

## Engaging "Madness"

### Introduction

My intention for this little booklet is to be a companion booklet to *Before You Call for Help* in which I laid out the basic understanding I have of the major issues any of us face when trying to help a loved one caught in extreme mental distress. This includes basic considerations before one starts the healing journey. And then I included a brief synopsis of attachment theory and point back to my blog where it is more thoroughly covered. It truly provided me the roadmap to help my wife through all the worst issues related to her trauma and dissociation. And then I wrapped up the booklet with my understanding of dissociation after 15 years of my wife and I embracing it rather than running from it as so many are apt to do.

But in this booklet I want to be practical and give lots of personal examples that may help others who have only seen the popular wisdom of the day on mental distress put into practice. This so-called wisdom 'others' the person in mental distress. It belittles the experiences the person has. It readily removes the person's agency with noble sounding reasons. And it medicalizes human suffering into basic biology which not only hinders healing but tends to cause more trauma to the sufferers while 'hooking' so many people on the drugs that are pushed to 'fix mental illness'. These things my wife and I inadvertently avoided when we took the attachment approach, and I learned to deeply listen to her and allowed her to be my teacher of what did and didn't help her heal.

I won't give many links for further study of things I may mention in passing in *Engaging "Madness"*. If that is your desire, please avail yourself of [Before You Call for Help](#) as I have embedded many links there which will hopefully back up the things I say here.

Thanks,  
Sam Ruck

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### Toward a Working Philosophy

My wife is my one and only. She is not only the first woman I ever told, "I love you," but she is also the only woman with whom I've slept. When she heard those words from my lips, she knew it wouldn't be long until I proposed to her. Three months later we were married after I'd barely turned 21.

But as much as we loved each other, almost from the start things were a struggle for us, but because of my youth, I had no idea that these struggles were symptoms of the childhood trauma she had suffered and only superficially shared with me while we were dating. Neither of us understood the depths that trauma had altered who she was.

And so, we struggled along. Physical intimacy was always a landmine issue for us: me wanting more and her acquiescing at best. Since I'd been with no one else, I had nothing against which to judge things except cultural and religious caricatures. But in other areas of our relationship, we were better in tune than most other couples I knew. And so, our relationship was an odd dichotomy of deep intimacy outside the bedroom and yet unhappiness, tension, and friction inside it.

We welcomed a son into our family a few years later, and when he became of school age, all of us participated in his homeschooling experience. Homeschooling was an area where my wife's genius was on full display as she shepherded our son through a classical training of Latin, Greek, logic, rhetoric, and the Great Books Conversation to name a little. I participated where I could, teaching him the Koine Greek I had learned in college, writing curricula based on particular books she wanted to use, and embracing the better parts of the subculture that are associated with this choice. I was enriched in the process as well. Eventually, the family effort culminated today with his being on the verge of completing a PhD from an elite, Boston-area university.

In the midst of the happiness that I believe we all shared in our home-schooling experience, my wife and I were still struggling with tension and dissatisfaction in our marriage. I devoured marriage books and even wrote a long study on the subject based on Christian wisdom literature. But anytime I brought the subject up with my wife, she would just spit back that I was the one with the problem. And so, unable to work on anything but myself, I desperately tried to become the best husband I could possibly be until my wife could no longer blame me for all our marital woes. When she finally acknowledged the changes she had seen in me, she

agreed to see an alternative, unlicensed counselor to deal with her childhood trauma. That choice of counselor was largely driven by our religious background and our lack of insurance and relatively limited financial means as the lady offered her help as a ministry rather than a business to the few people she saw. She had no connection to the official mental health system, and I never understood until later how fortunate that was for us.

We attended her sessions together for a couple of months while I worked on a personal issue of my own. This allowed my wife time to become comfortable with the counselor. Shortly after I resolved it, my wife agreed to continue going on her own. However, when she got lost trying to find her way to the counselor's home office one week and found herself in a completely different place, it was suggested by her counselor that she might have dissociative identity disorder (d.i.d.) which is the new name for multiple personality disorder.

My wife came home and told me, "I might have d.i.d." For me, it was an eureka moment. For 20 years we had struggled against an unknown adversary. Now we had a name. Now we had a place to start! And so, my wife and I started to walk the healing path just like we had walked the home-schooling journey: together. We were both completely ignorant of mental health issues because there was no history of such in either of our families that we were aware. Thus, we began a time of experimentation those first few years as I tried to help her. I had to learn to listen and take her words at face value. I had to remove the filter that we all tend to apply to others' words and allow her to teach me what she was saying and experiencing.

I also began the habit of daily journaling about my personal struggles and her progress on our healing journey. Though I'd had a fairly benign childhood and was securely attached to my own mother, nothing prepared me for the struggles, deprivations, heartache...and unexpected moments of joy which would become part of our journey toward wholeness. Moreover, neither of our immediate families would join us on our journey because of their own personal trauma which became glaringly obvious to my wife and I as we walked our own healing journey and came to understand what mental trauma and health truly look like. But as I poured myself out in the pages of my journal, I slowly began the personal transformation that would be required for me to become the safe and affirming healing companion my wife needed in order to face the horrors she had buried for more than 4 decades.

It was also at the beginning of our healing journey that my wife made a momentous

request of me, the importance of which I would only learn years later. She asked me not to read anything about d.i.d. She liked how I was helping her, and as she met others with similar issues on internet forums and how they were dealing with those issues, she was afraid I would stop doing what I was doing with her, if I read how others were doing things.

Therefore, I honored that request for the first 2 or 3 years of our journey. I read nothing about d.i.d. or how to help heal it. Instead, I simply engaged my wife, desperate for a win/win solution for our marriage. I allowed her to teach me what did and didn't work for her. Later, after we had developed our own rhythm and method of doing things, I began to read elsewhere. That is when I realized we had not done things the prescribed way, and yet, very quickly it became apparent that she was vastly further along in the healing journey than many of her fellow sufferers.

As I continued to read the expert literature available online, I realized we had naturally used the major tenets of attachment theory as explained by John Bowlby. By trial and error and by embracing our human inclination to attach to one another, we had affirmed what Bowlby had declared decades before: that deep connection between ourselves was not only stabilizing for both of us but also healing. Hence, I began to study this theory more closely, as I hoped to better implement the major concepts of that theory into our healing journey as taught by him: primary attachment figure, safe haven, proximity maintenance, affect regulation and the internal working model.

And thus, though there were other factors in our lives that contributed to our healing journey, these are the ones that most directly affected my movement toward a working philosophy of my wife's mental health struggles and how I could become the best healing companion possible for her in them.

Here are two of the questions that I had to answer when we first started our journey as complete novices concerning mental health struggles as I tried to build my working philosophy of engaging my wife's mental distresses.

**1) What role would I take in the healing journey?** As I desperately wrote in my journal to answer this question, I figured there were at least 3 main options that I had to answer this question. Many spouses and significant others who have a loved one who struggles with severe mental health issues, simply cut and run. But my religious upbringing and those 'pesky' marriage vows rattled in my head anytime I

contemplated it.

I also remembered the one time my mother had playfully abandoned me at home as we prepared for a family outing at a local swimming lake. She took off in our VW van with the rest of my siblings while I ran screaming down our long country driveway for her to "Wait! Stop! Don't leave me!" I tried to cut her off the direction I thought she would go. But after starting to turn the van my direction, she drove off the other direction, and I crumpled to the ground screaming my heart out! Even though she came back for me a few minutes later, that experience had literally scarred me (don't worry I'm ok now!). The anguish I felt from that experience was still visceral in my being at the start of our healing journey. How could I do the same thing, but permanently, to my wife whom I still loved!?

Moreover, her own parents didn't want to help 'fix' the mess they created by their negligence of their own daughter during her childhood. *(Later my wife and I realized what a mess her parents were as we realized both were trauma victims in their own rights.)* And yet, this was NOT MY MESS! I had had no part in creating it! I had 'saved' myself for a fairytale marriage and had instead been thrown into struggles for 20 years. Then, when we started the healing journey, we experienced hellish chaos for the next 5 years! This isn't what anyone signs up for when they say those cute little wedding vows that say for 'better or for worse, in sickness and in health'. We all know we really just expect the better and healthier parts!

The second option I figured I could take was the 'this is your problem, deal with it' attitude. As I've been on all kinds of internet boards for survivors that seems to be the attitude of many family members and spouses and significant others. "Deal with your issues, and don't let them affect our relationship." It's a rare spouse or significant other that I would rub shoulders with on these boards or via my blog who wanted to learn and be part of the healing process. Moreover, that attitude just seems like a war of attrition and prolonging the agony of both partners. If I was going to stay in this marriage, then I sure as hell didn't want either of us to suffer from this any longer than necessary!

And I sometimes wonder if that attitude is part of the drive to embrace the current narrative about mental distress despites its overwhelming track record of failure. "Take this little pill, and everything will be better." It's a quick and easy way to try and get back to normalcy, at least for the family, spouses and loved ones who really don't want to do the hard work of walking with their loved ones who are

hurting and traumatized. I'm not blaming family, spouses and loved one: it's a cultural issue of fast-food, consumerism mentality, where we don't value the time and effort it takes for deep trauma healing to occur in the people we love.

And so, I chose door three: active involvement in the healing journey. I wanted to become the best man I could be to help facilitate my wife's healing, and I wanted to do anything my wife needed to help her healing. I vowed to do anything, absolutely anything, my wife needed me to do to find a win/win resolution to her childhood trauma and extreme dissociation and our struggling marriage.

I often thought of the Olympic athletes who deprive themselves of all kinds of normal experiences the rest of us get to enjoy. As well, these athletes willingly choose to endure all kinds of physical pain and stresses for the minute chance of someday standing on that Olympic podium with a medal around his or her neck. I vowed to do the same for the woman I love. I had to come to the place in which I realized staying with my wife meant not knowing if we'd ever have a healthy marriage. It meant accepting that this current dysfunction was our 'normal,' but I would vigorously do anything I could to change that normal for both of us just like those athletes.

Furthermore, I am someone with a deep religious upbringing. In fact, my college degree is a religious ministry one. But very little in my upbringing or training had prepared me for the path my wife and I would travel except the concept of sacrificial love that is supposed to be a hallmark of the Christian life; and yet, too often that hallmark of faith was missing in my own life and relationship with the woman I love. The Golden Rule of loving others like I want to be loved and sacrificially loving and preferring others over my own self had to become the standard against which I judged all the other rules and trappings of Christianity that I had been taught if we were going to survive this journey, together. As I encountered numerous crossroads where our needs for marital survival and healing diverged from some part of Christian culture and morality that had been elevated above its rightful place, I chose the standard of unconditional, self-sacrificing love and whatever it meant at that moment. Sometimes it was painful and distressing to release those things I had always thought of as inviolable in my life, but in doing so, it allowed me to change and grow and expand to become the man my wife needed me to be. And to be honest, I like who I am now better than I was at the start of this journey.

A second question I answered unknowingly, and yet, it is one that is of extreme

importance if one is going to engage a loved one's 'madness.'

## **2) What is the nature of extreme mental distress?**

Now, like I said, I didn't even know it was a question that needed answering until I began to frequent Mad in America's website about 7 years into our healing journey.

In our case, as I have already related, my wife is a genius, literally. She has taken multiple Mensa tests (*the group for really smart people*) and she always passes them. And I had watched her expertly guide our son's homeschooling education to the point that he said his professors for his master's degree were the first teachers he had encountered who were more difficult than his mother. As a result, he was the only student in his master's program that the school actively recruited back for its PhD program. And I have watched her nearly photographic memory on display our entire 33 years as my wife. I'm truly astounded by the intellect of the woman I married in many areas!

When I compare her and our son who has almost completed his PhD to my meager 4.Ogpa throughout high school and college, I jokingly refer to myself as the family idiot. So, it never even entered my mind to consider my wife 'crazy' or 'mad'. Hence the quotes in the title of this booklet. I realize people will argue that the two aren't the same, but I know my wife, and she ain't crazy!

Again, call me naïve, but since I didn't read anything those first couple of years of our healing journey, I didn't realize common wisdom denigrates the experiences of people swept into extreme mental distress and makes little attempt to find any meaning or value in much of what is experienced. Instead, too many in the mental health system still adhere to the now-discredited chemical imbalance theory of the brain and enrich the Big Pharma corporations and psychiatric doctors who dispense magic pills without any compunction about the serious and permanent side effects many of those drugs cause or the dismal results of such a methodology.

But in my ignorance as my wife and I began our journey through all the extreme things she experienced after 4 decades of bottling her childhood trauma up inside, I walked with her through them all without any expectations. As I watched her suffer from panic attacks, flashbacks, comatose episodes, mini seizures, extreme anxiety, mild self-injury, night terrors, body dysmorphia, ocd issues and more, I tried to find meaning and method in them as I desperately attempted to help her and alleviate the suffering she was experiencing. And little by little those phenomena began to make more sense as I had full access to her journey in a way that only family, spouses and significant others can have. And little by little, I

figured out how to help her through each of those experiences until today many of those issues are faint memories from the past.

I won't say a lot more at this point because I hope to give stories later how we discovered the solution to each one of those experiences, but we would never have found the solutions if we hadn't started at the point of walking together, engaging everything that came our way, and expecting to find meaning and method in it all. Sometimes it's true that our expectations either limit us or elevate us. I'm glad I never believed my wife to be crazy or mad, and so I expected these things she experienced to make sense and have a solution, if I was willing to search for it for the woman I love.

### **3) Validate and Turn**

The last topic I want to cover in *Towards a Working Philosophy* is my 2-step method of engaging my wife on this healing journey. Quite simply, I had to learn to validate whatever she was experiencing or feeling. In the section about 'delusions', I share about my tendency to argue with her at the beginning of our journey about things that she was experiencing which didn't line up with my view of reality. But it didn't take long for me to realize that was a dead end. I didn't convince her of my 'superior' position. She became more calcified in her position. And more importantly, it kept us disconnected from each other because **I refused to hear her and see her experience how she saw it!**

I'm reminded of the subcontinental Indian tale of the [6 blind men and the elephant](#):

*A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said, "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.*

Some versions of the parable have the men coming to blows because each man was absolutely certain that he was right, and his compatriots were wrong. What this

parable calls for is humility but also curiosity! Unless I was truly willing to enter into my wife's world and listen and try to see things from her perspective, we had no hope of walking this healing path together. If I had stayed adversarial and dismissive of her perceptions and feelings, it would have severely hampered the healing.

Now I didn't reject common knowledge about gravity or the earth rotating the sun in order to do this. But I had to learn to validate the perceptions and feelings of my wife in that moment even if they made absolutely no sense to me. She wanted to be heard! She needed to be heard because when the abuse happened during her childhood, her parents didn't hear her cries for help, and her abuser sure as hell didn't care about her objections. And so, my first lesson was to shut my 1 mouth and open both of my ears and listen to what my wife needed to tell me!

And as I learned to listen to and learn from her, I realized that so much of what she was experiencing was truly bound up in the past. So, it wasn't so much that she was 'wrong' or had 'a break from reality', but I had to change my perspective like in a picture. And once I adjusted my perspective to align with her, her perceptions and feelings came into focus and were more understandable and comprehensible to me!

But the second step is just as important. Someone who has experienced severe, childhood trauma develops a 'trauma paradigm' through which all of life is viewed. Consider a paradigm like one of those digital filters that you can use today in photography, and it will literally color the entire picture a certain color, or it will morph and twist the picture into a caricature of itself. So, everything my wife experienced, even 40 years after the abuse had stopped, when we first started our journey was viewed through that paradigm of childhood trauma and the fact that her parents were too broken and preoccupied with their own issues to see their beautiful daughter was being hurt and molested by the neighborhood boy.

So, after I had to learn to validate her feelings and perceptions which she shared with me, which were based upon her trauma of not being heard or protected by her parents, then I turned her to her new reality today: "Honey, I hear you. Honey, you aren't alone anymore. Honey, I'm happy to take care of you. Honey, I will protect you." And little by little as I validated her past and then turned her to her present

with me, she was slowly able to release the grip the past had on her and move forward in the present with me.

It's not quick. It's not easy. But it does work, and today even though we are still struggling to undo the dissociation, which is an entirely different beast, for the most part, my greater wife, all 8 girls, are in the present with me. Using these and the other things I hope to show in this booklet, I have slowly dismantled my wife's trauma paradigm, and it has, mostly, been replaced with one in which she is securely attached to me.

### Engaging "Psychosis"

In this next section I want to focus on what 'engaging' means to us and our healing journey. I have used the common terms that one would find if one were to do any search of the internet: madness, crazy, psychosis and delusions. And yet, if you were to go to my blog, you would rarely find any of those terms on it because I think they are neither valid nor helpful.

As I said before, after 20 years of marriage, just because my wife started to experience some extreme stuff, to put it mildly, those things didn't change my opinion of my intelligent wife: she wasn't crazy or mad. And, so, what about 'psychosis'? I hear that word thrown all around. It was ignorantly thrown toward my wife by a pastor with whom I shared just a little of our situation. But until I began to frequent the Mad in America website, I didn't realize just how big of a concern psychosis is to most people.

So, what is 'psychosis,' and why do I still reject its validity? If you do a quick search on the internet, it becomes readily apparent that the most basic understanding is psychosis is a condition of the mind when a person experiences a break with reality.

My first issue with the relative ease with which psychosis is used and thrown around is: a break from reality according to whom? Who gets to decide what is real and what isn't. Often perspective is a key ingredient to this question that is ignored. Our entire culture is wrapped up in a culture war that breaks my heart as I see both sides ripping our nation apart. Accusations by one side of the other side spewing misinformation and disinformation about covid, the elections, BLM, critical race theory, this, that and the other abound. And yet as I watch this war, it is apparent that so few people really quiet their internal arguments long enough to hear what the other side is saying and experiencing. Instead, we judge what s/he is saying according to our perspective and diminish their take on 'reality.' This isn't about justifying 'whataboutism' which is just a strawman to excuse our unwillingness to truly 'walk a mile in another persons' shoes' so we can understand what s/he is saying, feeling and experiencing.

Fortunately, I was so desperate to help my wife and to keep our marriage intact and not abandon the one and only woman I ever have loved that I listened to her! And as I did, all those things she was saying and experiencing slowly began to make sense to me. It was a matter of perspective and of my learning to see things from

her perspective and not judge them according to my own.

I said this booklet wouldn't be heavy in theory, but we need a little to understand how dissociation affects one's internal perspective. If you want more, read my other booklet, please.

Any trauma that causes significant fear or pain is sequestered (i.e., dissociated) (like an infectious covid patient) by the human mind/body system whether it is physical, emotional, mental or otherwise. If the person has the ability to self-heal and cope with the associated pain and/or fear from that trauma, then the sequester ends. But if the trauma and subsequent fear and pain is of such magnitude that outside help is required for healing to occur, the sequester will continue until such help is attained. A broken limb usually requires a doctor to set it and then physical therapy to restore full use of the limb once the break itself has healed. If the trauma includes severe mental or emotional fear/pain associated with it, then attachment theory teaches us that the person best equipped to help the victim is the primary attachment figure using the tools of proximity maintenance, safe haven, and affect regulation to help the person through the pain and fear.

If that is not done, the sequester (i.e., dissociation) will continue indefinitely as the human system tries to continue functioning as normally as possible. Unfortunately, as I hope to share later, each time a sequester occurs, personality traits and mental abilities seem to get scooped up in that sequestration as well. And thus, the person is left with diminishing capacity to deal with any future trauma.

Now, all that to say, as my wife began to heal, the various sequestrations she had experienced during her childhood were slowly lifted. I was engaged with one part of her while we were out on our weekly errands, and she made the comment how different everything looked than the last time she had been out. Just prior to that, I had found her hidden under a clothing rack at our local Macy's because she had become overwhelmed by her new surroundings. See, from her perspective, she was like Rip Van Winkle. When the trauma happened during her early childhood, she was put into a deep sleep (sequestered to minimize the pain and terror to the rest of the 'system'). And when she awoke, it was 40 years later! A lot had happened and changed in America from the late 1960's/early 1970's when this part of my wife had been put to 'sleep' until she awoke in the 2010's.

She was disoriented! And it was scary to her as she had lost everything familiar to her: her house, her parents, her toys, and now she was living with some strange man (me!). So, she hadn't lost touch with reality. Her reality had completely changed according to her perspective, and nothing looked familiar to her. She wasn't the only part of my wife to describe the dissociation in a similar manner. Once I proved myself to be a safe person for her, then I was positioned to help her reorient to the current circumstances in which she found herself. In other words, psychosis isn't a helpful term.

As my wife and I continued on the journey, I realized that other things she experienced, also fell into this category that I call the Rip Van Winkle effect: the natural disorientation that occurs after decades of deep sleep because of the forced sequestration various parts of my wife had experienced. Flashbacks and panic attacks seemed to be her mind's attempt to bring these long-sequestered memories of pain and fear back 'online' so to speak. But the process is messy at best. It is disorienting to the person as past trauma memories flood the person's system and overwhelm the current experiences.

Again, my wife wasn't psychotic. She was experiencing past memories and present circumstances simultaneously, and they overwhelmed her present reality and disoriented her. But as I learned to apply the attachment concepts I mentioned above, I could help her and strengthen her and sometimes literally carry her through the chaos until her mind could make sense of these renewed memories and put them in an acceptable position within her current, personal narrative.

My second issue with us using the term psychosis is it makes us lazy. If I say that my wife is psychotic, then what would be the point of making any attempt at understanding what she is experiencing? I can guilt free call her crazy, mad, or 'reality challenged' if I want to be charitable. If she's psychotic, I don't have to do any of the hard work to get inside her experience and figure out what's going on internally so that I can help her calm the chaos. It pains me anytime I hear someone use the term. I know most of us family, spouses and significant others aren't trying to be mean or cruel. We are just parroting the experts who ought to know better, but because we don't question the common wisdom, we repeat its failures.

I'm not going to whitewash this. Walking with my wife on this healing journey is the most exhausting thing I have ever done. I don't consider myself a saint or 'wonderful' as some have suggested. I have cursed all those damn experiences

from my past, which I related at the beginning of this booklet, which have prepared me to take this path. Part of me wants to quit! Part of me wants to be lazy! Part of me just wants to go and have a normal, healthy, easy relationship! I hate Valentine's Day that is again approaching and all the damn cards that speak of an easy, satisfying love that I've never known! But as I desperately wrote in my daily journal, 10,000 pages later, I know that the only way I can live with myself and be true to myself is to walk with the only woman I still love toward mutual healing...no matter how hard it is.

So, I truly do understand why we choose the easy path. I long for it myself. I have found so few companions to walk the one I'm on with me. It's lonely, and I'm treated like an ignorant buffoon everywhere I go, but I'm true to my authentic self no matter how much it hurts.

But lastly, lest I end on a down note, it's not all bad. No, I don't believe in psychosis. I know my wife isn't crazy or mad, and because I chose to walk with her through the hell of constant extreme states those first 5 years of our journey, we got to see some amazing things happen. I got to witness parts of her wake from their deep, forced sleep to a new life. I got to be there with each of them and help breathe life and stability into them. Despite the fear and trauma many of them had been forced to hold all those decades, they still had a magical perspective, a childlike innocence of life. As I helped each one release the fear and pain she had held for decades, I got to see each grow and connect to each other and lend the traits and abilities she controlled to my greater wife's personality as she became enriched and whole in a way neither of us had witnessed before. And I learned about myself along the way, too. Her experience taught me how to become healthier and whole, as well.

## Engaging "Delusions"

Well, what are "delusions"? Here's a basic definition from the internet: *an idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument, typically a symptom of mental disorder.* To me, this kind of sounds like a more specific way to define psychosis, and hence the quotation marks around the word. I never thought my wife was 'delusional' even after I became aware of its popular use, but that doesn't mean I didn't at times struggle with some of the things various parts of my wife believed as they left their forced sequestration and began to live outside with me. So let me share some experiences and see where I failed and where I succeeded in helping my wife through her more challenging perspectives.

Perhaps the most reality-challenged belief one part of my wife shared with me was her insistence that she had been a spy in Europe. What do I do with that kind of statement? Well, like most of us, I disputed it, over and over and over. But the more I disputed her claim, the more adamant she became in it! This was not working. And so, I finally came to the point at which I changed tactics. The next time she brought up her claim, I said honestly and without patronizing, 'Honey, will you please tell me about it sometime?' And that was the last she ever mentioned it.

I wrote about this on my blog. I still don't know what to make of that interaction and her insistence in the validity of that memory until the moment I validated her. Perhaps she just needed to be heard and validated. I honestly don't know, but what I do know is when I argued and disputed with her, it only escalated her claim, but when I validated her and her belief, it released her in some way that she has never brought it up again. You be the judge.

But there were lots of other 'delusions' my wife had, and most of those didn't resolve themselves so easily. And in the beginning of our journey, I tended to dispute them like most of us would. The same part of my wife, when she first came outside, claimed that her inside world was more real than the outside world. This seems to be common in the d.i.d. community. And for some reason I thought I could argue her out of that belief, but it only seemed to solidify it for her. And so, I had to learn to shut my mouth when she made these claims. Instead of arguing, I simply decided to live with her and enrich her life on the outside with me. I spent a couple of years doing all kinds of fun things with each part of my wife who joined us on the outside those first 5 years. It was almost like I imagine having grandchildren

would be. If I'd do it for a grandchild, why not my wife?

And you know what? I remember the day when that part of my wife, decided she liked the outside world better than her inside world. In fact, she told me she now wanted to stay outside permanently. And one by one, each part of my wife who joined us outside came to that same conclusion. They no longer wanted to be 'insiders' as they are called in the d.i.d. world. They wanted to make a life with me and our son on the outside. I had won the argument, by not arguing but by simply living with each part of my wife and making life with me and our son far more attractive than anything on the inside.

But what do I make of that belief that the inside world my wife experienced is more real than the outside? I see it as another example of the Rip Van Winkle effect. Imagine if you had been trapped inside your mind for 4 decades and only rarely did you get glimpses of the outside world. Which place would you think feels more real? Wouldn't that inside place feel more real to you if you suddenly found yourself on the outside? First you were forced inside. Now your brain has kicked you back outside. You didn't really get a choice in either decision and so coming to terms with the outside is just a prolonged orientation process, and I, as my wife's primary attachment figure am the one called to do it.

Here's another 'delusion.' When that same part of my greater wife first came out, she would longingly look at all the delightful little girl dresses and clothing and toys which are available today. It broke my heart to see her pine for something she never got as a child. Her parents had been fairly strapped for money most of her childhood and she rarely got big Christmases. And so, for the first 3 or 4 years, I lavished her with Barbie dolls and all the exquisite clothing that is made for them. We also bought Barbie and Ken's little brother and sister Tommy and Kelli and all the delightful things for them. For a couple years I played dolls with her. We amassed a huge cache of figurines and clothing, and we would spend a couple hours a few times a month changing all of them and setting them up in our bedroom so she could see them and be delighted by them. I also spent all my breaks at work playing Webkinz online with her as she created a delightful imaginary world with other children.

I came to view these childish longing as disappointments in my wife's unhappy childhood. Now, I could ignore them or tell her to grow up. But I decided the best way to deal with her disappointments was to satisfy them today the best I could.

And as I satisfied the various longings each part of my wife confided with me, little by little she was released from them. At this point it's been years since I've played dolls or done some of the delightful, childish things those parts of my wife longed for. Today all of them happily busy themselves with adult games and friends, and I firmly believe it is because I engaged the disorientation that left her feeling like an unhappy little girl that had lost her childhood in forced sequestration.

I came to view those deep longings like the proverbial monkey caught with its hand in the cookie jar, and its obsession with the cookies is stronger than its instinct for self-preservation. And so, I decided to indulge my wife's obsession. I decided to fill the obsession to overflowing, until that obsession was satisfied and quenched, and she could happily release those proverbial cookies and be released by the death grip the cookie jar had on her. And today she has moved on from so many of those obsessions created by the disorienting Rip Van Winkle effect. I almost miss some of them as we have yet to be blessed with any grandchildren, and I miss the delights that satisfying those obsessions brought to me as well.

But some 'delusions' can be dangerous. That same part of my wife one time told our son and me that she wanted to buy some store-bought fairy wings like little children wear so that she could jump off a building and fly! Our son and I freaked! This was a different aspect of the Rip Van Winkle effect. We discussed the 'age of alters' on my blog one time. And it was suggested by one of my readers that the age at which the sequestration occurs due to trauma is the age that becomes associated with that part of the trauma sufferer. But these sequestrations also 'lock in' childish perspectives including the inability to separate fantasy from reality. And so, to this part of my wife, she thought store-bought fairy wings would enable her to fly. Happily, as she spent more time outside with me and our son, she learned to differentiate between fantasy and reality as the normal maturation process was restarted.

The last 'delusion' I want to share is how the various parts of my wife relate to me. As I have repeatedly stated, the Rip Van Winkle effect cannot be overstated when dealing with the long-term effects of childhood trauma and dissociation. As the sequester is broken, the newly-released parts of my wife still operated from the perspective in which they were 'frozen' internally for over 4-5 decades; therefore, all 7 voices which joined us on the outside, view themselves as little girls since the overwhelming majority of my wife's trauma occurred during her

early childhood.

And so, as each part was released from sequester over the course of our healing journey, each one brought her perspective when the sequestration occurred with her; that of a little child. And each had no interest in being a wife to me. And so, I chose to relate to each part in a manner that felt most comfortable to her. I didn't demand that she accept my reality, that she was part of my wife. Instead, I entered her reality and chose to relate to her on that level. Most of the parts wanted to relate to me as a daddy figure they didn't have with their absentee father, but others were ambivalent, and I didn't force what wasn't desired. And as I related to each one and met her where she was and helped her release the pain and fear she had carried from the trauma including the lack of healthy parental figures during her childhood, it released her from the death grip she was in. And each one began to move forward. In fact, two of them quickly move forward and 'grew up' until they wanted to relate with me as girlfriends. And one part later wanted to become engaged as my fiancée.

### ***"Paranoia"***

I added this section to the 'delusion' section after originally publishing the booklet on my blog because I continue to hear others talk about their loved one's 'paranoia'. See the quotation marks? Let me explain.

What does the internet define paranoid as? It's being 'unreasonably or obsessively anxious, suspicious or mistrustful. As I said with 'psychosis,' it's all a matter of perspective, and when I took the time to understand why my wife was constantly afraid, she no longer seemed unreasonable. In fact, I would argue she was quite reasonable. However, the reasons were from the past trauma, and hence this is another instance of the Rip Van Winkle effect on full display.

It's important to put ourselves in the place of our loved one when the trauma was happening. For my wife, she was a toddler who was at the mercy of her neighborhood abuser. She had no ability to stop the abuse on her own, and in her mind, he kept her from the only other source of relief from the abuse that her parents represented with his threat to kill them all if she spoke to them of what he was doing.

So, she did the only thing her brain could conceive to mitigate the abuse: she became 'hyper vigilant' as she tried to decode all the sounds and events in her

immediate environment. Thus, every unexpected noise was a potential sign her abuser might be returning. Every unexpected event could be a prelude to more abuse. She tried to control her surroundings and the people in them in her desperation to minimize her abuser's ability to hurt her which, of course, was impossible and exhausting.

So, for the first 20 years of our marriage, my wife would wake me at least once a night and tell me she heard a 'noise' downstairs, and she wanted me to verify it wasn't a break in, sigh. There was no point in arguing: if I didn't do it, she would fret the rest of the night. And so, I trudged downstairs and checked things to satisfy her and then came back to bed with the 'all clear' message to her. And anytime I got out of bed to go to the restroom or got up early to go to work, no matter how quietly I tried to sneak out of the room, I would hear her gasp as she startled awake at the barely-audible sounds I would make as I left the room. She never slept soundly because her brain was on 'red alert' to detect any noise that could signal the next abusive episode.

But over the course of the last 15 years, as the traumatized parts of my greater wife were released from sequester and came outside to be with me, I was able to help each one deal with the past trauma and then accept her newfound safety with me (validate and turn). And as I did so, the hyper vigilance has slowly diminished, until today, I rarely make a trek downstairs to check for noises, and I can quietly sneak out of the room without hearing the familiar 'gasp'. It makes me smile with happiness as she is slowly lowering her defense-alert level.

And just like other so-called 'delusions,' if I argued or minimized her perspective and feelings, it only escalated her fear. She needed to be heard! She needed to have me care for her in a way her parents never did. And as I did so, it released her slowly from the death-grip the past had on her. Then she felt safe to have me hold the truth of her abuse so that she could rest in her newfound relationship with me and move into the present.

So, if your loved one is 'paranoid' ask him or her about it. Don't be distracted by 'outlandish' claims of aliens, secret societies, the 'CIA' or anything else. Remember, childhood is full of fantasy and dreams and childish perspectives, and sometimes the mist of the past event can make memories fuzzy. Focus on the immediate fear. Ask what would help him/her feel safer. Remind him/her that s/he isn't alone anymore, and you will help him/her be safe. Be careful not to do things that might

escalate the fear, but honest engagement shouldn't do that because now your loved one will know s/he has an ally and someone to watch his/her back in a way that probably never happened during the original abuse...and that is when real healing can begin to take place.

So, is my wife 'delusional'. I would argue not. Instead, I would argue that she is disoriented and suffering from the natural childhood inability to separate fantasy from reality after large parts of her personality were trapped in a forced sequestration caused by her trauma. And just like Rip Van Winkle, her perspective is from another time, her childhood, and as her primary attachment figure I am tasked with the duty and pleasure of orienting her to current circumstances today. I chose to walk with her where she is during the orientation process and grow with her as we find our way together rather than forcibly demanding that she accept today's reality before she is ready.

## Engaging Voices

If you notice, this is the first category that I haven't put in quotes. It's the first thing in our common wisdom about mental health distress that I have found to have validity. And yet, our common wisdom belittles this phenomenon and pathologizes it. Instead of embracing voices as something many of us naturally experience when properly understood, our culture twists and shrouds it in shame, fear, and ignorance.

I will admit I'm struggling with this section and which term to use. In my opinion 'voices' are basically an internal phenomenon, but if they are welcomed and made to feel safe like our son and I did, at least in our experience, every 'voice' wanted to externalize and join us in the outside world. I honestly can't say if that would be true of all people or not. But once the 'voice' is outside, it would technically be called an 'alter' or 'part' in dehumanizing terms, at least that is how all of my wife's 'alters' see these terms. So, I struggle because I don't want people to feel like, oh, this is about 'alters', my loved one only has voices, so this doesn't apply to us, But beyond that, as I mentioned all my wife's 'alters' find these terms offensive and dehumanizing and if you went onto my blog, I typically just use the names I have come to know each 'voice' by. So, in this section, you may see me switch around as I struggle to speak in terms that won't make people stop listening, but also won't confuse them if I start using the 8 personal names of the girls (voices) who comprise my greater wife.

So, what are 'voices' and how does one engage them in a way that is helpful and healing rather than in a way that increases the dysfunction of our loved ones? What do you believe about the 'voices' that some people hear? I remember wrestling with that question when my wife and I first started the journey. How I answered that question would determine how I engaged them or whether I engaged them at all.

I remember some of the options I considered. As I already said, common 'wisdom' typically views voices as inherently pathological. They are a sign of mental illness. They are a sign that the person is crazy or going mad. They are delusional, and not real in any sense. And they make people do scary and dangerous things that are uncontrollable. And because this is the prevailing 'wisdom', our entire mental health industry is centered on stamping out or controlling those voices. They are seen as forces to be actively opposed at worst or begrudgingly tolerated at best.

Another option is that these voices are real, but they are coming from an outside source. As someone with a deeply Christian background the idea that God or angels or even demons could be communicating with a person can't be dismissed out of hand. Neither could one dismiss the possibility that beings from outer space or other dimensions could be communicating with a person.

But my own experience of such things, (*despite being devoutly religious when we first began our healing journey and traveling through the charismatic and Pentecostal factions within Christianity which actively seek this kind of experience*), was completely nonexistent. I believe many who have chosen this option are fueling the rise in popularity of mysticism and shamanism and many other beliefs which see these voices as guides to deeper truths and meanings. I won't say these people are all deceived. I would honestly have loved to have experienced similar things when I followed Christian traditions that believed in them, but I never did. If the outside sources of voices are real, more power to the hearer, but based on my complete lack of success to experience such things after decades of trying, I decided it was unlikely the voices my wife was experiencing fell into this category.

So, I landed with the last option that I thought was most viable: that voices, no matter how they express themselves internally or externally, are just a part of that person's wonderfully complex and creative mind. And so, if these voices my wife had started to hear were part of her own mind, then they were a part of my greater wife that I wanted to engage especially as she urged me to do so. Much later in our journey, I believe this option has been fully vindicated as we learned about dissociation and how it works in her mind.

If you accept the picture that I have tried to paint of mental sequestration (or dissociation) in [Before You Call for Help](#), then voices easily fit into this picture. Let's go back to our analogy. All trauma that causes pain and fear is sequestered (i.e., dissociated) by our human mind/body systems no matter the nature of said trauma. If the person continues to experience trauma that includes a mental/emotional aspect, then the mind continues to try and find 'space' to sequester the trauma within its framework. And when the trauma is not quickly resolved with the help of someone trusted, preferably the primary attachment figure, then the sequestration become systemic and permanent unless someone comes along to later help undo it.

Now imagine a house that is filled with disconnected rooms, and in each room an occupant is trapped. If one occupant makes noises or speaks, another occupant in another room might be able to hear it, but that sound or voice could feel frightening, scary, foreign, friendly, etc., depending on each one involved in that limited interaction. In fact, if the occupants are put in these rooms at a young enough age, children have fertile imaginations, and the sky is literally the limit for what these noises and voices could represent to others trapped within the house but with no way to discover the source.

I could add layers and layers to this analogy as my wife and I have walked in her dissociation these last 15 years, but I'm afraid it would just become confusing. I hope that choice doesn't make this section and the rest of the booklet appear simplistic to my readers as I do have reasons for what I believe based on my experiences in the trenches with my wife on this journey. We have found that those voices were just lost parts and pieces of her greater self that were forced to sequester because of the unbearable pain and fear they held from the trauma she suffered as a little girl.

So, back to my wife's declaration: "I might have d.i.d., Honey..." Where do we go from there? Neither my wife nor I really knew what to do, but for whatever reason, she wanted me to try and engage the voices she started to hear as she attended counseling sessions. I couldn't hear them at this point as they were only internal. So, she would tell me what they said, and I would respond appropriately to them. It was a learning experience for both of us as she had to practice listening to them and then relay their messages or comments to me. We determined that the first voice seemed to be a little girl's. And thus, I began to do little-girl things which I thought would be fun and affirming to this voice, like play games and one time I did a 'girls party' in which I remember her delightedly putting makeup on my face even though she still was just inside my wife's head.

Eventually, as I proved myself to not only be a safe person but willing to engage each voice in areas that were important to it, one by one, over the course of 5 years, each voice moved to the outside to develop a personal relationship with me. At this point the 'voices' would more commonly be called alters but each one of them made it clear she wanted to be treated like a real girl. It was each one's desperate plea that I love her for herself and not because she was 'part of my wife.' She wanted to be seen as real and not treated as imaginary like common 'wisdom' suggested. One was so heartbroken when she read an article about

getting rid of 'smaller' alters like herself: her desperate plea was, "I don't want to die. Please don't make me go away!"

From the perspective of each of these 'alters' they are real, and they were distinct from my wife. And this is technically true which is why you may notice my use of the term 'greater wife' from time to time. Each one wanted to be valued for herself. And so, I treated each as she desired even though from my perspective, they were all part of my 'greater wife' that I was only now getting to know through each one of them. I never hid my perspective from them. When pressed, I would tell them, "I hope someday to marry each one of you girls." And yet, I didn't force my perspective on them. Instead, I engaged each girl where she was at. Each had been formed from the forced sequestration caused by the trauma. And so that was the paradigm each started with.

My first task was always to prove myself to be safe and attentive to each girl who came outside. Essentially, I was offering myself to become her 'primary attachment figure' as Bowlby outlined. Once each girl securely connected to me, (*symbolically affirmed by allowing me to 'marry her into the family' just like I had done my wife with a ring and all*), then she had the security she needed to deal with the trauma, fear, pain and whatever else bound her to the past. Like a good parent or romantic partner, I gave these girls the comfort and love and affirmation their own parents never gave them when the original trauma was occurring. The trauma and associated pain and fear anchored each one to the past. Once I helped each one process these things, the girls/alters/voices/parts were released to move forward. Then we could walk together toward a healthier paradigm that was no longer dominated by the past trauma.

Well, that sounds like my blog, and not how I wanted this booklet to be. So, here's an example of engaging my wife's angry voice since these kinds of voices are what drives so much of our cultural fear of this phenomenon.

In the second year of our journey two voices had already decided to externalize and come outside for me to love and care for them and build a life with them. At this point my wife and another girl, Amy, began to tell me about 'the General.' This voice was still inside and angry! It hated me for some reason. It said vile things about me that neither my wife nor Amy would relay to me.

So, what do you do when someone hates you? I asked my wife why I was hated so much by this voice, and right away my wife produced a list of a number of offenses

this voice accused me of. Now, I had a choice: would I defend myself or would I accept these accusations as valid even if I didn't fully agree with them? I was reminded of a quote that 'apologizing doesn't always mean you're wrong and the other person is right. It means you value your relationship more than your ego.' Moreover, to be honest, many of the accusations had merit. Remember, we'd had a stressful marriage for 20 years. I wasn't perfect no matter how hard I had tried to be a good husband. I had failed many times to live up to the Christian ideal of sacrificial love. And so, I began the process of repairing my relationship with this angry voice. Whatever 'the general' accused me of, I would first make sure I understood the extent of my offense to her, so that I could make full and unpatronizing apologies. I never gave 'my side of the story.' The first time I apologized to 'the general', my wife said the angry voice got quiet and didn't know what to do with my apology.

And so, for the next 6 months I worked through 'the general's' grievances she had against me. With each apology, her anger began to lessen. I never defended myself. And sometimes she accused me of things I knew I had never done, but I realized that the voice was venting anger from past trauma, too, and had no access to confront her abuser as he was long gone in the past without name or location to us. And so, I allowed myself to hold the anger she had for him as well. And little by little her anger was extinguished. No lies, this was an emotionally painful and draining process for me.

During this process of apologizing, the 'general' decided to come out and directly deal with me one night. The first time she did, I freaked out. I thought I was in *The Exorcist* movie as this sullen, gravelly-sounding, venom-filled voice suddenly sat in our bed. I said, "Who is this?" And she spat, "It's Me!" Once I calmed down and realized what was going on, I began to engage her. She had come out to inform me that a meltdown I was having at that moment was not helping my wife and Amy feel safe, sigh. And so, my feelings be damned, I tried to pull my crap together and get back in control of myself.

And that began the engagement I had with the 'general.' But one rule I had was I never, ever talked with these voices without a personal name. The 'general' refused to tell me her name, and so I gave her one. I made clear if she didn't like it, she could change it at any time, but I refused to call her 'hey you' or 'the general' which was a derogatory name my wife and Amy called her. I knew how important it had been to Amy and Sophia (the other voice to come outside the first

year) for me to engage them as 'real' and love each for herself. And so, I named 'the general' Allie, and we began an alliance in which I helped her protect and keep the others safe.

She is my wife's 'warrior' voice or 'defender' voice as it is called in the d.i.d. community. And I would regularly ask Allie how I could protect and care for the others better. I let Allie know, 'I will help you, if you let me. You aren't alone anymore.' And little by little, Allie my adversary, then my begrudging ally continued to let go of her anger, until I remember the day she accepted a little Webkinz 'love froggy' from me just like a delighted 8-year old girl would do as she wrapped it up in her arms and looked at me with absolute love and adoration in her eyes. It's a moment that still brings tears to my own eyes because that transformation was so hard for both of us to achieve.

But that was just the beginning of my wife's 'angry voice' transformation. When she accepted that gift from me, she wanted to change her name to something she preferred better to express her newfound freedom to be the little girl she had always really been. See, she had been forced to be the lonely warrior, desperately trying to protect the others since her own parents had been too preoccupied to protect their daughter from her neighborhood abuser. And Allie had no hope of winning against any adult abuser in the future other than to puff herself up like those little lizards that inflate their chests to appear larger than life to scare off would-be predators. And so 'the general' was a combination of bravado and the attempt to do an impossible job she couldn't do on her own. But as I saw past her projection of bravado and engaged her on her terms but with an eye toward a better relationship, slowly she moved there.

And so, Allie became Allielieu to express her newfound freedom to be a little girl. She still had to protect the others, but she no longer had the anger, and she also knew I was a trusted and loved ally at this point to help her protect the others. At that point she allowed me to 'marry her into the family'. But unlike some of the other voices, Allielieu, once released from the anger and trauma, began to grow and mature along with another voice who externalized a year later, K.A. These two quickly matured into 20-something Millennials. Allie was the first to ask to become my girlfriend, and so I gave her another ring to celebrate that moment, and Allie (Allielieu was too, little girlish now) sang about that ring and the fact that she was someone's girlfriend for weeks! Then a couple years later Allie expressed her desire to become engaged to me. And so, the voice that had once hated me and

everyone else with vitriol had now come full circle and she was literally the first one of the voices to want to marry me.

Today, Allie will complain that I 'made' her weak because she no longer is full of anger and vitriol, but I point out that those don't make someone strong. Instead, she has become a gracious social-justice warrior. She along with Amy, Ka'ryn and sometimes K.A. will make the most eloquent arguments on social media which Allie drives as the warrior of the group and the other 3 sweeten the arguments with grace and exacting logic.

You may ask: what about your wife? Well, like I said, my perspective is all these 'voices' were just lost parts of my greater wife. And unlike some significant others in the d.i.d. community, I never, ever, ever played these voices (*turned alters/girls*) against each other. I always did things out in the open (*I mean seriously, how do you hide something from someone who is lurking there in the same mind?*). And so, there was no jealousy between Ka'ryn my wife and Allie my fiancée and K.A. my girlfriend. Moreover, Allie, like all the other 'voices', brought personality traits and mental abilities to my wife that Ka'ryn had never experienced on her own as I have noted many places in my blog.

Here's a second example of engaging my wife's voices: Tina. My first external experience with this voice was her coming outside while we were driving in a car. Suddenly a new girl was sitting with me, but she was frantically trying to open the door so she could jump out of it while we were on the interstate highway going 70mph! Needless to say, this was another scary moment for me! Fortunately, she didn't seem to understand how to work the door handle, or it could have been disastrous.

Who the hell was that? Well, the other girls knew a little about Tina but not much. Unlike the rest of them, apparently Tina had been trapped in a lonely, dark place of their inside world, like a dark, dank basement that everyone avoids using unless absolutely necessary. No one else had access to her, and to make matters worse, she was mute. How the hell do I communicate with a mute 'voice'?

But Tina continued to come out from time to time, and every time she did, she acted like a frightened animal desperate to get out of my presence. But now that I knew she was there inside my wife's mind, I tried to engage her. I lived by our army's motto of leaving no soldier behind, and even though I had no idea how to engage a mute 'alter' I began to try. I bought her a pretty, Christmas snow globe

for her to enjoy when I wasn't around. And then I bought an over-sized coloring book, and I would let one of the other girls relate 'feelings' they got from Tina about how she would like the various pages to be colored. I did other things like write a daily email to each and every one of the girls to create an attachment point with each: I added Tina to the list even though I had yet to have any real engagement with her.

So how do you communicate with someone who is mute? And then we got a tiny miracle. We were in Washington, D.C. for the Cherry Blossom Festival, and I lit a prayer candle at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (*even though I'm not Catholic*) in desperation for a breakthrough. And that night, Tina revealed that she knew sign language. And so, I quickly learned the alphabet, and we began to communicate that way. Eventually, I helped Tina through her overwhelming fear of me. Sophia, another girl also began to communicate internally with Tina, and at some point, Tina began to talk to me using Sophia's voice. Those two were naturally drawn together and eventually would become inseparable.

Meanwhile, I was still working to securely attach Tina to myself. The day she felt safe enough to formalize her secure attachment with me, we were on our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary cruise to Alaska, and I bought her a beautiful ammolite ring at the port we were in.

Once she was securely attached to me, it enabled her with entrust to me the trauma she had held for 45 years. **(Trigger warning)** She had been the part of my wife to hold the memories of her abuser snapping the neck of a little kitten in front of her eyes and threatening to do the same to her if she told her parents about what he was doing to her. Little by little I drew the story out of her and showed her that she was safe now, that I was there to hear her cries for help and protect her in a way her parents never had. I spent many nights with her literally wrapped around my upper body like a little child does as I walked around the house and she buried her face in my neck and cried and wailed and flailed as she let out the horror of what that man threatened her with and had done to her.

But once it was out, she was no longer bound to her past and the cold, dark basement room that represented it. That was when we learned the importance of Bowlby's **internal working model**, and we began to connect all those disconnected rooms in my wife's mind in which my wife's voices had been sequestered. We moved Tina out of the basement and into an adjoining room with Sophia. Eventually they opened a wall between their two rooms and literally became inseparable when they

desired to be. We also eventually created an internal common area where all the girls (voices) could gather and be together. And we created a hallway that connected all the once-disconnected rooms.

If you are wondering how we transformed my wife's inner world, well her deep religious beliefs served us well. We simply prayed the transformations into existence as the girls were ready to restructure their trauma-bound, individual, internal rooms, into a more-healthy house where they could move freely about and interact act with each other. And that inner transformation also facilitated an external change: now all 7 of the 'voices' could be outside together if they wanted. And so, the 6 voices which had once been disconnected and 'strangers' to each other and my wife were now coalescing together as a group.

More and more they were learning to function as one group, one person. And our marriage was finally starting to become healthier. The two older girlfriends wanted to experiment in the bedroom in a way that my wife, honestly, didn't care to do. Again, I never did anything in secret because... how do you hide it especially when they are more and more connected internally? And there was no jealousy even in this because I always affirmed my love for each and every one of them and never would play favorites with them even though a number of the girls wanted me to do so!

So, after 7 years of chaos and bringing 6 voices outside to engage with me and securely attach to me which allowed them to internally connect to each other to varying degrees, I thought I saw the finish line for us. All the girls were actively working on their inside 'house' to become more and more connected. Tina and my wife Ka'ryn still didn't have full access to the rest of the house like the other 5 girls did, but they could talk and communicate in other ways.

And then the unexpected happened. One day another mute 'voice' showed up outside, and all our hopes for healthy normalcy slowly came crashing down. Unlike all the other voices, this last girl was completely unknown to all the others before she made her entrance outside. This was 7 years ago. The first 6 voices took 7 years to connect with me, heal from the trauma and pain and fear and largely connect with each other. They each worked hard and let me help them do so. But this last mute voice was totally different. There have been times over the last 7 years which I have dubbed The Great Impasse that my wife has begged us to stuff this last 'voice' back inside. All of us are so tired of this, and the last girl knows it. But that damn, Army motto always rattles in my head that we don't leave any

soldier behind...no matter how painful it may be. And so, I always affirm to the last girl that I love her, and we don't get rid of someone just because it's hard. And I defend her to the other girls as well.

And I'm fighting tears right now as I type because it's been really, really hard. This voice doesn't let me help her like the others. She's extremely independent even though she's just as needy, if not more than the others. On top of that this new girl only had control of short-term memories so it was like those movies in which the person had 40 first dates with the same person: Jenny couldn't remember her daily interactions with me at all for a couple of years. And so, each day was like starting fresh with her. How do you build on a relationship when she barely remembers you from one day to the next?

For the first year, Jenny was little more than like a ghost. The other girls and I would be watching tv. They'd go to the restroom, and then Jenny would return, silently, watching me. She'd sit by me but never close.

Eventually I learned to communicate with her. First via the sign-language alphabet I had learned for Tina, and then, as she healed, she eventually accessed Sophia's speaking voice for her own. Little by little we clawed our way into a relationship. Little by little I clawed my way with her into a secure attachment in which she finally asked me to 'marry her into the family' on another cruise. Yet, even then, she struggled to find release in the safety of that security as the other girls had because of her memory issues and the ambient fear, for lack of a better description, that has flooded all the girls since she came outside with us.

Jenny firmly believed all food made her throw up when she first joined us because as a child, she'd had the unpleasant task of eating anything her mom had prepared that the other girls hated. But Jenny began to sneak tastes of food when the others ate, and one day she announced to me that she wanted to learn to eat if I would buy her a tandem bike as a reward. And I never refuse to reward the girls, if we can afford it, if they are willing to do the hard work of healing and changing their trauma paradigm. So, I bought the bike for us to all enjoy, and Jenny worked diligently to overcome her fear of eating...and today, to my wife's chagrin, Jenny loves to eat!

But as I have poured myself into Jenny and she has started to heal these last 7 years, her memory has gotten better. It's still spotty even today, but I can tell she

can access general memories at times. Sometimes I'm astounded by things she can recall now. And, happily, we no longer have to start fresh each day in our relationship.

Jenny was also trapped in the 'basement' of my wife's internal house but far more deeply than even Tina had been. We are doing many different things to try and connect Jenny to the others. I taught them to 'internally email' each other for important things. Shellie and she somehow have read books together since the day Jenny came outside even though they have no conscious knowledge of it. And she and Shellie are beginning to talk internally, too. Jenny and Tina share a special 'language' together that I can only describe as 'tongues' to anyone who understands that term, but unfortunately, they are too scared to use it to connect, sigh. And Jenny is connected to Sophia by use of her speaking voice to talk with me, and I've observed how those two are beginning to drift closer and closer together in their mannerisms. And yet, even though we have created these numerous attachment points between me and Jenny and Jenny and the other girls, so far we haven't been able to break her free of whatever internal roadblock that keeps her from fully engaging the others so that they can all be outside together as well.

It's been a long 7 years. I have had very little adult companionship during that time because Jenny dominates all our private time at home. And there's no adult intimacy with my wife or girlfriend or fiancée. I wonder if we are on the right path with Jenny, and yet I just can't leave Jenny behind like the other girls have suggested at times. She's shared with me how lonely and scared she was those, nearly 5 decades she was trapped in the deepest recesses of the 'basement' of my wife's internal house. But I hurt and ache every single day, and I know my wife and all the other girls do as well. It never gets easier, and some days I can barely breathe because I have needs, too. So, I just shove them down and keep hoping like those Olympians that if I stay the course, we'll find a way to help Jenny connect to the others fully so we can all be together again.

So, engaging voices. I could write so much more but it would probably overwhelm you. Sometimes, it's hard not to be discouraged, especially these last 7 years. I vowed I would help my wife 100% recover from her early childhood trauma: it was a vow I had no idea the scope it would cover. And, again, there have been many happy things even with Jenny. She has come such a long way despite how painfully slow it has been. And despite her slow progress, I have seen my greater wife, all 8 girls,

begin to morph and integrate and connect on deeper levels that give me hope and make me so proud of all the work they have done to achieve it. All 8 of them, even though Jenny isn't fully connected with the others on the inside, are learning to move and act 'in sync' as one group, as one person. It truly is remarkable to see the 8 disparate, broken, and traumatized voices that once inhabited my wife's internal house become healthy, happy, and inseparably connected as a group, as one person.

One of my greatest joys, every time it happens (like yesterday) is when the little girls are outside with me, and they will raucously sing, slightly off key, with the radio. It always brings a smile to my face as I remember what scared, broken and even angry voices they each had once been when each first joined me on this healing journey. It makes all the pain and deprivation and tears worth it.

## Engaging Extreme States

In this last section I hope to address how I put the concepts of Bowlby's attachment theory into practice during all the extreme mental states which have happened as my wife 'tore off the scab' of her long-buried childhood trauma. Fifteen years later, I recognize most of the phenomena as various aspects associated with sequestering trauma i.e., dissociation. Again, if you want to read more about proximity maintenance, safe haven and affect regulation see my blog as I have described them more fully and also given links to various scholarly articles that helped me more-fully implement them on this healing journey with my wife.

### 1) Panic attacks, Flashbacks, Anxiety attacks and Triggers

Now, we all experience mental triggers. They can be positive or negative like when a certain smell pleasantly reminds us of mom's or grandma's cooking for a Thanksgiving meal. If you notice, there is an overlapping of a present-day experience that 'triggers' the recall of a past memory. And that's mostly what panic attacks, flashbacks, and anxiety attacks really are, except they are much more extreme and overwhelming! The past and present are concurrently overlapping, but because of the intensity of the memories, they don't produce a happy feeling like Thanksgiving dinners of the past, but they feel like utter, overwhelming chaos.

Remember, when the original trauma occurs, if the child or person is unable to process it on his/her own, and if s/he has no one trusted to help her/him do it, then the mind sequesters it so the person can try to keep up a semblance of normalcy. But those unprocessed trauma memories "fester" inside the brain and will keep spilling out in various ways like our bedroom problems the first 20 years of our marriage.

Now, despite our struggles in our bedroom the first 20 years of our marriage, elsewhere our relationship was fairly stable. So, there wasn't much that caused her trauma memories to spill out. Others who are dealing with volatile daily lives may deal with these "spill overs" all the time. But once my wife determined to deal with her trauma and rip off that scab, 40 years of unprocessed memories came flooding out. And she was overwhelmed to put it mildly! It was like being hit full force with a hurricane while she was in a tiny little boat. She couldn't think straight. She thought she was losing her mind. She told me she was going crazy!

Enter proximity maintenance, safe haven and affect regulation. And so, I

entered her hurricane, and I rode each one out with her. She would hide under tables and in closets like a little child or pet does when scared as she was assaulted by the memories from the past. And each time I would follow her under that table or into the closet. I would gently wrap her in my arms and legs and whisper, "It's ok, honey. I've got you. I'm so sorry no one was there when this happened. But I'm here now. And I love you. And I take care of my girl. You're safe now."

Many times in the beginning she was so overwhelmed by the emotional hurricane that she couldn't even respond or acknowledge my presence, but I figured she was aware of my calm, comforting presence. I was literally her rock and her anchor in those hurricanes. And as long as I didn't lose my calm, my calm would overcome her fear and terror, and she would come back to me in the present within 10 or 15 minutes. But, one time I remember losing my calm, and, sure enough, that escalated her terror, until I took a deep breath, found my center, and then I could calm her as well.

Think about those common hurricane scenes in movies where a small boat is tossing from side to side and half buried as each massive wave pummels it. The frightened boater for good reason fears for his/her life as massive wave after massive wave buries him or her! S/he is sputtering for breath with each wave that buries the deck. There is no firm ground. There is nothing to hold onto!

But now, change the scene by adding your favorite superhero or a divine angel who is willing to ride out the storm with that boater. Yes, it's still scary, but suddenly you know that there's someone there who is larger than life and won't let you drown. That is what we as family members, spouses and significant others can be to our loved one who is overwhelmed by these kinds of things. We can change the entire dynamic of that scene for our loved ones by simply being there in that hurricane with him or her.

Now let me add, it is a very common response for people, including my wife, to 'want to be alone' when these things happen. Sometime my wife would try to get away from me, but I firmly believe that one of the greatest powers the original trauma holds over sufferers is the fact that they were alone in it. It creates the overwhelming feeling of being alone and abandoned rather than the security of attachment that each of us longs for. And so, I never, ever let her go through one of these hurricanes alone, even if she told me to go away, even if she tried to physically leave my presence. I didn't always hold her because, depending on which

girl was out, some of them didn't feel as comfortable with me doing that, but I would at least sit with her and be with her so she could feel my body heat radiating into the cold, lonely terror of that memory...and she knew she wasn't alone...she knew she and I were in this together!

I did this for a couple years. Every time she was hit with a recently, unsequestered memory, her mind was right back in her childhood when she didn't have the ability to process it herself. But this time she had me, my presence (proximity maintenance), my calm (affect regulation) and the security that I would never abandon her (safe haven) from which she could draw so that her brain could begin to process that trauma, and today, 15 years later, it's been years since any of those hurricanes have hit. That doesn't mean she doesn't ever feel triggered or upset; we all do. It's just part of life, but it means those hurricanes are now more like thunderstorms. And she may still not like them, but we can relatively easily get thru them today.

## **2) Eating 'disorders', Body 'dysmorphia', Gender 'dysphoria'**

With the ugly culture wars going on in this country, I debated whether to even cover these. But after my wife and I have spent 15 years untangling the maze of dissociation she experienced, we have found each of these issues in her case was a result of dissociation. Does that mean I believe dissociation is the only source for these legitimate feelings in people? Of course, not. But there is no way to have intelligent discussions about any of these issues because both sides have staked out inviolable tenets in their opinion, sigh. But this is how I walked with my wife through each of these and why we found each of these in her case to be a function of dissociation.

When my wife and I first started this journey, she told me she had no idea what healthy looks like. See, she had been molested as a 2-year old. (*Who the hell does that to a two-year old!?*) Sigh, but anyway, I realized at that point, that I better get my crap together and get healthy myself, or how would I model it for her? And it took me years of journaling, fervently, to figure out 'who am I?'. I also had to figure out what 'healthy' really does and does not mean.

My wife would also confide with me, "I don't have any idea what I'll be like when we are done." And I always affirmed two things. "Honey, I love you no matter what." And secondly, "We don't have to worry about what you'll 'be'. Let's take care of the trauma and dissociation, and the rest will take care of itself." And so, as these other issues popped up into our healing journey, I didn't fret. When one

girl told me she was asexual and another girl wondered if she was even a girl, I didn't freak out and wonder what would happen to my marriage if she suddenly decided she didn't want a man. I simply affirmed each girl where she was and made clear I loved her for who she was. And then I walked with her, and we found our way through each issue together. No forcing. No manipulation. No coercive 'conversion therapy'. Just love and unconditional acceptance as she struggled with the disorientation that 4-5 decades of dissociation had brought to her and each of the 7 other girls who had been trapped in separate, internal spaces.

And as those internal spaces were reconnected to each other, many of these corollary issues took care of themselves. My wife, Ka'ryn, is the one who struggled most with eating 'disorder' issues and body dysmorphia. She literally couldn't feel hunger pains, and she would ruthlessly not eat if her weight got too high. She would nitpick at every flaw she saw in her body despite being 5'7" and 120lbs., every wrinkle that began to appear on her face as we got older, and she never had a good word to say about herself no matter how pretty she looked. She absolutely couldn't accept any compliments I gave her and would throw them back in my face.

But when the other voices, the other girls, came outside, they controlled parts of my greater wife's personality and abilities that naturally counter balanced Ka'ryn's body dysmorphia and eating issues. I remember when K.A. told me, "I look damn good for 50!" And K.A. will always fish for a compliment from me whenever she dresses up, even just for our weekly errands. She loves to hear me say how pretty she looks.

And the little girls love to eat and don't give a damn if they gain a few extra pounds! And unlike Ka'ryn who literally couldn't feel hunger pains, these other girls would come crying to me about how starved they felt because Ka'ryn was in the midst of another attempt to ruthlessly lose weight.

So, how I helped resolve this was by teaching them all to work together. I taught K.A. to speak with Ka'ryn internally and help her see how good they really did look. Ka'ryn also learned to accept my complements via K.A. And I tried to help the little girls and Ka'ryn find a happy middle ground about eating. I didn't want Ka'ryn to constantly be triggered as her weight increased from the constant snacking of the other girls, and yet, the other girls couldn't ignore the hunger pains they felt just because Ka'ryn didn't feel them. We looked for healthier and low-cal snacks. And I remember the time I suggested to Amy, "Make her feel your hunger" and later Ka'ryn told me of experiencing hunger for the first time, something that had never

happened before.

And so, literally, my wife's body dysmorphia and eating 'disorder' issues took care of themselves as the various girls internally connected and began to help each other experience the aspects of my greater wife's personality traits and mental abilities (like feeling hunger) that they couldn't access on their own because of the previous internal, household sequester.

As for the sexual and gender dysphoria? Well, those largely took care of themselves, as well. I affirmed my unconditional love for each voice, for each girl. But I think these issues were wrapped up in the Rip Van Winkle effect and the fact that each had been frozen during childhood when fact and fantasy swirl around and sometimes mesh. Forty to fifty years of sequestration caused so much disorientation, but the longer each girl was outside, the more these issues sorted themselves as each girl tried to create a life with the other girls that was satisfying to everyone and not just her own proclivities.

### 3) Self-injury

I'll be honest. My wife didn't struggle with this much. Perhaps that is because I practice proximity maintenance, safe haven and affect regulation with all of them every single day. I don't know.

But the little it did happen, it was typically Ka'ryn. She seemed the least able to deal with the overflow effects of the trauma memories even though, as host, she really didn't hold any of them directly. See, when the trauma happened, it was the other girls who were forced to experience and hold the trauma memories. They were the ones forced into sequester to keep the trauma from overwhelming the system. Ka'ryn was left on the outside, thinking everything was 'normal.' But the other girls had taken with them into sequester the mental abilities to deal with the trauma, I believe.

And so, when the other girls came out, we never followed [ISST&D's](#) example of forcing the host to process the trauma memories (bad, bad idea!). Instead, I helped each girl who already held those memories process them, and then with the power of those memories greatly diminished, the memories could enter everyone's general narrative.

But in the beginning of our healing journey, Ka'ryn could still feel the power of the

memories hit her, even if indirectly. And she would viciously bite her hands or dig her fingernails into her hands because she had no means with which to deal with the power of the memories. I would sit with her and try to regulate her with the 3 tools at my disposal. Maybe they helped, since it truly was a rare occurrence in our journey.

But I remember one time, Ka'ryn was feeling overwhelmed in general, and I asked Amy how she was feeling, and she casually acted like the issue was no big deal to her. And that's when it was again affirmed to me that each voice, each girl, held different mental abilities (*like trauma processing*) and how important it was to connect them to each other so they could help one another. And at this point, it's been years since I can remember the last severe-for-us instance of self-injury.

#### 4) Comatose episodes

The first time this happened, I freaked out! We were having a somewhat heated discussion about something, and suddenly my wife just fell to the ground, completely out of it! WTH? What do you do? After my heart started beating again and I was able to get my brain back in gear, I began to think about it. I decided to try and engage another part of her. I began calling out some of the other girls' names who had joined us outside at that point in the journey, and sure enough, when I hit "Allie" out she popped like she had been watching me all the time to see what I would do. And that was my introduction to comatose episodes.

Comatose episodes really were a result of prolonged dissociation and the fact that the girls still had not sufficiently created the internal pathways between each of them so they could communicate. And so Ka'ryn had 'fled inside' unable to cope with our disagreement, but no one was there to 'catch the baton' and carry on with things on the outside.

Tina was terrible about this. She was so internally disconnected from the others since she was in the 'basement' originally, that every time she went back 'inside' for a year, the body would swoon, and I would run to catch her before she hit the ground. It was truly unnerving that year as I was afraid my wife would harm herself in one of these episodes. And then with her body wrapped up in my arms to keep her from hitting the floor, I would gently call out until I found someone else to come back outside. And then we would carry on.

Once we moved Tina out of the internal 'basement' and up beside Sophia where those two could always, internally talk, the comatose issues subsided...until Jenny

joined us...who was also trapped in the basement. Ugg!

But those episodes also became a source of amusement to Amy, who liked to play and joke. Jenny was usually sitting on the couch when it happened, so at least there was little fear of her hitting the floor. She would 'go inside' and her head would swoon onto her breastbone, and I would try to call someone else out like usual: usually Amy or Sophia would pop outside. But sometimes I would start calling for someone else to come outside...and I would call...and call...and call...and then I would start thinking to myself...*this is taking a little longer than it ought to take.* And so, I'd stop and say, "I see you, Amy!" And she would smirk and open her eyes, and laugh and say, "How did you know it was me?" Or sometimes when I realized what she was doing, I would play back and give her a little lick on her face, and she would gasp in disgust, 'How could you!?' And I would laugh back, 'Well, two can play at this game!'

But let's say you're saying to yourself, "My loved one doesn't have alters." Then engage him/her in other ways. Talk about different kinds of happy activities you enjoy together. Or get out games or crafts or other activities s/he enjoys and use them in plain sight of your loved one. If his/her eyes are shut, then be sure to make loud enough noise that s/he can hear and identify what you are doing. Or maybe go to the kitchen and cook or prepare a favorite dish of your loved one's.

The thing to remember is just because it appears that your loved one is 'comatose,' unless it is physically induced from a physical injury, some part of your loved one could be watching and observing just like Allie did that first time it happened to my wife. Or maybe s/he is 'stuck' and needs help to re-engage with the outside world. Once I engaged with her, she popped out of this state with ease. And after that, these comatose issues for my wife became minor inconveniences as we all quickly learned to navigate them until we had moved both Tina and Jenny out of the internal 'basement' and upstairs where they could connect with the others.

### **5) Mini seizures**

The last extreme state that I want to cover is mini, epileptic-like seizures. Again, the first time my wife's eyes rolled into the back of her head and her body and face began gently shaking, my heart stopped. *Breathe, Sam. Breathe, Sam!* But once I got my own brain back online, I kind of went, *hmmm???* *That kind of looks like a computer glitch to me. You know, when the little mouse arrow turns into a never-ending circle-y thingy, and just goes and goes and you try to click out of it*

*and then the screen goes whitish. Damn you, computer, respond to my impatient mouse clicking!!!!*

*And so, I thought, Sam, maybe my wife's brain is having trouble 'switching' to that other program(girl). Maybe, I can help her get 'unstuck.' And so, that seems to be the case. Whenever she would drop into these gentle seizures, eyes rolled back in her head, I'd taken her hand or gently touch her face and say, "Honey, come back to me. Amy, come out now. Sophia, can you hear me?" I just tried to engage different parts and sound calm and encouraging until her brain could 'click' back into gear and get out of that 'loop' in which it was stuck.*

*Happily, these episodes were 'glitches' and rarely occurred unlike the comatose episodes that occurred for years until we got Tina and Jenny out of the 'basement.' But they were still unpleasant experiences for the girls, and the best I could do was 'be there' and try to help them through it.*

### Conclusion

And so, this is how I engaged my wife's 'madness.' I truly never found her to be 'mad' and I honestly object to even trying to 'take back' the term as I never othered my wife. She is just my wife. She is my best friend. She is the love of my life. She just happened to be traumatized during childhood, and so I get the privilege of walking with her through the convalescence period of training her mind to reconnect with all those previously-sequestered areas. I had to be willing to change myself, so I could become the healing companion she needed. And I had to be willing to be physically present with her through all the things she experienced so that I could apply the attachment concepts of proximity maintenance, safe harbor, and affect regulation as John Bowlby described decades ago. How I wish his foundation would give me an audience because we have affirmed everything he postulated and even far more than he understood as I have literally helped my wife pick up all the scattered, dissociated pieces of herself and weave them into a healthy, integrated whole, despite our continued struggles with the remaining vestiges of 5 decades of dissociation.

Sincerely,

Sam