

Healing Companions

by

Sam Ruck

Note: I want to encourage you to jump ahead and read Chapter 6: Engaging "Madness" first. We live in a frenetic society, and I accept that reality. Chapter 6 is the practical chapter how I walked with my wife through all the stuff that resulted from her trauma and dissociation. If after reading that chapter, you found my suggestions helpful and beneficial, then you may have more interest in the other chapters which pave the road to chapter 6. If not, I wish you the best as you seek to walk with your own loved one in a manner that is most healing to both of you.

Foreword:

I was barely 21 years old when I got married. Thirty four years later, my wife and I tell each other we grew up together. And in so many ways we really have. But things have never been easy for us. Physical intimacy has always been a struggle for us, but it wasn't until 20 years into our marriage, when my wife finally felt safe enough to grapple with her early childhood trauma, that we learned the root of many of our struggles.

In this book, I hope to share my side of our healing journey together. I'm not a therapist, but as her husband, I'm what attachment theory would call my wife's primary attachment figure. But before I could fully assume that role I had to address a number of issues to become the healing companion she needed as we faced the fallout of that early trauma: extreme mental states from severe dissociation. We had a little help on the way, but never as much as I wished. My wife saw an alternative counselor for a number of years while I was dealing with my own issues and learning how to become a better companion for her on this journey. And our son who was 17 years old when the signs of her trauma first erupted into our family continues to be a source of help and validation for her.

Even though we never used psychiatric drugs during our healing journey, I'm not suggesting that for everyone. If used judiciously while understanding the many side effects they can cause the longer they are used, they may be of value as long as one doesn't expect them to heal the sufferer of any mental 'illnesses' (more on that later).

So, what would I propose after 15 years of walking with my wife on this journey? I would love to see a greater collaboration between therapists, sufferers and the primary attachment figures of the sufferers, which would be the spouses, significant others and families. We are the only ones who can be there 24/7 when our loved ones need us. And, if we cultivate a relationship with our loved ones that is based on respecting their agency, humanity and how they are experiencing their trauma and its effects, we will have access to help them in a way that no one else can possibly replicate.

Thus, I would love to see more of us trained and empowered to be that healing companion our loved ones desperately need. The things our loved ones experience can be scary for both them and us the first time they happen: they were for me repeatedly. But as I engaged my wife through each of her experiences, those 'scary' things became normal and almost routine, and that's when I began to learn strategies to help her through them. That's when she began to experience the deep healing she desperately needed.

So, in this book, I hope to share some of my struggles and failures but also some of our many successes as I learned to become the good healing companion my wife needed. It's been one of the hardest things I've ever done, and yet, I hope I'm a better man for having chosen to walk in this with her. Moreover, we've grown closer because we've gone through it together. We've seen some beautiful and deep healing and growth in both of us because we chose to take the journey together.

Sam

Author, <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/>

Reading Key:

In this book you will find me referring to my wife in multiple ways. Because dissociative identity disorder can be a little confusing to those on the outside, in an effort to reduce the confusion, I've decided to give you a small guide to help.

Ka'ryn Marie. My 'greater wife'. She is the woman I married. She is the composite of all the others...

Ka'ryn. My greater wife's host: the public persona most people see. The 'alter' who sees me as her husband. The one who does the majority of interaction with people outside of me, our son, and previously her counselor. Sometimes I refer to her simply as my wife because that is the relationship she and I share.

Allie, K.A., Amy, Shellie, Sophia, Tina and Jenny are all various 'alters' of my greater wife. I may also refer to them as 'alters', parts, and even 'voices' but often simply as girls...because the last term is how they prefer me to treat them. If you visited my blog, you would rarely ever see the words 'alters' or 'parts' because the girls find them offensive, but in this book I have decided to use the common terms to reduce confusion.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Life Before	p.6
Chapter 2: Chaos Erupts	p.11
Chapter 3: Becoming a Good Healing Companion	p.24
Adjusting our Expectations	
Choosing our "Enemy"	
Sex	
What Role Would I Take in the Healing Journey?	
Agency	
Learning to Lead and "Coax" (if needed)	
Humility	
Support Network	
Our Inherent Humanity	
Goal of the Healing Journey	
Coping with Pain	
Becoming Educated	
The Great, Mental Health Debate	
Chapter 4: Attachment Lifestyle	p.56
Myth of Independence	
Proximity Maintenance	
Affect Regulation	
Self Soothing	
Internal Working Model (IWM)	
Chapter 5: Trauma and Dissociation	p.76
Mental Trauma	
Dissociation	
Validate and Turn	
Neural Plasticity	
Chapter 6: Engaging "Madness"	p.88
Engaging "Psychosis"	
—The Rip Van Winkle Effect	
Engaging "Delusions"	
Engaging "Paranoia"	

Engaging Voices

Engaging Extreme States

- 1) Panic Attacks, Flashbacks, Anxiety Attacks and Triggers
—Enter Proximity Maintenance, Safe Haven, and Affect Regulation
- 2) Eating "disorders", Body "dysmorphia", Gender "dysphoria"
- 3) Self Injury
- 4) Comatose Episodes
- 5) Mini Seizures

Engaging Lying

Conclusion	p.129
Bibliography	p.130
Appendix A	p.136

Chapter 1: Life Before

"Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a lovely princess...and a knight in shining armor...and they lived happily ever after..." There is a part of me, like so many of us, who is still dreaming of and chasing that romantic fairytale many of us grew up reading. But what too few of those fairytales told us were the years of battles and struggles that occur for some characters in these stories to reach the 'happily-ever-after' endings which are encapsulated by the ellipses.

I grew up the middle child of 5 siblings. I had a mostly happy but rather unremarkable childhood. It wasn't until much later that I realized that 'happy but unremarkable' was a wonderful gift that my parents gave me. I have fond memories of my mother playing the piano throughout my childhood as she loudly sang and filled my childhood home with song and music. I remember her reading nursery rhymes and Bible bedtime stories to me and my younger brother many nights before we went to bed. I remember her infectious laughter and playful silliness. And though my father wasn't emotionally expressive, I came to appreciate the fact that he was always around, making our childhood home a place where we could invite friends over and do fun things around the 5 acres we called home. He would stay up Friday nights with us kids as we grew older and watch the horrible B-rated movies which Hoolihan and Big Chuck¹ aired as we laughed at them and with them. He quietly lived the Christian faith about which he rarely talked.

It wasn't a perfect childhood. Is there such a thing? And sure I had some middle-child issues, but I didn't realize until much later that my parents gave me something special that would prepare me for my part of our fairytale journey. John Bowlby, famed attachment therapist, would say I was 'securely attached'² in a way that so many people in our broken and hurting world never know. Secure attachment isn't a magic pill or bullet. It doesn't ward off all evil or slay all dragons: it's just a starting place that helps us interpret the world around us and see things through a lens of the love, security and confidence I knew as a child. Thanks, Mom and Dad!

As I grew up and entered high school and then college, I did well in my studies and graduated at the top of my classes. I had plenty of friends and was even elected as

a class officer in my senior year, but I was still, kind of, a loner, doing my own thing and finding my own way. I always thought of myself as walking to the beat of a different drummer than those around me.

It was at that time my mom took me and my two younger siblings to a very conservative, evangelical church, and it shaped the rest of my life for better, and sadly for worse, as well. Despite the caricatures we read about in our country and its current culture wars religious conservatives are engaging in, I found some deeply shaping principles for my life. I was taught things like The Golden Rule³ where we are commanded above all else to love others just the way we want to be loved and treated. I was taught to sacrificially love the people in my life, even above my own desires and needs⁴. There were principles about using one's strengths for the benefit of those who were hurt and broken⁵. I was taught to take a long perspective on life: that the now and immediate shouldn't overrule the path to attain the 'happily ever after' ending no matter how long it took to reach⁶. And I was taught there is no such thing as an 'other': we are all made in our Creator's image, and thus there are no enemies, no other 'tribes', no 'other' people, or classes or genders: we are all foundationally the same: humans in our Creator's image⁷. I can't claim to love an invisible God if I can't love the visible people all around me⁸. And thus, absolutely everyone deserves my respect and love, period, mic drop.

I know religious conservatives in our culture can be a trigger and turn off to many people: I truly am sorry for the weapon religion has become to cudgel others into submission instead of calling us to love and serve those with whom we disagree. I truly apologize if that is the only kind of religion you, my reader, have ever been subjected to. I promise this won't be a 'religious' book, but I do hope it is a book in which The Golden Rule of loving others like we want to be loved will be seen on each and every page of our fairytale journey.

As I continued in my college career I was reacquainted with a young lady I had met through our church denomination when she transferred to the little college I was attending. She had this 'odd' idea that she couldn't speak to anyone unless 'properly' introduced, and so I became her de facto best friend as I tried to introduce her to as many people as I knew on our small campus. And as our friendship grew because of my 'duties' to introduce her to others, we began to date each other.

But to her chagrin, even to this day, I wasn't ready for marriage, and I found myself getting too serious with her. Therefore, I broke off the relationship in the spring of my sophomore year in college. We parted and went our separate ways: her to spend the summer in India, and me to spend mine in China. When I got back, I severed a long-term penpal relationship I had with another young lady after a disastrous weekend with her and her family.

That fall of my junior year in college my future wife and my paths were reunited by outside circumstances, and we restarted our friendship. In the early spring of 1988 we began dating again...and 3 weeks later I told her, "I love you" on Valentine's Day. It's still a source of mirth because she knew when she heard those words from my lips, words I had never said to any other woman, that a marriage proposal wouldn't be far off. And yet for her part on that Valentine's Day she gave me the dreaded 'friend' card as she played it safe. A couple weeks later I did propose to her, and three months later she and I were married after I had barely turned 21.

But our wedding wasn't the start of the 'happily ever after' portion of our fairytale. No, it was the start of a prolonged ellipsis that included a dichotomy. We were inseparable in many ways, and yet the relationship was full of trials and struggles which neither of us understood for more than 20 years. In many ways we had a very close relationship. We did nearly everything together. We tell each other that we 'grew up together' as we laugh at how young we look in the pictures of our first years together. We were economically poor, so we bought a fixer-upper house in the little Midwestern town where I was born and raised. I poured years of love into it as I restored it. Meanwhile, she covered the walls and furniture with decorations she lovingly handmade. I still prefer many of her handmade works of art (*which are*

truly beautiful) even though we can afford other things now. They are a symbol of the love we both poured into our house to make it a home. We were a team: and others have commented on the inviting, little home we have made together.

We also welcomed a son into our lives a few years after we were married. We were fortunate enough that my wife could stop working the day she delivered him in the hospital. But we also did it by making sacrifices that many people consider basic 'necessities' in American life. However, when it came time to put him in preschool, I lost my job temporarily. So, my wife thought she could surely teach preschool to our child.

And that began our journey through homeschooling. My wife is a genius, literally. She has taken the test to join the Mensa group⁹ (*for really smart people*) many times: she always passes. She has a nearly photographic memory when it comes to songs and other things she finds interesting. And she reads, voraciously, like entire libraries of books. She jokes that they lose money on her *Kindle Unlimited*¹⁰ subscription as she reads multiple hundreds of books every year.

And so, she put all that intelligence and love for our son into motion to give our son a classical education for the next 13 years of his life. She taught him Latin, logic, rhetoric, college prep and more. I helped where I could by writing custom curricula and teaching him the Koine Greek I had learned in college. We did family field trips and vacations to further his education. It was a family effort, and the experience produced many happy memories as we shared the journey together. It was another thing in our 'fairytale journey' that I didn't realize our fortune until much later. Our son confessed he never encountered a teacher more difficult than his mother until he started his masters and then doctoral program at an elite university outside Boston.

On the outside, to others, many people thought we were living that fairytale, happily-ever-after life. But inside the bedroom walls of our marriage things were dramatically different: we struggled with physical intimacy. It was always a source of stress and tension. I had saved myself for my wife: she is literally the one and

only woman with whom I've ever been physically intimate. And my wife had saved herself for me...and yet someone, when she had been a mere toddler, had taken from her what no one has a right to take from any child. She had told me about the abuse, but I naively thought it didn't matter. It certainly didn't matter to me, but it took us both 20 years of marriage before we realized that the superficial veneer my wife kept was hiding a virtual hurricane of emotional upheaval from those early, traumatic childhood experiences. To compound the trauma was the emotionally dysfunctional and at times abusive and neglectful parenting she had received because both of her parents were trauma victims in their own right. Thus, they never gave my wife the love and support she so desperately needed for a normal childhood let alone what she needed to heal after the molestation she suffered at the hands of a neighbor boy.

And so, in my desperation to find our 'happily ever after' I read dozens of marriage books, and I scoured the wisdom literature of the Christians. I even wrote my own bible study that radically changed the way I viewed how men and women, husbands and wives, should relate¹¹. Whenever I would talk with my wife about getting help for our bedroom woes, she would tell me I was the only one with a problem, sigh. And so I did the only thing I could do: I worked upon myself. I tried to become the best man and husband I could possibly be...until the day my wife could no longer say I was the problem. And that day finally came about 15 years ago, when she was ready and able to admit that she needed to deal with the after effects of her childhood abuse.

Chapter 2: Chaos Erupts

So, where do we go from here? Neither of our families had any known history of mental health issues (*later we were to realize both sides were simply good about hiding these issues and pretending all was well...*). Moreover, we didn't have insurance that would cover counseling sessions. And we definitely weren't financially secure enough to pay for them ourselves. So, that severely limited our options.

I did some searches on the internet, and somehow I found a lady who practiced an alternative, religiously-based form of 'counseling' called theophostics¹ as a layperson, free ministry. She lived about 45 minutes from our home. My wife didn't feel comfortable going to see this woman on her own to share her own deeply intimate struggles yet, so I offered to see the woman to help me deal with an issue I was struggling with. I was regularly 'triggered' (*experienced extreme reactions*) any time my wife cried.

Because the woman met people in her own home, she preferred not to see men on their own. So my wife came along and was able to watch how the woman interacted with me. I saw this woman for about 2 months, and she was able to help me find the memory to which my extreme reactions to my wife's crying were connected. Once I recognized the source of these extreme reactions, I was no longer triggered (*which was a good thing as our journey would imminently include a lot of crying!*). I felt I had accomplished what I needed with this woman, and my wife said she was willing to continue seeing the woman on her own for the issues connected to her childhood abuse.

A few months later my wife got lost going to her weekly counseling session: not just 'lost' but she 'found herself' somewhere totally different than where the counseling session was located. The woman, who had a history of helping another woman with DID², suggested my wife might be experiencing the same. When my wife came home, she said, "Honey, I might have DID." DID is shorthand for dissociative identity disorder emphasizing the place of trauma and dissociation in the life of the sufferer. It's the updated name for multiple personality disorder. For me it was an eureka moment³: for 20 years we had struggled in the bedroom for unknown

reasons: now we finally had a name. Now, maybe, we could figure out how to help things get better.

And yet, things would get much, much more difficult before they began to get better. I remember a short time after her diagnosis crying, wailing, snot running down my face as I fell on my knees despondently for a straight week. The realization of what my wife's diagnosis of DID would mean for our relationship began to sink in. Things had finally started to get better in our bedroom and elsewhere right before she started her counseling sessions, but now it felt like that was slipping away as we faced the dragon of her childhood trauma and dissociation. Yes, we finally had a starting place, but that was just the first, tiniest step of the journey.

As my wife continued to go to her weekly counseling sessions, she began to explore the childhood trauma she had ignored and kept hidden for four decades. Meanwhile at home, I tried to support her in whatever ways she would allow. Very quickly I learned not to pry her for information she wasn't ready to share, but with things she did share, I had to be a trustworthy confidant.

Here's the reason: our culture caricatures people who struggle with mental health issues. Collectively we say they are crazy. We think they are dangerous. We find them upsetting when they don't act in 'acceptable' ways. And my wife didn't want to be treated like that by others. Even though, for 15 years, people have repeatedly voiced their desire to hear my wife's perspective of our healing journey, and I have begged her to do so, she just wants to be herself. She doesn't want to be the crazy woman at church or with her friends from whom mothers clutch their children in case she does something unexpected. And so I have tried to honor her desire the best I can, but it's a 'dance' because I have needed and wanted support for myself. I'll share later how we found a compromise.

But my wife also wanted to hide her diagnosis from our son who would be entering his senior year of high school that fall as we continued to homeschool him. That was a very difficult request to honor, but beyond that, it was impracticable. We live in a

small house, and he was always at home. He wasn't nearly as naive as she seemed to think he was, and he figured a lot out on his own.

And so that first summer after my wife started her counseling sessions, she and I began to walk the healing journey together, just like we had learned to do with our son when we homeschooled him as a family. She began to tell me about the voices she had started to hear since going to counseling. I asked her what they said. She learned to listen to them, and then repeat what they said to me. And then I would respond in a way to engage and validate the voices. It was kind of like having a conversation with someone on the phone but someone else was holding the phone and relating the other person's responses back to me.

The first voice seemed to be that of a little girl. Since I was trying to engage this voice, I decided to do things that might interest a little girl. I began to play some of the childhood games we still had at our house from our son's childhood with my wife. Sometimes our son would join us. I also watched a number of children's shows with my wife like *My Little Pony*⁴ and *Jem and the Holograms*⁵. But I think I really connected with this voice the time I suggested we have a 'girls party' and I allowed her to do my face with makeup. I remember seeing my wife's face transform as the little girl inside came out and delightedly put makeup on my face.

It wasn't long after that party, after months of validating and engaging that voice, near the end of that first summer on our healing journey together, when the voice in my wife's head decided to come out and engage me directly. I had heard about various 'parts' when a person has DID, but this voice didn't feel safe to tell me her name when she introduced herself. For my part I refused to say 'hey, you' and so I gave her a name based on my incorrect understanding of my wife's DID. But she loved the name I'd given her and embraced it as her own even later when she told me her original name: Amy.

When Amy first came out, however, my wife, Ka'ryn, 'disappeared'. Amy took over with a voice and demeanor change, but more than that, Ka'ryn lost all track of time. She went 'inside' and that was when we began to learn about dissociation. We had

unknowingly 'uncorked the genie' and once out, Amy didn't ever want to go back inside and be trapped there again! She had never had the love of her own parents, and she quickly asked me if I would be for her that loving daddy figure she had never known. We had opened Pandora's Box⁶, and the chaos was about to begin!

When Amy, and a little bit later, Sophia first came out, I had already been validating and engaging them for months. My wife liked how I was treating these little girls, and so she requested that I not read anything about DID. She was concerned that I would read something, and it would change the way I was engaging her and the little girls on our healing journey (*yes, this is irony at its best as I'm now writing a book...but the point is still valid: let your spouse or loved one be the final authority on how you interact with her on the healing journey, not me and this or any other book!*). I honored that request for the first two or three years of our journey. I allowed my wife (all the voices and 'parts') to be my teacher. I learned to listen to her as we tried different things to help her and the other parts heal and connect.

I'd like to mention one other thing before I continue with the progression of our story. Like I said, it was simply untenable for my wife to hide what was going on from our son. He was a senior in high school, not an unaware little child. And as the little girls ("alters") started to come outside and be with me, they were loud. We have a little house, and he could hear the voice changes. And so I began to coach him to engage the little girls indirectly, proving himself to be a safe person just as I had done with them. He began to offer to play little-kid games with his 'mother.' He began to watch little-kid movies and shows with his 'mother', too. And, finally, on a family vacation to Gatlinburg that December, Amy couldn't contain herself as she leapt out to introduce herself to our son.

Bringing our son into the healing journey turned out to be a key factor for our healing journey on a number of levels. First it reunited our family so we could face this together rather than trying to keep her struggles hidden. Yes, our son was almost an adult, but too often I've seen people try to hide the 'ugly' things in life from their children rather than helping them learn how to compassionately help one

another in our families. It's no wonder so many adults seem unable to cope with a loved one's mental distress when we are told to hide it from our children.

But our son's presence on the healing journey also provided his mother an aspect of healing that I was incapable of providing her on my own. These other parts of his mother responded and interacted with him in a very different way than they did with me. They had missed so much of the formative interactions they would have received with peers during childhood, and, though a young adult, they often interacted with him as an older sibling.

Lastly before I return to the story of our journey, my wife and I did shield our son from the hardest aspects of the healing journey. She was careful to be available to him 'as his mother' even when the little girl 'alters' did not give me the same consideration to be 'with my wife'. And as I walked with my wife through many of the extreme states she experienced, I don't believe my son did the same. We never pushed him to do more than he willingly felt comfortable doing.

Now, I'm not quite sure how to describe the next 5 years that took place in our journey. In the space of those 5 years, 5 more voices, turned "alters", decided to come out and engage me directly after I had proven to each one to be a safe and validating person. My wife tells me that she felt like she had lost her life as these voices 'took over' and she was trapped inside whenever they were out with me. These voices, turned "alters", each told me she simply wanted to be treated like a normal girl and loved for herself but distinctly loved from my greater wife's host, Ka'ryn. And as each one came out, she had a voracious desire to discover all the things she had missed while trapped inside my wife's head for the last 4 decades of life!

For my part, I often visualized myself as the man in the circus who spins plates on top of little sticks as he runs back and forth between the plates to speed the plate back up before it crashes to the ground: one, two, three, four, five, six, and finally seven plates began to spin in my life over the course of five years as now 6 voices came out and desperately wanted (or needed) to make a life with me and experience

the love and life and relationship each had missed while trapped inside! Meanwhile, I was still working through many, many of my own issues, and yet each of these voices expected me to form a relationship with her as well. It was exhausting and overwhelming, and about each time we got the 'group' settled (*my wife learning to live with and talk with the newest voice to join us outside*) and functioning smoothly, another voice would make the transition outside and we'd have to start the process over again, sigh.

I determined from the start never to play favorites between the various voices/"alters"/parts of my wife. Each time I left for work, I insisted that I tell each girl goodbye and 'I love you' in the way she preferred. That quickly taught each girl how to switch in and out and give control to the others. Most learned quickly, but Tina (voice number 6) took more than a year. And so we had a little assembly line as I left for work each afternoon as one by one, each girl would 'jump' outside and I would tell her, 'goodbye, I love you' and then I would engage her briefly and kiss her goodbye the way she preferred, whether with butterfly kisses, rubbing noses or on the lips. Then I would do the same when I got home from work that evening.

That first year, after Amy broke the ice, Sophia also came outside. Sophia fronted as a barely understandable toddler who hardly had any motor skills and was continuously crying from the abuse she had suffered 40 years previously. The next year Alexandra came out, the defender of the group, sullen and hating me for every wrong I'd committed in our 20+ years of marriage, sigh. A while later Shellie, the little sister of Alexandra who blamed herself for every ill in our lives, came out, followed on her heels by K.A. the 'inside mother' to Amy. And then finally, we thought, Tina arrived: terrified of everything. Six voices, turned "alters" who just needed to be seen and loved as typical girls. They joined my life and were desperate for the affection and safety of a relationship they had never experienced.

But making the transition from 'inside voice' to 'alter' isn't a simple process. Each of the girls had largely missed the growing up process of learning to use one's body. Moreover, they still saw themselves as a little girl, now trapped in my wife's adult

body. And to boot, they didn't know how to work this body. And thus for the next 5 years, my wife's body was black and blue from constant mishaps.

Amy and Sophia were the worst as they'd get in a hurry and fall down, or up, the stairs repeatedly. And at nights if one had to go to the restroom, she didn't carefully feel her way through the pitch-dark bedroom but just plowed into the furniture as she headed to the bathroom to add more bruises to arms and legs. One time Alexandra (now Allie) was in the local drugstore with me, and for no apparent reason other than she had high heels on, she simply fell over and crashed into the display and nearly broke her arm! Tina did the same thing when we were on a cruise one time. My wife and I were dressed up for a formal night: all the men and women on the ship were dressed up in their best. Tina came out to see all the pretty people and promptly fell flat on her face. Then she fled back inside as I helped my embarrassed and confused wife back upright again. There were times when my wife's body had so many bruises on it that I wondered if anyone would notice and accuse me of spousal abuse.

For my part, it was unnerving and frightening how many times Ka'ryn would call me at work to tell me Sophia or Amy had fallen again. "Are you hurt? Are you ok?" Yes, she was ok, but she was definitely hurt and banged up, again, sigh.

Driving the car was another particular cause for concern: what if one of the little girls came out and didn't know how to drive or got scared in bad traffic? Amy called me one time as she was in rush-hour traffic on the outerbelt of I-270 in Columbus, Ohio. I had to talk her through it to keep her calm. Somehow my wife avoided any crashes as the girls were acclimating to the outside. One time when Jenny (voice 7) very first came out with us, I was fearful she might have an accident. My wife was driving from Ohio to Boston to visit our son, and so I told Jenny, "Don't come out, Honey, until you hear my voice telling you it's safe to come out."

Another issue I had to help the girls with as they transitioned from inside voices to outside "alters"/parts of my wife was the dissociative walls between them. I won't go into great detail about dissociation here because I plan to cover this topic

extensively later, but for now, understand that everyone dissociates. It's simply the mind's way of dealing with extreme pain and/or fear. You may be one of the lucky few who can say, "But I've never experienced anything very traumatic." Well, our minds dissociate other things as well like when we go on 'autopilot' and part of us continues to drive the car or do some other mundane task while the rest of our mind wanders off to some other tangent. Or most of us use a mild form of dissociation, I believe, called cognitive dissonance where we hold opposing ideas on a related subject, and rather than work to end the mental dissonance, we take the easy way out and keep those opposing ideas in 'separate corners' of our mind.

Thus, when a child experiences extreme trauma of any nature, sexual, mental, emotional, physical, or even extreme neglect, the mind will dissociate it, sequestering the experience in an attempt to protect the overall child. If no one safe and trusted is part of the child's life to help process that painful experience, the dissociation will 'take root', becoming semi-permanent. Over time the dissociation will become systemic and potentially continue growing in magnitude as the child reverts to dissociation to resolve future trauma.

That is what happened to my wife. As a toddler she was traumatically molested. She was so young that her mind broke that experience up 3 different ways (*Sophia, Tina, Jenny*) as it struggled to cope with the overwhelming mental and physical pain her abuser caused as her mind desperately tried to maintain some degree of normalcy. She was given no help or solace from her preoccupied and indifferent parents who had never dealt with their own traumatic childhoods, and thus they completely missed the telltale signs of trauma in their daughter that had to be present.

Prolonged dissociation has numerous effects upon a person. One result is the lack of communication between the various parts of the mind involved in the dissociation. As each voice, each girl, moved outside to be with me, she didn't know how to communicate with the others...and that meant disaster could be right around the corner...

I worked many years on second shift and didn't get home until 2:30a.m. most mornings. Jenny (*girl #8, voice #7*) had recently joined us. As I walked up to the front door of our house, I heard running water. There is no faucet or toilet close to our front door! I frantically fumbled for my keys, unlocked the deadbolt and whipped through the combination lock. When I opened the door, I found water pouring out of the living room ceiling, onto the floor and presumably continuing its path through the floor into the basement below. I raced upstairs and turned off the bathtub faucet.

Then I opened the bedroom door to find Jenny happily reading in bed. She was completely unaware that the other girls had turned on the water to start a bath like usual before they got in bed. They had gone back to the bedroom to wait for the tub to fill. Jenny came out, had no clue what they had done, and she settled into bed to read a story on her Kindle reader.

I cried for the next two days straight as I tried to clean up the disaster that had occurred. Jenny wasn't being bad. She had no clue what the other girls had done because she couldn't talk with them. I had to pull the area rug out of the room and let it dry overnight. The hardwood floor in our upstairs hallway warped and twisted badly. We couldn't even shut the bathroom door because of the warped floor boards. So, I had to cut out the affected pieces and eventually cover over the entire hallway with a floating floor. At work the next day, since I was the only one in our office on that shift, I cried the entire shift as I poured out the experience, trying to process it correctly so I didn't end up with mild PTSD myself. Life was already so overwhelming trying to help all my wife's girls: and this was just another thing with which I had to deal. I call that our Niagara-Falls event, and I still look up at our living room ceiling almost any time I enter that room in case I see any water...

That was just the worst example of the chaos caused by the inability of the various parts of my wife to communicate with each other. As 6 other parts of my wife moved outside those first 5 years, each of them desperately wanted to stay outside and not be trapped back inside. And so they were constantly popping in and out. I encouraged this, but it made things difficult until they learned to communicate with

each other so they didn't 'drop the baton' of whatever activity we were in the middle. Like one of the rare times my wife and I were being intimate together, and in the middle of things, out jumped a very unhappy and scared little girl. So, I'd come to a screeching halt as I had to instantly turn from lover into a comforting daddy figure, sigh.

Sophia would pop out when we were on errands, and in her excitement to go to a store, more than one time she ran out in front of a car in the parking lot and nearly got hit, sigh. She did that again, many years later when we were in Rome, long after she could easily communicate with all the other girls. We walked up to a 6-lane street and the traffic light was turning yellow. I stopped, but in her excitement, I saw my wife, compelled by Sophia, race across all 6 lanes of traffic, and I could only watch in horror and pray no impatient motorist ran her down!

All the parts of my wife love to sew and make things for our house, but only Ka'ryn has the master skills to do the most complicated sewing tasks. Many days I would be at work, and I would get a frustrated call from my wife, Ka'ryn, as she told me one of the little girls, in her excitement, had locked everyone else inside so she could finish the sewing project...only to make a mess of it. And so, now, Ka'ryn was left cleaning up the mess, again, as she spent hours ripping out stitches and re-sewing it properly. I always smile at those phone calls. I know it's frustrating to my wife, the process of learning to communicate with everyone, but it's that joy and desire of all the girls to do the same task that drives them to do the hard work of learning to internally communicate so they can get past the frustrating chaos that occurs because of the dissociation.

I also made them a craft room and filled it with supplies that each girl individually 'owned' and then 'contributed' to the overall group. They all love that craft room, and so they learned to work together so no one misses the hours of enjoyment they have in it. There was a lot of chaos in the beginning as all the parts of my wife fought to do her own thing in that room, but each slowly learned that progress is best made when they work together. I used to get delighted calls as one of the littlest girls asserted herself 'against' the bigger girls and did something on her own

to the frustration of the others. But, by doing these and other things, they learned to internally communicate so that we rarely worry about any future Niagara-Falls events (*fingers crossed!*)

Another result of the dissociation is that each part of my wife has different needs and desires. And in the beginning of our healing journey, all the competing needs and desires added to the chaos. One girl liked to play hide and seek when we were shopping and so, poof, my wife would disappear while we were on errands, and I'd have to go looking for her. Amy thought that was great fun, sigh. Some of the girls got scared when we were in public, and then, poof, my wife was gone again, but this time I found Shellie hidden under a clothes rack like a little child is apt to do when she is scared. It put me on high alert as I constantly had to watch my wife for signs that someone had come outside and might need my help.

When K.A. first joined our family, we were on a family vacation to Washington, D.C. We had entered the National Art Museum at the Smithsonian, and poof, my wife was gone, and I suddenly had a silent girl with me who apparently loved the art museum. For the next 3 hours our son and I followed her throughout the huge museum to make sure she was safe and didn't get lost, while she paid scant attention to us but was enraptured with the artwork. Another time I came home from work, after K.A. had recently come out, and she had broken an 'inside rule'⁷ and asked our son for a certain kind of food for dinner. When she realized her 'error', she began to wail for hours, and our poor son didn't know how to help her through her tearful sorrow. When I got home, I comforted her and assured her that the old, trauma-forged rule was ok to be ignored now.

When Tina first joined us on the outside, she was utterly terrified of me and all things at that point. The first time she joined me we were on I-75S going 70m.p.h. in Kentucky and I suddenly had a terrified, silent girl with me who was desperately clawing at the door handle, trying to jump out of our speeding car and get away from me. She did that more than once as I'm thinking, "My wife is going to kill herself jumping out of the car!"

It was nerve wracking. It was high stress. It was chaotic. It was scary. I learned to be on high alert at all times as I was always watching my wife in case she switched with one of her other parts and did something completely unexpected. But little by little we made it through that chaos. Fortunately our son attended the local branch of our state college, and so he could be at home while I was at work, and that way the two of us could keep tabs on my wife/his mother for most of the hours of the day and night those first 5 years of our journey.

But our struggle with my wife's childhood trauma wasn't the only thing adding chaos to our family. I was drowning in my own internal struggles. No one imagines anything like one's spouse having DID when he blithely says, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part..."⁸ We had already struggled the first 20 years of our marriage, and now the dial had been turned from a struggling 5 to mind numbing 11++ for both of us.

My expectations of 'happily ever after' for our marriage were crashing into our reality: I was really struggling. My wife told me that the first years of her counseling sessions she spent more time each week trying to deal with that week's blow up by me than she did exploring her childhood trauma. We were in a vicious circle because my needs got lost as the desperately needy inside girls began to join our relationship and clamor for my love and care. My own self was one more plate that I had to keep spinning on top of a stick...I was feeling frantic, rushing between the plates, trying to keep them going, trying to be a good husband and honor my marriage vows, but secretly I was wondering if the healing journey was going to be beyond my abilities⁹ and everything would come crashing down on me and my family.

Today that chaos is long behind us. Sometimes I can barely remember it as evidenced by the tiny snippets that I have written here but which filled 1000's of pages in my daily journal at the time. If you want a good visualization of the chaos we experienced, I might suggest you stream the series, *The United States of Tara*¹⁰. However, let me state an important difference between that show and our experience. Sadly, the family in that series didn't invite the voices-turned-"alters" of Tara, the wife and mother, into the family. They weren't seen as welcome family

members like our son and I treated my wife's other parts. Instead, Tara's "alters" were treated as unwelcome intruders, and thus, additional, unnecessary chaos was created because her "alters" tried to meet their needs outside of the safety and love which should have come from her family.

Chapter 3: Becoming a Good Healing Companion

Let me be clear: I love my wife. She is still the only woman I love and with whom I want to be. But, as I stated briefly in the previous chapter, my wife wasn't the only person in chaos: so was I. We were in a vicious circle as her needs and my needs were warring against each other, and if I didn't figure out how to deal with my own issues, we were not going to make it.

In this chapter I hope to be honest with some of the many issues I struggled as I became a good, healing companion for my wife. It won't help, if we don't acknowledge how difficult our position as spouse, significant other, family member or even close friend can be as we walk with someone who is struggling with severe mental health struggles. And that isn't to diminish our loved one's struggles in any way! We are in this together! We all have legitimate needs! But too often we allow our relationships to devolve into a war of attrition instead of realizing that we are, indeed, all in this together. And the best way I have found to make it through extremely difficult trials is to be honest about **my** needs, **her** needs and **our** needs with each other and work for a win/win solution.

Adjusting our Expectations

There are two things I've wanted in my life for as long as I can remember: one of them is a 'fairytale marriage' as I've shared previously. I expected a great sex life with my wife. I expected to be intimate soulmates who shared everything with each other. I expected a mutually satisfying relationship as we happily gave ourselves to each other's happiness in all of life. I expected her to support the vocation I had chosen before I had ever met her like I planned to support her dreams and goals.

But, when a loved one is struggling from severe mental distress it will affect the relationship and both parties involved. Now, my wife's struggles didn't affect everything important to me negatively. In many ways she and I have become soulmates because we went through so many struggles together. We are like those foxholes buddies¹ from the great world wars of last century. We were huddled together while all hell let loose around us, holding on to each other for dear life.

And when the shelling was over, and we were still alive, it created an even deeper bond between us.

But, of course, some of my expectations for my fairytale relationship were negatively affected to varying degrees. And that was a huge source of the constant blowups as she and I were engulfed in a vicious circle. We were both drowning, but as I desperately journaled my way through those first few years of our journey, I came to a realization. If I wasn't able to alter my expectations or accept that they would be delayed and even potentially never fulfilled, they were going to destroy my marriage.

And so I remember coming to a point of acceptance about how our relationship was right then at that moment. I had to accept it with all its flaws and with the potential of some lost dreams and hopes for my life. It didn't mean I wouldn't work as hard as I could to see our relationship become healthier, but essentially I recommitted to it, like the day I said my wedding vows, but now I really understood what that commitment would entail.

And, you know, something truly amazing happened. When I came to that place of acceptance, many of my anger issues and weekly blowups dissipated. I think they were related to me blaming my wife for not satisfying my expectations. But as we traveled that healing journey those first few years, and as I saw first hand how deeply her early childhood trauma had fundamentally affected her, I realized she was doing the best she could. No one would ever 'choose' to have DID. She wasn't being selfish on purpose. She wasn't trying to hurt me by ignoring my needs. She never had the deeply nurturing relationship I had had with my own parents.

Things didn't get any easier for me after my recommitment to our relationship. But this time I purposefully chose to walk with my wife in the full knowledge of how her trauma would affect us. Moreover, I now realized she needed me to be that nurturing, healing, safe person that her parents were never able to be for her because of their own unresolved trauma.

Choosing our "Enemy"

I was deeply impressed with my one aunt while I was growing up. Her husband, my biological uncle, contracted a deadly form of multiple sclerosis when he was very young, and I watched him wither away as I grew up. I'm sure it was difficult for my aunt to be in a somewhat one-sided marriage as she was a young woman caring for a completely debilitated husband: but, she did it until the day he died, and at least publicly, she was and still is one of the most happy and gracious people I know.

I also thought a lot about couples and families who face terminal cancer together or those who have an adult child with profound disabilities. In our selfish, independent, hedonistic society, how do some of these people cope with being 'stuck' with a loved one that obviously consumes so much of their time and energy? Some of them, like my aunt, are some of the most beautiful people you or I will ever meet. How do they do it?

Now, let's not get lost comparing terminal cancer or profound disabilities with severe mental health challenges. That's not my point because I believe my wife's mental health challenges are completely recoverable. My point is looking at the families, spouses and significant others who graciously deal with a trial that absolutely must affect them personally. Seriously, I doubt my aunt, who was a young lady at the time, was having great sex with my uncle as he was first wheelchair bound, and then lay bedridden throughout their 30's. I doubt they were going on lots of happy vacations or having exciting weekly dates together. The last few years of his life, he could barely even talk: so, they could barely converse together. Of course, he couldn't work, so she was the only source of income for her family as well. So, how did she continue in her deeply crippled marriage with her husband without letting it embitter her as a person or push her to move on with her own life and divorce him?

I admit: I don't know how she did it, since I never have been in a place to ask her. But this is one conclusion I came to on my own by watching her beautiful example: my wife's trauma and dissociation is the 'enemy' not my wife. Later I'll discuss my philosophy about mental health struggles and the biomedical model versus trauma

model, but here I had to accept that the fallout of my wife's severe childhood trauma and resultant severe dissociation is real. I had to accept that she was doing the best she could. When she said she just couldn't have sex with me, it wasn't because she was selfish, frigid or didn't love me. It was the result of the trauma and dissociation she suffered during her formative years. It would be no more fair to blame her for not 'acting like an adult' or 'just getting over it' than to blame someone with profound physical or mental disabilities or a terminal disease like my uncle's. In the same way, when her "alters", many of whom front as little girls, want me to care for them, make dinner for them, clean the house for them, even though I work a full-time job and my wife doesn't, I've learned to accept the extra responsibilities that are placed upon me as she and I fight the DID and work toward her complete healing.

One of the really important decisions I had to make when struggling with my own issues those first few years was accepting the reality of our relationship. My wife and I weren't going to find our 'happily ever after' ending to our fairytale easily. We were both going to have to fight for it. It was going to be a prolonged fight, and a significant portion of that fight was going to rest on my shoulders as I relinquished my rights and needs at times and was willing to help her in the struggle to address her trauma and dissociation. No, it's not fair. It's not the relationship I've dreamt of or that I saved myself for. But I don't believe my wife wants this either. She didn't choose to be sexually abused as a mere toddler. She wants her 'happily ever after' fairytale, too. She tells me she wants to enjoy sex someday with me, too. We are both victims of her abuser's actions to various degrees, and so I choose to fight with and for my damsel. I choose to fight for us. I choose to fight for my 'happily ever after' ending.

Sex

I'll be honest. I don't want to have this sex talk. Just thinking about it has me nearly in tears. It may be the singlest biggest source of emotional pain and heartache that I have faced on our healing journey. It is the dragon that never stops screaming in my head. It is the monster that tramples and crushes my heart, every single moment of every single day. I saved myself for marriage. I was part of

the purity movement² before it was even a thing in our culture. I believed the teachings of my religion growing up...and it feels like it cost me so much on this topic.

Moreover, I want to be clear: I have no interest in being anyone's conscience or morality police on this. I know opinions vary widely, and I come at this from a very specific reference point as we all do. Perhaps you'll find something of value in my struggles with this, but one of many things I've learned on this journey is there are a multitude of ways to see things. We each need to find the one that helps us best live in a healthy way for our lives, not someone else's.

If you are a parent helping a struggling child or adult child, then happily you can probably skip this section. Moreover, I know some spouses and significant others from my blog who still have reasonable sex lives with their mates who have mental health struggles. I am truly happy for them. But my wife's trauma and dissociation has severely affected our sex lives, and of all the monsters I have faced on our fairytale journey, this is the one that may still kill me or end our journey together. And so I fight it every day, with all the tools and weapons I have learned along the way. I tell my wife, "I love you more than sex", but this subject feels like a balrog to me, and I'm no Gandalf³.

So, enough. Let's get into this. When I look at our culture, Hollywood, the pornography industry, public modesty standards, religious instructions, the internet and everything else, I see so much disjointed thinking when it comes to sex. In our country we can have massive billboards of barely clothed men and women. We can watch shows with non-stop sex talk and jokes. We have all seen bedroom scenes of varying degrees of explicitness which passed through the censors and are even fed to our children . And of course, the internet is full of any kind of sex one can imagine.

And yet, major publications still use euphemisms for sex that suggest it is dirty, shameful and embarrassing. And if a woman nurses her baby in public, people lose their minds. If two people try to discreetly engage in sex outside or go skinny

dipping, and someone sees them, they could be arrested and labeled sex offenders.⁴ So many are so uncomfortable with their bodies in our society that many still want to dictate to women how they should and should not dress. We as a society are convulsing from insensible and conflicting rules about sex, morality and modesty.

Many in our culture seem to push a casual, promiscuous and nearly animalistic view of sex. They act like our children, let alone ourselves, cannot possibly control their hormones and urges. Hook up culture, "friends with benefits", "it's just sex," one night stands and so many other attitudes seem to strip sex from any higher function or meaning in our lives.

And yet, we, and the bonobos⁵, of all the animals (*usually, often*) have sex face to face. For people sex is not only for the survival of the species as with so many other animals, but for pleasure and bonding. Many have come to see it as the ultimate attachment connection between two people, even symbolically transforming two distinct people into one. They would argue it's more than a mere physical/biological act: on some levels it has a deeply moral, emotional and even a 'spiritual' quality to it that connects two people if you are willing to accept that term.

Beyond that the religious right in which I was raised attaches so much guilt and shame to sex in so many ways. I've spent my entire life being told that absolutely any and all sex outside marriage is wrong. Masturbation is wrong. Certain kinds of sex are wrong. All pornography is wrong. Sex toys and aids are wrong. I've had guilt and shame drilled into my heart and mind for so many years that even looking at another woman lustfully could condemn my soul to the fires of hell for all eternity! And so I saved myself for my wife. I never looked at pornography. I never masturbated. At times I even took off my prescription eyeglasses when I was out in public to keep me from possibly seeing an attractive woman and looking too long!

It was exhausting. It was crippling. It crushed me in so many ways because it seemed like one part of me was at constant war with another. Why is it that approximately 2/3 of religious men look at pornography?⁶ What was I supposed to do when my wife simply couldn't have sex with me because she was dealing with the

sexual trauma from her past, and my religion had stripped me of any and all other outlets? I was going to break if I didn't find my way out of that quagmire.

So, this is what I did. If it helps you, great. If not, that's ok, too. First I had to grow up. I had to embrace the naturalness and commonness of sex. And that includes our bodies and being naked. I simply couldn't continue to accept the guilt and shame that had been attached to so many aspects of these things because of my religious upbringing. I'm not suggesting there aren't healthy and unhealthy ways to express our sexual needs and urges and basic modesty standards, but I was done with the constant condemnation in my head.

Furthermore, perhaps one of the most fundamental changes in my self perception which helped me deal with so many of my personal struggles on this healing journey, and this topic specifically, was gained from observing my wife's struggles. As she began to heal and her other 'parts' joined us outside, I had to help them stop fighting each other and learn to work together. DID is known in some circles for the chaos created by the "alters" as they fight with each other to have their own needs met. And yet I was teaching my wife's parts 'team building' exercises and to respect each other. I repeatedly told the girls, 'there are no bad girls' each time we added another girl to the larger group and she was viewed suspiciously by the others as the 'outsider'. I taught the girls to use their strengths for the good of the larger group.

And then it hit me: I needed to do the same for my various parts: I had to stop the war caused by varying needs and views about sex and accept that this is all me. I began to see correlations between her various parts and various parts of my own personality. I had to embrace those parts of me that used to cause me excessive shame and guilt and anguish because of what felt like an insatiable need for sex. These parts are a reminder to me that I will always view sex with a moral component to it, but I couldn't let that be the only view I have about it. I also had to accept that the dearth of sex at times in our relationship drove other parts to consider alternatives. And these parts were driven by the physical and emotional need of connection and all the other things sex satisfies in our bodies and souls. I

could fight or ignore the war at my peril, or I could embrace and direct it to the best alternatives possible, acknowledging there was no way to satisfy all my various needs in our partially dysfunctional marriage.

I kind of started seeing these parts like *Godzilla*⁷ or *King Kong*⁸: 'good' monsters. I could try to fight them, but I would be sure to be beaten and trampled to death if I did. I was never going to subjugate or banish them because they served legitimate functions in my life. So I had to find a way to embrace and live with them that wouldn't destroy me or my marriage. And I had to be sure not to scapegoat my wife in all these inner battles: I had chosen my 'enemy' as I said previously and so this was a never-ending struggle with a kaiju⁹ I had accepted as part of our fairytale journey.

I still believe, per my upbringing, married sex is the healthiest and best because a committed relationship between partners is where such vulnerability and intimacy is safely, lovingly and healthfully shared between two people. But for this healing journey as my wife dealt with her early, childhood sexual abuse, she needed me to accept her limitations in this area until she can enjoy it as much as I do. Therefore, sometimes, more often than I wish, I have to make the best of lesser options when she needs us to be celibate. I try to watch myself when I avail myself of these other options and make sure I'm not doing anything to harm our relationship. And even though there's a part of me that that screams in my head "I'm a fucking loser", (*pun intended*), it's a hard truth I struggle to come to terms with in order to walk with my wife on our journey together.

What role would I take in the healing journey?

As I desperately wrote in my journal to answer this question, I figured there were at least 3 main ways to answer this question. Many spouses and significant others who have a loved one who struggles with severe mental health issues, simply cut and run. You know, this wasn't my fault? This is on my in-laws and their inability to protect their 2-year old daughter, and then their inability to act like adults and help her heal after they didn't protect her. Furthermore, when I vaguely asked them for help at the start of this journey, they both gave me platitudes and excuses. Why is this my responsibility, when the ones at fault won't even help? Sigh...

And yet the decision not to do the same as those who cut and run was anything but simple. As I've already said, helping my wife heal and connect with her parts taught me that I needed to have a good reason to stay in the opinion of each of my parts.

One part of me was deeply affected, nearly triggered, with empathy for my wife because of my own childhood experience. I remembered one time during my childhood when my mother had playfully abandoned me at home as we prepared for a family outing at a local swimming lake. She took off in our VW van with the rest of my siblings while I ran screaming down our long country driveway for her to "Wait! Stop! Don't leave me!" I tried to cut her off the direction I thought she would go. But after starting to turn the van my direction, she drove off the other direction, and I crumpled to the ground screaming my heart out! Even though she came back for me a few minutes later, that experience had literally scarred me (*don't worry I'm ok now!*). The anguish I felt from that abandonment experience was still visceral in my being at the start of our healing journey. How could I do the same thing, but permanently, to my wife whom I still loved!?

Another part of me doesn't want to get divorced because of how it will affect our son. I don't want that to be his legacy. I want him to know that you don't give up on someone you love just because things are hard. Another part takes extremely seriously my wedding vows, 'until death do us part.' She is my 'one and only' and 'my

first'. Those phrases are deeply meaningful to this part of myself. There will never be another woman like her with whom I've grown up these last 34 years. Even if I had an easier relationship, how do I simply throw out 34 years of history? Another part hopes for a win/win for us. I want that fairytale ending for both of us! I don't want to quit and lose that chance. Another part, the one that has always wanted to be in full time ministry, realizes that to quit now would mean no chance to write this book and share with others *"the comfort with which we were comforted"*¹⁰ To quit now, would mean all we've gone through together would be for naught with no chance to leave the world a little bit better place than we entered it. I want to plant a tree that more people than just my wife and I can enjoy.¹¹ And another part recognizes the obvious: I still love my wife. She didn't ask for this: no one would. I long to stop hurting, but I don't long for anyone else. Just her.

And so, after all these years of journaling, I realized all these reasons I had to stay in this marriage, even though it's still hard, even though I hurt so badly some days I can hardly breathe. And so I used all these reasons and more to answer my various parts anytime one would assert itself to find an easier relationship. Sometimes I was struggling so badly that I would have to remind myself of all these reasons in quick succession as I desperately fought the dragon that was trying to kill our happily-ever-after ending.

The second option I figured I could take was the "this is your problem, deal with it" attitude. As I've been on all kinds of internet boards for survivors, that seems to be the attitude of many family members and spouses and significant others. "Deal with your issues, and don't let them affect our relationship." It's a rare spouse or significant other that I would rub shoulders with on these boards or via my blog who wanted to learn and be part of the healing process. But to me, that attitude just seems like a war of attrition and prolonging the agony of both partners. If I was going to stay in this marriage, then I sure as hell didn't want either of us to suffer from this any longer than necessary!

And I sometimes wonder if that attitude is part of the drive to embrace the current narrative about mental distress despite its overwhelming track record of failure. "Take this little pill, and everything will be better." It's a quick and easy

way to try and get back to normalcy. I'm not necessarily blaming family, spouses and loved ones: it's a cultural issue of fast-food mentality, where we don't value the time and effort it takes for deep, trauma healing to occur in the people we love. And beyond that, it's the narrative being pushed by too many of the ones who ought to know better: the mental health experts. And so, in our desperation for a normal relationship, we willingly close our eyes as our loved ones get worse instead of getting better by following the common cultural narrative about helping those in distress.

And so, I chose door three: active involvement in the healing journey. I wanted to become the best man I could be to help facilitate my wife's healing. I vowed to do anything, absolutely anything, my wife needed me to do to find a win/win resolution to her childhood trauma and extreme dissociation and our struggling marriage.

I've often thought of the Olympic athletes who deprive themselves of all kinds of normal experiences the rest of us get to enjoy. These athletes willingly choose to endure all kinds of physical pain and stress for the minute chance of someday standing on that Olympic podium with a medal around his or her neck. I vowed to do the same for the woman I love. I had to come to the place in which I realized staying with my wife meant not knowing if we'd ever have a healthy marriage. It meant accepting that this current dysfunction was our "normal," but I would vigorously do anything I could to change that normal for both of us just like those athletes.

Or, in keeping with my fairytale dream, I wanted to be the kind of prince to fight through and do anything for my princess. Ours is a love worth saving. Ours is a love worth facing dragons and monsters and torment and hardship. Ours is a love worthy of an uncertain ending while being most certain that we'll take the journey together and face those hard things together whatever our end may be.

Agency

It's important at some point to deal with the concept of agency as we seek to become good healing companions. Simply defined it is "the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices."¹²

Unfortunately, in our society when people are undergoing extreme mental distress and begin to manifest some of the extreme states that I will discuss later, our society's tendency is to label them as 'crazy' or 'dangerous' or 'psychotic'. Because that caricature is based in ignorance of what someone is experiencing, our society sometimes strips them of their independence and ability to make their own free choices. If that person objects to being forced into therapy, in-patient hospitalization, or a lifetime of psychiatric drugs, our society may further strip their dignity from them by characterizing their objections as denial, a lack of insight, or anosognosia¹³ which is the ability to be self-aware of their real 'condition.' And thus our society can strip all personal agency from those in distress while giving all life choices of that person to others.¹⁴ This is wrong and should be an outrage to all of us in a free society!

But there's more to an understanding of agency than that. There are also power structures in all relationships¹⁵, and if you don't understand what that means, it can trip up even well-meaning attempts to help your loved one. For example, in my relationship with my wife, I am a man and the sole breadwinner of the family. Those two facts create a power imbalance in the relationship that I had to learn to recognize, appreciate and attempt to intentionally counteract. Additionally, threats and ultimatums are often used in a relationship to extract concessions from one side to the other. If I had used these in combination with the power imbalances in our relationship, not only would these tactics likely serve as triggering or retraumatizing, they would have been a form of abusive coercion to strip my wife of aspects of her free agency.

"Doing this for your own good" is often a phrase we utter to convince ourselves that stripping someone else's agency is ok because our intentions are good. But if real healing is our goal, then we need to respect our loved one's agency no matter how much insight we may feel we have for them 'if only they would listen!' Learning to lead and coax (*more on this below*) and help my wife without any hint of coercion sometimes feels like an overwhelming task, and yet, it's the only way I

have found to assure any healing is deep and foundational rather than superficial because she just wants to 'keep the peace.'

But even beyond that there is another level when it comes to understanding agency. Your loved one may have learned to respond to the demands of a past abuser 100% positively knowing that a refusal to obey those demands could lead to more abuse, threats of death and all kinds of other manipulative techniques such people use to control their victims. And thus, even your own reasonable requests or suggestions to your loved one may be linked to those of the past abuse. In other words, you may be trying your hardest to be mindful of your wording and to not use coercion, and yet your actions may be perceived that way because of past experiences of your loved one.

It took me a while to learn that I had to engage in a degree of verbal grounding related to many suggestions I made, emphasizing before and after that "I love you no matter what you decide. It's your choice. There will be no consequences if you don't want to do" whatever I had suggested. And then if my wife chose to ignore my suggestion, I had to make sure I did not pout about it or make her pay for it in some other way. It took years of this kind of interaction until my wife completely understood that she was free to refuse or accept my 'insights' and suggestions without any fear of retribution in any form from me.

Let me assure you that someone experiencing extreme states of mental distress is not crazy. She is not permanently, mentally incapacitated. Even when my wife experienced panic attacks, flashbacks, 'psychosis', and more, I didn't transgress her rights nor disrespect her free agency or equality with me, not even when the other girls ("alters") joined my relationship and some fronted as 2-year-olds. Sometimes I did have to act on her behalf when she was literally incapacitated, but by then I had earned her implicit consent because I didn't transgress any areas where I knew I did not have that consent.

Moreover, when it comes to agency, the hardest thing of all may be allowing the person we love to do harmful or damaging things to herself. I believe so many of

those destructive things may spring from a cry for help or an inability to process her own inner pain. So, if you can learn the attachment lessons I will share later, you may be able to mitigate the urges of your loved one to self-destruct. Thus, we are not condemned to passively watch the self-destruction. I have done all kinds of things my wife probably isn't fully aware of as I created a safe, healing and loving environment for her: like a gardener who weeds and works the soil and fences an area in to keep out animals that might destroy the precious crop. But in the end, we are all sentient beings, and you and I have no right to take away someone's agency no matter what the outcome of their actions may be.

Learning to Lead and "Coax" (if needed)

Well, having just discussed the absolute need there is to completely respect our loved one's personal agency on the healing journey, now I want to discuss how a good healing companion learns to lead and 'coax' as I mentioned above if and when needed. If these concepts seem incongruous and antithetical with respecting their agency, I hope I can show you what I mean.

When my wife and I first began our healing journey, she would regularly tell me, "I don't know what healing looks like." See, she had barely been 2 years old when she suffered the sexual abuse. It was so traumatic to her little psyche that it ripped that experience into three different pieces in her brain's desperate attempt to dissociate it away so she could find some way to continue functioning in life. My wife literally has no memories of normal, healthy life before her trauma.

But for many people their trauma occurs much later in life. I have a relative who was raped in her 20's. In therapy circles, they talk about 'empowering' victims and from afar, that seemed to be the path she took for her healing from being raped as she fought to get back to the healthy, normalcy she had known before that experience. It took years, and I'm sure it was difficult for her, but it seems like she found the healing she needed and has been able to live in that for decades now.

And as I thought about how different my wife's experience was from my relative's, I realized we simply cannot take the same approach for everyone's healing journey,

especially when the trauma occurs at an extremely young age. My wife wanted me to help her and guide her. She expressed her utter loss at times to know what to do to move forward. I kept reading about 'empowerment' and 'owning' one's healing, and I would get so frustrated that my wife rarely would act like the literature said she ought. She depended upon me for more than I honestly wanted her to. Was I hampering her healing? Was I too much of a crutch because she was too dependent upon me? And yet, when I pushed her to take more of a lead with her healing, she acted completely lost how to move forward on her own.

So, this is what I mean by 'learning to lead' in a way that does not in any way violate your loved one's agency:

First I learned to lead by example. When she told me, "I have no idea what healthy looks like", I realized she was looking for me to be an example for her. That meant I had to be healthy myself. She would see through any hypocrisy on my part because she was closer to me than anyone else in this world. So, as I continued to journal every day, I deeply explored who I was and what I wanted to be. When things upset me in life, I would journal until I figured out why they upset me, and what to do about them: was it a reasonable anger or not? I journaled about what was most important to me and how I could reach those things despite the difficulties of our journey. I journaled so I could try and become the best man I could possibly be in order to give her the example that her deeply flawed and traumatized parents had been unable to give her during childhood.

Another aspect of learning to lead is I had to be comfortable giving her suggestions for moving forward, but, and this is key: I had to completely remove my ego from the suggestions. My wife had to be free to 1) accept my suggestions, 2) reject my suggestions, or 3) tweak my suggestions. For my part, I realized that as the 'healthy' partner on this healing journey, I had experiences she didn't have. And so I was 'outside the forest' so to speak. She was caught 'inside the forest' of her trauma and extreme dissociation, and yet, I had to accept her absolute authority about what resonated with her as she moved toward 'healthy.' Even when she struggled to do so, she had to 'own' her healing and do what felt right to her, and

that wouldn't happen if I pouted because she didn't completely accept my suggestions.

So, I learned to lead, not because I think I know better than my wife. Not because I don't respect her agency. I learned to lead in certain situations because her trauma occurred so early in life, that parts of her needed that gentle, safe, loving parental figure she never had. It was up to her to decide what kind of person she was going to become as she got healthier. I never manipulated her into something I wanted, but I had to understand that for her, the empowerment movement felt more like being abandoned by her parents again. And so, I needed to be willing to embrace the kind of healing companion my wife needed, not what my relative needed. And that is a choice only your loved one can make as we respond appropriately to that choice.

But what do I mean by 'coaxing'? Quite simply: rewards. We all like rewards. I don't go to work for the fun of it: my paycheck and the raises I've earned over the years are a reward for the quality work I do. Athletes are rewarded with trophies and titles. Today customers are rewarded for their loyalty to the companies at which they shop. Why wouldn't rewards help my wife on the healing journey, especially her "alters", who all fronted as little girls when they first came out? Or more pointedly, why shouldn't my wife be rewarded for facing the horrors of what her abuser did to her 2-year old self? And why shouldn't she be rewarded for doing the hard work to tear down the dissociative walls between all her various parts?

We stumbled upon this great motivational tool because all the "alters" of my wife, when they first came out, fronted as little girls between the ages of 2 and 8. And to me it just kind of seemed natural to offer them a reward for doing something that was difficult or scary for them. However, I did learn that rewards should not appear coercive or manipulative. As well, they needed to be timed well.

What do those guidelines mean? Well, I had to learn to take my cues from the girls (my wife's "alters") and what they were ready to do as far as their healing goes. Sometimes I offered a reward for them to try and address a certain part of their

trauma when they simply weren't ready to do so. Other times I might suggest a reward for something that I felt they needed to address, but they didn't. If I pushed my suggestion trying to 'sweeten' the suggestion with a reward, I could tell they might start to feel coerced or manipulated. Thus, I had to learn to respect their agency even in the offering of rewards. And then, sometimes the girls would initiate and ask me for a reward to help them work through an issue they were facing, and if we could possibly afford it, I never said 'no' to one of them wanting to do the hard work of healing and moving forward.

Here are some examples of how we used rewards to help my wife move forward in the healing journey. When my wife first started going to her counselor, and Amy joined us on the outside, Amy really struggled talking about her trauma. So I got a stack of \$5 bills from the bank, and she simply took one every time she worked on her trauma with her counselor. I did that many, many times over the last 15 years. Even recently, I had a stack of \$5 bills to which Shellie and Jenny availed themselves multiple times each week as they pushed themselves to internally talk with each other. I trust them and don't require them to tell me each time they take money from the pile.

Another example is when Jenny first joined us. When she first came out, she believed that all food in general made her throw up (*a misunderstanding from her traumatic childhood that grew into a 'dysfunction' that needed to be healed*). But as she began to internally watch and experience the other girls eat and taste the food that went through her mouth, she decided it was very tasty, and she wanted to learn to eat on her own. She asked if I would buy her a tandem bike for us to ride together as a reward for her if she learned to eat. And thus, began our days of riding a tandem bike together. We put 1000's of miles on that bike until we wore it out and bought another one. And so, not only did Jenny overcome her misperception that all food made her throw up, but that tandem bike was a wonderful source of connecting and bonding between me and all the parts of my wife for the next 5 years.

I cannot overstate the value that rewards have added to my wife's healing. I can say with absolute certainty that she would not be where she is today, if I hadn't been willing to affirm the effort and strength it took for her to work on her trauma. Even if your finances are such that monetary rewards would be difficult to do, perhaps you could set up rewards of a different nature that would still be appreciated by your loved one as she works on moving forward from her trauma.

Humility

I'm reminded of the subcontinental Indian tale of the 6 blind men and the elephant:

A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said, "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.¹⁶

Some versions of the parable have the men coming to blows because each man was absolutely certain that he was right, and his compatriots were wrong.

I think one of the most difficult things for all of us to do is to accept the experiences of others as legitimate without feeling threatened in our own experience of reality. This is especially true as related to our own embodied experiences or senses of "truth." We are ripping our society apart in our culture war because we refuse to listen and understand each other's perceptions. Be sure not to do the same with your loved one. If you want to walk with your loved one on this healing journey, you will need to learn to walk in dual perceptions of realities: affirming hers without abandoning your own. But, be open to learning and growing as we all ought to be willing to do. Each blind man experienced a different part of

the reality of that elephant, and only if they had added them all together would they have come close to something that approximated the truth. Instead, they fought and argued over who was right and wrong and each of them lost out as a result of it. Happily, I have learned so much from my wife's life and experience on this journey.

Let me give an example from our own experience of what I mean. From my perspective I live with my wife who happens to have 8 "alters" at various stages of integration with each other. I view each girl through this perspective, and when pushed by the individual girls, I tell them so. I love each one individually as I have affirmed to each since the day she joined our relationship, but when pushed to answer specifically 'Why do you love me?' I will say, "Because I love Ka'ryn Marie, and all you girls are part of her."

But the perspective of those 8 girls is very different from mine. At the beginning of the journey each one saw herself distinct from the others, especially from my wife Ka'ryn. I was repeatedly asked, "Do you love me and not just Ka'ryn?" Amy hoped and prayed for her own body when she gets to heaven. She wasn't alone in that belief. Moreover, if you were to ask each one how she views our relationship, some would say I'm her "daddy." Others view me as a friend, boyfriend or fiancée, and only one views me as her husband. Most of the time we live in the reality that is dictated by their perceptions. I don't insist they treat me according to my own perception.

Another example is a person's feelings. So often we are in the habit of denying the feelings of others, intentionally or not. If someone says, "I'm scared," and we don't see any obvious signs of danger, we ask, "Why are you scared?" with the obvious implication that "you shouldn't be scared." If a person is always scared, we may even label that person 'paranoid,' further invalidating their experience. We may even start to distance ourselves from him/her.

The problem is we don't understand that many trauma survivors are somewhat trapped in the past, and their past experiences dictate their perceptions of the

present. It's not that they are wrong, and you are right. It's that their perspective is different from yours, and the worst thing you can do is invalidate it. Instead, when someone tells you they are scared, validate her by asking for more information and then further validate it by asking how you can help her not feel so scared. Most of us become frantic when we aren't heard. Trauma victims are no different, and validation allows them to see, over time, they are no longer alone. The power of a loving, consistent and safe presence in their lives will allow them to slowly release the fear they may have held over a lifetime. (*More on that later...*)

When my wife and I first started our journey, I had a choice to make. I chose to accept my wife's perspective on our relationship and reality in general to be as valid as mine. I tried to honor her perspective even though I didn't necessarily share it. I don't feel the need to constantly inform her that she is wrong, *from my perspective*, but when she pushes, I don't deny my reality either. And as we have walked the journey together and she has healed, her perspective has slowly been released from the traumatic chains of the past so she can embrace her current reality living with me. It's something I never force. She does it at the pace she is able. And we are creating a new perspective on reality together, as we travel our journey.

Support Network

The healing journey you and your loved one take will be deeply personal, but it is also affected by the cultural stigma that our society places on people in mental distress. Every time my wife calls herself a "monster," it breaks my heart. Neither I, our son, nor her counselor ever treated her as such, and yet there's no ignoring the terrible attitude most of society has about this topic and the people experiencing these issues.

And so, my wife's tendency has been to draw the circle of people who are aware of our journey as small as possible. My tendency was just the opposite, as I recognized that I could not do this on my own, and I desperately needed an outlet for all we were going through. Finding a workable resolution of those opposing

needs was paramount. Moreover, my wife pointed out that she, not I, would be the one caricatured. She would be the one mothers might pull their children away from, and all the other indignities our culture throws at those in distress. And so, that fear of being ostracized or being feared by others has always kept our circle smaller than I wish. Even my blog and this book is done under a pseudonym to protect her desire for privacy. But at times when I felt I was going to break, my need for support had to take primacy over her need for privacy. And so, we learned to 'dance' as we found a workable solution for both our needs. When we expanded our circle of confidants a little, sometimes it helped: other times it didn't. It's not satisfactory to either of us, but it involved compromise from both of us.

One thing that did help was to have a small, in-person, support network in my life. Sadly my own family was unable to be part of our healing journey for various reasons. But, I had an uncle that lived locally with us. He and his family were very supportive of me and my wife. They gave me a lifeline of caring people who would not demonize my wife while helping me with my own pain.

And then there is our son. I shared previously how he joined our healing journey. His presence on this healing journey has added a dimension to my wife/his mother's healing that I could never replicate. But I never have pushed him to do more than he was willing to do. Plus, I tried to set the tone. Since I never demeaned or belittled his mother, perhaps he followed my lead. He not only has been invaluable to her healing, but he helped alleviate a little of the responsibilities I have felt for her healing and initially her safety.

Finally, I have also had a few male confidants that I shared with along the journey. The important thing is to find people who can support you without attacking your loved one. They have to be able to accept your struggles and emotional pain that is part of the healing process without personalizing it as an attack upon you.

The things above are the things that worked for me. Now let me address some things that didn't. NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness.¹⁷ It is the largest national network to help the family and significant others of those suffering mental health issues. I only had one personal contact with our local group, but for some reason I didn't click with the leader. Later I have been told that the group is aligned with the biomedical model of mental health and will push this perspective. If you go to their website and find their page of financial contributors, they are unabashedly supported by some of the largest names in the pharmaceutical industry who have a financial stake in pushing the use of psychiatric drugs.¹⁸ Like anything, I'm sure there are good local chapters that deviate from the national stance, but be advised, if you want to follow the trauma model of mental health, you may receive pushback from this group because of a clash of paradigms.

There are a host of internet groups focused on mental health struggles. I haven't found a fit anywhere I've tried. Most are geared toward the survivors or therapists. Most are founded on the biomedical model of mental health rather than the trauma model except for Mad in America.¹⁹ And none have known what to do with someone like me: the spouse of a trauma survivor. I'm not saying they are all 'bad' places: Mad in America definitely isn't a bad place in my opinion. I just haven't found a way to fit into the circle all of them have drawn for their members. So, I wish you better success than I have found for myself.

Our Inherent Humanity

Humans tend to categorize people into various groupings. In the U.S. as in many countries, people experiencing extreme mental distress are grouped outside the 'normal' category from 'the rest of us.' We tend to think of them as 'crazy' and somewhat 'scary' and somehow completely different than we, the 'sane ones,' are.

Now, I never 'othered'²⁰ my wife by considering her crazy (*and only momentarily wondered if she might be dangerous-thanks to Hollywood caricatures, sigh*), but the longer we traveled our journey together, the more I confirmed our inherent commonality at all levels. Sure, she was more traumatized and dissociated than I

was, but it was a matter of degrees not a matter of some kind of foundational difference. In fact, as I helped her heal and connect to each of the other girls ("alters") who had joined our relationship, I learned more about my own internal constitution and workings.

And so, I want to impress upon you to find common ground with your loved one who is in distress. Be open to learning about yourself. Understand that no matter how 'bizarre' or even scary some extreme states can feel the first time your loved one is immersed in one, there is meaning behind it, if you remain caring, compassionate and curious enough to look for it. Realize that all of us experience flashbacks and triggers. Any of us can be momentarily 'irrational,' or have extreme emotional reactions that leave us thinking, "Where did that come from?" And if you have never found yourself experiencing any extreme mental state, (*if that is even possible*), be sure to thank your parents for the unusually healthy childhood you probably had and for the happy adulthood that hasn't stretched you beyond your limits.

I think some of the worst things our society has done on this subject is to use pejorative words to describe those experiencing mental distress or the extreme states that manifest because of it. Words like 'crazy', 'irrational', 'needy', 'meltdown', 'whacko', 'nuts', 'pathological' and so many others are condescending, but worse, they are ignorantly incorrect! Moreover, we simplistically use DSM²¹ terms like narcissist, sociopath, schizo(phrenic) and more to label and caricature and separate others from ourselves, rather than seeking understanding and empathy.

Goal of the Healing Journey

In the end if you choose to take this healing journey with your loved one, it cannot be to 'fix' him or her. Yes, she may feel and act severely 'broken' at times. She may even say those exact words about herself. And it's possible you will be called upon at times to sacrificially walk with her until she is in a better place in her mental health. But you must not let your relationship devolve into one of unequal worth or power where you lord over her with threats and ultimatums to

produce the desired changes...because I never found those to produce the foundational changes that deep trauma requires.

Instead, let me suggest that what your loved one needs more than anything else to heal is to be loved and valued by you without qualification, with no strings attached, and without ultimatums or threats. She also needs to be validated in her perceptions no matter how 'bizarre' or inaccurate they might seem to you at first. Despite the concern of some mental health experts that I would trap my wife in her perceptions if I validated them, 15 years later, I can affirm I didn't. My validation actually freed her to reevaluate things as she felt heard and safe to do so and move forward.

Moreover, we are social creatures, and the most fundamental way that our traumatized loved ones can be stabilized and begin healing is to connect with them in as many ways as possible to you and others around her and vice versa. I like to think about attachment points as a soft, silky web in which you and your loved one are connected by each and every thing you do together. The more points by which you are connected, the more strongly you will be held together in your relationship. Moreover, the more points of attachment the two of you share, the more stabilizing an effect those connective points will have on both of your emotional and mental health. And if you should have to walk with your loved one through all kinds of chaos like my wife and I did, those myriad of connection points will stabilize and hold you together when so many relationships are ripped apart by the stress, and at times, chaos of the healing journey. (*More about that process in the next chapter...*)

Coping with Pain

Most of us don't enjoy pain. As little children it didn't take long for us to learn to avoid things which caused us discomfort. If we touched a burner on the stove and it was hot, we immediately yanked our little hands away. We didn't need to be taught to do that; our minds and bodies did it for us without thinking. It was a reflexive response to something painful and potentially dangerous.²²

But as we mature, part of that process is learning that not all painful or difficult experiences should be avoided. When I was in high school sports, we had a saying: "No pain, no gain." My wife used to be a long-distance runner, and she tells me about hitting a 'wall' in the run and learning to push through the pain²³. And I believe most dedicated athletes (something I am definitely not!) have learned the necessity of ignoring certain kinds of pain which aren't actually harmful but are part of the process to train their bodies to become the best possible for that sport. But this is key in my opinion, learning to listen to all of yourself. Learning to know the difference between 'good' pain, tolerable pain and bad pain²⁴.

Now, as I became a good healing companion for my wife, I had to learn to confront all kinds of emotional pain. I had to learn how to 'hold' the traumatic pain my wife experienced as a child and shared with me without letting her pain overwhelm me. Moreover, I had to learn to deal with my own pain and all the struggles I experienced on our healing journey. And so I had to be intune and learn to listen to myself. When the pain was becoming overwhelming, I had to find outlets to lower the pain level enough for me to keep moving forward.

I could fill this section with pages of various strategies I developed which spoke to my various parts to help me cope with the pain. I told myself I 'had to be the adult right now because my wife couldn't be' which was underscored by the 7 little-girl 'alters' who joined our relationship. I told myself, "if I don't do this, no one else is going to help the woman I love." I told myself, "God equipped me to do what my wife needed for her healing." ^{25,26}(that doesn't mean I feel I must 'do it all' on my own). I had a few good confidantes with whom I could share. When my blog was more active, I enjoyed interacting with readers and our shared camaraderie. And I learned the nearly miraculous ability that physical connection with my wife, whether it be holding hands, a deep hug or sex, had to temporarily drain me of my pain if I was very mindful during the contact as I imagined myself channeling it out of my body and through the connection I had with her (don't worry...it didn't hurt her, lol!)

But possibly the biggest thing I had to learn about coping with all the emotional pain we were both experiencing was not pulling my 'hand' away from the 'burner.' I had to

learn to embrace the pain. I kind of imagined myself accepting the pain, breathing it in, overcoming my reflexive response to pull back from it. In the beginning it felt as if I imagine learning to breathe underwater might be. My entire system wanted to reject the pain and protect myself, but if our marriage was going to make it through this, then I had to learn to do this. And little by little, step by step, day by day, I learned the pain wouldn't actually kill me even if sometimes it felt like it might.

That doesn't mean I'm impervious to it. Many days I still feel overwhelmed. I still listen to all my parts in case I need to take action to lower that feeling of being overwhelmed. I still use my various coping methods and mindsets, but I no longer feel like I am convulsively trying to reject the pain. However, I am different than when I started this journey. One can't help but be changed by all the pain. I'm not giddily happy like I was when I was younger, but I am at peace with who I've become and the journey I've chosen to take with the woman I love.

Becoming Educated

I've been sharing how I became a good healing companion for my wife. And you may remember at the start of our healing journey together my wife made what I consider to be an extremely momentous request of me. She asked me not to read any other literature out there, expert or popular, about her dissociative identity disorder. She liked how I was treating her and especially how I treated her "alters".

You may not have noticed, but every time I use the word "alters" in this book, I've put quotation marks around it. There's a reason for that. Many people treat someone's "alters" as if they aren't real. Some suggest that a person's "alters" are pretend or made up, knowingly or otherwise²⁷. In fact, there's a debate among many of the mental-health experts out there whether DID is even real²⁸. Some would suggest that by engaging my wife's voices-turned-"alters", we created a problem that didn't even need to exist²⁹. Moreover, I tend to put quotation marks around the word "alters" because none of us, my wife, her "alters" nor I, really like that word. It has so much ugly baggage to it, and my wife's "alters" just want to be treated like a normal person.

My wife's "alters", like my wife, are extremely well read, and so they are very aware of this debate...and they are horrified by it. It's extremely upsetting to them to read how others think they aren't even real. When the original trauma was happening, their parents were too absorbed in their own trauma-induced fog to see what was happening to their daughter. My wife's silent cries for help were never heeded, and so her brain did the best it could and began to dissociate that trauma away so part of her could continue with normal life. Then at the beginning of our healing journey, my wife was afraid that if I read some of the literature out there by some of the so-called experts and if I read what the 'experts' thought of her "alters", they would influence me to stop engaging and loving the girls.

See, I was listening to her voices in a way our culture refuses to do. Now, I was engaging those parts of my wife which had long been sequestered and hidden away because of pain, shame and terror. Now, I was treating those "alters" of my wife as if I was happy for their entrance in my life. I even made it part of our ritual that when a new part came out, I would get a beautiful card by Josephine Wall³⁰, and I would write a poem to celebrate her entrance into my life. There's a small, barely-read section on my blog of the poems I have written along our healing journey. Here's a relevant one.

The Happiest Days

The happiest days of my life are when, Another girl joins me outside. For my heart will always have holes in it, As long as little girls hide.

So Tina I hope you never forget, That you are a source of my joy! And every time I get to see your face, My spirits are instantly buoyed!

Yes, the happiest days of my life are when, Each girl has taken a chance, And joined her hand into my own, safe one, That together we can join in life's dance.

So Tina, a partner for me, would you be? I'm ready to kick off our blues, As we listen inside to the music we hear, And don on our dancing shoes!

Yes, the happiest days of my life, it is true! When my girl is no longer scared, But knows she is safe in my gentle embrace, As together we dance away cares!

And so, I honored my wife's request not to read any literature out there for the first two or three years of our journey. Doing so gave me time to learn to listen to her. It allowed her to be my sole teacher on what did and didn't work for her. One of my groomsmen with whom I've shared this journey calls me an empath. And as much as I think I don't rise to the level of that term, I do believe that by letting my wife teach me what she wanted and needed those formative years of our healing journey together, it did teach me to be deeply in tune with her, almost empathic.

My wife and I seemed to intuit good relational practices because I listened to her. When we tried something to help her heal and connect to those other parts, we weren't bound to it because of a school or system of teaching. We tried it to see if it worked. If it did, then we continued doing it for each part that came out as long as it continued working.

But sometimes we tried things, and they horribly went wrong. I remember the time I told K.A. that she no longer had to be Amy's 'inside mother' since Amy had asked me to be her 'daddy'. K.A. had been rapidly maturing along with Allie, and as they grew up, they were acting more and more like 20 somethings instead of little girls. So, I wanted to give K.A. her freedom to explore that, figuring I could suffice as Amy's 'daddy.' But a few months later, my wife told me that Amy was in a tailspin and on the verge of collapsing. I don't really know what that meant internally, but what we tried hadn't worked, and so I had to ask K.A. to go back to being Amy's 'internal mother.' It was something Amy needed, even if I still don't understand to this day what exactly it does for my wife's internal system of organizing her personality.

Another time we were trying to help Allie move forward. I don't even remember at this point what the particular issue was, but Allie wasn't ready for the suggestion we made to her...and she began to freeze and seize up internally. Another thing I still don't understand to this day is how my wife can develop extreme, continual

migraines³¹ that are somehow related to her forward healing progress as she connects to all her other parts internally. But as Allie tried the suggestion I had made, she began to have an overwhelming headache for nearly 2 months straight. It nearly made her bedridden the headaches were so bad. It was just a little suggestion to connect her to the other girls better...and it had failed miserably. When I finally realized what was going on, I went to Allie and told her to give up on that suggestion...and the headaches went away, and she was able to function again.

So, during those first few years my wife and I developed a system of what I call pragmatism. We weren't, and still aren't, driven by any system or school of teaching on mental health. We are driven by what works to deal with her past trauma and what helps her internally connect her with all the other girls as we reshape her internal working model from one that is trauma-formed to one that reflects her secure attachment to me (*IWM, more on that later...*). And that has served us well.

And yet, as we developed a system that worked for us, I decided to start reading the expert literature available out there to see why, what we are doing, works so well for my wife's healing. I decided that I did, indeed, need to become better educated on the subject if I wanted to become the best healing companion I could be for her. There was no need for me to completely reinvent the wheel as I found some good information on the internet to which I availed myself.

The Great, Mental-Health Debate

As I became better educated on mental health subjects, I quickly realized there was a huge debate going on in our society and the halls of academia about how one should view mental distress issues³². Currently in the mental health arena there is a civil war occurring between two fundamentally opposed paradigms: the biochemical model which medicalizes all mental health challenges (something is 'wrong' with the person and his/her brain) and the trauma model (something has 'happened' to the person which explains the reason for his/her actions and feelings).

The biomedical model of mental health holds current supremacy in popular and academic culture and “focuses on purely biological factors and excludes psychological, environment, and social influences.”³³ According to this model, all mental health issues are purely biological in nature just like many other medical issues. From this model our society has taken to calling signs and symptoms of mental distress an ‘illness’ or ‘disorder’ like other biologically based illnesses such as diabetes, heart conditions and such. And just like we treat some of these other illnesses or diseases with medicine, psychiatric medicines are seen as a key, if not primary ingredient in the treatment plan to treat ‘chemical imbalances’³⁴ in the brain which are thought to cause the distress experienced by sufferers. In fact, the drugs are often the only treatment given when help is sought out by those suffering acute mental distress. Another hallmark tenet of this model is that these ‘diseases’ are thought to be for life: there is no permanent cure to be found for mental illnesses in this model³⁵.

But there is another model called the trauma model of mental health³⁶ which is gaining ground and credibility as our society grapples with the many failings of the current model to which it adheres. It is the paradigm to which I naturally subscribed on the healing journey with my wife.

Bob Whitaker is considered by many to have written the watershed critique of the biomedical model and its overreliance on medicine to address mental health issues in his book, *Anatomy of an Epidemic*.³⁷ In the book he asks why the number of people who receive government disability for mental illness approximately doubled since 1987 with all the wonder drugs for mental health available.³⁸ He then goes about answering that question while showing that our overreliance upon the psychiatric medicines touted as the ‘cure all’ for mental distress actually increase problems when used long term. Though the website he founded, *Mad in America*³⁹, has a strong, leftward tilt at times on many of the issues it deals with, it still is a treasure trove of information for those willing to dig through it.

The trauma model posits that the impact of various traumas that people experience throughout life provides a better explanation for the mental health 'disorders' that can develop as a person struggles to cope with said trauma. Trauma can be in the form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or lack of basic necessities, to name a few. As the trauma model has gained better recognition even those who hold to the biomedical model have been forced to acknowledge such widely recognized trauma issues as PTSD⁴⁰ (post-traumatic stress disorder) and other Trauma and Stressor-Related 'Disorders' now found in the DSM V⁴⁰.

It must be emphasized at this point that many believe since mental health issues are caused by trauma, not a permanent chemical imbalance or any other physiological dysfunction in the brain, then real and permanent healing is possible just like it is possible to recover from major physical trauma...with a lot of work⁴². Fifteen years into our journey, let me say the healing and radical, foundational changes I have witnessed in my wife have been breathtaking. Sometimes I feel like I am witnessing the birth of a star, and I have a front row seat as she becomes more and more beautiful each day, reclaiming aspects of her personality which had been lost in the murky past of her traumatic childhood.

However, I want to stress that even though my wife and I never looked to psychiatric drugs as part of her healing plan, that doesn't mean I believe there may be no place for them. My personal opinion is that when adequate human support systems aren't available to someone suffering severe mental distress, psychiatric drugs may be a short-term alternative. But be informed. Read the warning labels. Don't just take a doctor's nonchalant attitude as a sign that these drugs are safe and without side effects. The longer one uses them, the more potential one has to become addicted to them and suffer some of the many side effects listed in their own information pamphlets. Understand that despite the hype, the drugs are not fixing a chemical imbalance in the brain⁴³, but instead seem to be suppressing the extreme highs and lows which those in distress experience. The best picture I can paint is they are 'zombifying' the person onto a flat emotional plane that may be more manageable in the short term but may have other adverse effects the longer they are used. Mad in America has an entire

section on psychiatric drugs and how they work and affect us if you want to see an alternative view from a reputable source.⁴⁴

Finally, you need to understand that when you seek outside help for severe mental distress, it will most likely come from those who adhere to the prevailing biomedical model. They may push drugs as the main healing agent, and they may also, possibly, strip your loved one of her personal agency, especially if you have limited social power at your disposal. The psychiatrist is seen as the expert, and the sufferer and family views are too often minimized as barely relevant. There is a growing band of groups and therapists who seek a more humane and therapeutic way to help those in distress like Open Dialogue⁴⁵, but they are the exception and not the rule. An internet search for alternative counselors like we found who will not strip your loved one of her agency or force her to take psychiatric drugs to be in compliance with a mandated, rather than collaborative, therapeutic plan may be a better option.

Chapter 4: Attachment Lifestyle

"I, Sam, take you, Ka'ryn Marie, to be my lawfully wedded wife. To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until parted by death."

With those words over 34 years ago, I committed to start a lifestyle of being connected, of being attached, to my wife throughout our journey in life. And yet, when my wife's "alters" began to join us on the outside, they didn't feel any connection to me. Because of the deep dissociation my wife had experienced from her childhood trauma, these parts of her overall personality had mostly missed our dating and courtship in college.

So, one by one, starting with Amy, then Sophia, then Alexandra, then Shellie and K.A. and rounded up by the two most deeply buried parts of my wife, Tina and Jenny, over the next 15 years I began to date and court these other parts of my wife. To each girl I wrote a poem expressing my love for her. When I wrote this poem and gave her a corresponding card by Josephine Wall, Amy took to the nickname I gave her and she still insists I use it with her today:

Ear-Winged Fairies

Ear-winged fairies what a joyful day
 When they enter your life and begin to play
 They fill your house with giggles and mirth
 They fill your spirit with hope of rebirth
 And the more you laugh the stronger they grow
 As they flit all about in a fantastical show
 So praise the Lord if you happen to find
 A delightful fairy as special as mine.

Some of the girls quickly responded to my overtures. Others took years to overcome their previous trauma as I willingly tried to prove myself to be a safe man to each. And when each girl, each part of my wife, decided she wanted to make the same decision as the first part, Ka'ryn, had, then I 'married her into my family' and gave her a ring or piece of jewelry of her own choosing like Ka'ryn had received when we were married. Now, because the little girls viewed themselves as little

girls, I didn't have a sexual relationship with them, but we built a maturing relationship in many other ways as I began a journey built on attachment concepts with more and more of my wife.

Now, as I stated in the last chapter, part of becoming a good healing companion for my wife, eventually, meant that I needed to become more educated to help her heal. Ignorance for pride's sake of 'doing it on our own' wouldn't help my wife. And so I continued to read and join groups dedicated to mental health struggles on the internet. One of them was the now-defunct Trauma and Abuse Group (TAG) in the UK.¹ It was there that I first learned about John Bowlby's attachment theory.² That theory was like finding a silent benefactor that I had never known existed.

See, my wife and I had naturally been practicing attachment concepts on the healing journey. When she began to experience numerous extreme states (*more on that later*), I inherently knew that she needed me to walk through them with her. Maybe attachment concepts are hardwired into all of us because I naturally began to live out various aspects which this theory teaches about being a safe haven, about affect regulation³, about the importance of proximity maintenance⁴, and about my role as my wife's primary attachment figure⁵. Later we even discovered its tenet about the internal working model⁶ gave us the final key to fundamentally transform my wife's trauma paradigm to one that is healthy and integrated.

Let me pick our story back up. The first two or three years that my wife and I were on the healing journey, we just did 'what comes naturally.' I tried things to help my wife heal. If they worked, I kept doing them. If they didn't, then we tried something else. But I also listened to my inner voice that has a definite renegade streak to it. My wife and I never truly accepted the extreme forms of independence and individualism that our U.S. culture has embraced. As the other girls ("alters") started to join our life, all of them were plagued by a host of extreme states⁷ such as flashbacks, panic attacks, catatonic states, mini seizures, night terrors, agoraphobia, overwhelming anxiety, mild self-injury, 'paranoia' and more. When they began to display these manifestations of their dissociation, I just did what I thought any good parent or mate would do for a

child or loved one: I went through them with each girl, holding her, comforting her, speaking gently to her as I reassured her that she was no longer alone. I expressed sorrow for not being there when it initially happened to protect her, but affirmed that I would keep her safe now, etc, etc.

I made various personal guidelines along our healing journey, and one of them is I tried not to let any part of my wife cry alone as she was facing her past trauma head on. And so anytime one of the girls was crying, whether she was on the 'inside' or out fronting, if I found out about it, I gently requested for her to let me hold her while she cried, if she would accept that from me. She didn't have to talk about the source of her crying if she didn't want to, but I wanted her to realize she was not alone anymore. I would gently wrap her up in my arms, if she felt safe enough for that, because I wanted her to physically feel her connection to me and the warmth of my body rather than feeling the cold, isolation of her traumatic experience from the past. I repeatedly told her that I heard her, and I loved her, and I would go through whatever she was experiencing with her: she didn't have to be alone anymore. And because all of them fronted as little children like they were when the trauma occurred, I pointed out that even though each felt like a little girl, I was a big man who could protect her now...and I got the privilege of watching each girl's transformation as we practiced these methods.

When Sophia came out the first year of our healing journey, she cried for more than a year straight because of the abuse she had suffered 40 years previously. But as I helped wash away the smell of that man from her memory and as I cared about all the hurts and 'ouchies' she pointed out to me on her body, her emotional anguish began to subside. It took a couple years of me attending to Sophia's specific felt needs, but eventually, Sophia went from nonstop crying the first couple of years she joined the family on the outside to the girl who overflowed with joy and happiness. Some of my favorite family photos are of her dancing with joy on Cape Cod's beaches or laughing uproariously as she and I had our picture taken on a cruise with Alex the Lion from the characters of Madagascar. Today she holds the place in my wife's personality of expressing utter joy and delight at the simple things in life like dipping her toes into any body of water we are near.

Another example of how I interacted with various parts of my wife, satisfying their attachment needs without realizing it those first few years was with Amy. She had an insatiable desire for a healthy relationship with me that she had never experienced with her own parents. At the time Karen Peck and New River⁸ had a song out called "Jump" and the chorus is that of a father telling his young daughter who has climbed up a tree:

"Oh, Jump; Child, I will catch you; I will not let you;
Slip thru my arms; Jump; Don't think about it;
There's no need to fear; I'm standing right here; Jump."

And so Amy acted out that chorus the best she could for a few years. She would get on the far side of our dining room and have me stand in our adjacent craft room, and then she would run across the divide and leap into my arms. Happily I never dropped her, lol! But she did that routine over and over and over as she imprinted that happy memory into her mind where once had only been sad memories of her neglectful parents too preoccupied in their own, trauma-bound lives to be emotionally involved in their delightful daughter.

After a couple of years, I began to research the expert literature available online and was surprised to discover what I had been naturally doing lined up with the major tenets of attachment theory as posited by John Bowlby. I feel a huge debt of gratitude and hope someday the Bowlby Centre⁹ will allow me to share what their founder's theory has done for my wife and me. It literally has given us the roadmap we needed for my wife's healing as well as what we feel is a better way to live our lives in general: connected and attached to each other as we help each other through the storms that life brings us.

After I discovered the name of the theory we had been naturally following, I began to read up on it so I could more fully implement the major tenets to help my wife heal and hold our relationship and family together.

Perhaps my favorite quote of John Bowlby's is this: *"Human beings of all ages are found to be at their happiest and to be able to deploy their talents to the best*

*advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise*¹⁰. He and Mary Ainsworth are the best-known, early advocates of this theory. It has "become the dominant approach to early social development" and since the 1980's it has been used to study adult, romantic relationships as well¹¹.

The theory delineates four main attachment patterns in children. Mary Ainsworth developed the Strange Situation¹² test to observe a child's attachment style to her primary attachment figure or main caregiver. **Securely attached** children feel safe to explore their world even in the presence of strangers because if their feelings change, and they begin to feel scared, they can return to the safety of their caregiver where they will be openly welcomed and attended to. The **anxious-ambivalent**, **anxious-avoidant**, and **disorganized/disoriented attachment** are the other 3 styles. In each of these, the primary attachment figure is inconsistent or unresponsive to the needs of the child in the face of trauma or even basic needs, and so the child begins to develop various coping strategies that will affect it in a myriad ways throughout the rest of its life.

So what? I think the main thing to gather from these studies is whenever a child feels unsafe or in need, if it consistently meets positive affirmation from its caregiver after calling out or seeking help, then it will be securely attached to its primary attachment figure and will develop the same outlook throughout life. This will enable that child to confidently explore the world because it knows help is only a call away. However, children whose parents couldn't or wouldn't help them during times of distress or whose parents were unable to meet basic needs begin to develop the other three attachment styles in light of that reality. They never truly expect anyone else to care for them throughout life.

Fortunately, Bowlby gave us the roadmap to help those who were never securely attached to their own parents gain that sense of security. It's not easy, and it's not quick, but it is possible. Moreover, and I want to state this gently, but clearly: whenever someone has attachment issues, it is never their own fault but the fault of their primary attachment figure. But that statement isn't about blame. I

didn't understand these principles for the first 20 years of my marriage to my wife. Thus, as her primary attachment figure those 20 years, I failed and made things worse between us. But once I learned the principles, I was willing to change and become what she needed, so that her healing could begin. So, whether you are a parent who failed, or a spouse like myself, it's not about feeling shame or useless regret. It's what we do with this new information. We can't change the past, but we can change today and the future we create. It's about recognizing that our loved one's mental health is firmly based in how we respond to their cries for help. And just like I had to do myself, I simply call on all of us to do better. We can answer the call that Bowlby clearly gives: when our loved one cries out for help, no matter the reason, it is our responsibility, but also joy to answer!

Myth of Independence

If you want to help your loved one who is struggling with mental distress, the first thing you will probably need is an attitude adjustment. Unfortunately, here in Western cultures and especially in the United States, we have come to idealize independence¹³ and rugged individualism. Yes, there has been some pushback on those ideals lately as our society is ripping apart at the seams, and yet far too many people unthinkingly accept the premise that 'needy' people should be shunned, that adults should be 'independent', that healthy people should be able to 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps' and that truly successful people are 'self-made.'

Attachment theory tells us just the opposite: that the most healthy, most well-adjusted, and most productive people are those who have a support network. When they fall into distress, they can fall back on that network for help. Some researchers even wonder if the increase in addictions and mental distress are "*precisely because autonomy and independence have been encouraged at the expense of attachment needs.*"¹⁴

So, I want to encourage you to see that it's a good thing that your loved one who is in distress is displaying neediness. She is reaching out for help instead of

burying it inside. Hurt people are needy people. Hell, all of us are needy. That's human. That's normal. We need to stop pathologizing it.

Moreover, don't be afraid of what others may term 'rescuing' a distressed loved one. I don't understand why we caution someone about doing whatever is necessary to help a person who is drowning. Yes, there may be more and less safer ways to help someone in that situation, but we have to get into the water and go to where the person is to help her. Instead, our culture pathologizes the natural desire to save our loved one, to be the hero that they may need at that moment. We derogatorily say someone has a savior complex if they respond to the natural inclination we all have to sacrificially help our loved ones.

Things will get better if you invest the time needed to help your loved one feel safe, loved and valued. Our culture tries to shame those in need for expressing that need to others. And then our culture also tries to shame those who have the ability to meet that need from doing so. And, to make things worse, our culture tries to weaken our desire to save and protect the ones we love by saying, "only rescue someone if you can keep yourself safe from any harm in the process." It truly baffles me when we are only willing to get into a fight for our loved one's life if we can keep our hands clean and it costs us nothing.

But we took a different path. After 15 years of traveling this healing journey with my wife, certain phrases have entered our collective language and one of my favorite phrases is 'life is meant to be shared.' I quip it when we share a mug of coffee on the weekends. We say it to each other when we share meals and ice cream treats. We say it if one of us gets a special treat for our birthday or Christmas and the other wants to enjoy it, too.

But 'life is meant to be shared' is also for the hard times. It's for those times when my wife was regularly going through extreme states at the beginning of our healing journey, and I held her through each one and assured her she wasn't alone anymore. It's for those times when Tina first came out and she was so crippled with fear, that she nearly housebound us for an entire year. Once she was no

longer afraid of me, then she latched onto me for security, and she didn't even want me to get out of bed in the mornings before her (*I was still on 2nd shift at that point*) so that she wouldn't awake alone.

That phrase has become a reminder of the interdependent life we have sought to build to hold both of us together as we face the dragons and trials of our journey toward our happily ever after ending. We got a tandem bike because of Jenny's request for a reward to learn to eat. We put thousands of miles on it and its replacement. And then when COVID 19 hit, we moved to a tandem kayak so we still had something fun to do when the country got shut down. Amy and Jenny bought a cheap little Intex tandem kayak, and we found out we loved kayaking. So when that one died a few months later, we used our government stimulus money to buy a better one and keep on kayaking the next year, going all over Ohio and then vacationing in Michigan, New York and Florida. We continued to go kayaking and build happy memories together when our country was tearing itself apart because of COVID and the election, sigh.

Proximity Maintenance

Proximity maintenance and affect regulation are the two main tools Bowlby taught us to help our traumatized loved ones heal. Really, they are pretty obvious, and yet we live in a culture where we are encouraged to let our babies cry themselves to sleep for fear of them depending upon us, and latchkey children are the norm instead of the exception, and climbing the work ladder is more important than investing in our families. So, what ought to be obvious is clearly not obvious or at minimum not obtainable to many others.

For children, "proximity maintenance is the infant's desire to remain close to his or her caregiver. Attachment behaviors which infants utilize to connect with their caregivers include crying, smiling, sucking, clinging, and following."¹⁵ And, I believe, that need follows us throughout life especially when we are in the midst of distressing circumstances. We have to be physically present in the lives of our struggling loved ones! Social media won't cut it. Internet survivor forums won't cut it. We humans are wired to need the warm and reassuring, physical presence

of the person we are attached to whether we are in distress or not. If they are experiencing extreme mental distress and the manifestations which often go with that, they need your bodily presence. They need to feel your arms wrapped around them, (if your relationship is such they are good with that). They may need you physically available 24/7 at various times during the healing journey.

The first 5 years of our journey were utter chaos. Six different girls ("alters") joined our lives. They were all so hurt, so lost, and so needy. They weren't really connected to this world yet, and so they didn't know how it worked or how to work their own body either. As I related before, my wife's body was constantly black and blue as they ran into things, fell down the stairs repeatedly, tried to jump out of running cars, nearly got hit by cars because they didn't pay attention crossing streets, wanted to jump off buildings and fly using store-bought fairy wings, and so much more. Sometimes she hid in stores because one was suddenly scared. Other times she hid in stores because another wanted to play hide and seek. She hid in closets because the mailman came to the front door. She hid under tables from panic attacks. And I could go on and on and on and on.

Through all those things, my wife had my presence and our son's. Yes, it was exhausting those first 5 years. Yes, it was overwhelming, at times even scary. Yes, it limited my ability to do other things. But through all those things our son or I was physically present since he was still living at home while attending a local branch of our state college. I worked second shift and was home during the day. He went to college and was home in the evenings. Moreover, I made a point of being there with her as she went through the extreme states which were assaulting her. I would hold her hand as much as possible or snuggle on the couch. If she was hiding under something during a flashback or panic attack, I would sit down on the floor behind her and gently 'cocoon' her inside my arms and legs and whisper that she was safe now: "I have you." "No one can hurt you now." If she didn't feel like being touched at that moment, I just sat close enough to her that she could feel the body heat radiate from me to her so the message that "you aren't alone anymore" was constantly, physically conveyed through her senses.

Now, when my wife's "alters" first came out, most of them had little attachment to me or our son. They would come out...and just do whatever. We'd be shopping. One would 'pop' out, and she would just start to wander off in a store, curious but also a little dazed. I would stop doing whatever we had been in the middle of, and tag along. I'd try to engage her if she let me, but often I was ignored in the beginning. I made no attempt to restrain her, but I wanted her to be safe as I followed and tried to engage her.

Many of us may have seen movies or tv shows of someone who is in complete shock and dazed or in a 'fugue'. That's how most of my wife's "alters" came out at first, and so I just stayed close with each. I began to engage each one at whatever level she felt comfortable, but most importantly I didn't let her be alone, even if she didn't want me to have physical contact with her. I was like the tag-along puppy, talking, engaging, showing her things I thought might strike her curiosity, trying to make a point of contact upon which we could begin to build a relationship.

But I believe Bowlby's proximity maintenance can teach us much more than simply being present when our loved one is in distress and needs our safe and comforting presence to calm her. I believe an attachment lifestyle with our loved one means embracing the strength that comes from each other's presence at all times, good and bad. We are inherently stronger when we aren't alone. And I've found that I more deeply enjoy good things when I have someone with whom to share it. But, we have to be around. We can't be too busy to miss those opportunities to share life together.

When Sophia first came, she was absolutely and utterly mesmerized by Christmas lights. For more than a decade she would come out anytime we were near Christmas displays. I knew those displays were like a magnet to her, and so I would purposefully seek out Christmas stores or Christmas light extravaganzas during the season, not only to see the magic of those displays through her eyes, but to bond her and me together as we did something special together. I'd allow her to lead wherever she wanted to go for as long as she wanted to dominate outside.

Similarly, I remember taking our son and Tina to the Busch Gardens Christmas extravaganza near Colonial Williamsburg. She, too, was utterly delighted by one of the best Christmas displays I have ever seen, and when it was finally time for us to drive back to our room, Tina cried the entire way back to our room because she had to leave those beautiful lights. Those times are one of the many that I miss from that phase of our journey, when each girl had simple delights and we shared them together as we built a secure relationship for both of us.

I had a different ending to this section originally. I tried to minimize the effort I went through to stay physically close to my wife as each "alter" came outside and began to heal as she and I slowly bonded together. But, I actually miss those times when each girl initially came out. Those scared, disoriented, dissociated parts of my wife had a beautiful simplicity about them at the start of our journey together. They saw the world in a way that opened my eyes to so many things. And as I made the time and effort to 'maintain proximity' with each and every one of them, I got to see the world in a way that is so easily missed in our modern, frenetic society. And even today as most of the girls are connected and integrating naturally into my 'greater wife', I miss those simpler times when each one could show me the world through her unique, childlike perspective.

Affect Regulation

The second tool that Bowlby taught us is affect regulation. Affect regulation "is the ability of an individual to modulate their emotional state in order to adaptively meet the demands of their environment."¹⁶ Often trauma victims and/or those experiencing extreme distress have trouble regulating their reactions to things. I'm not suggesting we should be without emotions in life. That would be equally unhealthy. But when people have extreme emotional reactions in life, the reactions can become destructive or debilitating. In those situations, attachment theory has an answer.

One of the tenets of attachment theory is that the attachment figure provides another with 3 needed things throughout life: 1) proximity maintenance (being

close whenever needed), 2) a physical and emotional safe haven to alleviate distress and 3) a secure base from which the person can explore the world and develop their personal abilities and capacities.¹⁷ These 3 things help a person form a positive outlook about others, about herself and about life in general. And it is around these that a person learns major, positive affect regulation. If I understand this concept correctly, the attachment figure not only models good affect regulation, but promotes the necessary environment for the child to develop the same. In other words I'm the calm in my wife's emotional storms. I not only am an example to her of how to deal with stress, anxiety and past/current trauma, but I provide her the safe harbor to do the same.

We shouldn't minimize or invalidate our loved one's very real feelings. Instead, we need to learn to remain calm, loving, and empathetic, while we validate their feelings. We are not only modeling a good reaction, we are also giving them a safe place to express and release the emotional storms that have been bottled within. If she has been abused and traumatized, she has a right to be mad! Don't try to take that away from her by minimizing her experience. Give her a safe place and find a safe way to let out all the things associated with the trauma: feelings, memories and more. Then as the storms begin to diminish, we can help her contextualize that past into a narrative for today.

This call for us to help our loved ones with affect regulation harkens back to the previous chapter where I was trying to become as healthy as I could, so that I could lead by example. If I am emotionally unstable and in disarray, how am I going to be the calm in my loved one's emotional storm? And, trust me, I know this is hard especially as our country is still convulsing from all the stress that surrounded COVID 19, our culture war that seems to only be getting worse, and the upheaval from the 2020 elections. It's like the entire nation is having a meltdown, and we are taking it out on each other rather than coming together to help each other and help us heal as a nation. My wife recently told me she had considered checking herself into a mental health hospital because she was struggling so badly from what is going on in our lives and society in general. Moreover, yesterday I was sharing my own struggles with my wife, too, as we are

all discouraged about our inability to get Jenny connected to the larger group of 7 girls in my wife's 'system.' And so you can see, the need for loved ones to help each other with affect regulation never ends, no matter how far you are on the healing journey.

But let's go back to the start of our journey for some examples when my wife was struggling with so many extreme states. I think the presence of so many little-girl "alters" that joined us on the outside released me from the mentality of having 'adult' expectations from my wife and giving 'adult' solutions in response to her struggles.

When the little girls were out, it seemed natural to interact with them as a parent would a hurt and grieving child...and it worked. Only in reflection did I ask myself how we all can grow up to the point of forgetting our lessons from childhood. Moreover, I understand that experts and others may worry about 'infantilizing' and 'patronizing' our loved ones, but it never really felt that way to me or my wife. Those concerns kind of felt irrelevant to us when we were in the trenches fighting her recurring extreme states. She had a need, expressed by the little-girl "alters" which had joined us, and I met it, period. I didn't really 'see' my wife even though, obviously, I was still dealing with her body. I 'saw' the other girls with their other voices and mannerisms, expressing their desperate cries and needs for help which they never received in the long-forgotten past of their trauma. And the reality with which we were dealing was one created by extreme dissociation from her early childhood. I've often likened it to the Matrix movies. I didn't have any way to offer my wife a red pill like Neo took so that she could see the dissociation-caused Matrix in which she was bound.¹⁸ So I took another option. I followed her into her reality, helped her according to that reality, and then as she stabilized, as I was able to calm her and help her heal, we slowly climbed out of her own "matrix" together.

Now looking back at a safe distance from those 5 years worth of extreme states, we can get into academic musing about this and that, but what worked in that moment was quite simply things which would calm a little child: stroking her hair,

keeping up a gentle 'mantra' of soothing talk that I was there, I would keep her safe, "I'm a big man who will protect you now", etc, etc, giving her many, many baths to wash away the 'filth' of that man and then applying Johnson's Baby Lotion so she smelled clean, making her meals, reading her bedtime stories, gently wrapping her up in my protective embrace when she was so overwhelmed by a panic attack or flashback that she couldn't respond to anything else but my embrace, and whatever else seemed to help her feel the safety and security she never received from her parents.

The attachment theorists have begun studying romantic, adult couples and how the theory applies beyond the narrow scope of developmental childhood.¹⁹ They understand that no one ever outgrows the need to be deeply attached to others, especially one's romantic partner. I wonder if a healthy, adult attachment relationship subconsciously takes the lessons of what worked in childhood and contextualizes them into adult expressions. But if your loved one was deeply traumatized in early childhood, to some degree parts of her are still 'stuck' in childhood, and expecting her to embrace adult expressions like we might hope are unrealistic, and more to the point, not helpful. I was willing to go back to where my wife was stuck as evidenced by her 'little-girl alters', help her there, and then as she was able, we began to move forward together.

And in case you are wondering, today, 15 years after the start of our healing journey, I'm seeing the little girls less and less. They are still there, but they are naturally integrating into my wife's overall personality, and so they don't feel the need to 'front' all the time. It's honestly a hard adjustment for me because they still have a beautiful but unfiltered perspective on life that kind of gets lost as my adult wife contextualizes what they each bring to her overall personality. But this is the goal of the healing journey even if I found some former aspects of it really wonderful as well.

Self-soothing

Attachment theory teaches us that in a strong parental relationship an infant naturally seeks to be soothed and comforted by its primary attachment figure.

When an infant smiles, babbles or cries, it seeks to arouse the attention of an attachment figure. As that bond grows the child becomes dependent upon the figure for affect regulation and in the process learns to regulate itself thru self-soothing techniques. This takes place over the course of childhood until a person becomes largely self-regulatory.²⁰ However, attachment theory makes it clear no person ever outgrows the need for the soothing security of attachment bonds with significant others.

And yet, if your loved one goes to counseling or is part of any survivor, self-help forum on the internet, they are probably going to be taught self-soothing techniques. Unfortunately, many of these attempts forget that healthy self-soothing according to attachment theory naturally arises out of a lifetime of soothing experiences the child has with its caregiving parent. The foundation of all self soothing must be the wealth of experiences one has with the primary attachment figure. You can't learn this from a self-help book.

The great thing is one can gain those same experiences as an adult even if her childhood was less than ideal. I've spent the last 15 years pouring myself into my wife. As I've been reading through older parts of my blog for this book, I rediscovered my poetry section. I'd honestly forgotten how many poems I wrote to the various parts of my wife trying to help each create a new narrative in her heart and mind so that self soothing would come more naturally as it ought.

You're Loved

We're in a valley dark and deep
 With jagged cliffs that are so steep.
 With every step our feet are cut.
 With every breath our hearts cry out.
 We travel on. It never ends.
 Our hope is crushed at every bend.
 The pain, the tears that never leave.
 Oh, God of All now hear our pleas!
 But turn your head, my lovely bride,
 For I am still here by your side.

Look down and see we're hand in hand
 Or you're on my shoulders when I can.
 I love you, and I'll see you thru.
 There's light ahead, I know it's true.
 And when this trial is finally o'er
 We'll walk together to conquer more.
 You're in my heart. You're in my soul.
 In every cell my love does pour.
 So don't believe the lies of old;
 You're loved and worth your weight in gold!

Sam

7/14/09

At first the various girls in my wife's group were completely unable to self-soothe. Ka'ryn would viciously bite her hands trying to redirect the emotional pain she was unable to process. Now she can do much better because she is connected to the other girls and because I've spent the last 15 years affirming not only her but each girl's question of "Do you love me?" thousands and thousands of times affirmatively: "Yes, I love you!". I never tire or get annoyed at the chance to chip away at the lies she was fed during her childhood abuse and her parental neglect.

Every single kind and loving word or deed we say or do for our loved one builds a new, soothing matrix that cradles her and enables her to better fight past dragons and current ones. There is no quick and magic cure for trauma. We are seeking to build a loving and supportive attachment relationship over a lifetime, and if we do it correctly, it will benefit us just as much as our loved one. As my wife has healed and stabilized and become stronger, she has begun to reciprocate and do the same kind of things for me.

So, never lose sight of the fact that we were made with an inherent need for a lifetime of healthy, soothing attachment. Don't let self-soothing just be another way for our hyper-independent culture to push independence and isolation upon you or your loved one. We will always need a kind word, a gentle

smile, a squeeze of the hand, or even better, a warm hug from someone who loves and cares for us.

Internal working model(IWM)

The last thing I want to mention from attachment theory is Bowlby's internal working model. "Each individual builds working models of the world and of himself in it, with the aid of which he perceives events, forecasts the future, and constructs his plans. In the working models of the world that anyone builds a key feature is his notion of who his attachment figures are, where they may be found, and how they may be expected to respond. Similarly, in the working model of the self that anyone builds a key feature is his notion of how acceptable or unacceptable he himself is in the eyes of his attachment figures."²¹

As I read about the internal working model, I realized that my wife's dissociative identity disorder seemed to be a visual representation of what Bowlby was teaching. My wife's overall personality is broken into 8 formerly-distinct parts represented by each of the 8 "alters" with whom I interact. Internally, they have shared various aspects of their 'inner world' with me. Each of them has her own room inside. At the start of this journey, those rooms were largely disconnected though K.A. was Amy's 'internal mother' and Sophia was Amy's 'little girl.' Moreover, Shellie was Allie's little sister. Tina, Ka'ryn and Jenny were all completely disconnected internally from the others.

Over the years of our healing journey, as I've helped the girls securely attach to me, that change seemed to give them the secure base they needed to begin to heal. Simultaneously, I began to teach the girls to talk and work together. And yet, all the girls continued to default to their former way of doing things on her own until we began to purposefully change the inner visualization they all had of their inside rooms: their IWM.

Tina and Sophia taught us the importance of remodeling their IWM. Sophia is the littlest girl in the group. When she first joined me outside, she considered herself 1 year old. She barely had any motor skills and hardly could talk. She

would have been considered a nearly useless splinter by some experts. But after 6 years of healing and growth with me she decided to have another birthday a few years ago (after having another previously) and at age 3 she decided she's growing up and now demands more respect from the others. She then began to push Tina to be her 'twin,' (*i.e. equal*) now that they were the same age.

And for Tina's part, she revealed that not only had she been sequestered from the other girls for over 4 decades, but unlike them, her only inside clothing was a torn and tattered black dress without shoes and a rat's nest of hair that she could never fix: a pathetic picture of her abuser's throw away trash. That imagery broke my heart. Fortunately at this stage in the journey taking care of that was much easier and we had a couple of designer children's clothing websites²² to help her and Sophia choose her new wardrobe). Then she and her newly 'adopted' sister, Sophia, had beautiful new wardrobes of matching (*because they are [almost] twins!*) clothing. Now she has beautiful clothing (*inside*) and her hair is clean and neat. Her internal perception has radically changed: instead of seeing herself as her abuser's trash, she sees a beautiful, loved and cared for girl because of her secure attachment to me. My girl!

The changes above affect my wife's overall internal working model. As the little girls change their internal self-perception, they interact with each other differently and also with the other 5 girls. Then those changes affect how they as a group are able to interact with the world outside. My wife, the whole, no longer has a part of her that views herself as an abuser's trash. Nor does she have any part of her that sees herself as a helpless infant: I remember the first time Sophia was driving with our son in the car: I remember the look of shock and concern as he realized his life was in the hands of little Sophia. He had been away at his master's program for a year and had missed the changes she had undergone. She was no longer the barely understandable, helpless toddler he had known. She could drive now and do anything the other girls could as well, via her now-strong, inner connection to Amy. Inner perceptions affect the outer actions of everyone.

Now I understand that most of us, including our loved ones who are in distress, may not seem to have such a visually explicit representation of our internal

working model. However, I firmly believe my wife's experience is just on a spectrum that we all experience: more extreme than many, but certainly not the most extreme by any stretch. And as I have journalled daily over the last 15 years, filling thousands and thousands of typed pages, I have learned to listen to myself. I've learned to listen to things I say repeatedly to myself. I've learned to listen to my inner communication. Sometimes I have visual memories that repeatedly pop into my head. Sometimes I observed myself being 'triggered' by external events. I watched myself struggle with needs and desires, especially the ones which have gone unsatisfied as my wife and I have faced the hardships of journeying to our happily ever after ending. I struggled with the lack of help and support from my family and my wife's: how would I make sense of all that? I've also watched the things which drive me and won't 'let' me take a different direction in my life.

I also shared my belief that I have parts just like my wife does. And although my parts may not have been 'structurally' dissociated²³ like hers, yet on a practical level they acted dissociated as I experienced a lot of cognitive dissonance because I hadn't done the hard work to integrate all the competing needs and desires they brought to my life.

Over time I believe I reshaped my own internal working model. I don't believe it was anything nearly as visually explicit as my wife's. I can and will share more later of the visual 'reconstruction' we have done in her IWM that has made radical changes in her fundamental ability to interact internally with herself (*her 8, formerly dissociated "alters"*) and externally with the world. But for me, and perhaps the rest of us, I wonder if reshaping unhealthy aspects of our IWM is more about learning to really, deeply listen to and observe ourselves and as we interact with our loved ones and come to better and healthier conclusions than we were able to make as children when so much of our trajectory in life was being subconsciously infused into us by those early experiences in childhood.

As I sum up this chapter on attachment theory, I hope I have expressed how incredibly life changing these concepts have been not only to our healing journey

together, but to our marriage relationship and even to our family life. As I said previously, we never accepted the extreme forms of Western independence and individualism, but as my wife has healed, she has begun to act as my primary attachment figure as well. I am a human being just like she is. I need her help. I need her support.

Moreover, our son has yet to marry, and so we understand we are still his main source of attachment support. During the COVID lockdowns of 2020-21, he was living outside Boston, and his state had pretty brutal lockdowns. And so my wife and I did what we could to emotionally support him because he was almost completely alone for more than a year in a little room of a boarding apartment. I played PS4 with him via the internet for 3-4 nights a week as we tried to stop a zombie apocalypse as I tried to help him not be so alone. Additionally, my wife spent many hours on the phone after I went to bed at night so she could stay connected to him as well.

An attachment lifestyle is for all of us, not simply those who are experiencing mental distress. It keeps us emotionally strong and healthy especially as our country and culture are convulsing in an identity conflict in which neither side seems willing to listen to and affirm the other. So we need to reject our cultural model of unhealthy independence and warfare and listen to what Bowlby taught us all those decades ago as we live an interconnected, attachment lifestyle within our smaller family and social groups.

Chapter 5: Trauma and Dissociation

Thus far in this book, I have focused on us, the primary attachment figures for our distressed loved ones. We, the spouses, the significant others, and the family members, need to be willing to do the work to become good healing companions if we hope to walk the healing journey in a way that promotes healing. We also need to understand the basic tenets of attachment theory because I personally have found it to be the roadmap for so much that my wife needed to fundamentally heal. But now it's time to deal with what I believe are the culprits of our loved one's distress.

As I stated previously, I naturally adhered to the trauma model of mental health when my wife first told me she might have DID. Perhaps that's because the little reading that I did at first put DID in the trauma section of the DSM. Or maybe it was simply that in my naïveté I didn't know that according to our culture I should now consider the woman I loved and had lived with for the previous 20 years to be 'crazy' and intellectually unstable.

So, let me qualify that the things I share in this section about dissociation are things you may not commonly read. We took the 'road less traveled'.¹ If you read the literature in academic circles or in the popular literature, often they view dissociation and all its associated symptoms as something to be fought and avoided at nearly any cost. They promote grounding techniques as the sufferer desperately tries to fight dissociating. And the drugs they prescribe are often part of an attempt to keep the person on a flat, emotional plane and 'present'.

As I did some internet searches of 'coping with dissociation' and similarly phrased word searches, it is quickly apparent the angst and fear and desperation that many people have when it comes to dissociation. It is so misunderstood by many. Some of those searches left me with the feeling that the 'real person' was gone, and she had 'checked out from reality'. Nothing could be further from the truth!

My wife and I embraced the dissociation and have lived in it for the last 15 years. Let me say this clearly: dissociation is where we found the deep healing

must take place. All those places that my wife's mind had 'tucked away' and sequestered her trauma had to be brought out 'into the daylight' so they could be affirmed, validated, loved, healed, and eventually integrated into my greater wife who was so much larger than the woman I had known and loved the first 20 years of our marriage. The 'real' person? She's who you've always known as well as all those dissociated parts you can have the chance to meet, too...if you are willing to help her embrace them together.

At first having my wife's "alters" jump in and out nonstop and helping them deal with all the trauma, resultant dissociation and extreme states which followed was like learning to breathe underwater. It is scary at first, and I don't want to minimize that. It felt like I was suffocating and was going to drown! I know my wife felt like she had lost her life to the other girls. But, eventually, it became natural for both of us. Then to our surprise, living in that milieu allowed us to find deep healing and reconnect all those separated parts of my greater wife into a healthier group. We haven't arrived: it's not an easy process, but we discovered ways of undoing the dissociation along the way that have forever changed the way I see this topic.

And so that's what I hope to share with my readers. Am I an expert on dissociation? Only if you believe in experts with lived experience who have walked with and at times literally carried a loved one on the healing journey. I'm only an expert if you understand that I sat with her through flashbacks, panic attacks, mini seizures, catatonic states and more and figured out how to help her heal so that she rarely experiences those things anymore. I'm only an expert if you believe that teaching all the girls to communicate, work together, and slowly live together is important. Sadly, many experts hold up the chaos of *The United States of Tara* as typical: we started there, but we got through it together. Finally, you may disagree with why the things we did worked, but in the end they did work. I'd be happy to debate and dialogue the 'why' with any who want so we could all come to a better understanding of the healing process.

And one final word: you may say, "But my loved one doesn't have DID. So, your experience doesn't apply to ours." In my opinion, we've had to deal with so many different mental health issues because of the total breakdown of my wife's personality along the various dissociation fault lines. Each of the girls in my wife's group had her own issues which I've had to help her overcome. So perhaps, if you are inclined to read on, you may find something from our experience of value to you as well.

Mental Trauma

For the record I want to define mental trauma as I did on my blog:

So, what is the trauma? To me, it is anything that occurred at the time of the abuse. It could be the lies the abuser told the victim to keep power over him/her. It could be physical pain. It could be the feeling of loss of agency. It could be the feelings of isolation and being unheard by the primary attachment figure who didn't protect the child in his/her care. It could be the overwhelming sense of fear from not knowing whether one's life will end or when the next instance of abuse might happen if it is ongoing. These and so many other things, I relegate to the sphere of the original trauma.²

But it's not only the original trauma. From those painful experiences our minds often struggle to make sense of 'why' the trauma happened? Did I do something wrong? Am I to blame for this? Am I a bad person, and that's why this happened to me? Is this God's judgment upon me, and I need to accept it? If God is good, why did He let this happen to me?

It's important to remember that what is traumatic to someone else may not have been traumatic to you. Moreover, trauma can also include the absence of needed things like food, love, shelter, and more. The emotional and affirmational neglect my wife suffered from her parents was in some ways just as devastating as the sexual abuse she suffered from the neighborhood boy. They were supposed to protect, love and care for her. How does a child cope with that when that isn't the case? There are a host of factors which can contribute to the severity of the

effect any trauma may have upon a person. The support system one has in place will definitely determine the extent of the damage caused by any trauma. Don't judge. Someone isn't a snowflake just because you wouldn't react the same way she did.

I've spent years talking with the various parts of my wife about the trauma and things she had come to believe because of it. Sometimes she just needed to be heard. Other times she needed my perspective to help her choose a healthier one of her own. Daily life affords so many opportunities to discuss the past, validate her and then help her move forward. Daily life also gives me the chance to undo the neglect. The littlest girls love for me to take care of them like their parents should have. My wife tells me 'you don't need to make me dinner', and I reply, 'I know, but the little girls like me to, and I don't mind doing it.' Each thing I do to care and provide for those little-girl parts of my wife is a counter-weight to the neglect they suffered during their original childhood.

Dissociation:

Once any person has been traumatized, her trauma-coping mechanism called dissociation will kick into effect. So what is dissociation? Wikipedia says it "*is any of a wide array of experiences, ranging from a mild emotional detachment from the immediate surroundings, to a more severe disconnection from physical and emotional experiences. The major characteristic of all dissociative phenomena involves a detachment from reality, rather than a loss of reality as in psychosis.*"³

I'll be honest: I find that definition unsatisfying and not very helpful. It lists feelings caused by and symptoms of dissociation (emotional detachment, detachment from reality) without actually defining what dissociation is. This is how I would define dissociation after 15 years of helping my wife heal from it: *dissociation is the coping mechanism of our minds that sequesters (dissociates) any overwhelming pain or fear caused by trauma until it can be properly addressed and healed. If said trauma is not healed, then the sequester of those memories (dissociation) becomes (semi) permanent and causes the loss of use of any part of the mind associated with the sequester.*

We see something similar to mental dissociation at work all the time in those who have suffered physical trauma. This is how I described it on my blog:

If a limb is broken, and the trauma is not addressed and corrected so it can heal, then slowly the mind together with the body begins(sic) to develop coping strategies to live without the full use of that limb. If, for example, that leg is broken and no doctor is available, the person may use a splint and staff to continue walking. He/she may also begin to limp, trying to limit the weight that is put on the broken bone. Other muscles will have to work harder to compensate for the loss of the leg. And joints will become stressed from the additional weight they must bear. The break will begin to affect one's posture.⁴

The longer the limb is left traumatized, the muscles will begin to atrophy. The bone will begin to calcify over the break instead of reconnecting to its broken mate as the body tries to staunch the open wound. The tendons and ligaments would be stressed and stretched from the displacement of the broken bone. And even the mind would begin to incorporate the loss of that limb as nearly a normal part of life. Plus, stress and anxiety may become associated with that break if it was an especially violent event that caused the trauma. In time the break will begin to stress and affect the entire system, mind and body.

But say 40 years later (as in my wife's case), someone would come and *begin to address the trauma to the leg. The break would be corrected, and the body would finally be able to fuse that break. But there would be far more to address at that point than simply putting the two pieces of the bone back together. By that time the entire body and mind would have to be retrained from having compensated so long from the pain and disuse of the limb. The atrophied muscles would need strengthened and the rest of the body would have to be retrained to allow the eventually-healed leg to return to its natural use. Moreover, all the coping strategies that the person employed in the absence of the functioning leg would have to be unlearned, and that would not be an easy task after 40 years doing things without the leg. The other parts of the body that had tried to take over the loss of a functioning leg would now have to be retrained to allow the leg to do its natural function.*

From our experiences, I really haven't found extreme dissociation of the mind to be categorically different from the similar process that occurs in the body except that with the mind those dissociated areas can take on semi-autonomous-like properties, and, when encouraged as we did, become full-blown "alters".

However, let me remind you, again, that dissociation is something all of us experience. It's just a matter of degrees. The literature loves to point out that we all experience mild dissociation like getting distracted when we drive, and that is correct. But, I believe, there's much more to it than that. We have dissociative knowledge built into our common language: we simply don't recognize it for what it is. We talk about 'going on autopilot' when we have to do a boring task. We talk about being divided over things, "Part of me wants to do this....but part of me..." We also talk about being 'fully engaged' (assuming we can also do things while not fully engaged). We have so many other phrases that hint at our dissociative tendencies most of us ignore.

But it's still more than even that. As I began to understand dissociation better having helped my wife through it for 15 years, I began to see varying degrees of it in nearly everyone I know including myself. Most of us functionally live dissociated lives rather than healthy, integrated lives. I've shared some of my own struggles in chapter three as I grappled with competing desires and needs of sex in my own life that I had never fully integrated...leaving them for all practical purposes dissociated. Moreover, since I said this wouldn't be a religious book I left out my many struggles to fully integrate the conservative, religious beliefs I was raised to accept with the reality of my life and the reality of our healing journey. I just didn't have energy for beliefs that didn't work once we started this healing journey and all the initial chaos that ensued. And so I completely deconstructed the faith I had been raised to accept without much thought and tried to arrive at something I could honestly accept and embrace without requiring all the mental gymnastics I had lived with previously.

But dissociation is even more than that. I see it in the way most of us approach life: with our tendency to adopt simplistic, black and white fallacies. Typically, the various parts of my wife each had a single, different perspective on issues. Each had a black and white outlook on life, and yet, as we brought those parts back out and breathed life into them and helped them integrate into my greater wife, they gave her a depth of perspective and nuance on many issues. I realized I was lacking the depth and nuance that my own parts should have provided me. Most of the important topics in life aren't black and white; they are brilliantly technicolored and nuanced...but our entire culture is engaged in a simplistic tribal war that espouses 'Us, good. Them, bad.' And as I helped all my wife's parts integrate, that process affected me as well. I began to realize that things aren't nearly so simple and easy as I was raised to believe. I tell Allie, my wife's cultural warrior, how mentally exhausting it is trying to read and assimilate all the discordant views life throws at us. I understand why most of us prefer simplistic views of life: integrating complexity and nuance with enough humility to accept 'I don't know' everything on any subject into some kind of reasonable outlook on life is exhausting!

But dissociation is more than that. I see evidence of extreme states in myself and the people around us all the time. And as I will show in the last chapter, I think most of the extreme states are directly related to stronger dissociation. But most of us are very good at hiding them and downplaying them because we truly want to believe that only 'crazy' people experience those kinds of things. We are all so desperate to be part of "Team Normal" as Representative Liz Cheney calls it.⁵

Like I said from the very start, my wife and I were unaware of any mental health struggles in our respective families when we first started our journey. But as my wife and I have become more healthy, we realized how truly normal and dysfunctional our families were and are, but they would never admit it. And that's not to knock them: our culture is desperate to ignore how much we all struggle. We all want to believe we are on Team Normal and that it is the 'others' who are the crazies who believe conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation

and more. We desperately want to believe we are perfectly sane while we downplay our outbursts of anger, while we ignore the things that trigger us, while we ignore the strong cognitive dissonance between what we say we believe and what we actually live.

Dissociation is a normal human reaction our minds adopt to uncomfortable things in our lives. On one end it is caused by extreme trauma and the mental walls which are set up and which feel nearly unbreakable without a lot of help as I have provided for my wife, but it is also caused by the discordant realities of our lives as we struggle to integrate all the things which seem to attack the safe little worldviews with which we each grew up. Dissociation leaves all of us weaker because it ends up limiting access in our minds sometimes as badly as the example I gave at the start of this section of the person who lost use of his leg because of that trauma. Functional dissociation can leave us like those 6 blind men and the elephant: only seeing part of reality while we argue with one another about who is right and wrong instead of realizing others, with a different point of view, give us an opportunity to see things we would otherwise miss. An un-integrated life can be functionally as dissociated on some levels as my wife was structurally dissociated at the start of our healing journey. As she began to heal, I realized I needed to do the same.

Validate and Turn

Now, as we move toward the culmination of all our preparations to become a good healing companion for our loved one, learning about the basic tenets of attachment theory, and then gaining a (very) basic understanding of trauma and dissociation, I want to include a couple other things of importance. We have to implement the humility I called for previously.

Quite simply, I had to learn to validate whatever my wife was experiencing or feeling. At the beginning of our journey I had the tendency to argue with her about things which she was experiencing which didn't line up with my view of reality. But it didn't take long for me to realize that was counterproductive. I

didn't convince her of my "superior" position. She became more calcified in her position. And more importantly, it kept us disconnected from each other because *I refused to hear her and see her experience how she saw it!*

Now I didn't reject common knowledge about gravity or the earth rotating the sun in order to do this. But I had to learn to validate the *perceptions and feelings* of my wife in that moment even if they made absolutely no sense to me. She wanted to be heard! She needed to be heard because when the abuse happened during her childhood, her parents didn't hear her cries for help, and her abuser sure as hell didn't care about her objections. And so, one of the most important lessons I needed to learn as we started our journey together was to close my mouth and open my ears and my heart and listen to what my wife needed to tell me!

And as I learned to listen to and learn from her, I realized that so much of what she was experiencing was truly bound up in the past. So, it wasn't so much that she was "wrong" or had "a break from reality", but I had to change my perspective like in a picture or painting. And once I adjusted my perspective to align with hers, her perceptions and feelings came into focus and were more understandable and comprehensible to me!

But the second step is just as important. Someone who has experienced severe, childhood trauma develops a "trauma paradigm" through which all of life is viewed. Consider a paradigm⁶ like one of those digital filters that you can use today in photography, and it will literally color the entire picture a certain color, or it will morph and twist the picture into a caricature of itself. So, 40 years after the abuse had stopped, my wife still viewed much of her life through that paradigm of childhood trauma and the fact that her parents were too broken and preoccupied with their own issues to see their beautiful daughter was being hurt and molested by the neighborhood boy.

So, after I learned to validate her feelings and perceptions which she shared with me, which were based upon her trauma of sexual abuse and not being heard or

protected by her parents, then I slowly began to turn her to her new reality today: "Honey, I hear you. Honey, you aren't alone anymore. Honey, I'm happy to take care of you. Honey, I will protect you." And little by little as I validated her past and then turned her to her present with me, she was slowly able to release the grip the past had on her and move forward in the present with me. I clearly remember the day when the littlest girl, Sophia, exclaimed to me, "You make me safe! You make me safe!" And it is that safety that has allowed each of the girls to slowly move forward and begin to exhibit the traits of a securely-attached child as they leave behind their trauma paradigm.

It's not quick. It's not easy. I have literally spent the last 15 years affirming the new reality each girl shares with me today, affirming my love no matter how many times I am asked, affirming my commitment to stay with each. But it does work, and today even though we are still struggling to undo parts of the dissociation for the most part, my "greater wife", all 8 girls, are in the present with me.

Neural Plasticity

The last subject I want to deal with concerning dissociation is how our brains function. Neural plasticity refers to the changes in neural pathways and synapses of the brain due to changes in a person's behavior and environment. It "specifically refers to strengthening or weakening nerve connections or adding new nerve cells based on outside stimuli."⁷ Scientists used to think that only children exhibited neural plasticity but adults were 'set in their ways.' We know now that's not the case. The human brain remains changing and adaptive throughout life.⁸ However, our brains 'reward' use of neural pathways and 'punish' disuse. In other words if you use a skill constantly or begin stimulating the brain in new ways, your brain strengthens the pathways which are necessary for said skill and/or stimulation. The converse is true as neglected pathways can atrophy from disuse. Sadly that's the chasm that someone who has suffered trauma and extreme dissociation must overcome: neural pathways atrophied from a lifetime of dissociation.

I like the analogy of creating neural pathways on one of the websites I visited. "In the woods of your brain you regularly use certain footpaths to go to various destinations: the market, the stream to wash clothing, a friend's house, and such. But one day you discover an abandoned fort filled with things to discover. There is no pathway there, but you are so intrigued by this discovery and what it contains that you wear a footpath to the fort with your constant treks to and from it."⁹ That is what must happen for each person in the system to become connected to the others: daily activity between the people of the group until the new neural 'footpaths' are fully established.

Sometimes when I read some of the literature out there, there seems a superficial naiveté about helping our loved ones heal if they have suffered from extreme dissociation caused by early-childhood trauma. It's not enough to heal the trauma and then wave a wand to give your loved one access back to all those areas of the mind which are still dissociated. The neural pathways must be re-established or, more probably, established after a lifetime of atrophy caused by dissociation.

I have spent the last 15 years, daily engaging my wife's formerly dissociated areas of her mind to train her mind to easily access them. It serves two functions: one it keeps me attached to everyone in my wife's group, but just as importantly, it serves to strengthen the neural pathways to those areas which were formerly shut off to my greater wife. I write brief, daily emails to all 8 girls every morning: the five older girls always respond. For the first 7 or so years, I had a date with each girl every single week, giving her special time with me. Again it strengthened the attachment bonds between us, but also strengthened the neural pathways to give everyone greater access to the area of the mind in which she had been sequestered. And throughout the day, every day, I would purposefully engage as many girls as I could. I would kiss each of them goodbye as I went to work and each of them goodnight as we went to bed.

And beyond my personal, daily engagement with every part of my wife, we tried to create activities that facilitated engagement with all the girls. When Tina joined our family, I moved the small craft room I had created for Ka'ryn, Amy and Allielieu to a much larger room in the house. Then I completely renovated it and stocked it

full of supplies. I made sure to give each girl 'control' of specific supplies. At the time the littlest girls were still limited in their mental capabilities, but I wanted them to stay engaged while the other girls crafted together. So I bought Sophia, Shellie and Tina supplies which interested them and which the 'bigger girls' had to borrow from them like beautiful, metallic shimmer paints, designer papers, exquisite paper punches and more. That craft room and the shared interest they all had in it, forced them to learn to work together and be together, internally, mentally. Fifteen years later, the mental pathways between each of them have become easily accessible to the point they are often just together by default.

Chapter 6: Engaging "Madness"

In this last chapter I hope to put it all together by giving practical examples of how I engaged my wife throughout the healing journey. Remember, I never saw my wife as 'crazy' or 'psychotic', and so I expected to find meaning in the things she was experiencing, if I was willing to engage her and adjust my perspective to align with hers. And once I understood things from her perspective, then I was able to walk with her, and we could find a way out of the confusion, hurt and pain together.

But before I continue, let me recap a few things. Even though my wife requested me to engage her struggles from the start of our journey, the first few years my engagement gave mixed results because of the chaos and anger in my own life. So, let me be clear: the transformation that took place in my own life that I cover in chapter 3 was requisite before I could really help and engage my wife in the best possible, most-healing manner in her life. That transformation helped my wife feel safe to continue opening herself to the horrors of the trauma she had suffered as a toddler and then also safe to continue sharing those secrets with me. As I stated before: I had to earn the right to become her healing companion.

But I was recently reminded of another issue that was related to our joint decision for me to engage my wife at every point of her mental distress. When we first started this journey, I was repeatedly told on my blog and in other online forums that if I engaged my wife this way, I would make things worse. My detractors believed that I would 'damn' her, so to speak, in these signs of her 'mental illnesses.' I didn't have a good reply at that time other than I was simply doing what my wife wanted. This pushback by others was part of the reason Ka'ryn had asked me not to read other stuff lest I bow to the peer pressure of how things are commonly done when someone is suffering severe mental distress.

But over the course of the last 15 years, I feel our decision to engage everything she experienced has been vindicated. First, the engagement allowed deep healing because she rarely experiences the things I will cover in this chapter anymore, and when she does experience them, they are no longer the hurricane-force disruptions which engulfed her at the start of our journey. Now they are much more on the

level of a 'thunderstorm', like what most people who haven't been subjected to extreme trauma experience. Second, I believe that engagement guided by attachment principles allowed us to tear down the dissociative walls between all 8 of my wife's 'alters' and now they can 'mix and swirl' together when they want, even Jenny. No, that is not yet their default position (mixing and swirling together) as we still have work to do in their IWM, but the ability is there now, whereas at the start of the journey, it was literally impossible for them to interact on any level. And third, the engagement as dictated by attachment theory, allowed us to naturally restart the process required for my wife to develop as a healthy, secure person.

In retrospect, I believe we experienced a clash of mental-health paradigms when people warned me not to engage my wife or I would make things worse. See, those warnings, I believe, naturally arise from the biomedical model of mental health which says there is something wrong with a person's brain who experiences such things. That perspective believes my wife is 'crazy' and 'mentally ill' and all the things she experienced were signs of her mental pathology.

But, we naturally adhered to the trauma paradigm of mental health. And as we lived in and embraced those things she was experiencing, we came to understand that these things were part of the natural process of tearing down the decades of dissociation which had resulted from her trauma. We learned to help her brain reincorporate those memories and feelings back into her current personal narrative. Thus, rather than desperately trying to stop and medicate away those experiences, we embraced them as part of the healing process which I could help facilitate as I satisfied the role which Bowlby laid out for primary attachment figures.

Thus, I hope you will also consider that engaging the 'madness' of your loved one is a critical part of the healing process. On this side of the journey, I readily affirm that our decision to do so has made all the difference in the arc of our healing journey.

Engaging "Psychosis"

In this next section I want to focus on what 'engaging' means to us and our healing journey. In this book I have used many of the common terms that one would find if one were to do any search of the internet: madness, psychosis, delusions and paranoia. And yet, if you were to go to my blog, you would rarely find any of those terms on it because I think they aren't particularly valid, and they definitely aren't helpful.

As I said before, after 20 years of marriage, just because my wife started to experience some extreme stuff, to put it mildly, those things didn't change my opinion of my wife: she wasn't crazy or mad as those terms are used in reference to this subject. And, so, what about "psychosis?" I hear that word thrown all around. It was ignorantly thrown at my wife by a pastor with whom I shared just a little of our situation at the beginning of our journey. But until I began to frequent the Mad in America website, I didn't realize just how big of a concern "psychosis" is to most people.

Again, what is "psychosis," and why do I object to it so casually being used to describe people experiencing various mental health struggles? (*caveat: I'm not talking about physiologically or chemically induced psychosis, but that which is associated with mental trauma and dissociation.*) If you do a quick search on the internet, it becomes readily apparent that the most basic understanding is that psychosis is when people lose some contact with reality.¹

My first issue with the relative ease with which psychosis is used and thrown around is: **losing contact with reality according to whom?** Who gets to decide what is real and what isn't. Often perspective is a key ingredient to this question that is ignored. Our entire culture is wrapped up in a culture war that breaks my heart as I see both sides ripping our nation apart. Accusations by one side about the other side spewing misinformation and disinformation and believing conspiracy theories about COVID, the elections, BLM, critical race theory, this, that and the other abound. And yet as I watch this war, it is apparent that so few people really quiet their internal arguments long enough to **hear** what the other side is saying and experiencing. Instead, we judge what another is saying according to our perspective and diminish their take on "reality." We are right

back to the analogy of the 6 blind men and the elephant as each of us fights and argues about our perception of reality and disputes with anyone who would disagree.

Fortunately, I was so desperate not to abandon the one and only woman I ever have loved and to keep our marriage intact that ***I listened to her!*** And as I did, all those things she was saying and experiencing slowly began to make sense to me. It was a matter of perspective and of my learning to see things from her perspective and not judge them according to my own.

Let's recap the last chapter. Any trauma that causes significant fear or pain is sequestered (i.e., dissociated) (*like an infectious COVID patient*) by the human mind whether its source is physical, emotional, mental or otherwise. If the person has the ability to self-heal and cope with the associated pain and/or fear from that trauma, then the sequester ends. But if the trauma and subsequent fear and pain is of such magnitude that outside help is required for healing to occur, the sequester will continue until such help is attained. A broken limb usually requires a doctor to set it and then physical therapy to restore full use of the limb once the break itself has healed. If the trauma includes severe mental or emotional fear/pain associated with it, then attachment theory suggests that the person best equipped to help the victim is a stable and secure attachment figure using the tools of proximity maintenance, safe haven, and affect regulation to help the person through the pain and fear.

If that is not done, the sequester (i.e., dissociation) will continue indefinitely as the human system tries to continue functioning as normally as possible. Unfortunately, as I hope to share later, each time a sequester occurs, personality traits and mental abilities seem to get scooped up in that sequestration as well. And thus, the person is left with diminishing capacity to deal with any future trauma.

-The Rip Van Winkle Effect-

Now, all that to say, as my wife began to heal, the various mental sequestrations she had experienced during her childhood were slowly lifted. I was engaged with

one part of her while we were out on our weekly errands, and she made the comment how different everything looked than the last time she had been out. Just prior to that, I had found her hidden under a clothing rack at our local Macy's because she had become overwhelmed by her new surroundings. See, from her perspective, she was like Rip VanWinkle.² When the trauma happened during her early childhood, she was put into a deep sleep (*sequestered to minimize the pain and terror to the rest of my wife*). And when she awoke, it was 40 years later! A lot had happened and changed in America from the late 1960's/early 1970's when this part of my wife had been put to 'sleep' until she awoke in the 2010's.

She was disoriented! And it was scary to her as she had lost everything familiar to her: her house, her parents, her toys, and now she was living with some strange man (me!). So, she hadn't lost touch with reality. Her reality had completely changed according to her perspective, and nothing looked familiar to her. She wasn't the only part of my wife to describe the dissociation in a similar manner. Once I proved myself to be a safe person for her and willing to respond to the needs she expressed, then I was positioned to help her reorient to the current circumstances in which she found herself.

As my wife and I continued on the journey, I realized that other things she experienced, also fell into this category that I call the **Rip Van Winkle effect**: the natural disorientation that occurs after decades of deep sleep because of the dissociation various parts of my wife had experienced. Flashbacks seemed to be her mind's attempt to bring these long-dissociated memories of pain and fear back "online" so to speak. But the process is messy at best. It is disorienting to the person as past trauma memories flood the overall person and overwhelm the current experiences.

Again, my wife wasn't psychotic per se. These other parts of her were in a time warp essentially: so it was always a little bit confusing. And then to make it worse, when she experienced flashbacks and other 'extreme states' her past memories and present circumstances were mixing and clashing and overwhelming her. But as I learned to apply the attachment concepts I mentioned above, I could help her and calm her and sometimes literally carry her through the chaos

until her mind could make sense of these renewed memories and put them in an acceptable position within her current, personal narrative.

My second issue with us using the term psychosis is it makes us lazy. If I say that my wife is psychotic, i.e. she isn't living in commonly-accepted reality, then what would be the point of making any attempt at understanding what she is experiencing? I can guilt free call her crazy, mad, or "reality challenged" if I want to be charitable. If she's psychotic, I don't have to do any of the hard work to get inside her experience and figure out what's going on internally so that I can help her calm the chaos. It pains me anytime I hear someone use the term. I know most of us family, spouses and significant others aren't trying to be mean or cruel. We are just parroting our culture and the experts who ought to know better.

I'm not going to whitewash this. Walking with my wife on this healing journey is the most exhausting thing I have ever done. I don't consider myself a saint or "wonderful" as some have suggested. I have cursed all those damn experiences from my past, which I relayed at the beginning of this book, which have prepared me to take this path. Part of me wants to quit! Part of me wants to be lazy! Part of me just wants to go and have a normal, healthy, easy relationship! I hate Valentine's Day that is again approaching and all the damn cards which speak of an easy, satisfying love that I've never known! But as I desperately wrote in my daily journal, 10,000 pages later, I know that the only way I can live with myself and be true to myself is to walk with the only woman I still love toward our happily-ever-after ending...no matter how hard it is.

So, I truly do understand why we choose the easy path. I long for it myself. I have found so few companions to walk the one I'm on with me. It's lonely, and I'm treated like an ignorant buffoon everywhere I go, but I try to be true to myself no matter how much it hurts.

But lastly, lest I end this section on a down note, it's not all bad. No, I don't find the term psychosis to be very helpful. I know my wife isn't crazy or mad. She never had a 'break from reality'. More correctly, I believe she was experiencing a reality caused by the messy chaos of integrating her past, dissociated trauma into her

personal narrative today. And because I chose to walk with her through the exhaustion of constant extreme states those first 5 years of our journey, we got to see some amazing things happen. I got to witness parts of her wake from their deep, forced sleep to a new life. I got to be there with each of them and help breathe life and stability into them. Despite the fear and trauma many of them had been forced to hold all those decades, they still had a magical perspective, a childlike innocence toward life. As I helped each one release the fear and pain she had held for decades, I got to see each grow and connect to the others and lend the traits and abilities she controlled to my greater wife's personality as she became enriched and whole in a way neither of us had witnessed before. And I learned about myself along the way, too. Her experience taught me how to become healthier and integrated, as well.

Engaging "Delusions"

Well, what are "delusions?" Here's a basic definition from the internet: a persistent false psychotic belief regarding the self or persons or objects outside the self that is maintained despite indisputable evidence to the contrary.³ To me, this kind of sounds like a more specific way to define psychosis, and hence the quotation marks around the word. I never thought my wife was "delusional" even after I became aware of its popular use, but that doesn't mean I didn't at times struggle with some of the things various parts of my wife believed as they left their forced isolation and began to live outside with me. So let me share some experiences and see where I failed and where I succeeded in helping my wife through her more challenging perspectives.

Perhaps the most reality-challenged belief one part of my wife shared with me was her insistence that she had been a spy in Europe. What do I do with that kind of statement? Well, like most of us, I disputed it, over and over and over. But the more I disputed her claim, the more adamant she became about it! This was not working. And so, I finally came to the point at which I changed tactics. The next time she brought up her claim, I said honestly and without patronizing, 'Honey, will you please tell me about it sometime?' And that was the last she ever mentioned it.

I still don't know what to make of that interaction and her insistence on the validity of that memory until the moment I validated her. Perhaps she just needed to be heard and validated. I honestly don't know, but what I do know is when I argued and disputed with her, it only escalated her claim, but when I validated her and her belief, that validation released her in some way that she has never brought it up again. You be the judge.

But there were lots of other 'delusions' my wife had, and most of those didn't resolve themselves so easily. In the beginning of our journey, I tended to dispute them like most of us would. The same part of my wife, when she first came outside, claimed that her inside world was more real than the outside world. This seems to be common in the DID community. For some reason I thought I could argue her out of that belief, but it only seemed to solidify that belief for her. And so, I had to learn to shut my mouth when she made these claims. Instead of arguing, I simply decided to live with her and enrich her life on the outside with me. I spent a couple of years doing all kinds of fun things with each part of my wife who joined us on the outside those first 5 years. It was almost like I imagine having grandchildren would be. If I'd do it for a grandchild, why not my wife?

And you know what? I remember the day when that part of my wife decided she liked the outside world better than her inside world. In fact, she told me she now wanted to stay outside permanently. And one by one, each part of my wife who joined us outside came to that same conclusion. They no longer wanted to be "insiders" as they are called in the DID world. They wanted to make a life with me and our son on the outside. I had won the argument by not arguing but by simply living with each part of my wife and making life with me and our son far more attractive than anything on the inside.

But what do I make of that belief that the inside world my wife experienced is more real than the outside? I see it as another example of the Rip Van Winkle effect. Imagine if you had been trapped inside your mind for 4 decades and only rarely did you get glimpses of the outside world. Which place would you think feels more real? Wouldn't that inside place feel more real to you if you suddenly found yourself on the outside? First you were forced inside. Now your brain has

kicked you back outside. You didn't really get a choice in either decision and so coming to terms with the outside is just a prolonged orientation process, and I, as my wife's primary attachment figure, am the one called to do it.

Here's another "delusion." When that same part of my "greater wife" first came out, she would longingly look at all the delightful little girl dresses and clothing and toys which are available today. She would look at her hands and body and tell me, "These aren't mine." She would tell me she hoped in heaven to get a body of her own. It broke my heart to see her pine for the childhood experiences she had lost because of the dissociation. Her parents were not wealthy most of her childhood, and so she rarely got big Christmases.

And so, for the first 3 or 4 years, I lavished her with Barbie dolls and all the exquisite clothing that is made for them. We also bought Barbie and Ken's little brother and sister Tommy and Kelli and all the delightful things for them⁴. For a couple years I played dolls with her. We amassed a huge cache of dolls and clothing, and we would spend a couple hours a few times a month changing all of them and setting them up in our bedroom so she could see them and be delighted by them. I also spent all my breaks at work playing Webkinz⁵ online with her as she created a delightful imaginary world with other children. And even though I couldn't buy her the beautiful little dresses she saw for little children, I found her a beautiful 'princess' dress that I bought her for her to wear on a cruise so she could experience the longing in her heart.

I came to view these childish longings as a result of the dissociation. This part of my wife had been trapped inside and missed all the experiences she associated with a happy childhood. Now, I could ignore her longings or tell her to grow up. I could treat her like she was delusional: seriously, this is her body and her life, not the one she missed during the dissociation! But I decided the best way to deal with her disappointments was to satisfy them today the best I could.

And as I validated the various longings each part of my wife confided with me, little by little she was released from them. At this point it's been years since I've played dolls or done some of the delightful, childish things those parts of

my wife longed for. Today all of them happily busy themselves with adult activities, games and friends, and I firmly believe it is because I engaged the disorientation that left her feeling like an unhappy little girl that had lost her childhood in forced dissociation.

I came to view those deep longings like the proverbial monkey caught with its hand in the cookie jar, and its obsession with the cookies is stronger than its instinct for self-preservation. And so, I decided to indulge my wife's deep longings for her unfulfilled childhood wishes. I decided to satisfy her desires to overflowing, until they were satiated and quenched, and she could happily release those proverbial cookies and be released from the death grip the cookie jar that her missed childhood had on her. Today she has moved on from so many of those longings created by the disorienting Rip Van Winkle effect. I almost miss some of them as we have yet to be blessed with any grandchildren, and I miss the delights that satisfying those dreams brought to me as well.

But some "delusions" can be dangerous. That same part of my wife one time told our son and me that she wanted to buy some store-bought fairy wings like little children wear so that she could jump off a building and fly! Our son and I freaked out! I believe this was a different aspect of the Rip Van Winkle effect. We discussed the "age of alters" on my blog one time. It was suggested by one of my readers that the age at which the dissociation occurs due to trauma is the age that becomes associated with that part of the trauma sufferer. But these splits also "froze in time" childish perspectives including the inability to separate fantasy from reality. And so, to this part of my wife, she thought store-bought fairy wings would enable her to fly. Happily, as she spent more time outside with me and our son, she learned to differentiate between fantasy and reality as the normal maturation process was restarted and she was reconnected with my wife, Kar'yn.

The last "delusion" I want to share is how the various parts of my wife relate to me. I believe the Rip Van Winkle effect cannot be overstated when dealing with the long-term effects of childhood trauma and dissociation. As the dissociation is broken, the newly-released parts of my wife still operated from the

perspective in which they were "frozen" internally for over 4-5 decades; therefore, all 7 voices-turned-"alters" which joined us on the outside originally viewed themselves as little girls since the overwhelming majority of my wife's trauma occurred during her early childhood.

And so, as each part was released from her mental imprisonment over the course of our healing journey, each one brought her perspective when the dissociation occurred with her; that of a little child. None of them had any interest in being a wife to me. And so, I chose to relate to each part in a manner that felt most comfortable to her. I didn't demand that she accept my reality, that she was part of my wife. Instead, I entered her reality and chose to relate to her accordingly. Most of the parts wanted to relate to me as the daddy figure they didn't have with their absentee, emotionally broken father and their emotionally abusive mother, but others were ambivalent and so we simply interacted as friends until she was ready for something more. I didn't force what wasn't desired. And as I related to each one and met her where she was and helped her release the pain, lies and fears she had carried from the trauma including the lack of healthy parental figures during her childhood, each girl was released from the death grip in which she was caught. And each one began to move forward. In fact, two of them quickly moved forward and matured until they wanted to relate with me as girlfriends. And one part later wanted to become engaged as my fiancée.

Engaging "Paranoia"

How does the internet define paranoid? "Paranoia is thinking and feeling like you are being threatened in some way, even if there is no evidence, or very little evidence, that you are."⁶ As I said with "psychosis," it's all a matter of perspective, and when I took the time to understand why my wife was constantly afraid, she no longer seemed unreasonable. In fact, I would argue she was quite reasonable. However, the reasons were based upon her past trauma, and hence this, I believe, is another instance of the Rip Van Winkle effect.

It's important to put ourselves in the place of our loved one when the trauma was happening. For my wife, she was a toddler who was at the mercy of her neighborhood abuser. She had no ability to stop the abuse on her own, and in her

mind, he kept her from the only source of relief from the abuse that her parents represented because of his threat to kill them all if she spoke to them about what he was doing.

So, she did the only thing her brain could conceive to mitigate the abuse: she became "hyper vigilant"⁷ as she tried to decode all the sounds and events in her immediate environment. Thus, every unexpected noise was a potential sign her abuser might be returning. Every unexpected event could be a prelude to more abuse. She tried to control her surroundings and the people in them in her desperation to minimize her abuser's ability to hurt her which, of course, was impossible and exhausting.

So, for the first 20 years of our marriage, my wife would wake me at least once a night and tell me she heard a "noise" downstairs, and she wanted me to verify it wasn't a break in, sigh. There was no point in arguing: if I didn't do it, she would fret the rest of the night. And so, I trudged downstairs and checked things to satisfy her and then came back to bed with the "all clear" message to her. And anytime I got out of bed to go to the restroom or got up early to go to work, no matter how quietly I tried to sneak out of the room, I would hear her gasp as she startled awake at the barely-audible sounds I would make as I left the room. She never slept soundly because her brain was on "red alert" to detect any noise that could signal the next abusive episode.

But over the course of the last 15 years, as the traumatized parts of my greater wife were released from the dissociation and came outside to be with me, I was able to help each one deal with the past trauma and then accept her newfound safety with me (validate and turn). And as I did so, the hyper vigilance has slowly diminished, until today, I rarely make a trek downstairs to check for noises, and I can quietly sneak out of the room without hearing the familiar "gasp." It makes me smile with happiness as she is slowly lowering her defense-alert level.

Just like other so-called "delusions," if I argued or minimized her perspective and feelings, it only escalated her fears. She needed to be heard! She needed to have

me care for her in a way her parents never could because of their own trauma issues. And as I did so, it released her slowly from the death-grip the past had on her. Then she felt safe to have me hold the truth of her abuse so that she could rest in her newfound relationship with me and move into the present.

So, if your loved one is "paranoid," ask her about it. Don't be distracted by "outlandish" claims of aliens, secret societies, the CIA or anything else. Remember, childhood is full of fantasy and dreams and childish perspectives, and sometimes the mist of the past event can make memories fuzzy. Focus on the immediate fear. Ask what would help her feel safer. Remind her that she isn't alone anymore, and you will help her be safe. Be careful not to do things which might escalate the fear, but honest engagement shouldn't do that because now your loved one will know she has an ally and someone to watch her back in a way that probably never happened during the original abuse...and that is when real healing can begin to take place.

So, is my wife "delusional". I would argue not. Instead, I would argue that she is disoriented and suffering from large parts of her personality having been trapped in a forced dissociation caused by her trauma. And just like Rip Van Winkle, her perspective is from another time, her childhood, and as her primary attachment figure I am tasked with the duty and pleasure of orienting her to current circumstances today. I chose to walk with her where she is during the orientation process and grow with her as we find our way together rather than forcibly demanding that she accept today's reality before she is ready.

Engaging Voices

If you notice, this is the first category in this chapter that I haven't put in quotes. It's the first thing in our common wisdom about mental health distress that I have found to be helpful. And yet, our common wisdom belittles this phenomenon and often pathologizes it.⁸ Instead of embracing voices as something many of us naturally experience when properly understood, too many in our culture twist and shroud hearing voices in shame, fear, and ignorance.

So, what are voices and how does one engage them in a way that is helpful and healing in our loved ones? What do you believe about the voices that some people hear? I remember wrestling with that question when my wife and I first started the journey. How I answered that question would determine how I engaged them or whether I engaged them at all.

I remember some of the options I considered. As I already said, common "wisdom" typically views voices as inherently pathological. They are a sign of mental illness. They are a sign that the person is crazy or going mad. They are delusional, and not real in any sense. And, supposedly, they can make people do scary and dangerous things which are uncontrollable. And because this is the prevailing "wisdom," so much of our mental health industry is centered on stamping out or controlling those voices. They are seen as forces to be actively opposed at worst or begrudgingly tolerated at best.

Another option is that these voices are real, but they are coming from an outside source. As someone with a deeply Christian background, the idea that God or angels or even demons could be communicating with a person can't be dismissed out of hand. Neither can one dismiss the possibility that beings from outer space or other dimensions could be communicating with a person.

Though I sought those kinds of experiences my entire life because of my religious background, I never experienced them. I often watched people around me in charismatic and pentecostal churches seeming to have supernatural experiences and wondered what was wrong with me that I never did, too. I was desperate for those experiences: but I wasn't going to pretend to have them so I could fit in with the others around me. Moreover, I wonder if many who have accepted this option concerning voices are fueling the rise in popularity of mysticism and shamanism and many other beliefs which see these voices as guides to deeper truths and meanings: it would be a natural complement to the Christian belief in similar things. I won't say these people are all deceived. If the outside sources of voices are real, more power to the hearer, but based on my complete lack of success to experience such things after decades of

pursuing those kinds of experiences, I decided it was unlikely the voices my wife was experiencing fell into this category.

So, I landed with the last option that I thought was most viable: that voices, no matter how they express themselves internally or seemingly externally, are just a part of that person's mind. And so, if these voices my wife started to hear were part of her own mind, then they were a part of my greater wife that I wanted to engage, especially as she urged me to do so. Much later in our journey, I believe this option has been fully vindicated as we learned about dissociation and how it works in all our minds.

If you accept the picture that I have tried to paint of mental dissociation previously, then voices easily fit into this picture. All trauma that causes overwhelming pain and fear is sequestered (i.e., dissociated) by our mind no matter the nature of said trauma. If the person continues to experience trauma, then the mind continues to try and find "space" to sequester the trauma within its framework. And when the trauma is not quickly resolved with the help of someone trusted, preferably the primary attachment figure, then the dissociation becomes systemic and permanent unless someone comes along to later help undo it.

Now imagine a house that is filled with disconnected rooms, and in each room an occupant is trapped. If one occupant makes noises or speaks, another occupant in another room might be able to hear it, but that sound or voice might feel frightening, scary, foreign, friendly, etc., depending on each one involved in that limited interaction. In fact, if the occupants are put in these rooms at a young enough age, children have fertile imaginations, and the sky is literally the limit for what these noises and voices could represent to others trapped within the house but with no way to discover the other occupants.

This is a very, very basic analogy of what my wife and I have found extreme mental dissociation to be like. We have found that those voices were just lost parts and pieces of her greater self which were forced to sequester because of the unbearable pain and fear each held from the trauma she suffered as a little

girl and the lack of a loving and affirming relationship with her own parents. And because of how early she experienced the trauma, the 'doors' in her internal house were nailed shut, unlike the more mild and moderate forms of dissociation most of us ignore in our own lives.

So, back to my wife's declaration at the very beginning of our journey: "I might have DID, Honey..." She and I began to engage the voice she started to hear as I shared previously in this book even though we were told we would make things worse by engaging my wife's voices. Engagement is not what our culture believes should be done, and yet, these voices were desperate for engagement with me whether for love or security or to validate the anger one held. One was so heartbroken when she read an article about getting rid of "smaller alters" (called splinters) like herself: her desperate plea was, "I don't want to die. Please don't make me go away!" I replied to her, "Honey, I have fought too hard to find you and make a life with you. I love you, and I would never let anyone get rid of you!"

From the perspective of each of these voices they are real, and they were distinct from the one I had always recognized as my wife, Ka'yrn, because they are part of my "greater wife" Ka'ryn Marie. Each one wanted to be valued and validated for herself. Each one was desperate for the loving, safe relationship with me and our son that she had never known because of the trauma.

I already wrote about how my wife and I first began to engage her voices until Amy felt safe enough to come out on her own. Sophia followed soon afterward. So, here's an example of engaging my wife's angry voice since these kinds of voices are what drives so much of our cultural fear of this phenomenon.

In the second year of our healing journey my wife and Amy began to tell me about "the General." This voice was still inside and angry! It hated me for some reason. It said vile things about me which neither my wife nor Amy would relay to me.

So, what do you do when someone hates you? I asked my wife why I was hated so much by this voice, and right away my wife produced a list of a number of offenses this voice accused me of. Now, I had a choice: would I defend myself or

would I accept these accusations as valid even if I didn't fully agree with them? I was reminded of a quote that "apologizing doesn't always mean you're wrong and the other person is right. It means you value your relationship more than your ego."⁹ Moreover, to be honest, many of the accusations had merit. Remember, we'd had a stressful marriage for 20 years. I wasn't perfect no matter how hard I had tried to be a good husband. I had failed many times to live up to the Christian ideal of sacrificial love. And so, I began the process of repairing my relationship with this angry voice. Whatever "the General" accused me of, I would first make sure I understood the extent of my offense in her opinion, so that I could make full and unpatronizing apologies. I never gave "my side of the story." The first time I apologized to "the General," my wife said the angry voice got quiet and didn't know what to do with my apology.

And so, for the next 6 months I worked through "the General's" grievances she had against me. With each apology from me, her anger began to lessen. I never defended myself. And sometimes she accused me of things I *knew* I had never done, but I realized that the voice was expressing anger from past trauma, too, and it had no access to confront her abuser as he was long gone in the past without name or location to us. And so, I allowed myself to hold the anger she had for him as well (*and just in case any are wondering, a few years later, when Alexandra was in a better place, she came to me and apologized to me for accusing me of things she knew I wasn't responsible for during this time.*). Little by little her anger was extinguished. No lies, this was an emotionally painful and draining process for me as I'm sure it was for her, too.

During this process of apologizing, "the General" decided to come out and directly deal with me one night. The first time she did, I freaked out. I thought I was in *The Exorcist* movie as this sullen, gravelly-sounding, venom-filled voice suddenly sat in our bed. I said, "Who is this?" She spat, "It's Me!" Once I calmed down and realized what was going on, I began to engage her. She had come out to inform me that a meltdown I was having at that moment was *not* helping my wife and Amy feel safe, sigh. And so, my feelings be damned (*because my overarching goal was for us to make it through this journey together*), I tried to pull myself together and get back in control of myself.

And that began the engagement I had with "the General." But another rule I had was I never, ever talked with these voices without a personal name. "The General" refused to tell me her name, and so I gave her one. I made it clear that if she didn't like the name, she could change it at any time, but I refused to call her "hey you" or "the General" which was a derogatory name my wife and Amy called her. I knew how important it had been to Amy and Sophia, the first two voices to externalize, for me to engage them as real and develop a personal relationship with each one. And so, I named "the General," Alexandra, and we began an alliance in which I helped her protect and keep the others safe.

She is my wife's "warrior" voice or "defender" voice as it is called in the DID community. I would regularly ask Alexandra how I could protect and care for the others better. I let Alexandra know, "I will help you, if you let me. You aren't alone anymore." Slowly, Alexandra, who saw me as an adversary, then begrudgingly accepted me as an ally, continued to let go of her anger. And then I remember the day she accepted a little Webkinz "love froggy" (*stuffed animal*) from me just like a delighted 8-year old girl would do as she wrapped it up in her arms and looked at me with absolute love and adoration in her eyes. It's a moment that still brings tears to my own eyes because that transformation was so hard for both of us to achieve.

But that was just the beginning of my wife's "angry voice" transformation. When she accepted that gift from me, she wanted to change her name to something she preferred to express her newfound freedom to be the little girl she had always really been. See, she had been forced to be the lonely warrior, desperately trying to protect the others inside my wife since her own parents had been too self absorbed and broken to protect their daughter from her neighborhood abuser. And Alexandra had no hope of winning against any adult abuser in the future other than to puff herself up like those little lizards which inflate their necks to appear larger than life to scare off would-be predators.¹⁰ And so "the General" was a combination of bravado and desperation as she attempted to do an impossible job she simply couldn't do on her own. But as I saw past her projection of bravado and engaged her on her terms but with an eye toward a better

relationship, slowly she was released from her past and wanted to join me in that better relationship.

And so, Alexandra chose to become Allielieu to express her newfound freedom to be a little girl. She still had to protect the others (because she was the "defender" part of my wife's personality), but she no longer had the anger. Moreover, she also knew I was a trusted and loved ally at this point to help her protect the others. At that point she allowed me to "marry her into the family." But unlike some of the other voices, Allielieu, once released from the anger and trauma, began to grow and mature along with another voice who externalized a year later, K.A. These two quickly matured into 20-something Millennials. Allielieu was the first to ask to become my girlfriend, and so I gave her another ring to celebrate that moment, and Allie (the name Allielieu was too little girlish now) sang about that ring and the fact that she was someone's girlfriend for weeks! Then a couple years later Allie expressed her desire to become engaged to me. And so, the voice that had once hated me and everyone else with vitriol had now come full circle, and she was literally the first one of the voices to want to marry me.

Today, Allie will complain that I made her weak because she no longer is full of anger and vitriol, but I point out that those don't make someone strong. Instead, she has become a gracious social-justice warrior. She along with Amy, Ka'ryn and sometimes K.A. will make the most eloquent arguments on social media which Allie drives as the warrior of the group and the other 3 sweeten the arguments with grace and exacting logic.

You may ask: what about your wife, Ka'ryn? How did she react to me and Allie getting engaged? Well, like I said, my perspective is all these voices are just lost parts of my greater wife, Ka'ryn Marie. And unlike some significant others in the DID community, I never, ever, ever played these voices (turned 'alters'/girls) against each other. I always did things out in the open (*I mean, seriously, how do you hide something from someone who is part of the same mind?*). And so, there was no jealousy between Ka'ryn, my wife, and Allie, my fiancée, and K.A., my

girlfriend. Once she was released from the past trauma and pain, she grew beyond just the "defender" role those required.

And Allie, like all the other voices, brought personality traits and mental abilities to my wife that Ka'ryn had never experienced on her own. Today my wife can feel and express anger through Allie. And she also drives my wife to stand up for things she believes in like social justice issues. But she also will help my wife stand up for herself and no longer be a doormat to others, including myself, as I was recently accused of doing in the past by Amy...touché.

Here's a second example of engaging my wife's voices: Tina. As I said previously, my first experience with this voice was her coming outside while we were driving in a car. Suddenly a new girl was sitting with me, but she was frantically trying to open the door so she could jump out of it while we were on the interstate highway going 70mph! Needless to say, this was another scary moment for me and her. Fortunately, she didn't seem to understand how to work the door handle, or it could have been disastrous.

Well, the other girls knew a little about Tina but not much. Unlike the rest of them, apparently Tina had been trapped in a lonely, dark place of their inside world, like a dark, dank basement that everyone avoids using unless absolutely necessary. No one else had access to her, and to make matters worse, she was mute. How do I communicate with a mute voice?

But Tina continued to come out from time to time, and every time she did, she acted like a frightened animal desperate to get out of my presence. But now that I knew she was there inside my wife's mind, I tried to engage her. I lived by our army's motto of leaving no soldier behind, and even though I had no idea how to engage a mute voice I began to try. I bought her a pretty, Christmas snow globe for her to enjoy when I wasn't around. And then I bought an oversized coloring book, and I would let K.A. relate feelings she got from Tina about how she, Tina, would like the various pages to be colored. And, I added Tina to the daily email list even though I had yet to have any real engagement with her.

So, again, how do you communicate with someone who is mute? And then we got a tiny miracle. We were in Washington, D.C. for the Cherry Blossom Festival, and I lit a prayer candle at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in desperation for a breakthrough. And that night, Tina revealed that she knew sign language. And so, I quickly learned the alphabet, and we began to communicate that way. Eventually, I helped Tina through her overwhelming fear of me. Sophia also began to communicate internally with Tina, and at some point, Tina began to talk to me using Sophia's voice. Those two were naturally drawn together internally and eventually would become inseparable.

Meanwhile, I was still working to securely attach Tina to myself. The day she felt safe enough to formalize her secure attachment with me, we were on our 25th anniversary cruise to Skagway, Alaska, and I bought her a beautiful ammolite ring at the port to celebrate that milestone.

Once she was securely attached to me, it helped her to entrust to me the trauma she had held for 45 years. She had been the part of my wife to hold the memories of her abuser snapping the neck of a little kitten in front of her eyes and threatening to do the same to her if she told her parents about what he was doing to her. He also said she was 'his girl' and no one else would ever want her because she was 'ruined'. And he hurt her so badly that he told her that he left his 'mark' on her.

Little by little she told her story to me now that she felt safe. I was there to hear her cries for help and protect her in a way her parents never had. I spent many nights with her literally wrapped around my upper body like a little child does as I walked around the house and she buried her face in my neck and cried and wailed and flailed as she let out the horror of what that man threatened her with and had actually done to her. I pointed out that he had no right to claim her for his own; she was now free to choose. And that was a life-altering realization to her. And then...she chose me. And thus we began affirming to each other a series of phrases to state our new reality: "I choose you. We belong together. You are my girl, and I'm your guy." She and I still say those phrases to each other. She typically starts it, saying one phrase at a time, and I repeat each back to her. And

I always end every daily email I send to her with it. Moreover, we bought matching pendants to wear on chains around our necks with eternity hearts and the words of those phrases inscribed on them.

Additionally, she was no longer bound to her past and the cold, dark basement room that represented it. That was when we learned the importance of Bowlby's internal working model, and we began to connect all those disconnected rooms in my wife's mind in which my wife's voices had been sequestered. We moved Tina out of the basement and into an adjoining room with Sophia. Eventually they opened a wall between their two rooms and literally became inseparable when they desired to be. We also eventually created an internal common area where all the girls (voices) could gather and be together. And we created a hallway that connected all the once-disconnected rooms.

This visual inner representation of my wife's IWM has become the gauge of her recovery for me and my wife. I know this is a debate in some circles: what does recovery mean and who gets to decide its meaning?¹¹ *She (and she recently affirmed this to me verbally)* and I both see recovery in the simple terms of does everyone have access in her internal house to interact with each other? Right now, 5 girls, Amy, Allie, Shellie, Sophia and K.A. are completely free inside to interact with each other. But I call Ka'ryn, Tina and Jenny the 'lost sheep' because they are still limited in their internal access to the others. They each have varying degrees of access and ways to communicate with the others, and yet, the dissociative walls still limit that access. And so, today, the remaining walls surrounding those 3 girls are our constant focus.

If you are wondering how we transformed my wife's inner world, her deep religious beliefs serve us well. We simply prayed (*not going to debate whether Jesus actually answers our prayers or it was simply the power of belief in a higher power as my wife and I have different opinions on the answer...*) the internal transformations into existence when the girls were ready to restructure their trauma-bound, individual, internal rooms, into a more-healthy house where they could move freely about and interact with each other. And that inner transformation also facilitated an external change: now 7 of 8 the "voices" could

be outside together if they wanted. And so, the voices which had once been disconnected and "strangers" to each other were now coalescing together as a group, as my 'greater wife'.

And our marriage was finally starting to become healthier. The two older girlfriends wanted to experiment in the bedroom in a way that my wife, honestly, didn't care to do. Again, I never did anything in secret because... how do you hide it especially when they are more and more connected internally? And there was no jealousy even in this because I always affirmed my love for each and every one of them and never would play favorites with them even though a number of the girls wanted me to do so!

Today, Tina, the voice who was so desperate to get away from me because of what her abuser had done to her, is the girl who literally wants to always be physically connected to me. She **needs** physical contact with me in a way none of the other girls do. She seems to control that part of my wife which has the skin hunger¹² for contact with another human being. She also controls the ability to organize massive data that leaves all the other girls, including my wife, in tears. I watched her sort 19,000 .svg files methodically which none of the other girls would even attempt.

So, after 7 years of chaos and bringing 6 voices outside to engage with me and securely attach to me which seemed to help them internally connect to each other to varying degrees, I thought I saw the finish line for us. All the girls were actively working on their inside 'house' to become more and more connected. Tina and my wife Ka'ryn still didn't have full access to the rest of the house like the other 5 girls did, but we were working to open the doors between them and the other five.

And then the unexpected happened. One day another mute voice showed up outside, and all our hopes for healthy normalcy slowly came crashing down. Unlike all the other voices, this last girl was completely unknown to all the others before she made her entrance outside. This was nearly 8 years ago. The first 6 voices took 7 years to connect with me, heal from the trauma and pain and fear and largely connect with each other. They each worked hard and let me help them do so. But this last mute voice was totally different. There have been times over the

last 7 years which I have dubbed *The Great Impasse* that my wife has begged us to stuff this last voice back inside. All of us are so tired of this impasse, and the last girl knows it. But that damn Army motto always rattles in my head that we don't leave any soldier behind...no matter how painful it may be, and when this last girl acknowledges how difficult it has been to help her heal and connect to the others, I always say, "Honey, we don't get rid of someone just because it's difficult." And so, I always affirm to the last girl that I love her, and I defend her to the other girls as well.

And I'm fighting tears right now as I type because it's been really, really hard. This voice doesn't let me help her like the others. She's extremely independent even though she's just as needy, if not more than the others. On top of that this new girl only had access to short-term memories so it was like those movies in which the person had 40 first dates with the same person: Jenny, the name I gave her until she chose her own, couldn't remember her daily interactions with me at all for a couple of years. And so, each day was like starting fresh with her. How do you build on a relationship when she barely remembers you from one day to the next?

For the first year, Jenny was little more than like a ghost. The other girls and I would be watching tv. They'd go to the restroom, and then Jenny would return, silently, watching me. She'd sit by me but never close.

Eventually I learned to communicate with her. I always tried to engage her like the others. I'd buy her little gifts. I added her to my 'daily email' list with the other girls. I'd chatter along with her about life and point out things that I thought might interest her. But she never seemed to respond much until we finally connected via the sign-language alphabet I had learned for Tina. Then, as she healed, she eventually accessed Sophia's speaking voice for her own. Little by little we clawed our way into a relationship. Little by little I clawed my way with her into a secure attachment in which she finally asked me to "marry her into the family" on another cruise. Yet, even then, she struggled to find release in the safety of that relationship as the other girls had because of her memory

issues and the ambient fear, for lack of a better description, that has flooded all the girls since she came outside with us.

Moreover, as I have poured myself into Jenny, and she has started to heal these last 8 years, her memory has gotten better. It's still spotty even today, but I can tell she can access general memories many times. Sometimes I'm astounded by things she can recall now. And, happily, we no longer have to start fresh each day in our relationship.

Jenny was also trapped in the "basement" of my wife's internal house but far more deeply than even Tina had been. We moved her out of there and up close to the other girls, but she has yet to meet any of them internally. We are doing many different things to try and connect Jenny to the others. I taught them to internally "email" each other for important things. Shellie and Jenny somehow have read books together since the day Jenny came outside even though they have no conscious knowledge of it. And she and Shellie are beginning to talk internally, too. Jenny and Tina share a special "language" together that I can only describe as "tongues" to anyone who understands that term, but unfortunately, they are too scared to use it to connect, sigh. And Jenny is connected to Sophia by use of her speaking voice to talk with me. As well, I've observed how those two are beginning to drift closer and closer together in their mannerisms. And yet, even though we have created these numerous attachment points between me and Jenny and Jenny and the other girls, so far we haven't been able to break her free of whatever internal roadblock that keeps her from fully engaging the others so that they can all be outside together as well.

When our previous cat was in decline, Jenny found a Siamese kitty on Marketplace and we traveled across the state to procure her. Those two bonded, maybe even imprinted, to each other in a way that her cat group says isn't typical. And that little kitty has added an element to her healing that I could never replicate as they are together all day when I'm at work. Just this week I've been teasing her as she told me that her cat and I are, equally, her best friends(at least I'm not less than the cat is to her!). Moreover, we've been working 6 months to get an internal kitty with her to end the 5 decades of

isolation she has experienced. The other girls and I are hoping if we can help her internally connect to this 'kitty', it will be a game changer for all of us (*crossing our fingers!*).

Today, as I reflect upon Jenny, I can only guess that she controls my wife's primal fear response. She has flooded the other girls with that feeling for more than 8 years. But as I have satiated her need for safety, to be nurtured and to have a relationship, slowly she has attached to me and her beloved Kitty, and internally she has begun to attach to the others as well. And as that has happened her memory has improved and she has begun the final step of internal communication via Shellie.

It's been a long 8 years. I have had very little adult companionship during that time because Jenny dominates all our private time at home. And there's no adult intimacy with my wife or girlfriend or fiancée because it terrified Jenny. I wonder if we are on the right path with Jenny, and yet I just can't leave her behind like the other girls have suggested at times. She's shared with me how lonely and scared she was those nearly 5 decades she was trapped in the deepest recesses of the "basement" of my wife's internal house. But I hurt and ache every single day, and I know my wife and all the other girls do as well. It never gets easier, and some days I can barely breathe because I have needs, too. So, I just shove them down and keep hoping, if we don't quit, we will find our happily ever after ending, as we find a way to help Jenny connect to the others fully so we can all be together again.

So, engaging voices. I could write so much more. Sometimes, it's hard not to be discouraged, especially these last 8 years. I vowed I would help my wife 100% recover from her early childhood trauma: it was a vow I had no idea the scope it would cover. And, again, there have been many happy things even with Jenny. She has come such a long way despite how painfully slow it has been. And despite her slow progress, I have seen my "greater wife," all 8 girls, begin to morph and integrate and connect on deeper levels that give me hope and make me so proud of all the work they have done to achieve it. All 8 of them, even though Jenny isn't fully connected with the others on the inside, are learning to move and act 'in

sync' as one group, as one person. It truly is remarkable to see the 8 disparate, broken, and traumatized voices that once inhabited my wife's internal house become healthy, happier, and inseparably connected as a group, as one person.

One of my greatest joys, every time it happens (like yesterday) is when the little girls are outside with me, and each will raucously sing, slightly off key, with the radio. It always brings a smile to my face as I remember what scared, broken and even angry voices each had once been when she first joined me on this healing journey. It makes all the pain and deprivation and tears worth it. Even Jenny, who was once mute and terrified of everything, has been singing at the top of her voice with her Spotify playlist lately calling herself my "rocker girl".

Engaging Extreme States

In this section I hope to address how I put the concepts of Bowlby's attachment theory into practice during all the extreme mental states which have happened as my wife "tore off the scab" of her long-buried childhood trauma. Fifteen years later, I recognize most of the phenomena as various aspects associated with dissociation.

1) Panic attacks, Flashbacks, Anxiety attacks and Triggers

Now, we all experience mental triggers. They can be positive or negative like when a certain smell pleasantly reminds us of Mom's or Grandma's cooking for a Thanksgiving meal. If you notice, there is an overlap of a present-day experience that "triggers" the recall of a past memory. And that's mostly what panic attacks, flashbacks, and anxiety attacks really are (*imo*), except they are much more extreme and overwhelming! The past and present are concurrently overlapping, but because of the intensity of the memories, they don't produce a happy feeling like Thanksgiving dinners of the past, but they can feel like utter, overwhelming chaos.

Negative triggers in ourselves and others are pretty easy to recognize once you know what to look for. I learned to look for outsized emotional or other reactions to current events in myself, and once I recognized the over reaction, I

could try to track down the memory it was linked to. The link seemed to naturally break once I recognized the connection between the originating memory and how it manifested today. I shared a few of my own over the course of this book, but another one was that the smell of wintergreen used to make me immediately feel nauseous. But as I learned to help my wife and began to understand triggers, it was easy for me to separate the past event that caused the nausea anytime I smelled wintergreen in the present once I understood what was happening. Now I can happily enjoy wintergreen flavors and smells today.

However, if the memories are buried behind deep, dissociative walls, breaking those connections becomes much more difficult. Remember, when the original trauma occurs, if the child or person is unable to process it on her own, and if she has no one trusted to help her do it, then the mind sequesters (dissociates) it so the person can try to keep up a semblance of normalcy. But those unprocessed trauma memories "fester" inside the brain and will keep spilling out in various ways like our bedroom problems the first 20 years of our marriage.

Now, despite our struggles in our bedroom the first 20 years of our marriage, elsewhere our relationship was fairly stable. So, there wasn't much that caused her trauma memories to spill out. Others who are dealing with volatile daily lives may deal with these "spill overs" all the time. But once my wife determined to deal with her trauma and rip off that scab, 40 years of unprocessed memories began to spill out. And she was overwhelmed to put it mildly! It was like being hit full force with a hurricane while she was in a teeny tiny boat. She couldn't think straight. She thought she was losing her mind. She told me she was going crazy!

Enter proximity maintenance, safe haven and affect regulation.

And so, I entered her hurricanes, and I rode each one out with her. She would hide under tables and in the closet like a little child or pet does when scared as she was assaulted by the memories from the past. And each time I would follow her under that table or into the closet. I would gently wrap her in my arms and legs, cocooning her in the safety of my warm embrace, and whisper, "It's ok,

honey. I've got you. I'm so sorry no one was there when this happened. But I'm here now. And I love you. And I take care of my girl. You're safe now."

Many times in the beginning she was so overwhelmed by the emotional hurricanes that she couldn't even respond or acknowledge my presence, but I figured she was aware of my calm, comforting embrace. I was literally her rock and her anchor in those hurricanes. And as long as I didn't lose my calm, my calm would overcome her fear and terror, and she would come back to me in the present within 10 or 15 minutes. But, one time I remember losing my calm, and, sure enough, that escalated her terror, until I took a deep breath, found my center, and then I could calm her as well.

Think about those common hurricane scenes in movies where a small boat is tossing from side to side and half buried as each massive wave pummels it. The frightened boater for good reason fears for her life as massive wave after massive wave buries her! She is sputtering for breath with each wave that buries the little vessel. There is no firm ground. There is nothing to hold onto!

But now, change the scene by adding your favorite superhero or a divine angel who is willing to ride out the storm with that boater. It reminds me of Jason Momoa's superhero character, Aquaman, near the beginning of the movie when he finds the boater barely alive, clinging to his sinking ship.¹³ Yes, it's still scary, but suddenly your loved one knows that there's someone with her in that memory this time and he has promised not to let her drown. That is what we as family members, spouses and significant others can be to our loved one who is overwhelmed by these kinds of things. We can change the entire dynamic of that scene for our loved ones by simply being there in that hurricane with her and assuring her we're in it together this time!

Now let me add, it is a very common response for people, including my wife, to want to be alone when these things happen. Sometimes my wife would try to get away from me, but I firmly believe that one of the greatest powers the original trauma holds over sufferers is the fact that they were alone in it. It creates the overwhelming feeling of isolation and abandonment rather than the security of

attachment that each of us longs for. And so, I tried not to let her go through one of these hurricanes alone, even if she told me to go away, even if she tried to physically leave my presence. I didn't always hold her because, depending on which girl was out, some of them didn't feel as comfortable with me doing that, but I would at least sit with her and be with her so she could feel my body heat radiating into the cold, lonely terror of that memory. Sometimes I was forced to sit outside the door of our bedroom on the floor, but I kept up a steady, calm mantra of assurance that she could hear that could still envelop her.

Going through those emotional hurricanes with my wife was a 'dance' that we as family and spouses have to earn the right to participate in. I've been recently criticized by others as being bullying for not 'allowing' my wife her privacy when she wanted. And just yesterday my wife partially agreed with my detractors that sometimes she really wanted to be left alone, but I pointed out 'but the little girls didn't want to be left alone'. I don't have a perfect answer. I think we are all made up of parts that sometimes have different needs, and we have to do the best we can...and walk very, very carefully and humbly and be willing to constantly reassess what is and isn't working to help our loved ones heal. In the end we have to respect our loved one's agency, and yet we can definitely earn the right for deeper access into their struggles when we prove ourselves to be faithful with the access they have already given us. I didn't simply announce to her that I was going to be her healing companion and 'ride' her hurricanes with her. It was a process that I shared before of 'becoming' her healing companion, and as she saw the changes in me, it made her feel safer to give me greater access.

Anyway, I did this for a couple years. Every time she was hit with a recently, unsequestered memory, her mind was right back in her childhood when she didn't have the ability to process it herself. But this time she had me, my presence (proximity maintenance), my calm (affect regulation) and the security that I would never abandon her (safe haven) from which she could draw so that her brain could begin to process that trauma, and today, 15 years later, it's been years since any of those hurricanes have hit. That doesn't mean she doesn't ever feel triggered or upset; we all do. Triggers are just part of life, but it means

those hurricanes are now more like thunderstorms. And she may still not like them, but we can relatively easily get through them today.

2) Eating 'disorders', Body 'dysmorphia', Gender 'dysphoria'

With the ugly culture wars going on in this country, I debated whether to even cover these. But after my wife and I have spent 15 years untangling the maze of dissociation she experienced, we have found each of these issues in her case was a result of dissociation. Does that mean I believe dissociation is the only source for these feelings in people? I don't know.. But there is no way to have intelligent discussions about any of these issues because both sides have staked out inviolable tenets in their opinion, sigh. But this is how I walked with my wife through each of these and why we found each of these in her case to be a function of dissociation.

My wife confided with me, "I don't have any idea what I'll be like when we are done." And I always affirmed two things. "Honey, I love you no matter what." And secondly, "We don't have to worry about what you'll 'be'. Let's take care of the trauma and dissociation, and the rest will take care of itself." And so, as these other issues popped up into our healing journey, I didn't fret. When one girl told me she was asexual and another girl wondered if she was even a girl, I didn't freak out and wonder what would happen to my marriage if she suddenly decided she didn't want a man. I simply affirmed each girl where she was and made clear I loved her for who she was. And then I walked with her, and we found our way through each issue together. No forcing. No manipulation. No coercive "conversion therapy". Just love and unconditional acceptance as she struggled with the Rip Van Winkle disorientation that 4-5 decades of dissociation had brought to her and each of the 7 other girls who had been trapped in separate, internal spaces.

And as those internal spaces were reconnected to each other, many of these corollary issues took care of themselves. My wife, Ka'ryn, is the one who struggled most with eating "disorder" issues and body dysmorphia. She literally couldn't feel hunger pains, and so she could ruthlessly not eat if her weight got too high. She would nitpick at every flaw she saw in her body despite being 5'7"

and 120lbs., every wrinkle that began to appear on her face as we got older, and she never had a good word to say about herself no matter how pretty she looked. She absolutely couldn't accept any compliments I gave her and would throw them back in my face.

But when the other voices, the other girls, came outside, they controlled parts of my greater wife's personality and abilities that naturally counter balanced Ka'ryn's body dysmorphia and eating issues. I remember when K.A. told me, "I look damn good for 50!" And K.A. will always fish for a compliment from me whenever she dresses up, even just for our weekly errands. She loves to hear me say how pretty she looks.

And the little girls love to eat and don't give a damn if they gain a few extra pounds! And unlike Ka'ryn who literally couldn't feel hunger pains, these other girls would come crying to me about how starved they felt because Ka'ryn was in the midst of another attempt to ruthlessly lose weight.

So, how I helped resolve this was by teaching them all to work together. I taught K.A. to speak with Ka'ryn internally and help her see how good they really did look. Ka'ryn also learned to accept my compliments via K.A. And I tried to help the little girls and Ka'ryn find a happy middle ground about eating. I didn't want Ka'ryn to constantly be triggered as her weight increased from the constant snacking of the other girls, and yet, the other girls couldn't ignore the hunger pains they felt just because Ka'ryn didn't feel them. We looked for healthier and low-cal snacks. And I remember the time I suggested to Amy, "Make her feel your hunger" and later Ka'ryn told me of experiencing hunger for the first time, something that had never happened before.

And so, literally, my wife's body dysmorphia and eating "disorder" issues took care of themselves as the various girls internally connected and began to help each other experience the aspects of my greater wife's personality traits and mental abilities (like feeling hunger) that they couldn't access on their own because of the previous internal, household sequester.

As for the sexual and gender dysphoria? Well, those largely took care of themselves, as well. I affirmed my unconditional love for each voice, for each girl. But I think these issues were wrapped up in the Rip Van Winkle effect and the fact that each had been frozen during childhood when fact and fantasy and simple uncertainty swirl around and sometimes mesh. Forty to fifty years of dissociation caused so much disorientation, but the longer each girl was outside, the more these issues sorted themselves as each girl tried to create a life with the other girls that was satisfying to everyone and not just her own proclivities.

3) Self-injury

I'll be honest. My wife didn't struggle with this much. Perhaps that is because I practice proximity maintenance, safe haven and affect regulation with all of them every single day. I don't know.

But the little it did happen, it was typically Ka'ryn. She seemed the least able to deal with the overflow effects of the trauma memories even though, as host, she really didn't hold any of them directly. See, when the trauma happened, it was the other girls who were forced to experience and hold the trauma memories. They were the ones forced into sequester to keep the trauma from overwhelming my wife as a little girl. Ka'ryn was left on the outside, thinking everything was "normal." But the other girls had taken with themselves into sequester the mental abilities to deal with the trauma, I believe.

And so, when the other girls came out, we never followed ISST&D's¹⁴ example of forcing the host to process the trauma memories¹⁵. Instead, I helped each girl who already held those memories process them, and then with the power of those memories greatly diminished, the memories could enter everyone's general narrative.¹⁶

But in the beginning of our healing journey, Ka'ryn could still feel the power of the memories hit her, even if indirectly. And she would viciously bite her hands or dig her fingernails into her hands because she had no means with which to deal with the power of the memories. I would sit with her and try to regulate her with the 3

tools at my disposal. Maybe they helped, since it truly was a rare occurrence in our journey.

But I remember one time, Ka'ryn was feeling overwhelmed in general, and I asked Amy how she was feeling, and she casually acted like the issue was no big deal to her. And that's when it was again affirmed to me that each voice, each girl, held different mental abilities (*like trauma processing*) and how important it was to connect them to each other so they could help one another. And at this point, it's been years since I can remember the last severe-for-us instance of self-injury.

4) Comatose Episodes

The first time this happened, I freaked out! We were having a somewhat heated discussion about something, and suddenly my wife just fell to the ground, completely out of it! WTH? What do you do? After my heart started beating again, and I was able to get my brain back in gear, I began to think about it. I decided to try and engage another part of her. I began calling out some of the other girls' names who had joined us outside at that point in the journey, and sure enough, when I hit "Allielieu" out she popped like she had been watching me all the time to see what I would do. And that was my introduction to comatose episodes.

Comatose episodes really were a result of prolonged dissociation and the fact that the girls still had not sufficiently created the internal pathways between each of them so they could communicate (*their internal house was still mostly disconnected at that point*). And so Ka'ryn had "fled inside to her room" unable to cope with our disagreement, but no one was there to 'catch the baton' and carry on with things on the outside.

Tina was terrible about this. She was so internally disconnected from the others since she was in the "basement" originally, that every time she went back "inside" for a year. I'd see the distant look she got in her eyes as she stopped engaging me outside, and I knew she was about to go back inside. The body would swoon, and I would run to catch her before she hit the ground. It was truly unnerving that year as I was afraid my wife would harm herself in one of these episodes.

And then with her body wrapped up in my arms to keep her from hitting the floor, I would gently call out until I found someone else to come back outside. And then we would carry on.

Once we moved Tina out of the internal "basement" and up beside Sophia where those two could always, internally talk, the comatose issues subsided...until Jenny joined us...who was also trapped in the basement. Ugg!

But those episodes also became a source of amusement to Amy, who liked to play and joke. Jenny was usually sitting on the couch when it happened, so at least there was little fear of her hitting the floor. She would "go inside" and her head would swoon onto her breastbone, and I would try to call someone else out like usual: usually Amy or Sophia would pop outside. But sometimes I would start calling for someone else to come outside...and I would call...and call...and call...and then I would start thinking to myself...*this is taking a little longer than it ought to take*. And so, I'd stop and say, "I see you, Amy!" And she would smirk and open her eyes, and laugh and say, "How did you know it was me?" Or sometimes when I realized what she was doing, I would play back and give her a little lick on her face, and she would gasp in disgust, "How could you!?" And I would laugh back, "Well, two can play at this game!"

Jenny also thought she'd get in on the comedy act by feigning to swoon and drop her head on her chest as if she had gone inside. Then after a few seconds of me calling out for one of the other girls, she'd come right back. Sometimes she would pretend to be one of the other little girls, or sometimes she just blatantly refuse to go in as she'd spent so long inside that she hated to not be out with me...and I very, very rarely ever "make" the girls switch as I don't feel that's my place, though I am known to cajole and remind each, "how would you like it if the other girls refused to share and not let you outside?"

But let's say you're saying to yourself, "My loved one doesn't have alters." Then engage her in other ways. Talk about different kinds of happy activities you enjoy together. Or get out games or crafts or other activities she enjoys and use them in plain sight of your loved one. If her eyes are shut, then be sure to make loud

enough noise that she can hear and identify what you are doing. Or maybe go to the kitchen and cook or prepare a favorite dish of your loved one's.

The thing to remember is just because it appears that your loved one is "comatose," unless it is physically induced from a physical injury, some part of your loved one could be watching and observing just like Allie did that first time it happened to my wife. Or maybe she is "stuck" and needs help to re-engage with the outside world. Once I engaged with one part of my wife, she popped out of this state with ease. And after that, these comatose issues for my wife became minor inconveniences as we all quickly learned to navigate them until we had moved both Tina and Jenny out of the internal "basement" and upstairs where they could connect with the others.

5) Mini seizures

The last extreme state that I want to cover is mini, epileptic-like seizures. Again, the first time my wife's eyes rolled into the back of her head and her body and face began gently shaking, my heart stopped. *Breathe, Sam. Breathe, Sam!* But once I got my own brain back online, I kind of went, *hmmm???* *That kind of looks like a computer glitch to me. You know, when the little mouse arrow turns into a never-ending circle-y thingy, and just goes and goes and you try to click out of it and then the screen goes whitish. Damn you, computer, respond to my impatient mouse clicking!!!!*

And so, I thought, *Sam, maybe my wife's brain is having trouble "switching" to that other program(girl). Maybe, I can help her get "unstuck."* And so, that seems to be the case. Whenever she would drop into these gentle seizures, with her eyes rolled back in her head, I'd take her hand or gently touch her face and say, "Honey, come back to me. Amy, come out now. Sophia, can you hear me?" I just tried to engage different parts and sound calm and encouraging until her brain could 'click' back into gear and get out of that 'loop' in which it was stuck.

Happily, these episodes were infrequent "glitches" and rarely occurred unlike the comatose episodes that occurred for years until we got Tina and Jenny out of the

'basement.' But they were still unpleasant experiences for the girls, and the best I could do was 'be there' and try to help them through it.

Engaging Lying

In this last section I want to deal with an issue that can cause a lot of misunderstanding and frustration to everyone involved in the healing journey. I'm going to heavily rely on one of the most popular entries from my blog¹⁷ about so-called lying and hopefully we can see that this subject is not nearly as black and white as so many people treat the subject.

Before I enter into the subject of lying I want to state that I would guess (as I only have real-life experience with my wife) it is rare for trauma victims to be perpetual liars about their past trauma or about how the trauma manifests itself in their lives. The trauma survivors I read on wordpress are clearly not narcissists! They find it shameful and horrifying that such things happened to them. There's usually a part of them who would do anything in the world to not believe what happened to them. They often wish the trauma and the telltale symptoms of dissociation would simply go away. I could write so much more, but will leave it at this: I highly doubt most trauma victims are habitual liars in general especially when they are in a safe and loving environment.

However, there is a component of early-childhood trauma that fosters lying under certain conditions, and I want to discuss that so that we who help won't hinder the healing process.

The first thing to remember is that extreme dissociation develops in an environment of physical, emotional or sexual abuse when a child is very young. As well, it can also be connected with deprivation of basic needs: never feeling loved, never having adequate food or shelter and other basic necessities. Dissociation arises as an abused or neglected child desperately tries to cope with repeated trauma. Thus, the victim will try to develop strategies to unknowingly protect as much of her psyche as possible. Therefore, if lying is seen as a way to mitigate or escape punishment, abuse or even neglect, the child may choose to lie rather than

suffer more trauma. So, a trauma victim can learn from an early age that lying is a valid way to escape negative consequences. This doesn't mean she will be a perpetual liar, but it does mean if things feel unsafe to a trauma victim, this habit may get triggered into action later in life when it isn't necessary.

The second thing to remember is until a significant amount of healing has occurred, the various 'parts' of a person may not be able to share memories with each other if the dissociation is great enough. Remember back to the chapter on dissociation and the various ways it affects all of us. We simply are wired to avoid unpleasantness even if it essentially means ignoring it, or 'lying' to ourselves about it. So, the more a person is traumatized, the more difficult the internal communication becomes for her 'parts' whether or not they are full blown 'alters' like my wife's.

Thus, for a family member like me, I couldn't expect my interactions with one part of my wife to be remembered by another at the beginning of our healing journey. Her parts were not lying. Until the dissociative walls came down, I had to treat each part in the system as I would physically different people who have their own set of experiences and memories. But, I admit this is so hard to keep in mind when most of us do 'soft switches' between our parts rather than the harder, concrete switches which occur between my wife's 'alters.'

The third thing I learned while helping my wife is the lesson Amy taught me when she insisted she had been a spy in Europe. Sometimes, a part of our loved one desperately needs us to believe her no matter what. We need to tread lightly with our loved ones: 'the truth' is so much more complicated than most of us admit. We want simplistic, black and white truth. Humility and the parable of the 6 blind men and the elephant dictate that we walk humbly with our loved ones even when we strongly disagree with what she might be saying. We don't have full access to the inner workings of anyone: so, be careful how you judge another's assertions which may be based on things of which we are completely ignorant.

And lastly it's important to understand that until each dissociated part of a person feels completely safe with an outsider, the rules of silence and secrecy¹⁸ may not allow her to tell the truth, or at least the entire truth. We on the outside do not have the right to expect any information that is not freely given. My wife lived

through a nightmarish time in which her abuser played mind games with her, and so she learned to hide the truth from her parents, thinking she was protecting their lives from his threats to murder them all. That fear of telling the truth, even to someone who should have been her natural protector, carried long into our own marriage. And it took me a long time to slowly, gently help her overcome his lies and threats until she felt safe to tell me 'the whole truth.' Likewise, your loved one may be programmed to 'lies of omission' from our perspective which result from how she learned to survive her own trauma.

Now in my original blog entry, I reference another person's blog as the impetus for mine musings on lying. As I read Andi's blog entry¹⁹ and the comments past therapists had made about her, I was upset by the tone in those comments. I have learned enough about how our memories work to not make a big deal out of specifics and particulars. Only one 'alter' in my wife's group shared many of her memories from the abuse with me: those memories were scant on details and mostly focused on some of the major lies and threats her abuser told her and how she perceived herself as a result. However, Andy's therapist seemed more concerned about details and inconsistencies as if Andy's memories were on trial. But my attitude was to validate whatever memories this part of my wife shared and then work with her to change how those memories affected her self-perception today. When the evidence of trauma is overwhelming as it was to Andy's therapists and to me for my wife's parts, to get hung up on particulars and inconsistencies shows an incredibly naïve view of what is important. The trauma events in the past can rarely be proven 'beyond a shadow of a doubt.' What our focus as healing companions ought to be is changing the current self-perceptions that arise from those memories, not whether the memories are perfectly accurate or not.

Another concern I had with the comments from this woman's therapists from the past had made may arise from our differences in self-perception: I kind of felt like the comments were rather arrogant and demeaning to the lady. A therapist spends a lifetime being treated as an expert in her particular area of expertise. And after being treated that way for so long, any person will begin to believe in her elevated opinions. But as a husband I have to live with the realities of a reciprocal relationship with my wife. She knows my faults and foibles. And so even though I

have gained a lot of confidence over the years as I have learned to help my wife heal, I still approach her as an equal. And she keeps me humble any time I think my opinions and suggestions should be accepted by her more *gratefully*, lol.

And though the woman's post didn't talk about this, I have repeatedly seen on blogs where a therapist will categorize a patient as uncooperative if she doesn't do what the therapist dictates. However, I try not to make the various 'parts' of my wife feel trapped or cornered by me when I am trying to help her. By that I mean I don't want her to feel obligated to accept my suggestions or help. To do so in the beginning of the healing journey would have potentially elicited evasion or deception from her because I was still proving what kind of a person I would be. In the beginning my wife's 'alters' couldn't separate if they felt trapped by me from how they were trapped by their abusers in the past. So I tried to make it clear that the various parts of my wife were never under obligations to do what I suggested, and there would be no consequences to our loving relationship if any refused my help or suggestions. Even now I must be careful never to be coercive in my desire to see her healed. My intentions may be noble, but I must wait upon each 'part' of my wife to decide for herself what course of action she will take as she heals. Let me be frank: ultimatums and 'tough love' are coercive. You may get your loved one to change her behavior on the outside while nothing has changed on the inside, or worse, she may now lump you in the same category as her coercive abusers.

Honesty, lies, memories, trustworthiness. It gets kind of messy because of how trauma and dissociation take hold in all of our lives. We all seem wired to point out inconsistencies in others. The news media do 'fact checks' all the time now of our politicians in an effort to catch them lying about or misrepresenting things. But if we want to help our loved ones, we need to move past that desire to hold them to some standard of 'the truth' which is often a much more nuanced subject than any of us allows. Like the 6 blind men and the elephant, we can argue with and even fight over perceptions of reality with our loved ones, or we can take a better, more humble path, and listen first, deeply and intently to what our loved one is saying. Be hesitant to give answers and to judge. Be desperate to see things from their perspective even when it might seem like they are lying or being evasive. It might just open you up to an entire universe you would have otherwise missed without the

perspective your loved one offers you like when my wife brought me into her healing journey and I got to be part of the resurrection of the other girls who had been lost for decades.

Conclusion:

And so, this is how I became a good healing companion for my wife. I had to embrace the truth that we both needed healing on our healing journey. The journey couldn't be about 'fixing' her but walking together to a healthier life. I had to reject our culture's extreme push for independence and embrace our natural inclination to be attached to our loved ones. And as we lived in her dissociation welcoming all her 'alters', I learned to validate and engage all that they brought to our relationship rather than trying to minimize it. I truly never found her to be 'mad' and I honestly object to even trying to take back the term as I never othered my wife. She is just my wife. She is my best friend. She is the love of my life. She just happened to be traumatized during childhood, and so I get the privilege of walking with her through the convalescent period of training her mind to reconnect with all those previously dissociated areas. I had to be willing to be physically present with her through all the things she experienced so that I could apply the attachment concepts of proximity maintenance, safe harbor, and affect regulation as John Bowlby described decades ago.

Fifteen years into our healing journey, my wife and I have both radically changed as we have fought dragons and villains from our past together to reach our happily-ever-after ending. Today all 8 girls in my greater wife's group are naturally integrating to the point that they 'mix' and 'swirl' with each other, and I often have a difficult time telling them apart. Moreover, I like the man I had to become to walk with her on this journey. I guess this journey kind of was the process to fulfill the second personal wish I'd always had for myself. And so, I wish you each the best as well on your happily-ever-after journey. Perhaps someday our paths may cross, and we can swap stories of killing dragons and holding fast to our loved ones throughout it all.

Sincerely,

Sam

Bibliography

Chapter 1

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=big+chuck+and+houlihan>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secure_attachment

³ Matthew 7:12, Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you: do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

⁴ Phillipians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.

⁵ Romans 15:1-3 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

⁶ Hebrews 12:1,2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

⁷ Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

⁸ 1 John 4:20 "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

⁹ <https://www.mensa.org/>

¹⁰ https://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs/hz/subscribe/ku?ref=sv_kstore_2&ie=UTF8

¹¹ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2021/09/14/downloads/>

Chapter 2

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophostic_Prayer_Ministry

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissociative_identity_disorder

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eureka_effect

⁴ <https://mylittlepony.hasbro.com/en-us>

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jem_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jem_(TV_series))

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandora%27s_box

⁷ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2011/08/07/insider-rules/>

⁸ http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Marriage_1549.htm

⁹ Gen.1:28 "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This verse is often abused by those who

seek power and authority, but I believe it misses the key fact that we are supposed to be benevolent regents on this earth. Moreover, for right or wrong, I believe it meant I had been given the tools I needed to take care of my little corner of the earth, and at that moment, it meant helping my wife on this healing journey.

¹⁰ <https://www.sho.com/united-states-of-tara>

Chapter 3

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=foxhole+buddy>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_purity_movement

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tNWTJxLMXs>

⁴ <https://www.findlaw.com/state/criminal-laws/indecent-exposure-laws-by-state.html>

⁵ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=do+other+animals+have+sex+face+to+face>

⁶ <https://www.provenmen.org/2014PornSurvey/>

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godzilla>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Kong

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaiju>

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

¹¹ <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2020/04/29/tree-shade/>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structure_and_agency

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anosognosia>

¹⁴ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/civil-commitment-continuum-of-care.pdf>

¹⁵

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meet-catch-and-keep/201602/4-truths-about-power-in-relationships-including-yours>

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant

¹⁷ <https://nami.org/Home>

¹⁸ <https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Our-Finances/Major-Foundation-Corporate-Sponsorships>

¹⁹ <https://www.madinamerica.com/>

²⁰ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-ottering-5084425>

²¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=what+is+the+DSM>

²² <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2017.00010>

²³ <https://www.active.com/running/articles/6-tips-to-push-past-the-pain>

²⁴ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/orthopaedic-surgery/about-us/ask-the-experts/pain.html>

²⁵ Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be ^afruitful, and ^bmultiply, and ^creplenish the ^dearth, and subdue it: and have ^edominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

²⁶ Ephesians 5:25-30, viz, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish, and ²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

²⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12094508/>

²⁸ <http://www.fmsfonline.org/> The False Memory Syndrome Foundation is one of the biggest purveyors of misinformation about DID, 'recovered' memories, early childhood abuse, and more. They have a long history of trying to discredit trauma survivors, and many feel their efforts are more to protect the abusive parents than help those dealing with the fallout of the abuse decades later. I give the link here for informational purposes so you can make your own conclusion.

²⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/iatrogenic> Iatrogenic is the proper term used for this phenomenon.

³⁰ <https://josephinewall.co.uk/>

³¹ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/headaches-and-dissociative-identity-disorder/>

³² <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2015/11/05/the-biomedical-model-of-the-brain/>

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biomedical_model

³⁴ <https://www.healthline.com/health/chemical-imbalance-in-the-brain#what-is-it>

³⁵

https://screening.mhanational.org/content/mental-illness-curable/?layout=actions_c#%3A~%3Atext%3DThere%27s%20no%20cure%20for%20mental%20illness%20and%20healthy%20lives

³⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trauma_model_of_mental_disorders

³⁷

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Anatomy_of_an_Epidemic/XhPp_o6bB3EC?hl=en&gbpv=0

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatomy_of_an_Epidemic

³⁹ <https://www.madinamerica.com/>

⁴⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-traumatic_stress_disorder

⁴¹

https://istss.org/ISTSS_Main/media/Documents/ISTSS_DSM-5_Friedman_FINAL_Updated.pdf

⁴²

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/neural-plasticity-and-dissociative-identity-disorder/>

⁴³ <https://chriskresser.com/the-chemical-imbalance-myth/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.madinamerica.com/mia-reports/#1557705237838-02dfa082-f228>

⁴⁵ <https://open-dialogue.net/>

Chapter 4

¹ <http://www.tag-uk.net/attachment.html>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory

3

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2013/01/18/attachment-theory-and-affect-regulation-the-roadmap-for-healing-d-i-d/>

4

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/attachment-theory-and-proximity-the-roadmap-for-healing-d-i-d/>

5

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/attachment-theory-and-adult-attachment-the-roadmap-for-healing-d-i-d/>

6

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/attachment-theory-and-the-internal-working-model-the-roadmap-for-healing-d-i-d/>

<https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/attachment-theory-and-the-internal-working-model-part-2-the-roadmap-for-healing-d-i-d/>

⁷ <https://www.madinamerica.com/2017/02/understanding-extreme-states-lloyd-ross/>

⁸ <https://www.karenpeckandnewriver.com/>

⁹ <https://thebowlbycentre.org.uk/>

¹⁰ Bowlby, J. (1979), p.109 *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: TavistockPublications.

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strange_situation

¹³ <http://www.trauma-pages.com/a/steele-2001.php>

¹⁴ Walant, Karen B., Ph.D., *Creating the Capacity for Attachment*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, p.2.

¹⁵ <https://wellsanfrancisco.com/bowlby-basics/>

¹⁶ <https://www.psychologytools.com/professional/techniques/affect-regulation/>

¹⁷ <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/Shaver/site/Publications/mikulincerpere03.pdf> (note: they removed access to this pdf, sorry)

¹⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix_\(franchise\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix_(franchise))

¹⁹ <http://labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm>

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory

²¹ Bowlby, J. (1979), p.203 *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: TavistockPublications.

²² <https://www.cassiesclosetinc.com/ProductCart/pc/viewCategories.asp?idCategory=121>

²³ https://did-research.org/origin/structural_dissociation/

Chapter 5

¹ <https://poets.org/poem/road-not-taken>

² <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2019/07/17/the-nature-of-dissociation-part-2/>

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissociation_\(psychology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissociation_(psychology))

⁴ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2019/07/17/the-nature-of-dissociation-part-1/>

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/10/planning/liz-cheney-midterm-elections-trump>

⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/paradigm>

⁷ <https://www.allthescience.org/what-is-neural-plasticity.htm>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuroplasticity>

⁹ https://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/d/d_07/d_07_cl/d_07_cl_tra/d_07_cl_tra.html I admit that this website doesn't have the exact quote I have used here: it has a similar one. I can no longer find the website or the quote that I have used(though I think this is the correct website) but I really like the picture the quote paints for this topic.

Chapter 6

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/psychosis/overview/>

² https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Irving/Winkle/Irving_Winkle.pdf

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/delusion>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Barbie%27s_friends_and_family

⁵ <https://www.webkinz.com/>

⁶

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/paranoia/about-paranoia/>

⁷ <https://www.healthline.com/health/hypervigilance>

⁸ <https://www.webmd.com/schizophrenia/auditory-hallucinations>

⁹

<https://www.quotespedia.org/authors/a/anonymous/apologizing-does-not-always-mean-youre-wrong-and-the-other-person-is-right-it-just-means-you-value-your-relationship-more-than-your-ego-anonymous/>

¹⁰ <https://reptilefollower.com/why-do-lizards-do-the-neck-thing/>

¹¹ <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.001612012>

¹² <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/skin-hunger-coronavirus-human-touch>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duirBiDoq3Y>

¹⁴ <https://www.isst-d.org/> ISST&D is the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation. It considers itself the premier authority on trauma and dissociation. It's been years since I've read much of the literature their associated members have written because they seemed to take a 'host-centric' and therapist-centric approach to healing with which my wife and I strongly disagree. Perhaps the focus has changed in the intervening years, but I give it as a reference for any who have interest.

¹⁵ [The integration of traumatic memories versus abreaction: Clarification of terminology](#) Kathy Steele, past president of ISST&D notes their past failures with abreacting the affect in their patients. I know I'm just a husband but if you read her paper and its cold, clinical approach, besides missing some other key concepts I don't have time and space to go into here, I'd still take

the warm, loving attachment approach I have tried to lay out in this book any day over her approach.

¹⁶ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2010/08/13/recovering-memories-an-inside-out-approach/>

¹⁷ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2015/08/12/lying-and-dissociative-identity-disorder/>

¹⁸ <https://samruck2.wordpress.com/2011/08/07/insider-rules/>

¹⁹ <https://fumblingthroughtherapy.wordpress.com/2015/08/09/alleged/>

Appendix A

If you read the literature available about differences between 'alters', most of it focuses on very superficial and inconsequential differences, imo, like age, gender, food preferences, possible physiological differences and more.¹ I have made the statement within this book that 'alters' control different parts of the personality and different mental abilities². That observational belief of mine guides everything I have done to help my wife heal and guide her through so many corollary mental health issues. After 15 years of walking with my wife on this healing journey and embracing all my wife's 'alters', I believe trauma and dissociation are the two villains of all mental health issues: everything else is just symptomatic. But I ran out of time and space to develop that fundamental understanding I have in the main body of this book. Without that understanding, I would have been greatly hampered in my efforts to help my wife heal.

So, I'm going to throw out some basic observations on the 8 'alters' in my greater wife's group, and try to make a few points. But this is a very, very basic presentation on this subject by me. It's trying to coalesce 15 years of interaction with each part of my wife, seeing each one struggle on her own, and finding that **only** as each one healed and interconnected, internally with the other girls that those struggles naturally began to ease and often simply disappeared.

- 1) Ka'ryn and Amy control the overwhelming majority of my wife's personality traits and mental abilities. If I made a pie chart, they'd control about 70-80% of it between the two of them. They are the geniuses of the group. Each, on her own, has the mental ability do nearly anything she wants.
- 2) On her own, Ka'ryn is the master seamstress of the group, hikes and climbs better than the rest of them...but she struggles with body dysmorphia, mild anorexia symptoms, obsessed about money security issues, devoid of sexual interest, struggles feeling attached to me in a way none of the other girls have except, perhaps Jenny . Trauma role: the host who got to escape all the trauma and live on the outside thinking all was well.
- 3) Amy is the business woman of the group. She is the practical one. She is the adventurous one. She loves playing games. She and K.A. often team up and make financial decisions with me when Ka'ryn is unable to do so. She is the

one who loves to speak for the others and even Ka'ryn will defer to her. She has dominated this healing journey for the last 15 years in a way none of the other girls have, not even Ka'ryn. Trauma role: held memories of parental rejection, little girl of K.A.

- 4) Allie is the warrior of the group: standing up for the other girls and standing up for the oppressed, a culture warrior. She started out an atheist but loves to debate theology and hold inconsistent and biblically ignorant Christians to account for their beliefs and actions. She is also the sexy girl, the edgy girl who loves black. She wants to be able to enjoy sex. She is the only one with her own Facebook account separate from my wife's. She struggles with hypochondriac tendencies. Trauma role: defender.
- 5) K.A. The artist of the group. The fashionista of the group. The romantic girlfriend of the group who loves 'white'. The foodie. The one who wants to look pretty for herself and me. She loves for me to notice how nicely she has dressed and for me to compliment her. She loves her outside friends, to have social interactions, to go on dates with me, and go to the 'big city of Columbus an hour away from us. Whereas, Allie is now my fiancée, K.A. is my girlfriend, and for whatever reason, doesn't seem to want to get engaged with me. She and Allie often 'merge' with each other and with Kar'yn form the 3 adults of the group. Struggles with OCD tendencies and perfectionism. Trauma role: support 'alter', inside mother to Amy.
- 6) Shellie. Coal-miner's canary: sounds the alarm when danger is present, but easily goes to the extreme in that role and screams in movies during 'scary' scenes. She is very timid and always deferring to the other girls on the outside. She is zephyr-like and connects to me and our son...I'm not sure how to describe it. The bookworm of the group. The only one who knows how to set an alarm clock. Collects Graphic 45 paper just to treasure and plays the piano a little. Struggles with self-esteem issues, blames herself for anything that goes wrong. Trauma role: support 'alter' who worships and adores her older sister, Allie.
- 7) Sophia. Expresses utter joy at simple things. Wears her emotions on her sleeves. Struggled speaking and doing everything in life even struggled to move to the outside unlike most of the girls until she and Tina connected and

her connection with Amy increased. Trauma role: held memory of smell of the abuse and obsessed with bruises on her body, Amy's 'little girl'..somehow, barely verbal.

- 8) Tina. Controls skin hunger. Ability to organize 19,000 .svg files that brought all the other girls to tears thinking about it. Struggled with extreme fear, anxiety and agoraphobia until we connected her and Sophia internally and she let me hold the trauma she had been sequestered with. Once we moved her internal room beside Sophia's, the two adopted each other, became sisters and are often 'merged.' Trauma role; held memories of threats and taunts of her abuser, mute.
- 9) Jenny. Accuses the other girls of not listening to or caring about things important to me (Sam). As a result, she helped me fill our house with decorations for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Struggles because she originally only had access to short-term memories. Trauma role: primal fear response and forced to eat the food the other girls hated and often ended up throwing up because of it, mute.

As I have visualized this healing journey and my greater wife's composition by her 8 'alters', I have seen each of the girl's individual struggles to be a result of their disconnection from the other girls and the traits and abilities the other held which would counter balance her own struggles. And so beyond dealing with the trauma of the 5 girls who held any (Amy, Allie, Sophia, Tina and Jenny), as we tore down the dissociation between the girls, I helped them learn to help each other using the strengths each one controlled to balance the struggles of the others.

I kind of picture a person's brain and/or mind as a finely tuned organism. Within it, it has the tools each of us needs to stay in balance. But, dissociation breaks up access to all those tools when the brain/mind begins to sequester trauma. As the girls healed and released the trauma from the past, they began to connect to each other more strongly. And it was then that I noticed how one girl could help and 'balance' the struggles of another girl. So one of my roles on this journey was looking at the various struggles of various parts of my wife and trying to find 'solutions' to those struggles by teaming one of the girls up to 'help' the struggling part. It takes a lot of work on the part of my wife to retrain the decades-long

tendency created by the dissociation for each girl to 'go it alone'. But the more we were able to 'renovate' their IWM the easier they could default to their new reality and work together.

¹ <http://traumadissociation.com/alters>

² [Dissociative Identity Disorder and the Truncated Libido | Loving My DID Girl\(s\)](#)

This blog entry of mine is just one example of this quirk of dissociation.