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THE

Periodicals

"LOOKING UP" TIMES

By Maine Survivors of Incest

Vol. 2. No. 2

November, 1986



Photo by Jean Tillson

The pain persists in harmony.
This out-of-tune-ness we all know.
In time, in rhyme,
we ache.

Solemn Solitude

I feel such solemn solitude
 flowing through me with warm vibrations.
And I don't know if I'm happy, or sad,
 or just perplexed with the magnitude of feeling
 deep within my inner being.

—Sally, 1986

WHEN MOTHERS RAPE

My Mother

My grandmother was my mother.
My mother was my lover.

My grandmother washed my face.
My mother was a disgrace.

My grandmother tucked me in.
My mother climbed in.

My grandmother took me to church.
My mother was my flirt.

My grandmother loved me like a son.
My mother loved to have fun.

My grandmother protected my innocence.
My mother robbed me of it.

My grandmother loved God.
My mother loved sex.

My grandmother was my mother.
My mother was my lover.

My grandmother went to heaven.
My mother was out to lunch.

My grandmother's love lives on.
My mother's lust is gone.

My love is for my grandmother.
My pity is for my mother.

My grandmother was loving.
My mother was lustful.

My grandmother was kind.
My mother was blind.

My grandmother was my mother.
My mother was my lover.

My respect is for my grandmother.
My forgiveness is for my mother.

My desire is for a mother's love.
My reality is that there never will be one.

My mother was my perpetrator.
Her son was her victim.

Her desire was selfish.
My pleasure was shame.

My mother was my lover ...

She

She
Sleeps by day
And kills by
Night;

She
Stalks like an insane
Leper gone dead,
Buried...

Then ALIVE!

Rumbling cemetery dirt
For the freedom
To ride the
Tidal-fear of
Mortal children —
My Mother.

— Elizabeth Noel
©1983

Cold Goodbye

Mommy Mommy
You said goodbye
And I did

Sit at the
Cold and silent
Window sill,

Counting the hours
Like years as I
Watched with

Numbing fingers
The sun bleed
Crimson eddies into

Crystal night,
Until at last!!
You came again,

And I, in
Frostbite-feet
Slipped from my

Snow guard...
Dropping down,
Falling down...

Onto oak,
Rough-hewn,
I stood, staring

Hard through
Dewy eyes without
Looking up;

And I, in
Jammie-jumpers,
Shivering cold

On padded feet,
Turned from you
And walked away.

Elizabeth Noel
©1986

A Survivor's Dialogue

I scream at him in futility for the lost years and the needless pain.

"Why didn't you kill me? Why do I have to live with this terrible secret? You're a sick old man. I'll eventually win, you never will. You're poison. You destroy young life and joy.

"I've never been free. My body holds infinite pain and emptiness. I didn't do anything wrong, but I've suffered like a criminal. I'll win this terrible struggle in spite of you. I have to fight the part that let you in. My body was too small, vulnerable. I was completely helpless and you took away my life. You sucked me dry. My life fluids drained out of me as I watched them flow away. I couldn't stop them."

"I can't remember when I wasn't terribly afraid of you. My body is battered inside and out by the rage and pain a small body couldn't live with. Have you forgotten? You bastard. I can't remember, but my body feels it all; nameless, unknown terror.

"I'm blaming you, father. You might not be guilty, but I can't give you the benefit of the doubt. The hardest part of the struggle is not remembering. Perhaps when I was asleep or half awake. . ."

THE FOG OF AMNESIA

The Battleground

I'm afraid of men, especially Daddies. I can't
grasp why little girls want their Daddies around.
Why aren't they afraid?

As an adult, I watch them and I feel afraid for
them. I can't talk. I just watch, embarrassed.

I'm confused. My memories are vague, don't fit.
An evil force puts worms in my head, confusing
me so I don't know who to trust.

Somehow women turn into men. They grow
penises and hurt me. The gentle woman I'm
seduced by will eat me up. Are they good or
evil? Sometimes I can't tell and my fear turns
into panic and terror. I need to be held where
I'm warm and safe, but that's what threatens
my life.

I fear a force outside me will destroy me, body
and soul. I fight this force every day, because I
want desperately to live.

Disguised

Voices echo afar
Numbness which should be feelings
Memories which are blanks
Secrets still are covered
Truth is hidden by lies
Daylight is shaded by shadows
Happiness where sadness lies
Thoughts which are hidden
Tuck it in your mind
Close the door
Tucked so far away
At a distance it seems faded . . .

— Cheryl Gusha

Turn Around

Can I stop the judging,
Stop those who use me,
Curve the name tags placed upon me,
Change my fate?

Contemplate the showering of guilt,
Shift the responsibility,
Catch the door from shutting behind,
Catch my destiny?

Feeling so hopelessly shattered,
Falling into a bottomless pit,
Trapped in a cage with demons,
Can I not change the inevitable?

Burning at both ends,
Repaired after being broken,
Warmed when I'm freezing,
Why can't I change that which I do not know?

Please take it all away.

— Cheryl Gusha

MORE I SEARCH...

It continues like a tender wound that never heals.
It frightens me to be so close to the pain
sometimes
And I wonder why I cry.
It was so long ago.
And I cry.
Anger rises like raging fire, like raging wind.
I am the storm.

A Little Girl No More

A little girl is no more.
She is now a scared young "woman."
I shouldn't have become a "woman" so soon.
The little girl is still there waiting,
Waiting to come out.
I want to finish my life which was lost.

I trusted you as a friend. You broke that.
I looked up to you.
I no longer have that trust in you.
The trust in you was lost by your choice.
The years of friendship that we built
Have vanished forever.

My innocence was lost forever to be no more.
The "woman" has to live with the guilt and the
shame.
I will live with the pain for the rest of my life.
I will always remember.

The rainy days still come.
I am waiting for the sunshine,
Which brings hope,
Which brings FREEDOM!

—ALI

Twice Thrown Away

You rejected me even before
doing further harm.
Why didn't you just totally
abandon me without touching
me at all?
It would have been kinder.
But you took me up from where
you had thrown me away and
crumbled me up some more
before throwing me away
again.
One type of child abuse wasn't
enough for you, just as
abusing one child only wasn't
bad enough for you.
I had to be another one.
You had to scar my mind and
heart.
A sick kind of pleasure for you.
All the time I was buried in
secret pain, that I wasn't
entitled to feel.

— Not Your Daughter

November, 1986

The night is still with sleep.
Somewhere nearby, within,
A cauldron simmers, bubbles, spits and sizzles.
Somewhere nearby, within,
An endless ache brims with silent tears.
A tired rage weeps.

I Don't Believe

I don't believe in you anymore.
Years ago I walked out of a
locked door when I was
eighteen, when you thought
I'd believe that filthy was
really clean.
I don't believe in you now.
You're not my idol.
I'm sick of being lied to.
I don't believe in your brand of
reality.
It's a negative tomb, not
something for me.
That's not a place for the living
to be.
I don't believe in your dark
judgments that you cast down
from your throne.
Now I see that being a judge is
only being alone.
Oh, you said you were so wise.
But now I know what you really
are; nothing in my eyes.
You said you were our father
and that made you always
right.
Even Mom was always wrong.
We were nothing in your sight.
How could I believe in someone
so small, a man who could
stoop so low?
All you did was drink and abuse
us and always say, "I know."
Why did I worship you in fear?
I can't understand.
We were all under your thumb
and all you did was demand.
No, I don't believe in you and
I'm really glad I don't,
because I can see the truth,
the reality, so I won't.
You're not a hard worker, and
you're not an idol or a
deceptive decoy.
You're nothing and that's all
you'll ever be, because I am
fighting and breaking free.
I'm learning the real lesson:
To believe in me.

— Not Your Daughter

...MORE I ASK

Out Of Darkness

The cold, gray waters surge upon the sandy shore as I stand and watch the wicked peaks of waves rise and taunt me.

"Come on," they say, "you wouldn't dare jump in here!"

I shudder as I quickly dismiss the thought. What a cruel thing to think and how naughty of those waves to even suggest such a thought! I listen to them lapping against the beach.

The waves, so tormented and rough in the middle of the lake, the way I feel inside right now. So abused, so hurt. The urge to fight back, no matter what. So wild and free. Will I ever get this out of me, I wonder?

But then I notice that as the waves near the shore, they froth, they foam and spit. As quickly as they came, once upon the shore they gently lick the sand. Some waves come a little closer on the sand, some break along the rocks and some are dashed in two before they even have a chance.

That is just like me. I never had a chance. I was beaten, broken, used and rejected. I fought, oh how I fought. Just to simply stay alive, just like the waves in the middle of that lake. Full of wild desire to be heard, to be seen and to be known. No matter the cost.

Another wave comes. It is almost beaten down, but no, it wins. Just as I have always won over suicide before.

I slowly walk back to my car. Inside its warmth, I sit and look at the dark mountain across the lake and the glint of sun on the other side. Can I ever get across my mountain and see the sun again? I'm so tired, Lord, of struggling with this turmoil. I'm just like the waves; so torn, so tormented, so alone and so miserable.

Somehow, God, you've got to help me get a handle on my life. This mountain is so big and I'm so hurt inside. I just can't stand it anymore. Please help me see a bright new tomorrow.

The wind has picked up her pace. I leave the car to once more stand beside the glimmering, shiny, ever-changing lake. Yes, by God's grace, I will change. I will fight and I will grow. I will not give up now. I have come too far. All the horrid secrets are out now, so there's no need to die.

The wind teases her fingers through my hair and briskly rubs my face, making it cold and red. Yes, I am still alive and I can feel and I can see.

Yes, broken life and damaged emotions, you will be put back together again and rise as strong as this lake and that mountain. Oh, yes, I'll be swayed and I'll be blown about, but I will not be beaten. Never again will anyone have control over me.

Reaching

Reaching for those who raised me,
those who taught me,
the one I bore,
those I thought cared,
him whom I married.
Was I not blackened and condemned,
swept aside and buried,
deceived and taken,
tormented and shamed?
Pushed out.
My mind and heart still reaching.

—Cheryl Gusha

Bedroom Shadows

Once,
the bedroom shadows lingered
throughout my mind day and night
and I'd prefer to be alone
Though being alone consisted of such desolation
because it was easier and safer
than being within reach of someone else.

— Sally, 1985

Where Are Mothers?

Where are mothers when fathers are robbing innocence? Why do they choose not to see? How do they decide not to hear? When do they choose not to feel? How can they not see the fear in their child's eyes or the evil in their mate's?

Do they really not see, hear, or feel? Maybe it's like an elusive thread of a thought, too finely intertwined to unravel. Or maybe they've been caught in that very thread themselves, and are too close to see all the threads as a web of illness.

— Sue Meserve

Unfaithful To Me

You say to LOVE...

Yet you don't take the hate away.

You say to FORGIVE...

Yet you let me be offended and resented.

You say to TRUST...

Yet you've layed the pathway, stone by stone, to distrust.

You say not to JUDGE...

Yet you let them cast their stones at me.

You say don't LIE...

Yet they wrongfully marred me.

You say to HONOR...

Yet I've been dishonored.

You say you WATCH OVER...

Yet you chose to look the other way.

You say to BELIEVE...

Yet you watched while I was dismantled.

You say don't COVET THY NEIGHBOR...

Yet I was wrongfully desired.

You say don't STEAL...

Yet a thief came in the night.

You say to HONOR your MOTHER and FATHER...

Yet they physically and verbally smote me down.

You say not to commit ADULTERY...

Yet there were those who adulterated me.

You say not to bear FALSE WITNESS...

Yet there were those who were erroneous to me.

You say you can CURE...

Yet my heart is still broken.

You say do not KILL...

Yet I've been killed a thousand times a thousand.

— Cheryl Gusha

Afterthoughts

I

Pain...sharp, hot, agonizing pain.

This is something Jesus must have felt — well, I guess there is some solace in that.

II

A caricature of my childhood is best epitomized by the mere statement, "Gee Pop, what did I do to make my face hit your fist?"

III

Yes Dad, you can't "get" me when I'm unconscious or gone from the dimming light of my world.

— Elizabeth Noel

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The Cut-Off

A tear slips

silent

off my cheek.

I can taste

the salt of it

as it rolls between my lips.

The cut-off.

Then,

I feel the wind

blow

coolly across my face.

My clothes ruffle

and my hair

flows backward in a

Cut-off.

Anytime I feel,

be it happy

or sad,

and whatever the day

I feel

Cut Off.

— Sally, 1986

Never Is Forever

Never a hand to reach out for.

Never a touch that didn't hurt.

Never an eye that didn't look down.

Never a glance that didn't pierce.

Never a heart to feel.

Never an ear to hear.

Never a mouth that whispered kind words.

Never a voice that wasn't harsh.

Never a soul that helped to heal.

Never a mind that thought about the harm it had done.

Never a body to care about the child who was locked within.

— Cheryl Gusha

THE CLOUDS DO BREAK

Empty Pitcher

My pitcher was empty.
I was dying inside.
I could not explain my feelings.
I had no hope.
All the dreams that I used to dream
Shattered before my eyes.
I was alone and scared.
I was so confused.
My pitcher was empty.

My pitcher is now filled.
I am alive and well.
I can now explain my feelings,
And now show my feelings freely.
I have hope!
The dreams I now dream are
Growing before my eyes.
I am no longer alone or scared.
I am no longer confused.
I am in love.

My pitcher is now filled.

— ALI

Little Princess

As I pour another glass of wine sitting here stoned
because I don't want her to talk.
What she has inside hurts.
I don't want to hear it.
I don't want to hear her.
I don't want to hear myself.
I am sorry, little girl.
I will help you tomorrow.
I will listen,
Even though I don't want to...

Please don't run away.
I will help you.
I want to hear you.
I want you to find me.
I want us to find each other.
I want us to be one:
The Princess we were meant to be.

— Julie K. Fosdick

Dear "Looking Up,"

I wrote this poem recently after attending your workshop. I was inspired by seeing so many together against incest. I really believe that if each person who was there got it together and fought to stop incest, that we would eliminate it off the face of this beautiful earth. I will rejoice the day that should happen.

I am not ashamed of my work, or being out in the open about my incest. If this was more open years ago it may not have taken this long for me to talk about it. Thank you for bringing that openness to me.

A Child

There's a child. She wants to smile. She wants to say hello; she's been waiting for a while. She wants to come out. She's oh so small, peeking from behind the wall. She has many scars, yet she's shed no tears. There she's stood for many years. She's taken a step away from the wall. Standing alone, she's oh so small. She wants your love. She's reaching for you, but she's so afraid of what you'll do. She's taken your hand. She's standing near. She wants to trust, yet she's full of fear. She feels your warmth. She sees your smile. Could she just hold your hand awhile? She feels your love. You're standing near. She begins to shed her first tear. She's begun to trust. You're so kind to share your love with this child of mine.

— Michelle D'Entremont

Fears

I lie in bed in total fear, even though my father isn't near. I say to myself, "Don't be a fool. He can no longer get to you." I say to myself, "I'm better," but I'm not. It's something I haven't forgotten. They say, "Why hold on so long?" They say I did no wrong. But deep down inside, I crouch in a corner and hide where no one can get inside.

One day I went for help, and found my inner self. Now I don't look down, because my feet are firmly on the ground. So I say to you, "There's help out there for you, too. Just reach out and you'll see that you can walk proudly, just like me. Just remember you are someone and you don't have to do what this person tells you to, because we're all there for you."

Incest

The hurt inside. Does it ever end? Why does it abide always just around the bend?

He stole away from me my childhood and my soul. Every man reminds me of the one who was so cold. he had no right, but he helped himself. I learned to fight to save myself.

I was a toy that he enjoyed. Maybe he was just a boy, but the man enjoyed.

I learned to use it; it gave me time. It all seemed to fit; crime feeding crime. Prostitution. Sex for sell. He trained me then condemned me to hell.

Family lost, relationships fail. I pay the cost for desires of a male. Ruined for life. Can it be repaired? Can I be a wife? If only someone cared.

The answer's here. yes, someone cares. For all I've fought, it happens to be me.

— Judy Spaulding

Dear friends,

I'm 17½, a junior at Lewiston High School and I'm a survivor of incest. I was sexually abused by my father for 12 years, my brother for almost 9½ years and my mother for nine years. I've written a lot of poetry about the abuse and I'd like to share some.

Dearest Daddy

You mean so much to me.
I just need to hear your voice.
You don't understand that the things you did hurt.
I guess you didn't want to understand.
Still, I love you very much and I always will.
I know I've said this before, but I need you.
I need to talk and laugh with you.
I need your love.
I don't want to be punished any longer.
Please, Dearest Daddy,
Take the help others try to give,
So maybe you won't do it all again.
Don't make anyone feel as I do.
I don't want to hurt any more.
Please, Dearest Daddy,
For once just listen, don't lecture.
I need you as much as ever.
Please love me, Dearest Daddy.

Raging Waves

Raging in the rumbling waves.
Feelings flooding out the hope.
Despair slowly seeps into my heart.
Wishing I would drown swiftly.
Tears streaming down my cheeks.
Slowly a puddle is formed.
It grows and grows as I reminisce.
Thinking and living in the past,
Reliving and feeling hurt again,
The pain rapes my heart,
Stripping it of all the good,
Leaving it to fend for itself.
In my solitary world I ache.
My heart tears to shreds,
Leaving the water for me to drown in.
The raging waves come again.
The whirlpool pools me in.
Suddenly I am gone. Obsolete.

These poems summarize the feelings about loving my father after the abuse. I'll always have these feelings, but I now know it's normal to love yet hate. I have people pulling for me every day. In the past year and a half I've done a lot. I left home and I now am going steady with a senior from another school.

I've tried suicide a lot. I've been locked up in mental institutions for half of the past year. I'm not going to hurt myself again (I hope). Now I'm working on testifying against my parents, my brother, and some of my parents' friends who also sexually abused me.

I think I can make things work. I wish all the others luck, too.

— L.B.

The Steam-Roller

The purpose of a steam-roller is to press down tar that has been freshly laid. If by accident a person, animal, or thing gets in its way, it will receive the same treatment. I have a steam-roller coming at me and I have no way of getting out of its way.

The steam-roller represents the events in my life that threaten to crush me. I simply run for my life, as this is the only way I have learned to avoid being crushed.

I run and run until I am out of breath. I weaken. The steam-roller gains on me. As I collapse and await my horrifying fate, the steam-roller suddenly comes to a halt. It is out of gas. There is always someone ready to fill its tank. That someone doesn't seem to care that I am lying on the tar, in the path of the steam-roller. As long as the driver has money to pay for the gas, he will fill its tank.

Now I have time to catch my breath. There is someone for me, too. That someone gives me nourishment and courage to keep on running, but he cannot show me how to get out of the steam-roller's path. I realize I am the only one who can find the way.

Again I start running. I have a head start on the steam-roller. The driver must pay for the gas and wait for his change. The someone who helped me asks for nothing, therefore, I am away sooner.

As I am running again, I know that someday the steam-roller will break down and need repairs. Until that day comes, I must keep on running for my life. I must never give up no matter how many times I collapse.

The day comes when the steam-roller has an engine failure. It must go to the garage for repairs. As I am lying on the pavement exhausted, many people come to my help. Some feed me, some encourage me, some give medical treatment, as I am bruised and hurt, and some teach me the way to get out of the steam-roller's path.

I am strong and encouraged now, I have acquired new knowledge, but I know I am the only one who can actually get out of the steam-roller's path. They cannot do it for me.

The steam-roller is repaired and back on the path. As I see it approaching, I make the decision not to run, but to use my newly found knowledge to get out of its path. I am afraid. I do not know what is in store for me on the new path. It is foreign territory to me. Maybe there is a bigger and faster steam-roller on the unknown path. At the very last moment, I leap out of the steam-roller's path onto the new path. To my surprise, it is soft grass. I roll, laugh, and cry with joy. I made it.

After a while I look at my old path. The steam-roller is still pressing the tar. I am now safe. I have found a new way of life. I no longer need to run to survive.

Sometimes I see someone in the path of the steam-roller. I stop and whisper in his ear as he is lying exhausted on the tar, "never, never, never, never, ever, give up."

— Elaine R. Cooper

Climbing High

(Editor's note: In September, "Looking Up" offered a week-long backpacking trip for women survivors of incest, led by professional outdoorswomen who are also survivors of incest. The following excerpts are from a letter written by one of the participants.)

To my children,

I want to tell you about my backpacking trip through Gulf Hagas and the White Cap Mountain region of Maine. What an experience. When I left Augusta on Sunday morning with ten strangers (all women of various shapes and sizes, and all survivors of incest), I wondered if I had made the right decision. I did. But first let me fill you in.

Your mother gained everything she needed and wanted from this trip. A true feeling of being SAFE for the first time, inner strength and courage, and a realization that we are in this life alone and have to face it alone — but — if we reach out, there are many wonderful people around us to share our pain, healing, joy and happiness. The women were great. I found creativity I have never seen, peace and love and understanding I have never felt, and from within myself, strength and endurance and a loving peace with a Divine Spirit I have often wondered about but always believed in.

We were all hoping for a closeness and healing to come out of this trip, so we got into the heavy-duty stuff as the week progressed. Pain would be a better word than stuff. On a rainy, misty evening we sat around three candles and told our stories. It was very painful, but also very healing. The depth of pain that was let go was massive. I saw such pain and such beauty and strength in these women that I knew we could not only climb mountains, we could move them if necessary. This was an experience of a lifetime. Oh, I realize I will have others, but none will match this one.

About the group. There was a clown on the trip, to be there when I thought I couldn't go on; an artist or two, with creativity I was in awe of; a writer, who wrote from the depths of her soul; a landscape person who educated us in the flora of the woods; a student, who has more to offer life than any classroom could ever teach her; a worker, who has inner strength and courage she is just becoming aware of; a Pagan, who has beauty and depth abounding from her inner being; and a clerical worker, who has a free, wonderful spirit that allowed her to spring through the woods like an antelope.

I must also tell you about our leaders. Barbara is a tall, soft-spoken, strong and sensitive person. She was with us 100% for assistance in all areas of need from putting moleskin on sore feet to physically supporting me before I passed out from exhaustion, and always saying, "this pace is fine" when I really knew she could go faster and farther than I. I mention that Barbara was tall because the other leader, Ruthie is 4'11" and weighs 95 pounds. What a mountain of physical strength this woman is. Never, never would I have anticipated that she could have carried the load that she did. But she did. She was the greatest cook, gave us delicious food, and was supportive in every way throughout the whole week. I can't say enough good about these two women. In my entire life I have never known two women like them, and can't imagine that I will ever again have contact with two such powerful human beings.

We hiked all week with heavy packs (I carried 35 pounds!), doing things that were fun and scary. When we reached the top of White Cap Mountain, the highest one we climbed, the winds were between 50 and 60 miles per hour. I felt as if I was going to get blown over, pack and all. I had to take my glasses off because of the mist. First of all, I have to tell you that I have never been able to scream from my gut. I oftentimes cannot even holler loudly — it just won't come out. Well, everyone started screaming on top of that mountain and from the tips of my toes came this yell that was years of rage locked inside me. I wondered if I was going to be able to stop. I did. It felt wonderful. I can't believe I will ever be stuck again.

I hope you will have a better understanding of me and can read between the lines to know what I felt during this entire week with these wonderful, strong, courageous women.

I couldn't close without this thought. There is nothing in this world, no pain or hurt or crisis that you cannot overcome. Not from reaching out, but from reaching inward, because it's all there. All the love, and peace and belonging you will ever need.

I love you,
Mom

Moving On

I am an incest survivor and my hope is to become a triumphant winner over the effects of the deep, dark nasty stuff that was the environment in which I grew up. I want to rid myself of the "water" in which I live and breathe: of feelings of being isolated for safety's sake, of not really trusting anyone to get really close (I tire my husband with having to check out everything), always needing to know what's going on so I won't be surprised and hurt, of working continuously to make others happy, of just working all the time to prove I have worth, of being frightened if others find me attractive, of being terrified if I'm attracted to others, of feeling guilty all the time about everything, of moving invisibly from one secure corner to another where I can put my back to a wall and study hard to figure out what's going on so I can control the situation or at least observe unobserved, safe. That goal very often seems, well, impossible. I'm in my mid-thirties and feel like I've come a distance yet I have miles to go before I sleep.

I was my father's favorite. I remember being very small and being washed "funny." My father began to come to my bed at night when my mother was working 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. as a nurse. The image: my younger sisters in their bunk beds four feet from my bed. My having to be quiet to not wake them. Him sitting on the edge of the bed telling me to touch his penis, me recoiling at the disgusting turkey neck thing. Him saying he was teaching me about sex so I didn't learn it from nasty boys. (Me? I was a very good girl.) How many times I recoiled in horror from his various advances, I can't say. Finally I ran around him as he came into my room and locked myself in the bathroom right next to my bedroom. He banged on the door as I stood, back to safety watching the door. My older brother must have come out and settled things out there. I don't remember. He must have told my mother because she told my father if it didn't stop she'd get a divorce. She stood outside my bedroom door outraged. She did nothing for me, nothing comforting or special, much less get me to therapy or him to therapy. For the rest of my high school years he would leer lasciviously if I did things "normal" teenage girls do, like sunbathe in the backyard or wash the car in a bathingsuit. That house and yard were dangerous and disgusting. I left home for college as my way out and paid for everything myself.

In relating these picture postcards from my family album I am struck by my feelings of helplessness. I was a victim unable to speak about my anger. All I could do was get away. I've been in therapy since 1978 because I was aware that the battles just went on and on with the same scenarios, only the perpetrators were no longer there; I was just acting as if they were there. I've had lots of help from some good therapists in coping and improving my life. Early in 1985 I found a great therapist and, after eight months, she said I needed to work on the incest lots and lots, to get this fundamental stuff remedied.

Alma Yoray, my dance teacher, told me of Karin Spitfire's incest dance. I met and spoke to Karin and I have been delighted in the results. There were three of us in the "Movement Matters" class. We were all advanced, ready to work. The other woman was a rape survivor, her needs different, her story just as horrible. We shared these gruesome secrets slowly in small pieces week after week in a trusting, gentle, slow pace. We bonded.

Once, after some particularly exhausting exercise where I told certain people what I had to tell them, in absentia of course, the three of us began to skip to lighten up after all that stuff. I was in the middle and after a little while I closed my eyes, continuing to skip. I related how nice it was, almost like floating. Karin said, "Yeah, and we're not going to slam you into a wall." We each came out with our own personalized commandments: short phrases engraved on my inner forehead which summarized an epiphany I experienced.

Survivors need to trust other people, to allow ourselves to get close to another person. We have demons to get rid of. These demons are the perpetrators we now carry inside. My harshly critical and unsympathetic mother still "beats" me. My father-inside-me tells me I'm no good, I'm provocative and "bad." To counter this Karin would command me to "Act Out." And when I returned to class after that assignment and related my little acting outs, she said, "Crank it up, 'cause things will go faster." I'm having to learn to be myself; acting out will actually be normal. Contrast that to someone who tries to be invisible, a "good" girl who is trying to make a crazy situation be normal.

Movement matters. Period. I would first feel the physical hesitation I experience before an effort to act out. I would hear my small voice and experience the great effort it took to make sounds and movements. I would be straightening myself as Karin helped the other woman work on improving her posture and I would allow myself to say that my beautiful posture was simply a way I had of being invisible, of being unavailable. To do Karin's prescribed moves time and time again forced me to do something almost painful since the movements were so foreign. I would realize how deep the patterning is. And this is where Karin would counter my seriousness with. . . "It's easy." And I would say, "Thank you, Karin."

I have turned an exciting and wonderful corner. I'm now getting closer to the inner contentment and joy that I think are life's goals.

I must emphasize that the physicalness of Karin's class seemed crucial: incest is a body problem, so body techniques help. Meditation or mindfulness is another tool in being in my body now.

I pass this all on so others can try.

— Lindsay Mahler Nelsen



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“Looking Up” provides a variety of services to survivors of incest and those who care. We are a non-profit organization depending largely on donations from the public to continue our work. Please donate what you can.

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