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Looking Up

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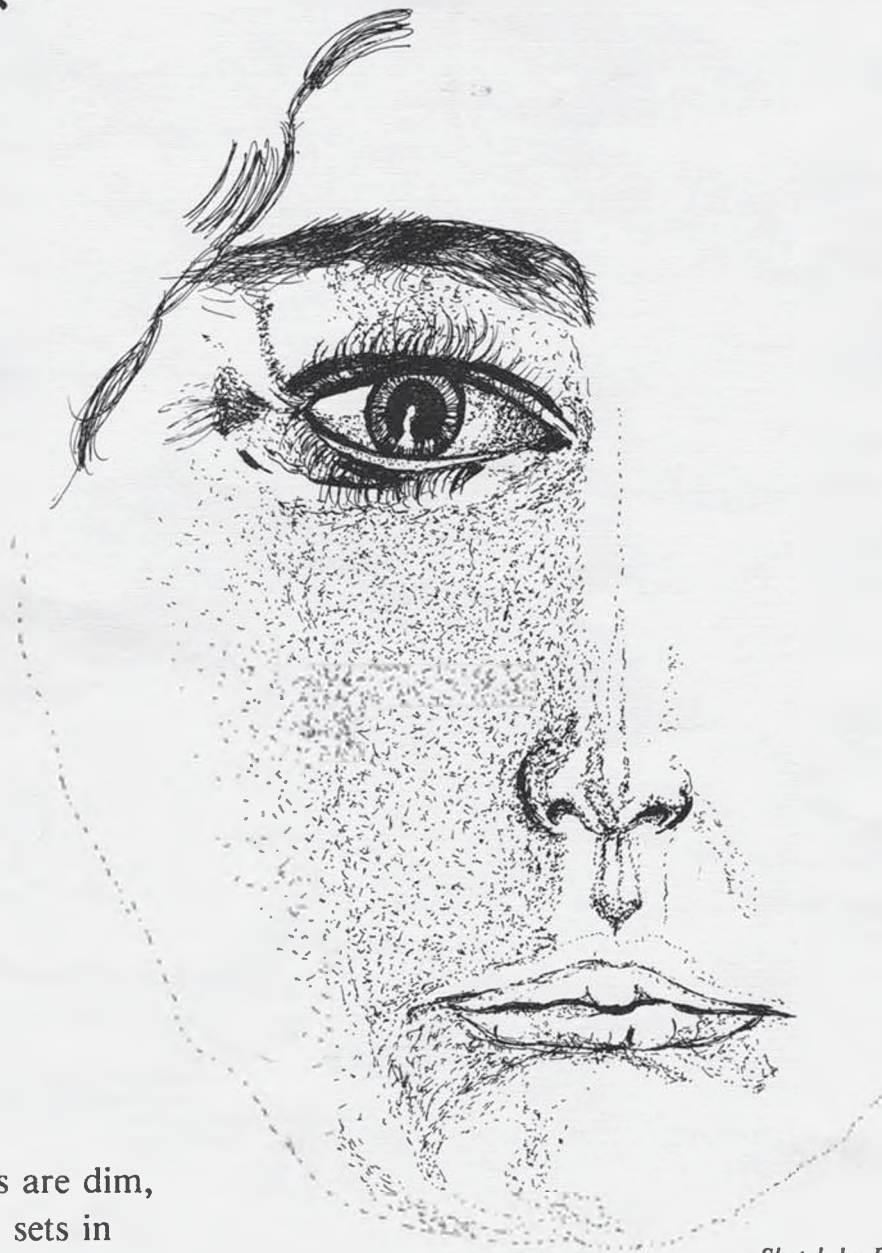
THE “LOOKING UP” TIMES

By Maine Survivors of Incest

With Guest Contributions from Survivors In Other States and Countries

Vol. 3 No. 1

May, 1987



When lights are dim,
and dark sets in
I replay the scenario
over again.

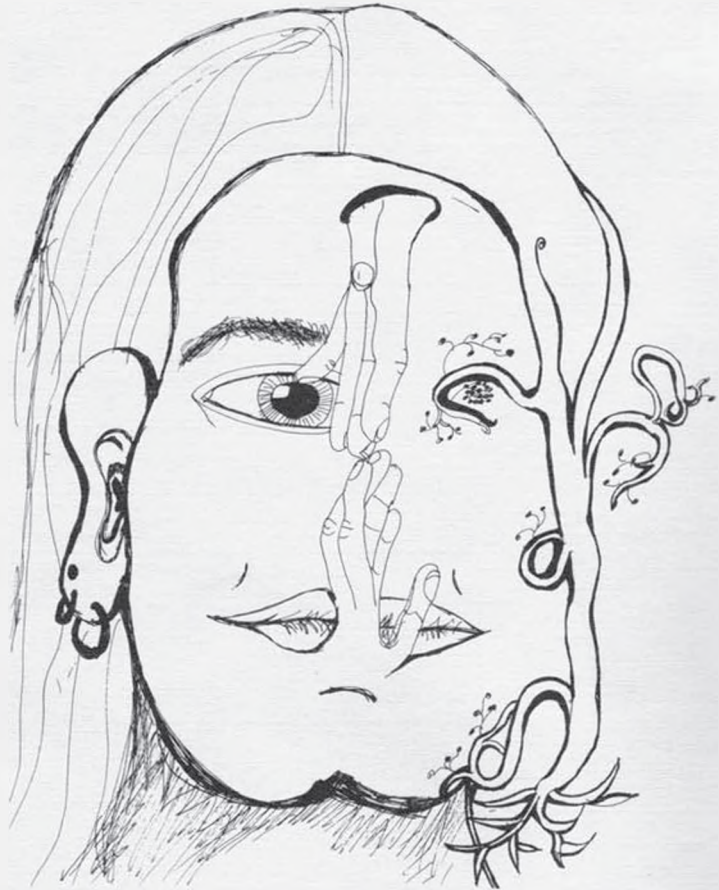
— Sally

Sketch by Eileen G.

It Was A Long, Hard Winter

Every little time
I try to remember
something nice and warm
that happened in December
I think of how I believed in
the love that came from you,
how you guided me
and taught me what I knew.
I trusted your intentions
with my very heart,
now I can't scrub out
every other part
of me that lives in darkness
yearning for the light —
loving to say goodmorning,
hating to say goodnight;
watching everyone carefully,
guarding what is left of me,
and wishing the part that was taken
could be put back quietly.
But then the feelings come
along with a little hush
that really doesn't matter
because the tears will always rush
every little time
I try to remember
something nice and warm
that happened in December.

— Tricia



Sketch by Eileen G.

Driving Through The Darkness

Driving through the darkness winding roads are blotched with ice.
Snow piled along the sidelines make snow-mountains to the mice.
Snow mountains speckled black and gray from passing cars' exhaust leave me feeling far away as the world
sets on defrost.

In a field by the roadside amid the glowing of warm lights, a celebration echos friends and music to entice.
Slowly I creep nearer but in nearness fall to weep.
Isolation cradles me as I reach out from my sleep.

— Sally

December 9, 1986

Dear Daddy:

This may be the most difficult task I've ever had in my life. It takes all the strength and courage I possess. My timing may be inappropriate, but let's face it, would the timing ever be right? And what you did. Was it appropriate? Was it right?

How do I say it? I'm letting out my secret that I know what you did to me as a child; that you molested and sexually abused me. I have carried this secret with me for 35 years. If I don't let go of it and let you know, I will explode! It has taken me years of sole-searching and the help of therapy to find the inner strength to unload the burden I carried with me for these 35 years. I'm tired. I'm getting old. It's time to settle up before it's too late. I have protected you and everyone else my whole life at my expense. Protected everyone else but me. I have to confront this; let the secret out at whatever cost in order for me to rest easier. I'm entitled to that. Do you know what it is to think about it every day of your life for 35 years? Maybe not consciously always, but the interaction with everyone who's been in my life. The distrust, the lack of my own self-respect, the inward rage, the feeling of abandonment, my disappointment in people, my general insecurity, I could go on and on...all products of my secret. It has molded my very existence.

I've tried to justify your act, to understand, but I never could. You were the adult. You had the responsibility to teach me, to protect me, to mold my life once I was brought into the world by Mommy and you. But instead I had to protect you. I had to be responsible for the deep dark secret all by myself and mold my own life. For a child, for this child, it was monumental. I had to shut off feelings and learn to survive. An adult responsibility given to a small child.

All the fights, the power struggles, were my way of lashing out, getting back. But the great rage and intensity of the anger was for the years of silence, of being hurt, abused and disappointed.

What do I want from you? Ideally, an apology and the respect and loving care I deserve. But if I don't get these things, it really won't matter. What matters, I guess, is that now it's out and it lightens my load.

This is very painful for me. I know there were times in my life that you have been there for me and I know you've done the best you can. I'm not writing this with malice. I'm writing to bring some kind of peace to myself. I am embracing my own pain and suffering.

My anger and rage is intertwined with love and affection. I'm very concerned for your health. Whatever course the doctors take, I hope you live for many, many more years.

The consequences and outcome of my confession are out of my control just as the need to come forth can no longer be contained.

With love,
Shel

This letter was never given to my father. He died December 27, 1986.

— Shelly B.

I Feel Good About Me

When I first told my secret, I was scared. I was scared people would hate me. But I soon found out, people don't judge me for it.

So I started to talk more about the incest. I found the more I talked about it, the less power it has over me, and that feels good!

— Carol Gagne

Run for cover my child, there's a storm approaching;
Emotional debris flying around bruising your tender soul and then the "I" of the storm nears.
I pierce it with one quick, clean cut and it hurts, and it heals and the badness comes gushing out
like the cleansing rain...

— Lori

On Goes The Process...

Sleep

Grandma Jennie, R.N., B.S. (chemistry) (honors), drank tea from a silver service at 4 p.m. precisely.

Later she lay abed in a morphine sleep, while Grandpa Nella entertained the children (the female ones) in his own particular way.

Ma could never abide needles after that.

Ma lived two years with her aunt, while people speculated "Why?" and how crazy she must be to flee "such a good home."

Grandma told her "You don't understand these things," but she did all too well, it seems.

Years later, wanting to be thought normal, and morphine being unattainable due to the Harrison Act, she married and kissed by Bacchus and Prince Valium, she quite easily slept her afternoons away, too, while my dad taught me things he shouldn't have.

"What a devoted father," his family said.

"You're lucky," the shrink told me. "Not everybody's got a father."

I, in my turn, like a dutiful daughter, wed morphine. In the land of Dorak and Anna O. because like them I "imagined things" according to Freud and Deutch.

In spite of it I thought it, I lived it, and my living it got stronger, as women can, always.

I said "I'm the kind you'll have to kill to lick.

No more sleep for me and mine."

Never another woman child helped to accept the unacceptable. Never another me of us. Ever.

— Maire MacLachlan

Don't Let It Lay

It's gonna be all right,
It's gonna be okay.
Sometimes you gotta fight,
Sometimes just let it lay.

When I was a little girl,
You trapped me in your bed.
Didn't know what to do or say;
I just let it lay.

Now I'm not that little girl,
But I'm still afraid of you.
What if you came to me
And had your say?

Well, it's gonna be all right,
It's gonna be okay.
Sometimes you gotta fight,
Sometimes just let it lay.

Now I am a woman.
Others share my pain.
We give each other strength
And NO, we won't let it lay.

Now I have the strength to fight,
And now I have the strength to say:
"You had no god damn right
To treat me in that way!"

— Susan Marden

On The Road To Recovery

Fluttering legs of brief fears
Are playing games in my head.
Glimpses of forgotten distant past
Laced with tiny tremors of terror for tomorrow.

Wispy, smoky clouds are trying to
Cover my new growing sun.
Slowly cool winds of grasping hope
Are gently blowing it clear.

For deep inside this barren soul
There grows a tiny seed of life,
The start of a fresh new beginning
Budding forth through pain and sorrow.

The strength of love draws new life
So the tiny seed with patiently grow
And will never again be harmed,
For now it learns and understands.

Layers of hurt and self-pity fall away.
Fear is pushed aside and hope stands fast,
While compassion and love and smiles
Dance on sunbeams holding hands.

— Pam

Beginning To Tell

I was bleeding the nightmare onto the stones,
Climbing the face of the hill.

The stones wedge into the hillside,
Part path, part brace for that steep slope.

At the top you will warmth with your hands
Into the coldest copper clay; pound sense into things.

I spilled the evil story into the room.
You drank tea, assembled the day:
the light, the toast, the white dog asleep on my feet
beneath the table.
You located me with a clear gaze,
a warm shape in the kitchen chair.

The boy-who-helps came in, swing wide the screened
door, stood aside.
Bits of fine dry dust from the night's damp presence
shook loose.
We watched it filter past.
We saw it change its life aloft in the green morning.

— MJ

I've Got My Pride, You Know

I used to look up to my brother until he dashed that away. I was only nine years old and he robbed me of my innocence and made me promise not to tell Mom and Dad. He hit me and hit me and hit me. Then it was over. So I thought. The disgrace and nightmares followed.

On my 14th birthday, my foster father did it. I am a Christian, so I have learned to forgive, but I'll never learn to forget. My social worker asked my foster father if it was true. My foster father lied and said he never did. The fog and lack of understanding and disillusionments that I am left with. I still have the nightmares that stayed with me. I don't think any more. I just exist.

All I thought that I had left was my pride. But, actually, I don't have even that. When will it stop? I'm 32 years old now.

I was recently in a mental hospital. I was scared of all men there and was reduced to the lowest of lows there. Thank you, Lorraine, for letting me talk to you. I needed to talk. I still don't understand why I feel guilty. I can't even think, clear anymore. I'm so confused. I've been reduced to nothing. Why me?

Please print this. I can't possibly explain how I feel. I have no privacy and no self-esteem left.

— N.L.

I. The Damage

Father,
I asked for bread and was given a stone.
I hungered and was not fed.
I limped and did not dance.
I ached and did not laugh.

I knew when the milkman was at the door.
I could hear the clinking of the bottles.
I knew the breadman came on Tuesdays,
And on Fridays sometimes we got cinnamon rolls.

I never knew about you. Where you were watching.
What you were planning.
Today, I spit in your face.

II. The Dilemma

Solitude,
why am I not like the others?
leaning, needing, gaining my direction and completeness
from closeness to another soul?

I long to be close to someone,
yet the nearness brings me sweats and shaking,
feelings I cannot identify or corral.

Commitment catches me
looking for cracks of escape in the walls,
for unlocked windows,
for doors that open out.
Again I dread the suffocating horror.

Daddy,
Always I yearned,
I ached in my standing apart
to be held by you, to be cuddled in your arms,
but I never could trust you.

Like all the world's wild horses
I seek open spaces
where gates open out, arms open out, a heart opens
out.

III. The Madness

1. Madness for me was simply a series, a lifetime, of
unwise choices; choices I was programmed to make.
With each I grew a little more angry and a little
more mad.

2. I have been
where the pieces of my life, my heart, my mind shift
and slide like ice in thaw where my hands and feet
drift through them.

I have
lived other lives, other identities, sought the work
and pleasures of others and come crashing with all
my fantasies to a jarring halt.

Where one fantasy disappeared I quickly remade
another from its altered pieces.

And the wind blew continually.

IV. The Recovery

1. I am
Fiery, stormy, raging
like a tree in storm
at one and the same the tree and the storm
the victim and the victor
aching, moaning, crying, wailing, searching
for ways to say those words, to speak
that message inside that threatens
that compels and commands
that frightens and attracts
that finally soothes and lets me sleep.
2. You question me, daddy,
with those little boy's eyes.
Will I compromise?
You want to know
can you crawl to rest between my bones and my
skin.
Well,
It ain't free and it's not for sale,
This comfort I have come to own.

No,
you can't crawl inside my mouth
and worm your way like pig disease
to lie in the strength that holds me up.
No.
No.
No.

— Nona Famous

Suffocating
in my bed.
The gag reflex
...out of nowhere.

And then,
laying naked
in sweat and vomit.
Curling up,
to cover my head.
Survival only lending itself
to another episode
of lover's facade;
and in sleep
empty images
pervade my nightmares.

— Sally

Truth is leaking...

Truth is leaking through my life like sewage. For years I've turned away, tried to stop the leaks, tried to jump ship, swim away. I've escaped in the night until the night became polluted, too. I'd escape to the woods and find it stained and waiting; I'd meditate until I hit black fists welling up in the silence.

There were pirates swarming over the decks, but it was so hard to tell, 'cause they'd come in the night, trading masks with the Captain, and sometimes be sitting at meals with the crew, all mixed up, laughing as one.

I've been so ashamed of this leaky craft. I'd hide the leaks and hope they didn't show. When swamped, I'd go down in hiding until I could surface again; forgetting, pretending, distracting. I would always clean off what I could...

One day, I took a walk with ten others whose desperation felt like mine. We formed a ragged wave ascending a mountain. Most had been fighting "colds" that wouldn't go away, until gradually they saw it was the family's cancer, rooted deep, stubborn, scary. Finally, a time where honesty is heard and helps. Whispers and screams, how it was, how it is; how to head the ships to safe harbors and know a pirate when you see one.

— MJ

Ava

Parading around in her underwear in front of her two teenage nephews, Ma liked to say "the moral standards in this house are high."

Insisting I share their bedroom

"Just on trips." I was 18.

She congratulated herself:

"We don't have the problem of sex here."

While Dad gave me his "special lovers' kiss" in front of her.

She'd remind me, "Be sure and tell me if he bothers you. I want to know."

While taking great pride in being deaf, dumb and blind.

Three-quarters naked, Dad lay in bed.

"You take care of him. He's in insulin shock."

He wasn't. I'm a nurse and ought to know.

What a lame excuse for them both.

"He's not my responsibility, you know."

I wanted to ask her, "What was? Certainly not me."

"Put on your pants," I'd say, "I'm on to you both!"



Sketch by Eileen G.

— Maire MacLachlan

Confusion

She puts her arm around me. My heart freezes, my insides tremble. Sexual feelings surge and I become terrified.

This is an out-of-control situation. I scream for help inside my head.

Deadly, scary, confusion where touching is so frightening and sexual.

I need to be held, loved, touched. Desperately. I need it more than most. But I'm deprived because of this never-ending Confusion.

— E.S.



Photo by Nona Famous

Reclaiming The Night

Night soothes across the sky toward morning.
I light my candle.
A bunny stirs in the shadow.
Night still, air chill.
Watching, approaching from the utter place on velvet step reaching across forever.
Soft bunny on weary feet,
Your fur is matted and your eyes are sad.
From where have you come, what place,
Where bunnies are made to bleed and limp?
What kind of place,
Where tears are made? Are hearts broken there?
What kind of place,
Unsafe for trust to close its eyes?
Come, by my bed, it's warm here.
We close both eyes when we sleep and rest comes easy.
We'll leave the candle burning and shadow ajar.
There may be others coming.

— Nona Famous

Dear Inner Self,

If you help me to remember what happened, I promise to protect you. I won't leave you. I'll take you to a place where you'll be safe. I'll let you cry about the pain and help comfort you in your despair.

— E.S.

In forming a home for the heart,
we must give permission to love the
new birds crouched within the sides
of the well; to reach down,
take them gently in hand,
to release them, clouds of indigo down
fluttering skyward.

They disperse with alarm and abandon,
then find homes sketched on the
inside walls of caves;
build nests from bits of string that bind
unopened parcels in the corners.
They feed richly on the night's dreams.

— MJ

Does it not
seem thus unfair,
to dwell on nights
when daytime's there?

— Sally

Slowly Reborn Again

have you ever been a caterpillar
small and ugly
crawling in the dirt?

The only ones to touch you
cringe and walk away
thinking what a creepy caterpillar.

People pick you up to talk to you
and others stare and step on you
just to watch the squashed remains.

You feel so small and lonely
you crawl into a cocoon,
hiding.

But through time and
tender care
you change into something beautiful.

A butterfly.
Now many see you differently,
as you yourself do.

And out in the world
you go sharing your beauty with all.

— Pam

I Grow

I grow and grow
and then fall down,
and down...
and down...
and down...
and down...
and then when I can fall no more,
I find I'm taller than before.

— Sally

Therapist

Like a child clinging to a tattered teddy bear for
comfort and security,
I cling to your kindness, your words of encouragement
and the security of knowing you'll be there.
Like the teddy bear I was too grown up for, and
perhaps never had.

It feels so good to hold on to you, yet I am so sad
sometimes, because I know that children outgrow
teddy bears in pursuit of adulthood and other
splendid things.

But what if I never outgrow you?
Or what if I do?

Like the precious tattered teddy bear packed away on
some shelf,
I will set you aside in the closet of my heart, and when
the tears dry
I will remember you, and smile.

— Lori



Sketch by Eileen G.

Fathers

Father-Love

Oh my body, do not grow
Don't grow rounder
Before his eyes
Where fires glow
Night-time lightening
Behind clouds
His veiled longing
His sudden reaching
out to hurt me.
Do not grow!

You were my doctor lawyer chief.
How can this go on making sense
When all I ever wanted was you?
You for my body and soul
To hold me when it howls
In waves around my ears
And friendship reels into
Good old days of father-love
And all I ever wanted died.

—N. Holmes



Sketch by Eileen G.

I Remember Daddy

He had gold teeth.
They fascinated me at three.
I asked to feel them.
He said they would feel better with my tongue.

I had my first pubic hairs.
They frightened me at eleven.
He asked to feel them,
And said they would feel better with his tongue.

Eight years between lickings.
And now, our tongues are still.

— Michelle

Daddy's Toys

You play with your toys
then cast them aside
to play another game.
Dolls don't need.
Dolls won't bleed.

I watch through the window:
Running smiles in sunlight's laughter,
skinned knees crying after.
Mommy kisses tears away.
Daddy's toys love to play.

At night in silence
I watch them sleep,
stroking real life's puffy cheek.
In dreamland
thoughts are all-a-scatter;
if they had feelings
would it matter?

— Sally

Family Man

He's a family man. He's good and right,
And people don't care
What he does at night.

He's a family man.
He works and earns his pay,
He's a family man.
He feeds his family every day.

He pays his bills so well,
His family ain't got no right
To stop him from sleeping
With his kid at night.

But, the kid finally says,
"Hey, this ain't right."
So she tells a policeman
What her old man does at night.

They take him to court
To await judgment day.
"What do you plea?"
"Not guilty in any way."

"What's your defense?"
He says, "she lied.
I'm a family man
And I've got my pride."

But the prosecutor
Draws the whole truth out.
This family man
Has been making out.

So they find him guilty
In the first degree
Of molesting his daughter,
But they set him free.

"Why," you ask,
"Did he get away?"
He's a family man
And there's bills to pay.

— Susan Marden

To The Mommies Out There

Mommy only caught Daddy once.
He tried to tell her
It was the first time he touched me.
But she didn't believe him.
Mommies may only catch them once,
But it happens more than once, Mommies.

— Carol Gagne

To My Father...

A prisoner
in my own home
And I kept going back
'cause I didn't remember.

'Now an orphan
with innocence lost
And wounds that cut deep,
counting the cost.

Facing the terror, the pain, the hell in my mind,
Crying out with insanity.
It can't be true.
Trying to die.

The wounds of one
cutting deeply
into another.
When will the madness stop?

When will we realize
there is no *other*
and there is no *me* who cries,
Only one. Only humanity.

Broken pieces of reality
and dreams.
Heartaches
and nightmares.

A prisoner
in my own home,
And I kept going back
'cause I didn't remember.

Now an orphan
with innocence lost
And wounds that cut deep,
Counting the cost.

— Sue Conner, Iowa

Mine

How dare you!
How dare you put your hands
On my new body,
Young and new and mine.
Not even done for men,
Not even made for bearing
Children yet, but you!
You used it just as if
It were your own to spoil.

— N. Holmes

You Can Be Whole Again

I have never written a story before, but my heart cries out for all the incest victims who have suffered as I have suffered. If I can convince just one person to get help, I will feel my story has not been told in vain. I consider myself fortunate in a way.

I will be 33 shortly. There are days when I feel 133 years old and there are days when I wish I were dead. Happy days are few and far between for me. At least now I can say I have a few happy days. Two years ago I never thought I would ever feel love as most people do.

My future was ruined at the age of eight years old. My father raped me and continued to do so for the next three years. My mother, for unknown reasons that even today I cannot understand, left me alone with him often. I begged her to take me with her. Each time she left, my insides would die a little more for I knew what was going to take place next. There were times when my father would make up excuses to be alone with me. He would take me to the store, fishing, picking flowers, or visiting, etc. All the fun things a child should do with her father were ruined for me, as he would always sexually abuse me. I both hated and loved being with him. I hated the terrible things he would do to me and make me do to him, but I loved being noticed by him. He was my father. It was my fault he was doing these things to me! Any other time, at home or with other people, he would ignore me. I did not exist. Why doesn't he love me? I must be a failure to him.

After three years of being sexually abused, my mother finally caught him. She admitted him to an institution for the mentally disturbed. He stayed there for a very short time and was released to come home. I was so frightened of him I dreaded the day when he would arrive home again. The subject of his abuse was never brought up after that. No one ever talked about what happened. He received help. I received nothing.

My father never touched me sexually again. But the damage had already been done. I could not look at him without cringing inside. I lived in fear of being raped by him again. I was terrified of being left alone with him. And still I believed if I wasn't the way I was none of this would have ever happened. I condemned myself until I was in my senior year of high school. I couldn't stand it any longer. I told my mother that I hated him. She was shocked. How could I say such a thing? We have done so much for you. She didn't believe me. She told me to tell my father that I hated him if I really meant it. Of course I couldn't because, after all, he was my father and daughters do not say such things to their fathers. Consequently I quit school three weeks later and ran away from home. I hated my life! I felt I would die if I stayed there any longer.

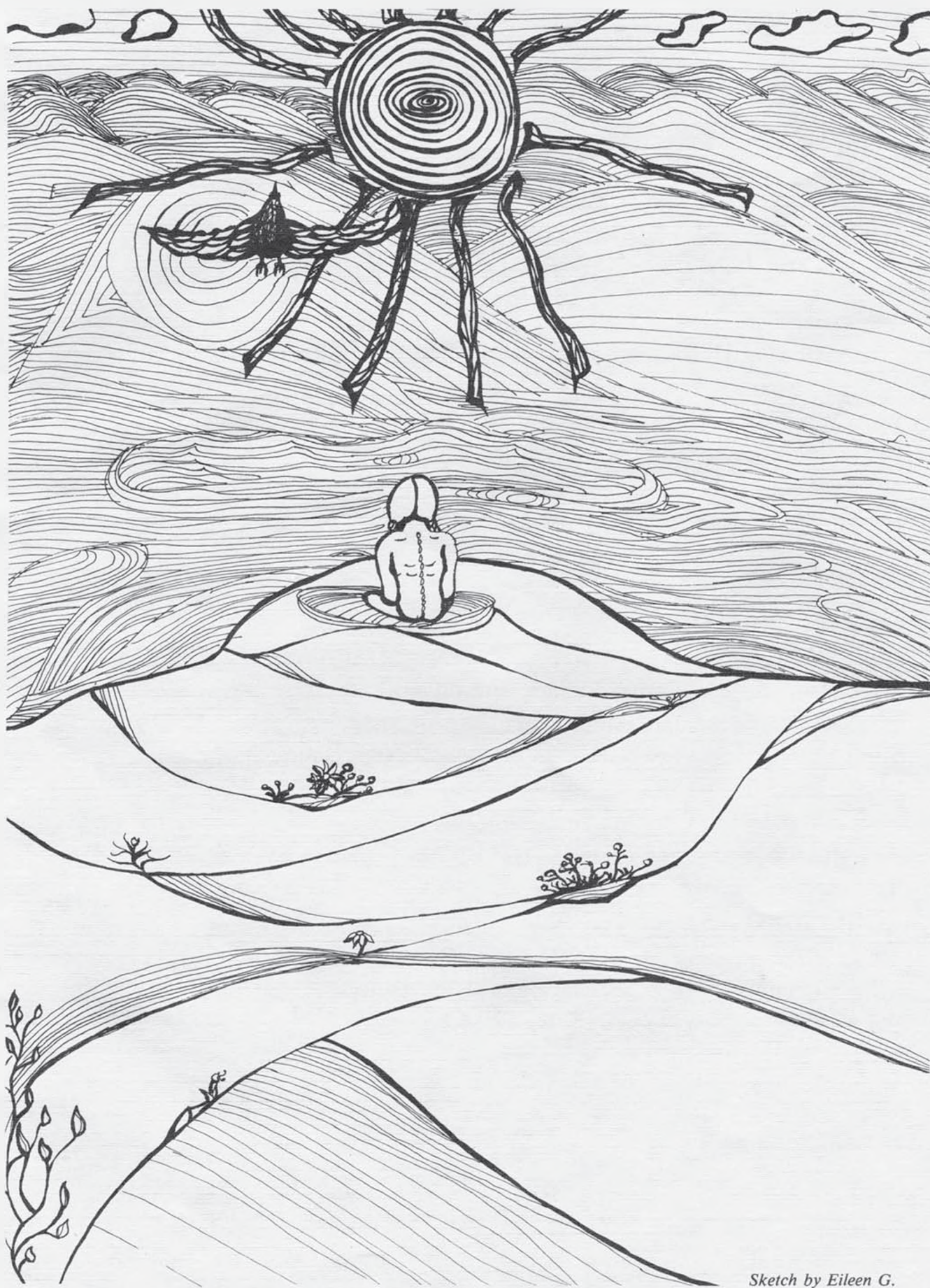
I married when I was 20 years old. The marriage ended in divorce. I did not know how to love or be loved. Subconsciously I always kept myself apart from people so that I would not be hurt again. There was an emptiness inside me that could not be filled. I hated making love with my husband. My body seemed to go numb the minute he touched me sexually. I could not even hug for fear of being hurt. Disgust was the only feeling I ever experienced.

My second marriage was ending in divorce also. My husband cared for me so much he convinced me to see a psychiatrist. I was scared to death. The first few sessions all I did was cry. I had to relive the whole experience again. I became so depressed I tried committing suicide twice and was hospitalized both times. My parents could not understand why I tried to take my life. The subject of incest had ended when my father came home from the institution. Why was I bringing this out into the open again? Didn't I know I was hurting them? If anyone ever found out they would hate them! Gradually my sessions went better. To this day I cannot speak of the actual sexual acts my father committed to me. I panic when I see those visions in my head.

I thank God for my husband, for he still loves me. He is so kind and understanding. He has gone through hell with me during my two years of therapy. I probably would be dead right now if not for him. I still cannot feel love or give love the way I believe most couples do, but I am getting stronger and some day I hope to love completely.

There is so much that could be read between the lines of these few paragraphs, I have left out so much. I know other incest victims have gone through so much more than I have. I wish all the incest victims could read this and realize that there is help to be found for them also. I beg of you to confide in someone, anyone. Ask for help. People love and care about you. Please do not be afraid of letting this terrible secret out of your heart. It is not too late for you. You, too, can feel whole again.

— Debra Batchelder



Sketch by Eileen G.

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“Looking Up” provides a variety of services to survivors of incest and those who care. Services include telephone/mail support counseling and referral; consultation and training; outdoor challenge activities; workshops and conferences; advocacy; and more. We are a non-profit organization which spends most of its money on direct services offered at little or no cost to participants. We depend largely on donations from the public to continue our work. Please donate what you can.

We invite all survivors of incest to send contributions for possible publication in the *Times*: essays, letters, poetry, artwork, anything of a literary nature. We edit for length, clarity, spelling and punctuation. Our intent is to publish survivors’ own words and not to alter their meaning within these quality/length guidelines. If you have questions or requests concerning this editing policy, please let us know and we will be happy to discuss it.

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