1

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

For a complete list of

other National Library

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

**ADULT SURVIVORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE --
CREATIVE AND LOGOTHERAPEUTIC ASPECTS**

by

STUART A. SHEIN, B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

(Master of Arts)

Department of Religion

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

March 1, 1994

© copyright

1994, Stuart A. Shein

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file / Votre référence

Charte / Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-92968-5

Canada

Name STUART A. SHEIN

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

RELIGION

0318

U·M·I

SUBJECT TERM

SUBJECT CODE

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION

General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523

Psychology 0525
Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

Language 0679
General 0289
Ancient 0290
Linguistics 0291
Modern
Literature 0401
General 0294
Classical 0295
Comparative 0297
Medieval 0298
Modern 0316
African 0591
American 0305
Asian 0352
Canadian (English) 0355
Canadian (French) 0593
English 0311
Germanic 0312
Latin American 0315
Middle Eastern 0313
Romance 0314
Slavic and East European

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

Philosophy 0422
Religion 0318
General 0321
Biblical Studies 0319
Clergy 0320
History of 0322
Philosophy of 0469
Theology

SOCIAL SCIENCES

American Studies 0323
Anthropology 0324
Archaeology 0326
Cultural 0327
Physical
Business Administration 0310
General 0272
Accounting 0770
Banking 0454
Management 0338
Marketing 0385
Canadian Studies
Economics 0501
General 0503
Agricultural 0505
Commerce Business 0508
Finance 0509
History 0510
Labor 0511
Theory 0358
Folklore 0366
Geography 0351
Gerontology
History 0578
General

Ancient 0579
Medieval 0581
Modern 0582
Black 0328
African 0331
Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
Canadian 0334
European 0335
Latin American 0336
Middle Eastern 0333
United States 0337
History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science 0615
General
International Law and Relations 0616
Public Administration 0617
Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology 0626
General
Criminology and Penology 0627
Demography 0938
Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
Individual and Family Studies 0628
Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
Public and Social Welfare 0630
Social Structure and Development 0700
Theory and Methods 0344
Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Agriculture 0473
General 0285
Agronomy
Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
Animal Pathology 0476
Food Science and Technology 0359
Forestry and Wildlife 0478
Plant Culture 0479
Plant Pathology 0480
Plant Physiology 0817
Range Management 0777
Wood Technology 0746
Biology 0306
General
Anatomy 0287
Biostatistics 0308
Botany 0309
Cell 0379
Ecology 0329
Entomology 0353
Genetics 0369
Limnology 0793
Microbiology 0410
Molecular 0307
Neuroscience 0317
Oceanography 0416
Physiology 0433
Radiation 0821
Veterinary Science 0778
Zoology 0472
Biophysics 0786
General 0760
Medical

EARTH SCIENCES

Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996

Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences 0566
General 0300
Audiology 0992
Chemotherapy 0567
Dentistry 0350
Education 0769
Hospital Management 0758
Human Development 0982
Immunology 0564
Medicine and Surgery 0347
Mental Health 0569
Nursing 0570
Nutrition 0380
Obstetrics and Gynecology 0354
Occupational Health and Therapy 0381
Ophthalmology 0571
Pathology 0419
Pharmacology 0572
Pharmacy 0382
Physical Therapy 0573
Public Health 0574
Radiology 0575
Recreation

Speech Pathology 0460
Toxicology 0383
Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Pure Sciences
Chemistry 0485
General 0749
Agricultural 0486
Analytical 0487
Biochemistry 0488
Inorganic 0738
Nuclear 0490
Organic 0491
Pharmaceutical 0494
Physical 0495
Polymer 0754
Radiation 0405
Mathematics 0605
Physics 0986
General
Acoustics
Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
Atmospheric Science 0608
Atomic 0748
Electronics and Electricity 0607
Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
Fluid and Plasma 0759
Molecular 0609
Nuclear 0610
Optics 0752
Radiation 0756
Solid State 0611
Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences

Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984

Engineering 0537
General
Aerospace 0538
Agricultural 0539
Automotive 0540
Biomedical 0541
Chemical 0542
Civil 0543
Electronics and Electrical 0544
Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
Hydraulic 0545
Industrial 0546
Marine 0547
Materials Science 0794
Mechanical 0548
Metallurgy 0743
Mining 0551
Nuclear 0552
Packaging 0549
Petroleum 0765
Sanitary and Municipal 0554
System Science 0790
Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY

General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

**Thesis Acceptance Form
M.A. CANDIDATE**

**The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research acceptance of the thesis**

**ADULT SURVIVORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE:
CREATIVE AND LOGOTHERAPEUTIC ASPECTS**

**submitted by Stuart Shein
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Religion

Carleton University

date

MAY 16 1994

ABSTRACT

The thesis will be a subjective and creative exploration of emotional abuse, using Viktor Frankl's logotherapy: a meaning-centered psychotherapy, to understand the impact of suffering on people's lives. The first chapter deals with the theoretical material on emotional abuse and logotherapy, while discussing the importance of literature, in addition to drawing parallels of Holocaust experiences. The second integrates personal reflections, impact of case-histories and analysis of two interviews, along with three poems written by the author. The third includes two narratives which amalgamate the material in the previous chapters. The purpose is to provide survivors themselves with an outlet for their suffering. The conclusion consists of a single poem -- capturing the author's feelings about psychological abuse, while the epilogue demonstrates how the film, Schindler's List is a lasting testament to all survivors.

With as deep a breath, she took hold of the first one and twisted its neck, as she had seen Nacha do so often, but she used too little force to kill the poor quail, which went running pitifully around the kitchen, its head hanging to one side...you can't be weak when it comes to killing: you have to be strong or it just caused more sorrow...Mama Elena was merciless, killing with a single blow...For Tita she had made an exception; she had been killing her a little at a time since she was a child, and she still hadn't quite finished her off.

(Laura Equivel: Like Water for Chocolate)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Jacques Chevalier for his support and encouragement, but most of all for his perseverance working with a temperamental artist who insisted on changing his mind. I thank Tom Henighan, Sean Kelly and Joe Ramisch for their helpful advice and for taking the time to see this project through to its fruition. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my friends, Sylvia and Gene who agreed to share their experiences. Their acts of bravery will not be forgotten. To my family, friends and of course to Deborah, who put up with my madness and elation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMMERSION (CHAPTER ONE)	pp. 1-23
-- The Abusive Experience	
-- Meaning in Suffering	
-- Meaning in Literature	
-- The Nightmarish Existence	
-- Perversion of God	
-- The Holocaust Paradigm	
EXPLORATION (CHAPTER TWO)	pp. 24-72
-- Personal reflections	
-- Poems: Spices and Half-Smile	
-- Subjective analysis of case histories	
-- Interviews conducted with adult survivors of abuse	
-- Experiential analysis of one survivor's poems	
-- Personal commentaries	
-- Poem: Intoxication	
TRANSCENDENCE (CHAPTER THREE)	pp. 73-111
-- Personal introduction to narratives: "Once Upon Discharge" and "The Screaming Room"	
LEGIONS (CONCLUSION)	p. 112
-- Poem: Legions	
THE SURVIVOR (EPILOGUE)	pp. 113-14
-- Personal reflections on <u>Schindler's List</u>	

IMMERSION

THE ABUSIVE EXPERIENCE

Torment. The word itself conjures up horrific images. They riddle our history, perhaps externalizing the depths of our depravity. I believe every individual, especially the emotionally abused, possess their own understanding of strife, their own depiction of suffering. Thus, it is vital that we explore, albeit subjectively, the ruins of their lives: the severity of abusive experiences; the potential meaning in suffering and in literature; the psychological/philosophical implications of a nightmarish existence; the perversion of God -- including the creation of a Holocaust paradigm.

One memoir (among others) had a huge impact on me: William Styron's Darkness Visible. He wrote about his battle with depression and described how he nearly killed himself. Although the memoir itself has nothing to do with emotional abuse, a particular quote has relevance. Styron writes: "One does not abandon, even briefly, one's bed of nails, but is attached to it wherever one goes. And this results in a striking experience -- one which I have called, to borrow military terminology, the situation of the walking wounded." (Styron 1992, 62)

Any victim of abuse understands what Styron writes about. I picture a soldier dressed in a tattered, green uniform; his silver dog tags broken, dragging his body along, limping. On his face exists a defeated, hopeless look stemming from the moment he

saw a fellow soldier machine gunned by the enemy. I cannot wipe his face from my memory...On some level, I feel like this soldier returning from the battle, needing to change from army fatigues into civilian clothing, wanting to explore a city park without the worry of an assault or the fear of stepping on a hidden mine.

I hear voices which grow louder and louder, until I hear a moaning, a cry so terrible, only a wounded animal can match its pitch. Such is my voice, the voice of the walking wounded, the sound of mourning.

Styron laments the loss of his self and in a sense, all victims of abuse must -- in the words of Bass and Davies: "You must grieve for the loss of your feelings. You must grieve for your abandonment. You must grieve for the past, and grieve for the present, for the damage you now have to heal, for the time it takes, for the money it costs, for the relationships ruined, the pleasure missed." (Walker 1992, 160)

I am guilty of dragging that dreadful *bed of nails*. I carry my suffering around with me because I feel that it says who I am and to let it go means reforming my identity. The pain is familiar. A lifetime filled with joy is strange, foreign. I know how to mourn. Can I learn to smile?

Many attempt to sever the cord which ensnares them. Who deserves to lie on such a cursed bed? It is difficult to understand the past, order the chaos. Healing can ensue by not suppressing the awful imaginings and catastrophes of our childhood, looking

upon them with malice fuels our self-hatred. How can we curse our suffering when it defines us? Perhaps the key lies in searching through the psychological morass, retrieving a damaged self and learning to cherish it.

How can one discard Styron's *bed of nails*? In Surviving Secrets, Moira Walker quotes Alice Miller: "The goal of therapy is to allow the silenced child in us to speak and feel. Gradually the banishment of our knowledge is revoked, and in the course of this process, as the erstwhile torments and the still-existent prisons become evident, we also discover our history, ourself and our buried capacity for love" (Walker 1992, 165).

Abusive experiences blemish our personal histories. In order to heal from any infliction it is vital to identify it. Thus, emotional abuse underlies all types of physical and sexual abuse (plus neglect), including beatings, burnings or rapes. Physical and sexual abuse is more easily visible, originating from outside the body, whereas emotional abuse is harder, if sometimes, impossible to detect, entering the mind, making it far more damaging (Renn 1989, 3f.). Further, the characteristics of emotional abuse consist of: "withdrawal of love, name calling, neglect, terrorization, seduction, stifling, sarcasm, lying, discounting shaming, humiliation, rudeness, denial of feelings, rejection, parody, failure to cherish, and contempt." (Renn 1989, 4f.)

How do we come to terms, how do we even begin to understand the damage that such events have on us and on our children? I do not know for certain. I can say that we need to look deep in ourselves; we need to stomach the horrors, in order to heal. When we wound ourselves and need stitches, they hurt, but we need them to heal. The same can be said for emotional scars. By looking at them, by reliving the anguish in therapy, we grow.

This reliving is not a "rewounding," but a path to healing. By examining the fragments of our lives we can find wholeness and meaning. I never heard of putting a puzzle together with half the pieces missing. If I attempted this, people would label me insane, likewise if I tried to put my life back together by flagellating myself or denying the suffering I endured as a child. On a personal note, through therapy, I discovered my hidden ability to love others, as Miller suggests. I learn to turn my *bed of nails* into a bed of roses, loving myself, accepting my blackness and actualizing my potential, transforming -- loving the missing limbs as much as those attached.

MEANING IN SUFFERING

I feel that any hardship, though painful, is a learning experience. Moving a step further, Viktor E. Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and eminent psychiatrist, wrote much about the meaning inherent in suffering -- a significant aspect his logotherapy, a *meaning-centered psychotherapy*.

At present, the training institute for therapists wanting to integrate the various techniques of logotherapy into their practices is situated in Berkeley, California. The Institute publishes a journal entitled The International Forum for Logotherapy. It includes articles that describes the current use of logotherapy in family therapy and prisoner rehabilitation, in addition to its application in cases of substance abuse, chronic pain and multiple personality disorder. Therapists are now adapting logotherapy to treat today's problems, using Frankl's original work as a base for a new monument (Lantz 1987, 65-80; Henrion 1987, 112-117; Khatami 1987, 85-91; Eisenberg 1989, 89-94; Hutzell and Jerkins 1990, 88-93; Olive 1990, 131f.).

Various techniques compose this therapeutic arsenal, such as the paradoxical intention which aims to break the pattern of one's neurotic symptoms. However, a major element of logotherapy lies in its view that people possess a will to meaning, a deep-seeded need to find meaning in existence, in life through work, love and in unalterable situations, such as abuse, illness and death. To ignore one's will to meaning leads to despair -- "suffering without meaning" (Frankl 1975, 137).

Further, logotherapy can be integrated into or complement the treatment of adult survivors of emotional abuse by allowing such people to understand their experiences as meaningful -- opportunities for growth: "Only under the hammer blows of fate, in the white heat of suffering, does life gain shape and form."

(Frankl 1986, 111) By assisting the abused individual to actualize the potential meaning in suffering and in positive life experiences, namely love and work, the individual is then able to piece together the fragments of their life into a cohesive whole.

For example, in The Will to Meaning, Frankl included the writings of a Carmelite sister: "'The depression is my steady companion. It weighs my soul down. Where are my ideals, where is the greatness, beauty, and goodness to which I once committed myself? There is nothing but boredom and I am caught in it. I am living as if I were thrown into a vacuum. For there are times at which even the experience of pain is inaccessible to me. And even God is silent. I then wish to die...And if I did not possess the belief that I am not the master over my life, I would have taken it. By my belief, however, suffering is turned into a gift. People who think that life must be successful are like a man who in the face of a construction site cannot understand that the workers dig out the ground if they wish to build up a cathedral. God builds up a cathedral in each soul. In my soul He is about to dig out the basis. What I have to do is just keep still whenever I am hit by His shovel.'" (in Frankl 1988, 132)

For her, suffering becomes a gift, beyond price, beyond measure. When she suffers from depression, she feels nothing, not even pain. She believes God is silent. After reading the sister's description of her depression, I sense the urgency that exists in life, my life at least.

When I feel depressed, I often turn to my girlfriend, friends or therapist. Depression is not necessarily pathological, but a normal response to everyday living or trauma. The Carmelite sister sees suffering as a Divine gift; her faith becomes a form of escape out of the existential vacuum. She sees God as master of her life.

I too believe in God. I don't rely on God as the only light-source for my life, yet others do. One could argue that such a belief is delusional and the image of an all-loving Father is a dinosaur on its way to extinction.

I don't view depression or suffering as a gift from God either. Thinking of it in such terms might confirm God's insanity. What kind of Divinity persecutes Its creations? I believe suffering is inherently human. God does not create sickness or torment -- we do. For example, if someone suffers from terminal cancer, is it God sentencing that person to death or is it that person's emotional climate or a carcinogen that causes the spread of oncogenes? In any case, suffering is a part of life and I think it's necessary to find meaning in it.

I wish to terminate my membership to the cult of suffering and begin living. It is very easy to become caught up in the victim's role, become mired in one's suffering. For countless individuals, God is benevolent and provides them with a sense of peace, otherwise unattainable. However, I prefer to confide my deepest fears to my girlfriend. I want to hug her, experiencing

love, evident in the warmth of her smile and her heart. Yet through my relationship with her, I strengthen mine with God.

I have a mixed reaction to the sister's image of God constructing a cathedral in each soul. Depicting the soul in that way conveys a beautiful symbol. I can see how important it is to her and how Christians can identify with it. On a more personal level, I don't see the human soul as a holy structure. I have trouble thinking about what image best conveys my beliefs. Suffice it to say, the soul means something different to each person.

Waiting for God to *hit her with his shovel* evokes a mystical theme: the Dark Night of the Soul. In order for her to ascend, she must descend. The search for meaning is similar because it originates inside and finding it requires the stamina of the mythic hero -- who traverses over unconscious terrain.

In a sense we are all heroes and heroines. For instance, anyone who survived the Nazi death camps or endured the tribulations and battles of childhood knows the definition of torment -- first hand. I am in the process of putting my past into its proper perspective. As a survivor of emotional abuse, I believe we must change our attitudes toward the abuse, using our childhood experiences to become conscious adults by viewing our soul murder not as death, but as motivation to live.

In The Doctor and the Soul, Frankl wrote: "A young woman fell ill and was visibly wasting away...She saw death coming and

looked at it squarely in the eye. From her bed in the infirmary she could catch a glimpse of a chestnut tree in blossom outside the window. She spoke to the tree often...'This tree is my only friend in solitude...I converse with it.' Was this a hallucination? Was she delirious? Did she think the tree was 'answering' her? What strange dialogue was this; what had the flowering tree 'said' to the dying woman? 'It says: 'I am here, I am here -- I am life, eternal life.'" (Frankl 1986, 115)

This woman, though perishing in the make-shift infirmary of Auschwitz, sees this tree which endows her life with some meaning. The tree symbolizes eternal life, in contrast with her finitude. Her dying has meaning by finding the last remnant of natural beauty, in an otherwise decrepit world.

By losing herself in the splendor of the tree, she could cope with her misery. The point is self-transcendence. Rising above the ugliness, rising above torment to seek love and beauty. That woman found a moment of rapture in the pain of her dying. I admire her and wish I could also achieve transcendence. As children, many survivors of abuse learned to transcend. The psychiatric profession refers to it as dissociation. Is finding beauty in the presence of ugliness an act, committed out of desperation? I see it as a human phenomenon, not as mere fantasy -- evidence for the necessity of imagination -- in a life where agony flourishes.

MEANING IN LITERATURE

Another embodiment of the human imagination exists in literature itself, which according to Frankl can endow life with meaning, salving emotional wounds: "Writers who themselves have gone through the hell of despair over the apparent meaninglessness of life can offer their suffering as a sacrifice on the altar of humankind. Their self-disclosure can help the reader who is plagued by the same condition, help him in overcoming it." (Frankl 1979, 90) We see this occur when abuse survivors turn to literature, such as Holocaust accounts, to cope, even understand their pain and eventually find healing.

I can't help being reminded of Intoxicated by my Illness, a book that moved me deeply. Anatole Broyard also wrote about the significance and meaning of literature. I wish that my own narratives (in Chapter Three) do justice to his monumental ideas. He writes: "The patient has to start by treating his illness not as a disaster, an occasion for depression or panic, but as a narrative, a story. Stories are antibodies against illness and pain...Anything is better than an awful silent suffering." (Broyard 1993, 20) If survivors of abuse treat their experiences as an opportunity for creativity, then we come to terms with our horrendous pasts, speak out against the atrocities in our lives and find meaning. Thus, by transforming silence into a screaming, by allowing a person the chance to vent long-held emotions, a narrative becomes meaningful. It seeks, in the words of Frankl, to

inoculate the reader against despair -- suffering without meaning (Frankl 1975, 137 and 1979, 91).

Broyard argues: "Making narratives like this rescues me from the unknown, what Ernest Becker called...'the suction of infinity.'" (Broyard 1993, 21) For Broyard, literature is a defense against the worst diseases, physical and mental; through literature, his laboratory, he found the cures (Broyard 1993, 29). Broyard sees literature as a defense against nihilism or existential despair. Writing can endow life with meaning, but more important, the narrative itself can serve as an everlasting monument to the individual. Its meaning comes not from its depiction of suffering, but from its epiphany.

Becker's (an anthropologist) words aptly describe or evoke what being abused feels like, in an emotional sense. Without getting too philosophical, I will say that a person who survives abuse understands very well what infinity means. Their torture seems endless; life becomes a *futureless* existence. They are hurled into a deep chasm or live in what Frankl calls an existential vacuum -- the popularized twilight zone.

Broyard makes another point, worth remembering: "Once we had a narrative of heaven and hell, but now we make our own narratives. " (Broyard 1993, 42) Broyard's words carry special significance. Survivors have their own rendition, their own versions of hell; while their growth or healing, voyage out of despair resembles a heaven. Thus, we see the psychological

significance of the Heaven and Hell of religious dogma. Perhaps they are not realms beyond human comprehension, but the projection of our own desires and fears onto a cosmic level; thereby, inhibiting us from understanding ourselves.

Ultimately, if we are to appreciate survival literature or narratives that explicitly treat issues of abuse, we need to open our minds to the possibility that the modern literary paradigm does not consist of angels battling demons, but children enduring the onslaught of the adults around them. Taking to heart the words of Dory Renn: "The child is the Survivor." (Renn 1989, 128f.) And glory to those who follow.

NIGHTMARISH EXISTENCE

Abusive experiences proliferate throughout modern literature; thus, it is important to look at the philosophical or existential levels, inherent in the life of an abuse survivor. Frankl writes: "The monotonous quality of life in the concentration camp led to the sensation of 'futurelessness.' A prisoner marching in a long column to a new camp remarked that he felt as if he were walking in a funeral procession behind his own dead body..." (Frankl 1986, 99) The prisoner's words open a floodgate within me. I read them, imagining how I would feel if I marched behind my own body. I picture my eyes staring blankly; my white skin contrasted by the black robes, dressed like a medieval executioner. I don't carry an ax, since the person in front is dead already. I march along looking at a bleak

countryside, hearing the earth heave as the others lower the casket, desiring to jump in. I cannot bear the loneliness of walking the earth -- without my body.

I am also reminded of Pat Capponi's memoir, Upstairs in the Crazy House, describing her life in a Toronto half-way house (half-way to nowhere): "I lived in waking dreams and nightmares, a very private madness in a house where madness was the norm." (Capponi 1992, 19) Her experience reflects a similar sense of what survivors of abuse endure. She too lives with a sense of futurelessness. She dwells in a world that exists somewhere between midnight and dawn. Hers is a life of unreality, a ghost-like existence.

I empathize with Pat. I never experienced a nightmarish existence, but have known people who did. Maybe there is an affinity among the abused; a sixth sense that allows us to understand other people's pain. I have little trouble identifying with Pat's story and the lives of survivors. I am a survivor myself. Perhaps that fact alone endows me with an ability to look into people's eyes -- drawing out their tears to dry my own.

Frankl, including the words of a patient, writes: "'...I no longer saw people as they are today or were yesterday; rather, I saw every single person on the day of his death -- no matter whether he were an old man or a child. I saw far ahead, to the end of life, and I myself no longer lived in the present.' In such cases of melancholia we may call the underlying mood a 'Judgment Day'

mood." (Frankl 1986, 203) The same mood can exist in people who survived abuse. Many become so depressed, they want to die. Thus, the *anticipation of death* becomes the only *joy* in life.

The Judgment Day mood implies that a person is dead, not physically, but spiritually because they endured severe abuse: physical, sexual or emotional. The insidious assaults devastate the person; thus, the person sees others on their dying day or believes that she or he no longer resides in a torturous present. Is this insanity? The only thing that is insane, as far as I can tell, is the abuse itself, not the reaction.

PERVERSION OF GOD

Among survivors, anhedonia is not a freak occurrence. Neither is despair. Many individuals are in peril, they suffer. Their image of a beneficent God can reflect this all-too human condition.

For instance, Pat Capponi states in her life-writing: "...God was single-mindedly obsessed with my personal abasement and destruction." She suffered from depression and she lived in a group home for ex-psychiatric patients where the living conditions matched the luxury accommodations at Bergen-Belsen.

In addition, Margaret Gibson, a Canadian author, who suffered from mental illness, wrote a book of short stories called The Butterfly Ward. In "Making It" she writes: "I must have something mysterious to believe in, not just concrete and glass and huge filing cabinets that touch the sky, so today I will say

that God is in the snowflakes. Yesterday he was Caliban. Tomorrow if the snow is gone I will assume that God is dead -- again. Perhaps he is always Caliban." (Gibson 1980, 96) Caliban is the slave in Shakespeare's Tempest -- the Quasimodo of Renaissance drama. Comparing God to such a monster reveals something about us. Are we equally monstrous?

Capponi's and Gibson's view of God illustrate, in the words of Ernest Becker, "the panic inherent in creation" (Broyard 1993, 21). I can identify with their view of a God who is hateful, deformed. Perhaps both women see themselves as monstrous and they displace their self-hatred. After reading their words, I could sense the agony of their *crucifixions*, hear their lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34)

I wonder if they really feel abandoned by God or by other human beings. I do not know if they are survivors of abuse. In any case, their pain is real and their writing starkly conveys it. As a reader, their truthfulness strikes me. They are brave to reveal themselves so completely. I envy their ability to write that well, capturing the essence of their emotions. I believe their God is synonymous with their life experiences. I identify with their suffering, although I wish I didn't. My experiences shaped me as theirs has. I can't speak for them, but I am happy to be myself, in spite of my past. I must confess. I have not seen God, yet I saw someone play the role of Caliban on stage. I can't help wondering

if he used method acting techniques or relied on Divine inspiration?

In any case, to worship a God such as Caliban illustrates the misery and urgency of human existence. I find myself, after completing readings and doing the interviews, putting faith where it rightfully belongs -- in myself.

Further, the attitude of God as decrepit or absent is alluded to by Lagerkvist, in The Sibyl. The novel powerfully (though not intentionally) evokes the spiritual ramifications of abuse, while signifying the meaning in a negative experience of the divine: "'He is your destiny. Your soul is filled with him; through his curse you live a life with god. You hate him, you mock and revile him. But judging by your indignant words you care for nothing in the world but him, and are filled with him alone. With what you call your hatred of him. But this very red-hot hatred of god is perhaps your experience of the divine.'" (Lagerkvist 1958, 152)

Lagerkvist's parable describes the life of an old woman, a former sibyl of the Delphic oracle; she lives on the mountainside with her son. A stranger makes his way to her hovel and she eventually learns that Jesus cursed him -- to wander the earth for all eternity.

For many, their mystical experiences fall within the range of ecstasy; however, the idea of one's experience of God as a lasting, dark night of the soul fascinates me, but the truth is, I don't know why. Perhaps I can identify more with such an

experience because I witnessed people wringing anguish out of their hearts and lived through enough pain, so an experience of God that resembles beautiful visions seems almost surreal. Thus, for many individuals, including my friend Gene who described God as a Junky "addicted to pain" (in another of his writings), their view of God, at least to me, appears more believable.

Surprisingly, I find myself toying with Nietzsche's view that God is dead. Yet Frankl argues: "I would say that God is not dead but silent. Silent, however, he has been all along. The 'living' God has been a 'hidden' God all along. You must not expect him to answer your call. If you probe the depth of the sea, you send off sound waves and wait for the echo from the bottom of the sea. If God exists, however, he is infinite, and you wait for an echo in vain. The fact that no answer comes back to you is proof that your call has reached the addressee, the infinite." (Frankl 1988, 154)

Many survivors see God as dead or twisted -- believing that the search for God in their own depths is perilous. Others need to strengthen their atrophied spirituality to heal. Implying that God is dead as Nietzsche does is both sanity and madness. In a world such as ours, believing in a silent or hidden God allows people to find hope in despair, discovering diamonds in their own coal mines. However, relying on a nameless God for salvation can be delusional, even meaningless. How many people sit in front of their telephones waiting for them to ring?

THE HOLOCAUST PARADIGM

In this Age of Abuse, madness and terror devastate countless minds, God becomes a grotesque entity and not surprisingly, the Holocaust reoccurs. I see faces of survivors, smiling like saints, photographs on book jackets or inside covers. They appear frozen, locked in the past or framed on a movie screen. Their stories are real, not some fiction imagined in the mind of some Hollywood writer or director.

I finished reading Witness to Horror, the final book on my reading list. I knew the author, Anne Kazimirski, personally. She told me about her life. Some of her stories filled with me consternation; the words of Psalm 23 echoed in my ears: "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." She described to me -- I can still hear her voice cracking -- how she witnessed Nazi soldiers raping her best friend, Sarah. When hiding in an attic with other people, she saw her mother dragged through the ghetto streets and mercilessly shot like some criminal. The only crime her mother committed, committed by many, was being born Jewish.

How can I put into words what people feel when they watch their loved ones perish, when they witness the murder of a soul? I have no answer. I have not witnessed the execution of a loved one, yet somehow I can fathom Anne's pain. Why? Perhaps I understand what it means to suffer...After my reading, I feel a great emptiness. The words do not flow; they stick in my throat, trapped.

I read several Holocaust accounts. Contrary to what some people believe, it is not an over dramatized period of our history. Its existence reveals the modern psychosis, plaguing each and every one of us today. Yet the modern Holocaust is not just genocide, but the annihilation of countless individuals. Bodies walk and souls fill unmarked graves.

The image of zombies treading the earth forces me to think of Hell and the Prince of Darkness. He does not represent some entity dwelling deep in the earth, his is a blasphemous icon, emblazoned on memory. Des Pres quotes George Steiner: "The concentration and death camps of the twentieth century, wherever they exist, under whatever regime, are HELL MADE IMMANENT. They are the transference of Hell from below the earth to its surface. They are the deliberate enactment of a long, precise imagining." (Renn 1989, 48)

The idea of an immanent Hell is not new. The existence of Hell on earth became frighteningly relevant in the creation of Auschwitz. Many children do not perish in gas chambers or become fodder for the crematoria. Instead their annihilation falls under the euphemism of parenting. Their lives epitomize torment. As Renn believes: "Thus, concentration camps are such a monument of annihilation that any abused child can find in them a representation of his or her own death of self." (Renn 1989, 45)

Renn asks: "Why was it necessary to construct an actual instance of hell on earth? What causes people to expend so much

energy on a concept like hell that they bring it about? It is possible that hell comes about from the worship of death. Do we value death more than life?" (Renn 1989, 48)

Renn refers to the existence of concentration camps, a historical *hell on earth*, a parallel of the abusive family. Both externalize our inner turmoil. It would be very easy for me to judge other people, condemning their behavior. I leave that to the judges and mental health professionals, abounding out there. My purpose does not lie in finding explanations, but in commenting on her questions and what they evoke.

Renn's words are chilling. To ponder the existence of an actual hell boggles the imagination of this reader/researcher. I know something about the depiction of hell in art and literature. Yet after reading the memoirs (narratives) of survivors and listening to their stories, it doesn't surprise me that a hell exists. It is not a hell of fire and brimstone, a hell where the dude in the red suit sits among the wretched, but a hell where people die behind barbed wire, where children perish.

Without getting too philosophical, I believe many of us *worship death*. Look at the concentration camps for a grizzly reminder; look at children growing up in families, dissolved by addiction, mutated by violence. The examples surround, terrify. I would go a step further. In a world such as ours, the split self becomes a normal occurrence. It is no longer a freak accident of Nature, but a human creation.

Frankl defines a person as "a being who continually decides what he is: a being who equally harbors the potential to descend to the level of an animal or to ascend to the life of a saint" (Frankl 1967, 110). Is it shocking that during the Holocaust, human beings metamorphosed into demons? Throughout history, prisons serve as monuments to suffering. I still have trouble believing that an Auschwitz can germinate. When I think of children imprisoned by adults, I feel enraged because children cannot stop the torture, the abuse -- I couldn't. What is this world coming to, when children become targets for senseless brutality? If they survive childhood, what becomes of them? Will they love or perpetuate the violence? The thought of children transformed into a new legion of soul murderers sickens me...I want to vomit.

Even more sickening are the tormentors -- victims themselves. Frankl writes: "The initial silence was interrupted by shouted commands...Their sound was almost like the last cry of a victim, and yet there was a difference. It had a rasping hoarseness, as if it came from the throat of a man who had to keep shouting like that, a man who was being murdered again and again." (Frankl 1985, 28) I believe with each act of unspeakable violence, the tormentor is killing himself again and again, symbolizing existence after spiritual or emotional death. The tormentor resembles a Dracula figure, who does not feast on

blood, but expresses rage in the most sadistic way imaginable and on the most helpless of victims, children.

The tormentor resembles an SS officer, in that his own apathy allows him to commit acts, which make the most courageous cower. He acts systematically and brutally. His conscience died when he suffered from abuse. He did not survive really. He endured the ordeals of his past, but never recovered -- another of Styron's *walking wounded*. In Surviving Secrets, Louise explains her father's violent behavior: "He was tortured in the prison camps. It doesn't take away the anger but makes me think, 'Oh God, abuse multiplies abuse.'" (Walker 1992, 60)

Anna Eilenberg wrote in her Holocaust memoir: "Maybe this is all a dream, I thought confusedly. Maybe it's just a horrible nightmare, and I'll wake up. A sharp blow on my head and shoulder told me that it wasn't a dream. This was Auschwitz, and this was our reality: a world of smoke and fire, of ashes and gas, a universe of madness where death was king." (Eilenberg 1992, 139)

Thinking of Auschwitz as a *universe of madness where death was king* powerfully evokes what children feel. Louise recalls: "Another time, I remember hearing noises -- my mother moaning -- and feeling sick in my stomach, not knowing what he was doing to her. As an older child I thought he'd raped her. It was like abusing my mind, letting a child see and hear those things." (Walker 1992, 37) The horrors that Louise endured

starkly parallels the atrocities which Eilenberg witnessed. To imagine what Louise felt when she heard her mother moaning cannot be put into words. Such feelings defy language. How can anyone describe such horror? If words fail to express such pain, how can people like Louise come to terms with their pasts?

I don't have any answers. Eilenberg like many others survived a diabolical period in history, while Louise survived the torments of her own childhood. I am spending valuable time in therapy trying to understand, gain some perspective about my past. I am slowly finding the words to describe what happened to me and then speak them -- shattering the silence. Perhaps the words always existed, but I didn't want to hear myself say them or acknowledge my pain.

Even today, some deny the existence of the Holocaust, seeing the whole thing as a product of some conspiracy. Yet by doing the same thing with the victims and survivors of abuse, invalidating their experiences, death ought to *reign as King* . Nonetheless, something meaningful flowers from Eilenberg's words and Louise's experience: to survive such torment speaks volumes about their strength. I applaud their courage and hope that someday I too can join their ranks.

EXPLORATION

Darkness envelopes me. I spoke to a friend on the phone last night. His girlfriend's father died of a heart attack on Sunday. I listened to him. As he spoke, I felt shivers run through me. I thought about the fragility of life and how we must be grateful for what we have. I am worried about Gene. During the past week he talked with me about his feelings toward his abusive father who called, wanting to know if Gene would visit on Christmas Day -- even asking Gene to relay an invitation to his brother.

My friend felt very angry and upset at his father for asking him such a thing. Gene wondered if he ought to go over for Christmas because his dad helps him out financially. I asked him if he could survive without the money and he answered in the affirmative. I suggested that if Gene could do without it then he ought to do what he feels. Gene visited his father.

I also said money represents a leash or chain and until he stops accepting it or removes the chain, he will never be free of his father's clutches. He seemed a bit happier. I feel that he has a long way to go. I will be there for him.

About two weeks ago, we met for dinner and he showed me some poetry and I felt awestruck. Both poems dealt with his abuse. He based one on an actual incident, the other on a dream. I asked Gene if he would consent to an interview and if I could include both poems. He readily agreed.

I remember their power. I never read anything with such intensity. My body trembled. The thought that such atrocities occur terrifies me: his father once held a gun to his mother's head. How could anyone do such a thing? One reason is alcohol; my friend's father is alcoholic.

I worry about Gene. Currently, he is seeing a counselor and as a result, frightening memories surface. Now he has to deal with his girlfriend's loss also. I spoke with him today and he sounded very distant. I hope he can survive. He told me that when someone else has a problem, you must put your own stuff on the back-burner. I agreed with him.

The wake is tomorrow and the funeral, Thursday, before Christmas. I worry about Gene. I hope he can keep it together. He has his own problems and I trust this added grief does not hurl him over the edge. He seems tireless, almost selfless. I do not know what is really going on inside his head. I hope he will be all right. As I said, I will be there for him -- no matter what.

I know his girlfriend needs him right now. If I was her, I would want to scream or cry, if only I could do it for her. Why do I need to do this? Perhaps I want to regain my humanity, vent long-held rage at my father for walking out on me, abandoning me, not fighting for visitation rights.

In retrospect, I felt worthless, believing what my father conveyed to me by his actions. I felt unwanted. Now the words

come. I felt ugly, terrified, stupid. I blamed myself, feeling guilty. Thinking that I made him leave...

What about my mother? She was there for me, giving me everything I needed. Sometimes she expected too much. I felt that I could never live up to her expectations. She tried to control me...angry with her. As a child I was happy being the adult, the man of the house (I had no siblings) -- after my father left. The funny thing is, now that I am, I miss the child.

My mother seems happy for me about my relationship with Deborah (my girlfriend). She is disappointed that she is not Jewish. She deserves the right to feel anyway she wants -- I do too. I am happy, although a lot of anger remains. It seems that I have to be angry at someone or something. I have grown accustomed to carrying resentment -- pointing a finger at my family for screwing me up.

Today I am distancing myself from my family emotionally, soon physically, by moving out in the summer. In therapy, I am working through the anger, the hurt, the fear. Realizing that I need to make my own life makes me tremble. Learning to take control of my own emotions, not blaming my family for making me feel a certain way. Taking responsibility for my own actions, not accusing others. Having fulfilling relationships. With Deborah, I am slowly finding out how wonderful a relationship can be. I care about her deeply. Who knows? Perhaps I will fall in love.

Sometimes I feel like a member of the Away team of the Starship Enterprise. Materializing on a new planet, in some exotic environment. I am discovering paradise. Not somewhere left of the Big Dipper, but inside my heart -- a white rose, not bloodied by the thorns of affliction.

ΔΔΔΔ

I am a Jew and the Holocaust has always had special significance for me. To think that 12 000 000 people perished, 6 000 000 of whom were Jews, staggers the imagination. Yet, other human beings endured, survived. Even in the face of such wretchedness, the resilience of the human spirit shines forth. Frankl writes: "In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of immanent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom...'Et lux in tenebris lucet' -- and the light shineth in the darkness." (Frankl 1985, 60)

As Frankl suggests, to find light in the impenetrable darkness, we must find the courage slumbering within us -- even when peering into the face of death. I attended a lecture given by Elaine Newton, a professor at York University, about the significance of life-writing, in particular, the diary of Anne Frank. The lecture concluded the memorial week of the Shoah (Holocaust).

Her talk was riveting. She said people have trouble understanding what it means when millions of people perish. We cannot identify with the millions of bodies fed to the hungry

crematoria, hurled into the bottomless pits, ravaged by typhus. It is almost unfathomable. Yet when one person dies, the event does not stagger the imagination. Seeing the photograph of Anne Frank, printed on the cover of her diary, puts a human face on suffering. We can identify with her.

Those who died in the Shoah, those who survived the onslaught and those children who walk the earth in an eternal night, shall never be forgotten, at least by me.

Each person who walked into the gas chamber or died on the squalid streets of the ghetto, did so as a human being. Even if those people's names go unrecorded, they shall always remain of Blessed Memory. Likewise, the moments which compose the lives of abuse survivors serve as a testimonial to their bravery. Even if they are nameless, even if we never read about their experiences, they deserve compassion and empathy. Anyone who triumphs in the face of such torment deserves accommodation for their bitter internment.

Yet one cannot measure suffering, one experiences it. Comparing one person's torments to another invalidates both. My experience of abuse might starkly differ from yours. I can identify or empathize with yours. Similarly, a prison does not differ much from an abusive family -- save for the bars.

Those who torture us forget their dignity and a part of them dies every time they hit, scream or rape us. Getting well, retrieving our lost humanity, shows our captors, our abusers that

even their icy blasts cannot murder us. We are stronger than they. We can emerge from the killing fields of Cambodia.

An important event shaped the way I see the Holocaust and how I react to the accounts of survivors. Many children perished in the camps, shot and beaten alongside their parents. Today these children have counterparts who also live through a Calvary of their own, some even make it to Golgotha. Shot gun fire ruptures their dreams, shouts interrupt their meals, rapes and beatings obliterate bedtimes.

Dreadfully, the Holocaust is a modern day occurrence. Grasping what a child suffers through when raped or "accidentally" killed is difficult because we would rather remain deaf to their cries, ignore the casualties -- too painful a realization. The roots of today's affliction penetrate deeply to the very core of human experience. The Children's Memorial at the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem has something immensely valuable to tell.

Let us open our hearts and our ears. Let us tuck our children into beds -- not stained by sperm or by blood.

ΔΔΔΔ

For the first time in a long while, I cried. I guess the time of year, near Christmas; the fact that most of my friends went home to be with their families...I felt depressed, lonely. I recall that at the time of my parents' divorce, I felt the same sense of isolation. Looking back, I felt like a pariah, a dwarf as in Pär

Lagerkvist's novel of the same title. Yet when the dwarf murdered a cat, I identified with it -- murdered by my parents' indifference.

In a recent dream, I walked with two women in front of a huge parking garage and I met a dwarf. I threw a poisoned dart at its leg and killed it. A short time later, another dwarf appeared. One of the women plunged a sword through its rib cage, pinning it to the ground. She then took a flimsy dagger and sawed its head off, proceeding to dissect its head, letting the brains ooze out.

Although I do not know the exact cause of the dream, I believe a number of factors contributed to its creation inside of me. Many of the readings for the thesis; entering another world where suffering and pain rule, reminding me of my own childhood -- the losses I endured. As for the dwarves, they embodied the distorted image I had of myself -- worthless and vile.

Today at my counseling session, after working with the dream, I finally began to mourn the losses and I feel lighter, stronger. I can see a future, brighter, not as bleak. I see myself, not a little boy, crying in a corner with a runny nose, afraid of moving, fearing my father's hand, but a human being who survived, whose life glows with radiance.

I can understand what Holocaust survivors went through. I have empathy when others tell me about the horrors of their lives. I believe one's liberation or realization is a victory against a once unconquerable enemy.

With my friend Silvi, I went to the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. It was during my trip to Israel over the summer. This was a highlight of my trip. I also visited the Wailing Wall and Masada.

We walked along a narrow, tree-lined path to get to the Museum, entering the main courtyard through two iron gates, forged like the entrance to Auschwitz. The infamous slogan: Arbeit Macht Frei (Work is Liberation) did not appear above them. Anyone going there today, does not need to work for liberation; they deserved it.

We saw rooms filled with photographs, art work, sculptures and the Hall of Names, where the names of countless survivors remain, marked on paper, etched in memory. The most moving place in the Museum was the Children's Memorial. It was plain-looking on the outside, but the sight that greeted me on the inside filled me with terror, remorse and fear -- that such a cataclysm occurred. I never experienced so deep a loss.

In the foyer (cameras not permitted, let one's eyes serve and one's mind record), black and white photographs of children hung. We made our way into the sanctum, walking a narrow aisle, which made a circle around. On either side there was glass paneling; darkness, except for hundreds of real candles burning, among many other photographs. A woman's voice echoed names of children in Hebrew, while a man's spoke the names in English. I

felt an overwhelming sense of pain as though all the pain I ever felt in my life welled up, paralyzing me.

I squeezed my friend's hand in disbelief. It seemed almost dreamlike, to think we stood outside the glass. I felt we belong on the inside; our photographs ought to hang next to the others. Those candles burning...How could such a catastrophe occur? Innocent children slaughtered. Their blood mingling with filth; their ashes scattered. I do not know. Perhaps they would transcend the agony more easily, if they rode on bellows of wind.

Photographs hung of boys and girls, of all ages. Sickening to think that such madness claimed the lives of so many. What strikes me is how a similar madness plagues us today, filling us with greater dread. Haven't the children suffered enough? I wonder what those photographs would say, if the children could speak...I only heard silence midst the sobs of other people swirling their way around. I liked the darkness, it concealed the million tears shed, one for each child.

How many more must die or endure abuse? I do not have an answer. I hope there won't be a need for any other memorials. If so, the photographs would be in color and no place would be large enough to welcome the mourners.

△△△△

I thought about a memorial or more appropriately a testimonial that I could offer to all children, those who burned in the Shoah and to those who survived the anguish of childhood. My

testimonial consists of two poems. To paraphrase Kafka, we need to crack the frozen sea within us and let our emotions flow. For too long, we keep our emotions caged up, for too long we silence the voices of our children...

SPICES

The sky turned crimson
from the setting sun,
matching the face of Mother,
when she screamed.

Her voice raw like onion,
rage burning flesh,
eyes tearing...

The fowl in the oven,
a lump of charcoal --
smoking, choking me...
Ruined dinner again.
Damn it!
Wonder if I did this
at Auschwitz, if anyone
would notice...

Starvation.
What a multitude to feed,
not enough fowl,
must prepare something else...
The taste of human flesh,
needs salt and savory,
thyme, marjoram...

Not enough spices, must
improvise, a few ashes
oughtta do it.
No one will worry
about the presentation
of such a regal delight.

Plenty to go around,
few to stomach it.

HALF-SMILE

I see the old photograph,
crumpled and worn.
I carried it in my wallet,
until I couldn't bear its weight.
I placed it on my night-table
and the young face stares at
me.

I have no words to gladden
your glassy eyes or turn your
crumpled mouth into
a whole smile.

As I dress, I look at you,
remembering...
When you used to run after
my bicycle,
your shouts reaching me,
before your wiry legs.

I think about your eighth
birthday party,
you got chocolate cake all over
your red shirt.
You didn't care, you
had fun.

I miss you.
It wasn't your fault, Robby,
you had no idea, Dad had been
drinking.
He didn't mean to fire
the gun
and blow a hole through
your tiny skull.

Wherever you are,
you can eat
a whole cake if you
want.
No need to
dream...

I will put your
picture back into my

wallet to keep you safe.
I see your half-smile, but
I won't forget your grimacing.

Robby, I am OK...
no need to worry
about your brother.
I don't mind the weight...
you are lighter than lead.

△△△△

Aside from personal experiences, I came across several first-hand accounts of abuse survivors. They had a definite impact on me, adding a frightening degree of realism.

One woman, named Hannah (a pseudonym) talked about her mother: "She always told me it was my fault: I had an evil streak, I was jealous, I was the Devil's daughter. She took me to see a psychiatrist when I was thirteen years old, and at the end of the session he said, 'There's nothing wrong with her -- she's a normal girl.' After that she beat the living daylights out of me, saying it was just an act I'd put on. And how dare I? She even took me to church and tried to get me de-possessed by the priest. She thought I was possessed by the Devil." (Walker 1992, 45)

It is difficult to believe that such accounts are true. It is easier, however, to deny their existence or invalidate those people's experiences. Why? It forces us to look at aspects of ourselves that are better left in the shadows. Meanwhile, children must endure the madness of their parents, while we blind ourselves. Hannah's mother believed something was wrong with her daughter. She had the problem. De-possession. Hannah

was not possessed by the devil; rather, I could say that Hannah's mother was the one possessed, not by some demon, but by self-hatred.

When living through experiences that damage self-esteem, we learn to loath ourselves. If we do not have an opportunity to voice our fears, if no one is around to listen to us, then we bring our fears, our insecurities into adulthood. By then, hatred intoxicates us, acting out barbarously toward our children who become the musselmen or zombies of the horrific camps. They live a "provisional existence" (Utitz in Frankl 1986, 98), not knowing how long their internment shall last.

They try to behave like a prisoner evading death, acting in any way possible to avoid the degradation or brutality dished out by the adults around them. One woman named Jill (a pseudonym) remarked: "The good things were canceled out because I was null and void. Everything I did was criticized. It wasn't just the sexual abuse, it was actually a systematic...I got a sense of what the Holocaust was like. My father was Klaus Barbie. It was a systematic breakdown of the personality -- the mind, the person and the physical side. It was torture." (Walker 1992, 54)

Jill's father tortured her until she became completely indifferent to her surroundings, even oblivious to joy or happiness. Jill's words echo her urgency. She called her father Klaus Barbie. I understand what she means. Hers was a life of torture, robbed of her childhood like me. I wasn't sexually

abused, she was. The emotional effects of abuse are clear. I wonder about Jill. How she is doing today? If she has any children? If she is in therapy? I wonder if she will recover from her childhood – will I?

Jill speaks about her dying father: "When he was in fact dying and we were going to the hospital, I couldn't touch him. I could just manage to sort his pillows out. I didn't feel anything at his funeral. It was quite a joyous occasion." (Walker 1992, 87)

By not touching her father, Jill finally set up boundaries that she couldn't do when he abused her. In addition, a reversal of roles occurred: she became more powerful than him. Her father's funeral symbolized her freedom, a release from treachery. It is not crazy or insane to feel joyful at someone's funeral; survivors do not need to forgive their oppressors. Jill needs to mourn the loss, not so much of her father, but of the loving parent she never had.

Another case study that I read in Moira Walker's Surviving Secrets, moved me. Anna (a pseudonym) spoke of her father's cruelty. Her anguish remains in my memory. Anna's story: "'I used to sleep in the attic room. It was very cold in winter. It was the only room without heating. I wasn't allowed to use any electricity, so I couldn't have a fire and only a very dim light-bulb. If he was angry with me he'd take that out. They didn't feed me. I wasn't allowed to eat with the rest of the family. I was hardly allowed into any other rooms. I used to go for days

without being spoken to. He used to forbid my mother and the other children to speak to me.'" (Walker 1992, 29)

The emotional abuse that Anna survived is damnable. To think that a father could transform his daughter's life into a crucible for wretchedness is criminal. This account, among others, illustrates the debilitating realities of living with Daddy. Anna's father is a medical doctor. Perhaps a Hippocrates in the eyes of his patients, a Mengele in the eyes of Anna.

A client describes her dissociation: "'I'd see my father coming towards me, and I'd know what was going to happen. I'd just switch off, as if I wasn't there. Sometimes I'd get the sense of looking down on my body as my father abused me. I could see me, but I wasn't part of me.'" (Walker 1992, 182) When an individual is severely abused or if an individual faces a trauma, she or he will dissociate, a psychological defense against immanent death -- emotional or physical. Illustrating the split between body and mind, the former endures horrendous punishment, while the latter flees -- reflecting that imagination is not child's play.

Jane (a pseudonym) was sexually abused by her stepfather. Besides surviving the abuse, she was locked away in a psychiatric hospital. Her words: "I was very relieved when he died. I got summoned to his death-bed. He came around, and asked God to forgive him. I was still frightened of him even when he was just like a skeleton...I was on a locked ward. I used to try to kill

myself, and I'd cut myself. I was quite violent toward myself. I'm covered all over in scars. I thought if I changed the way I looked my stepfather wouldn't be interested in me." (Walker 1992, 11f.)

Jane's story is heart-wrenching. It demonstrates the extent of emotional damage sexual abuse inflicts on a person's psyche, while alluding to Jane's psychological motivation behind her attempted suicides and self-injury (self-mutilation): to stop the abuse. Personally, I don't think Jane's wish is crazy. It embodies sanity.

This is one of the saddest stories I read. Jane's stepfather, on his death-bed, asked God to forgive him. I can only speculate. If he was abused as a child, how would he understand what love is? Perhaps in his final plea to God, he took some responsibility for his abusive acts and, maybe, he is entitled to salvation. Jane's stepfather is accountable for his behavior as an adult, but not for whatever occurred in his own childhood. Indeed, if one is abused as a child it is not permission or an excuse to abuse others.

What about Jane? He destroyed her life, assaulted her in unspeakable ways and yet he asks for forgiveness? A moral dilemma embodied in the Nuremberg trials faces us once again: is it in our capacity to judge or determine who deserves absolution? I am sure of one thing, however -- Jane still felt frightened when she saw her stepfather lying there vulnerably. Maybe he finally

understood what being defenseless is all about. Sadly, Jane learned this a long time ago and now ironically, her stepfather did too -- with the cost of his own life.

The horrendous nature of these survivors' words can make us indifferent to their plight. Their lives are too shocking, almost beyond our grasp. It is easy to forget the person and examine issues of abuse on a strictly social, objective level. There is no chance of becoming attached or affected. I am not deterred. I find comfort in their words. In a sense, I find myself.

△△△△

I included material from two interviews. The first is with Sylvia and the second with Gene, both friends of mine. I let each person tell me what they felt was important, asking questions, in order to clarify or to find out more about a particular event or experience. By listening to their words, I caught a glimpse of another world, where violence is the norm and survival a way of life.

Sylvia talked about many things. She recalled one incident, as a young child, of being attached to the porch with a child's harness. She remembers being terrified. If the men approached her from a nearby factory, she couldn't run or hide. Her parents tied her up for her own protection, so she wouldn't explore Bronson Street. Sylvia considers this experience abusive -- not OK. She also fears relationships, that is, she fears entrapment or being tied up emotionally -- stemming from her physical

constraint as a young child and proving that abuse inflicts scars which outlast childhood as the image of Satan outlasts the time of his inception.

△△△△

"I was only like four-and-a-half, five years old[...]my parents having a big fight one evening[...]coming out of the bedroom, it was nighttime[...]the lamp on, the stereo was on and my Mom was trying to stab my Dad and he was trying to hold her off[...]it's a big knife[...]I was scared that my Dad was going to get the knife[...]I really idolized my Dad a lot[...]sure I was going to get killed[...]afraid my Mom was going to get killed[...]struggling[...]somebody's gonna get it[...]as usual I tried to get in on the fight and stop them and I was yelled at to go back to my room[...]kept crying and screaming[...]Stop it! Stop it! Don't fight! Don't hurt Daddy! Don't hurt Mommy! [...]He was pinned against the wall[...]turned it around so my Mom was pinned against the wall[...]he was able to get the knife out of her hand[...]the knife was out of the way and my Mom was crying[...]someone backed away[...]resolved[...]All I remember is the imagery[...]and how it's affected me today[...]it triggers a fear of when I see someone hold a big knife a certain way[...]it makes me feel something in my chest[...]I wonder if they're going to turn on me[...]"

When I heard my friend's words (a second time), I felt repulsed that parents can act in such a primal, brutal way. Such a

violent display disturbed me deeply. My father never beat my mother. Sylvia is my friend and thinking that she survived such violence is almost unbelievable. Perhaps I lived a sheltered life. When I heard this, I didn't want to believe her. But I must. When something so horrendous confronts us, the first thing we want to do is ignore or deny its existence. Some monsters are not imaginary.

To say that I felt pity as my friend poured out her story is an understatement. She nearly died. Sylvia feared for her own life and the fear has never left. Imagine a five year old stabbed to death...A horrific image. If I did not feel disturbed, could I call myself a human being? No. I will not become clinical or indifferent. I will feel for my friend. I will validate her feelings. I will acknowledge her suffering. The wounds remain fresh in her memory -- the blood not dried.

ΔΔΔΔ

'My mother is really fucked up[...]/That make's me mad because you don't want your parents being fucked up because you don't want to be fucked up[...]/'

To admit that our parents are wrong or imperfect is very difficult. We are programmed to love, not despise them. When growing older we sometimes face a paradox: hating people we once loved. This is normal. How can we blame our parents, railing against them, for acting the way they do? It is easier to blame ourselves, saying that we caused our parents to act out

against us. Many attempt to repress their anger so as not to risk further punishment from parents by expressing it. Who needs more guilt?

However, if our parents are screwed up, it means we are OK. Sylvia's words triggered something in me: I believe that my father is a bastard. I thought for the longest time that I was too, until my therapist helped me to rebuild my self-esteem and express myself. You know, I learned something out of all the pain -- that, damn it! I am valuable, that meaning exists. I can love and be loved. I hope Sylvia feels the same way. Moreover, letting the anger out, learning that once-forbidden feelings are acceptable and humanly normal, makes a difference -- turning the fence between madness and sanity into a mere wire.

ΔΔΔΔ

'He was like Mr. Passive in one moment[...]/eerie having girlfriends over[...]/he really screwed up the relationship[...]/he died[...]/so I guess that's a good thing[...]/I always thought he was the hero[...]/When I was twelve I began to always fight with my Dad, I started to hate him and I didn't know why[...]/There was an incident that I only become aware of[...]/when I was thirty-two, thirty-three years old: I actually had a dream that finally completed itself which was[...]/about incest with my Dad[...]/I woke one morning when I was twelve feeling really weird, feeling just out of my body[...]/really strange and I didn't know why[...]/the night before my parents had a fight and my parents

were not drinking[...]/been out to a party or something[...]/angry with each other and my Mom went off to bed[...]/and I was in my room[...]/I woke up the next day feeling very strange[...]/very emotional[...]/remembered in the middle of the night I had this weird dream I did not understand[...]/having my head covered by the blanket[...]/having my legs spread apart and having something shoved between my legs, inside of me[...]/I didn't cry, I just screamed[...]/I remember I can hear my Mom snoring in the distance[...]/I could hear my dad's voice[...]/of him having sex with me[...]/different sound, different kind of breathing[...]/I always thought of snoring, my Mom was snoring, but now I think about it[...]/it was my father[...]/In 1990, when I moved out of home again and got my own room[...]/very protective[...]/I felt safe and secure[...]/I began to have a series of dreams [...]/remembering things like[...]/muffled sounds, remembering having my head covered one night, another night I woke up like sweating[...]/a flash of a dream or a flash of an image of someone's body on top of mine[...]/where is this coming from? I don't go see these kind of movies, haven't been reading any kind of books like this[...]/where is the imagery coming from[...]/Everything was going well for me[...]/suddenly these dreams start[...]/for a couple of weeks I had constant dreams every night where I woke up nervous, afraid, suddenly I didn't want to see my Mom anymore at all, wanted to avoid her totally[...]/wanted to be alone and figure out what's going on[...]/one night I woke up in a real sweat and suddenly

remembered[...]/had a dream[...]/the dream was real[...]/knowing that I'd been raped[...]/at least once[...]/knowing that, not that I could see his face because my face was covered by the blanket, but I knew it was my Dad[...]/It freaked me out[...]/I didn't go to work for a week[...]/'cause the shock of this person that I idolized all my life, would do something like this to me[...]/The thought of an adult doing this to a child is to me, just horrific[...]/I couldn't believe it[...]/I didn't know who to talk to about this[...]/I couldn't talk to my Mom about it because it was her husband and maybe she wouldn't believe me[...]/My fear then was here I'm an adult, maybe she'll think I'm just trying to say this, just to be mean to her, and say something awful about her husband just because I was angry with her[...]/I just kept it in and phoned my friend Val in Toronto who is an art therapist[...]/Val confirmed basically what I told her[...]/the one thing that Val said that gave me the creeps was[...]/usually if you find out that if it happened once, it happened twice[...]/I hope not.'

After rereading Sylvia's description of her rape for a third time, I find myself in a state of shock, more appropriate, disbelief. I listened to my friend. Incest, I thought, was taboo. Something no one ever talked about, except in (auto)biographies or on TV and it happened to people -- out there. My friend's story struck a chord inside. I can understand her rage. How can an adult do such a heinous thing to an innocent child? It is not enough to say that the abuser also had a fucked up childhood -- it

is no excuse and certainly not permission to screw morality. I really don't know if my friend will completely recover from such a wound. She seems OK. She talked somewhat indifferently as though the incest happened to someone else. Perhaps she is healed and can talk without difficulty.

Some people even have the audacity to blame the child for what happened or adults think the child is lying about her or his sexual abuse. This raises a difficult issue, the controversy surrounding childhood fantasy. Of course, children fantasize about various things. It is not uncommon for them to invent imaginary people in their lives; however, I cannot stress this point enough, children who tell an adult about an abusive experience speak the truth. I believe children would not have the ability or the information, otherwise. Further, sexually abused children will withdraw, often acting out their experience with dolls -- touching their private parts or faking intercourse.

A divide exists in modern psychology, the raging controversy surrounding false memory syndrome: people remembering an abusive or traumatic experience many years later, usually during the course of therapy. Some professionals believe that their client's remembrance is valid; others feel the incident is a gross fantasy, created by the client to please or gain attention from the therapist.

Whether the abuse occurred or not, is to a certain extent irrelevant. The person says, "I was abused." The person needs

some type of help. If the therapist argues that the person is fantasizing, she or he may invalidate a real occurrence. If the therapist agrees unconditionally with the words of the client, she or he might perpetuate the client's dependency.

In any case, a drama unfolds in the client's psyche. I believe too much energy is expended on verifying the authenticity of the client's story. Better therapy emerges from clients spinning their own tales, not from tales fabricated by the therapist. The word is impartiality. The inner drama is one of complexity and a plethora of reasons might motivate the person to lie or tell the truth, for instance, testing the therapist to see if she or he will abandon the client -- a displacement of grief or anxiety over an absent parent.

Such a fear is logical considering the circumstances. I worried about my therapist abandoning me like my own father. If we are to come to some kind of consensus about false memory syndrome, I believe we need to visit the patient's or the subject's world (demonstrated in my own creative work) as an anthropologist visiting a new culture, leaving our preconceived ideas at the door of our own world. If someone says that a spirit lives in a tree, perhaps one does.

Another technology for dealing with incest and other atrocities is denial. What would happen if we listened to our children and believed them? Would the whole foundation of

society crumble? I think not. I think many children could be saved. If we want to stigmatize anyone, name the abusers.

My friend also told me about another incident that happened a few years earlier, when she was eight years old. Her sitter, a woman married with children, fondled her. Touching Sylvia's genitals, expecting Sylvia to do the same to her. Sylvia never told her parents. She feared they would not believe her and punish her for lying.

Sylvia's words illustrate the destruction of her mind and the violation of her body. After the sitter molested her, Sylvia wept or acted out in such a way as to prevent her parents from leaving or making them late. Even today, Sylvia fears having a PAP test (due to her incestuous experience). She has trouble with relationships and fears being left alone because she "is not sure what's going to happen."

Soul murder is an apt description of what Sylvia experienced during childhood. Healing is not easy for someone who endured such abuse. My friend struggles (as other survivors) with childhood memories and dreams, depicting a world torn apart by guilt, shame and fear -- a world that many people wish to leave in darkness.

I visited this world and survived. I think it's fair to say that many of our earlier lives depict a Hiroshima. Yet how big does the bomb have to be for us to define ourselves as survivors of abuse or for others to take notice? Such a question is almost

unanswerable on a general or social level. The decision lies with the individual, the person. For myself, I don't envision my earlier life as a nuclear holocaust, though I suffered. I view Sylvia's and Gene's lives as more indicative of a Nagasaki. However, I don't believe the bomb has to be that large to cause damage. I remember showering with my father as a young child. I stepped out and flushed the toilet, turning the warm water -- steaming hot. My father screamed at me. I ran out of the bathroom.

Some people feel they need to make up stories, telling others they were abused as children -- gaining sympathy and attention. These people are also mired by emotional pain. As for me, I don't advertise my survivor status -- it doesn't seem appropriate. I identify with others who are. Perhaps I fit the theory that survivors of abuse often devalue their experiences, dubbing them insignificant or dismissing their severity. Sometimes I come to terms with my abuse by displacing my emotions: grieving or getting angry when others talk to me about their experiences or through immersion in Holocaust literature.

I believe some people dismiss abusive experiences as trivial. Perhaps they don't want to believe that such atrocities are possible or that others behave with such cruelty. The incident with my father may not seem important or abusive to the reader, but it was for me. If I wanted understanding, even sympathy from friends, I could embellish the story with a beating. I don't have such desire -- others do. Tragically,

countless individuals join a cult of suffering -- turning their pain into an endless litany so they can receive from others what they sorely lacked as children: empathy, attention, admiration. For some, martyrdom becomes a way of life. They wear a crown of thorns -- the victim's fedora.

I am one of Styron's *walking wounded*. As time (the most venerable of healers) passes, I am dissolving my pain -- extinguishing the fiery stacks that filled my childhood with toxicity, with poison. I am in recovery.

We must not allow ourselves to become mirror images of Lot's wife -- turning into pillars of salt by looking at the garishness of our childhood. By talking about what happened, expressing our feelings, allowing our suffering to have meaning, then we can heal -- transforming the senseless brutality inflicted on our bodies and on our minds into an opportunity for growth by exclaiming: "If I can survive this, then I can survive anything!"

I really believe the key to healing for Sylvia and the countless other survivors is changing roles from victim to survivor. It is easy to say "I am a victim," saying "I am a survivor" is the first step to empowerment from helplessness. I learned that I am no longer a child, but an adult. I am learning to set down my ponderous burden without guilt, forging ahead at a pace unimaginable.

As survivors, we endured a tremendous amount of suffering and we deserve a better life, deserve a loving family, deserve fulfilling relationships. Transforming the murder of one's soul or mind into a birth means confronting the overwhelming pain, the oblivion of one's childhood. I know it is not easy, but life can be meaningful, filled with joyous experiences, not catastrophes. To find contentment, wholeness and love, we must see ourselves as settlers, not wanderers.

ΔΔΔΔ

'I also have really low self-esteem[...]I didn't like anyone ever seeing me[...]ashamed of my body, definitely ashamed of my body[...]ashamed if someone saw my body they would want to take it away or something, sexually or otherwise[...]after doing some, I think probably from the very beginning, talking about the counseling, the sex abuse, trying to get back my self-esteem, talking [to] good friends who've been really supportive, a lover who has not been ashamed of my body and made me feel like it mattered and it's OK, actually I think that's where most of it came from, the person saying, 'It doesn't matter what your body looks like, it's you who counts and it's what's in your mind that counts' which is really amazing, isn't it? That that person could say that to another individual that the body doesn't matter and reinforce[...]that your body is great, I like your toosh, whatever[...]so I began to like my body because someone I loved[...]said my body was OK[...]the neuro-linguistic

programming thing, feeling I am OK, I'm fine the way I am and that if I want to change my body[...]/it's because I have reasons for it[...]/health reasons or personal[...]/that's because my body is OK and if it's bad or something, it's OK and if people think it's wrong, well that's their opinion, then it's probably something they should keep to themselves[...]/A friend of mine saw a portrait of myself, showing one breast and my arm up and said, 'Wow, what a great breast!' And I always hated my breasts and yet, this person thinks it looks great[...]/made me feel like, yeah, all breasts no matter what they look like are OK[...]/breasts are beautiful no matter what shape or size they are[...]/it's a continuous acceptance of myself inside and out[...]/a transpersonal experience.'

Body image and self-esteem are vital issues that survivors of abuse must confront. Sylvia felt that she had low self-esteem, evident in the way she saw her body. She felt ashamed if anyone saw her naked; she feared that someone would take her body away -- realistic considering her abuse.

It is important that such a fear not be dismissed as trivial or considered insane. The fear says something about the anguish that survivors of abuse experience. Many face soul murder and are spiritually or emotionally dead; is it shocking that they also fear total, physical annihilation? Many have lived through atrocities that would make the bravest wince. Along with the emotional damage, many survivors have a death wish -- hoping

not to survive another torturous day. Thus, abuse has an impact on spirit and on flesh -- illustrating that violation of or violence against the body transforms the psyche into the Day After.

The feelings of shame, worthlessness and ugliness reflect the damage inflicted by all types of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional -- obliterating the person's self-worth. The expression: "Words hit hard as a fist" has relevance. If anything, survivors internalize the brutality around them -- if my dad rapes me, what does that say about me? An inner voice exclaims: "Slut!" If a parent assaults a child with words or a fist, forcing them to endure trials unfit for human or animal, a person might believe: "I am worthless. Nobody loves me."

A lover told Sylvia how beautiful her body was. Yet survivors of abuse have a difficult time listening to the good things people say about them because for so long, they only heard the bad. In my case, when my girlfriend tells me how wonderful I am or that she enjoys my company, I have trouble believing her. I look at her with surprise. Slowly I am getting over the fact that I am not some hideous apparition on a late night movie, but a person worthy of love and admiration.

I am happy for my friend because she now sees her body as a Venus -- depicted in her own art. She once hated her breasts and now she adores them. I saw the portrait and it struck me. My friend's face appeared serene; there was little body symmetry, one breast appeared larger than the other. However, Sylvia looked

beautiful, content, contrary to the destructive messages of her childhood.

Sylvia acknowledges her self-worth, slowly repairing the damage to her self-esteem. She seems happy with who she is, accepting her inner self, loving her body and spirit. I feel that Sylvia is growing, finding love where guilt and self-hate once festered. Over time, survivors who make the transition, who gradually change their attitudes about themselves, learning to see themselves as wonderful, not decrepit, as valuable not worthless -- can eventually escape from their dungeons, finding the radiance within.

ΔΔΔΔ

'Well I kind of wish my Mom wasn't still drinking the way she is 'cause every time I see her get drunk it reminds me of the night when my Dad did rape me because the fact that no one was there to protect me and my Mom wasn't capable of protecting me because she was drunk, stone drunk and sleeping. So when I see her drunk today, anyway[...]/anger[...]/God, you know Mom if you had been awake maybe I would never have been raped, the point is why say that to her and make her feel terrible, the fact that she wasn't awake and I was raped, I can't change that[...]/it will never go away, it will always be there until the day I die[...]/I can't change it, but I can't blame him, what he did was wrong[...]/he was drinking that night, he was on medication, the military had him on something and he shouldn't have mixed the

two and he did and other stuff in his life, stuff going on with my Mom, you know whatever[...]what he did was wrong, but he wasn't my father when that happened, he was someone who was not healthy, not well and a stranger, so it makes me angry that he broke the trust and that hurts and yet I can't change it.'

Sylvia's words echo her pain and anger, her hurt. As an adult, whenever she sees her mom drunk, it reopens the wound of that dreadful night when Sylvia's father raped her. She's angry that her drunken mother was unable to protect her like a decent parent. I feel that my friend is still upset with her mom for doing nothing, except drinking and sleeping. The event will never die from Sylvia's memory -- it lives.

It seems to me that Sylvia is less angry with her father than her mother. Perhaps she, like many of us, expect more from our mothers. We expect our mothers to be there for us and if they are not, we become angry. As children, our mothers seem to be primary caregivers, so when they screw up, it is a greater transgression than a father's.

Mothers are supposed to be perfect, according to societal norms. Yet they are flawed like the rest of us and prone to make mistakes. They are human. Sylvia's mother fucked up; so did her father. She is still alive, whereas her dad passed away over twenty years ago. When the memories of her incest surfaced, Sylvia's mother was the only living person at whom she could vent her anger.

I don't condemn Sylvia for blaming her mother. In my case, I directed much anger at mine which really stemmed from the wound inflicted by my absent father. Emotionally, I blamed her for sending him away, for him abandoning me -- for his leaving, even though it wasn't her fault. I have not seen him since I was eight years old, except two or three times at court appearances. Today, I realize that he is missing out on a lot -- getting to know his son.

People who survived incest and other forms of abuse can heal, although the events themselves are everlasting. Sylvia seems to forgive her father, saying the medication and booze turned him into a Mr. Hyde. Her anger remains because he violated her body and caused her unimaginable pain -- plastered or sober, makes no difference.

How can survivors face their abusers? If they are dead, people may feel cheated or frustrated. They have no outlet to express their unresolved anger. They might have other alternatives, such as a good friend or therapist. The same can be said for those whose abusers still live. Confronting them can be excruciating. They may deny the abuse or attempt to decimate the adult once again or, in rare instances, apologize utterly. However, unresolved anger is really pain or rejected love. These adults rail against their abusers by expressing their anger; otherwise, it can become cancerous. To heal in the face of such

adversity, as my friend is doing, takes great courage -- a meaningful accomplishment worthy of a Purple Heart.

How can my friend come to terms with the trauma? Indeed, the emotional scars are severe. Any survivor needs to know that what happened is not her or his fault; they need not feel guilty about it; as children they were unable to stop the abuse.

Further, feeling angry is normal and recognizing the hurt allows us to heal. In my opinion, forgiveness belongs to Christian saints and God. Survivors of abuse don't need to forgive their abusers. We don't need to carry the anger around either for all eternity. We need to channel our energy into our own healing by accepting ourselves, releasing the emotional chimeras inside by talking, screaming or crying in a constructive atmosphere (for example, with a therapist). I am not saying that it is easy to relinquish guilt or vent emotions, shut off long ago. Doing so requires a lot of time, energy and patience with ourselves.

For countless people, their pasts resemble a dark closet, inhabited by a real Boogie man or Boogie woman. Those who have been sexually, physically and emotionally abused know a great deal about suffering. Maybe one day they will know even more about healing. What can they do in the meantime, when their feelings surface, when nightmares fragment their sleep, when a parent still drinks?

I have no answer, maybe a few words of encouragement: Many of us lost a great deal and have suffered more than anyone

deserves. It is useless to pickle our brains with alcohol or anaesthetize the pain as our parents or relatives. Finding the path through despair, discovering happiness and purpose in life, means saying something to ourselves, that perhaps, no one ever did: "I love you."

ΔΔΔΔ

'Religion is in myself[...]/my idea of religion[...]/first of all I hate the word religion because it means something, an institution somewhere[...]/I like to believe that my being will be connected to some kind of gentle, giving, understanding, all-accepting environment[...]/I don't think the divine has to be a specific thing[...]/but I feel inside my heart a part of it[...]/I feel a total love and acceptance and it's something that comes from my chest, where my heart is and I feel kind of a nervousness, kind of a[...]/vibration, energy thing going through my whole body, but I know it comes from my heart and whether it's triggered, it's related to my brain or not I do not know, but it just feels right and radiates outward[...]/it's inside of me, so I think the divine or what is divine love is inside of me and I really believe that it's in all of us, but when you look at someone who is really[...]/depressed looking and morbid[...]/they have this negative cloud following them, the divine is in them, but they've just[...]/not opening to it because they're so hung up on the garbage they're dragging around and they're feeding themselves all that negativity[...]'

Sylvia's view of spirituality marks her growth or emergence from deep psychological trauma. She understands the word religion to signify something institutional. For her, spirituality must be personal. She sees herself connected to an environment where gentleness, compassion, acceptance and love dominate -- unlike her childhood environment where anguish, an insidious monarch reigned.

As I spoke with Sylvia about her spirituality, I sensed a calmness. She also accepted what happened to her and even believed what a friend told her: though your father raped you, some good came out of it all. I think my friend understands what is meant by self-transcendence. A mythical image springs to mind: the phoenix rising from the ashes. She suffered a tremendous amount. Out of all the misery, she found love. What does that say about the resilience of the human spirit? It is indestructible (and I trust Sylvia would agree with me).

We can become lost or stuck, our life sucked out by some monstrous creation of our childhood. Contrary to popular belief, a lifeless spirit is not dead, but in need of resuscitation. Sylvia implies that human beings are spirit and flesh; if we want to achieve wholeness, one way is not to look for some cosmic deity, but for the deity within -- emotions longing for expression.

Sure we lived through a hell. Many might think of the divine as something twisted or demonic, a reflection of ourselves: an inner construction wrought by years of abuse and torment,

countless assaults on fragile bodies, spirits and minds. Thus, healing, finding inner love and peace, requires engaging in activities (such as therapy) which allow us to enter regions once unknown -- hoping Virgil remembers the way.

With my friend Gene, I decided to conduct the interview differently. He writes creatively, using his childhood experiences for material. He showed me two, recent poems; when I read them several weeks ago, I asked Gene if I could interview him. He seemed eager to help me out. I included his poems plus a recorded dialogue.

My friend began therapy. He is severely wounded and often depressed. Whenever he smiles, I jokingly congratulate him. I try to be there for him, urging Gene to express his feelings -- many of which permeate his writings, making them startlingly real, even frightening.

The unconscious life of adult survivors requires a deeper exploration to illustrate the extent of damage inflicted by a childhood of intimidation, fear and violence. I also have personal reasons to include his poems here: I want to give him a chance to get published, but more important, a chance for his works to spark dialogue -- amplifying his cries into a roar.

ΔΔΔΔ

A HOT SUMMER NIGHT

i remember the night

*nearly ten years ago
quiet, until
the monster arose in him
borne through spirits and liqueurs
fed from the day's enjoyments
remember the sounds of the shotgun
shell entering the chamber
hidden between the bed and the wall
shivering...
the tears accompanied the cry
and the sobering voice of the woman
whom had given up all
shoot whimpered through the cries
the door was shut
brother came and left
sister was quiet in another room
wishing to be in another world
i knew the consequences
shoot! rose above the whimpering
seizures between the bed and the wall
epileptic convulsions never had before
couldn't make a sound
what to do but lie and fear
while they dueled in another room
oppressed, she was forced to be
across the bed where they had made love before,
was the blood from the precious soul
which had borne the siblings and me
while the other half lashed
and destroyed*

*i do remember
it was a hot summer night*

The poem's starkness originates from the fact that it recounts the story of a real incident, staining Gene's childhood. He is now twenty-three. The events of that horrible, summer night fill Gene with panic and rage. When I talked to him about it, he felt guilty about not helping his mother. I reassured him by saying that you could not stop the abuse or assuage your father's rage -- fueled by alcohol.

Gene's poem filled me with awe and consternation, awe at the intensity of his work and consternation that he lived through such an inferno. His wish "to be in another world" reflects a desire to dissociate, turn off his emotions and escape to a safe place. He convulsed violently, mortified by what would happen in the next room. Hearing shrieks, hearing your father loading a gun to blow your mother away...I cannot even fathom his pain, his fear. His mother lay across the bed stained with "the blood from the precious soul which had borne the siblings and me[.]" Gene alludes to the split inside his father's psyche -- with the dying of his soul came the birth of his rage.

At one time his parents made love, bringing life into the world and now the atrocious battle...How could his father act like that? How could a person's mind crack, letting such fury intoxicate the senses? Terrifying, to think that the human mind is capable of such multiplicity, bestiality. Yet his father pointed

a loaded rifle at his mother. He didn't shoot. Afterward, he called a family meeting, blaming and berating Gene, his brother and sister for the previous night's cataclysm.

I feel for my friend Gene. I am grateful that he survived such an insane display of affection. He needs to do a lot of processing and healing. Gene still sees his father occasionally. I wonder how he feels when he looks into the same face and hears the same voice which turned his childhood into a living nightmare?

To say that this poem moved me is an understatement. It starkly expresses reality -- a howling in a winter wood. I hope that Gene continues his quest to vanquish the wolf.

ΔΔΔΔ

I COULD HAVE BEEN THE SAVIOUR

*I could have been the saviour.
So the dream went on;
My father was poised above his destructive tools.
In His house,
the one He claimed to have built with His own hands.
What about my mother's help?
Where is my mother?*

*I could have been the saviour.
My father kneeled before me.
His back was to me.
I had the axe in hand,
with murderous potential.*

Where is she?

*I could have been the saviour.
I stepped outside
and hurled the axe into the family.
Turned and walked.
My mother beaten--
Her wretched soul.*

*I could have been the saviour.
He lay in vulnerability.
Catastrophic toys
He played with.
The irony--
For him to die by the tools
of His own annihilation.*

*I could have been the saviour.
My mother in hand,
we left His house
with axe perched in His soul.*

Gene based this poem on a dream and it has religious significance, saying something about his personal beliefs. The words "I could have been the saviour" was in my opinion, a clever subversion of a beneficent Christ: Gene saves his mother by murdering his father. He describes him prostrate with his back turned. Reflecting Gene's wish that his father acknowledge his sins by praying for forgiveness or more practically, becoming

aware of the abuse he inflicted or simply displaying ignorance or apathy.

Gene's action of hurling "the axe into the family" signifies his unresolved anger at his father for turning his home into a Vietnam and family members into P.O.W's. In addition, the axe can become a phallic symbol, a perversion, conveying that men are dangerous and the intent of sex is harm, not love.

He refers to his mother's soul as wretched, twisting the Judeo-Christian view of soul as the *candle of God* into something detested, dark -- using the soul for a test tube, filled with misery. The irony (evident in stanza four) consists of Gene's father dying by his hand-made tool.

Gene and his mother leave the house "with axe perched in His soul." This gruesome image reflects Gene's power to murder his father. The axe itself symbolizes a dissected soul -- his father's or his own. The allusion to father as "His, Him, He" invokes the significance or insignificance of God. Gene loathes his father. I suspect since he cannot vent his rage directly at the Satan of his childhood, he expressed it at God; embodying Him as the unloving Father, crucifying Him -- not on a cross, but sacrificing Him like a lamb with the sacred axe.

The use of religious imagery in this poem is profound. It depicts the wide variety of religious experience, while demonstrating the range for its expression. Gene seems ambivalent about God and this is understandable. In order to

worship a beneficent God, one needs to find God's glory within and around. If immersion in Eden is a parent who decimates, crushes the spirit in his (her) children, then who can blame Gene or anyone else for transforming God into something repugnant, abhorrent?

To be sure, we can look upon suffering as a divine gift and transform it into something meaningful from something destructive. Yet (and I repeat) the person must work out the anger, which is absolutely necessary for healing, while others also need the unconditional love of God -- a remedy for a traumatized childhood.

Gene's poem, at first glance, may appear blighted by despair, but actually it is an emotional testament. He walks away from the house of destruction and although many scars adorn his body and spirit, I can't help noticing, how many medals he carries with him.

ΔΔΔΔ

[Gene's Dream] 'I heard the door opening, but wasn't sure if anyone was actually there, so I heard noises and thought there was some type of activity going on/[...]so then I open my eyes and saw this floating head. It was black with short, white hair, really wavy, it had square, white eyes/[...]I asked 'Who was there?'[...]but, I got no response, I remember this head being right in front of me, then I felt the lower portion of my body, my legs being raised by something/[...]sort of a force that caused my legs to start rising, my shoulder blades, my neck and my head remained

pinned to the bed, but as the lower portion of my body rose, my chin began to sink into my chest. The whole time, I attempted yelling, but felt incapable of doing so and any cry for help would come out as a murmur[...] I remember feeling extremely frightened, so I must have been in a dream, so I woke myself up and when I did, I could still see the image of the head on the wall and I remember feeling, trying to blink my eyes very quickly to wake myself up as quickly as possible[...] It felt as though I had woken up twice before the image of the head disappeared. I remember the sensation I had in my legs, they were numb and tingling and I felt incapable of moving them. I guess as I woke up, I regained the movement of my legs, remember being awake for a couple of hours and still very frightened to go back to sleep. And I remember not being too sure, if it was a dream or reality. I guess later on that day, I had come to the conclusion that this was probably the most frightening dream of my adult life that I could remember. I still don't know where it originated from and why it happened."

[Stuart] "What associations come up for you?"

[Gene] "Actually, I think I've only had one association with the dream[...] I guess I saw the head as being the spirit of J's

[girlfriend] father and not sure why he would be visiting me[...] I really have a hard time making anything out of the dream[...] I may have had some feelings of guilt for some of my behaviors with J., such as sexual experiences, how I treat her as a person

within a relationship. I guess, sometimes I feel that I am not good enough for J., that perhaps, it was her father telling me to stay away. I guess the only other thing I can think of is that because sometimes I feel as though I am not good enough for J. I guess that's perhaps where that may have come from. I guess when I think of it, I look at J's upbringing in comparison to mine and it makes me feel inadequate on an emotional or relationship level. When I compare what she's had when she was growing up, a loving family and I compare it to my own, I see that she has a lot of stability and self-confidence and comfort in feeling strongly for someone, whereas for myself, I feel sometimes like I do not know how to behave or what the right emotions are. This has led to an overwhelming feeling of confusion and maybe even, not loneliness, but a feeling of being lost because many references or socialization of what a relationship is all about, I have gained through my family and personal experience. When I compare that to J. and her experiences, she has just been taught how to feel and how to handle it. For myself, any relationships that I've seen have always been tumultuous[...]/wrought with violence and sadness, fear and anger that have led to my uneasiness within a relationship. I want to love, I honestly feel I am loving, but I am not sure if I know how to do it. I guess because[...]/I am angry with these frustrations, I would like to discuss that. I am angry with myself because I am continuously having these images of having my heart broken and being alone and quite often, they

lead to certain jealousies within the relationship and a sense that I feel in order to be comfortable in a relationship I need to spend as much time as possible with J., but I am afraid of suffocating her and not allowing her space for personal growth and at the same time I feel as though my personal growth is being suppressed without being able to overcome these frustrations, due to the lack of inability to overcome these frustrations. I fear that my behaviors and my feelings are going to be the demise of this relationship. I guess I want this to work so much that I feel that I am reaching in all directions for the right answers. I want to be able to feel comfortable when I am not with J. and comfortable and content to know that I will see her soon. This might sound weird, but I don't feel as though she is part of my life, unless she is physically before me. I want to be able to feel or to know that when we are not together, we are still very much dominant members of each other's lives. I guess a lot of things that lead to these feelings are that I currently have a high need for affection and love, I guess. Rationally, I know she's thinking of me, but my feelings aren't so sure, they need constant reinforcement. And sometimes I feel, she doesn't realize this, I would like her to tell me that she needs me as much as I need her. Sometimes I'm very sensitive to her moods or to her voice intonation. If at one time she calls and is excited to speak to me, I feel very happy and secure, but if the next time I speak to her, she seems somewhat indifferent, I begin to fear the relationship

ending or that she doesn't love me. I guess, yeah because of that, I think maybe she is not aware of the fact that I really need to be felt needed. I've discussed this with her before, but I don't think that at that time, I knew exactly what I needed from her. Yeah, I need, I really need, to be needed. Maybe that's where a lot of these frustrations are coming from. She's so independent, sometimes I feel like she really doesn't need me, I am just a convenient person for her to have in her life. I need her to call me and tell me that she wants things from me, that she needs me to be there. Now I'm thinking about something, I haven't thought before, I think I should discuss this with her, I want to ask her if she really needs me in her life, I need her to tell me that she needs me. She always said that she will be there for me, but that doesn't tell me that she needs me[...]'

With Gene, I hit the tip of the iceberg. I feel there is much more going on beneath the surface. He revealed much about himself in the interview and in our conversations he readily talks about himself. Yet something is going on.

During one phone conversation, I asked him how therapy is going? He said that he left her office, feeling angry. He did not elaborate. A couple of nights ago, I called him; he sounded anxious. When I phoned him the following afternoon to confirm our plans, I asked Gene what was bothering him. He insinuated that he would tell me later. When I met Gene that night with his girlfriend, I asked him again. Gene said something to the effect,

"I intend to tell you, but another time. There are some things I don't like about myself..."

I can see that he is still in a lot of pain. Yet with his girlfriend (like the other night) he becomes a different person -- laughing and joking. It is wonderful to see him so excited. She is great herself and they make a terrific couple.

I hope Gene will be happy one day. I know he has the strength to face his suffering and work through his feelings. My motivation in helping Gene lies in the fact that no one was around to help me through the difficult times. I want to be there for him.

As his close friend and soon to be roommate, we will share a lot with each other. Ours will be a lifelong friendship. We will be happy for each other's achievements. As for the turbulent times, we will brave them together.

I include a poem which serves as a tribute to Gene. It captures my feelings toward him.

INTOXICATION

Through the streets
he walked,
no wrinkles etching
his parchment skin.
He carries a briefcase
full of half-read novels,
with yellowing paper.
Thinking about escape
into the countless pages;
immersing himself
in another story.

Words blur in
front of tired eyes
which soon behold a flower
with all its intricacies --
withering in the sheer wind.
He plucks it,
pulling bulb from stem.
He holds the withered head
in his hand, wondering
if his comes off so easily...
According to his drunken dad,
it would.

A girl rushes past,
her perfume lingering
behind.
Triggers thoughts of
his lover and confidante.
He walks home
through the park,
hoping to see her,
but she eludes him.
Even if he found her,
what gift does he hold,
to say how much he cares?
In his fist, the
remnants of a tiny
head and on his
heart, a canker.

Pus oozes.
He wants her to
cleanse his wounds.
Resurrecting the miserable
head in his hand
into the glorious flower
which finds even
in the chills of his fever --
a loving warmth.

TRANSCENDENCE

The narratives themselves are not autobiographical. I have not lived through such a Holocaust. Experiences in my life, readings, people I met, were amalgamated into these literary creations. I am affected by what I witnessed, read or heard; the characters remain with me -- alter egos displayed on paper.

ΔΔΔΔ

ONCE UPON DISCHARGE

She walked through the crowded food court in the plaza, a red kerchief pulled tightly around her head, tucked into the collar of a brown and white checked coat. A smile stretched across her pale face. She looked like one of Tevye's daughters. She lived in twentieth century America and the Muzak blaring over the loudspeaker was certainly no fiddle.

People glanced at her, thinking what a weirdo, dressed like that -- Raggedy Anne would be proud. But her story begins some years back, before her return to a society which preferred not to look upon her cherubic face.

Marsha Beckmann survived. Her whole childhood embodied a perilous excursion through Dante's Inferno. The souls writhing in agony didn't frighten her. Both her parents were addicts, her mother to work, her father to booze. Daddy beat her up because Mommy was conveniently absent. Although sometimes, if he was in particularly high spirits, he seduced her. Marsha enjoyed these

times because it hurt less than a hammering fist or the sting of leather.

Marsha's head covered by the blanket; her legs spread apart, something shoved inside -- crying, not screaming. Father having sex...his voice, another sound, a different kind of breathing. Grunting.

The sun poured into her room, waking her from a deep slumber, plus the noises coming from the bed next to hers. She sat up and yawned, walking over to the window, to see if anything changed while she slept. Repeating: "God! God! God! God!" With each word, her voice increased in pitch, until Marsha screamed, jarring the person next to her from a few extra winks, before the day's labors began.

She finished breakfast, returning to her room. She closed the door, staring out of the window. Down below some other residents, including the body that occupied the bed next to hers, gathered on the porch. They stood in a circle, passing a bottle around.

Sitting down on her bed, Marsha doodled on a piece of paper. How she longed to walk around, finding a forest somewhere, disappearing among the trees. As a child, she wanted to go to a day camp so badly, to play with other children. Her parents could never afford it. Mother said, "Don't worry, you'll have a much better time. You can go to the park and play in the sand...Maybe next year."

Running up to her room. Father walked in, seeing her crying. He held her tightly, so tightly. Fondling her chest, sticking a hand under her pants and underwear. He unzipped his, masturbating over her face, making her lick it off...Didn't know what to do, how to react. Remembering Father's words: "That's a good girl, Marsha. Don't worry, you will be very happy here."

She wasn't.

Marsha reread her tawdry novels, saving the Bible for sacred times, reading from its pages on Friday nights and Saturdays. That was the only religious article she possessed. Marsha once hung a mezuzah on her door frame. Someone stole it. She had no jewelry, although as a teenager, she wore a gold Magen David (Star of David) on a chain around her neck. Father pulled it off, beating her senseless. It happened when she accidentally walked in on him having sex with Bev, her older sister.

Weeping. He wounded her body, stealing her most prized possession. The next day, she visited with the Rabbi, lying about losing her Magen David (she told no one about her father's piety). The Rabbi said gently: "God loves you. He hears your prayers, even if you don't receive an answer. Remember that faith is in your heart, faith does not dangle around your neck. And you know, sometimes life is bitter, other times it is sweet -- a mixture of almonds and raisins."

She sat in the temple praying to God, who never answered her. At times, Marsha felt that God abandoned her. Never forgetting the words of her old Rabbi. In fact, her faith helped her survive the deserts in her life -- to find the oases.

She loved the Sabbath. On Saturdays, weather permitting, she ventured outside, walking in the park, not too far from the half-way house. Being close to nature allowed her to feel closer to God.

But the Sabbaths were not always times for celebration. Every Sabbath, her father would sing zemiros (sacred songs). If anyone else interrupted, he flew into a rage. One time, her brother, Nathan whispered. Father threw a decanter, shattering on impact -- wine staining the wallpaper, defiling blessed memory.

Other times, while singing, he sank into his chair defeated, weeping. Marsha almost felt sorry for him. Standing there, her statuesque form, a sharp contrast to the crumpled man at the head of the table.

She believed Daddy marred the Sabbath with his outpouring of emotion. What a horrendous joke! A family, fastened together one evening of the week. Its patriarch pretending everything is normal, pretending that he is pious, virtuous, when the reality of it all resembled God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorra.

After such an explosion or meltdown, she retreated to the sanctity of her own bedroom: "I feel like a Holocaust survivor.

Father is an SS. I have no chance for escape." She still read from Psalm 27: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

After the Sabbath, the monotony of the week began again. Somehow she felt that God only visited on the Sabbath, while the rest of the time resembled a night sea journey, devoid of God's light. What could she do then, what could she do now?

During these days, Marsha felt herself losing touch. Unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Replaying the memories in her head, wondering if her childhood actually happened or if it was some B-movie. At age sixteen, Marsha tried to kill herself.

She was admitted to the psychiatric ward of the general hospital and restrained there, tied to her mattress. The doctor spoke with her parents. Interned for three weeks, pumped up on drugs. A psychiatrist talked to her a total of two times, once upon admission, once upon discharge. She told him about what happened to her, but he didn't believe a word of it. The psychiatrist dismissed her story as paranoia and flatly told her, "The pills will fix you up nicely, so you can go home to your parents." Before Marsha answered, he walked away scribbling.

After a couple of months, she got up the courage to kill herself again; this time, they interned her for longer. In fact, the mental health system works similarly to the legal system: first

offenders receive reduced sentences, while repeat offenders, depending on the severity of the crime and suicide ranks way up their, receive stiffer penalties. Marsha was blessed -- she served one year.

During this time, she entered group therapy, an hour per week. The drugs knocked her out. She was hardly lucid enough to conduct a conversation, let alone discuss the inner workings of her psyche. Yet she told a social worker: "I see people dying all around me. I see you as an old woman with thinning hair. You are lying on a single bed, shoved in with many others in a brightly lit room. The stench is intolerable. Ranting -- no one hears anything you say. No one ever hears what I say. You die during the night and your words remain unheeded, except perhaps, by God."

"I see." said the social worker. "I'll speak to Dr. Grosvenor, about your case."

The other residents talked to Marsha occasionally -- they usually stayed away. Her gaze was, in a word, frightening. Looking innocent, azure eyes and blond hair made her appear angelic. People believed she had fallen and during certain times, Marsha felt the same way. When the Sabbath arrived, she took her place among the Seraphs.

She dozed on and off, shadows stretching along the walls. Yet the sun departed a couple of hours ago, shining in someone else's world.

Her mind wandered. Thinking about the Holocaust accounts she read. Marsha was a patient in a Nazi hospital -- lucky enough to meet Dr. Mengele. She was a twin. He injected chloroform into their brains. The twin died, she survived. The screams emanating from that hospital. Were people entombed there? Or were they some horrendous creation, dredged up from the abyss of human imagination?

Marsha identified with the survivors. She remembered reading Weisel's *Night*. Jews locked in a cattle car fighting for bread. The drive to hunger blanketing all other emotions. Marsha survived. That word defined her existence.

Other times she felt like a patient with terminal cancer, the proverbial six months to live. Couldn't eat any more, an IV drip entering her vein, reaching where Daddy's penis never could. At last, she experienced some pleasure, receiving nourishment -- even if it was chemical.

A skeleton -- too repulsive for Daddy; he would not like her. She reeked of shit, lying defenseless, wearing a diaper. She opened her mouth, the foul air escaping into the sterile environment.

Wanting her body preserved under glass, pickled in formaldehyde; her heart on display, so Daddy could see that even his wrath could not obliterate his daughter's love.

Thoughts unraveling. Ripping the paper, doodling on another. Tiny fragments littering the sheets and floor. She didn't care.

Thinking about Bev and Nathan. Both suffered terrible hardships, her sister survived more assaults on her body than Marsha could count, while her brother lived through beatings to make an SS officer wince. As for her mother, she never displayed her emotions. She tucked them away beneath her pink uniform, dishing out meat loaf with a free helping of kindness during her shifts. When she got home, she possessed a stained uniform and a pocket filled with change.

Marsha believed her mother was some actress, playing the role of devoted wife (and mother) with such expertise that she fooled the hospital staff and even herself. Making them all believe how devastated she was about her husband's immanent death. Marsha never knew how Mother truly felt, she could only guess. After all, this was the same woman who spent time on Friday afternoons polishing the silver candlesticks and covering the table with white linen, after her 6:00 AM to 2:00 PM shift. Making scrumptious dinners for a husband who viciously attacked her when the opportunity presented itself.

It made no sense to her, but maybe Mother felt that he would change. Is that so terrible? Maybe she saw the Sabbath as a chance for God to answer her prayers, hoping for her husband's redemption.

She couldn't even begin to understand her family, let alone herself. Who was Marsha Beckmann? She left her cell and wandered into the TV lounge, sitting down on a couch that

someone threw away. The supervisor of the home rescued it from a bitter end in a junkyard somewhere, giving it to these wretched people, so they could watch the black and white TV -- sitting in the lap of luxury, not on some hard floor.

Another body snored next to hers on the dilapidated couch. Thursday afternoon -- 28 hours to Sabbath. How would she survive? Reading a fantasy book, hoping to transcend. Wanting out of this urban Auschwitz -- no shower facilities.

Leafing through a magazine left on the table in the sitting room. Seeing an add for steak knives. It triggered the memory of childhood battle: The stereo blasting. Mama taking a kitchen knife, trying to stab Papa through the heart. Marsha yelled: "Stop it! Stop it! Don't fight! Don't hurt Papa! Don't hurt Mama!"

She saw models smiling, taut, beautiful bodies, luscious lips and drop-dead gorgeous faces, plastered all over the glossy pages. Marsha wanted to become them. In fact, she was a model for the downtrodden, modeling clothes, courtesy of the Salvation Army. You could bet that her fashions were not the rage in Paris or in New York.

She threw the magazine on the floor. The snoring man annoyed her. His nostrils quaked and his mouth opened at regular intervals, revealing missing or decaying teeth. Nicotine stained his fingers and he wore brown pants, three sizes too large and a red, flannel shirt. Marsha thought he looked like a lumberjack, but where did he keep his ax or chain-saw? Probably buried in

some deserted field, stained with the blood of his hapless victims.

She got up, returning to her room. The body occupied the bed near hers. She lay there, a chrysalis wrapped in her cocoon. Her head lay exposed on the pillow. Her tangled, gray hair covering her forehead, while her lips were parched. Deep wrinkles emanated from her eyes. She looked tired, almost dead. Marsha never spoke to her after she lumbered back to the room stone drunk a couple of weeks ago. Marsha remembered the body's words, even though she doesn't.

The body screamed at her. Marsha knelt and clasped her hands in supplication. The body raged. It spewed: "You Jewish pig. How dare you ask me about my life. It is my business, do you understand. I hate you, you fuckin' hoar. Go sleep with those men, who call on you... Fuck them all, every last one. Don't ever talk to me again, do you understand...Stay here, sniveling...Cry, cry, till you're blue in the face, jump off the building, drown your pretty, little head in the toilet or smear yourself with shit. I don't care, just leave me alone. Otherwise, I will take your precious Bible and rip it, tear it up. I know where you keep it, in your drawers, I will get it and rip it, tear it...So stay away from me..."

After hearing those words, she wanted the leviathan to swallow her, Sheol, for sure, would not be as horrible as this place, where Lilith reigned as Queen. For Marsha, this house was

the underworld. She grabbed her Bible, clutching it to her chest. Not letting that body steal it away. Never, never.

Finally standing up, eyes flaming, running into the hallway -- out into the night, holding her Bible, protecting it from the viscous monster than inhabited the room with her. She stayed out all night.

Returning in the morning, to find Medusa asleep.

Upon waking, the body spoke to Marsha who sat on her bed, still clutching the last remnant of her faith: "Busy night last night, eh?"

The body forgot about the whole incident, a blackness draped across Marsha's face and she just stared at her, eyes filled with blue fire.

She ate dinner in a hurry, soon going to sleep. She hated the evenings, except for the Sabbath that would arrive tomorrow night at sunset. Had trouble falling asleep. Penetrating laughter reached her ears from the TV room. Many of the residents stayed in tonight because of the below freezing temperatures. Marsha wrapped herself in her old coat and kerchief, under the sheets and blankets. Remembering her mother lighting the Sabbath candles, two glowing flames, keeping away the encroaching darkness. Listening to her mother's prayers floating down through the years...Marsha had no candlesticks. She welcomed the Sabbath with words -- things no one could take away.

In the morning, the place felt frigid, the supervisor obviously heated it with water, instead of kerosene. Marsha awoke, soon warming her hands around the piping hot mass -- what we call oatmeal. She ate and thought about the Sabbath, she felt such happiness, such joy, no one looking into her eyes would think that this girl knew the pain of an empty soul, a ravaged body.

She spent the whole day outside, walking through the streets and the park, looking at the people. They stared at her. Marsha was no freak -- a human being, a courageous woman who persevered through unimaginable hardship. God smiled on her.

She saw a few birds flying around and children making snow angels. Their mothers watching carefully, out of fear that some stranger would steal their children. Marsha walked and walked. She wanted to be outside, to be closer to God. Believing that the Shekinah did not enter her dwelling, after all, did God readily visit Hell?

She knew the Shekinah wafted over the treetops in the park and found refuge in the many homes. Marsha continued her excursion through Eden. She went into a synagogue and sat in the front pew, near the Arc, where the Torahs were kept. She felt close to God, in this place. She longed to touch the parchment scrolls, her hand gliding over the characters written by God's own finger. After an hour or so, Marsha departed when she heard other people entering the sanctum.

She hated when other people invaded her space. Yearning to be alone with God. Where could she go to be alone with her Lord, where could she show Him her adoration, her love? She wandered into the plaza and sat, drinking a cup of coffee. She praised God and repeated the Kiddush (prayer over wine). Her lips moved; she felt the presence of God fill her body.

Other people saw her lips moving, wondering what business she had in here, disturbing their conversations with her drama, causing them unnecessary pain to look upon her. They scowled at Marsha Beckmann, wishing that she never graced them with her presence. Noticing the crowd around, she felt their eyes preying on her innocence. She spoke to the men sitting at the table next to hers, "I don't know what you are staring at. Have you never witnessed the birth of a star?"

The two men stared at her and laughed. Wanting to murder them, but plastic knives are not sharp enough to do any real damage. She walked through the food court, emerging outside. Moving toward the river, gazing upon the sunlight reflecting off its smooth surface. She longed to touch the water, plunging herself into beauty...

She mused: "This river is real. Of my life, I can't be sure. I might as well have lived in Birkenau or die from typhus. I am just one mystery of a million, Divine mysteries. God is everywhere. I like to believe He dwells inside. Perhaps my father forgot to look inside and see the Divine flame burning there."

"I see the Chariot, gliding over the surface of the water. I want to join the Seraphs, hear the heavenly choruses resound in mine ears."

ΔΔΔΔ

THE SCREAMING ROOM

The door opened. No one was around. Sasha heard noises. A floating head appeared. Black with short, white hair and eyes.

"Who are you?"

Dead silence. His legs rising; shoulders, neck and head pinned; chin sinking into chest. Cannot scream, silenced.

Waking in the middle of the night; sweat drenching the sheets. The blasphemous icon of the head, painted on the wall. Blinking, wanting that thing to disappear. Sasha felt a tingling sensation in his legs. He could walk again -- even run. He never felt more frightened, believing that during his sleep, Satan possessed him.

He needed air. Sasha opened his bedroom window and peered outside, looking at the fabled man in the moon, who scowled down at him.

"Is the head real?" Sasha thought. He still saw its burning, white eyes...white eyes...eyes -- peering through him.

He walked into the bathroom. His reflection in the mirror: ghostly hair, ashen face, black lips and eyes no longer filled with wonder -- two empty windows, in desperate need of curtains.

Blood streaming from his nipples...Sasha roared. The cry erupted from the yawning pit within. No savior heard his cry.

He went back to bed, trying to sleep...Listening to the relentless ticking of the electric alarm clock. Morning, the harbinger of joy for most people filled him with a nauseous feeling. While the Night itself, brought no relief. Sasha waited for a dreamless sleep, none ever came. Instead, the Antichrist visited.

He wanted to blind himself, never to see the floating head. But it could appear under the blankets. It had terrible magic. He longed to become a worm, disappearing under the growing pile of laundry in the corner of his bedroom.

The dread head slumbered during waking hours, Sasha couldn't. He had to work and at night, when he desired rest and peace, the head awoke -- slowly pushing him toward the brink of insanity.

Sasha rose, walking into the bathroom, black circles under his eyes; sleepers in the corners -- the extent of his disfigurement. His hair was messy -- brown as the day before. Eyeballs, bloodshot by fear. He shaved mechanically, trying desperately to look his best. If only he could tattoo a permanent smile on his face, rubbing out the elastic mouth that he had from birth.

He wore an old, black jacket over a white shirt, in desperate need of ironing. If his face did not convey pain, then the remnants

of his wardrobe did. The library became a safe refuge. He filed efficiently; pushing the book cart ahead of him like a walker. He needed its support. Each day was an endless sentence. His prison had no bars, simply walls, streets and windows.

Five o'clock rolled around; Sasha dreaded going home alone. Often he worked overtime to delay the inevitable. By seven, there was no more work to be done. He left. Sasha pushed his way through all the people, congesting the subway station, onto a train. A towering fellow next to him spoke in rhymes. Sasha anxiously awaited his stop. He thought about jumping into the tracks. God knows, anything would be more comfortable than this.

Sasha climbed the stairs. A cigarette dangling from his mouth. At the second landing, a homeless woman sat, wearing a flowered dress, opening her toothless mouth. She tried to speak. Hoarse coughs became her words. She looked into his eyes and as they gazed into each other's faces, each one seemed to understand the other's anguish. Sasha tried giving her a crumpled five; the woman wouldn't take it. He grabbed her fist with the money and pushed gently. Neither said anything, they just stared, until he tore away, tears welling in his eyes.

The homeless woman's gaze followed him until he disappeared from her view. He walked past the memorial in the park, a memorial erected for the soldiers who perished in World War II. The Lady Victory heralding triumph on her bugle. Sasha felt no joy, just the dull ache of a rumbling stomach.

2 of/de 2

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
ANSI/ISO TEST CHART No. 2

He reluctantly turned away and ducked into a small, chain deli, not far from his apartment building.

After regular business hours, the place was deserted, except for the usual clientele: singles in need of sustenance, people with no homes to go to; others wanting a place to hide away, a place to drown their sorrows in a bottomless cup of coffee.

The green, plastic upholstery and cheap wooden chairs gave the place a grim atmosphere. The bright fluorescent tubes could deaden any one's sense of taste or sight. Sasha took a tray and ordered a small, smoked meat on rye, a side of fries and a medium Coke. He found a table near the window and ate quickly. Watching the people walk by. Many hurrying home to be with their families or dates for the night. Sasha despised Friday nights because it meant the weekend lay ahead, waiting to consume him.

The fries tasted greasy and the Coke wasn't nearly cold enough. Didn't really care all that much. It was just a dinner, a meal of no great importance. Who did he have to share his fries with or his misery? Another woman sat a table nearby, scribbling furiously with a black pen on white pages that she tore out of a spiral notebook. She smoked a cigarillo. The pungent aroma filled that section of the restaurant. He liked the smell, it reminded him of incense, the kind he burned in his dorm room. The woman wore short sleeves. Sasha couldn't help noticing all

the scars on each arm, a complicated lace work, made with the only tool capable of such precision -- a razor-blade.

"I really don't understand why a woman would cut her self up like that. Is anything so terrible, that a person would viciously attack their own body? You see all types here. I wonder what it would be like to be in her body. Maybe then the floating head would not find me..."

A terrible pallor masked Sasha's features -- a monstrous creation, hungering for love, gorging on food. He dropped, peering into the murky depths of a sewer. He wanted to throw himself down. Sasha believed the floating head would still find him down there too.

When he finally arrived home, he felt sick to his stomach. Cursing himself for eating anything at that hole in the wall. The meat went rancid. He vomited a couple of times, washing his face, scrubbing his armpits with a washcloth; longing to wash his toilet bowl mouth. He settled for brushing his teeth.

His misery began not in the twenty-third year of his life, but much earlier. He thirsted for human compassion, living in an emotional vacuum, a void. He had every reason in the world to feel dead inside. Cheated. Losing out on the love he so desperately needed; the anger welling-up, wanting to murder his father. Sasha couldn't understand why Daddy tormented him.

Perhaps a wish, to help his little son -- turning Sasha into a man like himself.

As a child, Sasha lived in a small town with his two sisters and parents. If anyone asked him about Daddy, he smiled like a good little boy. Inside, hurting, waiting for his father to notice him. He wanted to rake Daddy's face with his finger nails. Too bad, Sasha wasn't a girl.

Daddy locked him away in the attic because he accidentally spilled some juice. Shut up in the tower for two weeks. Sasha could go to school, but must come home immediately afterward -- he felt too frightened to disobey. Sasha recalled Daddy's barking: "Sasha, you stinking wretch. You dirty, sniveling shit. Lick up the juice! Off the floor. Now!"

Licking up the juice with his tongue. The attic became his home. On the night of the incident, Sasha's father, whom he named Mr. Prophet, removed the only source of light. He hated the dark. Luckily, a tiny window allowed the moonlight in, but he couldn't read by it or do anything except sleep.

Sasha longed for the Sandman, the floating head came in his place. It floated above him, its white hair like lightening in the surrounding shadows, its eyes penetrating. Wanting to run...The door remained locked. Heard footsteps outside, heard his parents' voices. Screamed. No one responded. The head chased him around the room, trying to consume him. Throat burning, tears flowing, heart bursting...

Wanted to die, calling out to Silvermane, a unicorr with a shining white pelt and silvery horn. Sasha heard his galloping. He jumped onto Silvermane's back and rode away into the Kingdom, where Satan and his children could not reach him.

Memories perforated Sasha's brain. "I wish Silvermane was here today. He meant more to me than anything. He galloped through the forest, the wind was no match for his speed. The smell of pine. We stopped in a beautiful clearing, made by a ring of weeping willows, the leafy branches like mossy hair. A maiden greeted us, stroking Silvermane's horn and pelt, patting me on the head. Her hands felt so soft. The three of us walked into the castle nearby, where musicians played. Then the violent roar of the ogre. Safe inside, drawbridge up, soldiers on duty...Silvermane was my savior. He died. Why am I still around?"

Sasha stretched out on his chaise, watching a little television -- the poor person's theater -- the Friday night line-up of sitcoms: *Family Matters*, *Boy Meets World*, *Step by Step* and *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper*. At ten, he turned to channel 2 and watched Greenaway's *Drowning by Numbers*. The three women drowned their husbands and finally the coroner. He hoped for the same courage as those women. He wished that he could have killed his father. Taking a knife, stabbing him or grabbing an ax, chopping through his wooden neck.

The next day, the first full day of the weekend, Sasha slept in late and went to the grocery store. He bought the usual staples: coffee, eggs, cheese, milk, bread and a devil's food cake mix. He stepped out of the store.

Sometimes, if the weather was warm, he walked in a nearby park. Sasha looked at the water, at the ducks flocking together. Their quacking was a complicated language, filled with joyous expressions, not painful litanies. What drake berated his young?

The sun danced on the snow, a million diamonds greeting his eyes. Remembering how Daddy shouted at him, when he forgot to set the alarm clock, missing the first class at school. Sasha could still see Daddy's face, the ripples of the unfrozen water, distorting his image -- never drowning his memory.

A couple walked by, arm in arm. He looked at the young lovers, wanting more than ever to be like them, meeting someone who would love him. Sasha thought out loud, "I am repulsive. Worthless. Who loves a piece of shit?"

As he spoke, Sasha realized that he addressed a huge tree, at least a hundred years old. Smiling, he realized the absurdity of his request. Surely the tree could understand his agony. It understood his feelings, enduring the heat waves and winter storms. He survived the torment of his childhood. The tree would live to see another spring, when leaves replenished its bare branches, surviving another autumn, when its crowning glory

turned into dazzling colors, disappearing with the first icy blast of winter frost.

Sasha could venture indoors when life grew unbearable, but the tree remained outside, a sentinel for all time. Who watched over him?

He walked a little further, finding an empty bench. Meanwhile, the sun cast its final gaze over the city for the day and Sasha continued sitting, even in the approaching darkness. Fire raged in the sky. Its heat did not compare with the seething emotions inside of him. He couldn't vomit his emotions like dinner last night or throw them to the heavens -- God didn't want them either.

"I wish I lost my mind, became one of those crazy people walking on the street. Mumbling to myself, screaming when I wanted to...Living off garbage and other people's generosity. Sometimes being a parasite has its advantages, feeding of its host, gorging itself on blood. I wouldn't have a care in the world. No one would expect anything from me. Let others worry about the welfare of my body, the salvation of my soul. I could go to one of those shelters and depend on those priestly people. I am tired of taking care of myself, let them take a turn. What a disgusting life. If I went stark, raving mad, all the better. Then I could show the world, who I really am. Let myself go, let myself live. Scaring the infidel who abused me. Show him the result of his cruelty. I am a monster."

Sasha walked out of the enveloping gloom of the park into the brightly lit street. Carrying the small bag of groceries, until he reached home -- a refuge from the bellicose world out there. His apartment was no attic. It offered the same protection. At night, since the appearance of the floating head, Sasha kept all the lights on, even the small one resting on his dresser. He couldn't sleep in pitch blackness, in case the demon from downstairs awoke -- frightening, tormenting him.

He opened the cupboard and fridge, putting the groceries away. If only Sasha could hide away his gruesome thoughts or consume them, digesting them like a bowl of cold cereal. He fell into his chair. Grabbing the remote, he flicked on the TV, muting the sound; the soft flickering images assaulted his white eyeballs. He often watched silent TV, watching the actors moving their lips so he could write their dialogue.

Too bad, he couldn't mute his father. Wanting to rewrite his past, altering the lines of his role, changing the dialogue of the twisted plays that composed his childhood. If only Sasha could invent a new story, create new characters to play his parents, his siblings? If he could cast himself as a superman, as a hero, he could show his father what metal he had at his disposal. What an arsenal, what power, Sasha could have -- if he was God.

As a child, after watching *The Exorcist* on TV, he thought a demon possessed his father. What other reason could Daddy have

to rebuke him with such fervor? For the next several weeks, he shut himself up in the attic, without being told. By disappearing, Sasha felt safe and besides, he would be unable to hear the roaring demon or feel its violent wrath.

After watching a few "silent" shows, he prepared a supper consisting of scrambled eggs with melted cheese and a glass of milk. He didn't feel like mixing the cake tonight. He ate dinner slowly, savoring every bite of egg and cheese, feeling the cold milk run down his gullet. He grabbed a chocolate pudding for desert, remembering his childhood lunches with the Flintstones and his favorite treat, chocolate pudding -- ambrosia for good children.

During one of these lunches, he spoke with his mother about a tree house that he desperately wanted for the backyard; his father walked in, patting him on the head. He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down beside him. He said, "Do you want some coffee, dear?"

Sasha responded, "No daddy. I don't want any coffee. Coffee is for big people. I am little."

His father responded sardonically, "No dear, it isn't just for big people." He grabbed Sasha, forcing him to sit on his lap, pouring the hot coffee into his mouth. Sasha gagged, spraying the table and him. He screamed: "You ungrateful piece of crap. Clean up this mess, right now! No dinner for you tonight."

Sasha's mother watched in dumb amazement, whenever her husband acted brutally, she stayed out of it. Sasha felt his mother was afraid, that she didn't protect him against Daddy. Sasha cleaned up the mess, running back to school. He never received the tree house of his dreams. Well, that is not exactly true. He received a real tree house, the attic room; it had wooden floors and no view of the neighborhood, it didn't smell like fresh air, it had the musty odor of dampness and decay.

Betty and Barney never visited him. Sasha always remembered the Rubbles and wished he lived with them: parents who cared about their son, Bam-Bam -- a father who adored his little boy...

Later on that evening, Sasha changed into his flannel pajamas and curled up in the chair. He raised the volume of the TV, since a movie was coming on shortly. Meanwhile, he flicked through the stations to find the right channel, catching the tail end of the *Billy Graham Crusade*, before the Saturday Night Movie. His words, "God bless you! Jesus loves you!" reverberated through Sasha's skull.

Sitting there mesmerized, breaking out in a cold sweat. At that moment, he became aware of his loneliness. He had no one, literally no one to talk to. Growing up, Daddy forbade the other children and his mother to speak to him; now he talked to a few people at work, having no real friends. Sasha believed that he had

nothing to offer anyone, except blackness and a crumbled Kleenex in his suit pocket. He felt afraid. Billy Graham's words shot into his very core. He formed the question that smoldered inside:
"Does God exist?"

Throughout his life, Sasha experienced fear, not love. He dreaded Mr. Prophet, who inflicted many bruises on his fragile psyche. He recalled going to Church with his family every Sunday; a menagerie of model citizens that Daddy displayed. They all prayed to God for forgiveness. Sasha prayed hardest of all. He hoped for deliverance from his burning desert -- none ever came.

He desperately wanted salvation and today sitting in his own living room, he had none. The movie of the week started: *Flatliners*, the story of medical students trying to cross the threshold between life and death. Riveting. Sasha watched the movie half-heartedly, but couldn't help thinking about God.

"What's the point of dying, if no one is there on the other side? Perhaps we just decay. I wonder what it feels like to decompose, to feel lower life forms burrow through your flesh? They would have quite a feast on me. At least I know, that if I see nothing, then the dreaded head could not appear before me. Who knows? Maybe he is the one who consumes me? Each white hair, a maggot?"

Sasha wanted God to heal his wounds, draping his body in rich vestments, cursing his father for accosting him and his mother, who smashed him with her indifference. God remained

silent. Sasha fell prostrate, praying and praying, while the haunting music of the film increased in tempo, marking the accelerating action. Sasha believed that he was not good enough -- even for God.

Reproaching himself continuously, until the whirring of his own thoughts made it impossible for him to hear the words of the plastic characters on TV: "I want desperately to be perfect, to be loved. I must cleanse my body of its impurities and scour my soul of its stains. I pollute my body with food, with liquid. I shall fast for a couple of days. God comes to those who wait, comes to those who purify their bodies. He shall not enter a sacrosanct temple, mine shall be luxurious, holier than holy. And if God is dead? Then it won't matter. I shall continue fasting, watching my body decay while I still live. Why deprive myself of such a pleasure?"

Sasha opened the medicine cabinet and popped a few tablets in his mouth. The valium took a while to take effect. He calmed down, his wired thoughts slowing into a continuous murmur -- watching the rest of the movie. Afterward, the news came on and the headlines struck him: More violence in Bosnia...Sasha switched channels, hoping to find a lifeline, something he could laugh with. Thank God, *Night Court* was on, a rerun, but so what? Sasha didn't mind. Ironically, he thought it resembled his life, the constant ruminations of his memories. The TV shows, at least, were humorous, whereas his life was not.

He remembered his eighth birthday. Daddy hugged him, giving him a beautiful stuffed unicorn that he carried around everywhere. He called it Silvermane. It was white; his horn, hoofs and mane were made from silver satin. Sasha never felt so happy before or again, hoping that the day would never end. He blew out his eight candles with one puff, wishing for a castle in the sky.

He departed from the world of *Night Court* , returning to this one. He went into his room, opening a drawer. Taking out his old diary, leafing through its pages. Sasha's diary, scrawled across the cover, in child's handwriting. How beautiful, he thought. The only thing in the whole world that belonged to him, other than his body. His mind belonged to Mr. Prophet, who injected it with hatred.

Turning on some music: Enya's *Watermark* CD. He wandered through his childhood once again, reliving some of the darkest moments. Sitting on the urine-stained mattress in the attic, which served as bed and chair. That night, he had no light bulb. He cried, hiding his face in Silvermane's white pelt, fearing the return of the floating head.

Mr. Prophet never liked tears. One time when Sasha cried, he smacked him across the face yelling brutally: "Tears are for the weak. Be strong, you disgusting worm."

Sasha heard his parents yelling in the darkness. Couldn't understand the words. Hearing leaden footsteps coming up to the

attic...Listening for the key in the lock. His father appeared. He screwed in the bulb...Sasha looked at him, an apparition -- fresh from a nightmare.

His face remained expressionless, puffing on his cigarette, its tip smoldering. Sasha hated his smoking, but said nothing. He stared at him. Without a word, he grabbed Silvermane out of Sasha's arms. He protested, but Daddy was too strong. He looked at the unicorn, a murderer studying his victim. Daddy took out a pocket knife and slit Silvermane's stomach open, reaching inside, pulling out the stuffing. He took the blade, severing the horn, throwing it at Sasha. Daddy remained silent. He grabbed hold of each leg and sliced through, dropping to the floor, no blood stains. He looked at the head, prying off the eyes. No optic nerves hanging...

Mr. Prophet saw his son lying face down on the mattress. Sasha couldn't witness the murder of such a loving friend. Why didn't Daddy poke out his eyes also -- sparing him from seeing this massacre? Mr. Prophet said nothing, heard Sasha sobbing. He departed, smiling. He picked up one of Silvermane's legs and kept it -- reminding him of a victory over a helpless creature.

Maybe he pitied his only son; after all, he destroyed his favorite toy, he didn't attack him. Sasha looked at the remains of Silvermane. Taking its blind head, cradling it to his breast. He closed his eyes, wondering if his unicorn would still come when he called....

Sasha continued leafing through the pages, touching the delicate, onion sheets to verify their authenticity. He tortured himself with all these memories. He hated living, he wanted to die, but felt afraid. He didn't believe in a Heaven. He knew about Hell, his whole existence was proof. Sasha remembered that night, when he tried to enter Hell by attempting suicide:

"I downed several sleeping pills, but my mother found me, she called 9-1-1 and they resurrected me. After hospitalization or as I prefer to call it, internment, I felt depressed. I hated the hospital, the schedules, the appointments, the food...After that place, I felt like a time bomb ripped through me. They medicated me and I managed to get discharged from that awful facility, to come home..."

"I dreamed of escape and I found the inner strength to endure such torment. The clipped words from ward nurses, the quizzical looks from psychiatrists. I told one doctor that I wanted to believe in God...he suggested that I read Nietzsche, I did. Nietzsche wrote: God is dead. After reading that I felt more hopeless than ever. My hero died, I strangled him..."

Sasha fell into an exhausted slumber, his thoughts, slowly consuming him. Sunday arrived with a flourish of church bells, reverberating through the crisp, winter air. Sasha slept most of the day away, until a gnawing hunger woke him.

He still didn't have a God or if he did, he resembled Mr. Prophet. He recalled walking into a nearby church and listening to the peals of choirboys, singing the praises of the Holy Name. He watched as the congregation members walked to the altar to receive the sacred host and wine -- the body and blood of Christ. Sasha rushed out...Believing he was undeserving of such a gift, loathed in the sight of God.

The Antichrist became Sasha's Lord. His existence was an excruciating exercise in worshipping a malevolent God. He felt relief when his Lord, Mr. Prophet died three years ago. Sasha hoped there was no resurrection. Imagined Daddy's eyes smoking from the heat of the furnace, his skin blistering. Smelling his charred body...

Sasha longed for invisibility. People choose to see God or they shut their eyes to God like children at a horror movie. Sasha kept his open, even when the horror on the screen became unbearable, gruesome.

He hated looking at himself; his own body disgusted him. If he became invisible, then others couldn't look on him with loathing and he himself would be spared the awful sight of his own body.

He dressed, walking through the outdoor market. People scuttled around, buying fruits and vegetables, hunting for the best bargains. He melted into the crowd and felt somewhat

comfortable, feeling oblivious, lost in a sea of city-dwellers. His soul resembled Siberia and himself, a prisoner in some frozen gulag.

On his way through the market, he passed by a mission for the homeless and destitute; Sasha felt that he belonged there too. He was not poor, but his body, his spirit needed nourishment. He believed that God despised him: instead of a soul, he possessed a roach-infested room with its own artwork: the dreaded head.

Moving through the city streets, an apparition lost in the wilderness. He wanted love, he needed it. He felt no one loved him, not even God. How much longer could Sasha wait for salvation?

As he passed the hospital, he thought about that sinister psychiatrist who obliterated his hope into despair. "How dare he rob me of my faith? I wonder how many other patients he defiled with his caustic atheism..."

He entered a donut shop, ordering a coffee. Seeing a man nearby with a huge afro, wearing a black leather jacket. His eyes (for he faced him) appeared wild. He smoked one cigarette after another. Sasha tried not to look in the man's direction, instead his eyes searched the tabletop, looking for the solution to the riddle of his existence -- hidden between its molecules.

He barely clinged to life. Perhaps Sasha preferred to be born dead. How much pain he could have avoided, how much suffering!

On the way out, he picked up an alternative newspaper. Too far from home to walk, the cold increasing, Sasha took the bus. Reading the paper, he noticed a whole section dedicated to the New Age movement: people seeking to heal themselves and others.

One add caught his eye, it referred to an Alternative Health Center and it mentioned a screaming room: "The Center is for those people who seek an alternative to traditional medicine and psychiatry. The screaming room is a place where people can express their anger or frustration at their condition, to gain some control. You can book one session or many and the cost is reasonable. For further information or to book an appointment call 723-1099."

A feeling of excitement gripped Sasha's body. After so long, maybe, he could unearth some joy in a mind ravaged by sadness, fury and self-hate. Perhaps God too would carry him.

Thinking about the screaming room all night. First thing Monday, he called, making an appointment for the end of the week. That day and for the next few, Sasha worked feverishly, intoxicated by the anticipation of his experience in the screaming room. Perhaps he would have the strength to persevere, discovering that life is not so meaningless, that some paradise exists. Perhaps he will be fed, never enduring the rumbling pains of hunger again.

Friday morning approached; he experienced another sleepless night, but the adrenaline coursing through his body compensated. For the past week, Sasha lived on nothing but crackers and water. He wanted to fast entirely, but once again his craving body won against his tiring mind.

He took the bus over to the center; it looked rather ordinary, but miraculous events often occur in the most mundane of surroundings. The receptionist led him to one of the rooms. He sat down in the plush chair, looking at himself in the mirror.

"I can't believe what has happened to me. What did I do to deserve such a wretched life? If I scream, I may never stop...God, God -- where is God?"

Sasha's heart thundered with excitement and with fear. He opened the two top buttons of his shirt, removing his watch. Screaming in that tiny cubicle; his voice filling the entire space, resonating off the walls, echoing through every crevice of his body, until every pore bled.

He concentrated, breathing deeply. His body became lighter and lighter. Transcending, transforming from flesh into spirit. Sasha walked along a country road, toward a church. Upon entering, he saw a maiden standing ahead, wearing a flowing blue gown. Beside her, the unicorn stood. Its horn glinting silver.

Sasha approached the maiden and Silvermane. He stroked the back of his unicorn and turned to the maiden, kneeling before her. The virgin spoke to him, "You are very brave for coming, but

you cannot remain here. Remember that wherever you go, we shall protect you..."

He listened to the fading words of the virgin. Sasha groaned: "I am wallowing in mud, have I returned to my fetid body? I try moving. I can walk, with difficulty, crawling out -- in an underground cavern...Many tunnels around, must choose. I venture forward, reaching the end. A mirror hangs. I want to die.

"The dread head floats. Consume me, if you must. Open your mouth, so I may step in. Swallow me!"

"Inside its mouth. Biting into me, can't sever my limbs -- swallows me whole. Acid burning flesh. Eyes groping in darkness, a light. Spitting me out in a hospital room...Daddy's final resting place -- among the living. The dread head shrinks away into nothing. My father lies in bed, crying out to God to forgive him. I hear no answer. How can he? After everything he put me through. He is a devil."

"A devil, blast it. Didn't rest until he possessed me. Praying to God for deliverance, what about me? The dread head comes. It is my god. I inherited my father's idol. Is his violence and cruelty, his way of loving me?"

"It is so easy to hate him. The black head is a part of me, looking at it reminds me of my father, myself. I feel like the toothless woman, wearing that filthy dress. A terrible gnawing in my stomach, a huge, black head, that hungers for eternity. I won't take any money from anyone. I won't be anyone's problem. I

don't need anyone. I depend on myself. A wretched head. Stared at, cursed at...in need of love. I starve for love. This rage, this pain must stop. I need God's grace. My icy spirit must melt, someday."

"Wailing. A group of maenads, dressed in tattered rags charge at me. Their voices thundering: 'Stinking, vile creature, shunned by all...Stinking, vile creation, shunned by all...'

"I run out of the tunnel, crawling back into the slime. Burying my head, trying to drown myself in the mud. I want to live".

"In a flash, I am no longer in the mud, but climbing a mountain, braving excruciating cold and searing heat. I am myself again, not that pitiful woman, but me, Sasha. Is this earth or the outer regions of Hell? I get to the top and look around, a wonderful view greets me -- an illusion, soon to disappear? Will those Maenads return to strangle me, hanging my body from a tree branch over some pit? Wouldn't surprise me. Will the dread head float up from down below and chew through my legs?"

"The view remains: autumn colors surround me -- reds, greens, brilliant yellows...I am higher than any eagle and I listen, I hear chanting, no more screams."

"I raise my hands, praising God. Am I healed, transformed from flesh into spirit? Have I attained perfection? I ascend. Feeling my body sitting in a chair...A terrible suction. Plummeting, awaking, looking at myself in the mirror of that

cubicle. Crying. I believe that I can endure for a while longer, knowing that I have an eternity to play among the clouds."

Sasha felt very strange, rubbing his eyes in disbelief. He left the screaming room, returning home by taxi. He sat down on the bed, taking out his childhood journal, a horrific account. Reading each page again, sentencing each event to memory -- tearing the book to shreds.

He didn't need to remind himself of the torment anymore. He pulled out a fresh piece of paper, writing furiously about the day's events. One thing puzzled him: the transformation from a man into the homeless woman on the landing of the subway station. Sasha couldn't make any sense out of it...

The gaze between them was unlike anything, Sasha ever experienced before. In those eyes, he saw something of himself, a spark. He felt a longing and a tremendous amount of love for a total stranger. His tears expressed that love, but he didn't want to acknowledge that he was capable of such feeling. He held tightly to the grief of his childhood, eating off the familiar dish of pain, fearing the return of the floating head. He believed that the homeless woman and his father were fallen angels, both capable of ascension. While the floating head, a monster of Sasha's creation, embodied him -- a mouth longing for a kiss.

Sasha wept bitterly for a couple of hours. He couldn't come to terms with his experience in the screaming room. He longed to talk to someone, but who would listen? He left the house in a hurry, walking through the familiar streets of his neighborhood until he reached the Church. He stepped into a confessional.

"I am in desperate need of help. I have no one. God hates me."

The priest said gently, "God loves you. What troubles you my son?"

"I am possessed."

The priest remained silent for a few seconds, then said cautiously, "I will pray for your salvation."

"Prayer is futile. I have tried, fuck God!! You must exorcise me, get this demon out, before I defile God's sanctuary."

"There is no demon inside you. Your soul is wretched and I will help."

"I am possessed. You don't believe me. You think I am lying. Damn you!"

Sasha bolted from the confessional into the street. He knew a demon possessed him. He heard the voice of the priest again, a voice without a face. He realized that in the darkness, when the priest spoke, he saw the face of his father. What could he do to rid himself of such evil, such misery? Something deep inside forced him to confront the inevitable -- returning to the asylum.

Sasha winced at such a thought. He wasn't crazy like the other lunatics, he was special.

Sasha longed to cleanse himself. He ran into the local community center, a low brick building with long corridors and many signs. He made his way toward the pool. He jumped in with all his clothes. Opening his mouth, letting the chlorinated water disinfect his insides, filling his lungs.

It felt wonderful, going to burst, exploding into light. Suddenly the strong arms of the lifeguard lifted him up. He felt himself pulled clear of the water. Coughing, struggling on the cement floor around the pool. Faces peered down at him, some angelic, others dark. A crowd gathered. He cried out to Silvermane, who galloped on the plains of the wind.

His eyes closed, he heard chattering all around. He felt his body lifted on a stretcher, the smell of chlorine in his nostrils. He drifted off, picturing Silvermane's horn piercing the dread head, while his own rested on the breast of the virgin.

LEGIONS

Soldiers fell from the sky,
their uniforms damaged
beyond repair.
They walked over the
fields of battle.
The apparitions couldn't
find their homes --
corpses rendered
unrecognizable.

Better if the Bomb hit,
consuming spirit and corpse
in a cloud of plutonium.
The legions returned
anyway
looking for their
lost possessions.

One soldier found
a body --
couldn't fit in.
Tiny, young
lying face down.
Turned it over,
its arms severed,
no one to hug.
Lips blue with cold,
clothes washed in blood.
The soldier wept
and thought of
the other place...

A nursery where
children's laughter
masked the cries
of anguish --
emanating from a wounded
earth.

THE SURVIVOR

Gold teeth lay on the table. Suitcases yawned on the ground, contents spilled, clothes soiled. I saw those hunted creatures running, hiding. Machine gun fire ripping through the air -- pregnant with screams. She walked through the chaos, innocence herself. Wearing a white dress, bloodless; her golden hair cascading over shoulders, weakened by hunger; bones hollowed by disease and by despair.

Thinking what a world we live in, when children are caught, hung, screamed at, spit on and roasted over coals, live with hatred. It reopens wounds incurred over a lifetime. Can I ever understand human rapacity or our capability to commit acts which defy all thought, all boundary? Yet if one can love, any miracle is attainable.

I saw Schindler's List with my girlfriend, Deborah. We experienced the film's intensity: flames fanning our faces, melting bodies, children suffering. I soon became indifferent. What is more terrifying: violence or apathy? I think both reveal the detriment, the blackness of the human heart. I cried through the film. Watching people shot through the head, brains splattering, blood washing snow; a child squeezing through the work camp's toilet, dropping into a lake of shit -- his legacy. I can't explain the events. I feel them.

I never witnessed such a portrayal of the Holocaust. The film infuses the events with breath, with life. I am grateful that Schindler saved 1100 Jews from certain slaughter. I believe that God appeared in this Gethsemane through him.

The ring he received from the factory workers had an inscription from the Talmud: If one saves a life, one saves the whole world. These words fill me with hope: When people look into the faces of the tormented and find in theirs, a willingness to survive, then she or he understands that a soul is not an empty artillery shell, but a day without nightfall.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Broyard, Anatole. Intoxicated by my Illness: And Other Writings on Life and Death. Edited and compiled by Alexandra Broyard. With an introduction by Oliver Sacks. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

Capponi, Pat. Upstairs in the Crazy House: The Life of a Psychiatric Survivor. With an introduction by June Callwood. Toronto: Viking, 1992.

Eilenberg, Anna. Sisters in the Storm. The Holocaust Diaries. Lakewood, NJ: CIS Publishers, 1992.

Eisenberg, Mignon. "Exposing Prisoners to Logotherapy." International Forum for Logotherapy, 12 (Fall 1989): 89-94.

Esquivel, Laura. Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies. Translated by: Carol and Thomas Christensen. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Frankl, Viktor E. The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

_____. Man's Search for Meaning. New York: Washington Press, 1985.

_____. Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967.

_____. The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975.

_____. The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979.

_____. The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Application of Logotherapy. New York: Meridian, 1988.

Gibson, Margaret. The Butterfly Ward. New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1980.

_____. Sweet Poison. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1993.

Gil, Eliana. Outgrowing the Pain: A Book for and about Adults Abused as Children. New York: Dell Publishing, 1988.

Henrion, Rosemary. "Logotherapy for Former Prisoners." International Forum for Logotherapy, 12 (Fall 1989): 95-96.

Hutzell, Robert R. and Mary E. Jenkins. "The Use of a Logotherapy Technique in the Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder." Dissociation-Progress-in-the-Dissociative Disorders, 3 (June 1990): 88-93.

Kazimirski, Ann. Witness to Horror. Montreal: Devonshire Press, 1993.

Khatami, Manoochehr. "Logotherapy for Chronic Pain." International Forum for Logotherapy, 10 (Fall-Winter 1987): 85-91.

Lagerkvist, Pär. The Dwarf. Translated by Alexandra Dick. With an introduction by Quentin Crewe. London: Quartet Books Limited, 1986.

_____. The Sibyl. Translated by Naomi Walford. New York: Vintage Books, 1958.

Lantz, Jim. "The Use of Frankl's Concepts in Family Therapy." Journal of Independent Social Work, 2 (Winter 1987): 65-80.

Le Guin, Ursula. "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in The Wind's Twelve Quarters. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975.

Olive, Kevin W. "Meaning in Drug Treatment." International Forum for Logotherapy, 13 (Fall 1990): 131-132.

Renn, Dory. Emotional Abuse of the Child. San Diego: Libra Publishers, 1989.

Rockhill, Kathleen. "The Chaos of Subjectivity in the Ordered Halls of Academe" Popular Feminist Papers. 5 (April 1986): 1-25.

Styron, William. Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Walker, Moira. Surviving Secrets: The Experience of Abuse for the Child, the Adult and the Helper. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992.

Whitney, Phyllis A. Guide to Fiction Writing. Boston: The Writer Inc., 1982.

END

0 8 - 1 1 - 9 4

FIN