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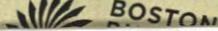


UNITED WE STAND

A Book for People with
Multiple Personalities

by Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

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1990



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A BOOK FOR PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

by Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

Launch Press,
Walnut Creek, CA

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PREFACE

In the course of my work as a therapist, I have met many multiples and the little kids, youth, and adults inside them. They have been smart, resourceful, and more than anything else, true survivors. I have admired them, encouraged them, and been concerned for them.

My greatest concerns are that many multiples feel badly about their inside people, think that they are crazy or strange, or that when they need help they are not sure what to do.

I have written this book in the hopes of encouraging multiples to see themselves as the creative, sturdy, smart survivors that they are. If the multiplicity creates problems, it is my hope that multiples will view them as issues that can be overcome, and will seek outside help when needed.

WHAT IS "MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES?"

When a person develops a number of personalities, or parts, which together make up the total person, that person is said to have "multiple personalities." People with multiple personalities (multiples) wonder what causes this condition. Often, they are afraid that having multiplicity means that they are mentally ill. Being a multiple does not mean that the person is crazy. This booklet will explain how and why multiplicity develops; how it is and is not helpful; and when it is important to seek outside help.

LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING...

Sadly, many children are mistreated by parents and caretakers. They can be physically abused, sexually abused, emotionally abused, neglected, abandoned, and ritualistically abused.

Children cannot understand what is happening to them and they cannot successfully fight back. They try to figure out how to stop the abuse, but they can't because they are too little. Children often wonder what they have done to make someone want to hurt them, but nothing they can do ever deserves that kind of treatment. It is the people who hurt them who are wrong, hurtful, or cruel.

Children who are abused are scared. They feel alone. Often, no one comes to help them and they have to fight alone to survive.

When abused children are alone with their thoughts and feelings, they can become confused about the abuse. One child thought, "I am so bad and ugly,

like a worm. My parents are right to try to beat the devil out of me. I am really bad." This was not true, but the child believed it to be true and grew up feeling this way.

It hurts to have feelings like sadness, fear, or anger so children who are abused feel a lot of physical and emotional pain. Some abused children have told me they would rather have physical pain than feel their hurt feelings.

Sometimes, children figure out ways not to feel. They push almost all of their feelings away. They don't feel the bad feelings, but then they can't feel the good feelings either. They quit expecting anything and get "tough." It's as if they put a brick wall around themselves for protection.



THE ABILITY TO “DISSOCIATE”

All forms of abuse are hurtful and bad, and some types are worse. When the abuse happens for a long time, many kids find a special way to survive, called dissociation.

Dissociation can be a very useful way to survive because it allows a child who is being hurt to escape mentally. The body and the mind seem to separate. While the body is being hurt, the person no longer feels it, because the mind (or soul) manages to escape to a safe place. Not all children dissociate in the same way. Here are some examples of different ways to dissociate:

Johnny’s dad used to whip him with a belt almost every night. He was frequently black and blue, often bleeding. He was very little, especially compared to his dad. He couldn’t fight back, he couldn’t run away, he had no one to tell, and he never even imagined telling anyway. He was afraid, but longed for his dad’s love. Since there was little else to do, when

his dad started whipping him, he stood next to a wall in his house, and leaned against it. Then, when his body was being hit by his dad, in his mind he went inside the wall where it was cold and hard — he felt nothing. At that moment, he had found a way to escape the physical pain.



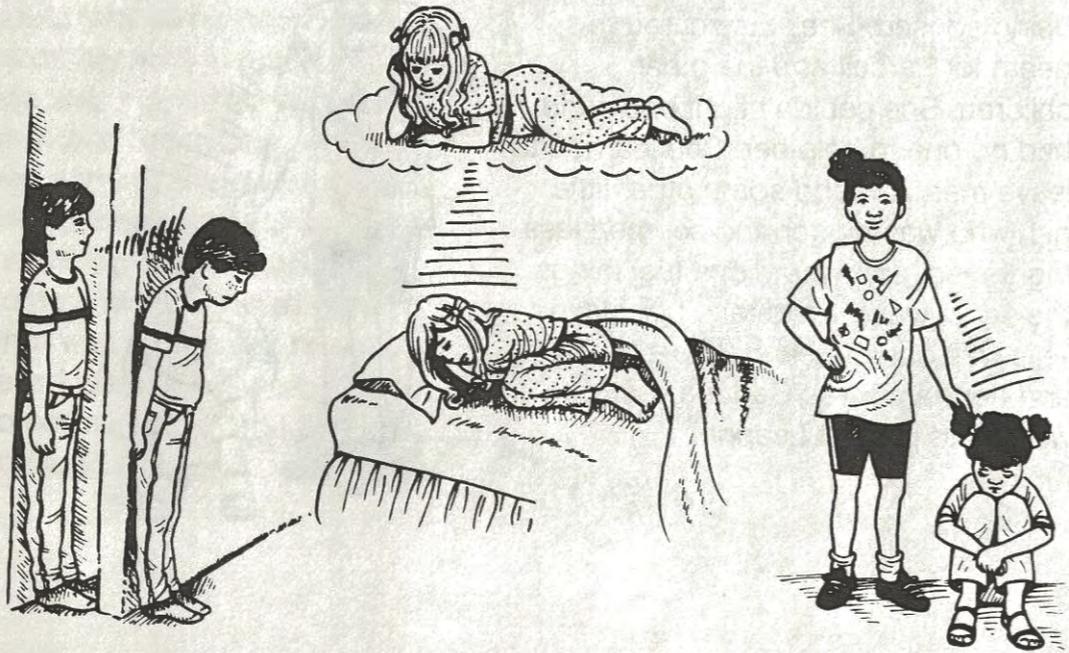
Lisa's father and brother used to come to her room at least twice a week. Both of them would take turns sticking things inside her vagina and her mouth. Lisa was frightened and hated what was happening, but there was nothing she could do. So she left her body and floated on the ceiling over the bed. Sometimes she would watch what was happening to someone called Lisa, but it seemed to be someone else — she felt nothing.



Leanne was a little girl whose parents belonged to a satanic cult. She was forced to see other children being abused. She was scared to death for herself and the other children. She couldn't fight back and had no one to help her. She learned to leave mentally, and some other little girl, who was bigger and seemed less frightened, and who didn't feel things the same way, would take her place. This was one of Leanne's personalities and her name was Carlotta. Carlotta wanted to protect Leanne.



All these children dissociated to one extent or another. They later learned to call it "spacing out," "taking off," "going inside," "getting little," "going blank," or "hiding." Kids have lots of names for dissociation.

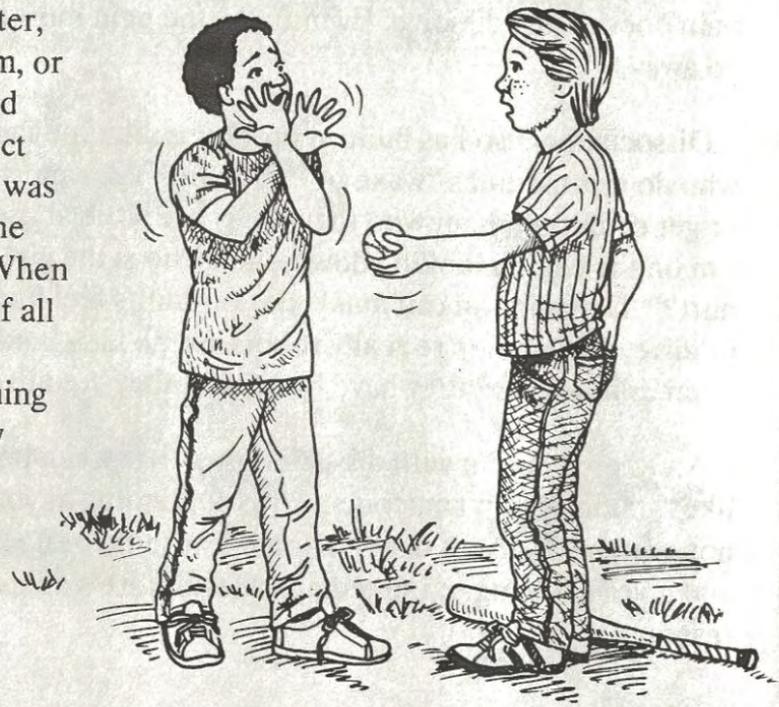


Dissociation does work. It is a way of coping and channeling the hurt so the person can function and survive. It numbs the pain, but unfortunately, the pain doesn't just dissolve. Eventually, the pain must be released so that it can go away.

Dissociation also has built-in problems, like the fact that kids and adults who do it sometimes "wake up" and don't know how they got where they are, or get confused about who they really are. One abused child said to me, "If I'm on the ceiling looking down, then who is the girl on the bed getting hurt?" Dissociation can make kids or adults feel like maybe they're not real or alive, maybe they're really robots. Some kids (and adults) cut their skin open to make sure they have blood and they are alive.

Another problem with dissociation is that it can become a reflex response, like blinking when someone throws something at your face. The person may not even be aware of dissociation because the reflexive response is so helpful and gives a feeling of immediate safety. Here's an example of a reflex response:

A small child was hit all the time. He learned to raise his arms and cross them in front of himself to block the blows. Much later, when anyone got near him, or moved suddenly, he would automatically try to protect himself, even when there was no danger of being hit. The habit had been learned. When he kept protecting himself all the time, other people thought there was something wrong and they kept away from him.



What had been very useful to him as a child was no longer needed. As a matter of fact, it now interfered with his making or keeping friends.

Dissociation can become a habit. People can just “take off” at the slightest sign of trouble. Unfortunately, **when they’re taking off all the time they don’t get to see if there’s any real reason to leave.**

Some people who dissociate don’t like it if they can’t control when they leave and when they stay. They can dissociate without trying. When they feel like they are not in control of when to stay or leave, they don’t feel good about that. This is one of the situations that can benefit from outside help. A therapist can help the client learn to be more in control of leaving or staying. It always feels better to be in control of what is happening.

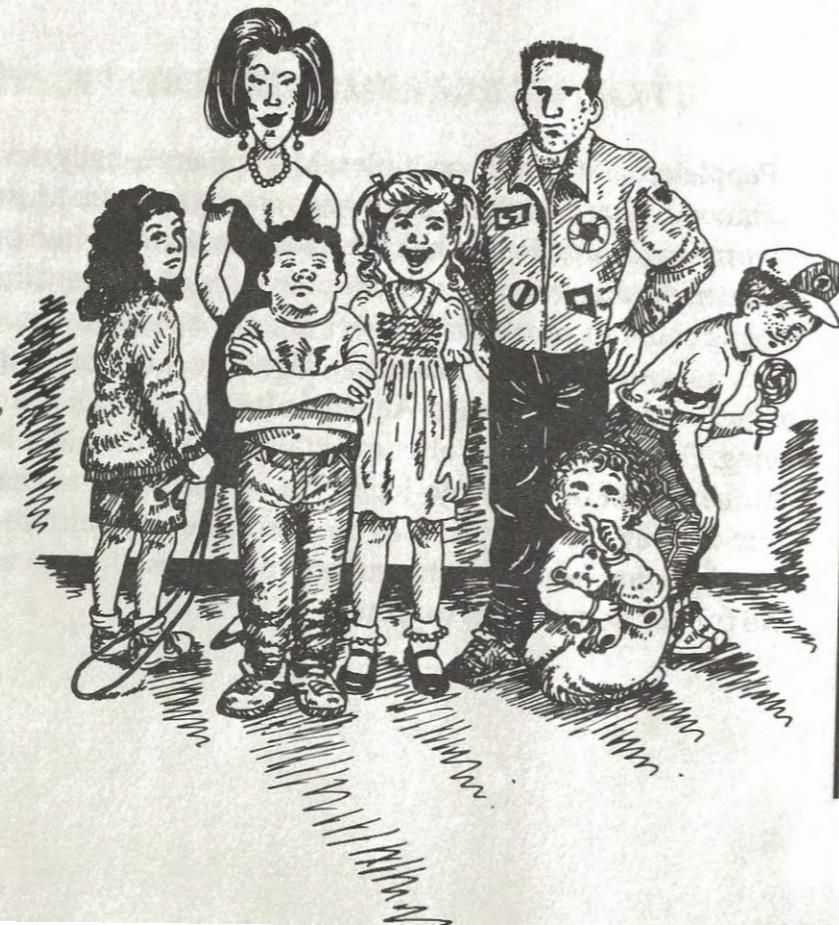
WHEN DISSOCIATION BECOMES MULTIPLICITY

So far we've seen that kids who are hurt can learn to dissociate to protect themselves from the bad things that happen to them. As I mentioned before, some children like Leanne dissociate and can also create separate and distinct personalities. Then, when the child "takes off," someone else can step in to deal with the situation. That someone else is called an alter. Alter is the word therapists use to describe a personality, or part.

ALTERS

People are not "born" multiples. Multiplicity usually develops in early childhood, after bad things have happened to a child. Most people who become multiples do so when they are very young; often before the age of six. Some multiples remember developing multiple personalities as infants. Young children usually have fewer alters than grown-ups. Alters are different from imaginary friends. Imaginary friends feel lots of things and behave in many, many different ways. An alter often has just one particular way of being. For example, one alter might be angry, one might be frightened, and another might be happy-go-lucky. Alters don't tend to change much over time the way imaginary friends do. Also, alters are different from imaginary friends in that, when an alter comes out, others often go away, so there aren't two friends doing things together.

Alters can be babies, young children or teenagers, adults or elders. They can be male or female. They can be outspoken or shy, aggressive or passive, cooperative, resistant, or argumentative. Very young alters may have limited verbal skills.



Sometimes the alters feel very separate from each other and very clearly defined. Sometimes the alters are in groups that speak in unison, or that listen and watch, quietly recording information. Some alters may have special skills or talents, like playing the piano or speaking French, while others don't. Some may need glasses while others see perfectly well without them; some may know how to drive while others cannot. Sometimes, alters are blind, deaf, or have other physical disabilities. Some alters keep secrets about things they have seen or done. Sometimes they keep secrets because they have been told they will be hurt or killed if they tell. Sometimes they keep secrets about the pain they have endured in order to protect the others inside their body. Early on, multiples may not be well-acquainted with their alters. As they begin to have memories or understand themselves to be multiples, they may get better acquainted with their alters, which is usually helpful.

When multiples are aware of their other parts, or alters, they often have their own words for them, like "kids," or "inside people." Multiples might refer to their alters by names, like Jane or Bob, or they might refer to them according to what they do, like "the angry one," "the sad one," "the one that's sleeping," or "the ballerina." When multiples are aware of their alters, the alters can come out with or without permission, or may come out if they're invited to do so. Some multiples say they make agreements or contracts with their alters about who is going to be out, and why. It would be important, for example, that an adult alter take a driving exam.

HOW DOES BEING A MULTIPLE HELP?

If you've read this far, you probably have some idea of whether or not you are a multiple.

If you're feeling a bit uncovered, or shy, or possibly understood or scared, it's OK. You have a right to feel lots of different things right now. Most multiples have lived privately with their inside people for many, many years, afraid that having inside people meant that they were strange, weird, or crazy.

Alters are, for the most part, your good friends. They have come to your rescue, endured pain for you, and they have hidden lots of your feelings when it wasn't safe to have those feelings and when you couldn't find a safe person with whom to share them.

Hopefully, as an adult, you don't now need all the protection you once needed and used. Chances are, the bad things have stopped happening, and although you may feel pain or fear when you remember what happened, you

are no longer in physical danger. Of course, sometimes that isn't true. For some abused children, the abuse continues throughout adulthood. This is a very discouraging and sad thought. If you feel unsafe as an adult, talk to a helping professional or other survivors about how to make yourself feel safer.

IS IT BAD TO BE A MULTIPLE?

Certainly not. I'm thankful that you were able to become a multiple because it helped you stay alive. It allowed you to protect yourself and remain sane in the face of severe abuse. It allowed you to endure the bad times and to keep your heart and soul safe from the abusers.

Being a multiple may no longer be necessary for you as a way to stay safe. It may even be creating very serious problems for you. It may be interfering with making or keeping friends. Only you know for sure.

The reality is that the alters have stored some of the feelings you felt were not OK. The alters have probably also stored and protected tender feelings that you didn't feel safe enough to have.

And all those feelings, whatever they are, are definitely OK. If you acknowledge and accept your feelings, you will feel more whole. Doing this

may also help you get to know yourself better. You have choices now. You have power over your present and your future.

IS BEING A MULTIPLE A PROBLEM TO ME?

This is a very important question. If being a multiple is putting your life at risk, or putting the lives of others at risk, you must do what you can to get help. Ask yourself the following questions: Do you have alters who show up and take you into bad situations with people who hurt you? Do you have alters who get lost and wander around and end up putting you in danger? Do you have alters who drink, do drugs, or behave in other self-destructive ways?



Do you have alters who get in the way of your efforts to improve your life? Do you have alters who punish you and torment you? Do you find that you can't stop the noise, voices, and uproar inside your head? Does someone terminate your relationships? Does someone spend your hard-earned money? Does someone eat a great deal, or not enough, or eat a lot and then throw up? Does someone hurt others, or try to kill or injure you? One of the times being a multiple can be a serious problem is if you are a parent, and one of the alters resents or wants to hurt your child, or leaves your child alone.

If any of these things are going on, it is very important that you seek help to get the alters to stop putting you in danger, hurting you, or hurting other people, especially a child. They can be helped to stop their destructive behavior. There are many therapists who have worked with multiples and will know how to help.

AM I CRAZY?

Being a multiple does not **make** you crazy, but being a multiple can make you **feel** like you're crazy. If you doubt yourself this way, you can become confused or uncertain. You can also feel ashamed, frightened, or want to spend time alone. This self-doubt and confusion can make you feel bad about yourself.

HOW MANY ALTERS DO I HAVE?

Everyone is different. You might have one alter. You might have many. You may know some of them better than others. Some of them may come out when you least expect it or when you thought you had already met everyone.

DO I HAVE TO TALK ABOUT MY INSIDE PEOPLE?

Many multiples are afraid to talk about their inside people out of fear that others will think they are strange or crazy or lying. Some multiples may have some alters who want to talk and some who don't. When the alters feel safer, and the listener feels trustworthy enough, the act of talking will become easier.

Therapists who work with multiples think it's important for them to meet the alters and let the alters talk directly about their secrets and fears and concerns.

HOW DO I GET TO KNOW THEM?

Alters are unique. Sometimes they are different from each other in a very small way that only you and your alters notice. As I said before, for the most part, they are friendly. If they are not, try to talk to someone about how to keep yourself safe even from your inside people. You do not deserve to be hurt. The hurting has to stop. The first step is to realize that being a multiple was a gift that allowed you to survive. Not everyone can become a multiple. Those of you who could become multiples were luckier. Usually, multiples are very



intelligent and very creative. If you see your multiplicity as something helpful, it might be less scary. If you respect your alters, this also helps. You might then be able to let yourself spend time inside, listening for your alters. Talk to your inside parts and let them talk to each other and get to know each other. Let everyone know that you are interested in listening and getting to know them. Invite them to talk to you when they feel safe. If they know they will be respected and believed, they will automatically feel safer to talk to you.



Because alters develop as a result of bad things happening, and because alters may come out when bad things are happening, multiples may have trouble remembering what actually happened. It is understandable to feel very afraid to remember, because what happened was so horrible and scary. Multiples might have tried to keep the memories down, in an effort to keep the feelings down. And yet, it is remembering and feeling **at the same time**, and recognizing that you are no longer a victim, which allows healing to take place. The feelings must be taken out of storage, looked at, experienced, felt, and given proper meaning, before they can be put in the past, where they belong. Some alters remember more than others about what happened, but they all have something important to contribute.

WILL I KNOW THEM ALL?

It's hard to say. Multiples and their alters are very unique and it is hard to predict how it will be for everyone.

SOME OF THEM ARE FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL

Some alters are truly your friends and protectors. You can consult with them and they will give you good advice. Use them as you would any support system, turning to them when you need nurturing, support, or attention. Likewise, these helpful alters can become inner sources of strength to anyone inside who needs support, encouragement, or tender, loving, care.



SOME OF THEM ARE SCARY

Other alters may behave in angry, unfriendly, pushy or unpleasant ways. When they are out they can cause a lot of trouble for you. It is very normal to be frightened by these alters, as you would feel frightened by any other person who behaves in a threatening manner. If you are feeling frightened by your alters with angry, mean, or hurtful words or behaviors, try to seek help, just as you would if someone on the outside was scaring you. These alters with mean, loud, or punishing behaviors have strong feelings they need to learn to express in safer ways. They too need understanding and respect. They can be helped to behave differently and express their anger (and other feelings) in better ways.



Some of your protective alters may guard you by scaring away perceived intruders. Their ability to express anger loudly can be very valuable. Still, they may need to learn about the difference between real dangers and situations which only seem dangerous because of the hurtful things that happened when they were little.

Some professionals are trained to work with people who express their anger too quickly or violently. The trained professional can teach safe and appropriate ways to express anger. A trained therapist will invite your hostile alters to speak to him/her directly, or through an alter who is safer. The therapist will also make sure your inside protectors are prepared for a crisis and have a plan for fighting off an attack. Therapists are trained to talk to people who have a range of feelings. Remember: **Anger is just another feeling.** You are probably frightened by it because you saw anger used in destructive and abusive ways. But anger is a normal human feeling and there are safe and non-hurtful ways of expressing it, such as exercise, role-playing, journal or letter writing, artwork, body movement, or talking to your lover, spouse, a friend or therapist.

WHO CAN I TELL?

The safest thing to do is to tell someone who knows about multiplicity, and who will be understanding and supportive. It's hard to know how people will react. One thing you might try is to discuss the subject of multiplicity with a friend or someone you trust and see how they respond. If they seem interested and understanding, perhaps you can tell them that you wonder if this might apply to you. Eventually, you might want to take a chance and tell them that you are a multiple. Most multiples feel relieved when loved ones know. They like being able to choose to show some or all of their parts. They may have inside parts who have been eager to spend time with friends or family. Of course, the choice of who is told is always made by the multiple.



If you are unsure about telling others, you can also try to find a therapist who works with multiples, to help you discuss being a multiple or to answer your questions. Keep in mind though, that many therapists are not trained to work with multiples. Most therapists were told that multiplicity is extremely rare and it is not emphasized as an area of study in school. Don't be afraid to interview therapists about their training or experience working with multiples, or ask for and check their references. Many therapists who work with multiples are trained hypnotherapists. Through hypnosis, you and your therapist can find and meet your alters. You always decide if it's OK to be hypnotized. There are many ways hypnosis can help heal old hurts. Many multiples find hypnosis a very helpful recovery tool.

There are a couple of newsletters just for multiples, in which you can have your questions answered anonymously. Being a multiple frequently creates isolation; efforts to break that isolation and make contacts with understanding and supportive people are encouraged. (See Resources Section)

WHAT IF I WANT TO CHANGE?

If you are a multiple and find that being a multiple is stressful or dangerous or problematic, you may want to enter therapy. I highly recommend that you consider therapy if you have any of the following:

You feel suicidal or homicidal

You feel abusive to your children or other children

You wake up in unknown places

You cut or hurt yourself

You hear internal noises, voices, uproar, and feel disoriented

You lose time

You might also want to seek help for other issues, such as not being able to form or keep relationships, difficulties with trust and intimacy, depression, anxiety, generalized fear, drug and alcohol addictions, sexual difficulties, or being hit or hurt by others. If you are having nightmares, flashbacks, confusing physical sensations, or find yourself having panic attacks, these are also reasons to seek help.

Trained and experienced therapists will discuss your concerns with you. Together, you can arrive at goals to be achieved in therapy. The primary goals of therapy with multiples are to create harmony within the entire person; to assist the multiple with remembering and discharging feelings; and to create a cooperative system that works in the best interest of the multiple.

Some multiples have found it is very helpful to talk to spouses, lovers or trusted friends, read self-help books, go to self-help groups, or talk to a clergyperson. Therapy is not the only answer, but should be considered if problems persist.

I LIKE SOME OF MY ALTERS. DO THEY HAVE TO GO AWAY?

If you decide to enter therapy, your concerns and goals can be defined with your therapist. As I said earlier, the usual goals of therapy are to help multiples communicate feelings among their inside people, share secrets and work through

upsetting memories, and to obtain a sense of cooperation, mutual support, respect, and harmony. Some therapists talk about "integration," or "fusion" as a goal of therapy which helps the multiple feel



more whole, more in control, and calmer, without the roller-coaster sensations which may have existed before. To achieve this feeling of calmness the multiple learns how to set effective limits on the threatening or punitive behaviors of some alters so that they no longer hurt the multiple or put the multiple at risk. These alters with self-destructive behaviors may not be totally gone, but the multiple knows what to do to keep him/herself safe. Specific alters may worry about being forced to leave; however, multiples get to decide what will happen to their inside people. Sometimes two alters who think and feel similar things seem to join together. When this happens, multiples like the feeling that nothing has been left behind, and something new has been gained. At the same time, they might miss the way it was.

ARE THERE OTHER MULTIPLES I CAN TALK WITH?

There are growing numbers of networks developed by and for multiples. Some of these resources are listed in the back of the book. It is great to see multiples becoming visible and empowering themselves through contact with others.

IN CLOSING

I have called multiplicity a gift. I have called it helpful, friendly and protective. I have stated that multiplicity is not a form of mental illness. You are not born with it. It develops as a result of severe abuse and maltreatment. I have also made it clear that some alters can create dangerous situations for you or others, and that it is important to get help should this occur. There are many, many multiples. Many have sought and received help. Many therapists are trained to assist you.

I am sorry you were hurt as a child. You were not to blame for this abuse. You did not cause it. There was nothing bad about you that caused people to hurt you. People hurt you because they were mean or confused. The adults who hurt you were wrong.

No one can change what happened to you as a child. The past cannot be relived but you can help yourself feel safer and happier now and in the future.

I hope reading this book will encourage you to respect your multiplicity. Your alters are all parts of you; together they make up the whole of you. I know that you will use all the information in this book to better understand yourself and take the steps necessary to create a safe and nurturing environment, seeking the help you deserve, when it is needed.

RESOURCES:

SURVIVORSHIP

A Forum for Survivors of Ritual Abuse and Other Torture
3181 Mission, #139
San Francisco, Ca. 94110
(Subscriptions for a monthly newsletter, \$25)

MANY VOICES

A National bi-monthly self-help publication for persons
with Multiple Personalities or a Dissociative Process
P.O.Box 2639
Cincinnati, OH. 45201-2639
(Subscriptions for six issues per year, \$30)

MPD REACHING OUT

A Newsletter about Multiple Personality Disorder
% Public Relations Dept.
Royal Ottawa Hospital
1145 Carling Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K12 7K4
(Subscription for lay person, \$12; agencies \$18)

BEYOND SURVIVAL MAGAZINE

1278 Glenneyre St. #3

Laguna Beach, Ca. 92651

(Subscription \$25/yr. and \$40/2 years)

HEALING HEARTSInformation and referral for survivors of ritual
abuse; Resource directory of helping professionals;
Survivor Conferences

1515 Webster Street

Oakland, Ca. 94612

(Subscription \$10/year)

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