

All of Me

The survival power of multiple personalities BY "JANA"

I REMEMBER the day my therapist told me she thought I was a "multiple"—a person with many distinct personalities.

I remember the shock, the panic, the confusion her comment set off in me. Like most people, I thought of multiple personalities as nothing less than bizarre. My primary acquaintance with the topic came from movies like *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Sybil*. I also had heard sensational news reports of people who used a "multiple personality defense" when accused of some crime.

Even more frightening and troubling was the knowledge that, in the fundamentalist circles in which I had grown up, the phenomenon of multiple personalities was equated with demon possession. Essentially, everything I had ever heard about people with multiple personalities could be summed up in one word: *strange*.

And now, my highly regarded therapist was saying I was one! But my anxiety over the diagnosis

began to fade over the following weeks as she explained what it means to have multiple personalities and how they develop.

Many things began to make sense. My new understanding helped explain why I experienced unpredictable mood swings and acted and felt differently about myself in different settings. It explained why I was unable to estimate time realistically and therefore constantly overextended myself. It explained why I had always had difficulty relating to others.

My therapist and I talked about "dissociating" or blocking out unpleasant things, mentally separating myself from what was going on around me. During much of my life, I have felt that I wasn't really living but just being pulled along in a current—sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly, sometimes not at all.

It isn't easy to find therapists who understand multiple personality disorder (MPD). Misdiagnosis is common. No one, of course, is likely to go to a

therapist saying, "I think I have a multiple personality problem." We go because we want help with other problems.

I phoned a rape crisis center for a recommendation of a therapist after two troubling events: I had been sexually harassed at work, and I had seen an audience on a television talk show blatantly blame the victims of sexual abuse by ministers. I believed no one could understand the shame and self-destructiveness I was feeling. I have a history of suicide attempts, and I was planning another. But I decided to try one more time to get some help. I contacted one of the therapists the rape crisis center had recommended. I believe God led me to her.

I TOLD THE therapist I didn't want to live anymore. I was very tired of living; all my existence, death had been the only way I knew to escape my abusive childhood and the horror of incest.

But I also said my parents and I had resolved all that, and we had a good

relationship. I realize now that this statement was coming from Wonderful Daughter, the part of me that always wanted to believe I had a warm, loving family like other people and therefore tried to act as though it were true. I showered my parents with gifts, even though nothing ever pleased my father, and my attempts instead unleashed his wrath and criticism. I visited them as often as I could, even though I was always apprehensive beforehand to the point of being physically ill. And I dutifully tried to solve any problem they were facing.

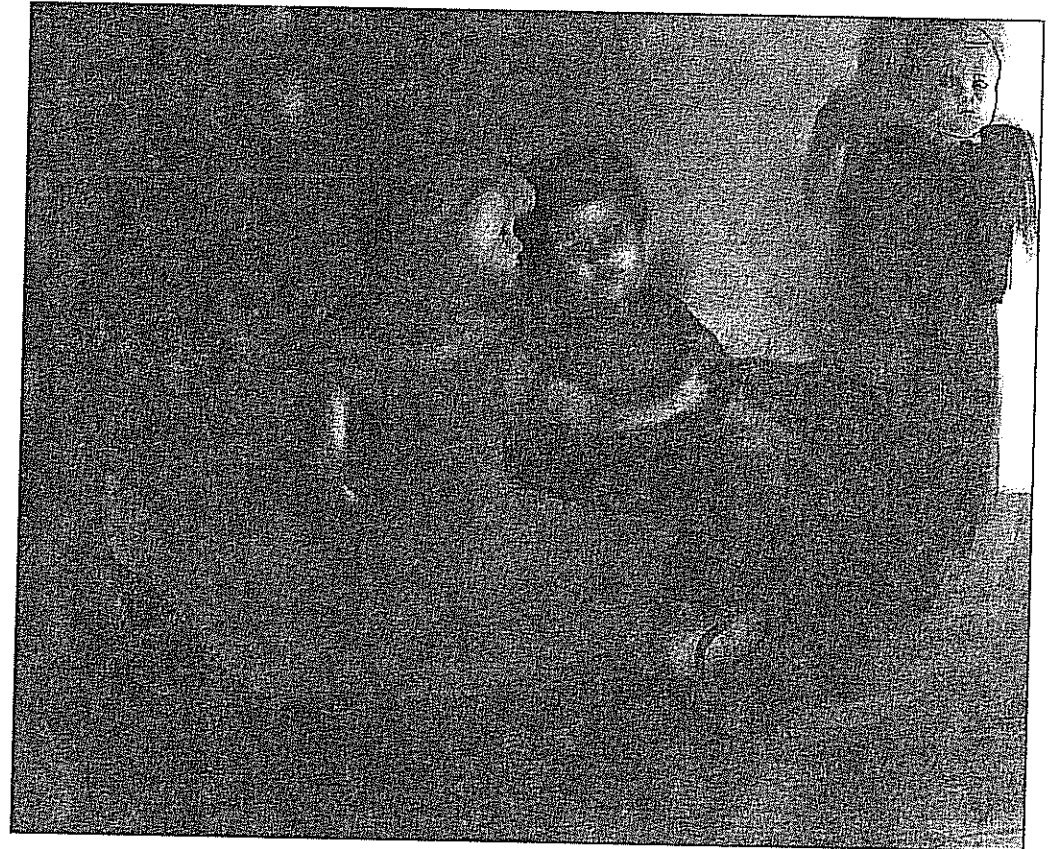
Wonderful Daughter fit with the sentimental greeting cards my parents sent me, the verses gushing pride over parental memories of my ostensibly glorious childhood and their delight in their dear, wonderful, adult daughter.

Such a family portrait is false. But Wonderful Daughter could know only the fantasy family, not the real family. Although my therapist recognized the pain and terror that Won-

derful Daughter would not acknowledge, she waited until I was ready to talk about it.

Then one day, during a quiet moment in my therapy session, my therapist asked me what I was seeing. I saw a little girl about three years old holding a dead kitten, afraid to cry because crying would mean severe punishment. I saw a little girl about five years old being hurt in her bottom. I saw another little girl about six being beaten and locked under the house, where she talked to God as she sat, frightened and alone. I saw a little girl about nine being raped.

Over time, I began to see that each of these little girls was a separate entity, a distinct personality. There were Little Girls, Older Ones, Teenagers, and also Boys who could talk about some things the others didn't know about. One Boy carried the anger. Another tried to protect the others from harm. My therapist talked to the various personalities at different times.



THE MULTIPLE personality phenomenon is a coping mechanism that provides a positive and creative way of surviving tortuous situations.

Psychotherapist and survivor Lynne Finney points out in *Reach for the Rainbow* that abused children endure unremitting pain and terror from which they cannot escape. They cannot control the abuse or know if and when it will ever stop. "Abused children have three choices," writes Finney: death, becoming psychotic and dysfunctional, or finding an alternative way to grow up and function.

Finney explains that children who uncon-

sciously choose to deal with the ongoing horror by dividing their minds into various personalities are creative, intelligent children. "Each personality seals off memories and feelings in neat little packages so that the child does not have to deal with too much pain at once. The child is insulated from the pain and remembers nothing at the conscious level. One or more personalities deal with the abuse and protect the other personalities from knowledge of the abuse so that the child can continue to function on a day-to-day basis." Because of its power as a survival strategy, MPD is more appropriately named multi-

ple personality response.

People with multiple personalities are not insane; they are not schizophrenic. Many are functioning well in every walk of life—as doctors, teachers, and therapists. I have completed a doctorate and have been a university professor for many years. Because of the misinformation and prejudice surrounding the topic, only a few people know about my multiple personalities. Those closest to me who know do not regard me any differently than before. In fact, they understand me better now that they know my situation.

What happens next? My therapist leaves that up to

me. There was a time when integration—trying to bring all the personalities together as one—was the standard goal of treatment. Often it still is. But no part of myself need be eliminated.

As Finney points out, many survivors with MPD think they must choose between killing off personalities or keeping them as they are. "The better alternative is to simply reform existing personalities so that all become functional and helpful parts of the individual." She suggests that each personality be treated as a distinct and separate member of a family so that "memories are recovered, emotions are released, and dysfunctional decisions and behaviors are reconsidered and altered."

This is what I am working on. My journey is one of recovery through the healing work of therapy. My therapist carefully, gently, lovingly, and safely guides all of us—the Little Ones, Teenagers, Adults, Boys, Silent Ones, and those still sealed away in their vessels—on a journey toward life free from abuse, torture, and terror. We speak, and we tell our stories. We learn to cope with the past memories, when the abuse happened and our existence was terror.

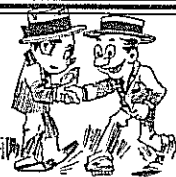
We choose to live.

"JANA" is a pseudonym.

Artist **ELLEN PHELAN** lives in New York City. Born in Detroit in 1943, Ellen collects old dolls and paints them "from life" in her SoHo studio. She is represented by the Patricia Faure Gallery in Santa Monica and Barbara Toll Fine Arts in New York City.

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My Brother Tommy

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er. He called her the queen of hearts, not the queen of diamonds. He then gave his name as Aloysius, his confirmation name. By the time he got to the chicken, the jury had broken the code.

The jury stayed out for five minutes, long enough for a cup of coffee. They found by a preponderance of evidence that Tommy was a danger to himself and to others. Judge Buford ordered him committed indefinitely to Rusk State Hospital. Pat and Tommy and I hugged each other and cried in the courtroom.

INDEFINITE COMMITMENT did not mean that Tommy could not get out of the hospital. He could leave on furlough, but there would be no need for a retrial if his family or his doctor felt it was time for him to go back in. He might still have been there, forehead clear and head full of lithium and Raleigh Filter Kings, if the doctors at Rusk had not tired of his disruptions and discharged him.

Anyway, as Christmas approached, Tommy called Peggy and said he needed some groceries. Rather than give him money, which tended to go for drugs, Peggy usually got groceries for him. As he listed his groceries, Tommy threw in a request for Pampers. "Pampers?" Peggy was surprised.

Once before, Tommy had attempted to follow the biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply by attempting to get married. He had met a rather tough young woman at a country-and-western bar during one of his pre-tattoo breakdowns. Pat and I got it annulled, although the girl's mother had demanded \$1,000 to sign the annulment papers for the unconsummated, drug-booze, one-night misdeal. So Tommy never married, had no children, and had no need for Pampers.

"What for?" Peggy asked.

"For Mary and the baby."

"What?" Oh God. Christmas. The Nativity. His forty-sixth birthday. He's going off again.

He repeated, "For Mary and the baby."

Peggy drove out to Tommy's house



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