



I HAVE DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER

Quiet Storm

Psychological Concept

dissociative identity disorder (formerly called multiple personality disorder)

Quiet Storm, a pseudonym the writer gave herself to symbolize the quiet surface that covers an inner storm, writes of the several people who she believes live within her. Each has a separate identity, career, and "memories, talents, dreams, and fears." She describes several of the women who are a part of her, and tells how they evolved as defenders against child abuse. Storm's interior world is vast, filled with children, adolescents, and adults. People often notice great changes in her and remark that she often seems like a completely different person. All of her selves are gradually healing, but integration is not an issue she is ready to confront.

Some readers may find portions of Storm's article disturbing because of the abusive ordeals she presents as causes of her illness.

Elaina is a licensed clinical therapist. Connie ~s a nurse. Sydney is a delightful little girl who likes to collect bugs in an old mayonnaise jar. Lynn is shy and has trouble saying her l's, and Heather-Heather is a teenager trying hard to be grownup. We are many different people, but we have one very important thing in common: We share a single body.

We have Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). We have dozens of different people living inside us, each with our own memories, talents, dreams, and fears. Some of us "come out" to work or play or cook or sleep. Some of us only watch from inside. Some of us are still lost in the past, a tortured past full of incest and abuse. And there are many who were so damaged by this past and who have fled so deep inside, we fear we may never reach them.

Imagine a little girl walking with her parents through a bookstore. She's only four, but she already knows how to read. She sees a book she really wants, and asks her parents if she can have it. They tell her no, and a single tear of disappointment rolls down her cheek. A single tear, but it is one tear too many.

The little girl's parents don't say anything in the store, but when they get home they take off her panties and beat her until her bottom is raw and bleeding. The panties are replaced with a diaper that is fastened to her skin with silver duct

tape. She is locked in a closet for three days. She is fed laxative mixed with milk in a baby bottle; her diaper is never changed. Her parents tell her again and again that she is a dirty little baby and will never grow up. They are right.

There is more, worse, but the little girl does not remember it. It's too painful to remember more. If she stays in that closet and refuses to acknowledge the passing of time, then maybe those awful things didn't really happen. Maybe there can be some other ending to her story.

In a way that little girl never left that closet. Another little girl did, one who shared the same body but whose existence began the moment the closet door opened. Where there was one, now there were two—one who understood that she must never ever cry to her parents for any reason and another who huddled forever in a dark inner closet, because to remember what happened next, when her parents finally came to get her, would be too much for a single young mind to bear.

Many of our Alter personalities were born of abuse. Some came because they were needed, others came to protect.

Leah came whenever she heard our father say "Come lay awhile with me." If she came, none of our other Alters would have to do those things he wanted. She could do them for us, and protect us from that part of our childhood.

Halfcup came when we were left at home for days on end with nothing to eat. She cooked meals for us. She cleaned up afterward so our parents wouldn't know we'd found a way to unlock our bedroom door. Halfcup still loves to cook. Last Christmas we bought her a new set of pots and pans.

Connie came when the body was beaten so badly that somebody had to come who didn't feel the pain, who could comfort the Alters who hurt, who could tell the doctor we'd fallen off our bike. We couldn't let anyone tell him what really happened. That would have made our parents even madder.

Unlike many of our Alters, Connie grew up into an adult as our body did. She was created to be a healer, so it was only natural that when she was old enough, she would enroll in nursing school.

Connie didn't know that at the same time she was in nursing school, Elaina was in grad school working on her social work degree. Nor did Elaina know about Connie. All they knew was that, even with only three hours of sleep each night, there never was enough time to get things done.

MPD is not a disease. It is not a sickness. It is a highly developed coping mechanism that allows the young mind to compartmentalize, or "dissociate," repeated and traumatic abuse. The six-year-old who smiles at her teacher at school cannot hold back the tears when her father enters her room in the middle of the night. Somebody else has to come, somebody who can do those things without crying because crying isn't ever allowed. And the little girl whose mother tucks her in at night and calls her Peaches will never understand why that same mother ties her to the bed when she has a fever and beats her and tells her only bad little girls get sick. Somebody else has to come—somebody whose nose isn't stuffy and who doesn't have a fever.



Being able to create Alter personalities to cope with the abuse is the only thing that allowed us to survive our childhood alive. MPD was never a disease-it was a gift, the gift of life we gave to ourselves.

Once we were grown up and had escaped from our abusive parents, the system that protected us for so many years became unnecessary. But still our internal system of multiple personalities survived, and the longer we went untreated the worse things became for us. We lost time, as Alters unknown to us took control of the body. Sometimes they went shopping. Sometimes they haunted libraries. Sometimes they cowered on the floor in the closet because one of our Alters saw a little girl walking hand in hand with her father and the very sight of it terrified her. Often an innocent remark from a friend would trigger old memories of abuse, and for the Alter who held those memories it was as if the abuse were still going on. We couldn't stand to be touched, or to have anyone tell us they cared for us. We felt worthless and alone.

It took five years and as many therapists before we found someone who recognized our MPD. It was another year before we fully accepted the diagnosis. Only then did we truly begin to know ourselves.

The more we learn about ourselves and the abuse that created us, the stronger our system becomes. We've become one another's friends. We form alliances, accept responsibilities. We take care of each other.

Elaina and Connie work for our living. Elaina is a respected therapist who is building an extensive private practice. Connie works weekends at one of the local emergency rooms. Heather drives the car, and watches out for all the children we still have inside of us. Sydney sits with the tiniest ones when they are crying, and Lynn holds the stuffed polar bear while we sleep and pesters Heather to make sure we have plenty of crayons on hand for when she and her inside friends want to color.

Like many Multiples, we have constructed a large internal house where we go to live when we are not occupying the body. It's several stories high, with crystal chandeliers and big picture windows, and there's an inner yard filled with rainbows where the little ones go to play while Elaina and Connie are busy at work. The little ones are never allowed out when the adults are at their jobs. We have enough trouble hiding our MPD from people as it is. We have to wear tinted contacts because our eye color changes every time a different Alter comes out, and if we had a dollar for every time somebody has said to us, "Jeez, it's like you're a completely different person," we wouldn't have to worry so much about paying the \$7,000 a year we have to spend on therapy because our medical insurance doesn't cover MPD.

We each have our own rooms in our internal house. We can decorate them the way we want, and lock the door and be absolutely safe from harm. But it's sad to know there are many doors in this house of ours that have never been opened. Late at night we hear the sobs and screams of those who live behind these doors, Alters who are still imprisoned by their abusive pasts and for whom there is yet no peace.

One of our Alters named Molly recently told our therapist that the very first thing she can remember was being locked in a closet. There was someone in there with her, a little girl dressed only in a diaper that was taped to her skin. Molly remembered leaving the closet, but didn't know what became of that other little girl.

Our therapist tried hard to reach Molly's companion, but she wouldn't talk to him. She was too afraid to come out, terrified of the devastating memories that loomed just beyond her closet door.

That was the day of the tremendous thunderstorm. There were high winds, pelting sheets of rain, lightning, hail, and thunder. We seem to gather a lot of internal energy from storms. We feel electric inside and sometimes seem to feel a part of the storm itself. We think of ourselves as a storm, a quiet storm where outside everything may appear calm and peaceful but inside violent tornadoes rage.

Anyway, as soon as the storm began, we went driving in Heather's car. All around us the storm was swirling and howling. We could see, we could practically feel, the rain pelting down on us through the glass T-top roof.

While Heather drove, Molly led many of us to the place deep inside where that little girl still cowered in her closet. She opened the door and went inside. She held the little girl in her arms, and told her about all of us and how we were waiting outside to love her and take care of her. All she had to do was remember the past and by remembering, free herself from it.

Bravely, the little girl took Molly's hand and walked with her out of that closet. Everything appeared misty to her at first, but then the memories coalesced and we all looked on as she remembered what happened more than a quarter of a century ago so vividly that it all seemed to be happening to her again, right then and there. She remembered the baths, the boiling hot water, the acrid lye soap, the wire brush with the rounded wooden handle. She remembered the pain, the blood, the searing violation of her private parts.

"You won't be a bad little girl anymore, will you?"

"No, Mama! No, Daddy!"

We remembered too. We wept, we screamed, we shared the pain while Heather drove us through streets full of water that sloshed against the wheel rims, through bolts of lightning that lit up the sky and through thunder that shook the car.

We named the little girl Misty, and when she was through remembering, Molly took her to her room where she removed her soiled diaper and bathed her ever so gently, and then helped her into a pink night dress and a pair of big-girl panties. The two curled up on fluffy pillows.

Outside, the storm was still raging, but inside, for a time, all was quiet in the eye of our storm.

Little by little we were healing ourselves and freeing ourselves from the tyranny of our past. Our therapist tells us that when we have remembered everything and worked through the pain associated with these memories, we will no longer need Alter personalities to protect us, and then and only then we can begin the

process of integration into a single, cohesive personality. But that will be our decision—whether or not we will even want to turn from many back into one.

Integration isn't something we even think about right now. Right now we're far too busy working to heal all the wounded children inside us, the frightened adolescents and angry adults. Together we will continue to reclaim what was stolen from us by the perpetrators of our abuse. We cannot recapture the lost years, the shattered innocence, but we will not let our past destroy our future. We are survivors of our abuse, not its victims. We know that the loudest cries are often very, very quiet. We will listen to these cries, and we will honor each part of us that endured the pain in silence.

For us, the silence is broken'~:~:~;. !

Response and Analysis

1. What tragic events does the author suggest led to her developing dissociative identity disorder (formerly called multiple personality disorder)? Why does she believe the personalities were needed? What does the author mean when she writes, "We think of ourselves as a storm, a quiet storm where outside everything may appear calm and peaceful but inside violent tornadoes rage"?
2. Briefly describe the personality named Molly. What did Molly tell the therapist? When did the other personalities remember the terrible events that occurred when the author was a little girl? According to the psychodynamic perspective and the behavioral perspective, how do dissociative disorders such as dissociative identity disorder develop?

Personal Experience and Application

1. Suppose the office of psychological services at your college or university asks you to help create a public service announcement discussing the causes of child abuse. List three factors that are associated with child abuse. What recommendations might you offer to reduce its incidence?

Research

Suppose you conducted a research project examining the worldwide prevalence of dissociative identity disorder. Imagine that your results show that the prevalence of dissociative identity disorder varies considerably across cultures. In what ways could you explain this finding?