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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. 2

Fall, 1987



Mothering A Victim

Sketch by Eileen G.

Little Child

Little child from my womb,
violated much too soon,
betrayed in the name of love,
confusion's what the night's made of.

Little child in my heart,
in daylight doth the night depart.
fears, once locked far away,
run rampid 'fore they meet the day.
Courageous, we must take command
and guide ourselves with loving hand.

Little child from my womb,
let not incest be thy tomb.
You're not guilty — not to blame.
Let the man take his shame.

— Sally B.

We lovingly dedicate this issue of the *The "Looking Up" Times*
to the memory of

TRISTAN WOODSUM

August 6, 1981 — October 21, 1987

Sweet child, precious son, dear friend, he taught us how to live and love without fear of pain or separation. With eyes that saw to the depths of our souls, he will live forever in our hearts as the symbol of all children whose birthrights are to be loved and cherished and never betrayed.

Gayle M. Woodsum and Barbara Bostad
Co-Founders, "Looking Up"

HEALING ENERGY

A poem composed after returning from an outdoor challenge activity program offered by "Looking Up"

Together, ten unknown faces
with a common bond greater
than sisterhood,
committed ourselves to the
unexplored
while our past beckoned us
to remain silent.

It was a gentle place
that had always been there,
but not for us;
A place where rivers flowed
and refused to dry up
with the knowledge of
our pain,
and horror at our abuse.

As the trees showed their
presence with a majestic bow,
they cheered as we tapped the
unknown strength to go on.

Those who used this great place for their home,
continued their daily living;
Insisting we take note of their need
to survive.

We recognized their destruction
by others,
As they recognized ours.
But the destruction was just a part.
For the strength was the heart,
the path that brought us together,
the firm hands that helped us
with our heavy loads.
The steps that led us across
rushing waters.

The purpose came together.
So innocently.
So quietly.
Yet, so clear.

Isolation no more,
we said in unison.
Isolation no more!

We had become partners in healing.

— Marcia Weston
May, 1987



Healing Work

I'm currently putting a lot of energy into restoring my eyesight. I've been convinced for a long time that my nearsightedness was the result of trying to cut myself off from the unbearable reality around me as a child; the most literal and subtle expression of my emotional condition. After long efforts I am now *seeing* results in the gradual clarification of my vision.

— Judy

BULL

I too love coincidences
they feel warm and round and smooth
a gift
I collect them, hold them near my heart
to share with my women friends

"Guess what happened!
In that book you gave me, they are called the Blue Clay
People."

A quick bright look is shared
ah, yes, a convergence
"it must be a message for you, a blue clay potter
it means it's a gift from the universe"

It's fun to love coincidences
I collect them to share with friends
we feel warm and safe, a circle made
the universe provides.

I too love coincidences
but I know what they are:
two separate events
brought together only by my loving presence
the gift is from me to myself.

But they collect past lives.
And so, "There are no victims"
(an aching fear rises in me and breaks the circle)

YES THERE ARE VICTIMS
especially the children who did NOT choose

"Your anger does not serve you"

Bull
It does serve me it's clean it's the purifying fire
it's the courage to face the nausea and say
NO MORE THIS IS WRONG STOP IT

"But maybe you chose this life so you could learn that lesson"
Bull!

I could have learned it some other way
the way we're teaching our children.

This I know:
The dark is also real
there are horrors I did not choose

"Everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds"

NO this sucks me toward numbness

I choose survival.
I must say:
It was wrong it was horrible I didn't deserve it
it shouldn't happen to anyone ever again
admit it was awful all the way down
there was no saving grace
no "maybe I chose this for some reason"
BULL!

A terrible thing happened it shouldn't have

What happens when people say:
(a girl is molested) "She chose that before she was born"
(my father molested me) "You've had many fathers.
Why concentrate on one bad one?"
BULL!

I've had one father and it was awful

What happens?
Can they feel the pain?
How will they find the fire to stop the abuse?
What about all the unborn little girls?
Who will protect them from that which they did not choose?
(now I see I want them to rescue me) my mother didn't

A mother in pain, "My child is dying"
They comfort her, "It seems tragic, but it really isn't.
Your child has chosen a short life this time."

BULLSHIT!

I call it what it is
The Shit of the Bull
what he uses to control us

I am scared to holler "bullshit!" to name the dark
to call the pain "chaos is also real"
I am scared to break the circle

then I'd be alone
I've always been alone

I say:
"It's awful that your child is dying
what a waste, it really stinks"

I can see that you are very strong
that you are fighting with all your strength
I share your pain I respect your courage!"
I take your hand
As mothers we look straight into the dark
and yell "NO!"

Some bad things happen for no reason
(and out of our mind's control)
the terror of that spins me back
to when I was helpless and I don't remember what
but it really did happen.

Can I turn horror and rage
into living strength
into humor
into loving?

On earth there is life and death, horror and joy
it takes courage.

I choose life on earth.

I seek the child within
Yes, I say to her
You were innocent
a scary thing happened to you
what you truly deep down wanted you didn't get
(a father who was a father)
instead you got what he chose

it was awful
it was dark real dark
I've been gone but I'm here now
go ahead and cry
it's over it won't happen anymore it wasn't your fault
it was never your idea
now come into the light
I love you.

— Molly

Over The Years

Tears I've wept for you,
Years I've denied I slept with you,
Fears of the fool I was for you.

Trapped in myself for knowing you,
Wanting so desperately to let go of you,
Trying so hard to believe in you.

Asking now, why was it all for you?
I turning my back and walking away from you.
Suffering no more, one day at a time, because of you.

Starting each day now, walking the walk with
the Lord, creating a new life for me.

Happy I'm me and grateful for the holy spirit in me
and God looking over me.

New beginnings, new thoughts. Fresh and clean. A
child eager to learn and grow in the direction I'm going.

— Susan T.

Who are you to wander into this land alone,
Unprotected, Open?
Have you no fear
of the ugliness within?

I am a womyn strong and free,
Broken from the shackles that once "protected" me.
Talk to me no more of the ugliness within
For I have been there and I have seen

The ugliness: a lie you used
to keep us bound.
The truth: the beauty/strength within.
The ugliness... the lie.

— Diane

Do you hear that child's scream?
'Tis but a long forgotten dream.
Reality is cold and stark,
for little girls who hide in the dark.

— Sally B.

Momma, Did You Know?

Momma did you know and choose just not to see?
That though he made sweet love to you, he also fondled me.
He touched me in the secret place where mysteries lie and wait.
He lied to me and trapped me, it was then I learned to hate.

Momma did you know, did you never hear my tears?
Or were you just too busy cradling your own fears?
He made me touch his body, he made me play his game.
I was just a little girl, if you knew who would you blame?

Someone somewhere said a good girl would never tell.
She would bundle up this secret and hide it oh-so-well.
Well, I'm hiding from you momma, and my secret seems to
grow.

Did you ever question? Or did you always know?

— Mandy Richards

Revolutions

When I was a little girl,
I'd ask my mother why?
She didn't answer... she'd cry,
Or maybe close her eyes and sigh.

Now, time has past,
and I'm a mother, too.
I understand why mother did
what she did or didn't do.

It would be so easy
to learn as mother was taught,
don't rock the boat little one,
ask not why or why not.

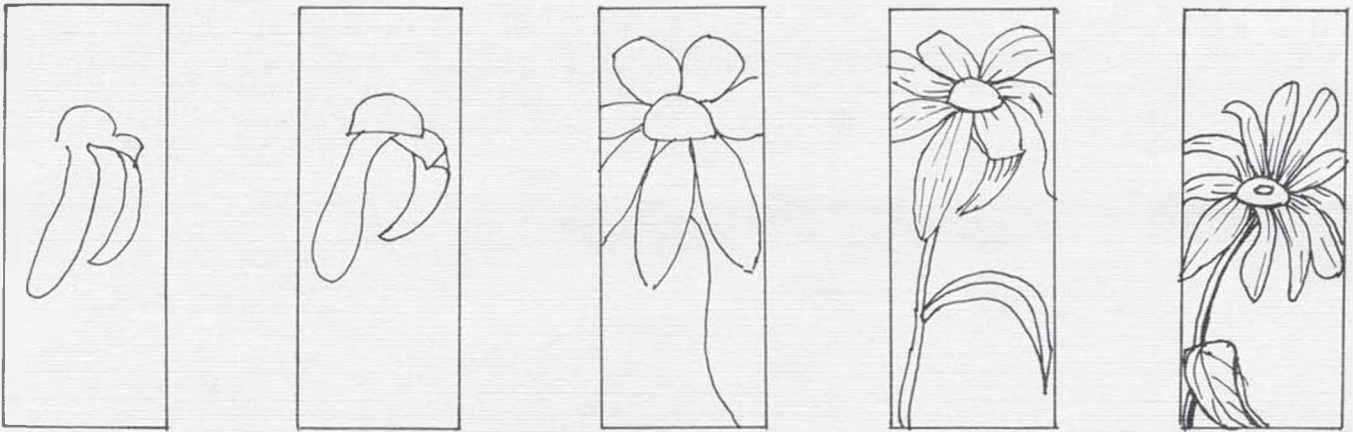
But I'm a different woman
as I write this here today.
I don't need a man around
to pay the bills... or play.

I say gently to my daughter
as she looks with teary eye,
"You're a person in your own right
and I'll hold you when you cry."

"If he comes to haunt you
when I'm not around,
it's okay to say no,
to run or stand your ground."

I hope my little daughter
grows to stand up tall.
I hope she finds the power inside
for when she's feeling small.

— Sally B.



Sketch by Eileen G.

The Color Red

I had been back to visit the spot twice, but those times were in Winter. So I returned on August 7, certainly within a few days of the date my uncle raped me. Without a boat, it took over an hour to hike to the end of the lake. I remembered my childhood enthusiasm for fishing. Since that day when my uncle took me out to try our luck, I have never fished again.

I held my breath as I approached the boulder I identified back in January. I felt a bit ill, but no insight came.

I wandered up the stream, away from the lake. A splash of color caught my eye. With delight I recognized the cardinal flower, brilliantly showy red blossoms growing from the stream bottom.

I sat on a rock in the middle of the stream to visit with these rare favorites of mine. A hermit thrush called. A hummingbird went from flower to flower, its wings making a low-pitched buzzing sound. I watched it proceed upstream, drawn to the scarlet blossoms.

An image came to me of a fantasy I wrote when I was 16. It was of a very deep pool in a stream hidden in the woods. I must have had this stream in mind when I wrote that.

Suddenly goose bumps raised. **Red.** That fantasy I wrote was full of redness: the underwater plants, rocks, fish were vermilion and scarlet and crimson. I remember pouring over the thesaurus looking for synonyms for **red**. And all my later science fiction escape fantasies took place on planets with red vegetation.

As the power of that insight swept through me, I gasped for breath and tears poured forth. Yes, trees sprout, grow, die over a period of a quarter century — but the cardinal flowers still bloom in the first half of August.

— Stephen Bies

A Flashback

Dad in his recliner reading *Penthouse's* "true sexual" stories that he enjoyed so much. Mom was gone. She left him. I stayed with Dad because he needed me. I didn't know cartoons would be different from then on.

Dad never put his penis in me, so I thought I was not a victim of incest. I became a frequent runaway. Everyone thought I was a "confused" girl. Dad was the greatest in everyone's eyes, even mine. It hurt bad. No, you don't have to get a penis stuck in you to be a victim.

P.S. I was with Dad the night he died. I was asleep beside him when I woke up because of nothing and saw him breathe his last. I love him, I miss him, but I sleep good, now.

— Catherine

Daughter

What happens between a father and daughter?

If the father violates the daughter's
trust,

If the father violates the daughter's
right to be a child,

If the father violates the daughter's
sense of self,

If the father violates the daughter's
right to protection,

If the father violates the daughter's
right to her own body.

It's all upside down and inside out.

The protector is doing the violating.

Who protects the daughter from the "protector"?

No one. Absolutely no one.

And the daughter fears,

And the daughter cries,

And the daughter

SILENT.

Who protects the daughter from herself?

she is wrong

she is bad

she is sinful

she is dirty

she is unwanted

No one understands

Why she runs into the night.

"Why does she leave the home of her protector?"

No one understands

Her anger, her silence, her self-inflicted pain,
her SILENCE.

— Diane

Mandy Mae

There's a girl all curled up in the dark.

Doesn't anybody wonder why she often stands apart?

And in her child's heart, she's so afraid of the night.

Oh mamma please, can't we leave on just one light?

But the daylight is too big for her. He wakes her with his voice.

He walks into her room. Hush-now-hush, you really have no
choice.

And then he leaves and softly shuts the door.

She holds herself and rocks herself, no more, please, no more.

You are so very gentle and yet so very cruel.

Don't you sir realize, you are breaking every rule?

Her childhood is so very short with games and dolls and such.

And you stole away her innocence when first you chose to
touch.

This child I know so very well, her name is Mandy Mae.

Her toys have all been put away, she can't come out to play.

— Mandy Richards

Daddy's Girl

My daddy always told me
that I should be good, that
I should behave.

My daddy always said
eat your veggies, comb your
hair, come closer, be my babe.

He always told me that
I was his little girl, that I
was the chosen one.

He always said be quiet,
don't complain, and later
all will be done.

My daddy always told me
that I was so special,
so pretty, so unique.

My daddy always said that
I would not roam in
this world for that I seek.

And yet I roam and I seek
looking for an end of that
which I speak.

Rage

Oh no! I can feel it now. It's starting at my toes.

No, don't come, please! Now it is in my gut.

A wrenching, burning, aching. I have to go to the bathroom.

I have the runs. I want to vomit, maybe that will stop it.

Oh no!

Here it comes again. It starts with my gut, now.

It's in my throat. I squelch a scream.

Sobbing, I choke it back down to my gut.

Again, I retreat to the bathroom. It's coming again.

It's in my throat. Sobbing, I reach for an aspirin to kill the pain
in my head. I'm shaking now, unable to control it. But, I
have to. It's a writhing, screaming monster inside me that I
MUST control. Control...that is the key.

I don't want to lose it. I'm afraid to lose it.

— Peggy Day

There is something not quite right about Dad rubbing Vicks on the
chest of his 16-year-old daughter.

Dad, I have a bad cold and I'm having a hard time breathing.
Memories of how Mom would take the blue jar of Vicks out of the
medicine cabinet, open it, and gently rub my chest with the con-
tents; the smell of which had become synonymous with mothering
and caring and loving.

Memories that allowed me to allow Dad to attempt the same. The
feeling, however, was all wrong. The hands too rough. The smell
not right.

But I'm here now, I asked for it. Laid out on his bed on my back
with my shirt open and my bra off, my breast exposed, waiting for
the loving touch.

But it's not there. It's his hand on my chest, rubbing. I turn away
and pray for him to hurry.

He could have said no!

— Diane

Inheritance

I cry, but I never scream.
Too risky.
Not nice.
The fear of losing people,
Losing love and support,
Rules me.

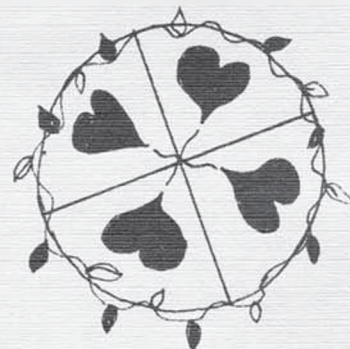
This fear grows.
At first I talked, felt, cried
When I was with others.
I found relief in being touched,
Feeling warm and caring.
But now I cry alone,
Consumed by my fears
And guilt and self-hate.

The pain and terror of remembered rape
Is not the cruelest inheritance.
It is the burning eyes,
The constricted knot in my throat
When I feel so alone,
When I want someone to be with me,
...When I cannot risk asking for help.

The lesson was well-learned,
Burned into my soul:
It is my fault,
My hurting self is ugly.
No one will love me when I am needing love.

Never scream.

— Stephen Bies



The physical pain is over. The emotional pain is still prominent. The
first time was 1963, the second time 1968, the third time was 1986.
I'm a victim. He's the attacker. I died inside. He is fine. Where is the
magic eraser? I think my tourniquet loosened. I don't want to be me
any more.

— N.L.



Sketch by Eileen G.

Religion

mother talk'd to me of
Molech who had children sacrificed to him
Baal who took the lives of all first born
Chronous who ate his own kids alive
i wonder if she was trying to tell me something

at such times, she would lecture me on
the origin of families and religion
i would repeat to myself an apocalyptic litany
from the 63rd chapter of the Book of The Prophet Isaiah
benumbing words:

"i trampled them in my wrath and in my anger i crushed
them"

"i poured their lifeblood on the ground"

who says religion can't be used as a weapon?
Yaweh is stronger than Baal may get you — someday
or mythology as a club

my mother was a very intelligent woman
and it showed in her lectures to me
on Molech and Baal
and Chemosh the fire god
who burned children to death

no wonder i was always interested in history
and religion
forever afterwards

— Maire MacLachlan

History

If the fabric of childhood was as it should be, then childhood dreams would be of boys and 4-H fairs, camping, whatever. Mine was instead visions of such apocalyptic fury as you couldn't imagine. Deadly nightblooms.

Fire. Tidal wave. Poison. Car wrecks and God, if he would help me by killing my parents, thereby freeing the family geisha. Freedom. The word reverberated in my mind as only slaves, blacks, misused can understand it.

My soul was free if my body was family property. Retribution wrapped around my head, in my head, as he approached every night. Jesus was right about preserving the inner self at all costs. Then I was frozen in those dreams like a bug in amber.

A student of history now, studying others, trying to avoid my own. In my studies, Zapata emerges from the mountains of Morelos to free the peons. Dolcino descends from Mt. Rebello to bring justice to the people who say the past doesn't influence us and a child's dreams are not remembered.

— Maire MacLachlan

Childhood

Cocktail waitress dresses on an
anorexic body.
Cleopatra in braces and acne.
Zebra eyes, high heels like stilts.
Pathetic object of parental desire.
Temple drake in childhood's bloom.

Runaway.
The third generation of it.
Nancy Sykes at 15, on the street.
Later she said "I went home after one of my dates
nearly killed me,
nearly beat me to death.
There were worse places than home"

She found out
the hard way.

"I never thought
that was possible,"
she later reminisced.

— Maire MacLachlan



as i sit at my desk, it's Christmas eve nite. my mind wanders back over scenes in my life. what had i accomplished? what had i become? was i a success or considered a bum?

i remember at first, when i was 6. how i loved trucks, balls and pick-up stix. that point in my life things were different and didn't stop, even though Dad was a cop.

i have 4 brothers whom i thought nice and strong. appeared in my eyes now as disgusting and wrong. i've also 2 sisters whom i love very much. we surface-talk and still keep in touch.

a family you may call it, but oh no, not me. we've hardly nothing but hate for each other, you see. a couple of us surely get along as friends, but the "family tie?" i don't think will ever mend.

things began with the oldest. he was a red-headed kid. his freckled face opened up with #1 bid. times of pushing, prodding, trying to force himself in. but i was too small. there was nothing to gain.

i didn't understand. what had i done? why and how could he hurt me and think he'd won? times that i wondered if it ever would stop, then he let another have a piece of the crop.

the second was next to come up in line. he had to prove he too could shine. he hurt me, but not as the other so much. in my heart it hurt to think he felt he could touch. i remember the pain and filth felt down deep. seemed hard to explain as little by little up it would creep.

then a third stepped in. at the time i recall he wasn't so nice. i'd cried or i yelled; he threatened my life. it wouldn't hurt a bit. . . nor take very long. half hour later, i was still trying to be strong. he thought it so funny. i'd shut my eyes and not move. i just wanted it over and let him prove what he had to prove.

the fourth was next and last. he came on like a bomb that'd gone off with a blast. he came on quick and took his part; once again it all began to start. he'd bring his friends home some nights. they'd come up to get me.

my secret seemed harder and harder to cover. i no longer could handle it alone. i had to open up, dust off my self. i opened up and told my mother one day. her reaction? wasn't what i expected it to be. her sons wouldn't do that, so it must've been me. i'd opened up and let my feelings fall, yet i was a whore, and sleeze. to my mom i was nothing at all.

well, i obviously made it, and am doing fine. there's a drive that holds onto me, deep down in my heart, a drive that god put there right from the start.

my past is behind me and it shouldn't control, but many times occur, and i fall into my old role. i do want it over, put in its place, so life will come to me at an easier pace.

i'm sure that in the years to come i'll get my life in line. all eyes around will be opened to things of which they were blind. it will, i know, come to an end. and no longer take control, and when that happens i can be "me" and take on my new role.

— Sharon



Grandfather's Love

Grandfather's love was way too strong.
Grandfather's love was very wrong.
Grandfather's love was full of hugs and kisses.
Kisses here, kisses there, kisses where you wouldn't dare.
Scared of grandfather's love.
Frightened at night.
Hoping that someone just might find out what grandfather's
doing at night.
Grandfather's love was done all in bed, with the covers pulled
over my head.
Grandfather's love wasn't nice.
The games he played weren't fun at all, in the bed, in the car,
somewhere that wasn't far.
No one knew what was going on.
Grandfather's love fooled them all.

Written in recognition of my abuse
through the ages of 12-14. 1983-1985.
Perpetrator — my grandfather.

— Barbara Hooper

Untitled

I close my eyes — what do I see? Visions of people walking up to
you and saying hi! and they walk right past me. Say nothing. I feel
nothing. Am I imaginary? Then someone trips over my foot and
blames it on you. Should I say something? Would you hear what
I'm saying to you? Would you feel my touch on your arm? Do you
see me? Do you know I'm here? Or am I just one of those visions
in my head? And when I open my eyes I can see nothing, feel nothing,
respond to nothing. My big question is am I invisible or visible in
my sense of mind?

— Laura
15 years old



Sketch by Sally B.

Thanks, But...

For all men who tried to be
friends,
who tried to be
kind,
my apologies.

Crippled like Quasimodo,
marked inside
by what happened
so long ago.

My thanks for your kindness.
I wasn't able to
use
your help.

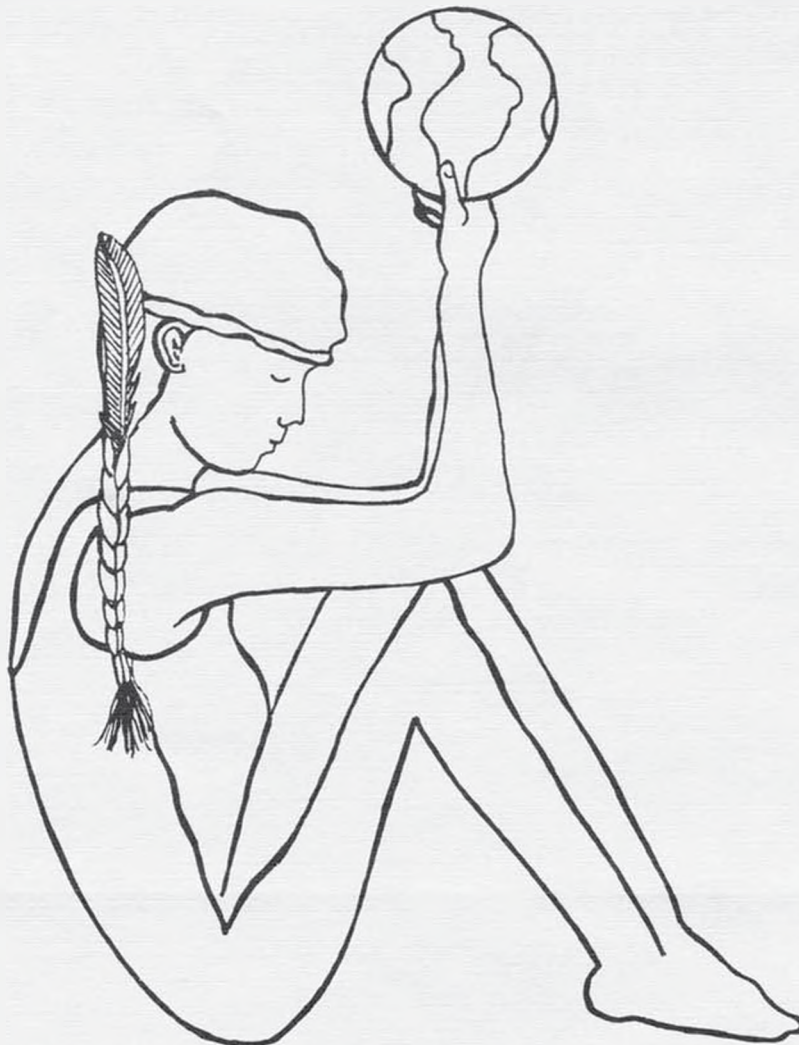
I was afraid, even though I wanted it.

How could I tell you
what it is like to fear
half the world?

— Marie MacLachlan

My little girl has always been unhappy;
She's dragged her feet through life.
It's not just me,
There are millions of us.
We show you what you have done:
Stripped us,
Dirtied us,
Shamed us,
Called your god down upon our heads,
Eaten our food,
Lain in our beds.
But no more.
Your time is up.
We haven't learned patience for nothing.
We can wait for your demise.
The little girl cries
And cries.

— Margot M.



Sketch by Eileen G.

Why Me?

Incest: full of filth. Incest: full of disgust. The struggle to live and fight is but a must. Suicide thoughts, distortion galore. Please stop, Daddy, I can't take no more. I have no trust, for I was betrayed. The innocence I had started to fade.

I remember wanting you to hurry and leave me alone, but all I could hear was your moan and your groan. You made me lie there to pay for all the shame. Mommy didn't believe me, therefore I was to blame. All my life I've been through hell. I'm hurting so bad, God, can't you tell? I was too young to be exposed to so much. I feared your presence, I feared your touch. Normal kids played around with Barbies and toys. I was taught silently to give my body to all the boys.

The horrifying secret we kept tore me apart. The selfishness you had was a stave in my heart. All those years thinking there was something wrong with me. All those tears I shed, so hard to face, it just couldn't be. I am so self-destructive with my razors and knives. If you only could have known you've ruined so many lives. Having to pay for someone's mistake makes the pain unbearable to take.

Full of rage, full of hurt, why did you treat me like such dirt? So much anger kept deep down inside, wanting to scream, wanting to hide. I need so much help, I need to survive. Peace of mind, I desperately thrive. I'm so confused. I'm in so much pain, I can't take it anymore. I'm going insane.

Thinking of the scenes are gross and chilling. I was only a baby; I had to be willing. You degraded and used me, then threw me away. Then acted like nothing happened, the very next day. Why didn't you believe me, Mommy? I needed your protection.

Why couldn't you love me, Daddy, without your sexual affection? My self-esteem is very low. To love myself, I'll never know. Is that all I was worth, to open 'em wide? Have your orgasm, then push me aside. You'll never know what you've done to me, the game of survival I've yet to see.

It's hard to take control over your life when you never could before, but now I am 19 and the incest is no more. It's time to let go of that little girl in me, to love, understand and forgive her, and let her be.

— Lisa

Daddy:

Inside of me, daddy, there is a terribly confused child who never grew. Oh, she grew physically, but her mind just couldn't cope with all the pain and confusion of incest, so emotionally, she stopped growing.

Sometimes, daddy, I'm that small child who desperately needs you, and sometimes I'm that small child who wants to kill you.

You told that small child inside of me that you loved her, and then you would hurt her. You told her that sex was a sin, and then you raped her. You told her that she was the only one you loved, and then you took her sister. She tried so hard to be what you wanted her to be and you threw her away anyway. Why? A child growing into womanhood needs to feel like a flower blossoming, but instead, you made her feel like a leper to be cast out. You made her feel that breasts were something to hate, forcing her to deny her femininity.

The child inside of me has a new father, and now there is a chance to start over, to grow, to feel special, and to become the woman that god has intended her to be. She even has a new name, daddy. It's Precious. I'm sorry that you will never get to know Precious, but that's your doing not mine. You see, daddy, in order for Precious to grow and to heal, she must let you go. With the help of her new father she will learn that love isn't abuse.

— Precious

When It Happened

Mark, my uncle, touched me, and forced me to sit on his lap in a gold-brown swivel chair. The texture of the upholstery was rough, like burlap, and the chair was square. Mark stuck his tongue in my mouth. He forced his breath in my face. I felt his teeth, tongue and saliva in my mouth; he was trying to kiss me like an adult. He was very tense. I was appalled by my uncle repeatedly forcing his tongue, teeth, and stale heated saliva into my mouth. He kept grinning at me and asking me if I liked him kissing me that way. He spoke seductively to me and in a patronizing way. He turned off the light. While Mark was sticking his tongue in my mouth, my cousin Michael walked in. Mark told him in French to leave the room. Then he continued abusing me.

We were toward the middle of the garage. Mark kept talking to me and forcibly manipulating me, asking me if I liked him, and then not hearing me tell him "no."

Mark kept touching me, with my back to him. He forced my pants and underwear down. He was telling me to let him do what he wanted. My pants were down. He was forcing me to stand close to him. I tried to keep as much distance as I could. He rubbed his erect penis up and down on the crack of my behind and my thighs. He kept rubbing it on me.

Mark kept rubbing his penis up and down on the crack of my behind and on my thighs, and he kept forcing me to stand there, not wanting me to see him. When he tried to kiss me, my teeth were frozen shut, so he made fun of me.

Finally he acted mad at me and ordered me to leave the room. He gave me a piece of gum in a yellow wrapper, from out of a dresser drawer.

— Edi



At The End Of It All

I am the daughter of an alcoholic. I am an incest survivor. Two years ago last week my father died of a stroke. He had his stroke in March and I drove home to Bar Harbor each weekend, to visit him in the hospital.

One Saturday I found myself wandering down a deserted corridor of the hospital rather than sit in his room and confront him and my feelings for him. I stopped myself short and forced myself to go back to the room and deal with the issues there. I looked at my father. He was partially paralyzed and could not talk easily. He was as crippled lying there as I have felt by what he did to me, all these long years.

Part of me wanted to scream at him for dying, for withdrawing from me before I could confront him. Another part of me felt terrible that he was never able to climb out of the bottle and deal with his own pain and fear. . . to finally accept himself and feel whole, for just once in his life.

As I stood by his bed looking down at him and wondering what to say, he beckoned me to him. I approached him and asked, "What is it, Dad?" He had lost weight and was quite weak. He feebly brought his hand out from under the covers and gestured for me to take what was in it. I cupped my hand under his fingers and looked down. There was nothing in my hand. I raised my eyes to meet his and he wet his lips. I leaned forward. He whispered, "Put this in the trash. Throw it away. Don't let your mother see."

I nodded. I went to the waste basket and deposited his invisible apology. I went back to his bedside and saw that his fingernails were too long and broken. I never liked to touch him, or be touched by him. I found an emery board and filed his nails. I forgave him with my eyes. That was the last time I saw him.

— Barbara Balkin

"LOOKING UP"
P.O. Box K
Augusta, Maine 04330
Telephone (207) 626-3402

"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.

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The next issue of *The "Looking Up" Times* is scheduled for Spring, 1988

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