

2023 | VOLUME #2

creative healing



PROSE, POETRY, AND ARTWORK BY DISSOCIATIVE WRITERS

**Creative Healing:
Prose, Poetry, and Artwork by Dissociative Writers
Volume 2**

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Cover Image: *Hidden Girl*
by Sharon
pastel on paper

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Internal Compassion, clay figures, 5"

EMERGING SELVES

by Suritaplus

My name is Surita. When I was twelve, I secretly wrote, "I think there's something wrong with me but I don't know what. It's like I'm made up of a lot of different people and there's an invisible string wrapped around us keeping me together. I'm afraid the string will break and my pieces will fall apart. If it does, everyone will know I'm crazy. They'll take me away and lock me up forever." With that fear in mind, I vowed to force myself to appear normal.

My resolve worked well until, after thirty years of pretending to be someone I was not, the string broke, worn thin from years of stomach pains, migraines, and believing I was defective. I may have convinced other people but I couldn't fool myself. I was not like everyone else. I was falling apart and I needed help. I needed therapy.

Wanting a therapist to literally see what I felt, I drew a picture of a woman with many children attached to her, inside the calf muscle, across her back, on her shoulder. Separate but still connected. However, my sketches lacked emotion and were disappointing. Eventually, I took myself to a nearby craft store and came home with a heavy box of pink clay-like stuff called Sculpy. I had no real plan in mind and wasn't even sure I knew how to use it. But this is what called to me in the store, so this is what I had to work with.

It continued. For six months, I brought to therapy figure after figure. I studied them as they evolved displaying emotions and experiences that seemed vaguely familiar. I marveled over each. I listened to them and eventually learned to recognize them as

parts of myself. They were letting me know who was inside. The voices I'd been hearing. The arguments, laughter, sobs.

Today, I'm still trying to connect to my history, recognize my emotions, and reclaim my body. Having the sculptures, tangible objects to look at and touch, helps me make those connections. These are my protectors, my artists, musicians, teachers. They rescued me so I could survive. Survive, so I could learn to thrive. They are me, and together, We are Suritaplus.

About the author: Suritaplus is a 73-year-old retired kindergarten teacher who was diagnosed in 1989. Her goal for a healthy system is internal cooperation, communication, and compassion. She has alters ranging in age from infant to 94 years. Together, they live at the New Jersey shore.



Internal Compassion, clay figures, 5"

EVOLUTION OF A FRACTURED PSYCHE

by Mariah

We all come bursting into the world;
trust that someone will catch us.

Complete dependence;
trust that someone will meet our needs.

Life or death;
trust that someone will protect us.

Unsolvable dilemma;
trust until it is repeatedly violated.

Evolution of a fractured psyche;
trust no more.

About the Author: Mariah is a 21-year-old part who writes poetry to help young parts communicate. She is a member of the Eclipse System, a DID system of 21.

Parrot
mixed media collage
by Mariah



TORN MEMORY

by Peter B.

It's always the same torn memory.

A man without a face.

Janitor's clothing.

Blue or was it green?

That's all I know.

I should be sad,

But I'm empty.

I sense there's more.

I claw at it

To get behind the memory

To see what it's made of.

I want to shake it

And smash it

And make it new.

I want it to finish.

But there's no way in,

Always the same smooth wall,

Not even a wrinkled edge to pry.

It's always the same torn memory.

A man without a face.

Janitor's clothing.

Blue or was it green?

That's all I know.

I should be sad.

It's always the same torn memory.

About the Author: Peter is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse who likes to write because it helps him figure things out, and it is sometimes easier for his inner children to express difficult ideas in a poem.

ON RECOVERY

by Suritaplus

It began when the first one spoke
a tiny voice crying out into the open
Out of body.

It grew to many
a cacophony of cries and shouts fighting
for recognition.

It quieted with listening to Outsiders who
believed our story
heard our pain.

It evolved with internal communication
cooperation compassion
for each other
for the Highest Good of All concerned
We became
a System
recovering.

About the Author: Suritaplus is a 73-year-old retired kindergarten teacher who was diagnosed in 1989. Her goal for a healthy system is internal cooperation, communication, and compassion. She has alters ranging in age from infant to 94 years. Together, they live at the New Jersey shore.



Family Tree
acrylic on paper
by Judith Ritchie

HELPING HEROES HEAL

by Judith Ritchie and Heroes

We don't remember in the way remembering is supposed to be.
For we have carefully packaged our memories in special storerooms called "people".
Some, (most) are little people and some are bigger;
But all are waiting..
Waiting to be opened and allowed to go free.

We need help from the outside to unpackage the inside;
To find the packages, to open them, and to let the memories be seen.

There are special Outsiders who take up that job
Who help us carefully, very, very carefully
Find each and every "storeroom" (the people), and then coax the memories free.

These have to be special Outsiders..
Whose hearts are too big for their bodies;
Whose eyes are clear and see far and deep;
Whose voice is soft, gentle, never yelling or harsh;
Whose mind is sharp and understands;
Whose words don't judge, cut, criticize or condemn;
Who are safe – in every way;
And whose arms are open wide – receiving, nurturing, and holding securely.

Special "packages" need special people to help open them.
Outsiders, heroes in their own way, who know how to "handle with care";
Who realize the packages are "fragile", and who won't drop, bend or break them,
But who lovingly and fiercely protect them.

We, the Insiders, are unseen heroes who have been to hell and back.
We have fought frontline battles
And have seen the whites of the Enemies' eyes and felt their hot breath on our necks;
And we have survived....

And now we need the kindness, strength and care of the Medics.
For our wounds are huge and many;
They are Multiple....

Our wounds are so deep
That we need Outsiders who are willing to sacrifice, to care;
To get down into the horrors of the dark, dirty, stinking trenches with us,
And to help our Heroes heal.

About the Author: Judith is a Writer, Researcher, Historian, RA/MC Survivor and Hero. The poem was written on August 15, 2019. Copyright: may be used with permission by author.

MY NAME IS...

by gabriell

“My name is ‘Gabriell’, 2 ‘l’s, no ‘e’ on the end.” I’ve been saying that since I learned to spell my name. Few people actually call me that, though, usually just my mother. Most shorten it to “Gabby” or “Gab.” For 53 years, that’s who I thought I was: Gabriell, Gabby, Gab. Imagine my surprise, shock really, when my therapist said to me: “You realize ‘gab’ is just one of your parts?” “Gab” as just another part, I’m still having trouble wrapping my head around that concept. “Gab” may be the “ANP” (Apparently Normal Part), the part that interfaces most often with the outside world, the part that everyone knows, the part who covers for all the other parts so that we don’t appear “crazy.” And other parts may express themselves through “Gab.” Still, “Gab” is simply (or not so simply, really) just one part of my self among close to 30 other parts of my self. I am not just “Gab.”

That’s what DID is - a whole self expressed in many parts. No individual part contains the entire self (though some individual parts may believe they constitute the entire self). The self is the sum total of all those individual parts. And each part carries a piece of our story. It may be just a feeling or a sensation. It may be snapshots, discrete pictures of events in my life. Some parts may be able to string together a relatively coherent narrative, though those parts are often lacking the emotions or physical sensations that one might expect to accompany such narratives. The sum total of all those parts, all of their feelings and sensations and experiences and thoughts, that is who “I” am.

In order for a whole self to emerge from a self in parts, all of the dissociative barriers between the parts, the very barriers that were essential for our survival, must be breached. Each part must be able and willing to share all that it contains with every other part, all of the energy, feelings, thoughts, sensations, experiences, wants, needs, and beliefs that were, by necessity, once held separately by the

distinct parts. It is only when this happens that a fully integrated and truly functional self begins to coalesce.

This journey of recovery and healing from childhood trauma and from the amazing thing our mind was able to do in order to survive takes an enormous amount of effort, struggle, commitment, and persistence. For while dissociating got us through the abuse, now that we are safe, it no longer serves its life-sustaining, life-saving function. Dissociation can’t help to project us forward into a future built on trust and connections with other people, a future that has meaning and purpose.

I am very slowly allowing myself to admit that I am finally making progress in my recovery from childhood trauma and from DID. Owning this progress has been exceedingly difficult and scary and maybe even painful at times because it embodies hope, hope that I will one day be able to fully embrace my existence and move forward in my life as a whole person, that I will be able to live the life I dream of, one with meaning and purpose. Hope is dangerous because it can so easily be crushed, and it is that very emotional anguish that DID has, in part, protected me from. To hope for something is to open yourself up, make yourself vulnerable, because in the past, all hope did was leave me wanting and waiting for things that never came - connection, a hug, love - and the pain of that was almost unbearable. Yet, here I am, still clinging tenaciously to hope.

About the Author: Gabriell Sacks, Ph.D. has a background in Special Education and has worked as a music teacher, an elementary school teacher, and a behavior specialist consultant. It took 22 years in the mental health system, multiple therapists, and close to 2 dozen hospitalizations before she received an accurate diagnosis of DID. Now, with the support of her skilled therapist, she is finally making progress in her healing, moving forward, and reclaiming her life.



Grief

mixed media by gabriell

DEAR ONE

by Laura

Dear one,
Love of my life,
Child of my loins,
Daughter of my hopes and dreams.

I lost you once
When I tended to my wounds
Watching you with heartbreak
Through the veil of protection
Calling you but never reaching you
Because of me, not you
I cried for you and for all of us.

I gained you back slowly
Inch by inch
Step by step
Smile by smile
Hug by hug
As I got stronger and wiser
And able to manage my pain that had nothing to do with you
Together but distant
We became
Joy of joys
Not a perfect relationship but good enough.

I am losing you again
Losing you now
As I tell my story you don't want to hear
As I paint the canvas of our pathetic lives
That remind us we are frail mortals in an imperfect world.

I'm sorry love
I will always be here
May life bless you with the love you won't allow yourself to receive from me
May life be kind
May life be good
May life give you all you desire.

I cry
I'm here
~ Mom
(Lyn)

My Littles' Song

*(Sparrow aka No Name, Angel aka Devil, Snake,
Little Linda, Linda Belinda, Rosie, Little Lyn, & More)*



We're going to live in the garden.
With flowers, and birdies, and trees.
We'll never go back to the tunnel again,
Instead, we are happy and free.



We're happy! We're happy!
Let's dance like a riggity jig.
We're safe and secure in the garden.
Together, we're growing up big.



*Music & Lyrics of original song "Move Over" by Malvina Reynolds
Adapted by Lyn Barrett in honor of the renaming and release of some of her Littles. 2022*

About the Author(s): Lyn is the founder of Dissociative Writers, a writers' workshop facilitator, and the author of Crazy: Reclaiming Life from the Shadow of Traumatic Memory. Many moons ago, she was a preschool teacher. She loves children.

Laura ("Dear One") is the one who gave birth to and mothered my children. Her devotion was unassailable, but she fled when she sensed danger in the home, leaving her with overwhelming guilt. To this day, she continues to attempt to rebuild connections of love between our unified self and her children.

WEAVING

by Somebody

If I could wake up today and do anything...

If I could wake up today and not be a wooden, possum-stuck figure on the bed, I would weave.

I would weave a hand.

I'd weave it out of loose, natural willow. Dark vine would criss-cross, the raised veins of an old woman. My hand looks like that. It often stops me for a beat while I question it. "This does not belong to me," I think while I hold it up to the light.

It would be oversized because my hand seems too big for my body. If I put my palm across my face, the tips of my fingers reach my hairline, so technically it's the right size and not too large at all.

The willow bends and creases to make sharp fingertips and sides of the hand, more harmful than protective. My hands once lifted my small niece onto a sofa as she leapt mid-play. I don't know how to play but I tried. Fear and pain briefly crossed her face as my hands cut into her armpits. I let go and play resumed.

This disembodied hand would end with a wrist of irregular unfinished stalks. Sometimes when I look down at my hand it is detached.

I have a nightmare often. I stand at a mailbox. It is curved metal, weathered and dented, with a squeaky red flag you can lift for the mail carrier. Patchy crab grass stretches its tendrils across the sandy gravel onto bleached pavement. There are no trees shading the yard or lining the street. It's too sparse and open, too bright, too quiet. I barely hear faint violence in a house far away. When I open the mailbox, metal tab slid against metal tab with a slightly chalky feel, a bomb explodes.

I stand in the road and scoop up arms and legs. I try to bundle them together, ten or fifteen limbs, but they keep overflowing and are too slick, like arms and legs in an over-chlorinated swimming pool, sun-in and lemon and baby oil.

The clumsy, frenzied scooping and dropping and grasping is scary. The explosion or startling boom is missing. I have a nagging feeling I am afraid of the wrong thing. The feeling follows me around, even outside the dream.

I would weave the upper part of the chest from above the bust to a long neck. It would be sculptural, a tight weave like outdoor seating, neat and orderly. It would fold and wave like fabric. I'd form the indent of the clavicle, the collarbone, the bend of the neck pushed forward in concentration or force or obedience. Those dark willow vines would bind the breast plate and constrict the breathing, pinning the figure into frozen space.

I cannot breathe. In my chest and in my throat the airway is constricted. I can't get air in. I can't get out of my chest. It's bound and drowning at the same time.

I cut myself out of my favorite dress in fourth grade: kelly green, v-neck and cap sleeves with tiny flowers. The bodice was so constricting either from outgrowing it or from panic that I slid scissors down the front to the waist until I could inhale again. You would think I'd have learned how to breathe by now.

I would weave two long legs out of grapevines, ropey, so tough they could not be cut. Each cord would be twisted and braided to define the muscles of the calves and thighs. They know how to run and they know how to kick. I would attach delicate blue paper butterflies onto the vines. Maybe it's a thank you because those limbs are my best protection.

If I could wake up this morning and feel light, like a butterfly, that could move whenever it wants, I would make something else.

A Little Duet.

The following little duet is between a bass and soprano, and the student may amuse himself at pleasure by inventing theories to account for their disagreement. Wherever one hand has the melody it must play with a melody tone, and the other hand must take care not to make its part too positive and obtrusive. The righthand will need this caution very much, since in consequence of its being more used than the left, and so much more generally playing the melody, it acquires what might be called a melodic quality of tone, which often covers up the melody of the left hand, even where the author intended it to be the leading part.

Andantino con un poco di moto. M.M. ♩ = 69.

A. SCHMOLL.

22 *mf marc. il basso*

Fine. *5.* *5.* *4.*
marc. il canto *p*

mf *D.C.*
victory n.

The principal thing in this study is to have the hands being effected by contractions even as a fine ear would desire to have them. system of varying the touch, both as to force and as to position. a) The hand springs upwards lightly at the term and even. Owing to the changes of position ways easy to get the running work so clear and will be necessary to put in operation Mason's the requisite speed and evenness is attained. be sure and prolong the bass tone.

Vivace. M.M. ♩ = 134.

BRAUER, Op. 15, No 9.

23 *p* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.*

Fine. *mf* (a) *cresc.*

f *dim.* *D.C.*

(b) (b)

A Duet for One
collage on paper
by Venn

TOGETHER

by Venn

My body betrays me daily.
Knees collapse to the floor,
unsteady, unsure.
Muscles seize,
and my body reminds me
of what brought me here.
Insidious prods inside me,
pressure from the ghost of a memory.
I watch the holder,
the version of me who witnessed these things become memory
as he thrashes.
I cannot hold him
any more than I can hold his pain.
There is no hand to put on his shoulder and no arms to encircle him with
because my body is his.
Ours.
A history and life divided
because we cannot hold it and still live it.
We float across the cosmos, bundled together,
enduring together,
grieving together,
and all I can do to save him is write this.

About the Author: Venn Khadyr is an artist, writer, educator, and astrologer based in North Carolina. Venn discovered their system in 2014, and instinctively turned to art and storytelling as a way to make sense of things. Through a blend of art, spirituality, and therapy, their system has found a path forward.

FACEBOOK HEARTBREAK: A METAPHOR FOR THE LIVING

by Chameleon (CC)

I once cried over everything and nothing at all. Every X-Factor audition. Each song of heartbreak and hope. Every post of overcoming and those of giving up. I cried over a world gripped in hatred and divide. While masks held murderous breath and wildfires ate their way through lives singed and scarred.

I cried for the ache of a world unravelling.

Now, the crying has stopped. The tears dried up. The release now numbed and made catatonic. I no longer cry over a world in ruin. I am exhausted. Made mute in the enormity of it.

What a sad thing to breathe. To exist in a time of such toxic individuation. As I slowly die, strangled in the quicksand of my own unending violation and exile.

I was once able to grieve but I grieve no longer. The wailing wall buckling in its pilgrimage untaken. While I still wail for a world that has lost its way; because it is inconceivable to wail for a life where the broken breath, the wildfire's gluttony, the forgotten child is all I've known.

I am the broken breath.

I am the wildfires' ability to burn.

I am the child long forgotten.

My pilgrimage to self-hood a journey to nowhere.

I once cried over everything. And now nothing at all. And in the absence of my outward protestation, I am mirror to a world that offers "thoughts and prayers" then scrambles to find the next available distraction. A people that have no clue how to grieve in the closet of their own darkened bedroom. The fall-to-your-knees, face pressed to the floor howling. The hand over mouth to suppress the jagged sob.

And now *I* am the one scrambling to find the next YouTube video. The barely-teen girl singing to the ghost of her mother. The prodigal son trying to make his father proud. And here, and here come the tears. Not for me, I think. Surely, not for me.

'I am crying for the wounds of the world,' I whisper. 'You are crying for the wounds of YOUR world,' whispers back.

And there the unfettered truth of it. My wounds exposed to a world where the grieving is held alone; if held at all. So instead, I cry over a world in disarray. I cry over the raping of a forest and the murderous selfishness of the unmasked throng.

I cry...and cry....and cry.

I cry over everything and everyone but me. I cry until there are no tears left to shed.

I cry.

Until absent of tears,

I grieve....

I grieve....

In silence...

Alone.

About the Author: As a Chameleon changes its form into a plethora of colors to survive in an often bleak and colorless world, I too shift and meld in an attempt to survive a world where to be seen, to be absent of the blending can result in danger and pain. It is only through my words where I shed this skin and reveal the soul within. The full rainbow-array of the raw reality of this life of mine, a life spent shape-shifting to escape the pain of my history.



Untitled
ink on paper by River

KLEPTOMANIA

by River Walker

They were small, insignificant mementos.
The urge to possess was greater than the fear
Of getting caught.

Jewelry, stuffed poppets, cigarettes, and food
Like peaches and cherries, pink bubble gum.
These were easy.

Babysitting always led to one or two trinkets.
Shop clerks were the real threat. They looked at
me as if I was a thief.

I was.

Juvenile delinquent who got away with it for
So long. I thought I was getting back at the world,
But it only rendered me guilty. It took my dignity.

Now I steal moments alone. I take in the Earth and
Her stability. I am grounded. I steal away in the night to
Bargain with the spirits of the underground, like Persephone,

I eat my pomegranate, stolen from the bowl
and let the bright red juice run down my chin
and grin.

*About the Author: River is a system that is a work in progress.
We use poetry as a way to navigate life with DID.*

35 YEARS AGO

by Sharon

Nervously digging into the skin around my fingernails, I'm crouched forward sitting in the waiting room. It's a tiny square box of a room, four faded worn blue chairs lined up against one wall. Nothing adorns the also faded blue walls. A white circular machine sits on the floor spitting out a continuous raspy sound filling the stark space.

A middle-aged thin man with greying white hair and beard opens a door. Timidly, I lift my gaze. He's already disappeared, leaving the door slightly ajar. Body trembling, I manage to stand and move towards the door. I peak around it and cautiously shuffle my feet down the very narrow dark hallway leading to another half-opened doorway.

I enter, eyes cast downward, scanning the floor, I notice across the room, two brown leather shoes resting on an ottoman. He's sitting relaxed in his tan chair, the doctor I assume, silently peering directly at me from behind his round metal eyeglasses, expressionless.

I freeze, shivering, not sure what to do next. Silence wraps its way around the room, circling me in place. There are no introductions, instructions.

I'm not sure how I got here, in this stiff upright chair, but I am seated across from the man in the leather chair. Eyes still cast downward, I study the earth toned pattern of the worn carpet between us. I am a young adult woman, but suddenly I feel very small, like a frightened child of four or five, I cannot move. Frozen in place, this child does not know how to make words, she's terrified to make any sound at all. I want to will this body to get up and run, as the silence suffocates, the little girl becomes increasingly immobilized.

I can't help her as she shakes uncontrollably, I've weightlessly floated and am watching from the far top corner of the room. She looks so small and helpless. Sad and scared.

Week after week, month after month, years of silence filled sessions, him peering at her above those spectacles. Occasionally, the sound of his pen scribbling on his yellow notepad, no questions asked, no words exchanged. Many little white pieces of paper handed over to her as she would scuffle back down the hallway...on fourteen psychiatric medications at one point, no, she could not think straight, weighted down by the heavy fog of the multiple chemicals coursing through the body. He'd call it "decompensated, non-compliant", resulting in countless forced hospitalizations, each "safe" place re-traumatizing to the children within. At times, dangerous places, locked units, no protection.

Punitive, shaming, degrading. Thick layers of trauma piled on the already severely abused, shattered, fragmented young woman.

Two and a half decades later, DID would now be a thing, something a little more understood, thankfully, help would begin to be available. Healing would begin.



Hidden Girl

pastel on paper
by Sharon

acknowledgements

Many people (and parts) were involved in the creation of Creative Healing. Thank you to all of them for their bravery and willingness to speak up and tell their stories.

Special thanks to Lyn Barrett. As the founder of Dissociative Writers, Lyn brought together a vibrant and supportive community of writers and artists and provided a platform for all of us to be seen and heard and understood. If not for her vision, DW and this Anthology would not exist.

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**Creative Healing:
Prose, Poetry, and Artwork by Dissociative Writers
Volume 2**

Creative Healing explores the lived experiences of being diagnosed with DID and the complexities of healing and recovery.

Dissociative Writers is a weekly writing group comprised of individuals living with and healing from a spectrum of dissociative disorders.

Volume 1 and 2 of Creative Healing can be downloaded at:

www.dissociativewriters.com

