

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

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Living in a "Normal" World Challenges and Rewards of Recovery



Paths to Recovery

On this fifteen year long journey I have been down as many paths.

Sometimes the paths seemed like dead ends, sometimes I repeated them until I had a well worn path, and coping skills to match. Paths became a common theme

in my collages, each path another tour of my recovery. When will I find the final path? How will I know where the path will take me, or where the path will end?

There have been so many paths already. Each path a new direction.

Some dark and dirty, some well maintained. Some like the yellow brick road, abruptly ending, but no ruby slippers and hopefully no place like home.

The paths enlighten me, they just keep showing up in my work.

The paths are my journey, my recovery.

By Donna Holzem

MV

On Being "Normal?"

By Heather

When I was a kid, all I ever wanted to be was "normal." I didn't want to be different. I wanted the same things as other kids. I wanted to have friends and have them over to my house. I wanted to play with other kids. I wanted my parents to be OK in the eyes of other kids. I wanted to be liked. But I wasn't like them and my parents weren't like other parents. They were different so I couldn't have friends over 'cause they wouldn't understand. At some point I must have had a friend over because I knew that the other kids thought my parents were weird. That, or maybe I told them about my parents. At any rate I knew that our family as a whole was different and that I also wasn't acceptable in the eyes of my family either. I was always being told to "grow up" and "why can't you be like other kids?" So I didn't play with other kids and didn't have them over so they wouldn't find out how different we were. I was a bad kid and was always getting punished for something.

As a teenager, I gave up on trying to be "normal." I just wanted people to accept me for the way I was. I was tired of people trying to change me. My mother would tell me that if I would just be a little more lady-like or more agreeable or a little nicer then it wouldn't be so hard for people to like me. She told me that I made it difficult for her to love me. I still got hit at home because I couldn't manage to behave myself and be good. So I occasionally went to a free clinic for some therapy to try to change my behavior, but that didn't last long. It felt good to talk to someone who seemed to actually be interested in my welfare though. How odd.

Then as I got older and got into some abusive relationships that ended badly, my mother told me "what did you expect going out with the likes of him" "you got yourself into this now you can get yourself out

of it" "if you'd made better choices then maybe you wouldn't be in this mess." This wasn't helpful and only served to remind me that it was all my fault. It was my fault for going out with him, not his for hitting me. I didn't understand how I could have made a better choice. After all, he hit me less than she did and said some pretty nice things about me when he wasn't drinking. This was an improvement from living at home.

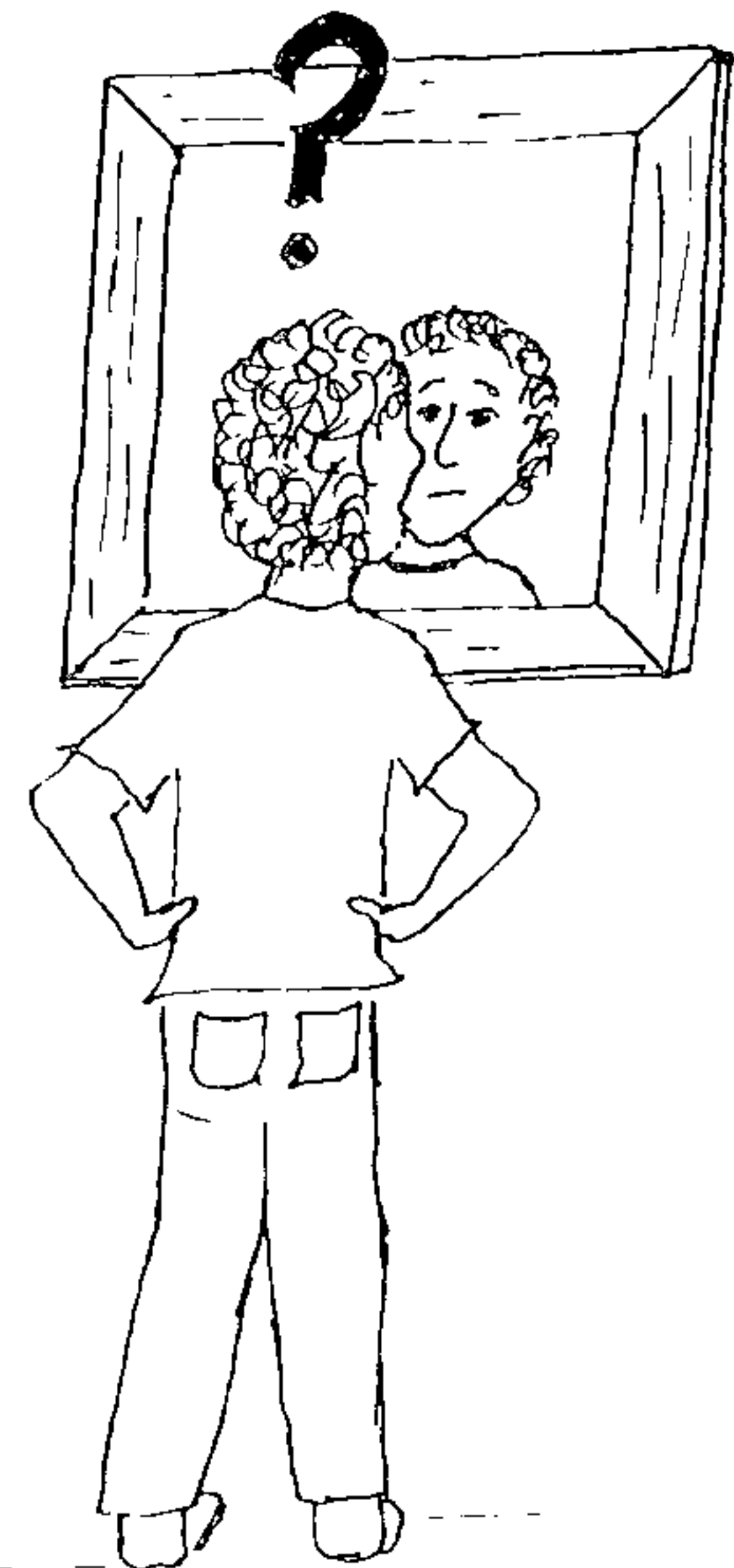
Well, as the years passed I learned to keep my history to myself and tried to pretend to be like everybody else. If you act like everyone else then you get treated like everyone else. Relationships came and went. Marriages came and went. Finally a few years after my mother's death, when I was seemingly happily married with a house, car, and a dog, the facade started to unravel. I went back to having temper tantrums like when I was a kid. I found myself unhappy with the way my husband wanted me to be. I didn't want to be a housewife and caretaker. I tried having a life and career of my own only to find my secrets oozing out and people noticing that I was different again. Once again I found myself in therapy for 'stress reduction.' Then it happened. One of the kids inside came out in therapy. Oops. Well so much for being "normal." I actually apologized to my therapist saying I kinda knew that could happen. But at that point in my life I didn't really care anymore. I just wanted some control over the way I was and again wanted to be "normal."

After years of therapy and every step I made toward being "normal" I would see people in my life that I had always thought were "normal." All of a sudden now they didn't look so "normal" anymore. They actually had problems and dysfunctions of their own. These people thought I was dysfunctional! At least I was doing something about my dysfunctions. I learned that my family of origin was anything *but* "normal" or healthy. That my relationships and all the bad

things that happened to me were *not* my fault. That a lot of the choices I made were made from a standpoint of an abused child. I wouldn't have recognized "healthy" if it had bit me.

Now that I'm "normal?" I realize that the whole world is dysfunctional in some way or another. Some have more dysfunctions than others and some show and some don't. Nobody is free of it, not me, not even therapists. I try to change the things that disrupt my life and not try to be like anyone else anymore. If someone doesn't like me this way, then tough cookies. I still keep my history to myself though, usually. Actually the fact that I'm happy with myself and able to change what I don't like is something that others envy about me. How about that, THEY want to be more like ME! Go figure!

MV



By Eileen

Words

Words flow easily for me now. I have learned a lot through this wonderful gift of expressing myself.

The first thing that comes to my mind as I type is how far I have come, I have a long way to way go to be fully healed, but I see things as they are, not hiding behind a facade, that others are hiding behind.

The second and most fulfilling thing that I learned through my writing and my struggles is how far I have come.

To feel at peace with all that has happened, the good and the bad, I see more good then bad. I am rejoicing in the good.

It's about time!

By Mary G.

MV

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Living in a "Normal" World

By Jan T.

I'd like to share my contrasting experiences of living in a "normal" world before and after treatment. First, I'd like to say I am a survivor of ritual abuse, sexual and physical abuse from very early childhood through adolescence. I have had DID for all my life.

My first experience with the "normal" world was this: when I was seventeen I could no longer cope with anything and attempted suicide—I ended up in a coma for 10 days. When I recovered and was sent back home I told myself, "Okay—nothing works—even suicide. So from now on, "nothing ever happened to me and I'm going to be normal!"

I got a job as an aide in a hospital, and I very closely watched people, to learn how "normal" people act—what they say, what they do, how they act and behave toward each other. I took a self-taught crash study course in "being normal." I imitated their

behavior, their mannerisms, etc. And it worked! I passed for being "normal." So I went to school, worked part-time, got married, had a family, etc.

All the time, passing as a "normal" member of the human race.

No one ever knew I was merely imitating the behavior of normal people. No one ever knew what was really inside me—the pain, the "badness."

I was able to keep up my facade for a number of years—until my father died.

I broke down. I could no longer function in the "normal" world. All of my illness came gushing out—therapy, hospitalizations, medical problems, psychiatrists, asthma, heart problems—you name it. It was a roller coaster. My alters could no longer be silenced, and the option of being in the "normal" world no longer existed.

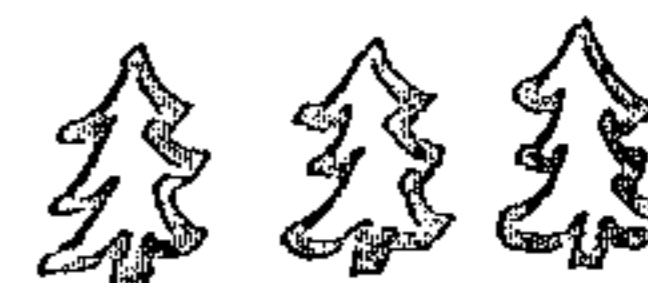
But, there is a happy ending.

After my roller coaster ride of therapy—I was lucky to have an excellent therapist and psychiatrist—I have integrated all my alters.

And I now live in the NORMAL world, without the quotation marks. I no longer have a facade of acting like I'm normal. I now can feel joy and happiness and peace just like everyone else. Sure, I feel sadness, and anger and fear, too. But I feel connected to people now. I work as a nurse, and I truly care about the children I take care of.

I don't have to "study" people anymore to wonder how to act to pass as being human. Therapy works. I AM human!

MV



Healing Horse Therapy

By Amy Leigh (age 9)

I had gotten to a place in my journey where traditional talk therapy left me blocked and somewhat disheartened. So I incorporated a new form of therapy. This took my healing to a new experience. I gained more insight of who I am and what I could become. It

gave my journey an abundance of clarity and an in-depth look at myself. This therapy is called Equine facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP). It provides hands-on time with a horse or horses. It

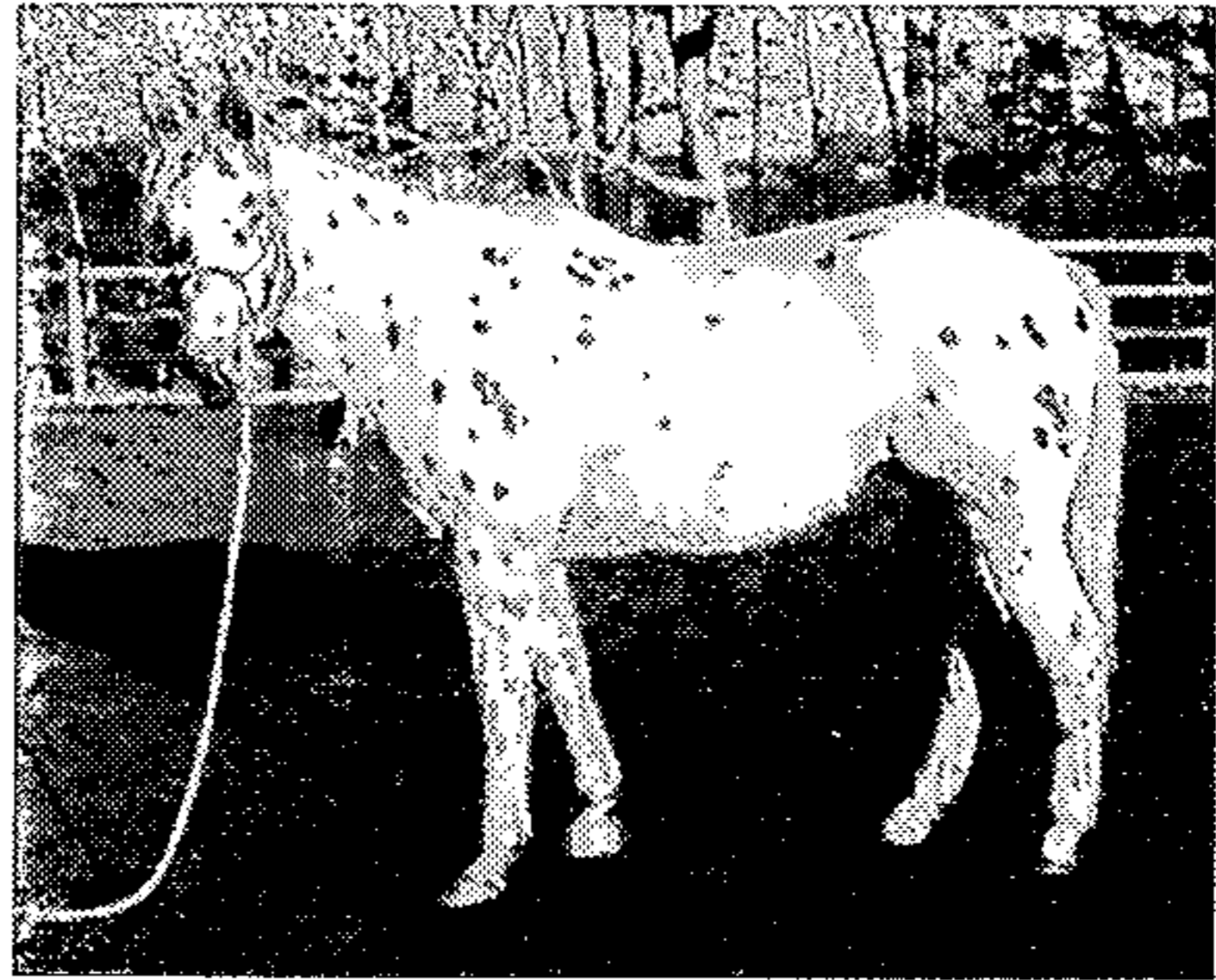
also takes a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), licensed professional counselor (LPC) or other licensed mental health professional. Also there is another person who is vital to the process. They are called "equine specialists." They work as a team together. They have training in EAGALA, the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. The main team member for it to work is the incredible creature, the horse.

How does it work? EFP focuses on the personal goals which are set on a weekly basis. These help the client work on certain issues. The issues could be trust, boundaries, reality checks, self-esteem, feelings that the client wants to learn how to express—which may be feelings that they have never been able to express before. EFP can also be geared to working with people with trauma/PTSD and even DID clients.

As a DID client it has changed my life. I have learned that I have the right to say NO and claim my boundaries, both spatial and emotional. I learned to do more self-validating and problem solving. I'm more aware of the times I hold my breath. I became aware of how much I had been

floating out of my body and therefore learned I can miss a lot during such times. The last two big ones I learned were that I had a voice and it was ok to use it. Then, I learned to feel and express anger appropriately. I had never allowed myself to really know anger.

What was the process like? Let's imagine being in an arena with a large horse. The one that was with me was named Scout. We had a task called "pool with a horse." Up against the wall were two PCP pipes forming a pocket. I was dealing with feeling safe. The goal was to get me and Scout in the pocket. However, I couldn't touch Scout. Through talking to him I finally got him to follow me into the pocket. I felt safe and protected with Scout. It was the first time in a long time. I'm glad we made a good shot.



This is Scout

legs, a dip in his back, and a big rump. However, you like him. Can you come up with just one thing you like about yourself?"

I chose my hands, because they can be gentle.

Thanks to Pistol, he helped me slow down and notice something I like about myself.

The therapy has blessed my life. I make eye contact better. I express feelings that I never had a chance to do before. I focused on not holding my breath. I stay in my body more and I learned about boundaries. I felt safe and they taught me ways to stay safe. I was empowered, something I never knew I could be.

I thank my whole team, especially the magical horse.

Change

Dedicated to Scout, who taught me about boundaries
Change in me.

I stand in the round pen
tall yet small

Claiming my space to stay safe.

I'm not alone in this place.

Only I can keep it safe.

He enters, bumps, pushes and even nibbles.

it's rude and scary.

frozen in the past and feeling in the present.

He comes real close — change.

I risk it all to stand tall.

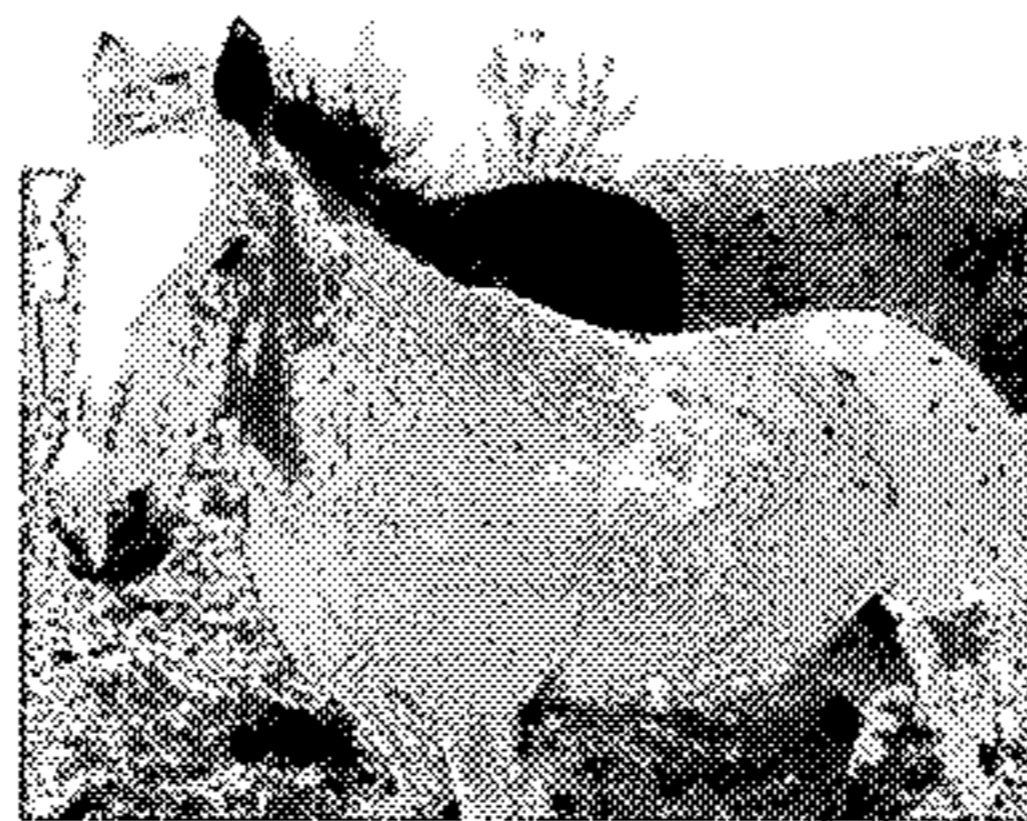
I push him away safe and all change in me.

I can be free.

By Amy Leigh



This is Change



This is Pistol

My next task was with Pistol. Pistol was 'way over on the other side of the arena. I went to Pistol and handled him like I was grooming him. The issue I was working on was being gentle with myself and self-image. I said I hated doing nice things for myself and I hated the way I looked. I couldn't come up with one thing I liked about myself. We talked about how I was treating Pistol. Our therapist said, "Look at your hands.

He has just stood there, completely calm. Your hands are being gentle and you are talking calmly. What about giving some of that to yourself?" Our therapist continued, "Look how Pistol looks. He has short

Recovery

By Mary G.

I have been in and out of therapy for 30 years. I stayed with many therapists because I liked their personalities, not because they were helping me. I always knew that most were well intentioned, but I think I expected a therapist to be psychic. Looking back, there were a few that understood many things about me because of what I didn't say. Even after I was finally diagnosed with DID, I was unable to ask for, let alone accept the help I needed. I was driven by my fear of really being insane. I thought I couldn't tell this to a therapist or I would be locked up. On occasion my girls would intervene on my behalf, but I was never privy to what actually happened during those sessions. The therapists would always point out my mood swings and I would always agree. I never told most of them I wasn't actually at all the sessions.

After 30 years of comparison shopping, I found the right therapist. From the moment I heard her speak, I knew Maureen was the one. With this realization came great anxiety, horror and fear. The thought of actually getting well struck me pretty hard. It sounds strange, but I was so ill for so very long I was afraid of being well. My girls didn't like it either because they thought I was trying to rid myself of them. Maureen always understood this and I never felt ashamed of how I felt or my sometimes hysterical actions. She always saw me through and stayed by my side. This in itself was a novelty. No one ever stood by me like that. No one ever allowed me to just feel what I felt without guilt or shame.

Through continuous therapy and hard work, trust was established. It was time for incorporation. I could never have moved forward without it. Just the word incorporation frightened me along with what it implied. It turned out to be a milestone in my recovery. I immediately felt a stillness and peace within myself that went beyond the

scope of my imagination. Suddenly my girls and I shared one heart, one soul and one mind. We were together. What happened to all the chaos I always felt within?

Finding the right psychiatrist has been important to my recovery as well. So many in the past just looked at the surface issues I exhibited. Their job was only to medicate me. I felt they were never really concerned about me or why I had these issues. My current psychiatrist saw me as an individual with individual needs. I did need help with obvious problems, but I believe he was interested in how I happened to have these particular problems. The best part was that he worked with my therapist. We were all working together.

I soon learned that in order to maintain these new feelings, I needed to change. I didn't know how to be well. As time goes on I am able to let go of the old memories and feelings. Everything had to change. Even before incorporation, I removed myself from my family. Once I understood that they would never take ownership for their acts and that they would always be who they were, it was easy. This may not be a critical step for everyone. It was critical for me, however, and for right now remains a crucial element in my recovery.

I have greatly benefited from journaling. When emotions and memories are running high, I write about them. Not only do I write about them, but I sometimes send them off to another person to read. I don't necessarily want advice or feedback; just getting it out at times gives me a great sense of relief. Writing about my feelings can help me understand why I feel as I do. Many times, the emotions I feel today are really old feelings that come from listening to the old tapes playing in my head. Once I establish this, I can look at what is really bothering me. Sharing my feelings and thoughts is no easy task, but has gotten easier.

The first several times I did it, I felt like crouching down and covering my head with my arms. I expected my world to cave in around me, but it didn't. Writing can be very personal or can be shared. It's whatever works for a particular individual. MV

One Step More

The tomorrow of this journey
Is shrouded in the past
I wish I knew the ending
Or at least the next few turns
Does the path continue up
Or do I face a steep descent?
Will tomorrow bring the sun
Or sharp cold sleet upon my face?
Is it safe for me to hope,
Or better to draw my doubt
Around me like a cloak?
Despair is somehow comforting
Disappointment of no concern
But hope is an unknown quantity.
Nothing familiar there.
The choice is mine; I must commit
No guide to lead me now.
I find myself afraid to move,
Frozen in uncertainty.
I am afraid to start this path
Yet I cannot turn back again.
Nor afford to stand where I am
This choice is mine to make
My guide has led me to this place
And silently urges me to move on
I must make this choice for myself.
Choices restricted to Death or Hope
Can I choose the proper one.
The one I am ready for?
I can I choose to Hope today
To live for another dawn
I choose to continue my journey
No matter how frightened I am
I choose to commit to Life itself
And endure what pain must come
I know I cannot escape scot free
And I will pay the entrance fee
Somehow I shall escape these bars
That invisibly hold me still
I shall step this one step more
And hold myself in faith
That once again my guide will greet me.
Once again in place in front
To guide me through the wilderness
And teach me the path to come

By Candace E Barnes

One Step Closer

By Lindsay

The first time "we" heard the term INTEGRATION from our therapist, our Alters dug in their heels and said "NOT US!" ElizaBeth, our most powerful Alter, was adamant that integration was not anything she would ever allow.

Integration is the recommended therapy in the professional community for "multiples." It is supposed to make us "normal." But what happens when an Alter integrates? To help answer this question we offer the story of the transition of one of our Alters we call ElizaBeth.

She has been part of us for over 50 years and takes over whenever there is any threat. We have been in and out of therapy for 10 years trying to understand our "situation" and how to cope. ElizaBeth attended most of the therapy sessions being angry and feeling threatened. How could she be the "problem" when her entire existence was focused on fixing problems?

As time passed ElizaBeth began to realize that her strength of purpose and intensity of demands were out of balance with the "real" world. ElizaBeth would have to change if her "appearances" were to create more benefit than damage to those she attacked as she protected us. If ElizaBeth were to INTEGRATE she would have to be different. But how? Would it mean she would disappear forever? Would she die? What would happen to us if she left?

We were exhausted after ElizaBeth appeared and she felt the same exhaustion. Was it possible her strength was waning as we all aged? But her decline in appearances was driven by factors other than age. As we gained the skills to manage our life, our need for ElizaBeth decreased. We were better able to discern which people were healthy enough for us to be around. We surrounded ourselves with the loving people we deserved.

We were becoming better at recognizing situations that created

stress, and avoiding them. We could choose to participate in things that enhanced our wellbeing and abandon anything that failed to bring us joy.

Although powerful, intelligent and courageous, ElizaBeth realized she was not a complete person. Like all of our Alters she was only a portion of a whole personality. Each Alter held survival skills, or a memory, or a series of traumatic events from the past. And every Alter lacked offsetting qualities that brought a sense of balance that "normal" people have within a single personality.

ElizaBeth realized she was pure anger and rage. She was not able to feel compassion or express fairness or see objectively. She realized she might have inflicted more harm toward others than the protection she intended for us. She realized that her reasons for existence might be coming to an end as we continued to gain skills. ElizaBeth found this a frightening thought, and at the same time it gave her reasons for leaving. If she left us the outbursts of anger and rage might end and the rest of us could respond more appropriately to stress. But there was something she needed to do before she left.

The original child that was born into this life created ElizaBeth. Her job was to protect that child. ElizaBeth needed to know if that original child was now safe. If so, then ElizaBeth could be freed from her responsibilities and leave us. But where was the original child?

ElizaBeth was aware of the other Alters and should be able to find the original child. The rest of us stood by as we watched her search. We feared that we had we split so many times there was no longer a single "core" personality to be found. ElizaBeth was not convinced that this was true and continued searching.

She was also asking for answers to difficult questions. What makes up the self? In a mind that has split so many times, is each Alter just a piece of the

self? Are Alters only a thought or image in the mind? What happens to everyone else if one of us leaves? If all the Alters left, would there BE a personality? Where does an Alter "go" when they leave? If Alters can leave did that mean they were not "real" to begin with. Questioning the reality of our shared existence was alarming for everyone inside who was capable of understanding the seriousness of ElizaBeth's thoughts. We were afraid of what would happen if ElizaBeth left.

We were also surprised at the ease with which her transition took place. We had been using hypnosis with our therapist to access the Alters in a safe environment. Hypnosis is a form of relaxation that accesses the subconscious mind. We had been using hypnosis for our healing process. In a hypnotic/therapeutic trance we are able to feel the fear and pain of the Alters and know we were safe at the same time. Hypnosis is not for everyone and we are not recommending it. What we know is that it worked for us as our life was becoming more about healing than being about loss and abuse.

The day ElizaBeth "transformed" we were in a hypnotic trance session. In the distance we saw an open window. It was the window in the upstairs bedroom of our childhood. We looked down on the driveway below where we played as a child and remembered the hours we spent looking through that window, wishing we could be outside playing instead of locked in our bedroom. As a child we had many fantasies about jumping to our freedom, but the driveway was too far down and we might get hurt.

As we recalled more memories of our childhood, we floated (in trance) out the window and down onto the driveway. We recalled dad teaching us to ride our bike and playing hide-and-seek in the evenings with the neighborhood children. Flashes of our childhood presented themselves until at last we came face to face with ElizaBeth. She was standing with her

arms crossed over her chest looking resolute. With all the authority she could muster she said, "I will not leave!"

Was this going to be a fight to the end? Would ElizaBeth take over one final time and push the rest of us into the background forever?

But ElizaBeth's challenge was not heart felt. She had stopped searching for the original child, believing she was lost forever. She needed to know that she was no longer necessary for our survival. We assured her we were stronger and better able to protect ourselves and make wise decisions on our own. ElizaBeth was surprisingly ready to release her responsibilities.

She sat down on the ground next to the rose bushes. There was no fight left in her. She spread her arms and released all the sadness she felt from not being able to find the original child. There was a look of relief on her face and at the same time we saw a weariness we had never noticed before.

We thanked her for all her years of protection and told her that we loved her. We told her we were sorry that we held on to her long after we were able to protect ourselves. ElizaBeth smiled. She could see we were capable of caring for ourselves now. She knew we were not the vulnerable child she had to protect from harm. We had intelligence and strengths of our own. We had family and friends and other resources we could draw upon.

Exhausted, ElizaBeth handed us a large flat stone. Then gave us one stone for every time she protected us. She asked us to build a stone path from the house to the place where she would rest near the roses. There were enough stones to make a long, wide path connecting us to her memory.

As we watched her sitting in the rose bushes, Elizabeth began to change. She grew smaller and eventually became the ten year old child she had been all along. No more the "Heat Seeking Missile with a Payload". ElizaBeth was ready to release her heavy responsibilities.

There was one more image just before we came up out of trance. Wings appeared on ElizaBeth's back

as she transformed into an angel. She would rest knowing she would be needed no longer. Feeling complete we asked the therapist to bring us out of trance.

It was not easy to lose ElizaBeth. Without thinking we called upon her the next time we needed her. No one responded. She was gone. It was a simple task and we had to do it without her. The hard part was doing it without her. It left us feeling empty. Not sad, not scared, not alone, but empty. ElizaBeth had played a huge role in our lives and without her we felt empty. Each time we stepped up and took care of something that ElizaBeth would have done for us, the emptiness filled—just a little. Months later the feeling of emptiness had faded. We could function without ElizaBeth and feel "full."

We now live high in the Colorado Rockies and far away from our childhood home. It is there that we built a stone pathway from our house to the wild roses that grow here. It's ElizaBeth's path. When we walk the stone path we remember that she was there for us every time we needed her. We still get angry, but we're better at tempering that anger instead of unleashing the rage of ElizaBeth. We can talk about what's wrong and solve problems instead of having the split second appearance of ElizaBeth to "set everything straight" for us. It is different and it is also better.

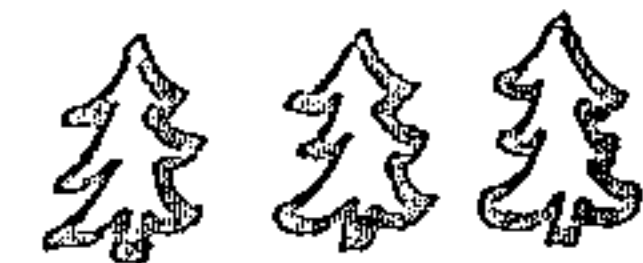
We thought her transition was complete, but there was one final step. It happened in hypnotic trance. ElizaBeth returned as a guardian angel. Somewhere deep in our subconscious mind she watches over us. She never takes over our mind or controls our body or our words, but there is an awareness that she is present. Instead of feeling ElizaBeth's rage we feel our own anger and know we have a problem to solve. Every step without ElizaBeth is a new step for us.

What the medical community calls INTEGRATION, we believe is a transformation of an Alter. As we realized we had skills to work effectively in the world and protect ourselves, ElizaBeth transformed to a guardian angel. She is still present, but instead of the personification of

rage, she brings the love of a guardian angel. We never believed in angels until ElizaBeth became one. We now hold out the possibility that all our Alters may be guardian angels waiting for their turn to release their heavy responsibility and spread their wings.

For us this is what it has been like to be one step closer to "normal."

MV



Humanness

How do things get this way?
How does love become so entangled
with humanness that it's slowly
choked off and dies?
Within that question is the answer...

humanness

Human frailties and faults and feelings
and forever. All spoken or enacted
(or not spoken
nor enacted) too soon or too late,
too often or too sparingly, too
blindly or too logically.
Humanness.
That's the answer

So many of us know it.
Still here we are asking, searching,
pondering, wondering, even supposing
Myriads of ingenious dolts, we are.
Ironic.
Paradoxical.

This painful, wonderful cycle of
stumbling
and wandering and starting afresh.
It goes round and round and ends
only
at the Rapture.
This cycle is life
Life is LEARNING.
Learning is Humanness.
So, like all others, in the midst of
humanness
AM I.

...
How do things get this way?

By DRH

MV

Hope – Feeling Better

By Connie

I am Little Connie. I am four years old. I am sad. I am sad because I am all alone. I cry. Then one day I met the others. It was like coming through a bubble.

Now I am growing up and feeling the happy feelings. But I was sad for a long time because I know my mom loves me but I didn't know if she likes me. She was not very happy either and I thought it was up to me to make it all better—make her happy. Now, I know she does like me but she just doesn't know how to be close. If she could be close to us, she would. She just doesn't have it to give. But she is trying and getting better. Sometimes mom was happy but I remember she was mad a lot.

I couldn't talk to her. She was always busy. I needed her to hold me more. I needed to tell her I have to sit in a closet when she and dad go out. I do this because I have to; I feel someone makes me but I don't know why. I pray, I see the dark, I wait, I keep very quiet. I know better than to tell anyone. It just doesn't feel like a safe thing to do. Until I met my talking doctor. Now I feel safe and happy. I wish I could keep my mom happy, but I am learning other people take care of their own feelings.

When I went to Kindergarten I felt lost and alone. I didn't know where my mom was. This feeling of being lost and alone comes over me a lot. Now I know I am not alone. My doctor helped me meet the others inside. They are with me always. Connie and Protective One help me feel much better. I give them hugs. We find strength, comfort and hugs together. At first I was afraid to share my sad. I thought they would be sad. I learned to trust. Now we share our feelings and feel much better.

When I am sad about the closet, Protective One can let me know why she made us do it and that we don't need to do that anymore. We are safe now. Connie knows the feelings too,

now. We had to tell her—she wasn't there—but she said she wishes she could have been there and that is very kind of her. It is sad she had to know but now we are closer and feel much better. We understand as we share our memories. Also, I have always loved to color. Now we take art lessons!

I now feel more adult. My family is very loving. They make each of us feel special. We love our husband and children so much and they love us. I have come a long way. The deep sadness I felt has healed. We have a very caring doctor. He has always been there. I began to feel safe. And that is a lot of caring! Soon, he will retire. It will be one of the hardest things for us. We will need to be close to each other and talk. We will always have him in our heart. We will always remember what he would say.



I am Protective One. I am 17 and I carry the feelings of protecting everyone. I can get mad and anxious too. I felt so disconnected, it was like being in a coma. No one talked to me and I didn't talk to them. In therapy, I learned there are others. It is like coming up through a fog. At first it was not clear where I was going and I was scared. You need to have a doctor you can trust; someone to guide you through the fog to a wonderful awakening deep inside your soul.

When I was four, I got out of my bed at night and sat inside a closet. I couldn't get out until I was perfect. Perfect in what I say, think and do. No one knew. It wasn't safe to talk and there was no one to talk to. I was alone. Now in talk therapy, I have learned, I don't have to be perfect and protect everyone. It takes a lot of work with my very caring doctor. He is patient and goes at the pace we each need. I feel safe. With lots of work I

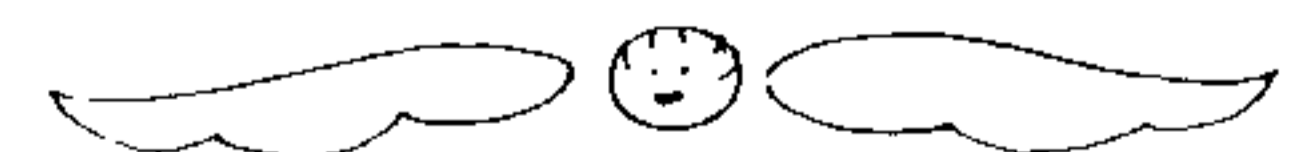
have learned I don't protect people—they do that themselves. I have OCD but am getting better. Our doctor has had a lot to work on! I try to think in a normal way. My doctor helped me to know my thinking is normal for a child who had no one to talk to about my worries. I developed my own way of thinking to protect myself and everyone else. It is scary to change the only way of thinking I have known. But now I can try to think normal, more like an adult. I remember the old way and I can choose the new way. I am happier. Now I can share the worries; the panic. I can talk. It is safe. The burden is shared, the load is lighter.

In therapy I learned there are others. I have Connie and Little Connie to comfort and support me and give me hugs. I am no longer alone. I can talk with my inside family and my outside family. It feels so good to have their love, care and support.

I used to feel I had to hide. Feeling mad or anxious, I would take us on walks but now I can share and not be alone with my feelings. This is the most exquisite feeling and I feel better.

I love music. We now sing in a choir at church and play the piano at home. I am finding and sharing my abilities and interests, more and more.

Soon our doctor will retire. Our feelings are deep and strong. He is like one of the family to us. I will remember all we have worked on is ours to keep. I will remember to always go inside and share. It's just...he is the first person I ever talked to and the first one is always special.



I am Connie and being the host, I carry the continuity of our life history. In therapy, I was diagnosed with MPD/DID when I was 47. I am now 54 and am finding relief and am feeling much better with a more complete

sense of my Selves.

I always knew I heard voices inside my head but I didn't know why or what it was. I felt a separateness in my mind and body. I had thoughts that weren't mine. My left side felt different from my right side. Touching with my right hand was something that created a very strong anxiety. Feeling so separate I was confused and afraid.

I could also become very sad without knowing why or how to get hold of myself. Why? I am so happy. I have a wonderful husband and very loving children.

One day my voices were too strong, controlling me, and I found myself crying on the bedroom floor. I felt paralyzed. I sought out therapy. I am so grateful I had the courage. Our doctor is very caring. He slowly and patiently helped me find out about my voices. It was like going through layers and layers to reach each other. I was so uncertain, I just had to trust.

Little Connie came out slowly. She has a deep sadness. She feels little, lost and alone. She took on the thought she had to make mom happy; make everything all better. She is only four and life is sad.

When Protective One came out, I, we were afraid of her. Since then we have learned she was protecting us the only way she knew how. As a child she had no one to talk to about her worries. Her life was full of rules. She developed her own way of thinking. We now call it the old way and the new way of thinking to help her remember what was then and what is now.

As I learned about My Selves, my sense of being separate began to make my world make sense. In the beginning it felt like there was a wall between us. In time, everyone felt safe enough to come out and share. It seemed we were so separate, we were in different worlds. We needed to share our memories, thoughts and feelings to fill in the gaps. There are body memories. Now I understand why I react so strongly to certain things.

Protective One doesn't cut anymore. The tissue memories have healed. My stomach no longer hurts. I

know in trigger moments it can but if there is a panic or flashback we can go to each other. We have been able to find our safe place inside where everyone can come and know their feelings are safe. We can be together in a moment. Our inside family is very healing to us. When I learned about the closet and the feelings Little Connie and Protective One had there, I asked, "Why don't I have those feelings?" Protective One said, "Because you weren't there." I let each one know I wish I could have been there to listen and give comfort.

I love to read and write. In journaling we have come together where we all write and share our feelings. Little Connie carries our sad feelings. She is our gentle one, sensitive and full of hugs. She loves art and shares her abilities with us. This is very helpful in art class!

Protective One is our strong one. She carries our mad and anxious feelings. We know she has a sense of protection we all need. Her ability to do math and read a map got us our job. She even has a special sense of humor. She loves music and shares her abilities in this area with us.

We find our music, art and journaling to be calming and healing. It is good therapy for us. I try to give us all the comfort we need; like a nurturing mother. Our mother was not able to give what we needed. She was emotionally abusive and neglectful due to her own traumatic childhood. Therefore, even though her behavior was unintentional, the normal parent-child bonding could not form. My father could listen but I was fearful of getting him in trouble. Now I try to remember the good times. In therapy we have learned the art of self-parenting. It is very useful when all the negative comments go through my head. The silver lining in all this is: I always knew what I needed and we were able to give it to our children.

Our doctor helped us to come out to our family. He even came to our home so we could all be more comfortable. It was one of the best things he could have done, as said by my husband. My husband and children responded caringly and lovingly; we are truly blessed. We

found our family to be very reassuring and healing in our sharing.

Soon our doctor will retire. It will be one of the hardest things in life for us. Little Connie grew up here. Protective One learned to feel safe here. I learned to listen to my voices here. He has made us all feel special, safe and important. He has shared our life history. He truly values and respects our feelings. His care is patient and kind like a loving parent. He always returns our calls. He is able to, as we say, "go there."

Our talk therapy is very healing to all. With time and care, we are now feeling the comfort of blending Our Selves. This feels so good. As we come together, we share abilities we never knew. I now understand so many of the why's. There is a wholeness. I am a stronger person with a gentle strength and ability to comfort My Selves.

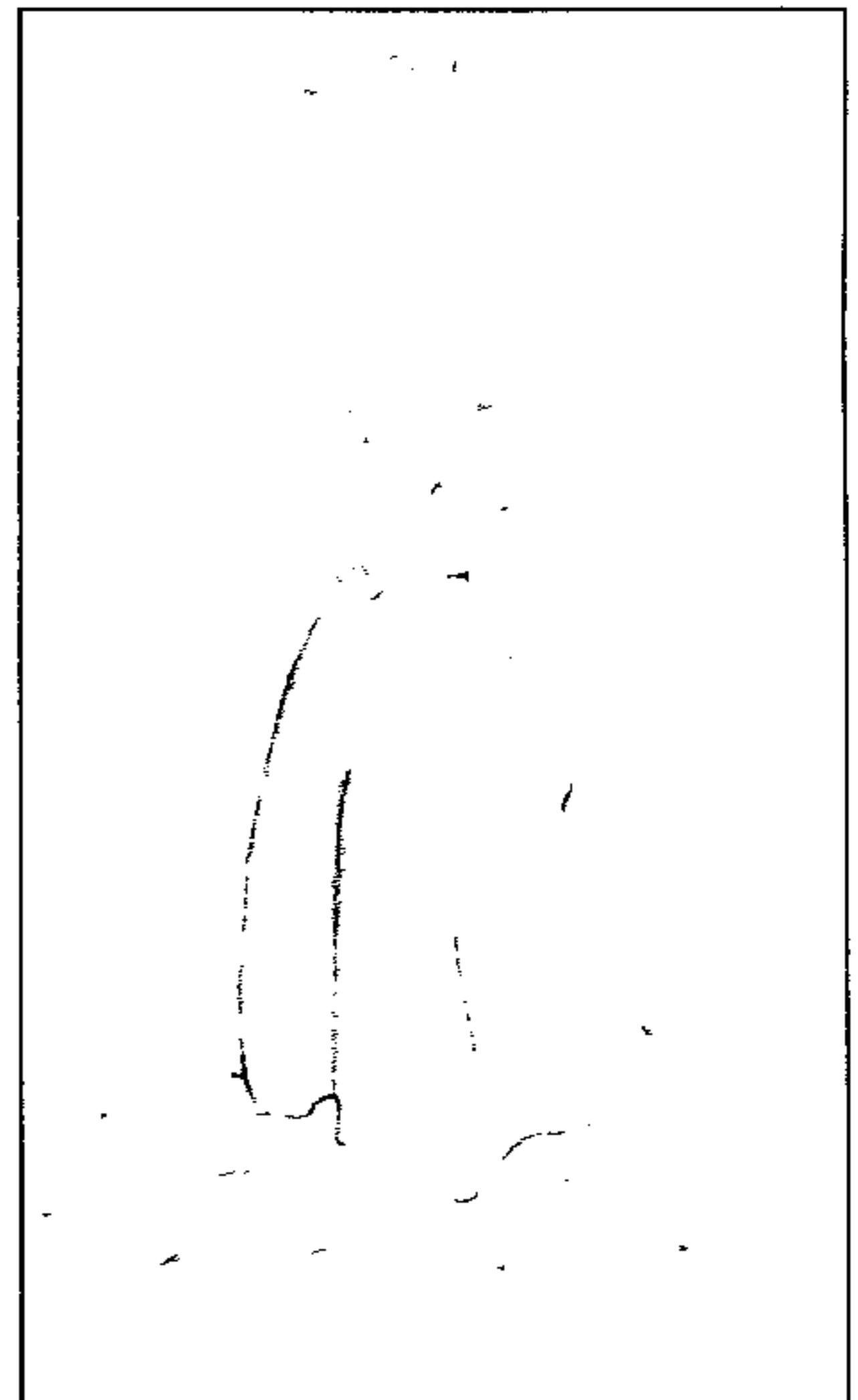
How do you thank someone for such a caring gift?

We will always remember...

Warmly,

Connie and Her Little Ones.

MV



A Reawakening

By D.

I am a boy. I am a girl. I am a woman. I am a man.

I was diagnosed with DID/MPD two years ago after what seemed a lifetime of other diagnoses, a lifetime of suffering the unidentifiable. Following almost two years of intensive therapy something that I always sensed at the back of my mind, my feelings, was that a tragic mistake was made many decades ago and that I have been living my life as an alter, a female alter. What made this devastating was that I was born a boy, raised as a boy, and had sex reassignment surgery over three decades ago after living and working as a woman for almost five years. I wanted to believe that my decision was the right one. I convinced myself that it was the only path to take, conveniently forgetting the many traumas that I experienced when growing up, one of which was being abused and treated at times as both a little boy and a little girl.

Although the diagnosis of DID is the first one that actually seemed to make sense, I doubted it, continue to doubt it as the therapist had always assumed that my "core" gender identity was female, completely dismissing the fact that I had been born male.

Early childhood was confusing. Most of my interests were that of a boy; a sensitive, vulnerable, bookish boy who avoided at all costs anything that required physical contact. I did like "girl" things though and social interactions with girls were preferred to those with boys who always seemed to want to play rough. The "girl" side went as far as dressing up as one which I remember having done since the age of two. This dressing up was never discouraged and as difficult as it is for me to believe, became the source of both

abuse and of praise.

By the age of eleven it became a family problem as my mother did not want my step-brothers and sisters to see it. It became my secret, publicly continuing to explore those avenues of interest that for the typical adolescent boy were an anomaly but privately expressing deep inner feelings that were considered girlish, feminine.

All of these feelings and behaviors were "me," but I never seemed to be able to be free of the dictates of the strict binary gendered world that was New York in the 1950's. The word "confusing" as I used earlier does not do my experience justice. I was torn: torn between what appeared to be two completely different identities, one of which did what society expected of him, the other that could only express "herself" in private with shame being the wall that separated me/us.

Life's difficulties increased as a teenager as girls no longer wanted to associate with me as a friend. My interests continued developing towards the arts and intellectual realms and I found myself alone and ostracized by both sexes. I did manage to make a few friends who were homosexual but I was not like them either. I did not see men as sexual, I wanted to be with a woman. During this time, for reasons still unknown, a hatred of my genitals became intense and I discretely read about those who obtained the surgery and became "normal women." None of my friends would have believed this though. My appearance, despite a small bone structure and being very thin, was definitely that of a boy. My behavior, though not aggressive, was not effeminate. I did not know what to do. There was such denial, shame, and inner contradiction that I became numb, emotionless.

In my early twenties I saw a psychiatrist who convinced me that I needed a girlfriend so that I could

learn to express my masculinity. I did find someone, a wonderful and intelligent woman who did not ridicule me for my ignorance about heterosexual sex. Our "ideal" relationship lasted almost three years when I finally decided to see an Endocrinologist about my desires to become a woman.

I knew at the time that there was doubt, of some type of split, however this secret was held close and even the best doctors in the world did not suspect me of being anything but a "high intensity transsexual." To be candid, I was not honest with myself, or with them.

Now I know that these "desires" were caused by a myriad of issues. My "ideal" woman wanted a provider, a husband, a father and I was not prepared, as someone devoted to creating art, to take on these responsibilities. So I escaped into a stereotypical "womanhood," all that I learned from a brilliant but also abused mother. Her escape became that of her first born son.

Yes, the best doctors. I was treated at Harry Benjamin's office, psychiatrically "approved" by an associate of Kinsey. And how did I get away with what I can now only call an elaborately acted deception? I looked good and behaving like a woman was easy, natural. Somehow the traumas of childhood enabled me to make a convincing impression. That convincing impression lasted until I was 58 years old. Then, to myself but not to others, it began to fall apart.

A short lived relationship with a woman caused me to realize that my role was that of the "boy." What was disturbing was that I liked being the boy, felt as a boy, wanted to be the boy. I'd hinted at this earlier in therapy; however when it finally went beyond a comment I became Sisyphus pushing a stone marked regret.

Continued on next page

Reawakening, Cont'd.

Then the phantom "limb" syndrome started. I felt my phallus, long discarded, inverted, never to physically exist again. I felt what only men can feel. I began to adjust my pants to "make room" for genitalia that no longer took up space. All of this natural, without forethought. No, this was not an alter or a part or even an aspect; it was me. It was who I denied for over three decades. It was not imagination or a trance. That young man was me.

I continue to search for answers, solutions or even acceptable compromises. Was I born with Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (PAIS)? Should I change my name? Should I try to again live and work as a man and can I even do so at this point? Can I live in a twilight world between the binary? How will society react? All of the questions disturbing and none with an easy answer. Even the most skillful therapists are devoid of solutions. This is uncharted territory.

So that is my story, or part of it. I wrote it for others like me, or who are considering radical, irreversible alterations in their bodies. For those who stand on this precipice, be honest with yourself, and then give it time and be honest with yourself again and again until it hurts. Therapists can be of help, but not when you aren't being honest with yourself, something that I avoided. All of the experts in the world can be fooled if one is skillful enough. Sometimes we have to be our own experts. Don't fool that one.

MV

Editor's Note:

Thanks to D for sharing an incredibly difficult experience. Many MV subscribers have serious questions about gender.

For more information on PAIS and other intersex issues see www.isna.org On Transgender topics, this URL includes some opinions about dissociation and abuse

<http://www.trans-health.com/displayarticle.php?aid=38>

Life in Normalville

By SK

I never dreamed I would ever be able to write about what it is like to live in a "normal" world. I have been in therapy for nearly 23 years, 13 of those as a "known multiple." I still pinch myself sometimes to be sure this world that I'm living in is real. Until the last year or two, all I knew was abuse, therapy and struggle. Now, though, I have a taste of what it's like to actually function. Amazing!

Ten years ago, I went on SSDI and lost the best job I could have hoped for. Since then, I have had five surgeries, numerous psych hospitalizations, and have survived my partner's suicide and continued abuse. I had no hope of returning to work, but here I am, not only working, but running my own company with a friend. How did my life ever turn around?

First of all, it has turned around by therapy, therapy, therapy. In the 23 years, though I often longed to, I never gave up completely. I fought hard to win my place in the world. Fortunately, I have a wonderful therapist who is very wise. She has a heart of gold, a gentle spirit and the wisdom that comes from staying up-to-date in the field. Never a day goes by that I don't thank God for her and all she's done for me.

But it's more than just going to therapy week after week. For one thing, it's a belief in a world that I'd never known. For years, I never knew there was any other type of world than one of hurt, anger, abuse and devastation. I functioned only from session to session, rarely lifting my head to do anything but gasp for air. But about a year and a half ago, I started thinking that, perhaps, I could actually live.

A friend and I decided to start doing workshops. We started building one; then it was three; now it is six. It's perfect because I have flexible hours and do a lot of work at home—still the safest place. Because my friend is not a believer in DID—or in therapy, for that matter—I've had to

live "as if" more and more. I knew I couldn't let her down. (At first, I did it for her.) If I was hospitalized, I'd catch it from her. Gradually, I noticed I was moving away from life as I knew it.

Having a company to run constantly pushes me out of my comfort zone and challenges me to do the next thing. And that's all I do—the next thing. I still have no real vision of what this business of mine is quickly becoming. Luckily, for me, my friend is the visionary; I just do the next thing.

Now when I look back, I marvel at how our business has grown, but I also marvel at how I have evolved. My therapist says I'm integrating rapidly. While that thought scares me, inside it makes me smile because I'm thinking that life after abuse really is possible. I'm doing it! Oh, I still get scared, and I still struggle a lot, but deep inside, I know there's a shift happening, and it feels kind of good.

I guess I'm living proof that even the most horrific abuse can be survived, and the curtains can be opened to a new life. For me, it was taking the next step and acting "as if" in a foreign world. While I still see my splits and my private devastation, I'm beginning to know that the whole world isn't like that. I'm also beginning to know that I'm really going to make it.

MV



White Petals

By Susan N.

Little One Speaks

Even though I'm just six years old, I'm smarter than the other two. I'm the only one who knew we needed to come to therapy today. Flowerchild thinks because she is a teenager, no one can tell her what to do. Flowerchild hates therapy. She hates everything, even her own soul. The Grownup was too tired to drive, too tired to shower, but I cried so long she finally gave in and drove us here. It's hard when three people all live in one head.

I sit real still behind the sofa in Roxanne's office and my fingers tracing the lines on the Chinese rug. I make them skate like Peggy Fleming. I reach up and tug on my grownup's sleeve, but she won't look at me. I need a Kleenex and I'm afraid to ask. Flowerchild gives me her "you better shut-up" eyes. I am afraid of her

Sniff, wipe. Sniff, wipe. I scrunch up my face and squeeze my eyes tight so my tears won't drip. I whisper cry so Roxanne can't hear me. If she knew I was here, she'd give me the biggest box of fluffy tissues, cuz she is very nice for a therapist. And even though she can't see the way my ponytail swings or hear my shoes click-walk, she knows I live inside my Grownup's head. She looks at me sometimes and smiles. I wish she'd look right now. I finger skate some more and make Peggy twirl

Sometimes Roxanne wants to give Flowerchild a green plastic bat to swing at the pillows like she's mad at the sofa. But Flowerchild never takes it. She'd just smash it on Roxanne's head. Roxanne gave her a gardenia once, but it was really meant for me. It smelled perfume nice and I loved the thick white petals. They were soft and cool. In the car going home, Flowerchild let me keep it in the visor. I was so happy, a big smile got stuck on my face like the wax clown lips I get at the candy store.

But then Flowerchild turned crabby. She said Roxanne didn't pick

the flower for us, that we got a leftover someone else gave her. Cuz that's what we are, she said. Leftovers. She grabbed the flower and threw it out the window, and I watched the white petals fly away.

Flowerchild Speaks

I see Little One wiping her nose with the back of her hand and tries to stay quiet. She knows better than to ask for a Kleenex, the sniveling baby bitch. I evil eye her and mouth, no hugs today. She pouts, looks down, and plays with her fingers. Screw her. When she's fifteen, she'll understand that touch burns you raw.

My foot is bouncing so hard on the floor that my leg shakes uncontrollably. Roxanne is speaking, but my head is so crowded I can't hear. Instead, I read her lips. "What's up with the energy?" she asks. I want to kick the wall, stomp about, take that green bat and smash it over her head. Inside my head I scream. Aren't I paying you to tell me? JUST FIX ME! I watch Roxanne watch me and wonder what she's thinking. I turn away and say nothing.

Grownup is unresponsive. She stares out the window, unwilling to face the past. She floats outside to a safe distance, lands on an oak tree branch, and looks back at us. I tell her she's useless. Her silence is deafening. I tell her to jump.

Roxanne's afraid that someday I'll drive off the bridge, so after each session, she asks us to call when we get home. I know she doesn't really care if we call or not. We pay her to pretend she cares.

Once, Roxanne gave us a gardenia. Little One was so gleeful, I let her put it in the visor for a while on the ride home. But that flower wasn't really for us. We'd been lied to all our lives so I told Little One the truth.

Roxanne didn't pick that gardenia from her garden. A client gave it to her. Roxanne gave us a used flower. She told us we deserved it, we were

worth it. Freakin' liar, that Roxanne. I took that gardenia, threw it out the window, and watched the stupid petals fly.

Grown Up Speaks

The sun peeks through the blinds of Roxanne's office, creating shadows that bounce across the mint green wall. Between my racing thoughts and the other voices in my head, I fear my mind will snap loose like a tumbleweed driven by the wind. I stare at the oak tree outside the window and see myself swinging on a branch.

Little One traces her finger along the pattern of the rug and whimpers while Flowerchild glares at Roxanne. Exhausted by the ongoing chatter and emotional energy these parts of me demand, I sit defeated. I am unable to move or speak. My mind searches for a way to drown out the others, and I sing:

But nobody ever hears him, or the sound he appears to make.

*And he never seems to notice, but the fool on the hill
Sees the sun going down, and the eyes in his head,
See the world spinning round.*

Flowerchild sends the shut-up look to Little One whose eyes grow wide with fear. I am powerless against their anger and sadness, and I look to Roxanne for comfort. Her soothing voice confuses Flowerchild but embraces Little One who hugs herself and rocks.

I'm somewhere in the middle, pressed between these chapters of my life like a faded flower. The day Roxanne gave us the gardenia, I saw my longing for beauty through the eyes of my inner child and felt the fear of intimacy pound in my raging teen's heart. But most of all, I saw a garden where gardenias flourish, love flows and white petals take flight.

The Holidays This Year

By TRT and The Associates

I don't celebrate the holidays. Never have. With my knowledge, never will. That's always been a question for me, in school, in work, "Why?" "Why don't you?"

Well, there's so many tactful ways of saying this or that. But I think you, like me, are done with the BS and would like some straight answers.

I don't celebrate them because they're pagan. Period. Look any holiday up in the Britannica, yes, even Christmas. They are not based on Christianity. Sorry to be so brash, but hey, after a few years of misery aren't I allowed to be blunt with you, my brethren?

So wow, in just a few paragraphs that tells you a lot about me. If you were here I would explain about everything you wanted, but you really can do it yourself. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia tells the truth of the matter...Actually, you probably already knew that, just hanging onto your (painful) traditions, right?

So I was raised in this household that was all about serving God correctly. Without any pagan traditions—and that felt good. At least, that's what I heard at our place of worship and when my father studied with us as a family.

But that is not what we came home to. That is not what we saw, heard, felt each day and night. And somehow I became We.

I did not know it then. I did not know it until a few years ago. So all my young life I was just living in terror of the maniac I called my father. Added to this abuse were the more confusing bedtime visits of others.

But we were sure the perfect family on Sunday. People told us so. As I got older I learned to gently laugh—they really believed it. I also learned to lie; how could I be the one to break the spell? And I took solace in the scripture *1 Peter 5:9* "stand up strong.. in the knowledge that your brothers all over the world are suffering the same things." JB

So, somewhere, at least one other family was going through the same thing! Maybe they were in Africa, or Peru. But we were not alone! I would think of them when the worst was here.

I had so little knowledge then of Abuse's Hand. That it was Worldwide, that it was happening in the US. In my state, in my town, in my Center of Worship, maybe

not just us, maybe the family right next to us as well. I really thought we were alone, that no one else knew the suffering we knew. I remember thinking, as I was growing up, "If this is what a Christian is, then I don't want to be one. If this is what God allows on the helpless, I won't worship that God."

It took me years of growing up to understand my father was not acting as a Christian. He was ill (untreated BiPolar) The others who mistreated me? I conveniently forgot about them until WE remembered.

You know, all my questions about suffering, and the way I was raised, I was able to wrap my head around it, once. I understood that God is a God of love. *1 John 4:8* "Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love" JB I understood that true suffering and evil do not come from God, they do not even enter His thoughts: *Jeremiah 7:31* "they have built the high place.. to burn their sons and daughters; a thing I never commanded, a thing that never entered my thoughts." JB

So I was able to worship with whole souled devotion. Then my world shattered. Many things happened at once. Along this terrifying and uncharted road, I learned that I as a pronoun was now incorrect when referring to myself and rather automatically the transition was made to We/Our/Us.

I became angry at the Creator for old issues, and now for a set of new ones. Why was I suffering twice? Literally, through child alters and flashbacks that ranged into short horror movie length. Why must I be punished again?

For a short while I subscribed to the *Psalms 14:1* "there is no God!" JB theory, but deep down I felt that wasn't true. (Even the scripture calls you a fool for believing it.)

I also felt my anger at Omnipotence about as worthwhile as an ant being really furious at me. It would not matter much, and hey, life goes on. Still, there is that scripture that says Omnipotence does care, *Psalms 34:18* "Jehovah is near to those who are broken at heart, And those who are crushed in spirit he saves" NWT

So, why didn't God stop it? That's the question, right? Therein lies the power, the mercy. Pretty simply because miracles like that have been off the board for awhile now.

But I know I have to get my head around my anger. And even if you tell me it's misplaced, there is so much of it. So many people could have stopped it. The perpetrators—that would have been a great start, but what about all the others along the way?

And You? What about You, God?

If You're not bustin' out miracles like You did in the old days: when it comes down to it, will You at least make them see how we've suffered and get some back for us?

I know I've got to get the anger under control and maybe there are some of you who do too, because of promises like this: *2Peter 3:9-15* "Jehovah is not slow respecting his promise, as some people consider slowness, but he is patient with you because he desires all to attain salvation."

As I said before, we seemed so alone. I'm sure you did too. Now it's amazing to me to see all the poster and commercial campaigns. Even "Help your Neighbor" campaigns. We'll see how much it helps. I would think a lot. Imagine some 6 or 8 year old kid, standing looking at a poster thinking "Does this mean me? or Will Mom or Dad kill me for telling?" Still, They are thinking.

The holidays are a major time to be "thinking." Abuse of all kinds increases during the holidays. For instance, child abuse climbs rapidly in the month of December. According to Dr. Timothy Kutz of St. Luis University, last December (2003) saw 28 abuse cases compared to the monthly 21. He states "The stresses of the holiday season particularly take their toll on those who have problems controlling their tempers. The weather turns gray and nasty which gives families a bad case of cabin fever and cuts employment opportunities for those who work outdoors." See <http://www.slu.edu/readstory/more,3606>

I know we're all hurting inside. But let's be aware this season of the families in anguish like we were. And when we see one, even if it means letting our "ToughJoe" out of the bag for ten minutes: let's mow those jerks down.

And hey, that's a gift we can give all year 'round.

Happy, Happy to you and yours

Art From the Heart

By Keepers

Normally, putting words on paper comes very easily to me. They flow and fit together in a way that I feel happy with. When I am done, I click the SEND icon and send it off, not stopping to really think again about what words were on the paper.

But, this time is different and ever so special. This time it's about letting *MANY VOICES* readers into my innermost world where the greatest changes have taken place and where these beautiful new buds of hope and love and courage are being protected and nurtured every moment of every day so that they may take root and grow strong. It's about taking you into the deepest depths of my mind and heart where my artwork always begins. For me, it's about letting go of all the fear that has paralyzed me every minute of every day for over half a century and opening my arms to welcome you into my world where you are welcome to either accept or turn away from what I have to say.

For several years, special people have been telling me that even in multiplicity there is a oneness somewhere deep within. After endless searching and continual questioning, I have found that at the core of keepers where we all become one is this compulsion to create and express what lives within us all. Although, I know that we will always see ourselves as keepers who live in multiplicity, we have found that oneness that has always escaped keepers. Out of respect for this new sense of who we are, I am choosing to write what I say in terms of "I" instead of "we", my hope is that the collective I will be understood as you read.

In less than one month, I will have a full fledged gallery showing of my artwork that will last a full three months. To say that this is a monumental thing for me is to minimize it far too much. This opening and showing is what I have hoped for; dreamt of and worked toward for over forty years now.

Although my artwork has had other successes in recent years, I always saw myself as a homemaker who lived in multiplicity and happened to be able to draw or paint. Now, for the very first time, I am able to see myself and my many parts as true artists, which means more than anyone could ever know.

In all honesty, I do not feel like being an artist is something about me. Looking back at my ancestry and looking forward to my children, I know it is something that is simply in my blood. My great grandfather, an immigrant from Ireland, made his living painting murals on restaurant walls in the early 1900's. My father was an artist with much talent although he made his living as an interior decorator. His legacy to me was surely his passions for color and texture. His art supplies were his gift to me when he passed away and the true beginning of my art. My son, who is now grown, has been a phenomenal artist since he was very young. He has done several pieces that truly boggle my mind. As he learned art in school, I learned from him. So, in a way, I feel as if my art carries on a family tradition that this family has passed down from generation to generation.

I am afraid that I have always had a much greater passion for doing my artwork than for doing housework or laundry or at times even spending time with my children. I wake up in the morning in a hurry to get to my easel and put on paper in whatever medium suits the mood all the thoughts and feelings that seem to flood my being. I get so engrossed in my art that anything could happen and I would not notice. Time flies and the day is gone. The only thing I have accomplished is getting half of a picture done while dishes and dirty clothes have gone unnoticed. Yet, that artwork has always seemed so vital to my survival.

At first and for many years, I saw the artwork as an expression of my unbearable pain. I thought I was

drawing and painting my inner demons; my anger and my fear. I was sure that, somehow, I was giving life to my memories and thereby setting them free in a way nothing else did. Eventually, I began to see that this was not getting me anywhere and I put those pieces away for many years. My artwork changed at that point as I began to try to draw and paint peace and happiness and love. I thought that if I could see these things on paper, they would become real to me. There was not a conscious moment when these things were real to me but the time came when I put all of that artwork away and began doing pieces based on the beauty I was actually seeing in the world. My artwork shows my evolution from depressed and frightened and hopeless to knowing that it is so good to be alive and that every bit of pain I had felt held a touch of beauty as well. The strange thing is that as I look back on those early pieces, I see that they express hope and love in ways I had no concept of back then.

The greatest struggle I (keepers) have ever had to deal with is coming to peace with our own gender. This became crucial since we were raising two daughters who we wanted to love so badly but our own antagonism toward all females was seriously getting in the way. Therapy was no help in my dealing with this issue but I had to find an answer. I began drawing women in every way I could imagine—from nudes to mothers with children to grieving widows. It took over 20 years of drawing but I came to understand what it means to be a woman and what amazing wisdom women have and that it is safe to not only trust but to love as well some women. This was a very private journey for me and my artwork was the only vessel available for my journey.

I have always wished for the ability to soften my focus and see in more abstract terms than I do. You see, my artwork is always incredibly detailed and exact. That is because I really do

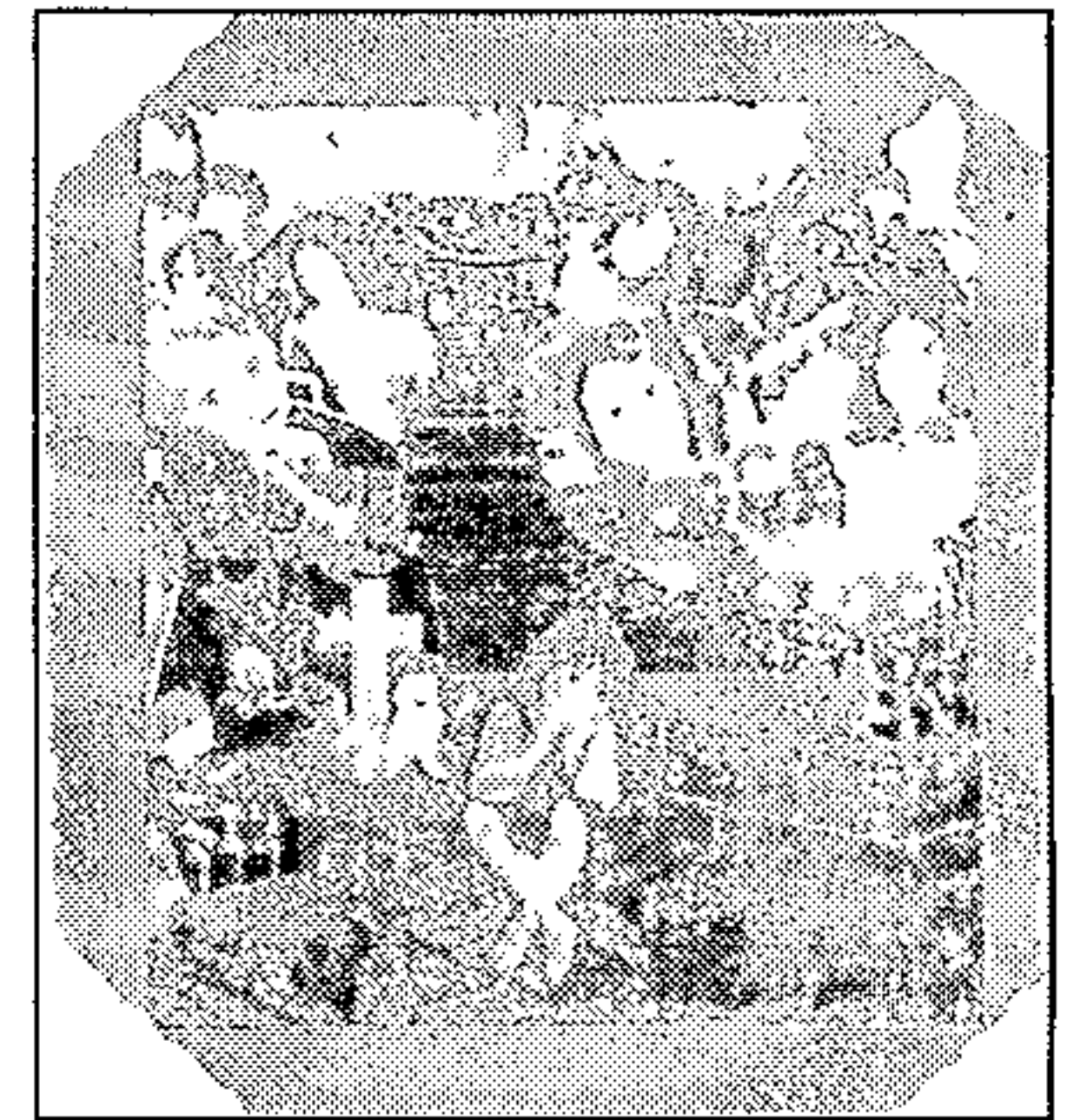
Art from the Heart, Cont'd.

see every color in a flower or in a rainbow. When I look into any face, I see every color in the eyes and every line in the skin and every shadow being reflected. Not only can I not forget what I see but I always feel compelled to paint it or draw it or capture it for others somehow. My artwork really helps me know how well I and my other parts are perceiving the world and that helps me validate my own sense of reality.

More and more, colors and textures have become so important to me. Each color, each texture, each stroke of my brush is setting a mood—either kicking it up a notch or bringing it down a notch. Each stroke

expresses something that is inside of me and says this is who I am. Before, each stroke felt like it was crying out for someone to understand and now each stroke seems to be saying to others that they have someone here who understands and cares in ways words cannot express. Maybe, it has become a mutual understanding between the artist and the patron.

I do not know what more to say except that my art has been what healed me. It has been the method through which God has revealed himself to me. My art is me in every sense of the word because all that I am is in each piece I do.



My Multiple Mind

Artwork by KEEPERS

BOOKS

A Fractured Mind: My Life with Multiple Personality Disorder

by Robert B. Oxnam ©2005 Published by Hyperion Books, New York, NY
www.hyperionbooks.com \$23.95. 285 pgs. Hardback

This is a book I've been waiting for...a lucid, intelligent account, by an excellent writer, about what it's like to learn in midlife that he had a dissociative disorder. And it doesn't spare the tough stuff or embarrassing moments. I started reading this book at 9:30 PM last night, knowing I had to get up at 6:30 for an appointment. I figured I'd skim it and write a review. But I was enthralled by this book and did not put it down until every word was finished, at 1:15AM. It was worth the lost sleep to read it, cover to cover.

Why do I like it? Well, it's honest and straightforward. Even so-called "normals" should be able to understand internal division as explained here. Oxnam lets his alters write their own experience and opinions about their roles in 'the Castle,' the special mental construct where they live 'inside'. In the outside world, "Robert Oxnam" (the entire Robert Oxnam) is a mature, high-functioning multiple. Since his graduate studies at Yale in the mid-60s he's enjoyed a successful, high-

profile career as a specialist on Asia. He was president of the Asia Society for a decade. He accompanied high-level executives (Bill Gates...Warren Buffett) to China. He's hosted major TV shows on Asia. With only a few exceptions for specialized treatment, he has worked at his profession throughout his therapy—and worked well.

Why does it matter that he's well-known to the public? Because people who read this—'normal' people who know him personally—will be forced to change their opinions about the reality of dissociative disorder. Elite scholars and business executives who have encountered him professionally cannot help but realize he is competent—yet also has put forth a vivid description of his hidden, troubled life. He shows, point by point, how he is healing with the help of his dedicated doctor, Jeffery Smith. Sadly, the only way things seem to change in this country is when the people 'at the top' realize there is a problem. It is easy for elites to dismiss the difficulties of the poor and powerless. It is not so easy for them to dismiss it when trouble hits 'one of their own.'

It was a joy to read how he handled the unexpected public exposure of his diagnosis. (Obviously, he kept his treatment private in the

business world.) Although he had served as "superstar lecturer" someone implied that perhaps his MPD diagnosis would make him a danger to the organization. Oxnam – a man of impeccable professional reputation - was becoming a victim of the stigma that frustrates so many of us in recovery from trauma. Tired of fighting the whisper campaign, he was near quitting when, as he said, "Suddenly I felt a surging resolve to give it one last shot. I had given my all to these people for years with very positive results, and now they were treating me like a pariah. Enough was enough." He then went to the head of the organization, told them he'd seen an attorney and was prepared to sue them for defamation of character. The organization's bullies backed down.

Dr. Oxnam doesn't minimize the difficulty of recovering from dissociative disorder. But his account is full of hope. Dr. Smith's end notes explain more about the diagnosis, in lay terms. *A Fractured Mind* has already received good reviews in high-circulation or high-status venues, ranging from Salon to Forbes Book Club. Please buy or borrow this book and pass it around. The more people read it, the better for all of us in recovery.

– Lynn W.

THANKS ONCE AGAIN!

For 17 Years, Wonderful MV Readers have shared their hopes for recovery on our pages. Soon MV embarks on its 18th year. Help us make it a comfort to those in need. Writing & artwork welcome!

February 2006

Feelings in Therapy. Anger & Rage. Love for Therapist. What do you experience? How do you tell? How does a "good" therapist respond? ART: Express an emotion, visually. DEADLINE: December 1, 2005.

April 2006

Feeling Lonely? How do you cope? Survivor Retreats, Support Groups, Conferences, Online. Share your experience. ART: A comforting scene. DEADLINE: February 1, 2006.



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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