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Anger Management,
Soothing Yourself
... and More

Holistic Healing

Healing is a song so young/old
it is silently full of words
and raw sounds rising
from the deep

Healing is dream visits when
yesterday your legs are blue
from too much walking

Healing is remembering what
the mind boxes in and the soul
needs to grow so dark is melted
down in heat and light

Healing is using hands filled with
shame to form containers of earth
parts of trees things discarded

Healing is waking to see day
through tears reflecting
sun, moon, breath, heartbeat

Healing is tasting
bread, sand, water between toes
air on the tongue while speaking
silence, sensation and
howling dogs remembering wolf
saying no for the first time and
meaning it
saying anything in any way with
gesture, touch, paint, music, earth,
don't absence, presence

Healing is salt in water that purifies
to amplify your soul doing it
your way your way your way

By Living Earth  

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Rage!
In L. Lee
August 23, 2010

Here I am writing; she is retreating to the background, allowing me to speak. I have waited decades to speak. This is an unbelievable task for her. At the age of one, on her first birthday to be exact, she went inside and stayed there for 40 years with no memories of her own. Should she be angry about this? One mind could not hold the physical and emotional pain inflicted on it so in God’s infinite wisdom I was one of many who were magnificently created to hold these memories and feelings. Each time she steps back into her mind and allows one of us to come forward she is frightened of never returning. Is it appropriate for her to be angry about this? A better question is, should she be allowed to express the truth of this anger? In all of our therapeutic sessions we have never once felt it was appropriate to do so. Yet, we are told we have a right to be angry. Each time we have tried to trust that this is true, our behavior was deemed inappropriate. I am not saying I want to purge all of my feelings in an out of control manner. I want to express the truth about what I hold.

My name is Rage. I feel like I am a mystical creation because I am feared by many. Within my expression people react negatively to everything about me. People want me to go away. They say I am inappropriate and unnecessary. I’ve been called spoiled, selfish and totally inappropriate. I have been taken to therapy in hopes of making me go away. I’ve been told I’ve needed to heal from myself.

I say hogwash to this insanity. I know I’m nothing to fear. I couldn’t be more thankful to be living in an inner family who is learning to embrace me, for I hold the emotion of the truth of the crimes committed against us as a child. Without me there is no healing. I have yet to come across one person who can replace my name in the face of such horrific abuse. In my opinion, I believe it is impossible for us to heal without safe, contained access to the emotion of rage. If a young child must secretly and silently hide the crimes committed against them, only to grow up and find out their emotions are inappropriate, where is the expression and the healing? If we were allowed to express our true emotions when our body was that of a one year old, what would be the acceptable behavior? Would we have been told our behavior was inappropriate? I think not, and yet it is!

I have always compared the rage I hold with fire. Fire can be a very scary thing for it can burn down buildings or entire forests. It can destroy lives. I have always believed I was the one to blame for the many losses we’d had through our lives. Trying to learn how to quench the fire inside of me has been my greatest struggle. This is no longer our goal. I have learned to embrace my beauty. My beauty lies in the emotion of my voice. So I ask. Should we be angry at the loss of her 40 years? The answer is a big resounding yes. Should we be allowed to shout this on a mountain? Absolutely! It is in the speaking we are free. I now see myself as a beautiful bond fire. I am sitting on the beach in the moonlight, encircled and embraced by my inner family. It is within my expressions I am safely contained, loved and respected by them. They are comforted and warmed by me. We sing and we laugh and the children roast marshmallows. We come together as a family where we will forever hold true to the promises we have made to each other. We will continue to speak and we will never let our fire go out.

Thankful
Thankful today
as I sit
and
listen
to
grief

By Rhonda H.
Trust

Trust travels down the road.
The bus is full of children.
The bus is a body that contain the children inside.

A car runs a red light crashes
in front of the bus,
The driver of trust flies into the windshield,
The windshield cracks to many pieces
But holds together as one.

Trust continues down the road
This time someone else drives
Looking through a fractured window
The driver can not see her route too well.

Suddenly a loud crunch
The bus side swipes a 16 wheeler
Children fly all over,
Windows on the right side cracks
Into million pieces,
The children are battered and bruised

Trust continues on
Now shaken and confused
Someone else drives
It’s one of the children

The wheels of the bus hit a curb
Trust tips on to its left side
Everyone inside is flung into the windows
Now cracked into billions of pieces

Someone comes along
Offers to put the bus up right
The bus now on its 4 wheels
Children battered and bruised,
hide under their seats
No one wants to drive
Trust seems broken

To repair trust the driver
 Learns to become more aware,
Aware enough to put a adult
in the driver seat
Aware the children need protection,
seatbelts will do
Aware everyone must work together
In order to see where we are going
Cooperation is a must
for everyone on the bus
Aware there will be accidents
no matter what we do
Aware it is good to be prepared.

By Joanna

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—Lynn W., Executive Director/Editor

THE YEAR SHE LEARNED TO DELEGATE

Okay, I need those cookies by tomorrow.
Nine sharp. The silver needs polishing. And gifts — Johnny
wants a sleigh...

By Joanna

MV
From Shame To Victory
By L. Lee

Back in 1980 I thought I had the perfect life. I was a wife, a mother of two beautiful children, and lived in a quaint little home, a fixer upper. I began working part-time (mother's hours) when my children started school. I was there in the morning to make them breakfast, get them dressed, and home at the end of the school day. Evenings were typical ones: dinner, baths, homework, a little television and off to bed. Life couldn't get any better.

And then I received a phone call. It was my father, calling from California. He said he was coming for a visit. The last time I saw him was in 1966; I was 13 years old when he left. One would think I would have been hesitant, or curious, or even angry. I was not; instead I was elated. I told him I couldn’t wait to see him. He was finally going to meet his grandchildren. I began making lists of what I needed to do before he arrived. I shopped, I cleaned, and I prepared my children to meet their grandfather. In my mind this was going to be a glorious celebration.

During the visit we sat and talked for hours about the memories of my childhood. We drove around to all the places where I had grown up. He showed me where he worked and told me how he loved taking me there to show me off because he was so proud of me. I always knew I was daddy’s little girl and it was so nice to have that feeling again. It was the one thing I had missed all those years he was gone.

I began to feel a little odd as the visit continued. One time in particular, as we were walking down the street of my childhood home, I began seeing pictures in my mind that made no sense to me. I saw a child being sexually abused by a man. I had no idea who this child was or what these pictures meant. As quickly as the pictures came they left and the feelings went with them. I continued to enjoy my trip down memory lane with my father and we had a wonderful time.

As the visit was coming to an end we began preparing to take him to the airport. I did not want him to leave. We drove to the airport in silence. We said our goodbyes and as I watched him board the plane, I tried to think about all of the future visits we would have now that he was back in my life. I had no idea that this visit would alter my perceptions and change the course of my life forever.

Weeks had passed since my father left and life went on as usual until one day while I was preparing dinner the same pictures I saw that day with my father flashed through my mind, only this time they were clearer. Once again I saw a young child being hurt. My heart started racing and I started to sob. All I could think was No, it can’t be. This time I saw the face of the man; it was my father and the face of the little girl was me. In what seemed to me to be the very next minute two weeks had passed and I had no memory of them. This was the beginning of my journey of healing. It was the beginning of a long hard road struggling to recover the painful memories of my past.

Flashbacks, anger, pain, and memories hit me like a ton of bricks. I was angry and I struggled to stay in control. I was trying to maintain my marriage, my role as a mom, household chores, working part-time and managing a social life. It became completely overwhelming. On top of that I began to realize the wide spaces of lost time I was experiencing were not normal. I began to feel like was a complete failure at managing my own life. I didn’t have anyone to talk to and I knew I needed to find a good therapist... someone who could help me sort out all the confusion.

I began searching, and that too was a long and difficult process which also ended in failure. Ultimately my life was out of control. I was completely stressed and overwhelmed. I decided to admit myself into a women’s program in a psychiatric hospital. It was in this hospital I was misdiagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. I was released from this hospital six weeks later to return to my life.

I had no aftercare plan in place and I found myself back in the same situation. I once again had no therapist, no support system and no one to talk to except this time I had a label and I was now considered mentally disabled. I was angry and I believed I had a right to be. I knew I wasn’t disabled. I knew I would have to carry around this anger for the rest of my life unless I found a therapist who would hear me and understand me. I continued my search and once again I met with failure. My anger continued to build and become completely unmanageable. It was affecting every aspect of my life. My life continued to fall apart. My marriage was crumbling and my children were caught in the middle, struggling to make sense of their own worlds.

I realized I could not help them so I decided to leave and continue to try and get help for myself. I will never forget the day I walked out of my home for the last time. I left sobbing with my head hung in shame. I was filled with guilt. I felt like a failure as a mom. I never thought I would find the strength to live with this guilt. I knocked on my sister’s door and she took me into her home. She helped me find the courage to sign myself into my second stay in a psych hospital. This time I was properly diagnosed with M.P.D. (Multiple Personality Disorder), now called, D.I.D, (Dissociative Identity Disorder). When the therapist in the hospital asked me if I heard voices in my head and I told her I did it helped release some of the anger I had been carrying. I was finally heard. Upon release from this hospital I resumed my search for a therapist who understood this diagnosis. I finally succeeded and I have been with her since 1993.

Slowly I began to accept this diagnosis and my life began making sense, but the guilt of failing my
children still haunted me. I continued to blame myself for being angry which caused me to bury my anger once again. I believed that I was not being angry I would have my children in my life.

To date I am still filled with a great amount of anger, but my therapist hears me and understands me. She has helped me to understand that my anger was appropriate and in fact saved my life and she continues to acknowledge my strength and honors my anger. She helps me go to the deep dark vulnerable places I need to go in order to feel safe and protected and also continues to help me feel strong and capable.

In the process of writing this article I thought it would be a good idea to ask her what her thoughts were about ways I manage my anger. She said the following:

"There are many kinds of day to day things that you do to manage your anger. You breathe when your overwhelmed, you rest when you're tired, you write when you're trying to understand your life. But across the board the struggle for you has been in not being heard. Being heard helps you to do those day to day techniques for managing your anger and your life. Everything seems meaningless to you if you're not heard."

The most effective way I manage the anger inside of me is journaling. Through the years my journal has been my best friend. It is always there. It doesn't matter what I tell it and it handles my harshest rage. It never holds me responsible for being inappropriate or uncaring. It allows me to reach the deep places of loneliness, abandonment, and helps me feel safe. It never forgets what I say. As I sit at my kitchen table, pen in hand, and write, the words flow from my mind onto the page and my tears are allowed to fall. I am able to reach the hurt, buried deep beneath my anger. I am able to sit quietly and listen to those who live inside me. Little did I know then that my father's visit would be the greatest gift he ever gave us. The gift of tapping into our own anger. Today I can say I am we and together we are strong and we are capable.

The most powerful healing piece for us is the knowledge that everything seems meaningless if we are not heard. Listening to ourselves and acknowledging our own anger is the very thing that gave us courage and brought meaning to our life. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think the one thing that caused me to hang my head in shame and guilt was the very thing that would help me hold my head up high.

A Poem

This is what is going on, This is what is,
Where am I going?
Where have I been?
It seems my life is a jumble of things,
It seems that my life is a puzzle.
How can I help when I can't grasp the problem?
How can I heal when I can't grasp the problem?
Is healing for real or only an illusion?
Is healing for here or only for another place?
I hear the cries of those who are hurting,
I hear the pleas of those in pain.
My heart reaches out and it aches to help,
But how can I help when I can't grasp the problem?
Is healing for real or only an illusion?
I cry to the Creator of All and pray,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
What is Thy will? What is heaven?
Are we to ask? Are we to know?
What I think at times is that this might be hell.
But then I hold an innocent baby, I watch a beautiful sunset, I hear a child's laugh, and I rub a soft kitten against my cheek.
And I know this cannot be hell, hell is the end... this is a beginning.
As painful as this life may be... This life is a beginning... a beginning of forever, where ever that ever might be.
And I know...
That what we do in this life will effect where we spend forever. Even if forever means we cease to exist.
I do not want to leave this life with only regrets and pain left to others.
I want to leave a legacy of love and forgiveness.
And even if I do not totally grasp the problem,
I know part of the solution is to follow this code.
Do onto others as you would have them do onto you.
Give love and you will get love...
Give pain and you will reap pain...
So where ever I have been and where ever I am going...
No matter how jumbled my life may seem...
I can still love...
And that is a good thing...

By Multijudy RV

Peaceful Places inside
We have so many parts...
There are several peace spots,
Our Main spot is a very, very large tree house, large enough for all and more and so...
We shall share our horse too for to us they are magic

VALEDA 9-24-10
Blacking Out

For the last several years I have been privileged to work almost exclusively with adolescent boys and girls in a correctional facility. Many, if not most, of these youths dissociate, and they present the problem in many different stages. There are gradations in the degree to which people dissociate. Working with adolescent boys and girls I have come to believe that dissociative disorder probably starts as dissociated rage, because in some this is the only dissociative symptom.

I believe that dissociated rage usually occurs in people whose bodies respond abnormally to strong emotions. For these people negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression, are so painful that they try to avoid the pain in every possible way. One way to avoid this pain is to transform every negative emotion into anger. When this anger builds, it becomes rage, and rage is so intolerably painful for people with this condition that they routinely black it out. Blacked out rage is a serious social problem, but no one knows how widespread it is, because mental health professionals do not routinely ask about it.

When people don't know what they are doing they have no control over their acts. I know of at least one case of murder that happened during a dissociated rage. A child was threatened by his father, a man who had previously injured the child when enraged. The child grabbed a gun to keep the father at bay, and as that child's acute fear turned into rage he blacked out. He pulled the trigger while blacked out and killed the father. When he came out of his blackout he saw that the father was dead, and realized he had shot him. Because

blacked out rage is not on the psychiatric or judicial horizon, he was never asked if he remembered pulling the trigger. I asked, and he didn't. It was too late. He had already been convicted of murder.

The problem with blacked-out rage is that, though much is known about the way it originates and its biology, the pieces have not been put together. So here's what I have been able to gather from the research.

Some newborn infants react to stress more intensely than most people. This is not necessarily a genetic trait. It can be due to hormones circulating in the blood stream of a mother who herself overreacts to stress. When stress in the mother creates an excess of these hormones, they cross into the fetus's blood stream and affect its brain. Evidence from laboratory animals also suggests that a similar brain change can occur in a baby whose mother leaves it alone much of the time. It seems likely that a baby or toddler left alone in a hospital for a period of time may develop the same problem.

In these infants and toddlers the stress reaction is powerful, painful, frightening and prolonged. I believe that they learn to counter it with anger at this early age. Think temper tantrum. I also believe that this is the time when these children learn to black out the pain. What seems to happen is that the whole forebrain — the part neurologists call the executive brain, the part that makes decisions, exercises judgment and considers the consequences of actions — is cut off from the rest of the brain, which rages without those vital functions. In the laboratory removing the cerebral cortex, which includes the conscious part of the brain, of a cat can create a model for this state — the so-called thalamic cat, which shows exactly such uncontrolled and undirected rage.

Putting together information from various sources I believe what occurs is this: People learn to control some of those blacked-out rages. They do this by using other parts of their brain to function, while isolating the raging part. They are still angry most of the time, but the rage is not conscious and does not turn into action. Instead they may have severe headaches. Some people hear this rage as an angry voice. These people appear to be very unemotional most of the time, but sometimes they become quite emotional. Because they isolate parts of their brains in this way — as can be shown by brain imaging these people often don't know they are angry. They have developed what we call dissociative states, including at times Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Because their emotions change so often, they may be given the diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Actually people with this condition are very anxious. Their anger is just a reaction to their constant fear. Often their anxiety expresses itself in other ways. They have panic attacks; they may have phobias; they have nightmares, and quite often they are anxiously compulsive. If they experience a disaster or abuse they are liable to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but in their case the condition does not begin with the trauma. Trauma feeds into their constant anxiety, aggravates it and shapes it.

Sylvan Tomkins, a psychologist at Princeton, found that emotions are tied to memories. Thus, if you are angry, you will remember all previous occasions when you were angry. Since in these highly emotional people anger covers up fear, frightening memories can recur with the anger. When I talk to the angry parts of dissociative people, they tell me that
they must withhold frightening memories from other alters, confirming Tomkins’s observation.

Many professionals believe that treatment requires that a person suffering from PTSD face the trauma that provoked the condition. Since the underlying problem is panic, forcing a patient to confront a frightening experience will result in rage and dissociation. In my opinion the treatment must address the anxiety, so that the need to avoid memories falls away.

There are many effective treatments that address this need. For instance, we know that the hormones that are involved in the stress reaction include glucocorticosteroid and arginine vasopressin. Both these hormones can be reduced by deep massage, which requires no words at all! Unfortunately therapists who work with words are told not to touch their clients. However, massage therapy and other therapies, such as art therapy help people to recognize and face their anxiety.

Pharmaceutical companies are working hard to develop drugs that counter the excess of hormones, attacking the stress reaction where it starts. In the meantime the most effective drugs to control anger are those that control anxiety. Unfortunately there are no perfect drugs for this purpose. Drugs such as Valium make matters worse, for they may themselves cause blackouts, as can self-medication with alcohol. When people who take these substances do black out, they release the same blacked-out rage they are trying to avoid. Anyone taking substances like alcohol or Valium cannot be treated with words or other medications. It is a lesson it took me a long time to learn.

The medications now in use that reduce anger to the point where it no longer results in blacked-out rages are in a class called antipsychotics. They work because they actually reduce anxiety, not because the person for whom they are prescribed is psychotic, i.e. out of touch with reality.

Of course, when a person blacked out he or she is indeed out of touch with reality. Since the FDA, and psychiatrists in general, don't know about these blackouts, the FDA has not approved the use of these drugs to treat rage. They are, however, highly effective.

Psychiatrists are also using medications that block adrenaline, the hormone that circulates in anger. These adrenaline blockers, an example of which is a drug called prazosin, are very effective, but because they can lower the blood pressure they are not used routinely.

Misunderstanding anxiety that has turned into blacked-out anger costs us millions. I work in a facility to which judges send delinquent teenagers. Many of these teenagers suffer from the condition I have described. They are brought before the judge because of something they have done in a blacked out rage. The judge, and the mental health professionals who examine these kids, don't understand this condition. They don't know that hormones can shut off the executive part of the brain. Everyone assumes that people always know what they are doing. Over and over I have heard these teens tell me that they believed they knew what they were doing, but they actually relied on what others told them to fill in their own blanks.

Adults who continue to live with this stress reaction are just as likely to land in court, because it is blacked-out anger, freed from judgment and foresight, that leads to many cases of domestic violence, road rage, child abuse.

If mental health professionals and the courts were to recognize this condition, we would not have people incarcerated at high cost to the states, instead of being treated for their anxiety. We could put a dent in domestic violence without tearing families apart. Anger is a normal part of humanity, but it need not be as destructive as it so often is. By not recognizing the problem we punish those who suffer from it instead of helping them.
Mirroring Our Childhood

By MySong

There are several reasons why we, as survivors of child abuse, seem to keep repeating the abuse in our lives by marrying abusive spouses, alcoholics, drug addicts, and even unknowingly seeking abusive friends. Abuse is in low-income and high-income relationships. It has no economical or educational boundaries.

This article focuses on how to recognize an abusive relationship; whether it is physical abuse or emotional abuse, it is all abuse. It will also show you how to set good boundaries and the need and right we have for them. In the end, it will show you why, as survivors, we seek out abusive relationships without even realizing it. It is my hope that this article will help you get out of these types of relationships and learn to take care of yourself, love yourself and in the end stay safe.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

It seems physical abuse would be easy to recognize, but it has a hidden agenda which we frequently don’t see. Of course, there are often real physical injuries such as broken bones, physical scars, etc. Just being pushed can end in an injury. Physical abuse is the use of physical force against someone in a way that injures or endangers that person. Physical assault and battery is a crime, whether it occurs inside or outside the family.

Ask yourself, does your partner have a bad or unpredictable temper, are you being physically hurt or is someone threatening to kill you or your children, or are they forcing you to have sex? These are all forms of physical abuse. If your partner injured you once, it is likely this person will continue to physically assault you. If you are involved in any kind of a relationship like this you are in danger. If you are being physically abused, call the police. Physical abuse can start in a very minor way and can escalate into your death or the death of your child. GET OUT NOW!

The cycle sometimes goes like this:

Abuse - They lash out with aggressive, violent behavior. It is designed to show you who is the boss and who is in control.

Guilt - Some, but not all feel guilty, but not over what they have done, but for fear of the consequences of it.

Excuses - They come up with all kinds of excuses for what they have done and blame you for their abusive behavior. They never take responsibility for their own actions.

Normal behavior - This is called the “honeymoon phase.” They act as if nothing has happened and may turn on their charm; they may even buy you gifts, thus trying to keep you in the relationship. This gives you hope that they have really changed this time. They haven’t.

Fantasy and planning - They think about what you have done wrong and literally fantasize about how they are going to make you pay for it, thus turning it into a reality.

Set-up (sometimes) - They literally set you up, creating a situation to put their plan into action as a means of justifying abusing you again.

Spur of the moment - Some abuse is not “set-up,” but is a spur of the moment and impulsive action, so this cycle may change, depending on the abuser.

Because of this cycle, it makes it difficult to really come to terms with the fact that this is not ever going to end. We all want to believe we are loved and frequently stay in a relationship like this because we are afraid to be alone or feel we will never be loved again. Thus the cycle continues.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional and verbal abuse can actually be the same thing. It is not only as damaging as physical abuse, but many studies have shown it has longer-lasting scars and is more difficult to heal from. It is any abuse that uses fear, humiliation, intimidation, guilt, coercion, constant berating, belittling, name calling, screaming or manipulation. It can be anything from constant criticism to repeated disapproval or even just the constant refusal to ever be pleased with what you do. It can include name calling, accusing, blaming, threatening and ordering, control games, extreme jealousy, refusing to listen, emotional withholding, raging, sarcasm and infidelity. It is a system of brain-washing that wears down the person’s self-confidence, sense of self-worth and trust in themselves as an individual. It can be in the form of domination to control your every action, not allowing you to have friends or visit family, controlling your money and making you account for every cent you spend or making fun of you in front of others. They may also use emotional blackmail by threatening to end the relationship, or invalidate or minimize your feelings. An alcoholic or drug addict can have very unpredictable responses so you constantly feel anxiety or frightened. You eventually lose your sense of self, your personal value; it invalidates who you are and destroys your very core. Your self-esteem becomes so low that you cling to the abuser. Frequently you blame yourself for the abuse, feel powerless, or feel you cannot make it on your own. Many times you feel that you are not only unlovable, but unworthy of love and have nowhere else to go. Probably the ultimate fear is being alone.

SETTING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

A very simple way at looking at personal boundaries is just saying, “NO, you cannot do this, this is my space and you cannot do this to me.” Boundaries tell someone what your limits are and they define your line. They are a way of protecting and taking care of yourself. It is your right to protect and defend yourself and actually your duty to take responsibility for how you will allow others to treat you. It is a way of owning your feelings and having a voice. You may not have had the right to have a voice when you were a child, but you can have one now. When you
set a boundary you let go of the outcome. It is not an easy thing to learn to do and can be quite difficult for an abuse survivor, but it is essential to learn to set them. It can give you a great deal of peace realizing that you can protect yourself at last. It is learning to love yourself and take care of yourself in a healthy way. When you set a boundary, it is telling someone you deserve and demand respect. We all have the right to be treated with respect and dignity.

It is not easy to start setting boundaries, especially when you are involved with an abusive person. You have to assert yourself and it can be terrifying to set boundaries with a person you fear will leave you or possibly physically hurt you. If you set a boundary with a physically abusive person and they threaten you, call the police immediately. If you never set a boundary, you will never know who you really are. You will never escape the enmeshment of a codependent relationship and learn to see yourself as a separate person. Setting a boundary is saying it is not OK to hit me, to talk to me that way, to try to control me or to treat me abusively. When you do not respect yourself, it is hard to realize that you don’t deserve mistreatment. Setting boundaries teaches you to only allow people to treat you in a loving way and realizing you deserve that.

There will always be boundary breakers in our lives. They will constantly try to cross your boundaries and you have to remind them over and over what your boundary is and not allow them to cross it. If you let them cross it you are letting yourself be victimized again. It is important not to let another person continue the same pattern and it is just as important to enforce your boundaries. It takes courage and determination to set and keep boundaries, but it is always worth it. You deserve it. Sometimes you just have to let go of certain relationships in order to not let yourself be re-victimized.

We all have to make choices in our lives and we have the choice to allow another person to abuse us. It is really your own choice, even though you may not now see it clearly. It is not an attempt to control another person, but taking control of your life and deciding how you want to be treated. It is an important step in taking responsibility for your own life and yourself. It is an empowering tool that stops giving your power away to another human being and stops you from being a victim. Ultimately it keeps you safe and helps you know who you really are.

**REPEATING CHILDHOOD PATTERNS**

We, as survivors, are not aware that we actually may seek out abusive relationships, but frequently we do. As we emerge from our childhood abuse and do not deal with it, we actually feel comfortable in that type of environment. It is familiar to us. It is something we have lived with for probably a very long time and unfortunately what we are used to. It sounds strange, I know, but it is frequently true. Think about how long you spent in your childhood with an abusive person, possibly a very long time. It replicates the dysfunctional childhood we escaped from. It seems safe to us, but of course, it is not. It is merely familiar.

An abuser is an emotionally unavailable person; therefore we frequently seek out this type of person. It is not unusual for us to repeat this negative pattern over and over again until we deal with our abuse. It is a destructive lifestyle and will never get any better until we recognize what we are doing and deal with our past. What isn’t resolved from our childhood comes back to confront us again and again within the pattern of our lives. Some people never change this and keep divorcing or leaving abusive relationships, just to seek another destructive one out. It is a self-defeating behavior that stole our lives when we were children and also ambushes us as adults.

Another thing we may do is seek out an abusive relationship in an attempt to “fix” that which is broken. We try to change that person in an attempt to somehow change the person that abused us. Of course, this never works, as we can only change ourselves. We frequently marry a person with the same characteristics as our abuser. Since we were not able to fix our abuser, we attempt to fix this other person. Of course, this doesn’t work either.

It is also an attempt to heal. We actually try to “undo our abuse.” We try to re-live the abusive relationship in the hopes of getting it right this time. None of these things work.

The only way to heal is to deal with our abuse and walk through our own pain. It is not an easy task, nor do I suggest trying to do it alone. We need someone to help us walk this difficult journey of healing and sometimes it is a very long journey. Indeed. But we are survivors and we can do it. The longest journey begins with a single step, but we can heal in the end and stop this cycle of abuse.

**Stepping Stone Prayer**

Every day is yesterday passing us by
another day wasted
another chance for change
ever, ever, forever more
now is your chance
one foot in one foot out
around around drowning in doubt
can you make it? the leap so far
can you take it, can you see
never ever ever after me
every now and then a word
for those who were, are never heard
how dare you look
how fair are we
fairest fairest of the fair
one step more, a step toward me
a whisper a wind a word in the sand
no, no more please
we just cannot stand
teer and totter near and far
cannot stand still
trembling hands
a world upturned over it’s head
tiny ones inside scared to speak
will they ever ever meet
cannot heal with strings yet undone
be the fear fear the dear
what we cannot touch
won’t reach us here
if it’s not real then it’s not true
our reality fights every day anew
this fairly fair true enough
and they thought brothers grim
to us

*By Kate Edelin*
This is My Life

By Freda

I have nestled into a recliner, the
darkened light bulb heating over
my shoulder. My roomy shuffles
through the edge of the room on her
way from here to there. “I love you,”
I mumble from under a blanket I am
tucking around my shoulders.

She stops, smiles softly. “I love you
too, honey. You are such a wonderful
person.”

Tears fall before I know they have
begun. I smile in return and turn my
head away as she shuffles on. Startled
by these tears I am wondering,
asking, confused.

I want my Mommy to say those
things, I hear a tiny voice say.

‘But you know she never will,’ I
remind this small girl.

SHE can’t say them! That is for
My Mommy to say!

‘But Mommy doesn’t love any of
us, kiddo. She doesn’t love any one.’

She loves ME! She declares with
the clarity of a three year old.

‘She does not love herself. She
does not love Daddy. She does not
love any of us. She can’t. She doesn’t
love herself, so she can’t love any one
else.‘

Mommy, I Want My Mommy! she
begins to whine.

‘She is gone forever, kiddo. She left
us, all of us. We are on our own now. I
am your Mommy now.’

I don’t KNOW YOU!

I hear hurt, anger, fear all rolled
into four words. ‘You should. I’ve been
here for a long time now. I love you. I
am the one who has taken care of
you, protected you, argued for you,
colored with you.’

You don’t play Dollies with me,
she accuses me.

‘No, that is Jewel, one of your older
sisters, isn’t it?’

Is she one of my Sisters?

‘Yes she is.’

The child stares at me for a long
time. Finally she demands,
disbelieving me, Where is she?

I’m right there, honey. It’s ok. This
is the one who loves us now, waving
her hand towards me.

My Mommy Loves ME!

Our Mommy is right here, Jewel
says pointing to me. The Outside
Mommy never loved us. But we have
a new Mommy who loves us. You
know her. Jewel is holding her hand
out to the child. Come on Fearful, let
me hold you, as she squats down to
gather the small child into her arms.

Settling into a rocking chair she
snuggles the small child close to her.

Fearful has not taken her eyes off
me. She not my Mommy, she
declares clearly.

She is not the first mommy, no.
But she is our Mommy now. She loves
us. The other Mommy never loved
any of us. She didn’t even love Daddy.

Fearful swings her head around
to Jewel, Not Daddy?

‘Not even Daddy,’ I put in.

Her head snaps back around to
look at me again. She stares at me,
trying to pull the truth from behind
my eyes. She looks back at Jewel. My
Mommy Loves Me! She the Only one
’loued to say nice things to me,
glaring at Jewel.

We all say nice things, Jewel
reminds her.

She CAN’T. Fearful declares
pointing with her whole arm towards
where my roomy has gone on with
her day.

‘She just did, honey. And it’s ok.
She loves us...’

She Can’t Love US! She Don’t
Know Us!

‘She loves all of us, kiddo. It’s ok.
I love you, she loves me. We all love
you.’

Fearful flops against Jewel, tears
flowing. Jewel wraps her arms
around the child and rocks her gently
humming a quiet tune.

This is hard for all of us. No one
has a ‘happy ending’ with this
encounter. No one had gotten a
deepen deeper understanding. ‘All we have is
another very sad kid who has to cope
with giving up the dream of having
her mother’s love or very approval.
As one of many this is not a new
experience. But we do have safety.
We do have love amongst many of us,
and a hug for a child in tears. For
now, it is enough.

---

Meditation - Affirmation

Breathe in and breathe out.
Breathe in calm and safety.
Breathe out tension and pain.
Breathe in calm and safety.
Breathe out tension and pain.
Keep breathing in and out.
You are safe and protected.

Ask inside for help.
Find your safe place.
Find your strengthening place.
You are a kind and loving person.
Breathe in and out.
You begin to relax and feel calm.
Know you are safe and free.

By Jenn J.
I Been Thinkin’
By Nyla Blair

I been thinkin’:
If J says one more time
about how, really
her dad meant well

I’m sayin’:
You told me he
chased you and beat you
ongoing
when you were a small child

You told me 2 “perfectly good” men
asked you to marry
and you couldn’t do it
’cause of what your daddy did.
and yet, I’ve not heard from you
about your anger towards him.

What I have to say
about this
is it parallels
my life in that

I do not “Do” anger
I’m just learning about anger.
I have a tendency
to forgive my father prematurely.
He made lots of money,
he & mom.
And I got it when they died.
He came over from Germany
and didn’t even know English &
learned English
in the LIBRARY
and by LISTENING to people
and he spoke
with zero accent
I gotta lotta reasons
to respect my father

But he abused me
when he shoulda been
protecting me

and my mom was complicit
just like yours was.

And what I’m doing in my life is
healing.
I’m not interested in “coping.”
I’m going for HEALING.

So when you excuse your father
and say HE had a hard life—
that fits right in with
my excuses for my father.

I’m determined not to go
AROUND
my anger
but THROUGH it.
I gotta FEEL it
before I can let it go.
I gotta know what I’m letting go of.

My dad, too,
was brought up wrong
and painfully
and with reasons
why he later abused me.

And I’ll get to the place where
I forgive him.

But I’m not there yet.

My feelings of anger
are sealed off
& I gotta open that wound
& clean it out
so I can heal

So hearing your excuses for your
father
without having heard
your anger at your father
does not serve me
in my healing

You run your life any way
you want to
You’re my friend
and it’s not up to me to
“Psycholize” you or
try to figure you out
or judge you.

All I know’s what I hear from you.
I’m not even claiming
that what I hear
is actually what you said.

I’m just saying
it doesn’t serve me
on MY path
to hear you excusing your dad
or minimizing what he did to you.

or to hear your reverence
for your mom
who didn’t protect you.

So all this’s got me thinking...
do I really
need to go through the anger?
Do I really HAVE anger?
Or is it just solid

unmitigated
cold
thorough
fear?

Well,
my 2 main top teacher/mentors
Judy & el Ralphp
both say yep
I need to feel the anger
and yes it’s there

So…and my OWN sense of it
is that
gee it’d sure be convenient
if that weren’t the case

but it looks like it is.

MV

By Kathy A.
Take Care!
By Susan Stocker, LPC

Susan Stocker’s book, The Many Faces of PTSD, is reviewed in this issue.

I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of articles which suggest bubble baths and candles as ways to take care of ourselves. I think we’re all fairly certain that as pleasant as bubble baths and candles are, they are not the answer to better self-care. I want to suggest two options which I know offer more balm and more long-lasting effects: time alone in our own heads and positive self-talk.

Time alone in our own heads is one thing many of us have never had much of and/or have learned to fear. Actually, time spent meditating, sitting still, being in silence, and sitting or lying with a warm blanket over our feet is one of the most self-nourishing things we can do.

Probably you are thinking, “I don’t know how to meditate.” Yes, you do. You just don’t realize that what you instinctively crave is actually meditation. Meditation is sitting still and thinking about absolutely nothing. Meditation is letting your mind run free. You may be imagining that if you let your mind run free, you’ll end up in a panic attack. Truly, you won’t. Simply let your mind go wherever it will, and as often as necessary say to yourself, “Breathe.” The more anxious we are, the more shallow our breath.

So, you take a deep breath from your tummy, and oxygen gets to your brain, and you just keep concentrating on breathing. Soon you’re feeling stronger and more stable. Then you let your mind run free, and if you start feeling anxious, you start taking deep breaths. This is the cycle of meditation. The more you do it, the more time is spent on letting your mind run free and the less time is spent on needing to control your breathing. Breathing becomes normal and your “default” setting. In the beginning you may need to remind yourself fifty times in five minutes to breathe. Later on you will need to remind yourself five times in fifty minutes to breathe.

Letting your mind run free is like letting a trapped or corralled horse run free. It is a way to run off the pent-up tension. It is a way to stretch. It is a way to be who we are in our core, and a way to fall back in love with life.

Secondly, we are experts at self-criticism and self-condemnation. The negative chatter in our heads has got to quiet down so we can hear the divine, true words which tell us that we are each special and individual and meant to be heard on this earth so we can accomplish and understand and learn things which will serve us as spiritual beings. I don’t know about you, but I awaken in the middle of the night and my heart is pounding and I revisit everything I’ve done during the day which might not have been perfect.

Recently, and I’m sixty-four and a therapist, I have started telling myself to quit it. There is a whole world out there willing to beat up on me. I don’t have to do it. And I certainly don’t have to do it in the middle of the night. “Go back to sleep, sleep in peace, and know that there has rarely been a moment in your life when you have not done the best you knew how to do.” The Buddhists have a saying: “If you can look back on the last year of your life and not feel shame or guilt, you haven’t grown.”

Let’s just keep growing and learning and stretching. And, please, let’s make a pact with each other that we will start treating ourselves with the kindness and respect and grace with which we would unthinkingly and absolutely treat each other.

Time alone in our own heads and kind, tender self-talk . . . and while we’re at it we could take a bubble bath by candle-light.

The sisterhood is strong!
Letter to My Younger Self

By MJ

Dear Mar, I see you sitting alone in the park on a blanket. This is your favorite place to come and relax. I know you like it there because when you leave you always feel refreshed. Sometimes you journal and sometimes you draw. Once in awhile you just gaze across the field at the summer wild flowers and watch the willow trees sway into the wind before you drift off into a blissful sleep. At times you dream of the old Giant Willow and how the tall branches and swaying leaves hid you from the dark shadow man with no face.

You always seem to bring your favorite blue bag with the number 87 printed on it. It's always packed full of more things than you could ever use in one day at the park. The items in your bag include: a special memory journal, colored pens, pencils, charcoal pencils, drawing tablets, your Ipod with all types of music as well as the many meds you might need if a journaling session brings back an unpleasant memory.

I know you feel like your journaling serves no purpose and sometimes makes you hurt worse inside. Often the entries remind you of a time when you were hurt as a child by the ones that should have protected you. Even though journaling is hard and the thoughts are unpleasant they are bringing healing to you. The colors you use are one of your tools to freedom. Each time you use red it seems to be for a hurtful memory and each time you use green you are writing about growth. Purple is for when you are angry and that's ok to write about too. Please keep writing until you feel peace inside. There are many other colors and in time you will know what each one stands for in your pictures and writing.

Your choice of music is not usually slow or even comforting. A lot of times it is music that just plain makes you feel inside. Sometimes it's orchestra music and sometimes it's the hardest rock with the harshest lyrics. I would like to tell you that even though cutting brings you instant relief, that later on in life you will realize that there are more productive ways to handle your pain.

You need to know that you do not have to relive all of these bad things you have experienced as a child to live a productive life now. You do not have to feel the pain again and it does get better. Your drawings will someday be a gift to help another child that needs hope. Your colored journaling entries will be a shining spot in the darkness for children as well as hurting woman who have suffered sexual abuse. I want you to know that it's ok to speak and be heard. It's ok to be strong and courageous. You are beautiful and you are special just the way you are. No one can ever take away your inner beauty or your unique talents and gifts.

Your "Old Willow Tree" stands firm today and still sways in the wind. Its branches hold all your secrets that you continue to tell them and they still sway slowly as the leaves sing a song of sadness as well as healing. Just as the leaves change colors through the seasons so will your journaling entries and your life experiences. Don't be afraid to accept new seasons and let people see the real you. One day all the pieces to your life puzzle will be complete. Then you will see there is safety beyond the branches of your Willow Tree.

***Love, Your Heart***

Dealing with Anger
– or Not

By Alicia F.

It took a lot of "trial and error" for me to come to an understanding that I wasn't the only person with anger conquering my life. I wasn't the only one abandoned and left alone. I wasn't the only one who'd been raped and left to live and tell about it with what voice that I had left. I wasn't the only 12 year old child out there who'd raised my siblings and had the spirit of a woman. My spirit was much too old for the little girl it was stuck with. Anger for all my shortcomings seemed to rule my entire world; leading it around by the threads that barely held it together.

Time and time again I've been dropped to my knees by the hard stuff that life tends to dish out. Do I deal with it? Well, I do now. I didn't used to, though. I learned when I was down on my knees in self-afflicting misery and anger, and had nowhere to look but up...there's a Higher Power. Wow!

No matter what you see religion as...we all have God and it turns out that He's up there listening. I had the answers all along to the anger, guilt and sadness that lived my life for me. All I had needed to do this whole time was look UP!

I finally realized it when I too looked up, after blowing up on a relative and finding myself literally screaming toward the sky. It started with the words "GOOD GRIEF!" But who was I screaming at?

That's when I knew I had been subconsciously screaming at a God. Imagine how dumb I felt, after all these years of lifestyle-crippling grief and anger. This deadly concoction could've killed me.

Now? I have a life to live, and it's not life living me instead. I have to purge myself of it, to be rid of it, and not allow anger purging me instead.

Say the things that make you angry out loud. Someone IS listening.
The Magic Wand: It Does Exist!

By Kate Edwin

Chances are you have heard this phrase at least once from a professional in your time in treatment, "I wish I had a magic wand, but I don't." The common reaction is, well why the heck not, followed by a sinking in the pit of your stomach and sometimes with an anger chaser.

I have been in some form of mental health treatment for 10 years now. Only in the last 4 or so have I received the correct diagnosis. I have gone through over 3 dozen psychiatric medications, some more then once or twice, I have been through, CBT, psychoanalysis, counseling, the Trauma Model, Inpatient, outpatient, intensive outpatient, partial and day treatment programs. I have been through who knows how many therapist, counselors, case workers, case managers, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health techs, nurses, nurse practitioners, art therapists, occupational therapists and grief counselors. I also now hold a BA in Art and Psychology, and a certification as a Peer Support Specialist. Which one of these experiences stood out? None of them. Nothing "really" helped, nothing gave any sense of hope for the future, or of a skill that could actually be useful until I met a man who's favorite activity is teaching people how to blow bubbles. This psychologist had years before I met him, found the key to living with struggles. That key? That thing I now fully and truly believe BE THAT magic wand? Mindfulness.

With its roots in the earliest of ancient eastern cultures, mindfulness is about as far from "new" age as you can get. Sure it's been spiffed up and pared down to be used specifically with different diagnoses and situations, but all in all this is the only treatment that is 100% natural. And quite possibly the only thing in existence that is free of adverse effects and is impossible to overdose on. Mindfulness is at its very basic level, an awareness of being.

Mindfulness will NOT: cure an illness, fix your problems, stop your symptoms, tell you how to manage relationships, make things warm and fuzzy or make you happy.

So why have I come to the conclusion that mindfulness is this big magical dream come true if it won't fix anything or make it better? Because of the next list, what mindfulness CAN do: get you through any crisis, let you experience any emotion no matter how intense and come out ok on the other side, decrease the length of time an emotion lasts, help you focus on things other than triggers or problems, help you see what is rather than what you feel or think how things are, lets you experience negative situations and be OK, and it can stop those rambling, repeating tapes in your head. It can make trauma and all its effects bearable.

I adamantly believe Mindfulness can help any one of the six and a half billion people on this planet get through absolutely anything and come out the other side. Of course it can't cure cancer or stop an earthquake, but it can prevent people from having negative effects from those events and be able to like their life in spite of it.

Isn't that what we all really want? Be honest, don't you just want to live your life? Being free to do what you wish, no matter how other people think you should be doing it?

Sure, you will, after all, still have to do the very hard work of healing trauma. And Mindfulness doesn't come to you overnight either; it takes effort and practice, dedication and time.

But with Mindfulness, you can recover more quickly from a therapy session or a flashback, deal with switching and memory troubles with more ease and be able to appreciate the everyday, little things that can bring a smile to your face and peace to your soul.

Artist's Statement

...and one night in a dream, I came across a landscape. On the foreground I saw a flower. I thought it was for me. As I approached this flower, I knew it was just for me to hold. It was shown to me to pass along to others, to help them and show them that I care.

Art & Wording by Ellen A. © 2010 Dissociative Mind Art
Before I went for treatment this past summer, I would have told you that I didn’t get angry (except at myself of course).

But when I went to River Oaks I had to deal with the memories related to my abuse and after sharing with one of my therapists, he gave me a homework assignment to write an anger letter to my family and the cult who were responsible for this act. At the time I said “…but I’m not angry, and if I get angry then that makes me no better than my family.” (i.e. my abusers.)

He explained to me the difference between anger and rage and that what my family did was criminal and were acts of rage not anger. He went on to reiterate the fact the anger is an emotion, and like all other emotions they aren’t good or bad or right or wrong. And that getting angry is part of a healthy range of emotions, when expressed in constructive ways.

So I took a chance and did my homework assignment and wrote the anger letter to my family and the cult, which felt amazing, but at the same time out. And guess what—no one got hurt!

After that my Dr. suggested that I do something with it in Psychodrama and so I read it to the group, but it wasn’t really all that helpful to tell you the truth. So I thought about a way that I could get the anger out of my body in a non-violent way and came up with the idea (with the help of my therapist) of throwing couch balls at a cloth while making anger statements, (again as part of psychodrama.)

This time I started out being terrified and ended up really getting into it and got my whole body into it, and let me tell you I slept better that night than I ever have in my life. Plus I wasn’t in any physical pain that night, (which is huge for me). It was amazing how true it is that we do store emotions in our bodies.

The other thing I found incredibly helpful was splatter painting. Now you’re talking to someone who had never done art before going to treatment and I did this medium the most while I was in New Orleans, and I continued it upon returning back to Canada.

I have two pieces that represent anger for me and once again it felt amazing for me just to have the freedom and know that I am safe and not going to get hurt or be judged by splattering paint on a piece of paper or canvas. I would encourage everybody to give this a try.

**BOOKS**

**Ordinary Recovery: Mindfulness, Addiction, and the Path of Lifelong Sobriety.**

"Stop. Breathe. Look deeply. Express gratitude. Tell someone." Those are the basics, writes William Alexander, who teaches meditation and leads workshops at the Hazelden Foundation in Minnesota. This book is a revised version of his earlier book, "Cool Water." Essentially, he blends Buddhism and addiction recovery, with personal suggestions to guide individuals toward their own inner light. One such suggestion is to build a personal "cathedral," perhaps with a candle, incense, photos of loved ones, or the Higher Power of your personal beliefs. Alexander quotes Thomas Merton and Zen Buddhist philosophy liberally, as he also describes his own difficult journey of recovery through the embrace of a spiritual outlook. He does not accept the sometimes-judgmental approach of AA, which identifies the addicted person as "sick" i.e., "wrong or bad." Also he suggests that AA is both selfless and selfish at the same time...as we all may be, in recovery: "In serving you, I serve myself," he writes. "In serving myself, I serve you. It is neither selfless nor selfless. It is a whole new way of being..."

**Many Faces of PTSD: Does Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Have a Grip on Your Life?**

Susan Stocker tells the stories of twelve different PTSD cases in an intimate, personal style. Short on theory, long on human interest, through each example she describes her own evolution as a therapist dealing with trauma-damaged clients. What she herself learns about PTSD, she passes along to her readers. Short, pithy quotations punctuate the chapters with sound advice for others who either have PTSD themselves, or love someone who does.

For example: "I may feel like I'm in crisis. I am, in fact, simply experiencing my emotions. I have no need to fear my own emotional makeup," and "When you shut people out so they can't hurt you, no one can help you, either."

Her strongest admonition is to not judge or compare oneself with others. Stocker explains that individuals are affected by trauma impact on brain and body in very different ways. While one person may remain resilient despite severe trauma, another may become very fragile. This doesn't mean the fragile person is bad, or weak. Each person is born with a specific chemistry. Some react to a similar environment one way, some another.

This is not a book of "success stories." It's a book of realities, for both Susan and her clients—an interesting look at a complex topic.
THANKS EVERYONE for helping keep MV useful for all who have suffered trauma and past abuse. It is YOUR words and artwork that make MV such a great tool for recovery. Please keep up the good work! Art, poetry, articles, comments...we love it all! Blessings & Good Holidays to you from Lynn W. & MV.

FEBRUARY 2011

APRIL 2011

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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