

MANY VOICES

WORDS OF HOPE FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM TRAUMA & DISSOCIATION

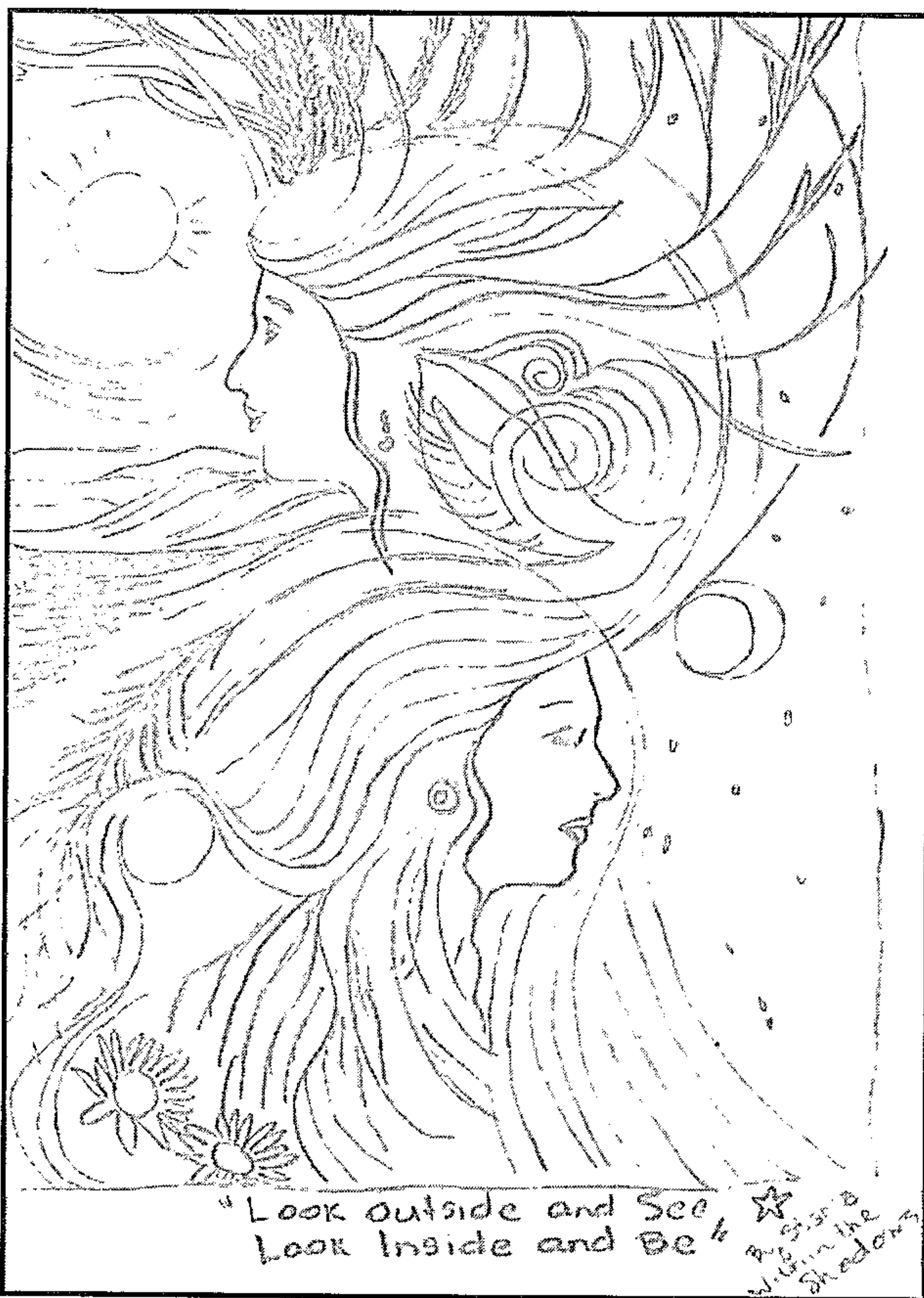
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Forgiveness:

Releasing What We Don't Remember



"Look outside and See
Look Inside and Be"

Be gentle with the shadows

Prayer of Acceptance

Lord, why have you left me here alone?
Your people cast me from their presence,
The family You gave me has turned its
back; Nowhere is acceptance to be found.
Fear and judgment replace love and
embracement.

Why have You allowed this punishment?
The abuse the world gave to me
Has made me different from the others I
see.

You gave me strength to survive the pain,
But now I am pushed away and rejected.

Can You not touch the hearts of man?
Tell them I am not a danger to anyone.
Show them I feel just like they do.
I can cry or laugh, I get angry and enjoy
happiness. I am not an empty shell to be
tossed away.

Lord, please answer me in some way.
I wish to minister in Your church.
Have You not given me special gifts,
Gifts only I can use to be a witness?
Why do You not let me use them?
Can You not forgive all my wrongs?
Will You not receive me as I am now?

Do not keep the door of service closed
forever.
I wish to teach others about my needs.
I would explain I am a real person like
them. I am not a freak to be feared.
My desire is to be a part of your church
here, To belong and develop friendships.

Lord, I pray You hear my heart.
Look with kindness towards me just this
once. Please understand the pain I feel
each day.
This I also ask, if it is not too much—
Send friends who will accept me as I am;
For do we all not bear scars from this life?

I try not to judge and I hope others do the
same.

Lord, are we all not Your children in the
end?

By Tami

MV

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The Gift of Forgiveness

by Marj

Forgiveness is a gift. Definitely, it is a gift. From you to me, or from me to you or involving any others—gift. Whether or not the recipient wants or appreciates it, to forgive is to gift.

What sort of a gift? Well, that's not as easy to proclaim with the definitive confidence of the first paragraph. The present may arise from deep inside the well of a person, and be discovered in a gentle gaze into the other's eyes. It may come with tears. Maybe there is another storm, and then finally comes the peace.

Whatever its "structure," it is wrapped in sincerity and authenticity. The bow is a caring or a loving. Even before unwrapping, the hope for the other's openness and willingness to receive wafts in the atmosphere of this moment. Or perhaps it doesn't, for there are doubts about the other's acknowledgment; fear to speak of the action that calls for forgiveness.

The moment may very well have come after years, or what has seemed like years, of difficult struggle. The price is paid internally, and might cost a few cents or a few trillion of heart dollars. Possibly it was soaked in a pool of blood, and washed out in time by many tears, then dried in the warmth of support and healing.

Although its cost may be outrageously expensive, sometimes it is offered freely, given "for free." That is the nature of offering to another, that the recipient is free to do with the gift as s/he pleases.

Do I really expect that I would give anything, anything, to bullies who stole my body, my innocence, my childhood, my sense of safety, my sense of self-worth? I can't. I just can't. Oh, if it ever will be, how can I give it freely? I'm not referring to someone who "talked behind my back" or who "snapped" at me because of his or her own frustrations, which are taken out on me. This is big time stuff here! If I'm ever to forgive them, they owe

something to me first or at least after or...At least they could admit what they did, so I can stop the crushing doubts that come sometimes, and I feel so confused and more than a little crazy!

Oh, the feelings that snarl out in pain from parts of me! I continue to discuss my stance, one that has come from many years of such strong protests. My anxious questions are poking at me, from the inside, once again.

Will the recipient accept or reject the gift? Does the acceptance or rejection of the gift equal an acceptance or rejection of the giver? Could it be that the one who bestows is wounded again? Unless shown otherwise, the vulnerable gifter does not know ahead, of his/her sign of forgiveness whether or not the wounds, perhaps still tremendously sore, will be reopened. Trust and courage...it seems to demand from me more than I have.

In my experience the gifts come from deep hurts, and the readiness to give doesn't originate in me. I pray to forgive, or to wish to forgive, or to will to forgive. My God, my Higher Power, plants and waters and—ouch! sometimes prunes this growth within me. I expose my cold emptiness or fiery anger to the Sun who warms me and draws me up from the hard ground in which my life was buried, controlled, stunted.

It is often of some comfort to remember the obvious: that I cannot do better than my best. In the compassion of my Creator, my hurt is well-known and felt. I need not drench myself in a sticky syrup of guilt as I wait to give form and wrapping to this forgiveness. Whatever happens or doesn't happen is not my burden. I ask for this present, or ask to ask; or ask to want or to will to ask. The tides of my journey include the free wills of others. I am unable to determine what will happen. I cannot expect more of myself than my willingness for what I might even feel to directly oppose. I allow myself to enjoy my now life, while growth and change follow their own pace in The Plan.

"It is okay to protest," I assure some panicky inner selves. There is no wrong nor shame intrinsic to our feelings. Gently together we bring Self to reopen the dark curtains, for there are far fewer now inside who want the others within to suffer in the blind darkness. I ask, and I let it be, and I allow further protestations and anger to be expressed. And I ask again. If this is the pattern of my entire life, I can still know that if I will to forgive, I have forgiven, regardless of my feelings. I will to forgive, and allow myself to fly freely away from the dark cocoon of felt failure for something that only God and I and perhaps my therapist can respectfully monitor.

Self-forgiveness is the most difficult for many of us. It has been for me. I had protected those whom I want to believe have loved and do love me, by accepting their expressed or unexpressed accusations that it is my fault. The tendency is to hammer and drill it into myself and to follow my destruction down deeply into the hell hole, where hope and healing die.

The same is true for pardoning myself as for pardoning others. I ask God to give me this gift: to tenderly and lovingly smooth this balm of self-forgiveness into my pores, to seep into all the wounds.

So times come when I am not striking in at myself, and my rage against those who have hurt me needs to crash out of myself. There are many ways I might choke out this rage. Sometimes I even claim "I will never forgive you, never!" With pen indenting and even tearing the paper, I say it as I feel it. I let myself believe this and scream it out for as long as I need to. I allow myself to deny willingness to forgive, until the worst of this poison has been vomited out. Without force or anxiety, again as it comes in its own time, I renew my will to forgive, even if it's the last thing in the world I seem to want. It's not because I have to, in order to be "good." I don't have to understand my abusers' pasts and

Continued on page 3

Gift, Cont'd.

certainly in no way must I disclaim their guilt. But oh, how I want to leave this burden behind me. Speaking only for myself, I am most free when I will to make a gift of my forgiveness, even if the other never knows. My abusers don't deserve this. We don't deserve gifts, do we? Real gifts don't come with an agreement that the recipient gives me a gift of equal value, or gives anything at all.

For me, not to will to forgive is allowing my perpetrators to keep me from being my true self. I do not will to be whom they began to make me be, before I could even know the basic life truths they were distorting. I do not remain victim to their ugly lies. On the other hand, I will not intensify the aching with "shoulds" about how I must feel. It is the only way to be gentle with my wounded selves and Self—to be authentically me.

MV*Forgiveness?*

Learning to forgive?

How do you do that?

I am just now learning how to live.

I used to be close to God.

I still pray when I can.

I can only do what I can do in the moment

a lot of that time is striving to stay present.

FORGIVENESS?

Does God really love me?

I think he does, sometimes.

I don't blame him for what happened.

People who claim to be his disciples don't understand what we go through.

I see God in the butterflies
in the blue skies

in the miracle of a new life.

I see God around me

in the sunsets and the sun rises
in the fish that jump in the lakes.

In those things I see hope and
forgiveness.

By Maria & Herfam 99

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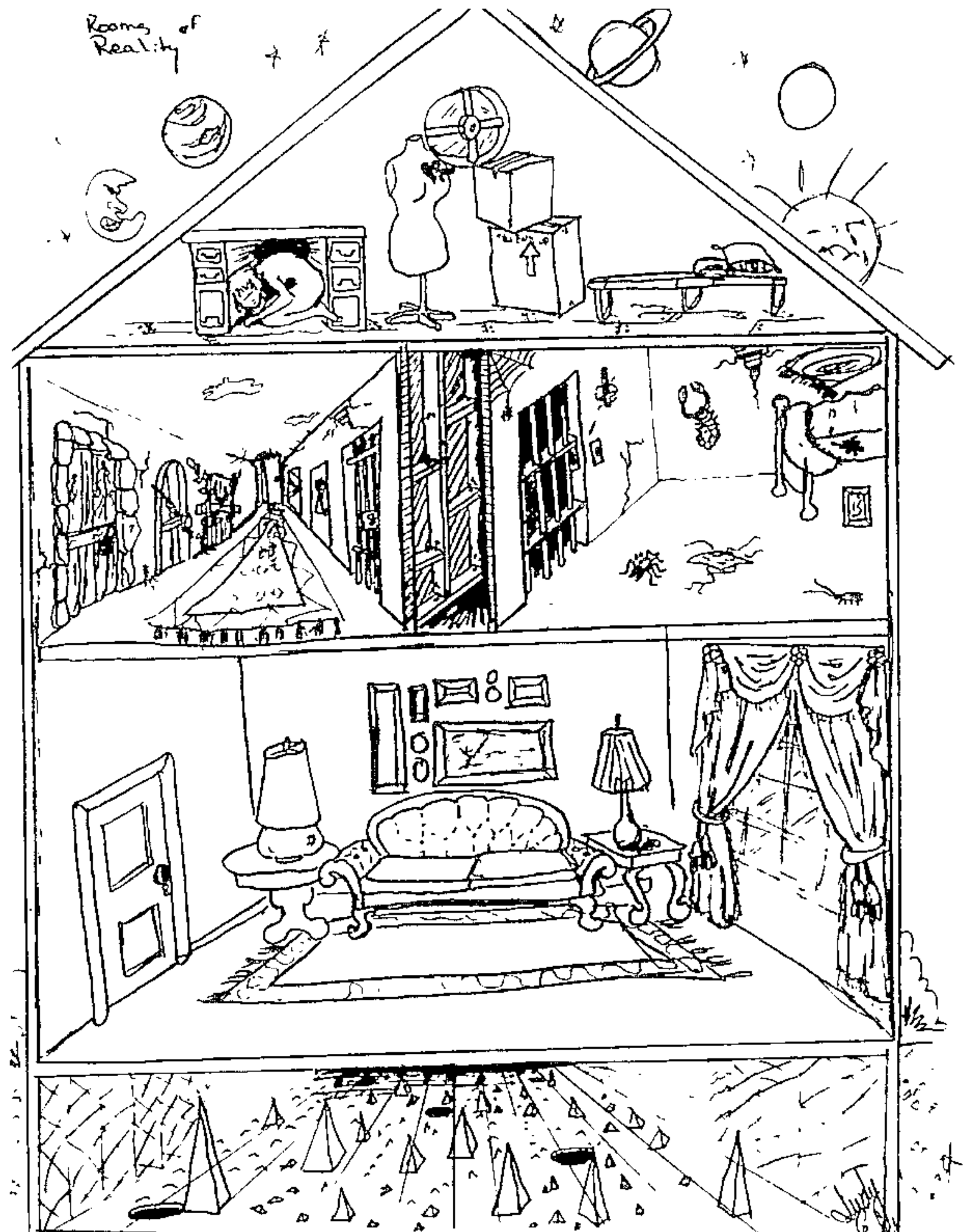
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This picture represents the rooms in my reality. I sketched this while I was waiting for one of my first therapy sessions.

By Judy E.

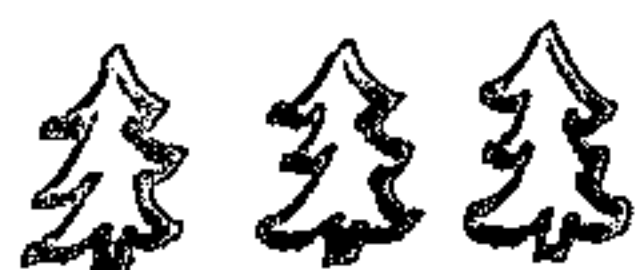
How to Forgive What We Don't Remember

I don't know, but I work at it anyway. I'm the one who suffers. My tight muscles hold on to memories that my mind can't grasp, and I think it would be nice to release that tightness. It hurts to be all tensed up, steeling for the blow that never comes. How do I release tension? Massage, chiropractic, meditation, yoga, walks, getting quiet, noticing tense muscles and asking them to release. Sometimes I do Chieil qigong. I feel myself surrounded by Chi (the universal life force) and I see myself as part of the earth's rhythmic flow of energy, releasing toxins and absorbing life energy. Release, absorb, release, absorb, in harmony with the universe.

One day I was writing in my journal, noticing what is good about me and praising myself. All of a sudden there were negative thoughts challenging my self-praise. Where does this come from? Oh, it's my mother's voice. I thought of my mother's criticism and my muscles begin to tense as I prepared to process anger. But this time there was another voice: "Quick! Feel the sadness that your mother didn't love you. Just feel it!" I felt my sadness and I cried for the love I was supposed to have, but didn't receive.

Sometimes I think about my mother's life and her pain. This pain brought her to a place of anger at me just because I was born. Sometimes I feel compassion and acceptance of what she was. Sometimes I am just so angry...I scream and yell and hit my plastic punching bag. I wish, I wish, I wish. I wish I would be done with anger work and resentment. Isn't it enough? Can't I stop it already? It is so damned uncomfortable! But when I feel heavy and resistant and I "should" be done by now, that isn't it. There is more work to do. But I think I am closer to "done" than I used to be.

By Ellen K.



Back when I began serious therapy 12 years ago, my therapist told me one of the goals of therapy would be forgiveness. I, in essence, told him to take a flying leap and go to h... There was no way I was going to forgive any of the people who hurt me. He was crazy. No way. That was 12 years ago.

Through the 12 years, I've learned a lot about me, about my family of perpetrators, about what happened to me and about forgiveness. And...it has been about 2 years since forgiveness started to take place and I really started the healing process.

I don't believe the healing process has a hope of being complete if forgiveness is not a major part of it. But it should not be done until you are ready to deal with what real forgiveness is. It is not something, I believe, that can be forced; but it is a process—like most of therapy.

The most major thing I've learned is that forgiveness is not for the perpetrator, but for me. Forgiveness is for each and every one of us—for all the hurt souls—not just in me but in every person reading this article.

The vast majority of people I've forgiven, family and non-family, don't even know that I have forgiven them. Most of them are still blaming me for everything that occurred and some of the tragedies within the family. They are not even in a position to recognize what they have done, let alone receive forgiveness for anything. And as long as harassment and stalking from them still occurs, I don't think they will ever be in a position of healing, receiving forgiveness, or giving forgiveness themselves.

Forgiveness is a way for me to let go of what happened. It in no way justifies what happened. And it in no way says "What you did to me was okay." What happened to me was *not* okay. What happened to each and every one of you was *not* okay. But forgiving someone is. Forgiveness allows me to let go of the hurt and the anger and the bitterness. It is allowing me, for the

first time in my life, to not hold onto the past but to move forward with my life and forge a new life for myself, devoid of a lot of the pain I carried with me.

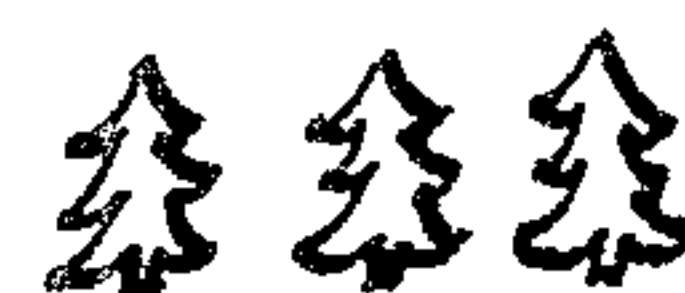
I have learned for the first time about God. I've learned in the past year about what God says about forgiveness. And, for me, that has cemented that the path I am on is the right path. I can't and don't want to get even with any of my perpetrators. Some of them are already dead, but many are still alive. They still are not safe people to be around. What I have learned is that getting even is not *my* job, but God's job. Forgiveness is *my* job. Being able to receive forgiveness for myself is my job.

The hardest person for me to forgive is myself. That one I am still working on and probably will for quite some time. The forgiveness occurs every time another memory surfaces or I face one more thing that happened.

Forgiveness causes a ripple effect in my own family as well as in others around me. When I forgive, I let go of anger and bitterness. I am a calmer person to be around. As a result, I pass that calmness to others around me. I respond to whatever the day is bringing with more calm than I would have in the past. The little things in the day no longer mushroom into a crisis. "Not forgiving" also causes a ripple effect. The anger and bitterness is passed to the next generation. As your child/children see you angry and bitter, they take up the same attitude. I don't want to pass that legacy on anymore than I want to pass on the legacy of every possible form of abuse.

Today I am choosing forgiveness. Today I am choosing to break the chain of abuse. Today I am choosing to make my little corner of the world a happier place to exist.

By Cheryl, et al

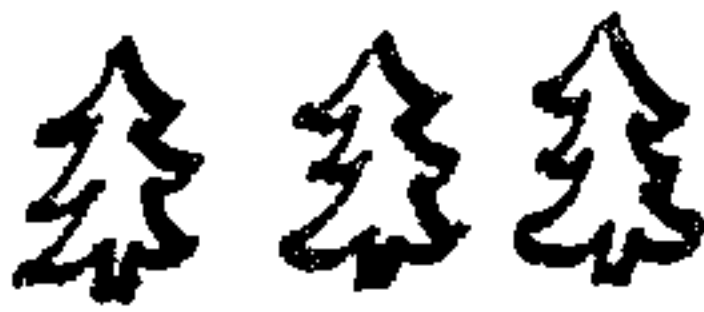


Forgiving others and myself is very tough for me.

My therapist taught me to picture myself, (or others that need forgiveness) on a floor with a cone over them, pointed at the top and encircling them.

Next imagine a white light flowing through it. This is a forgiving light that can be present whenever a person needs forgiveness, or all the time. Because the cone completely encloses the offender, it is also a "prison" that prevents the person(s) inside from harming anyone again. It really does the trick!

By Sally B.



It took five years of intense, expert professional help (therapy!) for me to begin to acknowledge the insidious cycle of abuse. At first I was only able to focus on my own horror and sense of betrayal. The mere mention of the word "forgiveness" brought a lifetime of suppressed rage to the surface of my awareness. "Strike out and kill," it said. "Pay them back for their disgusting desecrations!" If I couldn't kill the perpetrator, I could strike the voices inside who cried out for revenge. I was filled with rage and sorrow.

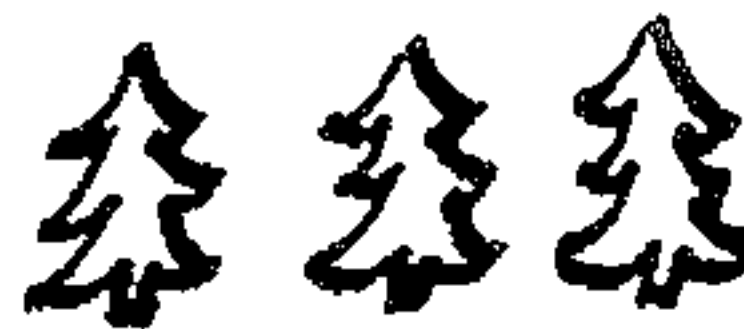
But abuse is an insidious cycle, destined to repeat itself without

intervention. Through the rage and sorrow, I desperately wanted to break that cycle for my family of choice. That desire kept me in recovery.

Forgiveness does not equal acceptance or condonement, and I do not believe forgiveness is required for healing to occur. Yet I have softened in my recovery process through two primary benefits of expert therapy: 1) I am able to see the cycle of abuse inflicted on my own parents by their parents; 2) nor am I above reproach, as I've been gently led to acknowledge my own abusive behaviors.

I can, at this point in my recovery process, call my father's sexual abuse of me "crooked love."

By the 3 Bs'



One way to look at forgiveness, is to examine a part of the root word: 'give.' If I come to the point where I can say to myself, "You still haven't asked my forgiveness, but I'll give it anyway," then that's one step in the right direction.

Then I physically 'give' something to that person I'm trying to forgive. For example, one of the perpetrators of my youth was a priest. He's since served time in prison for child molesting others. One day, during lunch at a restaurant with my husband and young son, I saw this ex-priest sitting alone at

another table. Since it was the first time I'd seen him in many years, old childhood fears gripped me. However, as I pointed him out to my husband, all the years of healing regained their hold over me, and I was able to calm down.

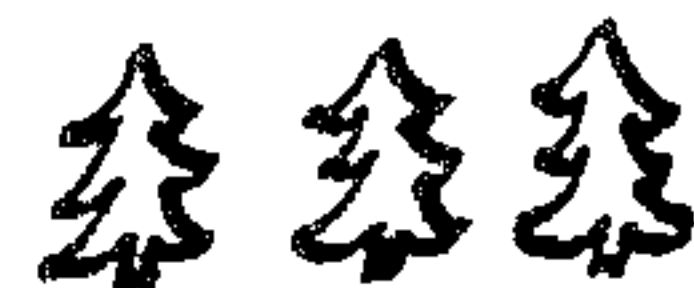
A desire to deal with this portion of my past overcame me, so I decided to confront him. My husband took my son outside, to give me privacy, even though it was a safe, public environment. Then I approached the table and received permission to join this man from my past.

We spoke for awhile, and incredibly the incident was very healing. He was now in a treatment program, and apologized for having hurt me. As he explained some of his past, I realized that he, too, was human, and not just some nightmare figure from my memories. And he sought healing, as I did.

I left, but only after wishing him luck on his road to recovery. In this way, I was able to 'give,' even though it was in the form of a verbal boost to his spirit.

Isn't it said somewhere, "To give is better than receiving," or something like that? So, why not give in order to forgive others? It's one tangible way to move ahead in life.

By Diana Barnum



Dear Many Voices Friends,

I awoke about a week ago in the morning to hear mySelf conversing:

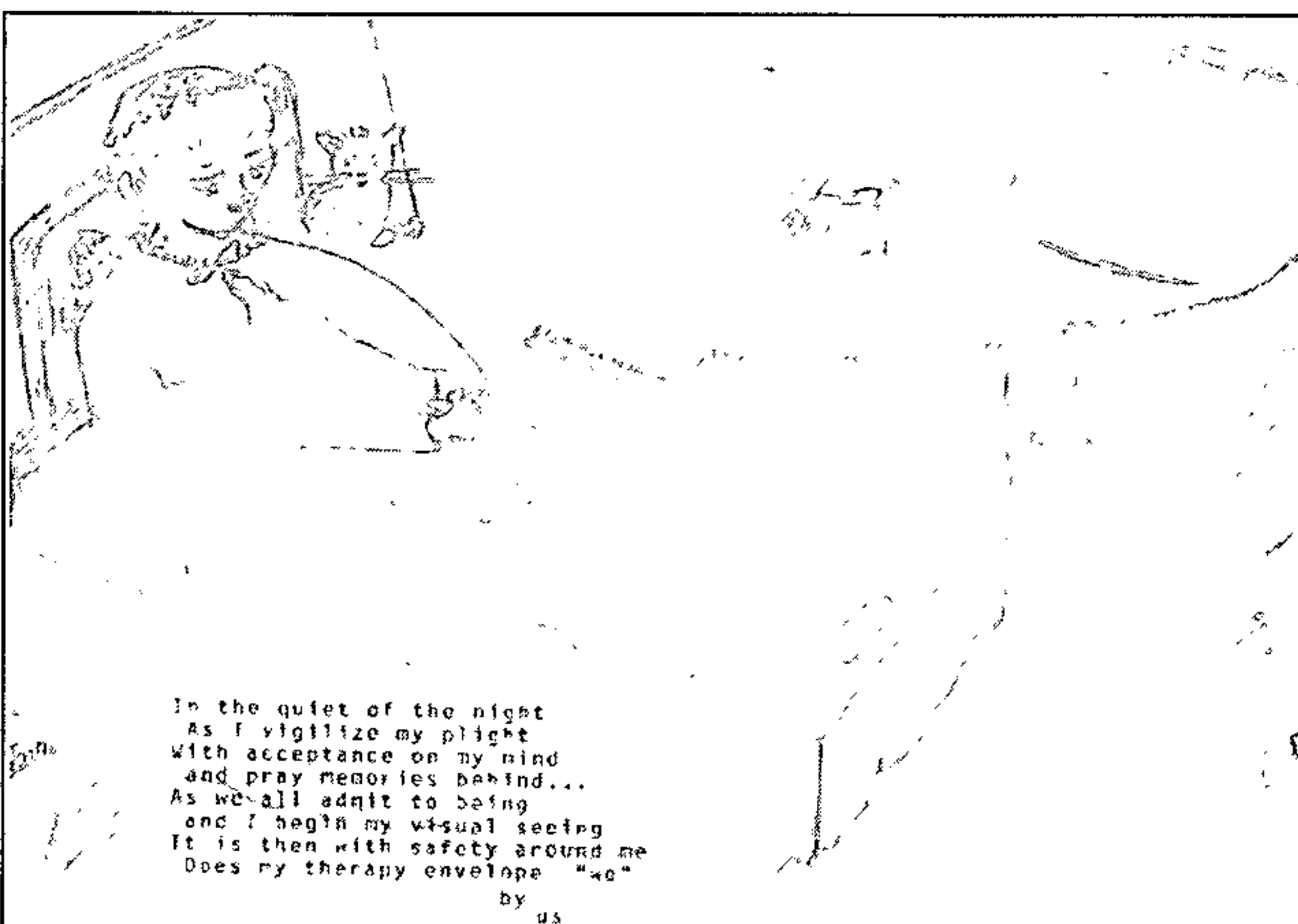
"What would happen if we put the "I" in the center?"

"I don't know."

"Try it," I responded. "What harm could it do? It's worth a try. Go for it!"

That day was a day I can only describe as serene. It was, and has been since then, a good time for me. I hope this is integration. I know I like this way of being, but if it should slip and I have a relapse, I know I have a way of dealing with that too. (12 Step.) I wanted to let you know. You might like to try it, too!

Have a great day! - Irene



In the quiet of the night
As I vigilize my plight
With acceptance on my mind
and pray memories behind...
As we all admit to being
and I begin my visual seeing
It is then with safety around me
Does my therapy envelope "me"
by us

Is Forgiveness a Viable Option?

By CE

Webster's Dictionary defined forgiveness as "The act of ceasing to feel resentment against an offender or pardoning for an insult." This implies that once this act is accomplished, the issue no longer exists. It also describes a one-sided undertaking whereby the victim does the forgiving and the offender is free to take any chosen position.

Oh, but if it were that easy...

Valentine Janet Meriwether, Ph.D., has written an insightful study of forgiveness in *Treating Abuse Today*.¹ She describes the old, but still pervasive, model of forgiveness much like the above definition whereby the forgiveness is "fragmented," ignoring any "bilateral or reciprocal aspects and treating it as a unilateral act performed by the victim without conditions. Above all, this old model ignores confrontation and repentance as intrinsic requirements in the process." The problems are obvious with this model. The victim ends up stuffing all hurt, anger, fear, etc., and issues of justice and retribution are never addressed. Also, the offender is allowed to escape unscathed without an admission of guilt, a heartfelt apology, or any assurance that the abuse will never happen again.

Dr. Meriwether's new model advocates direct or indirect confrontation (depending upon the safety of the situation) in which the offense is specifically named and there is a readiness of the victim to extend forgiveness with the aim of restoring a "relationship of benevolent love and accepting genuine repentance." Central to this new model is, "If people offend you, confront them, and if they are sorry, forgive them."

I fully realize that this is a very sensitive subject for survivors of abuse. Each of us must work through long and painful hours in therapy to arrive at a solution that is best for our mental and emotional well being. Religious convictions about forgiveness may be

a factor in determining our actions. Guidance by our therapist may play a significant role. The attitude of various alters obviously has great influence.

What I believe to be vital, however, is that we each must choose a stance that restores our own inner peace to the greatest extent possible. If this is not accomplished, we are allowing our perpetrator/s to claim power over us forever and to drastically impede our complete healing. I believe that this stance must include more than just acceptance seasoned with denial; it must include forgiveness to the greatest degree possible.

In order to even open the door to possibility of forgiveness, I think we must undertake the difficult task of forgiving ourselves. As survivors of trauma we so often carry (illogically) a terrific burden of guilt about our participation in the abuse experience, about what our disorder has done to those we love, or even about carrying the diagnosis of DID. Attacking this guilt with our therapist and with the insight that we were not to blame for our abuse is key to preparing our hearts to even consider forgiving our offenders.

In my own case, I am presented with the gamut of abusive situations. One offender is long deceased; several have disappeared; one is still very much alive and is an ongoing part of my life. More than anything I desire to free myself from these perpetrators, but the methodology is supremely problematic. I am far from finished with my work, but I cannot deny that tangible progress has been made as evidenced by my increasing level of health.

Meriwether says, "Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling." In dealing with each of my offenders from the vantage point of my therapist's couch, I am slowly tailoring approaches appropriate for each situation. Although anger is integral to each process, I don't think it can be an active element of the end product, for an unforgiving attitude

spawns the sort of hatred that literally eats at your sanity and imprisons you in negativity. Hatred also often fertilizes a desire for revenge or retribution. It may be different for some, but I can think of nothing that would adequately make up for my lost childhood and ruminating about the options just pulls me into a vicious depressive cycle.

My grandfather was my earliest sexual abuser and was the first I faced in therapy through excruciating memory work. He was a cruel man whose perspectives were skewed by his own mental illness. Dead for years now, direct confrontation was impossible, so under the protective watch of a wonderful psychologist, I slowly plodded through the memories, laying each aside as the time seemed appropriate. Without effort to minimize the pain of those years, I very gradually came to a place where I no longer felt hatred toward him. There was nothing magical about the process. It just no longer felt productive to harbor intense anger. A significant tool was unsent letters, written with countless tears and revisions. These accomplished a healing that I would have to label as forgiveness even though his repentance was not an option. Yes, this may be "fragmented forgiveness," but this man and his actions no longer haunt my thoughts and I feel free of him to the greatest extent possible under the circumstances.

Such completeness does not exist concerning those offenders who have disappeared from my life. My imagination puts them in the grave one day and in my rear view mirror the next. My desire to heal sometimes is so strong that I feel I am ready to put closure on the awful things that still reside in my memory. I like to imagine them feeling remorse even though that is probably unrealistic. At other times an almost explosive anger wells up within me because of my desire to confront these men and to tell them I hope they burn in hell. Obviously, the latter opportunity is not likely to occur.

So, I am left with treating this situation in the same way I have my grandfather. For my own good, I must escape their power and in my case, that involves eventual forgiveness, albeit unilateral.

By far the most difficult task is resolving my anger and bitterness toward my father who is still alive. His presence at family functions challenges my self-control to its limits and often plummets me into a period of depression. Out of a deep love for my mother, I have chosen not to break off contact with him for, by doing so, I would lose her simultaneously. Confrontation would be a disaster. He would vehemently deny my accusations. Once again, my voice would be ignored or discounted (especially due to my history of mental illness). Once again, I would be the victim.

So, in this case, my silence fits Meriwether's old model. It may not be the right decision, but I have convinced myself that I can treat this situation much the same as I have the others—by hard work in therapy employing unsent letters, empty chair work, tearful tirades, and perhaps some heavy transference toward my

therapist. I am counting on these things to gradually move me out of my hatred and bitterness and into that desired place of peace, even if it is tenuous. Whether he deserves forgiveness or not is not the point. I have lost much in my life. I hope that this choice will help me avoid losing my mother and the rest of my family. Meanwhile, I will work on strategies to retain my self-respect when he tries to emotionally batter me. That will involve believing that I am strong enough to openly challenge his criticisms in a way I never was able to do during childhood. I will find my voice at last. I no longer will succumb to feeling five years old in his presence. I am an adult now and dissociation no longer regularly clouds my vision. He is an old, weak man who surely must fear me for what I might disclose.

Post-integration (1996), I am now able to look back and better understand the origination of Tricia's terror, of Daniel's fury, of Margaret's drive to self-harm, of Courtney's bravery and defiance, etc. I will always remain in awe of how these parts of me sprang forward to protect me through horrendous times of pain.

Indeed, I feel I owe my very survival to them and now in return, I wish to allow each of them to sleep in peace with the assurance that the pain is over. I wish to abolish all vestiges of guilt. I want to be healthy, whole and positive.

Our earthly world is not a just one. As I write this, there are precious children being damaged by abuse on a daily basis and as survivors, I believe each of us is called to do what we can to stop this evil. However, first we must reach deep inside ourselves and find a way to heal our own wounds. Dr. Meriwether's new model is a viable option for some and I applaud those of you who confront and receive a sincere apology—rare but possible. My hope is that whatever path we choose, it brings us a version of forgiveness that leads to a higher degree of functioning, increased self-esteem, the happiness we deserve, and most of all, peace.

1. Meriwether, Valentine Janet, 1999. *"The Sword of Forgiveness: Clinically Integrating Truth, Justice, Prudence and the Relationship of Love."* Treating Abuse Today, Vol.9, No.1,p.6

MV

Letters

Dear Many Voices,

We want to thank you for the comfort you give me & the Boys. (Liz doesn't mind. This is a man's world after all, ha ha!) Especially in times of need as well as inspiration. Knowing that there are others (outside myself) who live as "us's" helps. However, sometimes seeing that most of your contributors are women makes us feel that we're strange and really don't "belong." In a world where we don't feel that we belong, that's unsafe and lonely...

To complicate matters, we, as a system have the disease of addiction (although only two parts see 'using' as an option). We say the "disease of addiction" because we're not addicts, we're people with a disease. We attend meetings regularly, and struggle with feeling "a part of" the group. People there, or so we perceive, attribute so much of how they feel, think, behave,

believe, et al to being addicted, when like our multiplicity, we know ours can be attributed to the abuse suffered as a baby/child. As with dissociation, parts found using drugs as a way to deal with the pain. Have others felt as I do? That once again we don't belong? How have you and your system learned to fit in?

We want to share something that helps us at many different times: music. So many of my parts find it freeing, validating, comforting. It allows us to play and be silly, feel the pain and sadness, the anger, the joy, the hope...Different parts like different music, be it jazz, country, classical, rock'n roll, lullabies and even the newer "angry stuff" for Randy. It's ok to be angry, see. And the only things I hurt are my hands, hitting (playing drums) on the steering wheel.

The only trouble is when we go "station surfing," switching from one

kid to another and back again. If that were the only difficulty we had to face...

I'd love to hear from and write to other readers, especially men, (although I know this is a women's world, in reality...)

Thoughts of warm sunny days; the calm as the brook rolls gently over the rocks; the coolness of the rain tickling my tongue in spring; the joy and playful ideas of puddle jumping, to you and all of you.

By Hank and the Boys

MV



Partner's Page

Forgiveness

By Richard

Everyone who knows her (including me) was flabbergasted when my wife forgave her father, one of the primary abusers who caused her to be a multiple.

"The God I believe in and the work I've done lead me to consider giving second chances," she said. "Speaking my truth, and being heard and respected, leads me to consider forgiveness. Not forgetting, but finally forgiving. I'm realizing that the man I know today is not the same man who hurt me years ago."

Forgiveness, as difficult as it might be, has been an important part of my wife's recovery. It's also played an important role in keeping us together during the difficult times all multiples and their partners face.

"Forgiveness is essential for any long-term, satisfactory relationship," said Dr. Tim Teague, Director of Pastoral Counseling at Truro Episcopal Church in Fairfax, Va. "Any two people who live together will hurt one another, so there must be some way to deal with the hurt when things go wrong. If there's no forgiveness, the walls build up, and cause a lot of dissatisfaction."

Is there any relationship more filled with hurt than one between an abuse survivor and his or her abusers? How can abuse like that be forgiven?

"I feel that forgiveness is not something our partners do for the other person," said Bill, one of the men in my support group. "They do it for themselves. They're saying, 'I'm not going to let this eat me alive. I'm going to get well, and move on.'"

Although I know that forgiveness is not possible in all (maybe not even in most) cases, I would advise any support person to encourage his or her partner to at least consider forgiving the abusers. I've seen it work wonders in the relationship between my wife and her parents.

"Thanks to the therapy work I've done, I seem to have gone beyond the need to blame," my wife said. "I don't need them to confess, 'I did this or that wrong.' I just need them to acknowledge that they made a lot of mistakes and made me what I am. And they're doing that. Accepting blame really isn't an issue now."

The same principle of forgiveness holds true in the relationship between my wife and me. It's no exaggeration to say that if

we hadn't learned to forgive each other, our marriage would never have gotten off the ground. Somehow, you have to learn to forgive each other again and again and again. My wife's psyche (or any multiple's) is a minefield of triggers, hot-buttons, cognitive dissonance, and outdated survival mechanisms. It's impossible to live with a multiple without setting these off fairly often. If she couldn't forgive me for that, she would have never married me.

For my part, I have to constantly forgive my wife for being a multiple. I can hear it now— "Well, that's mighty big of you, you arrogant bastard! She never asked to be multiple!"

Quite true, and I have to constantly remind myself of that. Consider what a support person goes through. I've put my dream of a normal marriage on long-term hold. My concept of what a wife should be has been kicked in the teeth. I've had to accept many things (like multiple personalities) that I thought were impossible. I've had to accept cutting, weight-gain, serial hospitalizations, and the loss of our sex-life.

If I couldn't recognize that my wife does not want to be this way, and forgive these things as they happen, I would have left her long ago, before we married.

How do we do this?

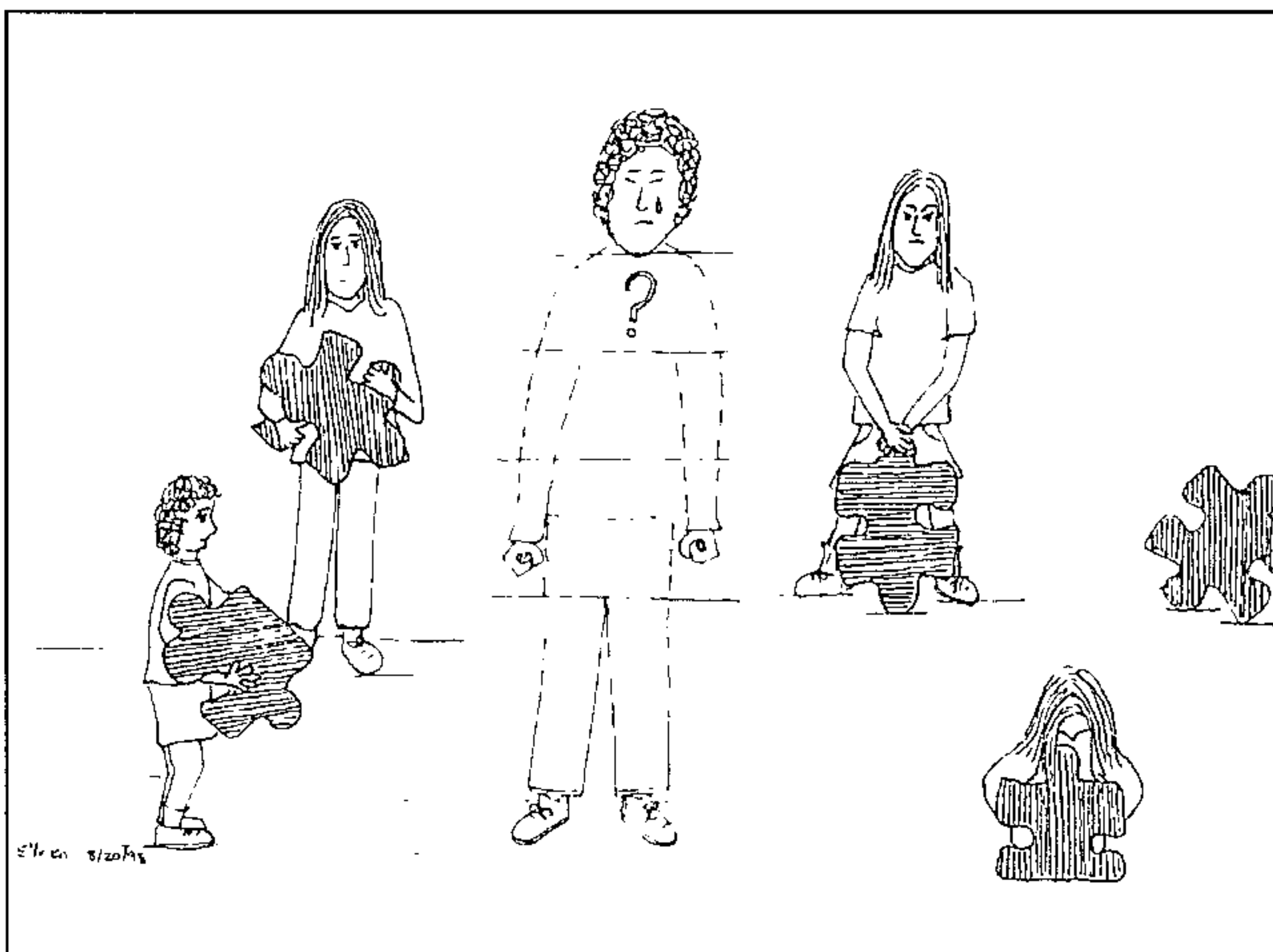
It's not easy, and my wife and I have learned some simple lessons the hard way.

The forgiveness principle—First we've learned that forgiveness is an important spiritual principle, common to many philosophies. For example, Colossians 3:13 states "...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

The dance of forgiveness— There are two vital steps in forgiving: the willingness to ask for forgiveness, and the willingness to give it.

It's tough to humble yourself, admit that you screwed up, and ask forgiveness. The only thing in my experience that compares to it is parachuting. It's scary as hell; it takes a lot of faith in your parachute and the rigger who packed it (or in your partner); and the possibility of a truly awful outcome is always present. That's why the silver wings of a paratrooper (and the willingness to ask forgiveness) are a badge of courage and leadership around the world.

The other half of the equation is the forgiving itself. As my wife put it, "Sometimes the most important part is deciding to forgive. Even if you don't feel it



at the moment, just deciding to forgive is the first step." One sign of being in hell is the absence of mercy, but with genuine forgiveness comes the release of the tension, guilt, and resentment that can poison a relationship. We remember that the winner must be our marriage— Maybe she screwed up; maybe I did. Maybe we both did (often the case). But we've found that who screwed up is far less important than making things right again. (Please note—Recognizing your fault, and admitting it up-front, goes a long way toward short-circuiting those questions.)

Forgive yourself— I don't know how much of a problem this is for other people, but it's a tough one for me. Carrying a load of guilt can be as destructive as your partner holding a grudge against you. Guilt is a grudge you hold against yourself.

Does all that mean forgiving and forgetting? Ideally, yes. Forgetting puts the hurt behind you and gives both of you a clean slate, a chance to try again without the inhibitions of fearing to make a mistake, or that someone is keeping score.

But forgetting is not always possible, or desirable.

"Anything can be forgiven, in that you don't hold animosity," said Teague. "But you may decide, because of certain hurts, that you will not continue in the relationship. You are saying 'This is a boundary of mine. If you cross it, then I will choose to not be with you any longer.'"

Fortunately, that's not usually necessary. Forgiveness does a wonderful job of repairing relationships. My wife's relationship with her mother is a good example. It used to be strained at best, a weird approach/avoidance minuet—the approach of love and need, and the pushing away of buried anger and hurt coming out sideways.

"I finally went to visit my mother at her home last January and confronted her about all the things she did to me," my wife said. "We thrashed it all out, and the magic of forgiveness took over, and we've moved on from there. My mother is now one of my closest friends."

There is magic in forgiveness. I recommend for all multiples and their partners to learn to do it, and practice it constantly. Through forgiveness, my wife now has a better relationship with her family than I ever thought possible. And she and I are still together because we've learned to forgive each other.

Healing

By Daisy Doll for everyone inside

Incest destroys things as nothing else can. I have only recently, agonizingly come to let go of the dream of one day having a daddy. I can never go back to being a little girl whose view of the world is untainted.

In addition to the abuse my father heaped upon me, he was also the only one I received any positive attention from. During part of this time, a neighbor who was a close friend of the family took me to rituals, where there were unimaginable horrors.

To cope with all these happenings, my mind created two separate systems, one to deal with the abuse at home and the other to deal with the cult abuse. Neither system knew about the other. In all my splits, sometimes only a fragment was created, sometimes a more distinct identity depending on the need.

This all started coming to light eight years ago, when I was almost 21. It has been a long, slow, arduous battle. Over the course of it, I've been terrified, ragingly furious, devastated, torn to shreds, suicidal, homicidal, and in more pain of heart than I thought humanly possible. The deepest hurt is the knowledge, slapped in my face over and over again, that my father never really loved me. How does one find peace, with that being such an intrinsic part of one's life?

I'm working toward it. Amazingly. In addition to all the horrible times, I've also felt relief—relief at knowing why I always believed I was innately bad, and that I'm not. And awe, absolute awe at the ability I had to save myself. When I would step back and look at what my alters had been through and how they protected me, I was dumbstruck by their resourcefulness, innovation, grace and sheer strength.

I've made it because of them. They protected me. Now I protect them. Your parts deserve no less.

Each part of you is an incredible testament to your desire to live and rise above what was done to you. Each part you created ultimately is there to protect you. I found the best way to honor what these parts did for me was to protect them in return.

When someone would ask me if I was going to send my parts away I'd answer "No." There would be an uproar inside, and

I would reassure everyone of what I fundamentally believe...no part ever deserves to be 'sent away,' destroyed, or 'gotten rid of.' Each and every part deserves to come home. As our 'home,' we visualize a beautiful, warm, safe, cozy place inside that represents our core, our heart. Everyone in my system belongs there. That is where we all began.

I have only four parts separate from me now. All the others have come home. There are many times I miss the others. The quiet took some getting used to. At times I don't think I'll integrate any further. Other times I know I will.

I've chosen numerous things on the outside to represent and memorialize my multiplicity. These things help to keep me grounded when times are tough.

I'm learning how to not dissociate automatically. Instead of believing the lies I was told about myself, I'm learning who I really am, now that my traits are known and available to me. I'm struggling with trust. I don't know if I'll ever have that one down. I guess it took me this long to trust myself; it'll take awhile to trust others.

It's been hell, but it's been worth the effort to climb out, even when so much was trying to drag me back down. Even when I slipped back down at times.

I want others who may be beginning this road to know that it *does* end. It *does* get better one day. And I want others who've been on the road for some time and who feel like they can't go on (for whatever reason) to know they *can* go on. Maybe they just need a rest for a bit. To sit down and recoup. It's okay to take a break. You and your parts deserve to take whatever time you need.

It used to be that every day was full of pain, confusion and turmoil. Then, as time progressed, once in awhile I'd have a good hour, then day, and then couple of days. Right now, it's about equal. I look forward to the time when the good days will outweigh the bad. After all my hard work, I deserve it!

Thank you for letting me talk. It has helped me. I hope it helps you, too.

How I Learned to Heal Resentment and Anger

By Kathryn A.

How do we learn to give up our feelings of resentment and anger? One big step is to indulge ourselves. We must realize that it is a process by which we master the skills of "letting go." My therapist was most helpful in this regard. She suggested I look at pictures of children in magazines and catalogs. Then, I was to imagine that I was one of those children. If I were a small child, would I have the strength to fight off my abuser? No! I was too small against the brute force, and I was forbidden to cry out or make noise in order to "keep the secret." Logically, there was no way I could have prevented the abuse. Why had I thought I "could have...or should have..." stopped what was happening? There was no way! Coming to this realization is the first step in learning to let go and to forgive yourself. Ooh, there is a scary word—*forgive*. It implies something spiritual, but that is not necessarily true. What does forgive or forgiveness mean? I looked up the word: *forgive*: 1. to excuse for a fault or an offense; pardon. 2. To renounce anger or resentment against. 3. to absolve from payment of (a debt, for example.)¹

Yet society dictates that we forgive one another. How do we do that?

When I began my therapeutic journey, one of the first books I obtained for help was *"The Courage to Heal"*² It said "...Healing depends a lot on being able to forgive yourself, not on being able to forgive your molester...You don't try to forgive Hitler." (151) Oh, how I clung to that last sentence, "You don't try to forgive Hitler." I thought this was the ultimate insult to my abusers and came to the conclusion that forgiveness was not on my list of "Things To Do." Somehow I missed the part about forgiving myself.

The second step was a long time in coming. Retrieving all the memories, and processing them with our therapist were the steps taken by all the people in my system. It took a lot of time and effort, but was successfully achieved.

As we continued in our healing we learned how to deal with our anger at our abusers creatively. We made a list of things we could do that were not harmful to us or others that could release the rage and anger. The list included: working with the foam padded bat or a three-liter bottle and hitting the floor, tearing up newspaper, throwing clay against a board ("plop" or "splat" is good), hitting the bed with a pillow, squeezing a ball or throwing it against a wall outside, or screaming.

One of my favorites was the time "we" (my inside parts and my husband) dug a hole in the back yard. I collected about 30 empty jelly, peanut butter, pickle relish and mayonnaise jars. (You could also go to garage sales and buy glasses or dishes to use.) Then I collected a big stack of throwing-size rocks and one large flat rock for the bottom of the hole. (It helps the jars break better.) My husband helped me line up the jars a few at a time as I threw rocks at them. The sound of the breaking glass was delightful. The process of throwing the rocks at the jars was energizing. I/We would yell the name of abusers, throw the rocks, and rejoice as their "jar" was broken. Our poor aim caused laughter. Isn't that incredible? You laugh while you discharge rage and anger! Frustration also was released when I would pick up a jar and just throw it into the hole and watch it shatter. Then, as pre-arranged, I went back into the house. As a child, I had been punished severely for breaking anything. It was a very freeing experience to know I could walk away from all of the broken glass without cleaning up the mess, and not get into trouble for it. My husband lovingly raked the broken glass into the hole and covered it with the dirt. (We have a huge yard and part of it is in an area where I could do this exercise, but you might want to go to a field or an out-of-the-way place so you can yell and the neighbors don't worry.) All of my rage and anger were buried with the broken glass and I like to think of

the flat rock as being a symbolic tombstone. The "tombstone" is buried with the glass so no one else can pay it homage.

My third step toward forgiveness was to make a list of all the people who abused me. I included the people who failed to protect me as a child (past), and those who deserted me when they learned I was a multiple (present). Then my therapist had me write a letter (that would *not* be mailed—*ever*) to each of these people. It is a letter of accusation, disgust, anger, hate, and all the negative things I could think to include. All the feelings were included in these letters: "You hurt me because..." Then I shared each letter with my therapist and we processed the feelings that resulted.

The fourth step was now to write a letter about the good things these people brought me. It is hard to believe that "good" can come from such horrible actions. These letters were difficult to write and took a lot of thought. It is hard to find good qualities in people you "hate." I found I received my strengths and talents from my abusers! I wrote about the few good memories I had with these people. My mother failed to protect me, but she also taught me how to cook. I thanked her for that gift. My uncle abused me, but he also taught me to appreciate the natural beauty of the great outdoors. A friend who deserted me upon learning my diagnosis of DID helped me learn a foreign language. You get the idea. The letter is about thanking them for their gifts to me and to forgive them their trespasses. Even if each of these individuals do not know that they have been forgiven, I know. This is the part of forgiveness that is letting go and moving forward.

For a couple of weeks I stayed stuck in the letting-go stage. It was so hard! I really didn't think I was ready to let go and forgive these people. I needed something more. The letters about the gifts and good things they gave to me just wasn't enough. So I came up with

another step. We took popsicle sticks and construction paper and constructed little people to represent our abusers. Then at our therapist's office, we took our "hate" letters and construction-paper people outside and burned them. We had to tear the letters in little pieces so they would burn. The tearing of the letters released what was left of my anger. Burning the effigies of my abusers was cleansing. We made a lot of smoke for such a little stack of papers, but somehow, that smoke was the final freedom. All my feelings of anger went up into the sky with the smoke! When everything was finished burning, then we watered it down and went back inside. I found myself crying from the relief I felt. I had finally let go.

I learned letting go does not mean forgetting, but it does mean the burden on your shoulders is no longer holding you down. The hate, the anger, the rage, and a little of the grief (I think), eat away at the fiber of your very being. What is worse is that the people that hurt or abused us are not even dwelling on their deeds. They probably are not even thinking about us while we fume, rant, rave, and worry. They are busy with their lives, while we are wrapped up with their past actions.

Letting go of the ties that bind us to our perpetrators is how we find freedom. Amazingly, I find that on the days my mind drifts to one of these people, I only feel sadness. They are still accountable and they will carry that with them forever. They will never know that I am free now. It is my bonus. It is also my gift to myself. Letting go and forgiving really is about forgiving ourselves.

1. **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition** ©1992 by Houghton Mifflin Co. Electronic version InfoSoft International, Inc.

2. Bass, Ellen and Davis, Laura **The Courage to Heal: A guide for women survivors of Child Sexual Abuse.** © 1988. Harper & Row, New York, NY.

MV

Hi Folks,

Well, (surprise!) my memory failed me again, & I misplaced the name/address of the person who wrote last month's wonderful piece about scars. I believe I know this person fairly well, which makes this doubly embarrassing...because I still can't remember! While I usually don't forward mail, except to "letters" contributors, I received a message for "Anne & Others" and would like to send it on...but because there was no name on the file that I received, & the external email containing it has vanished in AOL's trashbin...I can't forward this letter. Would the real "Anne" contact me so she can receive her message? & please...put your name & address somewhere on your submissions of art or writing, even on emailed attachments. Otherwise, the contact info gets separated, & I'll never really know who did what, if I need to reach you! Thanks! — Lynn W.

Letters

I have been wondering why I have the "stinking thinking" impulses to read about suicide when I am essentially feeling very well and not having any problems. I don't believe that is any kind of option, and I am not suicidal, nor have I been, I just occasionally look it up. I think threatening suicide is manipulative in the extreme. So, Why when I feel so good do I have these thoughts, and not have them when I'm feeling bad? Is this normal?

Rene

I work for the state of Oregon and my disorder was released to a supervisor who felt that she needed to announce it to the unit I worked in. After that happened, everyone felt I was a threat to children. My doctors will state otherwise. My disorder has never kept me from functioning on a normal level. Until this was announced, no one knew.

I have been to two attorneys who state I have a case, but given the disorder they do not want to touch it. Do any of you know an attorney who would represent an MPD/DID? I need to stand up for myself and say this breach of confidentiality is unfair. This supervisor did not have a signed release of information. If anyone can help me, please write to me, care of Many Voices. Thank you for your support. - M.

I am wife of Bill and Susan (who wrote a joint letter to MV several issues ago) and The Gang. It has now been close to half of our married life that we have known we have been living with MPD/DID. I think we are now in a comfortable zone with it; though we

have had many tears and difficulties, now laughs come easier. We even have our own MPD jokes—now that's pretty sick!

I think I shall be growing old with it—something I couldn't bear to think of in the beginning. I can't do much to turn back the clock—my great pain is for all of The Gang...what they went through (most of which they can't remember) and how much I thought I loved my mother-in-law all those years, until we realized she was probably the worst abuser. We haven't seen her now in several years, and I think that is best for The Gang and me. I love The Gang to pieces, although some have not made their presence known, and although I'm pretty sure not all of them love me—they are part and parcel of the man I love. I am the primary support of all of us—two jobs plus Bill's Social Security—and some days I think if I never pay another bill or think about how we're going to pay a bill or fill out another insurance form, etc., I will be thrilled. I would be happy to hear from more spouses and significant others in the newsletter, particularly those who are not MPD themselves (as I am not). Their thoughts on coping have helped me.

Wife of the Gang

MV



Having MPD and Being All Alone

By Diane & the Pod

My Dad was killed by a drunk driver when I was 22. I was a paramedic at the time and had I been working that hot summer night, it would have been my call. Soon after that I switched jobs for better pay. I was going to move out the summer he was killed but decided to stay home with Mom so we could grieve together. I think it helped. Three years later I was out on my own in my own home, two miles from my Mom. I think, as an adult, you become best friends with your parents. They had adopted me at birth, and I couldn't have asked for better parents. Both my Mom and I missed my Dad for a long time. He was taken too quickly. We spent the first two years trying to get "over it." I don't think either one of us ever did. He was a great Dad. Then, as I was moving into my home and breaking up with a man I had seen for five years, I was diagnosed with MPD/DID. The doctor that I was seeing at the time (the one who made the diagnosis) said, "Well, I'm sorry. I have no experience with this, and so I'm going to send you to someone else." Like...hello! You're throwing me out of therapy? You tell me I have this awful thing, and you're not even going to help me get through it?

Guess not...The next thing I knew I was seeing some other doctor. An analyst. I saw him five times, and he tells me, "I think you need to be in therapy with a woman. Here, call this lady."

I went home and wrote out my life story as I thought I knew it. When I met with the doctor I'm seeing now, I just handed her a seven-page biography on me and said, "You read it. If you like what you hear and you're going to keep me, then I'll talk to you."

That was twelve years ago. In the twelve years working with her, a lot sure happened. I got to know me and all of me, which is called "The Pod" now. Not like "two peas in a pod". There were 'way too many of us to fit into that kind of a pod. A "pod" like a family of Orca whales, that live together from birth to death. My pod had been with me for a long time, and when I first found out about them, all I wanted to do was get rid of them.

Well, for anyone who has been in analysis, you know this is a very slow process. But I wanted to get rid of them NOW! And she was telling me, "I don't think you want to get rid of anyone for right now."

Much to my surprise, she was right. She was right about a lot of things, and still is,

for the most part.

In and out of the hospital, rediscovering myself over and over. No one told me that it wasn't normal to hear people talk to you all the time. I just thought I had loud thoughts, and I guess I thought everyone didn't remember big chunks of their days. Only while working with her did I understand, and all the pieces started to make sense. Then my Mom, who I loved very much, got sick with cancer. Mom and I spent a total of nine months in Seattle, Washington, so she could get a bone marrow transplant (that didn't take, by the way). And she just kept getting sicker and sicker. Nine months of being on the phone to my therapist every night. Long distance therapy, since we were from Michigan. Two years my Mom fought the fight of her life, and unfortunately, lost her battle on a cold December morning in the hospital. I was right there with her, all alone. I lost my Mom.

I was 36 by now. Where had all my family gone? Now, I did have two brothers...one older and one younger. The younger brother was a drunk and a mean alcoholic. I resented his drinking and put him in the same class as the man who had killed my Dad. Yes, a murderer. So I really didn't want anything to do with him.

My older brother, who was in charge of my Mom's estate, gave the younger brother my Mom's house and he took the rest. Only after getting my attorney after him did I see anything of the estate, and by the time that happened, there wasn't anything left. Yes, I could have sued him, but by now I was not working at all, and hadn't been for nine years. I was living on disability. They just took it all. I got into the house right after my Mom died and got a few mementos, and those mean more to me than the money. Pictures and a ring she always wore, and a few personal things are all I have of my Mom. Oh, and the precious, precious memories of her and I fighting this fight together. So now I'm all alone. My biological parents gave me up at birth, and I lost both of my loving parents by the time I was 36. Are 36-year-olds supposed to lose their parents? I mean, was there a magic number where you're just supposed to lose your family? No one ever told me about that. No one warned me that you could be 36 and all alone in life. I wish someone had taught me that someplace along the way. But I still had a family. I still had the pod and over the years have become best

friends with them. Mother to some of them, teacher to all of them. After all, why would I want to get rid of someone (The Pod) who saved my life over and over again? Who protected me when I was too young to protect myself? By now they had become a big part of my life, and so had my therapist. You don't see someone for twelve years almost every day and not get attached. She was and still is my doctor, my therapist, sometimes my Mom, sometimes my family, always my best friend. Sure, I have a few close friends (three) and one aunt and an uncle who care about me. Unfortunately they live an hour's drive from me. We get together at Christmas and sometimes at Thanksgiving. But the rest of the holidays are spent with my family The Pod at home alone. Sometimes alone is OK. But when it's not, it's really *not ok!* I think the worst is to be sick and alone, whether that be physically sick or emotionally tapped out. All your friends are with their families, and your therapist? Well, she has a life and a family of her own. When this happens you finally realize and know what 'alone' means. You don't want to call anyone in fear of interrupting their lives. You're afraid to call in fear of getting the machine or worse—no answer at all. So you sit with the stupid TV on knowing that there has to be someone out there. You can see them on the TV. Sometimes that's the only way that you know a bomb hasn't dropped and taken all of the human race with it, and left you behind. So, you're all alone in your own space. Afraid to call anyone because...why would they want to talk to you, anyway? Afraid to get dressed and go out of the house. Where are you going to go, anyway? So you sit frozen in your home. The only thing keeping you warm are the tears streaming down your face. The only sounds you hear are the cries that are muffled in the pillows underneath you. And you wonder, when will I come in contact with someone again? Trust me, it feels like never....

Alone is being cut by an angry alter and having to go to the 24 hour clinic by yourself, and then being put in the suture area, and the nurses on the other side of the way say "Oh, a Multiple. Maybe we should get another bed for her so everyone will fit!" Ha ha ha.

(If you would like to write to Diane & the Pod, MV will forward letters...)

Thanksgiving

I

It is not yet time to be thankful
 If it comes ok, but not today.
 Today we feel regret.
 Not healthy.
 It is very healthy to be where you are.
 Where I am, not nice.
 Oh, I am so glad I can be not nice.
 That might be worthy of considering
 thanksgiving:
 Speaking up, sitting where I want
 Stating needs,
 Voicing desires,
 Expressing myself
 loudly,
 noisily,
 obnoxiously,
 Joyfully? no, not yet.
 Playfully? That's tomorrow.
 Today I want to be an obnoxious
 bitch.
 Today I will not be thankful.

II

Are you thankful?
 Sometimes.
 I don't know.
 Why? Why do I have to?
 Who is in charge here?
 When will I know? Ever? Never?
 Did you hear the music?
 No, I can't hear the music,
 too sad, too afraid, too lonely.
 This is a lonely time.
 I wanted love. I wanted friendship.
 I feel angry.
 No one is going to tell me what to
 feel.
 No one gives me orders, Not even
 you.
 I am thankful for my voice, for my
 love, for my feelings, for my walks in
 the woods.
 I am sorry.
 For what?
 I am sorry that it wasn't better.
 It is sad to be so alone.
 It is sad that all we had was food.
 It was very lonely.

III

Thankful?
 Who me? Not me!
 Ungrateful bitch
 Obnoxious child
 Lonely little girl
 Did you hear the music?
 Can you hear? People are singing the
 praises of God.
 There is no God. Why should I thank
 God?
 Today I am angry.
 Now I feel cold, distant.
 Where is the friendship I long for?
 Why doesn't anyone hear me?
 I want to be healthy. I want to be
 whole.
 It would be nice to be thankful.
 Expressing myself feels hard, not in it
 like before.

IV

There are doors opening,
 people speaking.
 They were not my friends.
 Maybe they were friends.
 Maybe it was you.
 No, it wasn't me. It was someone
 else.
 Words flow. Ideas come: Names.
 Losing names.
 No faces.
 Nothing is here. But me. I am here.
 My insides all present, wondering
 what will come next.
 Beware of smiling strangers,
 not to mention smiling mothers.
 very dangerous place to be.
 very dangerous.
 not safe at all.
 Do not read this.

V

There are people who are healthy.
 There are people who are hopeful.
 Can you hear them? I hear them.
 Do you see them? Not yet.
 Are they lonely too? Sometimes.
 Are they sad? Sometimes.
 Do they cry? Do they get angry?
 I think they do.
 Can they hear the music? Yes, they

hear the music.

All the time? I don't think so.

Are they thankful? Yes, healthy
 people are thankful.

Even when they are sick and life is
 bleak? Maybe not at that moment, but
 when they remember.

Why is it so hard for me? I don't
 know.

VI

I want to be healthy.
 I want health.
 I want to be held.
 I want to feel love.
 I want to play in the water,
 looking at the colors,
 watching dolphins play,
 seeing mermaids sing their song
 while a lonely seagull cries for its
 mate
 Thankful for the day
 hearing God in the music of the
 Ocean
 losing my angry self in the great
 silence.

VII

I want music.
 I want health.
 I want songs.
 I want flowers and softness, lifting
 me up and over.
 I want to hear angels sing in the
 night.
 I want freedom to be angry.
 Sometimes I want God, but not
 today.
 Today I want to be alone.
 Sometimes, lonely is good.
 Sometimes, lonely is healthy.

By Ellen K.



Thoughts on Forgiveness (a Christian perspective)

By J.M.

I believe that the traditional Christian interpretation of forgiveness affects many survivors, regardless of whether or not they are practicing Christians. The view of forgiveness that I grew up with has two premises: 1) I am a sinner—we are all sinners; and 2) Because I am a sinner I have to ask forgiveness of God and of anyone with whom I have a problem.

Several years ago I was given a copy of an unpublished paper by Frederick W. Keene, titled "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament." His insights have been helpful to me, so I want to share them. He bases his conclusions on a study of the cultural anthropology of the first century Mediterranean world, and on the words for and ideas about forgiveness that appear in the biblical texts. The first century culture valued competition and combat. So how would the concept of forgiveness be practiced in a society in which power and position are important? The answer is that it would be implemented in accordance with the power structure of the culture. "One person forgiving another would have been seen as laudable only if the forgiver was in a higher socioeconomic position than the forgiven." An offer of forgiveness from someone in a lower position could be perceived as an insult or a challenge to the honor of the person in the higher position. The same offer from a person of equal position could be accepted.

An analysis of the verbs used for forgiveness reveals a power structure in operation. Three different forgiveness verbs are used in biblical texts. 1) *aphiemi*—is used in the Lord's Prayer phrase, "forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4). The same verb is used in the Unforgiving Servant story (Matthew 18). In ordinary usage the word "debts" equates to considerations of a financial nature. "The words for forgiving and forgiveness now have an implication of a more powerful being, whether God or a person, releasing another from a debt of an obligation or a penalty." 2) *apuluo*—is used in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:37). It says "forgive and you will be forgiven." Keene says it is unusual for "*apuluo*" to be used to mean "to forgive," and it is only used that way once in the New Testament. It is typically used in passages about divorce. Once again, this suggests that there is a power hierarchy involved, because divorce was regulated by a gender power structure.

3) *charizomai*—Keene thinks that Paul liked to use this verb because it emphasized that God was generous and personal in his dealings. This form of the verb was also used by Luke in a passage about debts (Luke 7:41-42 in NRSV).

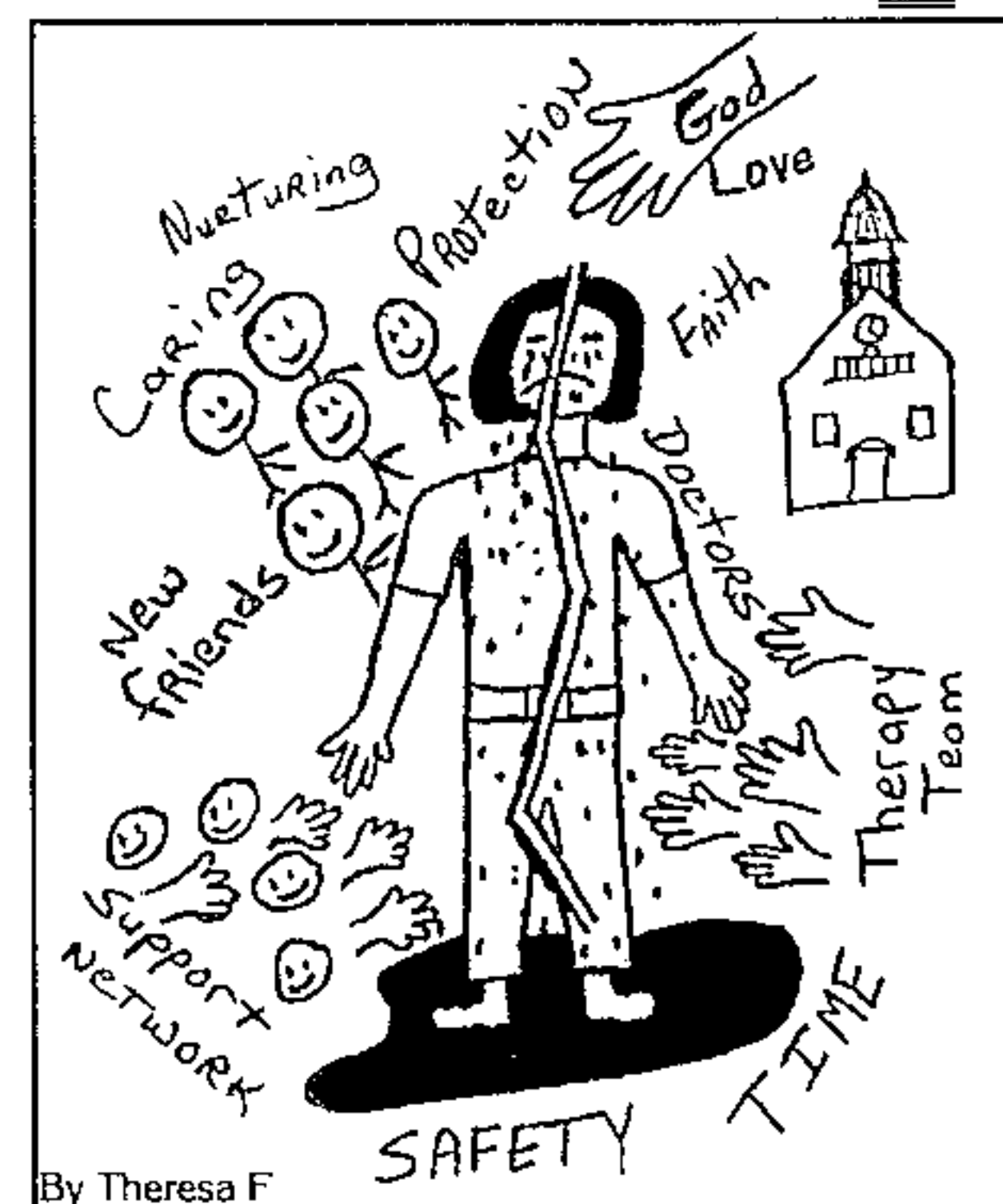
In these passages there is a hierarchical power structure evident, which is that we forgive those over whom we have power. But what if people are equals and therefore the power structure is not a factor? Two biblical scriptures refer to forgiveness among equals (Luke 17:3, Matthew 18:21). These scriptures use these terms to indicate equality: another disciple, member, brother. A flow chart of power, as it concerns the operation of forgiveness, would put God at the top—Jesus, as a human, next—then Creditors—then Debtors. At both the Creditor and Debtor levels there would be other people who would be considered as equals. Keene offers an interesting interpretation of Jesus' words on the cross to support his thesis that forgiveness flows down, but not up. In Luke 23:34, there is a record of Jesus' words "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." Keene says "This is a situation where Jesus has no power; he is speaking from a cross about those who have crucified him. What is noticeable is that he does not forgive them. Instead, he asks his Father, he asks God, to forgive them. Having no power in the situation, he cannot forgive. About the only way the structures of power can be invoked for forgiveness is the way Jesus chose: to ask God, who remains all-powerful, to forgive. This is the one place where, if Jesus wanted the weak to forgive the strong, he could have indicated it. He did not. He asked the strongest to forgive, and being the less powerful, did not offer the forgiveness himself."

Keene concludes that nowhere in the forgiveness passages does forgiveness flow up the power structure. It always flows down, except in the case of equals, where it flows across. His conclusions lead him to suggest that the least powerful cannot enter into the forgiveness process unless an equalization of power takes place. "To receive forgiveness, to be forgiven, the powerful would have to do more than 'make restitution'; they would have to give up their power." This alternative model for understanding the process of forgiveness responds to the concerns of requiring a

victim to extend forgiveness to a perpetrator. Using this model as a guide, it would be understood that an abuser would be expected to seek absolution from God. And if the perpetrator is truly repentant he would seek to make restitution to the victim. Since the victim has the least power, it would not be possible or expected for the victim to offer absolution to the perpetrator. Though the victim cannot initiate an upward flow of forgiveness she/he can initiate a horizontal flow. One major problem is for victims to forgive themselves, and in a sense this is a horizontal flow of forgiveness.

Carolyn Heggen has written about sexual abuse. Her observations support the existence of the hierarchy in the forgiveness process. "Forgiveness is not absolving the offender. The victim of abuse does not forgive the offender so his heart is made pure, his record made clean. This is neither her responsibility nor in her power...To put pressure on a victim to absolve her abuser is not only cruel and insensitive, it is also bad theology (*Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*, 1993, p. 127). Ellen Bass and Laura Davis write: "If you have strong religious ties, particularly Christian ones, you may feel it is your sacred duty to forgive. This just isn't true. If there is such a thing as divine forgiveness, it's God's job, not yours. If feelings of compassion and forgiveness rise naturally and spontaneously during the course of healing yourself, fine. They can be a powerful part of your healing, but not if they're forced into being because you think you should feel them." (*The Courage to Heal*, 1983, p. 151).

MV



By Theresa F



Is It Safe Here?

Is it safe here?
How do I know?
Maybe we can hide here.
Then no one will know
that we ever existed.
Take just a peek.
A tiny one at that.
Maybe someone should peer
out...
Who's going to do it?

**Me?? I don't think so.
Find someone else.**

Back to square one.
Who's going to do it?

**Me? Oh no. No way.
Ask over THERE.**

Okay.
Who's going to do IT?

I hope you're not thinking of me.
Find someone brave and strong.

Alright.
Who's going to do it?

RUN FOR THE HILLS:
She wants someone to take a chance.

Who's going to do it?
Maybe no-one today.

We want to just curl up
and hide. Maybe today is
just a "THINKING ABOUT
IT" day,

Oh yes!
Someone looked.
It was a very tiny movement—
a "one eye only" type of look.
Maybe it's OK??

We'll 'THINK ABOUT IT!'

*By the Co-op
(inside Deena)*

MV

Books

If He Is Raped: A Guidebook for Parents, Partners, Spouses and Friends

By Alan McEvoy, Debbie Rollo and Jeff Brookings. Published by Learning Publications Inc., PO Box 1338, Holmes Beach, FL 34218-1338. (800) 222-1525. © 1999. 104 pgs. Paperback. \$11.95.

This is a slim book packed with good information on a difficult subject: males raped by males. Whether the victim is a child or a prisoner, whether it's your husband, your friend, or yourself who is suffering, *If He Is Raped* will answer many of your questions. The chapter titled "Facts and Myths" dissects common beliefs, such as "men should be able to prevent their rape." The authors explain that a man who is raped is not necessarily gay...and neither is his rapist. Gay men who are raped are just as much "victims" as are heterosexuals (although society—and police—may dismiss their pain.) The rapists of men are on a power trip, just as those who rape women. You'll find excellent

guidelines for partners and family members here: help for the immediate aftermath, and a good explanation of long-term effects, as well. And the writers explain the practical psychology of the situation...how to comfort the victim without expecting too much self-disclosure, and more. Perhaps the most chilling section is devoted to rape in prisons, and how little is done to prevent it. There is guidance here, too, for families and friends of prisoners who may emerge from their ordeal full of shame. Anyone dealing with the issues of sexually-traumatized men should definitely read this book.

Women Living With Self-Injury

By Jane Wegsheider Hyman. Published by Temple University Press. (215)204-1099. www.temple.edu/tempress © 1999. 214 pgs. Paperback. \$19.95.

Jane Hyman is a psychologist who has spent nearly ten years learning about women who hurt themselves. The experiences of fifteen of those women are woven throughout this book; but it's much more than a series

of case studies. In exploring this subject, Hyman is trying to understand the meanings behind the acts, and frankly admits that there is no pat explanation for much of it. Reasons include trying to 'leave' the body, to 'feel' the body, to release emotions, to avoid suicide, to keep from injuring someone else...and on and on. Some feel their acts are abnormal, but others feel perfectly normal, at least initially. In her book, Hyman goes beyond the usual "problem-solution" approach, and helps us understand how these women live in the everyday world...how they work (hiding their scars), cope with their relationships (do they tell their kids?), and, sometimes, "recover" from the need to harm themselves. There is an extensive chapter on help for recovery, including many interesting self-help techniques. One involves tokens for injury-free days from the Internet! (Send your postal address to llama@palace.net) This is a fascinating book with a rich and diverse perspective on the complexities of self-harm. —Lynn W.

**Thank You for All Your
Wonderful Writing and Art!
Please Send More!**

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February 2000

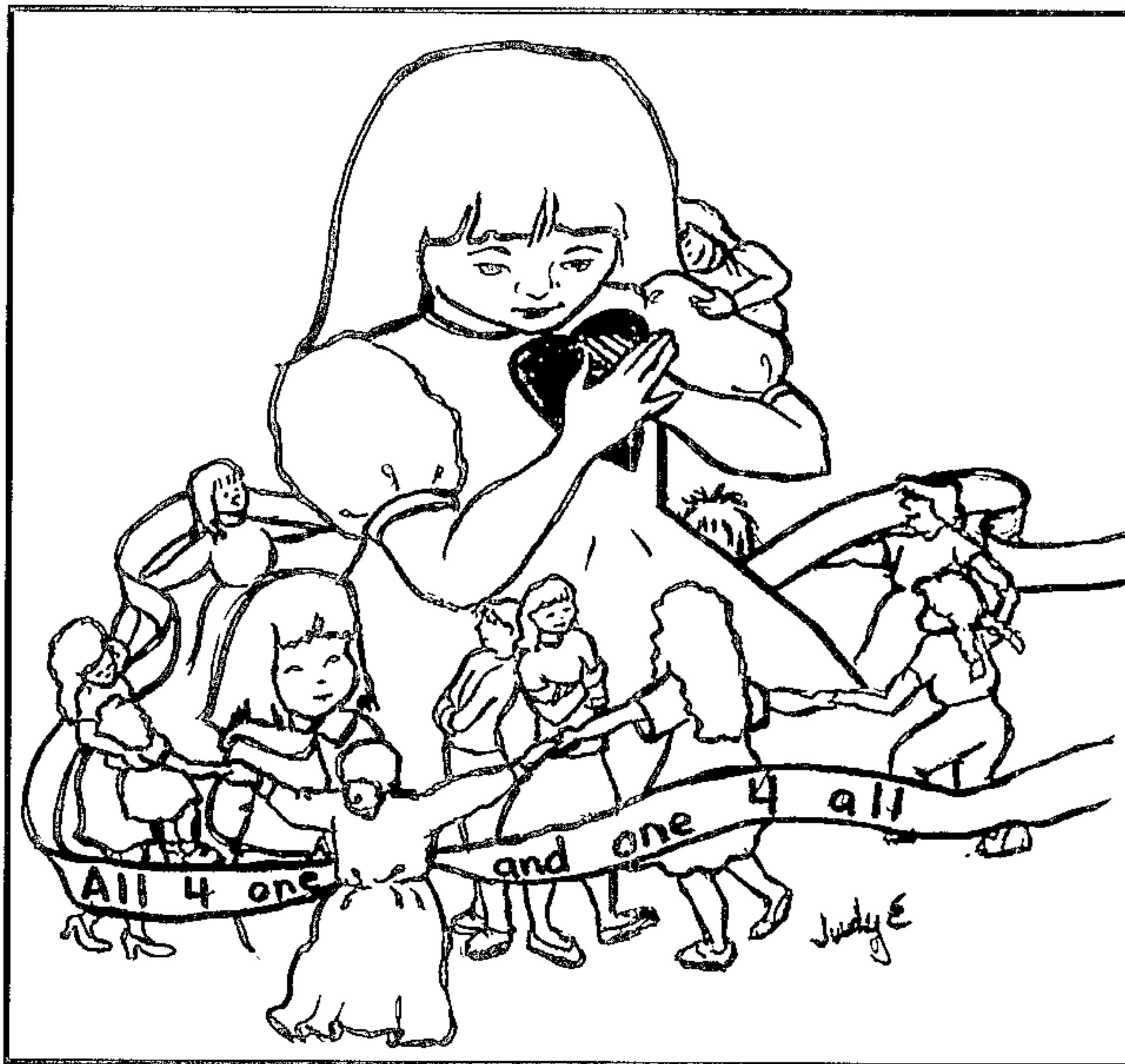
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