are more active, you feel better about yourself, you become fit, and as you reach attainable goals, you gain more confidence. You can use this in your life by not seeing things as such huge obstacles anymore, but attainable goals you can reach.

If you get around people when you are active, it helps with isolation and you become more social and can make new friends. So it can benefit you socially as well.

Activity need not be expensive. You don't have to join a gym or buy new clothes. First and most importantly, you need to find something that is fun, whether it is walking, running, hiking, jogging, yoga, an exercise class, or just doing more at home. You could walk instead of drive, take the stairs instead of the elevator, or even garden.

You need to:

1. Make the time to do it
2. Make it a priority in your life
3. Be practical
4. If you haven't been active for a while, it might be smart to get your doctor's approval
5. Find an activity that is fun

6. We all have a fear of failure, so set realistic goals
7. Give yourself rewards when you attain them
8. Accept that you will have minor setbacks, but tomorrow you can start again, so learn from them
9. Start with a friend if possible so you become accountable
10. Stay on track.

This is what worked for me. Two months ago I started hiking with my friend twice a week. After three weeks, we did a strenuous eight mile hike and made it to the top and attained our goal. I cannot tell you how thrilled we were to have made it. It took us almost eight hours to complete this difficult hike and my knees cried out as I hiked down that mountain, but I felt so good inside I cannot even describe it. Then I set my sights on an even higher goal. We applied to hike Yosemite, a 49 mile, 6 day hike up the High Sierras. I don't know if we'll get in or not, as it's a lottery system, nor do I know if I can even complete this hike, but I'm sure going to try. I'll train for it and even if I can't make it, at least I'll have tried, and maybe that is enough. While I wait for this hike, I am thinking about

asking a friend if he will hike Half Dome with me, a two day 18 mile hike.

I find great joy in hiking and feel such a sense of God up there in those mountains, a peace within my soul and it feels good just to be alive. I look forward to each hike, whether it is in the mountains or in the desert, it is all so beautiful.

My friend and I have now started a women's hiking group in our church and more women are interested in coming then we imagined. We are both excited and energized and it has improved not only my health, but also my happiness. I am a very goal oriented person and doing something attainable is exciting. I don't know if that High Sierra hike is an attainable goal for me, but if we get picked and get to go, I will certainly tell you about it. I think maybe it is not whether I make it or not, but just trying something so exciting and outrageous at my age. And maybe the joy of reaching a peak is just being able to look down at that amazing panorama and the magnificent world God gave us. What glory!

MV

Fun In Winter

By Kate

As you may know, we are in Australia for the next few years; we are seventeen hours and six months apart from the US and Canada. So while y'all are slogging through the snow, we will be basking in the sun. We plan a New Year's picnic with my gourmet goodies: deviled eggs, zucchini blobs (a technical term), sausage/cheese balls, fruit skewers, crudites, and Shrimp on the Barbie, at the beach to watch fireworks, which will get here first (neener, neener). Now don't come fussing, 'cause it will be cold as snot here for my July 4th party (which Aussies also don't celebrate)!

We hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for a dozen folks who had never known a Thanksgiving. You may have read about this if you get MVNews #51.

I cooked turkey and ham and dressing and that green-bean casserole and candied yams, mashed potatoes and gravy, and a whole bunch of other stuff. It was pretty wonderful if I do say so. (As a person who has to walk with a cane, it was a pretty big accomplishment.)

I'm not the praying type, but tradition is tradition, so I announced:

"I am going to ask the Blessing and if any of y'all are violently opposed to prayer, now's a good time to pretend you need to go to the bathroom. No takers, so I offered to bowed heads and to Whatever is Up There:

Our heavenly Father, Mother, or genderless Being anyone here chooses to worship,

We are gathered today in Thanksgiving for the many blessings we have not earned (but we are working on that part, honest!) and we are especially grateful for new friends and this wonderful place that You have made for us. We pause for a moment to remember some folks who are not here today, for whatever reason, and beseech that they come back to us safe and sound or are gathered unto You, at Your Divine Will.

Now God, while you are up, please bless us and Thy gifts which we are about to devour like ravening wolves (I hope) from Thy bounty through Jesus your Kid, Amen."

Then they scarfed it all up. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. Hope it made you chortle.

MV

Asexuality

By Shirley D.

All of you have heard of heterosexuality and homosexuality, but few have heard the term "asexuality". Put simply, it means a person preferring no sex. I am such a person. I have had such horrible experiences with sex in former relationships, including vicious childhood sexual abuse, that I choose to have no sex at all.

I know that life without sex sounds like an illness, as to most it is an important part of their lives, but I assure you I am a normal person who feels that sex is simply not necessary to be happy.

I wish to open the eyes of those who feel the same as myself. We are normal for where we've been. Sex has always been equated with pain and suffering for me. It triggers any number of flashbacks and terrifies my inner children. I have a number of six-year-olds and other children who have relived the abuse they endured every time I have had sex.

I want to let everyone know that asexuality is not weird. It cannot be "fixed" anymore than a homosexual can be "fixed". I am coming out of the closet, so to say. I choose life without sex. I am truthful with myself about how I feel about sex and am open with others that it matters to, about this decision.

The main point I am trying to make with this piece is that a life without sex can be very full and very freeing. Once I chose to be asexual, the pressure of trying to find a mate disappeared. I am allowing myself to be myself.

I am an asexual, and I am not ashamed.

MV

My Journey of Healing

By Janet

Things inside are dark and I feel utterly alone in my sorrow. I am truly grieving something I cannot grasp. A loss so great it is unimaginable to the average adult, a loss that scans the globe of my mind and at this point offers no reprieve, no respite, no comfort. I see before me so many hallways but I have no idea which direction to go. The carpet is red and the only light comes from single lit candles scattered here and there on the walls. I hear a child crying, screaming in fact, but I can't find her. Each hallway I turn down is a dead end. I am calling and calling to this little girl. She calls back "I am here, please help me; I am lost, scared, lonely and I am hurting. Please come fast, please help me." I keep searching. I feel frantic inside. Where are the doors? This little lost girl must be behind a door but oh, where are they? I see only endless hallways. Her cries become more insistent, more lost, more distant. I keep yelling "I am here!"

I drop to my knees defeated, so frightened I will never be able to comfort her. I am crying; I hug myself hoping she will feel my presence. I yell until I can yell no more "I am here for you. I want to hug you, comfort you!"

Suddenly out of nowhere is a door, a heavy wooden door with one of those old heavy door knockers. Can this be the door? Can I find that lost child here? I call out before I touch the door knob but hear only silence. I am trembling. I put my hand on the door knob afraid that something bad will happen but it is just a door knob. I open it slowly now. I am afraid, afraid of what is behind that door. I push it open just enough. It too is dimly lit with candles on the walls and before me I see a bare room with wallpaper of tiny red roses and green leaves. The carpet is brown and I notice it is filthy dirty from years of wear, tear, and neglect. My eyes scan the room quickly and there seems to be a dark corner. I look again and think I see a toe. A tiny pale toe covered with dirt. I cautiously move forward. I am speaking and realize I am whispering.

"Little girl, it is me, the voice. I have been searching for you. You are safe. I am here." I walk slowly. I am fearful. I feel it in my stomach. But why am I afraid? The room seems to get larger and the more I place one foot in front of the other the larger the room seems to be, and that dark corner seems unreachable. I ask the little girl to come out of the corner, into the light. Now all I hear are snuffles from the corner, so I keep walking toward it. I reach out and I finally see her. A tiny girl with blond hair, matted and dirty. She wears a torn dress and her face is smudged with tears. I can't take my eyes off her. Then I notice something that sends shivers through my body. Within the matted hair, the tear-stained face, the dirty torn dress, the dirt covered legs is blood. I move slowly so as not to frighten her. I go to her and I embrace her—no, I envelop her with my arms and my whole body. I rock her and tell her that she is safe, that I am here. She is no longer alone; she no longer needs to be fearful. I am here to protect her. I cup her face in my hands and tell her she is the most beautiful, special little girl I have ever seen.

She looks up into my eyes with eyes that are older than her years and begins to cry. "How can you say I am beautiful and special? I am dirty and filthy and covered with blood." She looks down at herself and shakes her head, and her tears fall harder, her small body trembles. "Look at me. Can't you see what I am? Can't you see I don't deserve your kindness? I am nothing. The bad people used me and threw me away, and here I sit in this dark corner, hiding my shame."

I again cup her angelic face and tell her all I see is a pure untouched beautiful soul and a heart that is waiting to fly to the farthest stars. A little girl that has yet to recognize her beauty and purity. She was protected; she was always kept safe. Yes, there were bad people but they were big and powerful. Her time of remembering has brought up these feelings, but I am here now to show

her the way, the way of safety, security, and peace. For this moment, for this time, the most I can do is to hold her closer and tighter, and let her know I would never leave her. That is enough for now.

Her mouth and her body screams "I am not worthy, I am broken, damaged, dirty, and anyone who looks close enough can feel my shame. It is best all stay away because I will pollute all those around me. Can't you see who I really am? Please, for your own good, stay away. My name? Oh what is in a name? Does it matter? I name won't change who I really am. A name will just punctuate my shame."

"Oh little Janet, how wrong you are. You are so special that many others inside came to help protect us. They all took your shame, your pain, your anger and your hurt. Your only job now is to feel the healing embrace of love, acceptance, and purity. The safety of knowing that Big Janet is there. She will never let go. You will never feel alone or scared. Comfort, security and purity will embrace you. All of those who protected you so long ago are still here and committed to helping Big Janet help you."

All I could do was just to hold her in that filthy room but now I no longer saw dirty matted hair, a tear stained face, a dirty torn dress or blood. All I saw was a pure frightened little girl who needed me, and for now that is enough.

As I embraced that beautiful child in my body, she sobbed and so did I. She was no longer alone. She need no longer be afraid of bad people, as that was a long time ago. As I held her I whispered ever so quietly that she was safe, warm, clean, and without shame. I heard the words I was whispering in my ear. Holding her tightly we left that room and those endless halls and found ourselves outside on a grassy knoll. Beauty and sunlight met us both. The sound of water was near. Still embracing the child with my body, I walked to the sound of the water. There was a

beautiful pool at the bottom of a waterfall.

I whispered once again, my voice so faint I could scarcely hear it. "It is time to remove the torn dirty dress; it no longer needs to be worn. There are other clean clothes, other choices." Again embracing her in my body I got into the pool gently so not to frighten her. We dipped into the cool, clear, pure water. We washed the matted dirty hair, the tear-stained face, the body covered in dirt and blood. Before me now was the little girl she always was. The only problem was, she was clean on the outside, but what about her soul? How does one remove the dust, blood and shame from the soul? I whispered, "It wasn't your fault. You are/were but a child. No one was there to protect you then, but I am here now. The shame belongs to the ones who hurt you. None of it was your fault. You were/are just an innocent pure little girl."

The freckles glistened on her face, wet from the water. She looked up at the sun, the waterfall, and then right at me. She put her tiny hand on my cheek, wet with tears, and said, "If I am clean inside, so are you." I sobbed.

I sobbed. he kept her tiny hand gently on my cheek, looking into my eyes. Oddly, she saw herself.

That little girl that was abused needed so much then, and no 3D people were there for her, but she had Peanut, Julia, and Seth. Trust with anyone or anything was never built, therefore never known. She needed so much, but nothing ever came, so she stopped expecting—in many ways, stopped feeling. She accepted her lot. Seconds turned into minute, minute turned into hours, hours turned into months and months into years. She had her school world and inner world, and then there was the world of the monsters. Right was wrong, wrong was right, good was never good enough, talk, be quiet, open your eyes, close your eyes, take off your clothes. One thing she learned oh so well, was shame. She couldn't even trust herself and her body even betrayed her.

So here I am engulfing her body but she sees through my eyes into my own shame, into our shame. It is I that

should be helping her. She was there for me with her creativity and purity. She needs to know trust, comfort, security, love, and she needs to know that shame isn't something she should wear. I have the power to protect her and show her love. I know what love is. I know what safety is. It is now her time. It is now my turn to keep her engulfed in the embrace of my body. What is in a name? Does she have a name? Yes, her name is Janet, a tiny child who never asked for anything. She is now a grown woman. The child and the adult both have needs, needs that require mending. But Big Janet needs to give to the small child. While Big Janet does have much to give, she is just afraid. Afraid of what giving comfort, love and security will feel like on her. Sometimes it is just easier to forget about little Janet and her needs. Big Janet needs to take care of little Janet. Big Janet needs to risk the feelings that will come up. Janet need the risk in taking care of herself. Time.

Oh, little girl engulfed in my body. I can say you were a victim and I will never let you go. It was not your fault. Nothing about the abuse was your fault. I am here for you." We look into each other's eyes and we both see a part of Janet. Little Janet deserves more from me, the survivor. There is also a part of Big Janet that knows she deserves more.

Big Janet, however, as an adult, is still having a difficult time believing that the abuse somehow was not her fault. No child is at fault for being abused, regardless of the type of abuse. But it is I, Big Janet, who cannot forgive myself. That lack of forgiveness comes on so many levels. In looking at all of the layers, these feelings may be at the core of my pain and wanting to die. So you are asking what it will take to look back at those years of abuse and remove the blame, shame and guilt. Here lies my biggest challenge. I do not have the answer yet. I want the answer. But I think I am stuck in my feelings. Maybe I just need to trust the process and as it continues to unfold, to believe in this process. To accept my feelings where they are and as they come not to pass judgment on myself. The abuses that were endured were so outrageous, so horrific, that they are hardly

believable. I go into the theater and put them on the split screen. I turn down the volume to try to reduce/eliminate the feelings. I watch with some detachment and I think "Oh my God, how can those things happen to a child, let alone anyone of any age." But then I say "It was me those things happened to, and I am engulfed again in shame, blame and guilt. I find myself so vile. So vile that I am unlovable by anyone, especially myself." That hatred of self constantly leads back to the suicidal ideations, plan, despair.

I can't forget. Then there is my system, the littles who saved me and the bigs who allowed me to become an adult. This scenario is something I can't forget. I, Janet, am fractured. My self is in pieces. These pieces contain two parts: my alters and Janet alone. Sometimes being Janet alone might be easier because I wouldn't have to be concerned about how those fractured parts of self are responding. If all parts of me were together, it would be easier. Because many still perform their original functions, chaos can still occur. Then I either have to be the referee, or I decompensate because I can't deal with what they bring to the "table" and it becomes a cycle of self destruction. Now, however, the bigs seem to be working together and I feel I am alone. The only real place to talk about Janet is in therapy. I don't feel like I can get support from the bigs because they seem to be so focused on safety there appears to be no room for the abuse. The little's still have their issues, and I feel like I have totally abandoned them. I must remember they are parts of me.

I am new in this DID journey and I am sure there are other readers who may be able to relate. We are survivors but that does not mean the journey is easy. I am hopeful these words will help others feel not so alone. But every day brings healing, even if it feels that we go backwards at times. Unfortunately this journey is not a straight line. It is laden with twists and turns. When things seem the darkest, is when we should try to remember that we survived because of our internal system that were created, and that our lives will get better.

Healing

By Debra F-D.

Looking through the rain-streamed glass, I recall a much darker time when the rain pounding on the concrete-laden alleyway sounded so much louder. It is different now. No longer does the sound of the rain bring forth the whirl of emotion it used to. It's a faint patter now, almost like a song in the wind.

But so much has changed since then. I no longer need to focus on movements of sound in order to escape the reality of being hurt, constrained, overpowered. A coping skill, yet no one taught me how to get away when I could not physically get away. I was a child then, and he was the person in my life who I needed, feared, and hated. I was sexually abused by my Grandmother's live-in boyfriend, Clyde. He died when I was seven years old. I repressed all memories of my experiences with Clyde, both traumatic and nurturing in nature. It was caustic confusion for a child under the age of seven. It was survival based on denial, a life of "what ifs," and so many silenced cries.

I lost very important parts of my life, but through challenging and often painful therapeutic work, I have gained them back. Over a period of 21 years I actively healed through individual and group psychotherapy,

using creative arts as a way of expressing feelings, and massage to work through body memories.

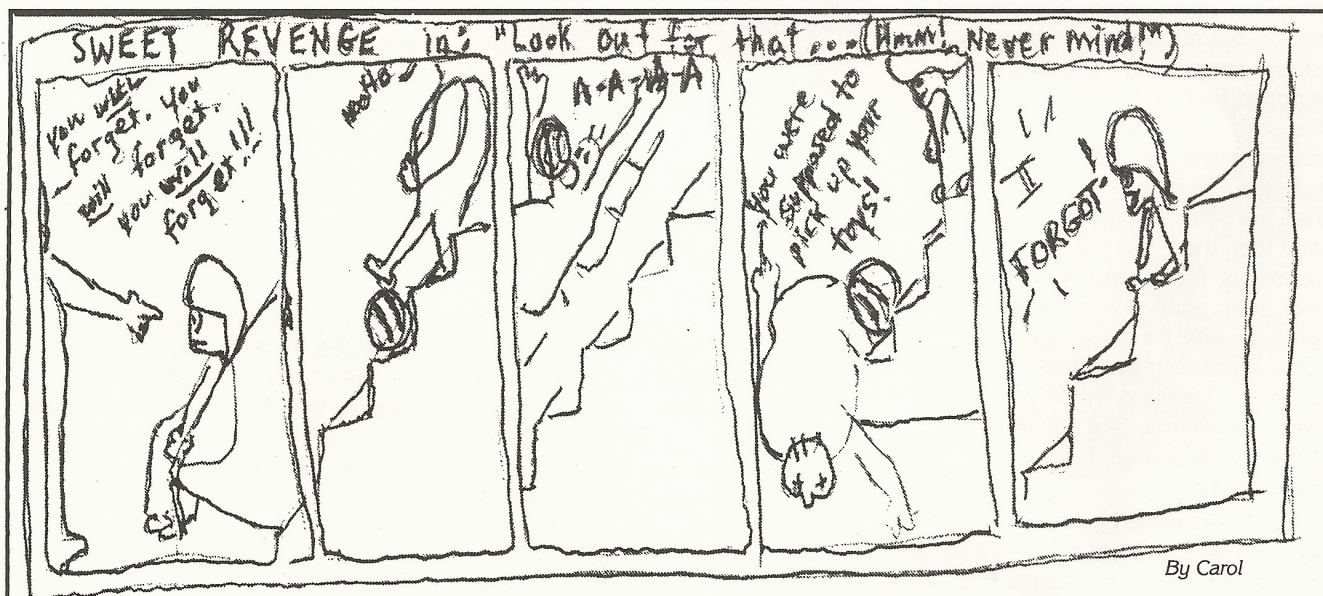
The greatest growth took place when I learned to trust. I shared present-day emotions with my psychologists, creative arts psychotherapists, and massage therapist, as well as the strong repressed emotions that held me back from growing emotionally. Therapy was a place of safety for me where I found support and understanding for memories of early childhood to emerge. As I worked through one traumatic experience there was space for another to surface.

This was a long healing journey for me due to the many false beliefs (including sexual beliefs and defining what is and is not abuse), old fears that complicated each step, emotional and physical blocks (dissociation, anxiety, panic attacks, migraine headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, gastritis, and asthma attacks), depressive episodes, suicidal ideation, and ongoing present day stresses. During therapy, I identified and released feelings, reconnected with memories, changed old patterns of behavior with healthy balance, changed negative views of my selves, and integrated my physical self.

I strongly support other survivors of trauma in their healing efforts. As I worked through individual memories as well as the issues and emotions, the joyous and peaceful moments in my life became more frequent, where clarity was achieved. As I resolved past trauma I learned about different aspects of myself and self-acceptance. As I came full circle with individual memories, they lost their energy and hold on me and became just what they are: only moments of experiences past.

At present, I surround myself with understanding and supportive people. I take medication that stops panic attacks, lowers anxiety, and manages depression. I continue to practice grounding techniques to keep me in the present moment. I am able to work part-time, and partake in the lives of my two grown children, and share my life with a loving man. I no longer feel shame in myself and am able to give pleasurable and positive experiences to myself. I have found that telling my truths to supportive people (professionals and peers) and trusting in their ability to help has enabled me to grow, enjoy life, and move forward on my own but not alone any longer.

MV



By Carol

Sex Injury: Past and Present

By Paul from Mind Parts

Paul writes the blog *Mind Parts* on healing as well as hosts the "Expressive Arts Carnival" where people submit art corresponding to a particular theme. You can find his site at www.mindparts.org

Sexual healing is a taboo subject in both the literature and in therapy. Nobody wants to talk about it. Yet it is one of the main areas where childhood sex abuse victims were damaged. It is my contention that since the problem is not addressed directly in the literature and in therapy, we discuss the issues tied to sex in an unconsciously masked kind of way. We can talk about being hurt sexually and what was done to us (and think we are talking about sex directly). About being suicidal. Depressed. Triggered. Switchy. And on and on.

But, while all important, these are symptoms of what is a core issue in the present. What is our relationship right now to sex? How is sex in the present dysfunctional? How is sex in the present hurting us? Helping us? Recreating? Overcoming? And how do all these questions about the present relate to the past?

I understand, I think, the essential barriers to talking about sex, even in the "safe" confines of the therapy office. For those of us sexually abused as children, our lives were generally focused on hiding the fact that we were being hurt in that specific a way. It should not be hard to appreciate that this is fertile ground for creating shame and guilt; stains on our soul which stay with us through adulthood and whose purpose seems to be only to deny us from seeking healing (or even thinking we are worthy enough to heal).

Not to mention those of us who were sexually abused were generally taught (we call them "rules") to behave a certain way in dealing with sex, through a number of manipulative means. As with any kind of learning, neuronal circuits are formed. Sex abuse ties in with reward, pleasure and fear circuits in the brain moderated by powerful neurotransmitters like dopamine. Literally, there is an imprint on our brains. These imprints are terribly

difficult to heal from. But we can heal from them if we deal with them directly instead of dancing around the perimeter.

I contend that the first step in sexual healing is acknowledging the original sexual injury. The second step is being able to break down some of the guilt and shame barriers to talking about the subject. But there is more.

Obviously, each of us was affected in different ways sexually. Some of us become hyposexual and just run away from sex. Some of us become hypersexual. Neither of these extremes is necessarily bad as long as you are comfortable in them. But many are not comfortable with who they are sexually and simply do not know who they are sexually.

To further complicate matters, some of us use sex to recreate abuses, whether it be through fantasy or in real-life, though I do believe there is a marked difference between the two. In the literature, re-enactment (generally referred to as real-life) is a more commonly discussed sexual outcome. In these situations, we are continuing the cycle of abuse by placing ourselves in harmful psychological or physical situations (and, yes, even if in fantasy).

It can be understood in terms of neuronal imprints and in terms of being a way to manage overwhelming feelings. I believe it is probably likely that the degree of sexual re-enactment is correlated with degree of dissociation. With dissociative identities, parts were created for specific purposes and roles which are harder to move out of. Further, it is easier to realize how sex re-enactment solves certain problems (like being able to tolerate overwhelming feelings of "parts" of us) while isolating other parts of us (who are traumatized by the present-day behavior).

Those are explanations and not excuses. Since, in most cases, the original abuse is not happening anymore, we are responsible for our

behavior. In this case, I think it is most aptly labeled as self-abuse behavior.

When one is able to label one's own re-enacting sex as self-abuse, then the third, perhaps the most important, step in beginning to achieve sexual healing is reached. We can achieve this only when we realize that the "positive" effects of recreating sex are dwarfed by the negative effects. And this takes a good deal of self-awareness and brutal internal honesty.

If we keep these three steps in mind--acknowledging original injury, overcoming guilt and shame, and labeling re-enactment as self-abuse--then we are making a great effort to heal. The prognosis, I think, is good.

While sexual healing may seem daunting, the good news is that once you have achieved all three steps, there is no going back. Yes, there are "setbacks," but I contend that once you gain awareness, you cannot lose it, you can only temporarily misplace it.

MV

Oscar Material

The outside world is a stage for the child who knows only terror and pain at home.

Polished acting skills let her look around when inside she is drowning in tears. She adapts each hour to her surroundings; trying to smile and laugh with friends, hyper-alert and so afraid at home where emotions must be hidden for safety.

There is a reward for those acting skills, one more precious than any gold statuette—she will survive her childhood.

In her world, movie stars are amateurs.

By Eileen S.

MV

Battling What Social Skills Mean

By Robin

I got to thinking about this topic. Being DID consists of using many different social skills. We are like a family, with all our parts that have to work together in order to work with one another. We have to use social skills to learn how to treat one another kindly in trying to heal, and become whole.

It is like a circle: As the core personality, we are responsible for taking care of the parts inside of me. But how can I do that if I don't know what social skills are?

OK. That means all our parts have to learn social skills together-or so I thought. But that isn't really how it works, because each part needs to learn new social skills, as they grow up.

So I have all these parts inside of me that need to learn social skills. I believe the process starts like this: First we have to learn to communicate with one another in order to even learn social skills. Once they learn to communicate they must learn how to interact with one another. Social skills get taught down the line of our parts. Each part teaches social skills to the next part.

One thing that confuses me: what if a part is not able to pick up social skills, or learn them--then what do you

do? Well, the older part says you just keep working with the younger parts until they understand. But isn't that a social skill they are using? I'm dissociating now as I write.

Social skills are considered many things such as communicating, using our sensory perceptions to detect how others (inside or outside) feel, learning to talk in a normal voice and not some obnoxious voice, when talking to little ones or even the 'tweens. The teenagers need to know when to take a break from dealing with the little ones and 'tweens. They have to learn not to talk to each other in an obnoxious voice, ever.

If you want a behavior to be taught inside, then you teach it to the parts first, and don't punish the part for bad behavior. You want to be a "good parent" to the parts inside, even if you didn't have good parents in your "real" life as a child. Reinforce with nonverbal feedback, like caressing your arms and saying "I know you are trying really hard. I'm proud of you."

Social skills also help us to play with each other during playtime, as well as share comfortably any thoughts or ideas that come into our mind(s).

MV

On the Cold Ground

He lies on the cold ground wondering why..

Life wasn't always so hard

Now he's broken

Invisible, hated, cold and alone
He doesn't ask for much, a bit of
food, a blanket

His life is silent, no one to listen or
care

Dreams, hopes, crushed and lying in
the gutter like dirty snow

He has a name, no one cares
He hurts, he bleeds, he cries, he
laughs

He was us, he is us

He has been shunned from the
human race

A quarter tossed from the rich lady in
the fancy car

Makes her feel better

He quickly shuffles over.

All traces of self esteem buried years
ago

He picks it up with a nod and a
thank you

And moves on

Feet raw with blisters in ill fitting
shoes chafing bare feet

Belly empty, trying to forget last
night's dinner of garbage

It's alright my friend

I see you, I hear your cries, I feel your
pain, I respect your humanity

You are not alone

You are not alone

By Jeana L.

MV

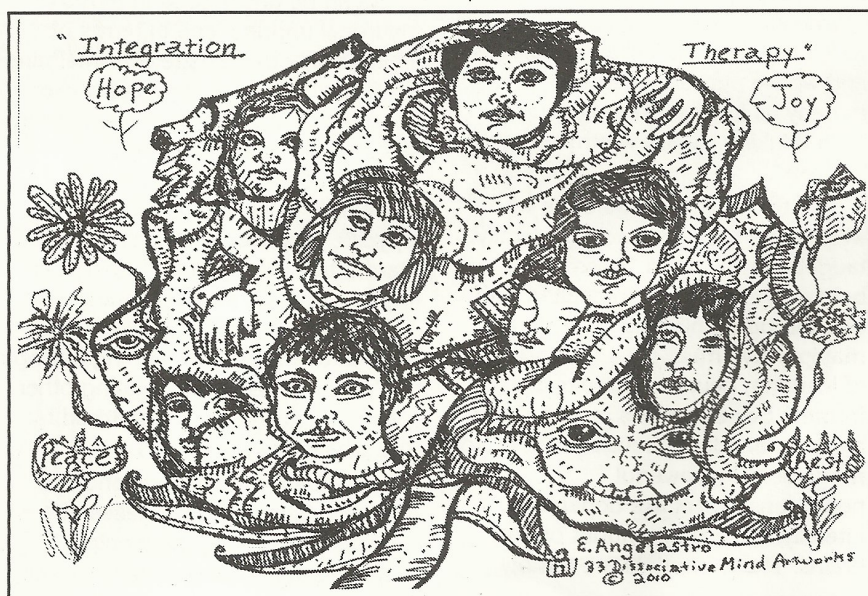
Control

I feel out of control. An important therapy group that I counted on has disbanded and I have felt completely lost. When I drive in bumper to bumper traffic, I usually call friends on the cell, using a headset of course, to keep me company. Yesterday I decided to practice a little control over my anxiety and made the drive home without using my phone.

I experience a lot of anxiety over not having had control over my trauma. I developed OCD, but it is not the environment that I need to control, it is me and my reactions to the world. I learned faulty systems in my family, developed alters to handle stuff, and now I have to learn to use my alters as a system to control the only thing I can--ME!

By Maureen H.

MV



Comments on Handling Money and Personal Finances

By MVNews (Free Email) Readers of Edition #45
[See archive at www.manyvoicespress.org/news.html]

I keep track of the regular expenses every month on a calendar. I mark how much is due on the date that it is due. I mark it months in advance, including any payments that are not monthly.

I mark it when I transfer money into the accounts from which they are paid. I also mark it when I actually pay it. That is for set payments. Trying to keep track of groceries and gas and miscellaneous is a bit more difficult. I kind of wing it on those...but then I am pretty good at keeping a tight belt. I transfer the bill money as soon as the income money comes in. I look at the calendar and figure out what has to be paid from that check and what has to be paid from the next, and so on. After the bill money is transferred out of the account (or the checks written), then I know how much is left over. I allow for gas and food and then I know, approximately, how much is left (if anything) for fun types of things.

My bigger problem comes from me not being the only one spending the money. Hubby does most of the grocery shopping and gas buying, but I do the checking account so I do "see" it. I could probably figure out a reasonable amount needed to keep afloat if I had to.

When bills come in, I open them and clip to a clipboard. They are in the order of date due with the next one due on top. When they are paid, I mark them paid and the date, and I file the bill in a folder which I keep in a file box. I have a folder for each bill. I am learning to throw away older bills after I have the info I need from them. (Trying to declutter.)

The reason I pay the bills is because my husband would literally lose the bills, which is not good. This way, I am on top of them. As for income, right now it is unemployment. I have handled the bills over the years through two husbands. Neither of them was good with money. I have had to budget to get out of debt and I work hard to

stay out of debt.

I think that I am just naturally a more organized person than most. So that probably makes it easier for me to be organized about money. I had a girlfriend who could not comprehend the idea that money in her account was not spendable because a bill was coming due the next week. She thought, if it was there, it was spendable. She did finally figure it out. That is one reason why I like to transfer all the money for bills out of my account ASAP. Then I know I won't accidentally spend it!

I don't know if this will help anyone else. It is just what I do, and it works for me.

By Abigail aka Flower

Next, from a British MVNews reader:

Earlier this year I moved out of the family home and into my own place. I wasn't paying much attention to the finances because I had a bit spare each month—not much, but it was positive. I own the flat I'm living in, but it has a "maintenance" fee. Two months ago I was surprised by a half-year bill for 1328GBP (about \$2130 in US dollars.) I had to ask my bank to increase my overdraft. I will be able to pay it off, but I am two years from my official retirement age, when I will no longer have a salary. I'm starting to plan what I can get rid of, like my car for example, so I can survive after retirement. I think this will be a common situation among MV readers. How are other people planning?"

By Mary D.

OK folks, here's MY update.

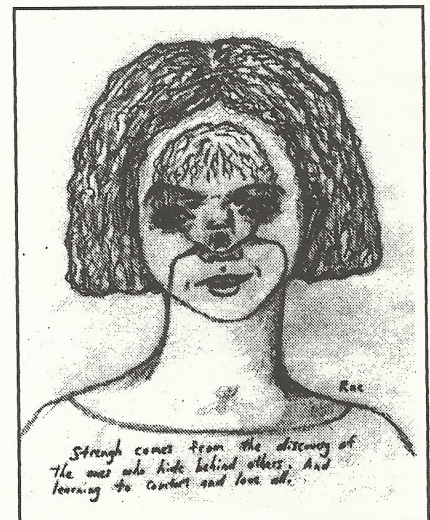
I confessed in that Finances newsletter that I didn't have a clue of what I really spent on personal expenses – other than rent and utilities (phone, electricity) where I receive regular bills. What did I truly spend on groceries, gifts for friends and relatives, medications (the latter answer is "a lot!") or the rare piece of

clothing, replacing a worn out bathroom rug, or the rare dinner-out or entertainment. I've always kept meticulous records of MV and my separate business expenses – but the stuff that keeps me alive—and makes life worth living (to me) was handled by guess-and-by-golly.

I have made some progress, though I am still 'way behind in the process. I started by opening a Quickbooks Account for personal expenses (which I'd never done before). And I am reconciling my personal bank statement as soon as I can get to it. (Which will be immediately after this newsletter reaches the printer.) I went back a couple years because I wanted to see what I was really doing with my money, and that is both good and not-so-good. It means I have boatloads of entries. I'm also trying (so far, in vain) to identify groceries, medicines, etc. I pay out of my \$20 per week cash spending money. That doesn't show up on a bank statement unless I somehow identify it in my Quickbooks (which no one on earth will ever see until I am blown to the four winds.) But it's important to ME, I now finally understand, to know what I personally do with my own funds, even if the IRS doesn't give a darn. I'm improving.

Lynn W.

MV



The Soul Inside the Jar

By Sarah Smith

Once upon a time there was a girl who wandered the forest with a jar in her hand. She was young and frail with long thin blond hair flowing in the wind and a dress, just as thin, flowing around her body. Her face wasn't as bony as you would expect for such a small girl, and in fact it was hauntingly pretty. Her blue eyes looked everywhere for the home of the jar's contents. It was important. God said it was important. He told her that inside the jar was a special magical essence called a "soul" and it needed a place to rest.

This lovely girl thought of herself as a shadow, and everyone knows shadows don't have souls, so she set about on a journey to find a resting place for the soul. She came upon a woman near a waterfall, weeping, and touched her shoulder. The woman looked up, tears running down her eyes like the water ran over the rocks behind her. The girl saw that she was not a shadow or a ghost, though she had no energy. She wondered if the soul would give this woman energy, and if the woman would give the soul a place to rest.

She held out the jar and asked "do you think this is your soul?" But the woman turned away and cried all the harder, with tears that seemed to wash away her life.

"No," she said, "it's not my soul. I don't deserve a soul for I gave mine away long ago."

"Well then, come with me and help me find a resting place for this soul. This waterfall is beautiful but there's so much more to the forest. Come with me, we can always return here when we need to."

The woman got up slowly. It had been more than twenty years since she moved about of her own free will. Her body was stiff and her muscles hurt. She was tired, but she rose up and followed the girl, curious to see if she could help find a resting place for the soul in the jar. They traveled along a path through the forest, looking for the resting place of the soul, as God

had said. Before long they found a demon-man. He was chopping down a tree with hacksaw, and so intent was he on his work that he didn't even know they approached. The girl and the woman were both a little fearful of him, so strong and tall and potent he was. They stood and watched him for a short while, and suddenly he turned and looked at them.

"I felt you! What do you want?" He thundered.

"Do you think this is your soul?" the little girl asked, holding out the jar for him to see.

The demon-man laughed at the question. He laughed until he was crying and holding his stomach. "My soul?!!!" he bellowed. "Do I think that is my soul????!! I'm part demon, stupid girl. I lost my soul to fire in a time I don't even remember, so long ago was that. It's not my soul, my soul has burned to ashes." His laughter subsided and a grimace took his smile's place on his red and tough face. It softened a little. "It's not my soul," he whispered.

"Well, we're trying to find a resting place for it. God told us it's a soul and that it needs a place to rest." The little girl took hold of the woman's hand, a gesture not lost on the demon-man. "This forest can be dangerous," the little girl said. "Will you come with us and perhaps your strength and power will scare away the creatures that would harm us?" She looked at the tree he was cutting down. "You can always return to your task when we are done, or you get bored."

The demon-man looked at the hacksaw and at the tree. He'd been cutting the tree for so long he didn't even remember why he was cutting. He only knew he was compelled to cut and that the job never seemed to get done no matter the force he used or the strength he spent. "All right," he said, "I'll come with you. I'll help you find a resting place for the soul in the jar."

And off they went, down the path in the forest, all three of them. Before

long they came upon twins, a man and a woman. The woman was solid and plump, with rosy cheeks and a smile on her face. The man looked just like her, only a male version, and was taller and thinner. He carried no emotion. He was sitting on a log watching the woman play with some forest critters. She had a few squirrels, a raccoon, and a fawn in front of her, and she was trying to teach them to read. The forest critters paid attention, then scampered about, then came back, then ran off again. The woman just laughed and kept to her lessons despite the antics of her class. It was all a game, and it made the little girl laugh and the woman smile.

The rosy cheeked woman greeted the three strangers warmly, though she was unsure of them. "Well, friends" she said, "what a lovely jar. What have you in there?"

"A soul," said the weeping woman. "The little girl is looking for a resting place for it."

"A soul!" The thin man and rosy cheeked woman both exclaimed together. "We were born without souls, and have been trying to earn one."

"Maybe this is it," the little girl said, holding out the jar.

The thin man shook his head and the rosy cheeked woman just laughed. "We haven't earned our soul yet, child. We have much work to do before we can have a soul."

At that moment, the jar began to shake. The little girl, in fear, placed the jar on the ground. She grabbed for the hand of the weeping woman, who grabbed for the hand of the rosy cheeked woman, who took the hand of the thin man, who clasped the hand of the demon-man, who placed his hand in that of the little girl. They were in a circle around the shaking jar, and they themselves shook with fear and even a little excitement. As they touched each other a deep magic began to flow through them, deeper even than the magic of the God who set the little girl on this mission. The magic was sadder than the weeping

woman's tears, stronger than the demon-man's strength, more joyful than the rosy cheeked woman's laughter, and quieter than the thin man's emotionless face. The magic was as frail as the little girl and as thin as her dress and as pretty as her face. It moved among them and through them and around them. It shook the jar until the jar began to break into pieces.

All of a sudden, with a whoosh and great beating of wings a number of tiny birds emerged from the jar. The birds flew straight into the air, and around the circle of magic, and in between the soul-less wanderers. There were white birds, and grey birds, and bright birds of yellow and red. There were green birds with orange wings and blue birds that matched the sky. As they flew around the magic circle they seemed to settle, one on each of the wanderer's heads and one on top of each of the trees and one upon the rocks and one for each of the critters that scampered about. The wanderers were holding tight to each others hands and looking up at the birds above their heads as each of the birds folded their wings and fell right into the wanderers themselves! The little girl who thought she was just a shadow became real as she held the hands of the others. The weeping woman whose life had washed away with tears had eyes that no longer cried, but gleamed with a new life. The demon-man found a new direction for his strength, one not bent toward destruction but rather one that protected. The thin man smiled, for his little bird helped him feel happy. The rosy cheeked woman's mouth was wide open in surprise and wonder, for she realized she no longer had to earn that for which she yearned.

"Why, it's not like I expected at all!" cried the little girl. "I don't know if God deceived me or if I misunderstood what He was saying! The jar held my own soul, and yours, and yours, and it was a deep magic that brought us together in this place to release them." Still holding hands, the troupe of wanderers laughed and cried all together and all at the same time, their souls now resting inside.

MV

Dealing with Clutter

By MVNews(Free Email) Readersof Edition #43

Lynn, this newsletter on clutter was on target for what I'm dealing with. It is very tough to ditch books, family heirlooms (with or without monetary value)—and clothes. I have made great strides this year cleaning out closets and bookcases.

The item I am most wrestling with now is my mother's rain-coat with zip-in lining. I helped her buy it. She died on Mother's Day in 2002. I can't wear that coat, nor can I give it away.

Right now I am trying to celebrate what I have accomplished in de-cluttering but saw that coat hanging in the closet again today.

One of the ways I've gotten rid of other things is to ask relatives if they want them. This has been successful because "memories" went to people for whom they have meaning. But that coat--not yet.

By Patti

The October E-Newsletter on Clutter really hit home and I was happy to find out I am not alone in cluttering behavior. I had both problems: too much stuff from impulse and emotional buying, and not putting things away. I left paths to walk through and generally the dirty dishes stayed in the kitchen. Usually, half my bed was covered with stuff and I left a spot to sleep in.

My daughter's step-mom put it well, explaining to my daughter that I couldn't "see" how bad it was. She was right. A lot of it was due to the exhaustion of depression and not having the energy to do laundry. I would go to the second hand shop after therapy and buy clothes for the next day. I accumulated a massive amount of clothes. Clothes were most of my clutter. I've watched the show "Hoarding" on TLC and it makes me cry because I used to be there. I don't watch it now. I'm moving forward and not looking back.

My landlord came in for a twice-a-year inspection of the property that was in the rental contract. She cried when she saw the house. I was

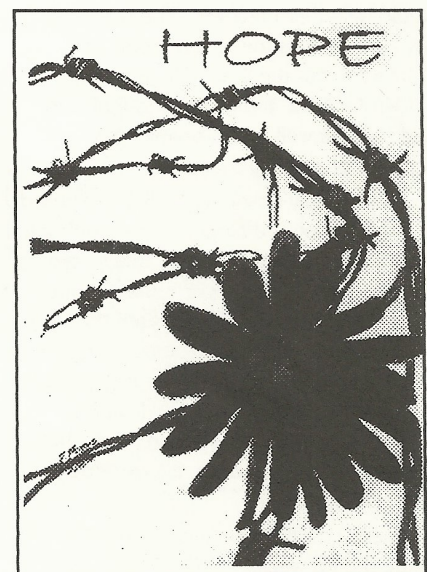
evicted. It took me five or more days to clean out my apartment to move. I have looked back at the pictures and cry when I see how bad it was. I either deleted them or filed the pictures away. I don't need the reminder.

I had two teenagers living with me for almost a year after Hurricane Ike hit and destroyed their homes. I call them my "Ike foster kids". One of them was very neat and organized and helped me clean up. She would say "OK, you have 20 Discover magazines. Pick 3 you want to keep." She was really helpful in organizing and getting rid of stuff.

Moving in with my parents helped quite a bit. The house is big and easier to keep clean. I do the kitchen most days and I really only have my room to keep up with. It only goes so far and then I have to stop and clean out. I'm not spending as much money on stuff anymore, as most of my emotional comforts have their place here. Also, many more of my comforts are outside of my house so that's less to keep inside. Working with horses helped with that. Also, I have an Amazon Kindle reader and electronic books that take up no space. I've got about 75 on my reader.

By Jenn

MV



Thoughts On Sybil Exposed

By Vivian

I began reading Debbie Nathan's book, *Sybil Exposed* [2011], knowing her premise: that Sybil, by her own admission in a letter to her psychiatrist, Dr. Cornelia Wilbur, didn't have multiple personalities; she made them up. Nathan attributes Sybil's subsequent recantation—she really did have multiple personalities, she said—to the fact that Sybil knew Dr. Wilbur was invested in the MPD diagnosis, so she went along with it because she didn't want to lose her. I was prepared for that, but not for Nathan's categorical attack on the entire DID diagnosis.

Nathan claims that Sybil—the 1973 book and the 1976 film—was padded with fictions to increase sales and thus responsible for the proliferation of cases of what had been, until then, a rare condition: multiple personality disorder. According to Nathan, Cornelia Wilbur “created” personalities in Sybil because she wanted to become famous for curing her, and Flora Rheta Schreiber, the book's author, went along with the falsification in her desire to be thought a more serious writer. Nathan posits that women in the seventies, the dawn of the feminist era, related to Sybil's story because they were confused about their identities. “Whipped back and forth by new ambitions and anxieties,” they sometimes “felt as though alien inner beings were doing their behaving.” Nathan says these women flocked to therapists, who diagnosed them as having multiple personalities caused by abuse, memories of which the therapists would help them recover. The result, as per Nathan, was the ruin not only of Sybil's life, but the lives of legions all across America: those who thought they had MPD as well as the people they accused of abusing them.

I was deeply unsettled by *Sybil Exposed* and the media and blogosphere brouhaha it unleashed. Part of me was able to see the fallacies in Nathan's arguments, but another part began to see myself through her lens. Was I a fraud? A product of the DID-Industrial-Complex? Was my therapy a sham? Was DID even real? Nathan never actually says DID doesn't exist, but she implies that if it does, it's extremely rare. Did I qualify?

These questions bounced around inside me for weeks.

I wasn't diagnosed by a therapist. I diagnosed myself on a summer evening in 1988, when I was forty-six years old and chanced upon a videotape of Sybil. I'd read the book years before, never associating it with myself; nor did I when I popped the cassette into my machine. But as soon as I watched it, I knew.

I was shocked. Multiple personality disorder, as it was then called, was something I thought of as bizarre. Could it apply to me? Yet it would explain things that had been going on my whole life: talking to faces in the mirror who weren't me; my feeling of otherness, of not being real, of watching myself from outside myself; cowering on the floor behind a chair during therapy sessions; three hospitalizations when I was in my twenties, ostensibly for schizophrenia; doing well in my two careers—as a librarian and an IT business systems analyst while at the same time being plagued by major internal upheavals.

I had spent my high school and college years combing through books about abnormal psychiatry, looking for any label, however scary, that would take away my feeling of being an alien. I found categories that matched the way I was some of the time—catatonic, schizophrenic, aphasic, obsessive-compulsive—but none that fit overall. Until I watched Sybil. I asked my therapist whether she thought there could be other people in me. She looked startled, then said yes. But over the next few months, I felt her discomfort. She believed that if I did have MPD, she should ignore it and force me to be a unified person; if I didn't have it, her job was to knock the delusion out of me. “You're not like Sybil!” she spat one day.

No, I wasn't. I never “woke up” in a strange place and wondered how I'd gotten there. I never lost time (that I knew of). If I had MPD, it wasn't “regular” MPD.

I eventually switched to a therapist who wasn't put off by MPD but had no experience treating it (I didn't know where to find such a person). I bought two copies of Frank Putnam's *Diagnosis and Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder* and gave her one. I wrote Putnam a letter describing myself and asking whether he thought I could have MPD; my therapist included a note, too. Putnam wrote back

without answering specifically, but he gave my therapist the name of a local expert and told me about *Many Voices*, a publication by and for people with MPD.

I subscribed and was amazed to read things I could have written myself—about internal chaos and how to deal with it while you had to go to work or interact with family and friends; about food addictions; about therapists; about forgiveness, boundaries, child alters, denial and disbelief. There were articles from those who were newly-diagnosed, as well as those who were integrated or on their way to integration. There were also articles from non-MPD people who were married to someone with MPD. For the first time in my life, I felt part of a community.

This community was safe because it was distant, composed of people I knew only through their writing and artwork. I envisioned them as “classic” multiples who would do the kinds of things Sybil did in the film—when the creak of a playground swing triggered a memory that made her switch to another personality, she waded into the pond in Central Park with her clothes on, abandoning the children she was taking care of. I felt superior. I might have been crazy, but I wasn't over-the-top crazy. At the same time, I was drawn to the *Many Voices* people in the way of a dog who suddenly spots another dog in a sea of humans.

Then I went to my first support group meeting. Arriving early, I found an ordinary-looking woman in jeans and a t-shirt setting up chairs. Did she have MPD? What if something I did caused her to switch and see me as dangerous? What if she threw a chair?

“Would you like some help?” I asked, trying to mask my fear.

“That would be great,” she said.

I had just spoken to someone with multiple personalities! She had answered! I assisted with the chairs, thankful she didn't know the injustice I had done her in my mind.

The rest of the meeting was humbling, too. I hadn't expected it to be orderly. There was a moderator, a raise-your-hand format that people adhered to, suggested topics, then sharing. I related to almost

everything I heard about therapists; shame; controlling inappropriate switching; navigating relationships with outside people; whether, and with whom, it was safe to share your diagnosis.

Though I continued attending the monthly meetings, listening but not talking, I was never sure I belonged. For one thing, the vocabulary didn't apply to me. I didn't consider myself a "survivor"; and I didn't think of my parents as "perpetrators"-they might have been hateful sometimes, but they could also be loving. For another, everyone in the group seemed to be a victim of incest. I wasn't. Could there be MPD without incest? Then again, wasn't MPD all about memories you had to recover? I waited for incest to surface in therapy. It didn't. I set about interviewing my aunts. They were forthcoming about upsetting things they remembered my father's having done, but incest didn't enter the picture-with him or anyone else.

So did I have multiple personalities?

Since 1988, I have asked myself that question on and off, occasionally measuring myself against Sybil.

Sybil lost time; once, she "woke up" and found it was two years later. I do not lose chronological time, but I do lose what I have come to call perception time. If I am at a party and a six-year-old part of me is out, I hear the grownup conversation from a child's point of view. People might be talking about politics, romance, business. I am awed by this and stay to the side, clearing the table and making myself otherwise useful, so no one will notice. I might know that someone there recently went on a job interview, but it would never occur to me to ask how it went-those kinds of things are not relevant to my child's world-so people probably think I'm not involved or don't care. Later, when the child is no longer out, I remember that I was at the party and everything that happened. But I didn't experience the event as an adult or make adult connections. In essence, the adult-me missed out on the party.

Another difference is that Sybil didn't seem to mind when Dr. Wilbur addressed her as Peggy, Vicky, or Vanessa. While I like it when my therapist recognizes and acknowledges that someone else has switched in, I'm uncomfortable if the recognition goes too far. It's OK for me or my therapist to refer to my parts as Emily or Wendy, but only when we speak about

them, not when I am them. The overview-me, watching from outside myself, would rather not make it too official.

Probably the biggest difference is that no one looking at me would be able to "tell," unless they saw me in therapy or at home. My drama is mostly internal; Sybil's was both internal and external. At least that's what I thought, until I came across a self-published book by Patrick Suraci: *Sybil* in her own words: *The Untold Story of Shirley Mason, Her Multiple Personalities and Paintings* [2011]. After reading it, I realized that even Sybil wasn't like Sybil.

Suraci recorded phone conversations he had with Shirley Mason-Sybil's real name-during 1993-1998, the last five years of her life, when she was in her seventies. (She gave permission for the recordings.) Mason told Suraci that she did have MPD, and that her integration has held. She said the book was accurate, but several fictionalized scenes were inserted into the film because the screenwriter thought her day-to-day life insufficiently dramatic. The wading-in-the-pond episode in Central Park never happened. The love-interest was made up (in the movie, Sybil's MPD gets in the way of a budding romance she has with a neighbor). Also a fiction was the scene that depicted Sybil running into the subway toilet after she switched in the street.

I recently read the hospital report my psychiatrist wrote in the mid-sixties, before multiple personality disorder became an official DSM diagnosis [DSM III, 1980]. In it, he says: "She described feeling at times that she was another person, either 'Ellen' or 'Wendy.' She also described experiences in which she was unable to move, experiences of 'being dead,' and a frightening experience which she described as her 'insides hurting'... She experienced various altered ego states and changes of identity... She retained however, the delusional and almost hallucinatory idea that she was surrounded by 'mirror people'... The patient has made use of a combination of depersonalization, derealization, and fantasy, in an effort to defend herself against overwhelming feelings of loneliness and rage."

His diagnosis: chronic undifferentiated schizophrenia.

See, I wanted to say to Debbie Nathan, the reason there were so few cases of MPD before Sybil was that there was no official name for it. Then I thought, Why do I have to justify my diagnosis to her? Or

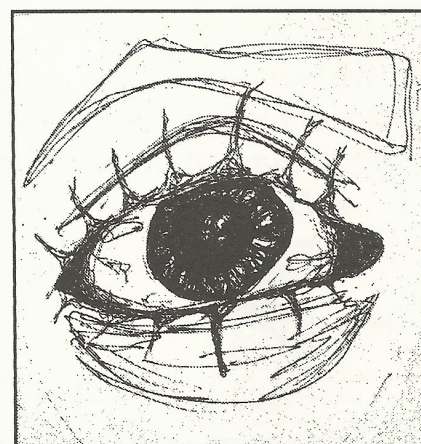
even to myself? What's my stake in it?

For much of my life, I felt like a non-entity. That changed in 1988, when I labeled myself MPD. Suddenly I was special, exotic. There was glamour to the chaos within me. I wasn't happy when the American Psychiatric Association changed the diagnosis to dissociative identity disorder [DSM IV, 1994]. DID didn't have the same sparkle that MPD did. Still, at least I had a disorder that existed. Now here was Debbie Nathan, armed with thirty-six pages of footnotes, saying DID was so rare that hardly anyone in the world had it-not even Sybil.

Whatever the specifics of Sybil's case actually were, I owe Sybil a debt for pointing me in the right direction. My work since the 1990s with two therapists, both experienced in treating dissociation, has helped enormously. People who know nothing about my diagnosis have said things like, "You seem different. More connected." I still have a way to go in therapy, but I've come to see that I am a legitimate human being in and of myself. In answering the questions Nathan's book provoked, I have also realized that I don't need an exotic label to feel special. As long as I fit loosely into an official description, it makes no difference what the term is. In fact, I would prefer a prosaic name, without the words "multiple" or "identity," something boring and forgettable, like "walled-off perception and/or awareness adaptation"-something that describes the way I fit into the world, not "what" I am.

I still alternately believe and disbelieve I have DID. I will probably never know for sure. That, too, is finally OK.

MV



Eying my Mind by KateEdwin

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