

Janet

I WANT TO LIVE

creating yourself a life
after childhood abuse

to my mother,
who wishes she had done differently,

to my husband and children,
whom I love

I am Dutch and I live in The Netherlands. Writing in English, I may not always use the right words. Nevertheless, I hope you will understand what I'm trying to tell.

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it is like trying to explain the colors to color-blind people. how can i describe, how cold this cold is, how black this night, how empty this emptiness. how can i give a voice to this desperate battle between silvia-silvio-silvana, so that you will understand? you don't see the bars and i will not be able to cry across these bars, so that you will finally hear.

from: *steinzeit*, Mariella Mehr

Contents

A funeral	5
Lost pieces.....	6
Help and hope.....	6
What's wrong with me?.....	7
Confusion.....	8
High school.....	9
No help.....	12
Robert	14
Child.....	14
Inpatient treatment.....	17
Psychiatric Emergency Unit.....	19
Stettbacher's four steps.....	21
Stranded.....	23
Body psychotherapy.....	24
Earthquake.....	25
Too late.....	27
Pieces put together.....	29
Back to the four steps.....	29
Therapy that works.....	32
Memories of my father.....	34
Memories of my mother.....	36
Memories of our family.....	38
Talking with Robert.....	40
Jean Jenson, and help from other books.....	46
Symptoms that remain.....	47
Solving the puzzle.....	53
The door.....	53
Symptoms that get worse.....	54
Talking.....	57
Headache.....	58
The movie.....	58
Who will believe me?.....	61
Real, unreal.....	62
Mortal fear.....	63
Some progress.....	64
Internet.....	66
Again... therapy.....	68
Again... sleeping.....	70
Again... talking.....	73
Nightmares and other dreams.....	74
My body.....	77
An ordinary life.....	78
Epilogue	80
Literature.....	84
Appendix 1	86
A summary of the therapy of Konrad Stettbacher.....	86
Appendix 2	88
Stettbacher, Jenson and scientific research.....	88
What are the consequences of childhood sexual abuse?.....	88
What works and what doesn't?.....	88
Exposure and EMDR.....	89
Cognitive Processing Therapy	90
Conclusion.....	91
Literature.....	91
Appendix 3 The Stettbacher-Miller controversy (December 1996-December 1997).....	98
Why did Alice Miller change her mind?.....	98

A funeral

July 2nd, 1994

My father - he is dead. Before, this would not have bothered me. I haven't seen my father or talked with him for six years. Didn't want to have anything to do with him anymore. But now, now I would have liked to talk to him. Five days ago I called him. It was a short phone call. We arranged an appointment for next week. Now I'm here, sitting next to his coffin. He isn't going to answer my questions anymore.

The reverend speaks. "There was a secret in his life and he asked for forgiveness." Afterward I ask the reverend: did my father tell him that he sexually abused me? "No, he didn't. He was very much afraid, and said very little. He only told me there was a secret in his life, that he had done terrible things, that he was very guilty and that he needed forgiveness."

Why didn't my father leave a message for me? He could have helped me this way, if he had wanted to. If he had told his secret, if he had told anyone what he did to me, that would have helped me. If he had apologized. Or least mentioned my name. But even with these vague "terrible things", he didn't have the guts to acknowledge that he did those terrible things to ME. He didn't do that for me. Not even that.

I am left empty-handed. Scared, desperate and exhausted. I don't know how to deal with my fragmented memories. Someone needs to tell me what happened, someone who was there – but apart from me, my father was the only one. He died and took the secret with him into his grave. How can I find the missing pieces of my life? How can I solve the puzzle, with the few pieces I have? I don't know.

But I know I have to. I've got to know what the puzzle looks like. I must know the truth. I want to live, and I need to know the truth, so I can live.

Why didn't I talk with my father earlier? Why did I wait until I was thirty one? Why did I wait until it was too late?

Lost pieces

1984-1995

Help and hope

September, 1984. I will finally get help. A friend urged me to see my doctor, and I'm grateful for that – me, I wouldn't dare to make that decision myself. After all, nothing is really wrong with me. Other people have real problems, I don't. I have no right to get help. But I long for help, and to my relief the doctor referred me to the Riagg¹, where I am to see a social worker. Well, it may have taken me until I was twenty-one, but now, finally, my life will be alright.

In the waiting room I get scared. How should I behave here? How should I walk up to this social worker, what should I say? Then a woman comes and picks me up from the waiting room. She introduces herself as Lucy. When we get to her consulting room she manages to put me a bit more at ease. Then she asks me what's wrong. What is the reason I am here? I try to say something, but I fail. My mouth seems sealed, I can't utter a word. But my thoughts are shouting: "This is what's wrong! I can't talk. Please understand. Do you hear me? Please understand me, this is exactly what's wrong with me: I can't talk!" But she doesn't understand. She can't hear my thoughts cry out. She doesn't know how to handle my silence, doesn't see my silence for what it is. But I really can't help it. I really can't say a word. Being silent is the only way I can explain my problem.

It hurts that she can't hear my silence. Somehow, I expected she would see my silence for what it is, that she would listen to it, and understand. I looked forward to this appointment so very much, I had set my hopes on it. The hope is gone now.

Still, I manage to say something in this first appointment. I answer some questions – though I don't always give the right answer. "How were things when you lived with your parents, did your mother talk a lot?" "No", I answer, truthfully. "And your father, I guess he talked more?" Well, if she says so, I guess she must be right, and I answer "yes", feeling confused and wondering whether this was right or not. But it wasn't. My father talked even less than my mother. In reality, the home I grew up in was wrapped in a deadly silence, only interrupted now and then by a hateful remark from my mother, or by some crazy, pointless remark from my father. But Lucy doesn't get to know this reality.

While I'm still wondering which of my parents talked the most, Lucy asks me about my friends in high school. I think of that day in my first year, when my friend Alison comes home with me. For Alison, it's only natural that I tell my mother I got an A for a test paper. Alison feels this is something good to tell. I don't want to, but I can't explain this to Alison. She keeps saying I should tell my mother. She thinks it is weird not to tell, and I don't want to be weird. So I tell my mom. And then I get the usual sermon that I shouldn't get A's, that it is wrong to do my best, that it makes me a bad girl. Alison is speechless. Never again, in all of my high school years, I dared to bring a friend home with me. I can't afford to, having such a weird mother.

Suddenly, sitting here with Lucy, I feel relieved and full of insight. Suddenly I understand: my mother behaved really weird, and that's why I never brought any friends home with me. Suddenly I see: my mother very often behaved weird and unpleasant, and this has given me a lot of trouble. At home, things happened that should not have happened. That's why I got so many problems. This, this is what I want to talk about with Lucy. It is really wonderful to be with Lucy and to understand myself. This is what I need. I very much long to talk with Lucy again next week, I long to tell her how things were in my childhood.

But Lucy doesn't hear my silent relief, either. "I get the feeling your case is too difficult for me. Next time I want an appointment with a psychiatrist being present, too." And that next consultation will be in two-and-a-half weeks. I gasp for breath. I don't know how to get through such a long period.

Lucy asks me to write down what's wrong with me, and to take this with me next time. So I try.

1 The Riagg is a nation-wide institution for mental health care in the Netherlands.

What's wrong with me?

I am staring at a white, empty page. What should I write down? What's wrong with me? I don't know. I am not doing fine, but I have no words for what this is, this "not doing fine". The way I feel – I can't compare this with other people's feelings. I have been this way for so long, I don't know any other way. I don't know how other people feel, I don't know how other people see the world, I can't look through other people's eyes to see what their world looks like. I feel estranged from myself and estranged from the world around me. Everything seems unreal. Sometimes I manage to feel a little bit of reality, by touching the wall of a house or room. Especially when it is a wall of crude stone this can help. Then, for a moment, I can feel the world does exist. That feels good. But I am not aware that for other people the world just always exists, I think other people need something like a wall for that, too. And the fog that I live in – I struggle with this fog all the time, but I don't have words for it and I don't know that other people do not live in such a fog. I think other people feel the same as me, but are better at acting normal. I think they try harder, they are better people. I think there is nothing wrong with me, I am just bad not being able to behave like other people do.

There was a time when I felt better. I was very happy, two years ago, when I passed the entrance exams of the conservatory. At the conservatory, I would finally be happy. Making music the whole day, playing flute the whole day – that's what I liked the most, that's what I could do with all my heart and soul. At the conservatory I would feel at home, here I would have friends, here I would belong. It seemed it was the best thing that could happen to me – away from my parents, in a new city, doing a study that I liked, no one who knew me, meeting new people, the chance to behave in a new way without someone noticing that this was new to me, the chance to be who I wanted to be, to be happy, to be part of the group, to do nice things. No one there who knew that I had always been weird, shy, fearful, silent, tired, unhappy and lonely. I could start with a clean slate. For the first time in many years, I felt happy. I felt full of hope for the future. And I succeeded. I felt at home at the conservatory. I liked the lessons. I liked studying. I had nice friends. I slept better. I was doing fine.

Then, almost a year later, the fog, the fear, the fatigue and the insomnia returned. I tried to deny the problems, I tried to act as if I was still doing fine. For one more year I just tried to hold on, and wait until things would get better again. But then, in the summer, my mother became ill. My parents said I had to do the housekeeping, and had to help my father at his office. I did what they asked from me. When I returned to my own home, I collapsed. I couldn't continue. I felt broken. Finished. I couldn't go on anymore. I tried to pick up my life and my study. I tried to become happy again. I failed. But what's wrong with me?

I am scared, scared of people. And I feel lonely, I long for contact. I desperately long for contact but I feel in danger when I am with other people. I don't dare to tell how I feel – with other people, I can only act and pretend. I hate acting and pretending, I hate not being myself, but I can't escape from this role – as soon as I am with other people I only can be a false self. This role exhausts me. I need to be alone to find myself again and recover from the fear. But being alone I feel unbearably lonely, scared and desperate. I run to and fro, unable to be with other people and unable to be alone. I hope for a miracle, I hope that someone will see what's wrong with me although I hide it, I hope that someone will hear what I want to tell although I don't say anything. But there is only this false self, and the fear and the loneliness.

I have anxiety attacks. Then I become hazy, I can't see clearly anymore, I start trembling and I am extremely tired. There is a big black hole and I fall and fall into it and am scared to death. I mustn't fall in this hole because then I will die. I feel torn to pieces, literally torn in two pieces. One piece is the black hole, my inside. The other one is my outside, the acting, the pretending of normal behavior that exhausts me day by day. I am mortally afraid, I see this picture of those two pieces and a very small, fragile bridge between them. The bridge almost breaks down, but it has to stay intact otherwise I will die. I tremble, I am scared and feel horribly tired. Everything is black. I shouldn't fall into the hole, but I shouldn't be my outer side either, since that strengthens the hole, pulling me down. Somehow I have to hold the pieces together, somehow I have to make sure the bridge doesn't break, but I don't know how. I only consist of overwhelming fear and exhaustion.

I feel constantly exhausted. Everything I do, is done on willpower. For everything I do, whether it is watering the plants or taking a shower, I have to try really hard and concentrate. Every movement I make, every word I say, I have to force myself to do it. I can do this only for a little while. When I have cooked and eaten, I am so exhausted that I can't even wash the dishes and have to lay down. My body and my mind are exhausted, so heavy, far away, numb. I only function by willpower, fighting every day to do the things I have to do and want to do.

I am always tense, I can't relax. I have a trick to stop the tension of my body for a little while. Then I just leave my body, leaving it flabby like some discarded clothes, an empty thing that has nothing to do with me. This makes me feel awful and it does not really bring relaxation. I'd rather not do it. But it is the only alternative for the continuous tension, which I can't endure either.

I feel insecure, worthless. I feel I can't do anything well, although other people tell me this isn't true. Often I make mistakes, and I feel panic and shame about that. Then I compulsively say things – things I don't understand, things I didn't think of myself. "Mama, when I am dead, may I come home then?", "you are a little girl and you are dead", "mama has to come!" or "my mama is dead but my daddy isn't". I have no idea what I mean with these sentences, and I can't help it and can't stop it. I feel very much ashamed about this.

In spite of feeling scared, tired and wretched, I consistently go to all the lessons and behave pretty much normal there. Partly my normal behavior is something that helps me to go on. Partly it is a disaster, since it exhausts me and my fear, the fog, my feeling of unreality and my loneliness get worse this way. Friends, teachers and family often are mistaken how I am doing. They give a pep-talk, try to cheer me up and try to solve my problems. They sincerely want to help me. "Look at the things that go well, you play the flute well, many other things you do well, you manage." I try to explain that I feel like a bank account with no money on it, from which I continue taking money. For some time, this may seem no problem, but debts get bigger and bigger and some day it will not work anymore. Indeed, it may seem I still function normally, but I know the price I pay for it, and I notice that every time I turn the switch to "normal functioning", I feel more broken.

I need help. Help that gives me something else than what I already tried myself. I tried and tried to solve my problems, when I was a child and again now that I am an adult. I tried to belong, to behave like others do. I taught myself to look other people in the eye, although I had to fight for it every time since it makes me so scared. I taught myself to change my quiet, silent behavior, to start talking, say words and sentences, although I was really afraid of every word that came out of my mouth. I tried to make friends, to step up to people and make contact, again and again, in spite of my fear and feelings of alienation, in spite of the impenetrable wall that seemed to be in between me and others. I taught myself to act as if I'm happy, hoping that this would give me friendships and nice experiences that would make it possible to be really happy in the end. I tried to focus on things that I really loved, hoping they would make me feel good. Again and again I tried to build up a pleasant contact with my parents. I tried to fall asleep using all the tricks that could possibly be thought of. I held on trying to act normally, I continued going to school, I continued studying.

I always thought that if I could hold on, all these things would become just normal in the end. Again and again I tried to start anew, to not make the "mistakes" that, as I thought, made things miserable before. When I went to high school, I started "anew", when I went to the conservatory, I started "anew", and so many times in between. Every time I started anew. But nothing worked. I am spent. I think of killing myself. Now, something has to happen that works.

What can I write down of all this, for my next appointment at the Riagg? I manage to write down that I am scared. Scared of other people. I take the paper with me. But they don't ask for it. The paper stays in my bag.

Confusion

October 1984. Second consult at the Riagg, an appointment with two people. Lucy I know already. She shakes my hand: "Hello Janet, come in." The psychiatrist also shakes hands, but doesn't say anything, she doesn't introduce herself. In the first consultation, Lucy introduced herself with her first name and her last name. That made it easy for me to know how I could address her. The Dutch language makes a socially important distinction between saying "je" ("you") to someone, and saying "u" to someone. "U" is a more formal word, which one uses towards strangers, teachers, doctors, etcetera (comparable to the old English word "thy"). Since Lucy introduced herself with her first name, I concluded I could say "je" to her. The psychiatrist does not introduce herself, so I don't know whether I should call her "je" or "u". What can I do to find out how to address her? I try to find a question that helps me to find out what I should say. But I can't find any question that doesn't require me to use the word "je" or "u". So if I'd ask one of those questions, I would have made a mistake already. I start to panic. I see no way to not make a mistake. I am terribly scared and can't say anything anymore.

And then suddenly, there is a way out. I come into a white light. Very peaceful, white light, wonderful white light. I feel extremely well, it is a lovely, serene and warm place to be. Around me there is only this white light and I feel happy, peaceful and delightful. White warmth and love cover me. I want to stay here.

But then, far away, I hear calling: "Janet, come back. You are far away now, Janet, come back." I obey, and suddenly I am again in this awful consulting-room with these two people, not knowing how to behave. I regret very much that I obeyed and came back. I would like to return immediately to the white light, but I don't manage.

They do not ask me where I was or how I felt. I don't know what they saw, Lucy and the psychiatrist. What did I look like, when I was in this white light? I have no idea and they don't say anything about it.

"When I see you this way, I start thinking about admitting you to a psychiatric hospital", the psychiatrist says. This alarms me. That is not what I want. Having to stay in a hospital means losing my study and this study I need so much to hold on. That is where my heart lies, that's the only good thing in my life. I want to continue my study at the conservatory. And if I could get consultations at the Riagg, I surely would improve. Why don't I get that chance? What happened right now, with this white light, that really is an exception, that really doesn't happen every day. I can stay at home, really, if I would get help. What can I do to get help at the Riagg?

I'd better do my best to please these social workers, I guess, I'd better try to behave the way these people want me to behave, to make it easy for them to do what they want to do with me. I can't afford showing here what's wrong with me, I can't afford telling things without words anymore. But where can I find the words for my story? I don't have words for my story. Being silent is the most truthful I can be, but they think I am crazy when I'm silent. I'd better behave well enough not to risk admission into a hospital, I'd better start talking, although talking feels like lying, I'd better start acting here, too, to make sure they want to treat me. Treatment will be on their conditions, and not on mine, I suddenly realise, and this feels like a painful loss - loss of the hope to have a place where I can be honest, loss of the hope to have a place where I can show how I feel and where I will be understood. They will not understand me, and there is nothing I can do about that.

"Could you please write down your personal history?" the psychiatrist asks. "And send it to us before the next appointment?" I'd like to do that very much. It gives me hope.

High school

I don't know anything to write about my years at primary school, nor about the years before that. But I can write a lot about my years at high school.

The first year at high school I feel fine. Going to high school for the first time is a good moment to start anew, to become more cheerful, more self-assertive, and more normal. I try to be like other people and that works well. I make friends soon and I belong. I feel relieved and happy. And I really learn something, at this school. I like this school.

Nevertheless, things become hard at high school. Even making one mistake in a test paper makes me scared, thinking that I'll get an insufficient mark and terrible things will happen. Also, I get into a lot of trouble with my mother, she is angry with every B or A. I shouldn't try so hard. She tells me, over and over, that good marks mean that I am a nasty and selfish child. I would be more lovable getting a D. She doesn't tell me that she makes these remarks because she hates my father, who did have a good education. She doesn't tell me that she thinks I will be as unpleasant as my father if I learn a lot. She doesn't tell me that she herself very much wanted to get a good education when she was a child, but wasn't allowed by her parents. I don't know why she makes all these remarks to me, I don't know what to do with her hate and anger. I decide not to tell her anything about school anymore. But I also think that I am a nasty, bad, unlovable child, because I can learn easily. At the other hand, my mother tells over and over how great other people are. Cousins, friends, they are so gifted, they perform so well. I am nothing, compared to them. It is confusing. I cannot make it out. I just know I am bad. A bad child.

At home I feel bad, but at school I feel good. Even though I am scared of test papers and bad marks, school is the place where I like to be, where I have friends, where I feel happy, where I feel at home. I

almost only get A's, it is easy for me to learn. I even like gymnastics, this first year at high school.

At the end of the first year of high school there is a phone call from school. It would be possible for me to go to grammar school. My father thinks this would be good for me, so it's decided I go to grammar school. But this means I have to change schools. I am scared. Scared of the new school. Scared of the big building where I don't know the way, scared to start in a new group where I don't know anyone and all other children know each other already. Last year I could act cheerfully and self-assured, last year I could make friends in the first week of school when we had camp. But this year, there will be no camp. I will know no one when I walk into the classroom the first time. I don't know how to do that, walking into the classroom and sitting down somewhere without knowing anyone. Where should I sit down, next to whom? What should I say? Who will want to be friends with me when they all have friends already? Here I can't start "anew" like I did last year, here it will be clear that I am different, that I don't belong. Scared and withdrawn I enter my new school.

The children are nice and try to make me part of the group. But I feel insecure and unhappy. I feel numb and alienated. I feel like living in some sort of fog. There is fog inside myself, and fog between me and the other children. I can't break through the fog, I can't make contact with other people. I feel weird and wrong. Also, I feel like I'm still a child, whereas the children around me seem to behave much older. I still like to play with my dolls, but these children don't do that anymore. I find myself suddenly in a world of youngsters that I don't understand and that makes me scared. I can't do the things they do, I can't talk about the things they talk about. Their world isn't my world. I feel unhappy. I am silent, apathetic and very tired.

I also lose touch with my friends from my last school and from primary school. I feel lonely.

For a period of five years I am at grammar school. All these five years I am in a class with nice children – but the feelings of fear, loneliness, of being bad and being different, remain. The fog and the alienation stay.

I am thirteen or fourteen years old. I sit on a wall outside school with some other children, during a break. They tell each other funny things and they laugh. I feel bewildered. Laughing, what is that? I feel laughing is something strange to do. But it seems one should do this. I try to laugh, too, I try to be like the others, I pretend laughing. I think everyone who laughs just pretends. I am thinking about laughing – who invented this? It is so hard to do and it makes me feel sick. Who started this? I don't realize that my classmates are really having fun. I don't remember that in the past I used to have fun myself, too. I really think everyone is just pretending, and that other people are just better at it than I am, or maybe they try harder. It has to be my fault. I am bad, ain't I?

I sleep very little. Scared and desperate, I lay awake, hoping for sleep that doesn't come, worrying about another day of being too tired to function. I count to thousand and two thousand and three thousand, I count the stars behind my squeezed eyes, I take off my blanket, I put on my blanket, I cry, I read, I write in my diary, I give up. Sometimes I go to my brother's bed. My brother isn't living at home on weekdays. Laying in his bed, I feel more safe and I manage to sleep one or two hours. Early in the morning, I return to my own bed.

When I sleep I always have nightmares. About someone chasing me, wanting to kill me. Each and every night. Nightmares about being Jewish, about World War II and roundups. I am not Jewish, and I don't understand what triggers my fear. I also have nightmares about my father. The same nightmare every night. I dream he laughs at me when I am in pain. I dream I tell him I don't like what he does, I tell him it hurts, I ask him to stop laughing. But he doesn't stop. He laughs and laughs. I become enraged and try to hit him, I think I will reach him then, finally reach him when he feels my punches. I try to hit him in his face with my fists, this laughing face, this laughing face that I hate so much and that continues to laugh. I strike and strike and strike but I can't reach him. There is some kind of transparent jelly around him that slows down my punches, again and again. My arms feel paralyzed. I fall to pieces from despair and hate and fear and then I wake up, mortally afraid.

Every night I have this dream. I am totally alone with this dream and with my other nightmares. Alone with the intense hate that I feel for this man. I feel very bad about hating him and dreaming that I try to hit him. Hating your father – one shouldn't do that. That's really bad. I should love my parents, but I can't. "Honor thy father and mother" – but I can't, I only feel hate, intense hate, every second, night and day.

It is hard to live alone with my parents, now that my sisters and brother have gone. I feel sombre and

don't feel like having a future. In the evening, I always make a bag with my dearest things so that I can pick up that bag immediately – I'm sure there will be a fire that night. I wonder why I still go to school – an atomic bomb will soon destroy the whole world.

At grammar school, I also have learning problems. Sometimes I get insufficient marks. This never happened to me before. Sometimes I just don't know anything anymore during a test paper. Often I just haven't been able to study for a test paper. At home I sit exhausted, staring at my books in a kind of trance. I can't learn. But I try hard, and every year I make it to the next year with good marks.

The vacations and weekends make me pull through. Vacations when I don't have to be afraid of school, and when I sometimes stay with one of my sisters for some days, undescribably nice days. The weekends when I don't have to go to school and when often one of my sisters or my brother comes home – when the house is alive, when meals aren't a battlefield of silence, fear and hateful remarks between my parents, when there is cosiness and warmth, although superficial and without someone really paying attention to me. I like to be together. I like to play games together. I like to have dinner together. I very much enjoy playing music together with my sister Sarah. But Sunday evening is a nightmare. Being alone with my parents again, knowing I have to go to school the next day.

I don't dare to tell that I feel awful. I don't know words for what is wrong with me. Besides, I think everything is caused by me being bad, and I don't want other people to know I am bad. Very, very seldom I find the courage to tell that I feel miserable. "That is caused by puberty", my father says. My feelings are not real feelings, they are just hormones. He says, he is the one who has had really hard times in life, and he starts speaking about himself. How he walked through the burning city after the bombardment of Rotterdam in 1940, how he had to go into hiding to avoid working for the German Arbeitseinsatz.

One afternoon, I go to bed. I shut the curtains. I feel exhausted and desperate and I think my mother will find me this way. I have to go to confirmation class that afternoon. My mother finds that important and I know she will come to look for me when I am not leaving in time. She will find me in my bed and then she will finally understand that something is terribly wrong, she will see that I can't stand it anymore, that I can't go to school anymore, can't go to confirmation class, can't do whatever. She will see that I am sick, that I need help. Then she will finally talk with me.

My mother comes, opens the door of my room, sees the curtains are shut, and leaves. My plan didn't work. Shall I just stay in bed so she will come again and find me later? But I don't dare to. I am afraid she will be very angry when I am late for confirmation class. I am afraid she will hate me even more then. So, at the last moment, I get out of my bed. My mother is angry that I am that late. She doesn't ask me anything. I tell that I was laying in bed, I hope she will ask me questions, I hope she will ask me why I was laying in bed. But she doesn't. I don't see any other possibility than to just go to confirmation class, exhausted and desperate, even more so now that my plan to get help failed. I see no other possibility than to force myself again, deny myself, just pretend nothing is wrong with me. I feel so horribly lonely with all my despair. I can't stand it anymore, I really can't. I need help, I need help urgently, but no one helps me.

Nevertheless, two times, my mother does take me to our family doctor. She tells the doctor I am always tired. She tells him I am ill more often than usual. But my family doctor doesn't think something is wrong. I should exercise more, he says. But I know very well that that is exactly what I can't do. Even the slightest physical exercise makes me exhausted and strange, feeling like being torn apart in a thousand pieces and with an impenetrable fog in my head. This continues for some hours, sometimes for the rest of the day. Having had gymnastics early in the morning, it is almost impossible for me to function at school during the rest of the day. I don't dare to tell my doctor that I can't do as he told me. Again my conclusion is that it's all my fault. I am bad.

There are some bright spots in the darkness. I love our cats, I feel warmth from them. It feels good to have them laying on my lap, to caress them. I read all the books I can find in the library. I like speed skating and I can skate well, although it gives the physical problems that I always have with exercising. I watch all the speed skating matches on television and make a scrapbook of all the articles in the newspapers about skating matches. I love music, playing the flute, taking flute lessons, playing in the Youth Orchestra – playing music together can break through the numbness I live in. For a short while I can feel alive, and feel happy when I play music together. I cling to these straws, I hold on and survive. Until I can leave, to go to the conservatory.

I write a long story. I think next time Lucy and the psychiatrist will talk about what I write – next time they will ask questions and help me to tell more about it. Then I will feel better.

No help

"You made a big deal out of your history. So, from the time you went to grammar school you didn't feel good anymore", the psychiatrist says. "No, that started in first class, when I felt unhappy because of my mother's comments on me", I answer. It seems the psychiatrist doesn't hear me. It is the only thing that is said about my story.

A confusing period follows. I do have consultations once every two or three weeks, which is far too little for me. Sometimes I talk with both Lucy and the psychiatrist, sometimes with one of them, and often I don't know beforehand with whom. After some time, I don't see the psychiatrist anymore, but I am not told why. She just isn't there anymore.

The consultations don't help me at all. But I don't dare to say that, I even don't dare to admit it to myself, since I can't manage on my own. I really need help and there is nothing else than this help – or the admission to a psychiatric hospital, which I try to prevent since I don't want to lose my study. I feel stuck. Lucy and the psychiatrist only talk superficially and don't offer anything more than what I already tried myself, and what didn't work: changing behavior, changing thoughts – but now it is called RET (Rational Emotive Therapy). This doesn't help me any further, but I pretend, to protect myself. Because for them I have to. During the consultations, I just act, to be able to talk, to be able to answer questions. I do what they ask me to do, I give the answers I think they want to hear. For a while, I manage to pretend RET is working. And then I can't keep up anymore. Lucy gets angry, tells me I don't try hard enough. Would I try hard enough, I would get better this way. Again I pretend it's working. But it isn't. Every time I hope that the next consultation will be different, that then they will talk with me about my childhood. But this never happens. At best, it is mentioned shortly, and then discussion is directed the other way: what behavior am I going to change now, which thoughts am I going to change. It is hopeless.

After two years of trying, it is clear that I can't go on. I don't sleep, I don't function. I get some medication against depression that doesn't make any difference. Which is not surprising, since I am not depressed. I am very scared, I don't sleep and I have other problems that I can't describe, but I am not depressed. I don't know what is wrong with me, but I do know that I am desperate because I don't get good help – and antidepressants don't change that.

Then finally I dare to ask it: "I would like to talk about my childhood." "For that, this isn't the right place, I got no education for doing that", Lucy answers. "There is another part of the organization where it is possible to get consultations every week and where they try to help people dealing with childhood experiences, the Psychotherapy Department. Here, you can't do this." I am perplexed. I didn't know about that. Why didn't she tell me before? Why didn't she admit me to this department right away when I came here two years ago? Why all this misery of the past years? Lucy will now apply for me there.

I get a consultation with a male psychiatrist. I tell him something about my childhood, especially about unpleasant experiences with my father. I tell him how my father always ignored what I said, how he acted as if I didn't exist. How I felt like talking to a concrete wall every time I told him something. How my father corrected grammar errors in every sentence I spoke, but never paid attention to the contents of my words. How he always spoke French to me, although I didn't want that and protested every day. How he was boasting right and left about my talents, but never saw me. For one hour, I describe how much I hate my father. Then the psychiatrist says: "Actually you loved your father very much. You loved him so much that you wanted sex with him. You are frustrated because this didn't happen." I tell him this is absolutely not true, I didn't want that. But he doesn't change his mind. He repeats his words. I leave totally upset. What this psychiatrist tells me feels like a wound inside me, unbearably painful.

Fortunately, I just read Alice Miller's book *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*. In this book, Alice Miller makes it clear that this idea of psychoanalysis about daughters wanting sex with their father is not true. Her book now helps me not to go crazy. I cling to Miller's books for hope. She writes about people with problems like I have, she writes about therapy helping people to deal with the past. So they do exist, therapists who talk with their clients about their childhood. Somewhere I must be able to find such a therapist. Somewhere, some day I will find real help. I have to hold on. Some day I will live. I mustn't give up now.

It is hard not to give up. Every day is one too many. I can't hold on anymore. Every day I feel I can't make it that day anymore, I can't, can't, can't. But I have to hold on, I shouldn't give up just before I get help. There will be one more consultation with some other psychiatrist of this department, and they tell me they will phone me. I set all my hopes on the appointment with this other psychiatrist. Every day I hope that please, please they will call me cause I can't hold on. I can't hold on till tomorrow, they have to call

me NOW. I need help. Badly. NOW.

But they don't call me. Day after day. Week after week. They don't call.

Finally, ultimately, the phone call comes. I talk two times with a psychiatrist – and I avoid all talking about my father. I want to protect myself from hearing such painful ideas again. I don't mention my father, I only tell about my problems with my mother. "Soon you will hear about the treatment we advise", the psychiatrist tells me. I wait. And wait. And wait.

Meanwhile Lucy has become ill. I have consultations with someone else, Paul. A nice young man. Talking with him is just as useless as it was with Lucy. I tell clearly that I am not able to hold on anymore. He knows I am waiting for a consultation at the psychotherapy department. Nothing happens. He just sits there and hears me speak. That is all. Every day is torture to me.

And then, four months later, when I am having again a senseless consultation with Lucy (who has recovered), Lucy says: "You have to agree now with admission to a psychiatric hospital. There is no other possibility anymore since at the psychotherapy department, they have a two-years waiting list." I am totally desperate. Nobody told me that, neither at the psychotherapy department, nor did Lucy who directed me to this department, nor Paul who talked with me during the six months intake procedure. Waiting for two years – and I am not even able to hold on until the next day. "I feel you're too ill to be helped at this place anymore. I don't want to be responsible for your treatment anymore since I think that it will not be long before you will attempt suicide. I don't see any other solution than an admission to a hospital."

Isn't this a strange idea? Isn't it strange that I should agree to be admitted to the hospital since there is a waiting list for psychotherapy? I feel this is not good for me in the first place, since I then lose everything that's a hold for me, and it's idiotic policy in terms of the costs of health service, since this would make my treatment even more expensive. If there is a shortage in the budget of health services, that leads to waiting lists, then this isn't the way to solve that, isn't it? But who listens to my reasoning?

It hurts me, hearing that I will not get help at the Riagg. I feel deceived by Lucy. She always pretended to be the expert, but wasn't honest to me. It was only after two years that she told me she didn't have an education to help people with their past. It was only when I had read the books of Alice Miller myself and started asking help to cope with my childhood history, she told me there was another division of the organization where clients can get this help. And now it is revealed there is a waiting list so I will not get the help I need. Why didn't she tell me before about psychotherapy? Why didn't she admit me to that division herself? Why didn't she ever discuss with me what would be good treatment for me? Why didn't she take responsibility two years ago and took care I got the help I needed? Why did she let me drown these years?

Always Lucy said it was my fault when I couldn't cope anymore. Always she became angry and threatening when I didn't cope with her treatment. Always I felt guilty and scared. But now I realize that it wasn't my fault. Lucy has been manipulating me – by making sharp remarks, by making threats, by ridiculing my thoughts and behavior. In many different ways she pointed out again and again that I couldn't expect making progress when I acted this way, when I thought this way. But she never talked with me about RET as just one of many ways to deal with problems like I had. She never discussed a diagnosis with me and never talked with me about a treatment plan. She never discussed alternatives with me, except admission to the hospital. Never was treatment with RET my choice. It hurts, seeing now how Lucy manipulated me all the time, and I now understand why Alice Miller stands up against manipulation in therapy: becoming more healthy means that I become more aware of my own needs, that I take my thoughts seriously, and that I become less powerless, and that can't be combined with being manipulated. Besides, it just hurts to be manipulated. But when I try to explain this, Lucy doesn't understand me.

Also, I now have something to discuss with Paul. I ask him whether he did see that I was in a very bad shape and whether he had seen that I needed help urgently? Yes, he did see that. I ask him whether he possibly would have been able to organize that I would get psychotherapy soon, in spite of the waiting list? Yes, he could have done that. Then why didn't he do that? Well, I had not really been one of his patients. So it wasn't something he had to do. He just had to talk with me to replace Lucy, and so he did: He talked with me. He had to talk with me since I had acute problems, but it wasn't his task to find out what was wrong with me and which treatment I should get. He knew the help of this department of the Riagg was not what I needed, he knew I had big problems and he knew that things couldn't continue the way they were going. But he didn't feel he was the one to intervene when I couldn't cope anymore. He was

not responsible for applying me to psychotherapy, so he didn't have to act when it took too long.

And then he says: "As far as I am concerned, you could have committed suicide. You weren't my patient, so I wouldn't be held responsible for it." Oh. He would not have gotten into trouble because of that. And that is the only thing that counts.

His answer hurts. It hurts horribly.

Robert

In the first months of 1987 I am desperately looking for help somewhere else. This is hard, since I don't have money to pay for a psychotherapist, the Riagg offers no help anymore, and hospitalization I don't want. All help apart from Riagg and hospital I have to pay for, and I am only a poor student. Finally, it turns out that there is a psychotherapist in my family doctor's practice, and that the cost may be covered by a special foundation in this practice. I grab this opportunity with both hands. Also, I have no other choice.

Robert, this psychotherapist, says he wants to help me to process my childhood experiences. I feel relieved, this seems to be a good basic assumption for the therapy. Robert is friendly and interested, his consulting room warm and cosy. I manage to tell Robert something about my problems, my childhood and what went wrong in the therapy I got before. He reacts with sympathy. He asks questions. I get hope. I am going to be fine, finally. Having gotten wise through experience, I tell Robert that I want a therapy in which I will not be manipulated. "Therapy without manipulation is impossible", Robert answers. I feel scared and desperate when he says this – I lose my hope that now finally I found a good therapist and a good therapy, I lose my hope to be cured. But I am not in a position to refuse. There is no one else I can ask for help. And I need help. My symptoms have become worse and worse. I remember all too well that I hardly survived without a therapist before. I am sure I will not survive now without a therapist. I accept the situation of Robert's therapy, although it doesn't feel good and although I know he is wrong with some things. I hope that the therapy may still give me enough to recover, in spite of some parts being not so good.

In the first period of the therapy I mostly talk about what happened at the Riagg. It hurts so much what they did to me and I feel so betrayed and deserted. The incompetence and indifference I met cut me to the bone. The loss of two and a half years of my life hurts unbearably. I can't put up with it. Sometimes Robert says he understands what I say, and he tells me it was wrong what happened at the Riagg. But sometimes he doesn't say that at all and I feel deserted by him, too. He says I can return to Lucy when I have processed my experiences with her. I feel bewildered. He knows that she doesn't have the skills to help me, doesn't he? He knows that she can't help me to deal with my past and that this is what I need. So how can he say such a thing? If even Robert doesn't understand me, to whom can I go to help me with my feelings?

The only thing I can do is tell and write as much as possible about my childhood in this therapy. That will help. So that's what I do.

Child

So tired. I am so very tired. I can't play. I climb up into my mother's lap. Every day I am so tired and I go to my mom. I sit silently in my mother's lap. For hours. How old am I? Four, five years old. My body feels like a strange thing. A strange thing, being something amiss with it. I feel my mother, I feel my mother's breathing. My mother's breathing seems to go automatically, being part of her. All this is just totally my mother. With me, it feels different. My body and my breathing don't feel like being Me, I feel like having to work hard to breathe. I am thinking about that. It makes me afraid that my breathing doesn't feel the same as my mother's. My body feels like a broken machine that gives me a lot of trouble to keep it working.

People and things around me are hazy. I feel hazy myself, too. Like I'm not really there. Sometimes I pull hairs out of my head. That feels good, like being alive. My mother wonders why I am having a bold spot on my head and goes to the family doctor with me. But he says it's nothing, since I do this myself.

I am having stomach ache. I tell my mother I don't feel well. She thinks I mean I have to vomit. But that's

not what I mean. I can't make myself clear to her.

I want to be with my mama every minute. I am scared to play at my friend's house. I am scared when my mother sleeps on Sunday afternoon and she is not there. I cry a lot. "Janet is squeamish about pain", the mother of one of my friends says.

Daddy sits in his chair, in the corner of our living room. I am two, three, four, five years old. I go to my daddy, hoping for love and attention and warmth, for a loving hug, every day again, despite everything. Daddy clasps me between his legs, holds me, I can't escape. I don't want to be forced. I protest, I say "no", I say "I don't want to", I say "let me go", I try to break loose. But he is stronger and I can't get loose. He doesn't let me go, he laughs, he likes this. He enjoys this. He always enjoys it when I am powerless, enjoys when I resist, enjoys me having pain, me being angry, me being scared. He likes that. He just holds me. I feel desperate, paralyzed, I can't do anything to help myself. It doesn't help to tell him, it doesn't help to get angry, it doesn't help to struggle. I am too small, too weak, there is nothing I can do, he just ignores everything I do. I feel like I'm dead inside. Daddy, why do you do this? I don't want to be dead. I want to live. Daddy, let me go.

Why doesn't anyone stand up for me, why doesn't anyone intervene? Why doesn't anyone notice that I feel desperate, every day again? He is my father, I am no match for him. I need help. It happens in the living room, everyone is there. No one helps. Why not? I am scared. Why doesn't anyone help?

I am my daddy's little princess. His child prodigy. I am his child, his possession. I have to be brilliant, the most brilliant child on earth. Daddy is always showing off with me. But I'm not able to do the things he says I can do. I have to read words that I can't read, I have to do sums that I can't do. I have to do math without understanding what he asks – I am only six or seven years old, and I really don't understand the math problems he gives me. But daddy says I do. I try with all my might. It mustn't show that I can't do what he thinks I can, that I am not as brilliant as he thinks. I feel desperate when I see one of his sums, I really am not that brilliant.

No one helps me. No one protects me. Not my mother, not my adult sisters, not my brother. No one notices that my father doesn't see me, that he doesn't even realize that I exist. No one notices that he sees me as a thing, that he uses me as a thing. No one sees who my father really is, no one notices what he does. Sometimes they are jealous because of my father's attention for me. I am daddy's princess - but he never paid any attention to the others. But it doesn't feel good to be daddy's princess. Why doesn't anyone see that?

My father is ill for a long time and stays in bed. I have to go up to him and say hello. I stand in the doorway of his bedroom at the attic. I don't want to go inside. Someone says I must go to him, but I don't want to. I stand there rooted to the earth and see him laying on his bed. I feel terrified and I feel weird, alienated. I don't want to go to this man, this stranger, this frightening man, my daddy on this bed. Bed. Daddy. Daddy on the bed. Fear. I don't want. Fear. Here, the memory stops.

I like it when my mother reads to me. She can read stories so that I can see everything in my head. Those are good times. Playing is fun, too. When I am not too tired, I like to play. With friends, with my dolls, with my toy tea-set, with Lego. With my doll's house with the furniture, the stairs and the lights my brother made in it. I like to roller-skate and to swing – swinging I like the most. I also like hearing children's songs on the record player. And I like watching television. Sometimes Karen, my eldest sister, plays with me. I feel good when everyone is at home and we are all together. But with the sad things, I am alone. There is no one to go to and cry.

People tell me I must be spent, having three big sisters. That I have four mothers. I believe them, but don't feel like that. I feel like I don't have even one mom.

Being a small child, I feel lonely in my family. My older siblings do things together, and I can't play along with them. They talk, and I can't take part in their conversations. At best, I can sit mum when they play a game, if and as long they accept me. When they play Monopoly, I can manage the bank, but I can not join in the game. When it is getting cosy in the evening, I have to go to bed. I remember a holiday, laying in the tent at night listening to the others when they are singing songs, my sister Karen playing her guitar. They are having fun. I am alone. I long so intensely to be with them. I feel lonely. I never really belong to them.

I am five or six years old. I remember myself thinking I want to grow up very fast. I want to be as big as

my sisters and brother are, so I can join them. I cling to that idea: I will grow up really fast. But then I realize that they will grow as well in the meantime. I will never be able to be as big as they are, I will never get what I long for so much. Suddenly I realize that no matter how fast I will grow, I will never catch up with them. I realize I haven't the ghost of a chance. The family I long for will never be there. For me, it has never been there, and it will never come. I feel lost and without hope. I long so to be part of a family. I long so to be together and do things together. I long so for safety, security, cosiness, equality, being together. I hate being the little sister.

And always, always they know better. I am sitting on a chair, the music-stand in front of me, seven years old. Recorder in my hands, music book on the music-stand. My sisters, adults already, around me. They are telling me what I do wrong, they want me to learn how to sit upright and how to play the notes. And I refuse. I refuse to do anything they tell me to. I don't want their comments. I sit there stiff as a stick and won't do anything anymore. I am fed up with them always telling me what I do wrong, fed up with them always knowing better, fed up with them telling me what to do. My sisters are astonished, they don't understand, they find me weird and stubborn. They don't know what it's like to always be the youngest.

Never ever am I right, never ever can I win a fight. I am no match for anyone. Sometimes I try with my brother, who is closest to me in age, but still seven years older. When Matthew and I fight, I bite him. My mother is angry because of that, this is not allowed. But what can I do? How can I win a fight? How can I defend myself?

When I am about six years old, there is one game that I can win: memory. I am good at it. "But," says my nineteen-year-old sister Sarah, "that does not count." It doesn't count, "since that is because of your age". All children of this age are good at it, she says, so she doesn't have a fair chance to win. That I lose all other games because of my age, that does count.

I go to school. I like it. I learn to read and I learn math. I am not that tired anymore. I play with friends. I feel able to have fun, be happy, play. I play at the playground, in the swing, in the sandbox, rollerskating. When I am eight years old, we move to another house. A nice house with a garden. There is a ditch next to the house. I have a boat and I enjoy sailing. I see the nest with the young ducks. the tadpoles we catch. I enjoy my brother's canoe. Skating at the ice in the winter. It is a lovely place to play. It seems, the sad things I can evade now.

But sometimes I can't. I am eight years old and working quietly at school. We are doing needlework. I ask a question to my neighbour. She doesn't answer, so I repeat my question. She still doesn't answer and doesn't even look at me. I am amazed. Then I notice that the class is dead silent, and when I look up I see all the children looking at me in astonishment. Something must be terribly wrong. "Now you have to stay inside during break", the teacher says. Eh? Why? What happened? No one tells me anything. It dawns upon me that the teacher has been very angry and said that anyone who would say a word would have to stay inside. And no one expected that I would say anything – me, the most obedient girl in class. Everyone thinks I know, but I don't. For me, it has been a quiet lesson, until this bewildering moment. Somehow I missed something. How is that possible? I don't talk about it with anyone. Too confusing, too scary to talk about.

In my head, there are images that keep coming up again and again. A kind of movie that attracts me. A movie that fascinates me, and scares me at the same time. When it starts I can't stop it, no matter how much I want it to stop. Images that feel like everything is happening right now, like I am dreaming while I am awake. I call it "my fantasy world" or "my other world". I don't tell anyone. It is a secret. A secret that I am ashamed of. I'd rather not think of it, but at the same time, I want to. I play the scenes from my "other world" with my dolls. It is frustrating that my dolls can not spread their legs the right way – then their legs rise, and that's not the right way. So I can't tie up the legs, and that has to be done. Sometimes I play the scenes of my "other world" with myself, secretly, alone. Camping in Friesland, I am sitting in my boat behind our tent. I tie up my wrists, the way it has to be in my "other world". The "movie" starts in my head, my feelings are intense – fear, pain, fascination and some kind of desire. Suddenly, someone is next to me taking pictures. Panic, being caught. In the middle of violent feelings, in the middle of pain, fear and the attractive force of anger and cruelty, I have to pretend that I am playing sweetly. That is hard and sad, and lonely.

Once, I play "my other world" with another child. I am eight years old. I play hospital with a friend. We take turns being nurse or patient. When Mary is nurse, she is nice and tender. I am not. When I am nurse, I am angry and tie her up and tell her I have to hurt her. I want her to do these things to me, but she doesn't. I am scared because of my violent feelings. But I can't stop them.

We move to another town. School is fine there, too. I miss my friend Emma, but she often stays with me during vacations. I also stay with her, although I still have trouble being without my mother. I am always scared when I stay with Emma. In my new town, I get a new friend. Hannah and I play together every day. One time, we don't agree what we are going to do, and Hannah returns home — tomorrow, we will play together again, but not today. Suddenly my mother stays next to me: "If you stay so nasty and selfish, you will have no friends anymore." I am frightened. No friends anymore, that's the worst thing that can happen. Also, the anger and hate in my mother's voice frightens me.

I am going to stay with Hannah. When we are late for dinner, her parents are angry with her. They are really angry. "There will be no punishment now, because Janet is staying here, but that will come later." Desperate and terrified, I make it through dinner and bedtime. I try to hide how I feel. But late at night, Hannah's parents find me crying in bed, and I am brought back home. "Homesick", this is called. I don't dare to tell that it was Hannah's punishment that made me so scared.

Despite all of this, I have a seemingly normal life, a very normal children's life with very normal children's things. I go to school and learn easily. I have friends, I play — swinging, walking on stilts, skipping the rope, playing with the hoop, playing hide and seek, rollerskating, swimming, sailing, with my boots in the mud so that it almost spills over. I sing in a children's choir and I play the piper flute in a band. I have goldfish and a rabbit and a turtle. Summers are endless, full of sunshine and warmth. Winters are full of snow and ice. These are good years. Nevertheless, I often feel "different". I feel I am too silent, too scared, too clumsy, and insecure. This hurts. But some time in the future, this will change, I tell myself. One time, I will manage not to be bad anymore.

It is good to tell and to write in the therapy with Robert. But it doesn't help. I was sure this would work, but nothing is changing. How should I continue?

Inpatient treatment

My thoughts of suicide become more urgent. Despair, exhaustion, emptiness, every second of the day and the night — unbearable. I feel a continuous urge to kill myself. I have to hold back myself constantly, I have to go against my feelings every minute. I can't keep it up. In the summer of 1987 I take an overdose of pills and alcohol.

That's a relief, to take all those pills, to finally be honest. That's what I have desperately longed for, to be honest, to be genuine, to really tell what is the matter with me, to tell the truth. I don't know any other way to tell the truth than this. For once, I have escaped from acting, for once I can relax. So now I can live again — now that I have been honest, now that I took all my pills, now things will become better. Feeling relieved, I can call for help.

An ambulance. The emergency unit. The intensive care. A psychiatrist who comes and talks with me. I feel far away, and just let everything happen. I am admitted to a psychiatric ward of the University Hospital.

Although I have resisted hospitalization for a long time, I am relieved to be here now. I feel hope. Here, at this psychiatric ward, I will really make progress. Here I am safe, here I can relax, here I can stop acting, here I am allowed to show how I really feel. Here they will understand, here they will talk with me and ask questions, here there will be enough time to pay attention to my story, enough to recover.

But that's not the way things work there. Although I am at a treatment unit, no treatment is given. Sandy, the psychiatrist of the ward, is friendly, but I seldom talk with her — once a week I talk with her for three quarters of an hour. Intensively exploring the past doesn't happen in those conversations. There isn't time for that. She does ask whether I was sexually abused as a child. "No," is my answer, "my father was a horrible man, but the only positive thing about him is that he didn't sexually abuse me. For that, he was too prudish and too Calvinistic."

At the ward, patients are kept busy with activities that are supposed to be therapy. There is occupational therapy — that's how I am kept busy in the morning. I can choose between keeping myself busy with art, woodworking, or sewing. I know all this will not help to solve my problems, and more probably will cause me to become exhausted. But I don't have a choice. I have to comply with their system. I choose to do something that may be useful to me later and I use the occupational therapy as a "free" sewing course. I indeed learn to sew excellently. But it does nothing for my health.

Another activity is creative therapy. I draw a painting of a desperate, abandoned preschooler who cries silently. This drawing tells me what I know already: I am this child, I am desperate and I need to talk. Talk about this child, talk about my childhood. I hope that this drawing will lead to someone trying to talk with me. But that doesn't happen. Since no one listens to what I draw, creative therapy is a totally useless pastime. (Later, when I go home and want to take these paintings with me, it turns out that is not allowed. The hospital owns them...)

Another activity they use to keep you busy is PMT (psycho-motorical therapy, yes). A kind of elderly gym class for psychiatric patients. Well, I guess it is not bad for people to move a little now and then. Really, nothing wrong with that, although in my case I have my doubts since my body reacts in such a strange way to it. But to call it therapy, is a lie. I try to explain I need something else, I tell them I need to talk about my past. But they call this "resistance against the therapy"... It is maddening.

They give relaxation exercises. But these only reinforce my fear and panic. Apart from all this, there are group discussions which usually are about things like the use of computers or TV, what to do at Group Evening this week, and problems between patients. Not a moment to process the past either. Nevertheless, I am almost relieved that at least people talk then, it is a tiny little bit in the direction of what I need.

I get an extensive psychological examination with lots of tests – from IQ to Rorschach. The psychologist tells me I will have a consultation with him later about the results of the tests, but that doesn't happen. I never get to know the results. I guess it is unlikely that the result of these tests is meaningful – although the tests consist of a huge amount of questions, none of them ask after the symptoms that tell best what is wrong with me. The fog, the feeling of unreality, the emptiness, feeling dead inside, going "out of my body", the unintentional sentences where I am crying out for my mother (something I try to hide as much as possible at this ward), the missing pieces of time as happened to me as a child – none of these symptoms come up for discussion in these tests.

What tells more than the tests themselves is the first, failing, attempt to do them. I have to tell something, seeing pictures. "Having to tell" is enough to let me panic. Then, it turns out the psychologist will write down everything I tell. I panic even more. I say: "Don't write down what I say, I don't want it!" But he doesn't stop – he writes down these words. I can't handle this anymore and I flee. Nobody talks with me why I panicked. The psychologist is irritated because I left the room. He says I have to do it again another time. I turn off all my feelings and work myself through the tests as though I am a robot.

More than anything, I have set my hopes on the family meetings – meetings between me, my parents and sometimes also one of my sisters, led by Sandy, the psychiatrist of the ward. I hope that because of my act of despair and my admission to the hospital, it has finally dawned upon my parents that there are serious problems between them and me. And because of Sandy's authority as a psychiatrist, they will now, at last, take an honest look at the past and admit what my past did to me. What a difference that would make for me! What I need is the truth, and someone who stands up for this truth in front of my parents – Sandy will do that.

But it doesn't happen. My parents are far from ready to take a look at themselves. They definitely don't want to look at the past, and don't want to know how that past feels for me. Even worse: Sandy makes no attempt whatsoever to push them in that direction. "It's nobody's fault that Janet had to be admitted to the psychiatric hospital", she says. "Everyone in the family carried responsibility for the way things were in our family." So did I, she says.

Never before have I felt so betrayed. I feel let down so very much. Lonely, abandoned, humiliated, betrayed.

The only result of the "family meetings" is that my mother starts calling me frequently in the hospital (and later at home), to complain how hard it is for her to live with my father, and that my father starts calling me frequently to complain how hard it is for him to live with my mother. And I am here in this hospital and no one asks how I feel. I break off the contact with my parents.

Treatment I don't get in the hospital. Honest discussions with my parents don't take place. The ways I have to waste my time with useless "therapies" is frustrating. Then what do these months in this hospital bring me? Some rest. I sleep better, I'm less scared at night. For a while I don't have to fend for myself, I don't have to go shopping and cook meals. Therefore, the permanent feeling that "everything is too much"

recedes. But the only good thing it really brings me is some new friends.

At first, I'm disappointed with my fellow patients. Before entry into the hospital I thought that all psychiatric patients felt the same desire as me: to try to find the truth about one's life. But I appear to be the only one at this ward feeling this URGE. This is a disappointment. Nevertheless, at this ward there are some people of my own age who are also having a hard time, who are at odds with themselves and their families. In this group, I can be more honest than in "normal" society with "normal" people. I don't have to pretend so much toward these patients, than I had towards my fellow students. Talking with them about feelings, I dare to say more than I dared with college friends, and this gives me a feeling of comradeship that helps me. Wry jokes about the hospital treatment and our parents bring relief. I make friends, and these are good and lasting friendships.

Also, for the first time in my life, I fall in love. In love with a nice boy with a great sense of humor and a lot of problems. Immediately, I run into my own limits and problems. In love or not – it turns out I can't stand any physical contact. That is a disappointment. For me, and also for Anthony of course. I don't have any sexual feelings, I have hardly ever felt them, except for something in my "other world" that looks a bit like sexual feelings but that I feel ashamed of. This relationship has so many obstacles that it never really becomes a relationship.

Finally I leave the hospital – I did gain some good friends, but I lost the hope that I felt when I entered. I am disillusioned about psychiatry, disappointed by the incompetence I found, hurt by the many painful and ignorant remarks of the staff that I encountered in those months. Desperately, I try to get heard in the last weeks of this hospitalization. But Sandy, who before was of good will ("What is it that you want to tell?" "I don't know..."), Sandy doesn't want to talk with me at all anymore. I have no other choice than to return home, although I am not any better. Treatment ward now is closed for me.

Psychiatric Emergency Unit

Subsequent admissions into this hospital, at the psychiatric emergency unit, are even more painful. Only once in this hospital I meet a psychiatrist with whom I can talk well and I think: "If I could have the opportunity to talk with him every day for a year, maybe then I would recover." But at the crisis unit of this hospital, one has to leave after a week, whether one's problem has been solved or not. So, I have no more than about five meetings with him.

Often I am bewildered by the incompetent remarks from the staff. "You can express yourself musically, can't you? That way you can help yourself." I can understand when friends show such incomprehension, although that hurts, too. But a professional... Is she really that naive, to think that one can get rid of problems like I have by expressing oneself musically? She doesn't believe me when I explain, she seems to think that I am not motivated. "You are bright, so you can solve your problems," someone else says. Unfortunately, my intelligence doesn't help me. I already tried everything I could think of. I need something else – and I thought they would know. But they know even less than I do.

Often, I am jealous of psychotic patients. Their problems are taken seriously, and I long for that, too. Psychotic patients aren't told that their symptoms are just a way to manipulate the staff – I am. They aren't blamed for behaving unnecessarily helpless – I am. They aren't told that if they'd really do their best they wouldn't have all those problems – I am. I find out that here are some symptoms that nurses and psychiatrists can't stand, and which often causes them to react in an insulting and hostile way: suicidal behavior, self-injury, and regressive, childish behavior. Unfortunately, these are exactly the three symptoms that are apparent with me.

I know I often behave in a childish way. I know this is weird. But I don't have much else, this is the only behavior that is more or less sincere. Psychiatrists think I am doing better when I behave like an adult, and they discourage regressive behavior, they react annoyed. But the adult behavior they like so much is only acting. They consider it as healthy, as a step towards recovery, but I notice that it makes me more ill. Somewhere in this childish behavior lies the key to the solution of my problems. That's what Robert thinks, too, but in the University Hospital I have to do my utmost not to let this child take over my behavior, and that is difficult when I go off-track so much that I end up at the emergency ward.

Suicide thoughts are with me all the time. Am I going to die, am I not going to die, will I stay alive, won't I stay alive, can I hold on, can't I hold on, how long do I have to continue holding on, how long do I have to give myself a chance, when am I allowed to give up, do I want to die, do I want to live? It is a daily

struggle, that I sometimes lose. "Next crisis, you should choose another solution", they tell me at the psychiatric ward, after another overdose. They don't understand that my solution gives me something that their advice doesn't give. Seeking distraction, doing things that give pleasure, being nice to myself, thinking positively, relaxation exercises, going to friends, talking about my problems, calling a telephonic emergency service that can't solve my problems, alarming a social worker who thinks admission to the psychiatric ward is not necessary — it doesn't work at all. So next time, I again take all my pills. It ends up OK every time, but at the ward they get angry. Wasn't I supposed to act differently?

Hurting myself is my solution for the emptiness. I desperately long to "feel something". I don't feel anything, I feel like a walking dead body. My belly is a huge hole, and only the edges leave a somewhat painful feeling. Pain is better than a hole. When I feel pain, then at least I exist. So I hurt myself. As a child, I did this by pulling hairs out of my head. Now I start cutting my wrists with a knife, to relieve the inner pressure, and to feel somewhat alive, to be honest for a moment. I never cut just anywhere, I only cut myself at the blood vessels on my wrists. Only when I run the risk of dying if I go too far, I find the relief I'm looking for. It's a permanent "game" with death, finding out how far I will go today. A "game" that relieves the pressure so that I can stay alive.

Other times, cutting is a way to punish myself when I make "mistakes". Making "mistakes", having said something wrong or maybe having said something wrong, hearing something wrong, forgetting something, making a mistake during a concert or exam or whatever — it causes a panic and feelings of being bad. When I cut myself, I find some relief.

I always carry razor blades with me, in my pocket. This makes me feel safe, I need to know that I can use them whenever I need them. Even the idea that I can't use them causes panic. I need to be sure that I can do something when the pressure and the tension get too high, when I can't stand it anymore.

At the crisis unit, you're not allowed to carry razor blades with you. I take them with me all the same. The nurses ask me to turn them in. I refuse. They become angry. I still refuse. They start to threaten. I refuse once more. Three of them together, they pick me up and hold me on my bed and examine me. I feel awful. But what I remember most is the awareness that something is amiss with my feelings when this happens. It feels like my feelings don't belong to this situation but to another. It feels like I am imitating something, I am imitating a part of my "other world". But I don't understand why I do this. I don't talk about it with anyone. And nobody talks with me. When they get the razor blades, they leave.

I can understand them taking away my razor blades — it is clear what I am going to do with them. But it would be more helpful if they would talk with me. If they would talk about the symptoms behind my despair, that would help. Ask about my panic, about my nightmares, my fears, the fog, the emptiness, the alienation. That would be a beginning, and asking the right questions, it wouldn't be difficult to find out why I wanted to hurt myself. Then it would be far more easy for me to stop doing it. But that's not what they talk about with me — they talk about the ward rules that I break, and threaten to send me home when I break the rules. It would even make a difference if they would just say that they feel sorry when I hurt myself, that would help me not to do it. But they don't say that. When I ask them: "Why do you feel it is appropriate to send me home in three days while you don't allow me to have razor blades here at the ward? I will have them at home, won't I?", they answer: "If you're home, you can do to yourself whatever you want, that's not our problem." Silently, unseen, I leave the ward.

Aimlessly I wander about for a couple of hours. I feel lonely and lost. I don't have any place to go to. I long for a warm and safe place to hide. But I can't find one. I consider going by train to where ever the train will bring me. Everywhere it will be better than here. But I don't dare to. I know I can't explain it to the ticket inspector. There isn't any other place to go than back to the hospital. I try to come in as unseen as I left. But this doesn't work. They see me and they are angry with me. They had to inform the police, how the hell could I leave without asking permission? I can't tell them. I am surprised that they do mind whether I am safe or not — that's exactly why I left, they made it clear to me that they didn't mind. But, well, I guess, they are officially responsible for me while I'm here — I remember Paul at the Riagg.

Finally I leave, prematurely. "Against advice" I go home. Crisis or no crisis, at this ward I am breaking down. Better then, to have no "help" at all.

In fact, I am so far gone that I can't live on my own and need a long-lasting admission to a psychiatric ward. But looking at my experiences at the psychiatric treatment ward of the University Hospital, and knowing about the treatment protocols of other treatment wards, I suspect that such a long-lasting treatment ward will not help me. I suspect that such a treatment will give me neither the therapy, nor the

safety that I need. I am even scared that my condition will worsen so much that I will not survive. But how can I cope at home? I am too scared, too tired, too sleepless, too suicidal, too far gone to be able to live on my own. Robert presents a solution by offering consultations twice a week, and when it turns out that's not enough, even three or four times a week. That way, I manage to stay in my own home, with admissions to the crisis ward when things go wrong, but all the same at home with ambulant therapy.

By offering contact very frequently, Robert does his best for me in a very special way. The disadvantage is that I am very dependent on Robert. Without frequent contact I can't manage. It's the therapy sessions and the phone calls in between that keep me alive. Talking with Robert breaks through the emptiness, in the contact with Robert I can stop acting for a moment, then I can cry, I hold out hope, keep my self-hurting behavior in check. As soon as he is away, I can't hold on anymore. So Robert's summer holidays are a serious problem for me.

Before the summer of 1989 starts, we get in touch with Birch Manor, a psychiatric hospital near the city where I live, to make sure that I will have someone to talk with during the summer. And that, if things go wrong with me, I will be admitted to Birch Manor instead of the University Hospital. That indeed happens during the summer. Fortunately, in this hospital I don't have to leave the emergency ward after a week, but I can stay there for five weeks.

This hospitalization is a relief. At the crisis unit of Birch Manor, the nursing staff does not become stressed or malicious in response to my problems. They have a lot of patience and take a lot of time to talk with me, often during a walk, which makes talking more easy. They react calmly and without blaming me for my self-hurting behavior, my suicidal thoughts, or for the mugs that I smash to pieces in despair. They pay attention to what I try to explain about my feelings. Although I can't explain really well, they show their good will to listen and to understand, which prevents accusations of manipulation or drawing attention. Because of the daily talks with the staff, they know me, and approach me when they see I am in trouble. And I dare to go to them when I feel that things go wrong with me – I am used to talking with them and I trust that they will react in a friendly way. I am happy I can stay here, and I feel thankful for the way they treat me there.

But it doesn't bring me real change. Robert's therapy doesn't bring real change, either. Both Robert and I try as good as we can, but it doesn't help. Therapy enables me to hold on, but there isn't any cure in sight, or even any improvement. I still feel scared and empty, living in a fog. I still sleep very badly. I can't fall asleep, and I can't sleep on, waking up every hour. The worst moments are when I wake up because of noise, outside or inside my house. Then I am completely shaken, desperate and terrified and can't sleep anymore. I still have have nightmares, several times each night. Still, I dream about German soldiers or unknown men who chase me. Sometimes I dream about my father. I dream my father is sexually abusing me – that never happened, so where do these dreams come from? Sometimes I dream about my "other world", about this movie in my head that often forces itself unto me. These are dreams that stay with me during the day, and I have a lot of trouble handling them. I can't get the scenes out of my head. One such dream I write down in my diary. "At the end I seek refuge in a corner, like a small wounded animal, curled up in a fetal position, hidden in myself." That is exactly how I always feel, the clearest way to describe what is wrong with me: "a small, wounded animal" that seeks refuge to die alone. Why do I feel this way? Why do I dream this?

Stettbacher's four steps

It is 1990, six years after I visited a therapist for the first time. And I am not any better than I was before I got help. Actually, I am much worse. I feel desperate, I hurt myself, I am at the crisis ward regularly, and I feel so unstable that I can only manage with the help of four therapy sessions a week. My immune system is failing, and I am ill six months a year with fever, laryngitis or other infections.

It is clear that the Riagg and the psychiatric wards at the University Hospital worsened my situation. But for several years now I have been in therapy with Robert, a psychotherapist who helps me to process my past. I am convinced that I am on the right track by trying to process my childhood experiences. Yet there is no improvement whatsoever. Why don't I get better? What am I doing wrong, what is Robert doing wrong? How can the therapy be changed so I will improve? I have no idea.

A year ago I have read Alice Miller's book *Banished Knowledge*. In this book Miller describes the therapy of the Swiss psychotherapist Konrad Stettbacher. She writes that this therapy helped herself very much to process her childhood experiences. Now I cling to this. I hope that this new therapy will help me, and I

wait impatiently for Stettbacher's book to come out. Finally, August 1990 it's in the Dutch bookstores. I buy it immediately. And I am terribly disappointed.

Making Sense of Suffering turns out to be a loose collection of notes and instructions for patients in Stettbacher's clinic, poorly written. I feel it tells me nothing new, I know all this already. Is this what I looked forward to so much? Stettbacher's method appears too superficial and rational to me. I do not understand how Alice Miller could be so enthusiastic about it. How could this therapy work, even without a therapist, like Alice Miller writes, why does she think that exactly this therapy can help people cure themselves? Besides, Stettbacher's therapy is very verbal. And talking is precisely what I can't do. I wonder if Stettbacher, like so many other therapists, would tell me that I must learn to talk before he can help me – whereas I need therapy first to learn to talk.

But Stettbacher also mentions another way to work with his four steps of the therapy process: by writing. And writing I can do, so maybe this could be a way to try the therapy. I don't believe in this therapy, but I am desperate and I don't see any other way to proceed. The therapy that I do isn't working, I trust Alice Miller, and I have nothing to lose – so I take paper and pen, lay the book next to me with the description of Stettbacher's four steps, and start writing. On the basis of these steps, I write down a memory that comes up at that moment. It's not a very important memory, not even a memory of my parents. It is a small incident with one of my sisters. I write using the four steps, I write what I perceived (first step), how I felt (second step), what my thoughts were (third step), and what I needed back then (fourth step).

In spite of my disappointment and disbelief when I read Stettbacher's book, these few pages of writing lead to a big breakthrough. "Why did you do that? For what reason did this happen? Did it happen because I...?" I just ask myself the questions that I read in the book. What are my answers? Yes, I thought this had been my fault, I thought this happened because of me. Then suddenly I notice that this wasn't true. This wasn't my fault, I was not responsible for what my sister did, she wasn't right, I didn't cause this, I didn't provoke it. I had always thought that I did. But my sister could have reacted differently. Never before I had realized this. She actually could have reacted differently.

The incident that I wrote about had been really minor, but suddenly I realize that this feeling of guilt is a central pattern in my whole history and in the problems I have. The past years, I always protested when someone said something to me about guilt and my own contribution to what happened – people often start talking about this, they seem to think that realizing one's own contribution helps to cure. I always thought that I protested so fiercely since I knew very well that I was not guilty. I always thought that I could see clearly that children are not guilty when adults abuse them, emotionally or otherwise. But somewhere in a corner of my mind, I still thought I was guilty, and my problems remained. I had been right in my protests, but since I wasn't aware of my own feelings of guilt, it hadn't helped me.

I remember that psychiatrists often called my behavior "victimizing myself". All too painfully I remember in which hurtful way they talked about this to me. They did this in several ways, varying from merely ignoring me when I tried to make clear how I felt, to making negative, even hostile remarks about my behavior. Or they asked me kindly but urgently to stop "acting like a victim", to no longer be the victim of my past. But that didn't work. It took until now for my "victim role" to disappear, now I find out that I really was a victim. This "victimizing myself" disappears only now, now that I can feel and admit that I was a victim, and can continue feeling and admitting it...

Now that I realize my feelings of guilt were unjust, I suddenly feel much better. My most troublesome symptom – that I feel desperate every second of the day, and therefore constantly feel the desire to kill myself or to cut myself – mostly disappears. I no longer feel the need to cut myself or to kill myself.

In the next months I use the four steps now and then. I write down memories, using the four steps. But without any noticeable result.

At the end of 1990 my boy-friend Anthony tells me he is in love with someone else. I immediately feel hazy and small, I withdraw totally, staring into the void. I can't talk anymore, I feel terrified and desperate and suicidal. It is clear to me that my reaction can't have anything to do with Anthony. I myself don't want to continue this relationship and I had already decided to tell him, but hadn't yet found the courage and strength to do it. I am not able to be in a relationship, with anyone. A man scares me too much. I not only say "no" to all sexual contact, I don't even want to be touched by Anthony. When I do allow it, this is just because I feel that I should. But I can't stand it and actually I can't even stand being in one room together.

I like Anthony a lot, but I don't want a relationship with him. I already told him I'd rather have a kind of brother-and-sister contact. It's understandable that he has fallen in love with someone else. I'm losing something I didn't want to keep — so why I am so upset? All my thoughts are about killing myself, and I have to try hard to hold myself back.

A therapy session with Robert does not bring any change. I am aware that I am a danger to myself. I will not be able to resist the impulse to kill myself. I need protection from self-harm. Robert arranges an intake for Birch Manor.

This time, it isn't at all easy to be admitted. The psychiatrist who has to decide about my admission to Birch Manor reacts with anger. He is mad at me, and tells me that my regressive behavior is completely stupid. He doesn't want to admit me to the hospital, since then he would reward this crazy behavior. Do I know how ridiculous I am, sitting there scared and huddled up? I'm not a baby, am I? I just should take all those pills, no big deal, I surely would awaken after some time.

But he doesn't dare to take this risk. "I am fed up with you, but I will have to admit you to the hospital. Would you really kill yourself, I would get problems since you asked me for help." He is pissed off that I caused him to do something he doesn't want to, and he says he is going to call Robert now and he wants me to be there while he is going to tell Robert the truth about me. He calls Robert and does his utmost to use to most insulting words. It is a long and painful phone call. Robert tries to calm him down and explain the situation, but doesn't get through. Later, Robert reacts upset when he hears from me that I was present at this phone call.

Finally, on Christmas eve, admission to the psychiatric hospital follows. I stay at a ward where I have been before and where I feel safe, with a friendly staff. One of them says he is impressed with the progress I made since the last time I was there, acting much more like an adult. But at first during this hospitalization nothing changes. I stay terrified, desperate and suicidal.

After a week I realize that I should work with the four steps again. Here, at this ward, I feel safe enough to dare to look carefully what lays behind my pain and fear. I find a quiet place and take paper and pencil again. I start writing and after some hours of writing and very carefully observing my feelings, I become aware of feelings of shame and of being bad. I see a vision of people looking at me. I see them pointing scornfully at me and I see that they feel I am inferior and bad since Anthony has fallen in love with someone else. I see an image of people who don't want me anymore. I am nothing, I am bad, I have no right to exist. Suddenly I realize that it is just bullshit that "these people" do find me bad, and that I don't have to take that to heart. I am not bad, I don't have to feel ashamed and I stand up for myself with the help of the four steps of Stettbacher's therapy. Then I hear my mother: "You are a bad, nasty and selfish child, and if you stay that way, you won't have friends anymore." To me, this situation with Anthony was "evidence" that she was right. Her prediction came true — my boyfriend left me. The feeling of being bad, being ashamed about that and the fear that everyone would know how bad I was, had been unbearable. That had made me so upset that I had wanted to die. Now that this is made clear and put straight, it is over. My desire to kill myself immediately vanishes, and the next day I can go home.

These two self-help therapy sessions, this last one about shame and the first one about guilt, have the result that I am much more stable. After this, I never need to go to a psychiatric hospital anymore.

Stranded

Encouraged by the good results, I start working intensively with Stettbacher's therapy. But after a month, I can't go on. I feel stressed and don't know how to continue the therapy. More and more, working with the therapy feels like a way to achieve. I feel stressed. I am not able to continue this way. Instead of feeling better, I feel worse. I stop working with the therapy of the four steps.

Quitting when I get problems with activities and become stressed — it's a disastrous way of dealing with problems that I started using the years before. First I stopped with the theoretical parts of my study, then with recitals at the conservatory, then with the whole study, then with teaching, now with Stettbacher's therapy — a hopeless and disastrous series of withdrawals, more and more confining my life. Robert encourages these decisions, this is the way he works. Let go of everything, and then something better will grow. Unfortunately, it doesn't work this way.

A major obstacle for my attempts to write with the help of the four steps, are the memories of my father.

The therapy seems to work well when I process memories of my mother, but not at all when I work with memories of my father. Again and again I end up in painful, unbearable feelings of despair, of not being able to reach him, not being seen, not being heard, my words being totally ignored – even now that I say the words in the therapy. I feel like talking into the void, and this is exactly what my memories are about, and what I try to solve. But I don't make any progress and I get very scared, unbearably scared. All my words ricochet off him, as if I hadn't spoken them. It is as if I do not exist, as if my life is slipping away from me, and this feels terribly frightening. I feel worse and worse and I don't know how to continue this therapy. I don't dare to continue.

Something else that causes problems with the therapy of the four steps, is that Robert tries to do the therapy of the four steps with me in sessions with him – and this fails again and again since I can't talk. I want to talk, I want to tell, but I can't say anything. The words are in my head, but I can't get them out of my mouth, I hardly say anything during a session.

In all sorts of ways, Robert tries to make me speak, to make me say at least one word, at least the one word with which I have to start the four steps: "mama". Often Robert is nice, understanding and patient when he tries to make me talk, at other times he is irritated and forcing, but nothing makes me talk. Or he puts pressure on me by saying that healing will never be possible for me if I don't start talking, and that we have to stop the therapy since it is useless this way. I become scared, but remain silent. Sometimes I succumb and say what Robert wants me to say, and what I myself would like to say but can't. Then I shut off all my feelings, step out of myself and say it: "mama". But this brings no breakthrough or step forward, I merely become overtired from the stress it gives me. I try so very hard, so terribly hard, to talk, every therapy session again. It's wearing me out.

I tell Robert I can do Stettbacher's therapy by writing, that I do write memories at home using the four steps. And that I even can do it aloud a little bit, at home with a cassette recorder. But Robert doesn't want to hear of it. He says it won't be any good. I have to do it with him, aloud with him, only then it will bring change. "I feel frustrated, I can't work with you the way you are now." Instead of trying self-help, I should put my energy in contact with Robert and solve the problems I encounter in the sessions. And then I hand myself in and let the self-help go. I am too scared of losing him, I do what he wants.

But we don't manage to let me do Stettbacher's therapy in Robert's sessions and soon we stop trying. So Stettbacher's therapy is shelved.

Body psychotherapy

Instead of the therapy of the four steps, we now start doing "body psychotherapy". By being touched and getting massages, I am "brought into contact with myself". And it works: I start having feelings when he does this. Overwhelming, severely painful and frightening feelings – but feelings. Body psychotherapy thus offers me a way out of the emptiness, a way out of the alienation and the feeling of being dead inside. Finally the hole in my stomach is filled – with pain. This gives me feelings of relief and healing – or at least a step towards healing. For a short while I feel I'm alive, I feel that I exist, that I am myself, that I am honest.

It never lasts long, this having feelings. Suddenly it stops and I sink in. I don't move anymore, don't cry anymore, I am not there anymore, apathetic, silent, weak, empty, far away. I say that I'm going "to the colors", and that as a small child, I also went "to the colors" laying in bed. Colors in my head. Robert grumbles, I should continue bodywork, I shouldn't get into these colors, I shouldn't stop the bodywork after such a short time, I should continue, only then it will bring me cure. But I can't help not having feelings anymore.

And after the sessions the feelings never last. I can't bring home with me the relief of being able to feel. At home, there is still the alienation, the emptiness, the feeling of being dead inside. And actually, this gets worse – the more I feel during a therapy session, the worse the emptiness and feeling dead afterwards. But of course, this just needs doing more sessions and continuing the therapy, then the result will stay in between sessions, too. This therapy works, it even works spectacularly. Body psychotherapy brings relief, and I always return to it to escape from the arid desert of emptiness. Body psychotherapy gives me hope. Body psychotherapy will bring the solution.

But some techniques of body psychotherapy I hate. Like the way Robert sometimes physically pushes me against the floor or a wall. Somehow I realize that this is wrong, that this is actually abuse, and I often

refuse this way of working. But all too often I am no match for him and I can't prevent this abuse. Robert has too much authority, he says that it is good for me, to express my feelings when he is holding me, and I can't defend myself against this idea.

The biggest problem is "rage work". I have to let out my anger by screaming, beating and kicking – against pillows that I should talk to as if they are my parents. He says this brings cure. But it doesn't feel like that, it always makes me feel extremely empty and dead inside. Robert says I should continue for a longer time and become even more angry. But the only result is an even more horrible emptiness. Often I refuse this technique. I myself feel that anger is not a "real" feeling but is a disguise for other feelings, like sadness, pain and fear. I experience acting out anger as useless and false, I feel it leads me away from my real feelings. I think that working with my real feelings is much more useful. Robert says I am resisting the therapy, or he says I lack motivation for the therapy, or he says I don't have enough courage, or I do not really want to be cured. He likes the "power" of the anger, and often tries to lead me to it. He says I walk away from the confrontation with my parents. I strongly feel he is wrong, but I can't protest. He is the authority and I am the patient. I am ill, so it is obvious to think that I am wrong.

It is hard to escape from being the patient and Robert being the authority. So I am very relieved when I read a book by Thomas Gordon. Gordon writes that anger is not a primary feeling, but disguises other feelings, he calls anger a secondary feeling. With the help of this book and this authority, I succeed better in staying by my own experiences and refusing to do "rage work".

Other forms of body psychotherapy, I continue. Body psychotherapy seems the best way to solve my problems, the fastest way to get feelings. I hope so strongly that this therapy will bring me cure. I am so fed up with a life that consists of being ill and doing therapy. I long for a normal life, an active life, a life with a job like other people have, living my life in a sensible way, a life that gives more than being lonely and laying in bed ill all the time. I want to feel well, I want to be better, this therapy has to work. I did every therapy I could think of, this therapy has to work otherwise the situation would be unbearable and I would kill myself. I can't hold on being ill all the time without having another kind of life in prospect.

At the moment I am in danger of feeling ultimately desperate, I turn the switch and decide that the therapy worked and that I am better now. Then I convince myself that I will finally be able to do all the things I wanted to do so very much but couldn't do for so long.

So I start working as a volunteer one morning in the week, or I start taking classes, or I start sporting or something like that. Small things, but revolutionary for me. And always with the idea that this is the first step, and planning what will follow next and what will be the result in the end: a normal life. I long so much for that...

But soon, I notice that even this first step is hard for me. That I feel very tired and don't feel good at all. But I hold on, thinking that I just have to get used to it, and when I keep on, it will go better and better and in the end I will be able to work normally. I remember that I thought so before and then it didn't work out. But I am convinced that this time things are really different, since now I really changed by this body psychotherapy. Now body psychotherapy has cured me, now I will manage.

After some months, I collapse. I feel exhausted, depressed, desperate and suicidal. Then I put my hopes again on resting and "letting go" and concentrating fully on therapy sessions with Robert and taking time for myself. Then I'm convinced that this will make me better. After some time it turns out that the therapy doesn't make me better, so then again I don't want to lose hope and start thinking that I am really better now and start new activities that give meaning and prospect. But despite the hope I set on therapy, despite my determination to build up a meaningful life, it doesn't help. I get worse and worse. I can do less and less. I am ill more often, I have a fever more often and longer. When will I get better?

Earthquake

In the summer of 1993 I go on a holiday to Sweden. Together with Max, a man I met a few months before. Max is nice. I decide I should stop being scared of men. After all, I have no reason to be so scared, so I should just ignore it and it will be over. And this is only a friendship, so there is nothing to be afraid of. So I do, and apparently it works.

But when in Sweden, within a day I feel awful. I have strong feelings of fear, aversion and hate. I can't stand seeing or hearing Max or be in his vicinity, which isn't easy when you sleep in the same tent... It's

clear to me that my feelings don't have anything to do with Max. He doesn't do anything that can reasonably cause these feelings. My feelings aren't consistent with his behavior. I start to think these feelings may tell me something about my childhood.

The first week we camp with a group of people, in a summer camp where activities are organized with Voice Dialogue. I don't have any experience with Voice Dialogue, but it turns out to be a way to see yourself in different roles, a way to let the different "voices" inside yourself speak. The people in this group are nice, I feel at home and I am touched by the respectful way people discuss their feelings and memories in this group. Scared, confused, amazed but also relieved, I realize that my feelings are telling me about sexual abuse. I feel intensely relieved that I can finally tell the truth about myself. But I also feel insecure since I don't have clear memories. On the one hand I feel like a liar when I tell the group that I have been sexually abused, on the other hand I feel very clearly that this is not a lie, and I feel tremendously relieved that I now at last tell the truth.

Home again, I forget what I realized in the summer camp. I feel very frightened when I come home and I stay terrified in the weeks after – but I don't understand why. Not even in the therapy sessions with Robert do I tell what I thought and felt in this group in Sweden about sexual abuse. I don't think about it anymore. I don't know it anymore.

But a few months later I am confronted with it again. During a therapy session, I manage not to plunge into my feelings like I do so often (like Robert wants me to), but to explore very carefully the borderline where feeling nothing changes into feeling something. And there, to my astonishment, I find a memory. Not a memory with images, but with only physical feelings. It's like feeling in my body again what happened when I was a small child. I feel something entering me, in my vagina, I have the impression that it is a finger, it hurts and I feel afraid and staggered, and it is my father who does this.

It is startling to feel this memory, it evokes a lot of anxiety and confusion, but I also feel relieved. The pieces of the puzzle of my life seem to fall in place. It seems to fit so clearly. I never before experienced something so real and so true.

I hope that this is the breakthrough in therapy that I have been waiting for so long, I hope that now my symptoms will really improve. But that doesn't happen, nothing changes. Instead, a period follows with a lot of fear and confusion, with doubt and feelings of guilt about my memory and at the same time a feeling of being sure that it is true. It feels often like I am out of my depth, it feels like being in an earthquake that won't stop.

Often I blame myself for lying about being sexually abused, but at the same time I am sure that that it happened. I think that I would feel better if I would get memories in the form of images instead of only feelings in my body, and I try to find them in the therapy. But I don't succeed. Desperately I try to find evidence of what did happen and what didn't.

I start doing group therapies, going to Robert only once a week. I long for group therapy, to break through my loneliness, to meet people who also struggle with themselves, to find the confidence that felt so good during the Voice Dialogue camp. And to be able to do therapy for a longer period, like in group therapies that last a weekend or a week. If body psychotherapy makes me feel alive, but sessions of one hour aren't enough for real changes, then maybe doing body psychotherapy during a weekend or a week will bring recovery. Maybe there I will get clarity about what happened with me. Maybe there I will get memories in images, that will enable me to know what the puzzle looks like.

I go to these group therapies in high hopes. I cherish the moments that I have feelings, the moments that I feel real and alive. I enjoy the nice people that I meet in these groups. And I come home with the intense hope and desire that these days have been a turning point in my life, with the hope that these days brought me real change, that a switch has been turned inside of me. Inspired by my cure, I start a job-application training, or more volunteer work, or classes. And then I discover that nothing has changed. I am still ill and exhausted. Each time I am disappointed.

Sometimes I take up the four steps of Stettbacher again. I write a short story about being sexually abused, using the four steps while I write. This immediately has effect. That night, I sleep for five hours without interruption, and the subsequent nights about four hours. I have never, for at least twenty years, slept more than two hours without a break, and almost always I only slept one hour at a stretch. Sleeping for three, four, five hours is a miracle. But after some nights, this stops. I again wake up every hour.

Still I am scared and confused. I don't have anything to fall back on, I don't know what did and didn't happen to me. I am afraid of my memories, but also long for clarity. I feel unstable, shaken by fear and uncertainty. Maybe if I would get clarity, maybe then the earthquake would stop.

What is left that I could try to do? Hypnosis, we haven't tried that yet, that could bring clarity. But we both fear hypnosis, Robert and I fear what it might bring up. Robert arranges for an assistant during the sessions, to make the sessions more safe, to be sure we can handle what is going to happen. Then the sessions start. For the hypnosis, I have to relax and concentrate and imagine a nice and safe place. But — all these things I can't. I can't relax, relaxation is something I never experienced. I am always on the alert and can't stop it. I never ever experienced a place where I felt nice and safe, and can't even imagine it in my fantasy. The Voice Dialogue camp came most close to feeling safe, but not enough to be able to relax when I remember it. I can't stop my feelings of tension, fear and caution. After some time, it is clear that hypnosis is not a suitable therapy for me. I can't be hypnotized. This method doesn't help me either.

Too late

How can I find out what happened? Did my mother see or notice anything? I haven't been in touch with my family for years, and therefore it is not easy for me to start talking. I organize a meeting, and it turns out to be a good meeting, but it doesn't bring me new facts.

Then I decide to do it: to talk with my father. That is the only thing left that can help. I need information from my father. I want to talk with my father about my memories. Maybe, with Robert, in Robert's consulting room, I am able to do this. Maybe then I dare to tell, maybe then I dare to ask my questions. Maybe then my father will be willing to answer my questions honestly.

To make an appointment, I have to call him. I don't dare, but I do it. To make it as safe as possible, I call during a therapy session, from Robert's room, with Robert next to me, on Monday June 27th, 1994. It is a special telephone call. For the first time in my life I am talking with my father without behaving like a nice, cute, docile, smiling little girl. I talk with my father in a serious, calm and adult way. My father acts lightly, says there is still a bicycle of mine "at home" — he can take it with him when he comes to meet me. "No", I answer quietly, "that can't be combined with what I want to talk about." We'll see each other next week, Tuesday July 5th.

I feel relieved about this phone call. I am surprised and happy that I could do this, being real in the contact with my father. I feel good, being real, being genuine, all the more because I could do this towards my father. This gives me hope. Hope that I will be able to talk with my father, hope that I dare to ask for the information I need. Hope that I at least will be able to deduct something from my father's reaction, something about the truth of my story. What shall I tell? What shall I ask? What evidence do I have, would he deny? Shall I talk about my "other world"? I hesitate. I am scared. Is it wise, to talk with my father? What should I do, would he deny? Am I strong enough to still discuss my truth in that situation? But maybe we will just have a good talk. And I am taken with the feeling that I did exist during the phone call. I feel touched. For the first time in my life, I did truly exist in the contact with my father. I will be fine, finally.

Two days later, a heart attack shatters my hopes.

So, that's how it came to pass, that's how I came too late. Too late to ask my father my questions, too late to see my father's reaction to my story, too late to get answers to my questions. I am left with a thousand "I-should-haves". For ten years I have been in search of the missing pieces of my life, and now, now I am just six days late to find them.

Desperately I try to gather some pieces. My father who had talked with the reverend about "terrible things" he did. My mother, who tells me after the funeral that my father behaved extraordinarily nervous in his last days, without mentioning his appointment with me to her. My brother Matthew and my sister Karen, who tell me they already suspected that my father sexually abused me — but who didn't actually see this. My cousin, who lived with us when I was three to five years old and who believes my story when I tell him — but who didn't see anything of it either. My sisters Sarah and Suzanne, who don't want to hear a single bad word about my father, who don't want to talk with me, and react with anger and hateful remarks when I write them a letter. There are only a few small pieces, the pieces I can gather.

Without help from my father and without any more clues from my relatives, I still need to get the picture

of my life completed. But how? I guess it will be body psychotherapy that should help, Robert's therapy and group therapies. But they don't work. I keep being ill, tired, scared, empty, sleepless, lonely and alienated in my fog. Will I ever recover, now that the only witness has died?

Pieces put together

1995-1996

Back to the four steps

April 1995. Almost a year after my father died. A four-days group primal therapy is going to bring change, finally, the change I hope for. For four long days, I will do my utmost to reach my feelings and memories. This time it will work. It has to. I grab this chance, I go for it, this time my cure will start. Body psychotherapy, acting out anger, dancing, letting my inner child speak, talking in the group, and all this for four days. I feel hopeful.

The first exercise starts. The music starts. I am standing there, I move, I talk, I cry, I scream, others around me cry, talk, scream, the music is full of feelings, the room is full of feelings. I feel fear and pain – and then my feelings are gone. I feel empty and dead, even more empty and dead than when I came here. The second exercise starts. I do my best to find my feelings. I want to feel, that's what I came for. To feel! I cry, I scream, I stamp my feet – but there is only an empty hole where my feelings should be. Don't I know this? Didn't this happen more often during group therapies with body psychotherapy? Yes, this has happened every time. Every time I ended up in this emptiness. But this time, I notice what happens. I notice, and I realize that in other group therapies, I solved this problem by throwing myself in the blissful feeling of belonging to a group. I see I could do that again, but I also see this "feeling good" is false. And now that I see this, I can no longer do it. I must try something else.

I decide to use Stettbacher's four steps in all the therapy exercises that are done. I ignore the instructions from the therapists and do my own therapy. When they tell us to act out anger (they, too, like rage work very much), I don't do that but I do the four steps, silently, in my head.

The emptiness and the feeling of being dead inside recede. It's not that I feel a lot now, I just can feel a little bit during the exercises with the four steps, and when I stop, my feelings stop, too. I am just empty in my "normal" way again, just like I always am. These four days do not really bring me progress, do not bring me a spectacular cure – I am just the way I was before this group therapy. But I do not lose myself, like other times when I did this kind of therapy, and I don't try to get my life in order in an empty-enthusiastic way. I am not doing better, but I am not worse either, and that is progress, in a way.

Now that I got on track of the four steps again, I try the steps at home, too. I combine some fragments of old feelings and images of my "other world" to a written story about being sexually abused, using the four steps. This time I describe the abuse happening in the attic, when I am three years old. That night, I sleep for six hours without a break, and the next nights four or five hours. Then, I continue to sleep on for four or five hours about half of the nights. It still means I sleep badly. Still, most of the time I lay awake for hours before I fall asleep and still I don't get enough sleep. But for me it's a revolutionary improvement to sleep without a break that long and that often. Happy with this result, I start working with the four steps more often, but when doing this therapy I fully concentrate on processing sexual abuse. This way, I hope to process my memories and get more clarity and more memories. But that doesn't happen – that's not the way it works. Stettbacher warns against working this way in his book, but I haven't been reading his book for a long time.

In the summer of 1995, I go to a Voice Dialogue camp in Sweden again. Because of my experiences in this camp two years ago, when I for the first time began to suspect I had been sexually abused and felt safe to talk about my feelings, I expect a lot of this camp. I hope this camp will bring the Big Change I long for.

In the last session of the summer camp, I speak from the child that I feel inside: a small, scared child, overwhelmingly scared, terrified. The therapists are confident that one can step into a memory and step out of it afterwards, step into "another part of oneself". I follow the procedure of "stepping out" of the memory, but I am not out of it at all. I stay in the fear of the little child. I try to suppress the feelings that were summoned, but that fails, too. The result is a horrible combination of emptiness and mortal fear. I feel terrible, much worse than before the summer camp, I feel totally empty and dead, I get almost no sleep at all, I have thoughts of killing myself again and I even cut myself again. I am exhausted and can't function anymore. Every second of the day I fight to survive – just like many years ago.

The Big Change hasn't come, that's clear. I realize my symptoms are just as bad as when I started therapy with Robert, or even worse. Especially physically I am much worse than I was before I started this therapy. I am almost continuously ill. These nine years of therapy didn't bring me any improvement, and ruined my immune system. But I still set my hopes on Robert's therapy. I don't know any other place to go to. Other therapies I had, before I started with Robert as well as in the nine years with him, were much worse. So I cling to him. Until October 1995.

Coming home from one of Robert's therapy sessions, I am very depressed and scared. That night, I lay in bed awake, terrified. Despair, emptiness, fear. What happened? Why do I feel so awful? Why doesn't this therapy work? How should I continue? What has ever helped me? I think, feel, puzzle. I look at all of my therapy experiences, all the therapy methods, groups, self-help, all those years. When did I become worse? What therapy was I doing then? Why did I become worse then? When did I become better? What therapy did I do then? Why did this therapy work? Has there ever been an improvement that stayed? I am very scared, but in my fear I feel forced to be honest and careful. I realize I urgently need good answers.

RET didn't help, surely. Learning to behave in a normal way didn't help, but behaving like the little girl I feel didn't help either. Following my urge when I was suicidal or wanted to hurt myself didn't bring permanent relief. Going against this urge didn't work either. Acting out my feelings by crying, screaming, hitting – it didn't work. Group therapy didn't work. Learning better social behavior didn't work. Making friends didn't work. Talking about the past, writing about the past – it didn't work. Except... yes, except when I did do that with the help of Stettbacher's four steps. Sometimes that did work. The first time I used Stettbacher's therapy really helped me, because after that I didn't cut myself anymore for years. That one Christmas, years ago, Stettbacher's therapy helped me to get rid of my urge to kill myself. Some other times, I did sleep better after using this therapy. During the four-days-primal-therapy Stettbacher's therapy worked well against the emptiness and when I forgot to use the four steps during the Voice Dialogue Camp last summer, things went totally wrong. In this night it finally dawns on me that Stettbacher's four steps are the only therapy that really helped me. It has been the one and only therapy that brought me real and permanent improvement.

Now that I am getting my thing together, I finally see how much harm body psychotherapy has caused me. Finally, after four years of body psychotherapy, I see the connection between calling up and expressing past feelings and the symptoms of depression. Finally I realize why Stettbacher's four steps are important. Finally I see that this unbearable emptiness comes about when I don't use the four steps while I am experiencing old feelings. That it is dangerous to summon ghosts of the past without knowing how to deal with them. I realize that the four steps are the tools I need. Tools to handle, tame and kill the ghosts. This night, for the first time I really understand the steps and their function, and I promise myself to never again omit them when I feel memories. Just these insights and this promise, in this frightening night after the group therapy session, make the emptiness, the fear and the pain go away, and make it possible for me to sleep again. That is to say: to sleep somewhat better than I did.

There is another thing I realize this night. I realize that again and again I have been disappointed that I didn't get the right answers from therapists. That I didn't get the answers and reactions that I hoped for, or even got painful and hurtful reactions. Now I realize that I tried to change this by explaining things to those therapists, that I tried to teach *them*, that I first tried to be their therapist, hoping that somehow they would become a good therapist for me. Suddenly I realize that this is a hopeless procedure, since these therapists aren't willing to learn and to change. And even if they would, it would be a cumbersome task, delaying my own recovery.

Suddenly I am aware that I myself know the answers that I want to hear, so I do not really need to get these answers from them – it isn't new information that I'm waiting for. I already know the answers, I have all the information I need, and I will improve faster if I rely on my own knowledge and feelings. I will improve faster if I try to provide my own answers and acknowledge them to be true, instead of waiting for a therapist to know enough to give me the right answers. I always thought I was dependent on therapists – but I am not. I have enough knowledge to be able to help myself.

This night I decide to have confidence in my own perception, to trust my own feelings and thoughts about what is good for me and what is not good for me. I decide I will no longer invest in the growth that a therapist like Robert needs, to be able to help me. The idea to do therapy alone scares me, but my conclusion is that on my own I will have a better chance of recovery than with the hindrance of a therapist, as I experienced until now. I also realize that when I try to explain answers to a therapist first and try to convince them that these are right, in fact I am doing the therapy alone, too. Then I am even working on the "therapy" of two persons. I decide that this is wasted energy. If I can't find a therapist

working in a way I feel to be good, a therapist who works with Stettbacher's four steps and who does not manipulate or hurt me or does any of the other awful things I experienced in therapies, then I will use my energy just for myself.

Nevertheless, I am scared to be alone. It is not a situation I choose. It is a situation that has emerged because I couldn't find a good therapist, and I still hope I will find one. I write Stettbacher to ask if there is a therapist in The Netherlands or Belgium who has been trained by him. It takes until December before I get a letter back – it turns out there isn't a therapist. But he also sends me some extra information about self-help that makes me understand some things that I did wrong when I worked with the four steps.

This information makes it clear to me that I should use the four steps every time I run into painful feelings. At that moment I have to stop my usual behavior, face my feelings, look for a memory that fits those feelings, and process this memory with the four steps. So, when I want to turn on the television to distract myself from painful feelings, I shouldn't turn on the television but instead realize how I feel and do the therapy. When I want to eat cookies because I feel awful, I should leave them alone and work with the four steps. When I am upset, when I panic, when I feel desperate, I have to use the therapy. This is important information for me. I never thought of this, used as I was to therapy in sessions at scheduled times. I find out now that Stettbacher's therapy is self-help in the first place, a daily behavior one should use every time one encounters memories.

Stettbacher's notes also tell me that I shouldn't expect results immediately, and that results will not persist at first. Before, I thought that "not having immediate result" meant that the therapy didn't work. I realize now that I have to keep on doing the therapy. Some things I will have to repeat over and over for a long time to make even the slightest progress. And if a session is successful, I will probably have to process this same subject more often. Years ago, when I discovered my undeserved feelings of guilt, the first time I worked with the four steps, I thought that this problem was all over now – I had so clearly felt these feelings of guilt to be undeserved, this was over and done. But now I understand I would have made more progress if I'd have worked with the four steps again and again, processing each memory until the feelings of guilt had completely gone. Besides, it now becomes clear to me that everything that give me trouble doing the therapy, should itself be used as starting point for the therapy. So, if I feel it is too hard to do the therapy alone, or if I'm disappointed because I don't have immediate results, I should use these feelings as a starting point for the four steps. Years ago, I stopped with self-help because working with the therapy felt like a way to achieve, and I became overly tired. But I should have used these feelings as a first step of the therapy again. I should have protested against the pressure I experienced, and I should have processed the memories that belonged to this pressure. Reading Stettbacher's information, I now understand how this therapy works and how I can help myself. This way, I can continue.

I tell Robert that I realize now I should have used the four steps when I felt old pain. He reacts positively, so I decide to try again with him. But I also doubt whether this is a good idea. Robert doesn't seem to understand my criticism on body psychotherapy, and even less the seriousness of this criticism. He just continues his usual therapy with other patients – manipulating them and letting them feel childhood feelings without giving them the tools to process them. This gives me the impression that he doesn't understand what is wrong with his way of working. And I realize that sooner or later he will make painful mistakes with me again, even if we only use Stettbacher's four steps.

I feel I won't be able to cope with this. I will have to be alert all the time, see if he makes mistakes, and I will have to stand up for myself then. And in the meantime I will have to deal with pain and fear from my childhood. Therefore, I decide first to work with the therapy alone, without Robert, for several weeks. Then, when I feel strong enough and I feel able to withstand his errors, I will do sessions with him again.

This plan fits well, since it is almost Christmas, and I wouldn't have any therapy sessions anyhow for some weeks. Also, I have hardly any other obligations, so I have a lot of time to work with Stettbacher's self-help therapy. Although I have been using the four steps in the months before, I feel it's only now that I really start the therapy. After more than twelve years of psychiatry and psychotherapy, it is only now that my therapy really starts. December 27th, 1995. But this time, I don't start the therapy knowing nothing about it. I have some experience with the therapy, I understand how it works, I know about mistakes I made before, that I can avoid now. I know some of my childhood experiences and how they influence my current life. I now start well prepared, very motivated and with the strong intention not to give up again.

Therapy that works

Until now, I usually wrote my words on paper when doing self-help therapy. For me, this is still the easiest way to do it. But now I also start working with a cassette recorder. I do "sessions" aloud, record it and later listen to it. Because I am so afraid of talking, this is hard for me, but I manage. I learn a lot from hearing myself when I listen to sessions I did. Often, more feelings and memories come up then. Or I notice I forgot steps, and do them while listening. Since I am so scared of talking, I partly shut myself off from my feelings when I talk, and therefore writing is still important, too. Often I can discover my feelings and memories better when I write than when I try aloud. But in these first weeks, I work mostly with the cassette recorder.

The therapy is tough, those first weeks. I do therapy at least six hours a day. But I do have immediate results. A symptom that had persisted for all those years of therapy with Robert, vanishes within a week: the emptiness and the feeling of being dead inside. It is astonishing how easy it is to solve this problem of feeling nothing. The only thing I have to do is learning to recognize at which moments I run into feelings, and use those moments for therapy.

I now find out I am absolutely not empty and without feelings. I continuously have very intense feelings. Painful and frightening feelings, that I have always had but never could cope with. It becomes really clear to me that without Stettbacher's four steps, I had no choice but to suppress my feelings – the feelings that I have are horrible, and just letting them be makes life unbearable. I need the tools from the therapy to deal with the feelings and the attached memories as soon as they come up.

I feel better and function better than before, better than when I felt empty. I don't experience pain to be a good feeling anymore, like I did when I worked with body psychotherapy, I don't long for pain anymore – on the contrary, I feel pain is horrible. But reacting to my feelings, protesting against the causes of the feelings, give me a sensation of being alive that makes my life better immediately. This first period of self-help I am overwhelmed by feelings and memories – the downside of the disappearance of the emptiness – yet I don't feel like I'm drowning. I am in control of the situation. I can really solve the pain and the fear with the help of the four steps. The dead, empty years are over. At last, I do live.

In the therapy, I am on my guard against the error I made before by only processing memories of sexual abuse. When I have feelings in my body that very clearly have to do with sexual abuse, I process this in the therapy, but apart from this I match all feelings that come up with other memories. Just the normal, daily memories of my childhood. I am astonished to find out that I didn't ever really deal with these memories during the nine years of therapy. All these memories I already had when I started therapy with Robert. I wrote about these memories in the therapy, I talked about them (as well as I could), I cried, I kicked and beat – and it didn't bring me anything. I gained insight and saw the connection with my current problems – and yet it didn't help me, I didn't really process any of these memories. I find that I'm only at the starting point of my therapy, now, 33 years old. This is a painful discovery.

In the first weeks I use as the first step of therapy the moments that I talk aloud without having control. These are moments that I say things that I don't want to say, things that I don't understand and did not make up myself. This happens ten to fifteen times a day, every time I feel afraid, panicky, guilty or ashamed because of a "mistake" I made – a mistake such as not hearing someone well, having said something wrong, *maybe* having said something wrong, maybe having been too silent or maybe having said too much, having been clumsy, having played a wrong note during a concert, or whatever fault it may be. I match these feelings against memories in which I as a child was criticized by my parents. These are the usual, everyday memories – therapy is almost boring – that I now put into words on the basis of Stettbacher's four steps: I tell what happened, I tell how I felt, I ask questions about the reason and give my opinion as an adult about this, and I stand up for what I needed back then to grow up healthily.

A memory of my father. I am seven years old and stand next to my daddy's desk. He writes down math problems that I have to solve. The problems have an *a* and a *b* in them. Problems that I haven't yet had at school. I don't understand what he explains to me. He says it is just simple and clear. But I don't know the answer. I stand there and I am scared and I panic, and I stare at the paper and try to guess what the right answer is. I must do his bidding, otherwise I am not safe. What is *a*? What is *b*? I give the wrong answer. My father becomes irritated. How could I given that answer? I should understand these math problems, they are just easy. Fear overwhelms me. Why don't I know the right answer? I should know. It's my fault I don't know.

But why do I have to do this, papa? Why do you put so much pressure on me? Why can't you just love me

when I can do what other children of my age can, and nothing more? Do I have to compensate for everything that went wrong in your life? It seems so. But that is not up to me. I need a daddy who loves me, regardless of whether I can do more than other children or less. I need a daddy who allows me to be Janet and live my life. Papa, I can't compensate for your failures. I don't have to compensate for your failures. I just want to be Janet. I needed a father who was just happy with what I could do.

A memory of my mother. My mother goes to an employee of my father's office. I am about twelve years old and go with my mother. We ring the door bell and go in. The woman gives me a package. Why? I don't know. I don't know this woman, why does she give me a package? What should I do with this package? What do I have to do with this woman? What does she want from me? I feel confused and afraid, I don't understand what's happening. When I open the package I feel confused even more – I really don't know what to do with it. It is a painted piece of wood with a notebook on it, and a pencil. This doesn't make the situation any clearer to me. It is something I don't need and something I don't like. I don't know why I got this. I stand there silently and confused, not knowing what to do with this weird thing. I feel alienated and surreal.

When we're outside, my mother erupts. I have behaved badly, I should have shown happiness and gratitude for getting this present, and should have told her I liked it very much that she had brought this for me from her vacation. Now I have embarrassed her, and that was really wicked of me. I am a really bad child.

I am flabbergasted by my mother's anger and her sharp criticism. I wasn't aware of doing anything wrong, I was only confused and scared. I hadn't understood that this package was meant as a gift, and I didn't know I was bad when I didn't say anything. I am so scared when mom doesn't love me, I am so scared feeling her hate. I need my mother.

Mom, why are you so angry? Why are you so hateful? What did I do wrong? Am I really that bad? Do I deserve all this anger and hate? Mama, why didn't you see that I felt confused and scared and didn't understand what happened? Why didn't you see my feelings and help me? Why do you always see feelings of other people and never mine? Why is it important that this woman shouldn't feel disappointed, and why isn't it at all important that I felt embarrassed? Why do you think that she, an adult woman, can't handle that whereas I, a child, have to be able to handle it? This is not fair. If you felt it was necessary to show gratitude for this present, you yourself could have done that, isn't it? You could have solved the situation by thanking her for giving me a present from her holiday. Then you would have done what you felt that needed to be done – and at the same time you had given me help in understanding the situation. Why did you let me down? Mom, I needed you to get me out of this situation, I needed you to see that this woman brought me in a painful and confusing situation. I needed you to do something about it. It seems you weren't even able to handle the situation yourself, so why do you expect a child can do this? Mama, you struggle with your own feelings. Those I can't solve for you, you have to do that yourself. It's not my responsibility.

Mama, why do you always ascribe malice, ingratitude and selfishness to me, when I react from totally different feelings? Why do you call me bad? You always seem to see me as essentially bad. But I am not bad, mama, it is not fair you see me like that. Your feelings don't have anything to do with me, they have to do with yourself and your problems with daddy. I need you to see me as the child I really am – a child that makes mistakes now and then but who isn't bad and doesn't have bad intentions. I need you to see me like I really am, a child who is in essence good and just tries to survive.

And why do I have to pretend to be glad with something I find ugly and don't want? Why I am not allowed to be honest? Why are my feelings never allowed to exist? Why do I always have to lie and respect others, always acting to please others? And why do other people never have to do that to me? I can't stand it anymore, I am torn up by all these lies, all this loneliness, by your hate.

You should have been there for me, as well in the situation itself as afterwards. You should have talked to me in a reassuring way, you should have told me that you saw my confusion, you should have given me the chance to express my feelings and explain the situation to me so I would understand what happened. You should have told me that what happened wasn't my fault. That I wasn't guilty. This way, I wouldn't have felt so awful and maybe next time in a similar situation I would be less confused and better able to react. Instead, you criticized me in a mean and frightening way. I didn't deserve your criticism. You were the one who made a mistake, not me. I needed you, I needed your help, I needed a mother, not a witch.

I cry and cry while I write all this.

In the therapy I process this event and similar ones again and again, whenever I panic about making a "mistake", suddenly feeling ashamed, frightened and talking these weird phrases. I become desperate, since this happens time and time again. Every time it's just as painful as the one before, and I feel I can't stand it anymore, I can't keep on feeling this and processing this and standing up for myself, again and again and again. It seems like the therapy doesn't help at all, since an hour earlier I processed all this already, and now it's coming back just as badly as it was then.

But when my friend Charlotte asks how I'm doing with this panic, I suddenly realize that it's almost gone. Unnoticed it has receded, and now that I pay attention to it, I realize that it happens only twice a week anymore! This is the result of working hard with the therapy for two months. Often it seemed as if there wasn't any progress, often I ended up with despair and fear at the end of a session which I couldn't get away, often the panic seemed to come back just as bad as it was. But in fact the panic and my usual reaction to it have almost disappeared, in a surprisingly short period of time. It doesn't totally vanish, but when it happens, it isn't that much "not being me" anymore, like it always was. I now feel these feelings are my own old panic, fear and shame.

About the same time, after having worked for almost two months with the four steps every day, I notice another breakthrough. One night after a concert, I sit at home on the couch, drinking tea. Suddenly I realize that there is something special. Until now, after every concert I played, I have felt panicky, empty and depressed, often with thoughts of suicide and wanting to cut myself. In the past few years it hadn't been so severe that I gave in to those feelings, but they were still there. Panic, shame and guilt every time because I had made mistakes. But now I am sitting here quietly and peacefully, I feel relaxed and this feels so normal that at first I do not even notice it. I did make mistakes during the concert. Less than I used to, because I was more relaxed and better concentrated than I was before these two months of therapy, but I still made enough mistakes to cause panic. But now I don't feel panic, and I am really happy to notice this. How hopeless had it felt all those times, again and again processing my memories with the four steps, but it clearly did have effect. This encourages me to continue.

It's not only making mistakes that makes old feelings come up. There are many situations that make this happen. To many simple, innocent, daily occurrences I react with extreme feelings. Not being understood, being touched when I don't want this or in a way that doesn't feel good, feeling physical pain, laying down or going to bed, being interrupted when I am doing something that feels important to me, financial problems, reading something in a book or seeing it on television, asking someone to do something for me (like taking care of my cats for a couple of days while I am away), going out, making a journey, seeing someone's hands (especially if the blood vessels can be seen clearly, then I panic), seeing ink on my skin or on someone else's, getting a letter from a friend and automatically thinking that she probably writes she doesn't want to see me anymore, my cats asking for food NOW when I come home tired and just want to lay down for a moment, not being understood by someone,... Those countless moments of being upset, of fear, pain, sadness, jealousy, shame, loneliness and anger I now try to process with the help of Stettbacher's four steps. I process many different memories. Some of them feel very characteristic for my childhood.

Memories of my father

In the morning, when I am taking a shower, my father comes into the bathroom. Every morning. I hate this. I feel humiliated and scared and I try to finish as fast as I can, to take the shower, dry off and dress. I hope I will be ready before he comes. But I never manage. He does not allow me to lock the door. Still, I sometimes lock the door, hoping and praying it will stop him.

I remember one time. I am about fifteen years old. I am drying myself when he rattles the handle and demands I open the door. I am afraid of him, and don't dare to refuse. I open the door, turn my back to him as fast, as I can and get dressed as soon as I can. I feel desperate and humiliated. "You shouldn't behave so prudish, I am your father, it is just normal if I enter. You are wrong, behaving this way. You should just let me in." Now I feel humiliated even more. But I am no match for him. I believe him. Now there is one extra thing on this already desperately long list of evidence of me being bad. I am prudish and this is bad. I feel ashamed very much, but I can't change. I still hate him coming into the bathroom, every morning again. I don't want him to look at me when I am naked. Every morning is a nightmare – until I am eighteen years old and able to leave home.

He did not touch me then. He just looked, again and again. Pretended that he had to use the sink and entered because of that. He could have done that two minutes later, but he doesn't want to know. He

doesn't want to know that he is being rude, nor that he has no right to come in without asking and without consent. Respect for other people is something he doesn't know. As always he only thinks about himself. He comes in because he likes to see my body. He takes my body away from me. I do already feel so uncomfortable with my body. He deprives me of the chance to get familiar with it. He deprives me of the chance to keep up with the changes in my body that are frightening and confusing for me in those years. He has always taken everything from me, and now this, too.

Daddy, I hate you for this. Why can't you leave me alone? Why don't you allow me some privacy? Why don't you listen when I protest? Why don't you respect a locked door? You are lying papa, what you do is not normal. I am not bad and not prudish. Privacy is a right, for all people and for me, too. Why don't you allow me to know that?

Daddy, I need a father who respects boundaries, who respects me as a person. A father who loves me instead of exploiting me. A father who likes it when I feel good, who doesn't want me to feel bad. Daddy, I need you to notice that I do exist, that I am a human being with my own feelings and thoughts and boundaries, not a thing that you could use as you please. Daddy, it is important to me that you see I am not your property but a human being, that you see that I exist apart from you, that I own myself, that I am Janet, separate from you. That my life is mine and not yours. Daddy, it hurts that you never saw, never acknowledged that I do exist. I want to live. I can't live without getting respect, I can't live being your property, I can't grow up healthily this way. I can't live when you deny me constantly. Daddy, it hurts that you never apologized for all the times you violated my privacy.

Hurt. It hurts. Never to be seen. Being used all the time. I am not a thing, papa. I am Janet. You should have acknowledged me as Janet, so that I could live.

Another memory. I am about six years old. I have a doll. Actually, it is a doll of my sister Susannah. The doll's name is Rosa. My father wrote the name on the back of the doll. Papa is sitting at his desk. I have this doll in my hand and stand in front of him — I feel so awful and it is so hard to write about this, I don't dare to look at this memory. Papa says, he says: "On your back, your name is written, too, just like it is at Rosa's back." I know that this is nonsense and I say "No, that is not true." "Yes, it is really true", says papa. I say "No, it isn't." Papa completely ignores what I say. He doesn't even seem to notice that I say something. "You can't see it yourself because it's on your back, but it is really there. 'Janet' does it say." I become annoyed and impatient. "NO! Really it isn't, it is not true." I think: "Just listen, daddy, stop this nonsense." Papa laughs. "You are really scared, aren't you, you say you don't believe me but you are just scared. You know it is true, that's why you say you don't believe it." "Nooooo!" I scream. I become desperate and feel the familiar powerlessness since I can't reach him, powerlessness since he doesn't hear me, since he ignores me, since he denies and distorts what I say. I feel so desperately mad, powerlessly mad. Hate, intense hate.

Papa enjoys this. "It is written on your back and you can't see it. With felt-pen." He thinks it is very funny, he laughs. Papa, I am not a little kid anymore, I don't like little-kid-jokes anymore, I don't believe these kinds of things. It is not a funny joke. I don't like it at all. Why don't you believe me? Why don't you believe what I say? All these words rage through my head but I can't say anything anymore. It is totally useless to express myself. Whatever I say, whatever I do, my father doesn't see that I exist and I can not make him see me. I can't do anything to make him see that I do exist. I can't do anything to make me exist. I feel like I don't exist and it hurts so terribly. So horribly. I feel like I'm exploding out of hate. Intense hate. I would like to kill him but I can't do anything. Powerless little child against big grown-up man. Desperate. I blow to pieces out of despair, I can't reach him. I can't make me exist. Raging despair. And he laughs, he laughs, he laughs.

Papa, why don't you hear me? Papa, I need you to see me.

Again and again and again, to everything I say or do he reacts this way, day by day, never do I exist. During my whole childhood I desperately try to reach my father, desperately try to be seen, to be heard, desperately look for a hole in this impenetrable wall around him, night and day. Desperately, raging, bursting open from hate. And again and again I think it is my own fault. I think I am not clear enough, I use the wrong words. If I would say the right words, he would hear me. But it's not like that. He doesn't want to hear, he doesn't want to see. To me, it feels like a life-and-death struggle to reach him. I have to reach him. But I never succeed. Never ever did I reach him, not once, not even for a second. Never ever. I never did exist for him. (Well, yes, in that one phone call, two days before he died, when I said that one sentence, then I reached him. That few seconds I reached him, when I said: "No, that can't be combined with what I want to talk about.")

Papa, why didn't you hear me? Why didn't you see me? Why didn't you believe me when I told it wasn't true that my name was written on my back? My words were clear enough, papa. You should have listened to me, you should have respected my words.

But in the therapy, I do not often process memories of my father. I more often use memories of my mother. These memories are much more accessible, the feelings painful but manageable. It is easy and natural to connect my feelings to memories of my mother, memories of her automatically come up. But the memories of my father, I am much more afraid of them. So very much afraid that I'd rather not look at them. The bathroom scenes, his remarks about my doll Rosa and his ignoring my words, the way he held me while I protested, the math problems he gave me, and so many more memories. Often, I have to force myself to leave the usual path of memories of my mother and go to work with the frightening memories of my father, force myself to talk to my father although my words seem to dissolve in a vacuum. My father is totally unreachable, now in the therapy as well as in the past, and I stay behind with all those fruitless attempts. An unreachable man, locked up in his delusions, inaccessible, a concrete wall around him no one can get through. Nothing I do drags me out of this powerlessness, this powerlessness that makes me desperate, my frightening inability to reach my father.

Although it is much easier to process memories of my mother in my therapy, I realized much earlier that something was really wrong with my father: when I was sixteen years old, I came to the conclusion that he was mentally ill. This conclusion felt frightening then, since I thought it might be heritable. And I recognized things, like his anger, the way he exploded when he couldn't find the end of the scotch tape roll. Inside, I felt the same. Was I also mentally ill, like my father? My mother's behavior had also caused me problems, but I hadn't realized that until I first talked with Lucy. Now, in my self-help therapy, I can finally process the memories of my mother.

Memories of my mother

I remember my mother wanted to teach me how to fry an egg, somewhere in my high school years. The subject "cooking" is painful. My mother is angry with me because I don't go to a domestic science school and not interested in needlework and other household activities. And she is angry because I am interested in my schoolwork. I am afraid of her hate and disapproval when it comes to a subject like "learning to cook".

We stand in front of the stove. The frying pan is on it. I have a knife in my hand and butter. I ask my mother how much butter I should put in the pan. "Could you point this out to me?" She refuses. "No, just try, and then I will tell you when it is wrong." I feel desperate, I feel cornered. I have never done this before and I have no idea how much butter I should use – I know I will do it wrong. And I know she will criticize and hate me then. I feel it is not fair what she does, this is not a good way to teach someone. If she had just shown me, I would have paid attention and learned it. I would have liked to know it now, I would have experienced that it was easy and I would have liked to do something together with my mother, which happens so seldom. But she doesn't help me. And now I stand there, with this knife and the butter in my hands.

Sometimes when I look back at this memory, at this moment I lay down the butter and the knife and I walk away. But most of the time, the memory continues. Full of despair, fear, aversion and powerless anger I blindly point at some piece of butter – and of course it is wrong. I hear her feelings of dislike in her voice, finding me stupid: "No, no, no, that is far too much, you are not going to fry potatoes, just eggs!" Then I give up and walk away, my body full of pain and anger. My mother is angry about me walking away, and when I go upstairs she says: "don't act so weird. It's too bad you don't want to learn anything, too bad you don't want to learn to cook." I can't say anything anymore, just run away feeling like a wounded animal and I think: "That is not true! I do want to learn to cook, but not this way!"

Why, mama, why are you doing this in such a mean way? I think somewhere inside, you do feel that it is mean what you do. You behave this way to take revenge. Revenge on your parents who didn't want you to get a good education, even though you were intelligent and wanted to learn. Revenge on my father because he is a learned person and you feel inferior; and besides, he is mean to you. Revenge on me because I am my father's child and intelligent and I am getting a good education. And because I get "attention" from my father. But, mama, I am only a child and innocent of all this. Innocent of your un-lived life. I am dependent on you. I need a mom who tells me "I love you" and behaves that way. I can't live with a mother who wants to humiliate me and who wants to catch me at mistakes so she herself will feel good.

I need a mother who teaches me things in a nice way, who does things together with me in a pleasurable way. Who gives me a chance to succeed and feel good about myself.

I need a mother who allows me to not know, a mother who allows me to learn, who doesn't reject me when I can't do what I have not yet learned. A mother who can understand how it is to be inexperienced. Why are you so disapproving because I do not yet know what no one ever taught me? This is quite normal, mama, not to know what you haven't yet learned. I want a mother who understands this, a mother who understands children's feelings.

I remember that I taught myself knitting, from pictures and instructions in a magazine. I am about thirteen years old. I am sitting on my bed and practicing. Before, when my mother tried to teach me knitting, she criticized me so painfully that I couldn't learn it, and I stopped trying since what I did was never good enough. Everything I did was deemed insufficient and was ridiculed. "Your sisters did this far better when they were your age, it's too bad and sad that you're so different from them", my mother told me when I was seven years old. So now, being thirteen years old, I am sitting on my bed with knitting needles and cotton yarn, that I stealthily took from my mother's stock, and I try to teach myself knitting. I hope this time I will learn it well and I hope my mother will finally love me then. I am quite fanatical. But finally I give up. Years later, my mother finds this knitting-work, with the knitting needles that started to rust in the meantime. "What is this", she asks me, astonished. I answer with something vague like "something I made long ago."

When I am twenty years old, I knit my first jersey. I knit welt stitch for the first time and I even have to knit circular. I make mistakes. "How could you do this wrong?" my mother asks, "it's plain to see that it is wrong, isn't it?" No, mom, not when you are doing this for the first time in your life, I have no idea how to see that. Mama, why don't you understand that things are different when you do them for the first time, different from having done them hundreds of times, like you did? Why is your lifelong experience the only standard for you? It is not fair. Again I have failed. It hurts. I need a mother who allows me to learn, to learn by trying.

Then, as a student, I again start teaching myself knitting, from a book. This time, I learn it very well, I become really good at it. My mother sees it, even compliments me with it. But she never apologizes for all the negative things she said about me. And even if I would not have become good at it, why should that be wrong? Why shouldn't I be allowed to be who I am, with the things I can and can't? With the things I like and dislike? Many jerseys and socks later, I stop knitting. Indeed, I am good at it. But my conclusion is that I do not really like it and I want to do other things with my time. It is hopeless to think I can restore my self-confidence by knitting. It doesn't help me to change my old feelings of not being loved. I need something else for that.

Another memory. I am about ten years old. I am standing in our garden, with my mother next to me. My mother is angry with me, since I don't want to eat dinner at my friend's house. I don't dare to, I am scared. I still have problems with playing at someone else's house, and eating somewhere else makes me really scared. "I am not going to eat at Hannah's house.". My mother doesn't pay attention to my fears, doesn't wonder why I am afraid, does not even see that I am afraid, doesn't talk with me, never talks with me. She just thinks I am bad and selfish. Hannah has eaten several times with us and I liked that, so now I have to go to her house to please Hannah. I shouldn't be so selfish. Silent and desperate I stay there.

My mother says I just have to go. I feel scared and angry. Angry since my mother orders me what to do. It feels humiliating to be forced to do what I don't want. It would have felt humiliating even if it had been something I had wanted. It just feels painful not to be allowed to have my own feelings and react to them, to make my own decisions. I become so angry that I say: "If you order me, I don't want to anymore!" It feels so good and natural, I feel so relieved that finally I make clear to her that I exist. That she isn't the only one with needs, but that I have needs, too. That I am not her property, that I can't always do as it suits her best. I think now she will understand, now that I told her this. I feel light and happy.

But she doesn't. She doesn't understand. My mother doesn't see that I want to stand up for myself against her forcing behavior. That I want to make my own decisions, she doesn't say it's OK for me to try to exist. Instead, she suddenly collapses and starts to cry: "O, Janet, now you are just like Susannah."

What did I do? What did I do wrong? I must have done something horrible that my mother is so sad because of me. I feel guilty and bad. Her tears makes me scared. I don't want my mother to cry. I don't want to be bad. Her tears force me more than her anger, force me to give up myself and do what suits her. Sacrifice my own needs to hers and adjust to what my mother can handle. I can't afford losing my mother. I can't

afford her to collapse crying. From now on, I should show my feelings even less than I did. Stand up for myself even less.

And why does my mother mention Susannah? Something is wrong with my sister Susannah, but no one talks with me about it – Susannah who doesn't come home anymore, my mother who often walks through the house crying, the stressful atmosphere at home. Now it seems I said something that Susannah has also said, but I didn't know. Now I have hurt my mother, but I didn't intend to. I feel afraid, confused and overwhelmed by her sudden wailing reaction. I didn't expect to start this just by standing up for myself.

But mama, what do I have to do with your pain? What can I do about your conflict with Susannah? That's not my fault, and I can't change it. It's not fair that you react with your sorrow about Susannah. That has nothing to do with what I said, I just told about my own feelings. Mama, why aren't you interested in my feelings? Why is it always your pain that is important, your tears? Why don't you want to know why I say "no"? Why don't you see that I just stand up for my needs? Why do you see me as bad and selfish, even though I have other reasons to do what I do and to say what I say? Why don't you see me as the child I really am – a child with fears and needs?

You don't see me, because in me you always see your husband, my father. You hate my father and you see me as belonging to him, as being him, this selfish man. But I am not my father, mama, you are mistaken. I am Janet. I am a child, a human being, not a monster. I need you, mama, I need your love and understanding and attention. I need you to talk with empathy, listen to me, ask questions carefully. I need that you want to find out why I am scared, why I don't dare to go to Hannah. I need you to be patient and concerned. I need you to have eyes and ears that see and hear me. I need you to see me from the notion that I am good, not from your idea that I am bad. I need you to pay attention to my pain, instead of burdening me with yours. It is not my responsibility to take care of you, mama. Despite your hardship – I am just a child, I need a mama.

Every day, many times each day, I use the four steps, processing my memories, every time I feel bad. I feel relieved. This therapy works. I hold on. I keep going.

Memories of our family

I remember a St. Nicholas' eve² when I am about five or six years old. I still believe in St. Nicholas. At St. Nicholas' eve there are presents and poems and surprise packets, a lot of presents and packets. It is nice and fine. I get a lot of presents. Then again there is a present for me, with a poem. I can't read yet, so my sister Karen reads the poem aloud. The poem says that I must go to Spain with St. Nicholas and Black Jack, as a punishment since I often did not finish my meal. I feel intense pain and cold, mortal fear. In my mind I say farewell to everyone. I see myself on St. Nicholas' boat with strange, frightening people and I see myself in Spain, having to live in a strange, frightening place.

Karen stops reading for a moment, puts her arm around me and says "We will not let you go." But this doesn't help, I know St. Nicholas is mightier than she is, I know it will still happen. At the end of the poem, it says that I don't have to go to Spain and there is some candy in the parcel. But the fear and the alienation stay with me and the rest of the evening, I see everything from a distant corner at the ceiling.

Years after this has happened, when I no longer believe in St. Nicholas, I am told that it was my brother who wrote this poem. Now that I look back on this event in the therapy, I realize that it is not really my brother whom I blame for what happened. He was a child himself then, about twelve years old. A child who was also the victim of similar cruel "jokes", a child who was forced to think that such jokes were funny and innocent. Matthew didn't know what can and can't be done, and he couldn't know this, being a child, having his own experiences.

But why doesn't my mother jump up immediately, why doesn't my father jump up immediately to let Karen stop reading when it is clear what is written in it? Why don't they tell Karen to stop reading? Why don't my parents run towards me, to clarify things to me, to tell me that this was not written by St. Nicholas, that this is not true? Why am I not allowed to know the truth about St. Nicholas at that moment when I am so terrified? Why don't I get the chance to cry, to feel safe to cry in my mother's arms, while she tells me the truth? Why should I still have to believe in St. Nicholas when it makes me so horribly scared?

² In the Netherlands, the day of St. Nicholas, on December 5th, is the traditional feast at which all children get presents, similar to the Christmas gifts in many other countries.

They do nothing, nothing at all. They just sit there. Why does no one see that I am terrified? Why does no one interfere? Maybe they don't want to disturb the "festivities". Why doesn't anyone see that there are no "festivities" anymore? "Just pretend nothing is wrong, then nothing is wrong". Awful feelings are only caused by talking about them. If you don't mention them, then they aren't there. Let's just pretend everything is nice, she will forget it, she's still a kid, she doesn't have real feelings. I remain alone with my fear, my feeling of being far away, and my alienation. I needed parents who stood up for me, who protected me and gave me the right information about the world.

And besides, they never should have made such trouble about me not finishing my meal. All that trouble during dinner. The one time my mother even did beat me for not eating all that was on my plate... I remember how humiliated and alienated I felt that time, when I had to bend over to let myself be beaten.

Another memory. My fourteenth birthday. For a long time I have longed to have a flute, a German flute. I used to play piper flute in a drum band. Now, I play piccolo in a youth orchestra and I long so very, very, very much to have a German flute. It seems an unreachable dream, something I dream of silently and sadly. In this period, after I switched to grammar school, I feel very depressed. This flute is really important to me. Something that would make me happy. Hope for something nice in my life. But it doesn't seem possible, how could I get so much money?

As far as I can remember, I don't talk about it with anyone. I hardly say a word anyhow, and life has taught me not to talk about my longings. I know that if I talk about a desire, that means I will not get it. My mother seems to do this to make me less "selfish" and to teach me to be content with less. If my mother has two presents, one for my friend and one for me, it is certain my friend will get the one I want the most. Therefore I have taught myself to never show what I want the most. If I am asked, I never point to the thing I like best. Because then I still have a chance to get what I want the most. With people other than my mother, this strategy leads to disappointments. At the drum band, we get new piper flutes. There are various kinds of flutes. One, I like best, and therefore I point to another one: "I like that one". And then I get that one – to my bewilderment and disappointment. The band-leader likes to give me the one I say I like. I had not expected that.

But now it is my fourteenth birthday and I live with my silent dream. We celebrate my birthday in the evening. I get the first present. When I take off the paper, I see immediately what it is: it is a flute box, for a German flute. I am so unthinkably, unbelievably, intensely happy. My very dearest wish, what I wished in the depths of my heart, what I longed for so silently and lonely, my hope in the desert of depression and despair, my unreachable wish has come true! I am so happy! And now I don't have to hide my desire, now I can show how desperately I wanted this, now I am safe, a miracle has happened. Excited I open the box. And then... There is no German flute in it. In the box lays my old piccolo. It is so terrible, so painful. I feel so betrayed. Especially because I showed my happiness and clearly expectantly opened the box. The blow after the intense happiness hurts so much. I try not to show my disappointment, in spite of my pain and confusion. I feel so humiliated and fragile because I showed my feelings so openly, showing my pain would make it even worse. I just pretend it to be a funny joke. But my heart is cold and dead. Betrayed, deceived, humiliated child.

"Well," my mother says, "I just found that box on a flea market and I thought you would like it and I put your piccolo inside it." "Yes, nice", I say, crying from pain inside.

Then I get the presents from the other family members. And then I finally do get a German flute, from everyone a part of it. But I can't feel happiness anymore. My heart stays cold and dead. I pretend to be happy since that is proper behavior, but I can't feel anything anymore. I did get what I wanted the very most in the whole world, and now I have to act to show happiness. My feelings have been taken away. I died inside. It is horrible.

For a long time I think there was no other way to give me this present. That there was no other possibility since they were several people giving me one present, so it had to be given in pieces, and after all, they just tried to be funny. So it had not been mean and I couldn't blame them. In our family, it was just a habit to tease each other, to criticize each other, and this was supposed to be nice and loving behavior. Now that I use the four steps, I see it was a mean and cruel trick. All of them, all these adults, thought about it and arranged to do it this way. One of them should have realized that this would hurt and should have canceled this plan. Someone should have realized that you are not allowed to treat a child's dream and longing in such a way. Wasn't there anyone in my family who saw this was not funny? Wasn't there anyone of all these adults who could see this would really hurt?

No one saw that there had been a marvelous way to give me this present. That it could have been a real feast, full of joy and happiness: that one of them could have given me this present and had told me this was a gift of everyone of them. That I had opened the box and would have seen there my deepest wish fulfilled. It would have been such a magical moment! I would have hugged everyone, feeling intensely, unbelievably happy. Why did no one see this was nice? How is it possible that everyone thought disappointment was nice? I needed people who were not confused, who knew empathy, who didn't play mean tricks. I needed people who loved joy and happiness and not pain and confusion.

I remember a birthday much earlier, my sixth or seventh. I get a package and it looks like nothing is in it since it is very thin. I refuse to unpack it. I know the "jokes" from the others, I don't want to be in that humiliating position again. But I have to unpack it. And then there is something in it. Small pictures for a poetry album that I like. Back then, when I was six or seven years old, I already knew that I should be on guard against my family. Now, on my fourteenth birthday, when I got this marvelous present, I forgot for a moment that I couldn't trust my family, and I paid dearly for it.

These and other memories I process, every day, several months, a cloudburst of pain, fear and loneliness, but I don't give up. I am fighting for my life. I consistently take the four steps. Although sometimes it seems useless and hopeless, I don't give up.

Talking with Robert

The emptiness has vanished, talking without control has decreased a lot, the panic after concerts recedes. And there is another symptom that decreases, these first two months: the fog is lifting. Step by step the fog that I had always lived in, disappears. Most obviously, I notice this on one occasion when the fog returns for a short while. This happens during a long and painful meeting with Robert. A meeting that I shouldn't have gotten myself into, but I did.

I have an appointment with Robert for January 22. But after I have done therapy for two or three weeks, it becomes clear to me that much more was wrong with Robert's therapy than I had realized till then.

In October, it became clear to me that just feeling and expressing memories doesn't help, and has even made me more ill. I came to understand that every time I run into old fear and pain, I should use Stettbacher's four steps to process what I experience. Now, after the first weeks of intense self-help therapy, I start to understand that also the way feelings and memories have been forced to come up in Robert's therapy sessions, were in fact harmful. I now notice that Robert's body psychotherapy forces defense mechanisms to break down for a moment. Some techniques that Robert used were really rough, others were more subtle, but all these techniques made me ill, they sustained and aggravated my symptoms, especially the emptiness. I now realize that body-work breaks down my defenses and at the same time causes these defenses to come back even stronger. Like a rubber band that is stretched and then rebounds.

Now, after some weeks of self-help, I'm certain that I don't want to do any body psychotherapy anymore. I only want to work the way I have been working for the past weeks, using memories that I spontaneously run into. It has also become clear to me that I continuously run into memories, twenty four hours a day, and that techniques to call up memories and feelings, even if they weren't damaging, are definitely needless. The emptiness, which for all those years was one of my main problems, turns out to be totally filled with feelings that are not at all hard to reach. You don't have to use tricks to feel them. Much less tricks that are damaging.

I realize that, would I have a session with Robert, I will have to tell him that I started to realize that body psychotherapy caused me harm and that I don't want to do it anymore. I don't feel strong enough to confront him. Besides, I now realize that I can't go back to a therapist-client contact. These few weeks of intense self-help have made me so independent, taught me so well to be my own therapist, that I can't go back to being a client. And even less when the therapist has less insight in therapy than I have myself. Also, I don't need a session, I am doing fine, and I don't feel a therapist can contribute to this. This feeling of independence is a surprising discovery for me, and an enormous relief. For such a long time I have been dependent, on therapists, on hospitals, pills, groups – it is such a relief to find out that I can help myself. I leave a message on Robert's answering machine to cancel the appointment of January 22, because I don't feel I need a session then. And I say I will contact him myself, I should want a session.

It is painful to realize how much damage body psychotherapy caused in my life. It's hard, thinking about the years I lost doing Robert's therapy. All those years that I consented to Robert's methods, all those times

that I had to stay in bed, being ill – I could have seen that I didn't get better, couldn't I? I could have seen I even got worse. Why did I continue body psychotherapy? How could I have been so stupid to leave aside Stettbacher's therapy, why didn't I ask him for more information when I couldn't continue the therapy? I could have seen that Stettbacher's therapy was the only therapy that had really worked with me. All those horrible, lost years I could have done therapy in a useful, healing way, all those years the solution to my problems was in my bookcase – and I did nothing, I only made myself more ill by staying with Robert. I am so terribly angry with myself.

And I am angry with Robert. Why did he let this go on for nine years? Why didn't he see that I didn't become any better? Why didn't my constant illnesses lead him to conclude that something was really wrong with the therapy we were doing? Why didn't he take action when there was no improvement in my emptiness, the fog and the alienation? Why didn't he help me find another therapy? How could he mess around with me for nine years? How did he dare to let so many years of my life be wasted? All those years I could have used for studying, working, having a relationship, having children – but they have been spent being ill. Lost years, lost chances, lost possibilities. Grief. I can't stop crying.

I am still in tears, and then the telephone rings. Unsuspectingly I pick up the phone – caller ID's don't yet exist. It's Robert. I hadn't expected this. I am not prepared for this. He catches me off guard. I can't hide that I am very angry with him, but I know I shouldn't talk with him about the causes, I know I am not strong enough for that. I can manage to just refuse. I just keep on saying that the therapy has ended and that in the future I am willing to talk with him about it, but not now. Robert becomes really angry, he wants me to tell him now what the matter is. "If you don't tell, I'll just rip you out of my memory!" I persist and don't tell, and say we will talk later. Never before have I been this strong.

But afterwards, I have a hard time. Hearing Robert's voice revives the intense emotional bond that I felt with him before. It hurts not to be with him, not to go to him. Suddenly I feel the intense need to call him, I long so much for him, for his warmth, his attention, I have to do my utmost not to call him to tell I'm coming back to him. I feel attracted to him like iron to a magnet, I feel like being tied to him with a hundred strong ropes and pulled towards him. I am totally sure that it is wrong to go back, I am totally sure that it is wrong to talk with him now, I know that my intense longings are old feelings and that I have to work with them in the self-help therapy and I know this will work best if I do not go to him. But it is extremely hard for me to withstand my desire to run to him and to settle things.

And there is this one remark: "If you don't tell, I'll just rip you out off my memory!" There is something special about this remark, that pulls me towards Robert more than the rest of the phone call. I so much long to go to Robert and make it up. I realize that this remark touches something old. I realize that I shouldn't give in to my desire to settle our argument, but that I should process this in the therapy. But I don't succeed in finding the specific memory that belongs to this remark. I am not even aware that there is a specific memory connected with this remark. I can't solve the intense feelings that have been brought up by this remark.

One month later, I suddenly see which memory was connected with Robert's remark. I am ten years old. My sister Susannah isn't coming home anymore, my mother walks through our house crying, the atmosphere at home is stressed. I feel scared and lonely in this situation, since no one talks with me about it. Then one time I see a letter laying on the table, a letter my mother is writing to Susannah. For a moment, there is no one around, and I seize the opportunity to get to know more about the situation. I only have a few seconds and I can't read more than a few sentences. I have always remembered what I read then: "If you don't respond now, I'll just tear up your address!" I have never remembered that I felt something when reading this. Nevertheless it is this memory that is connected to Robert's remark. And now I realize that I have been terrified by my mother's threat. It is only then that Robert's remark loses its magnetic effect, the pain and fear dissolve, and my desire to go to him and settle our argument vanishes.

But by then I have already called Robert to arrange a meeting. Something else leads me towards doing that, too. In the new edition of her book *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller writes that she herself managed to cure herself by working with Stettbacher's four steps, but that others failed when they tried. Miller says she got letters from people who tell her that after a first clear improvement of their problems using Stettbacher's self-help therapy, their old problems came back, and that they asked her for a therapist.

This decreases my self-reproach: I wasn't the only one who couldn't keep on doing the therapy using only the information from Stettbacher's book. But I also become scared. Scared that this means I will not be able to continue the therapy alone. Alice Miller writes that it would be better to do self-help together

with someone else who also is doing this therapy. Maybe Robert would like to do this? To me, it is still clear that I can't go back to a therapist-client contact, and definitely not with Robert. But I do see a possibility for mutual help and exchange of experiences. Then we would be equals, and we would both use Stettbacher's four steps for our own therapy, and perhaps Jean Jenson's therapy, too, a therapy method that I don't know yet but that Alice Miller mentions in her book. Now, after reading Miller's book, I think that Robert would be willing to do this. And this way I would feel able to work together with Robert. This would be a great solution, this way I wouldn't be alone doing therapy anymore.

All this leads to an appointment with Robert at February 16. Then I have been working with Stettbacher's four steps for seven weeks, I have changed enormously, my symptoms have diminished a lot, I have far more insight into myself, my problems, and into the therapy. I have clearly grown, I feel more adult, more independent, stronger and more powerful. But not strong enough, I suspect, to be a match for Robert. I know this meeting comes too early for me but, pulled by ropes of old ties and old fears, I am now sitting here and will try to make the best of it.

To have some chance to tell my story, I use a tried and trusted technique: I have written down everything I want to say, and read this aloud. In this way, I tell about my proposal to be partners in this therapy, and I tell what I started realizing about body psychotherapy, the way it has harmed me and how I feel about having lost so many years of my life doing this body psychotherapy.

Very soon it is clear that there is not the ghost of a chance that this meeting will give me what I hoped, against all odds, to get: insight from Robert in therapy, his willingness to learn from previous mistakes, and continuing together, helping and supporting each other. "If I would take seriously what you wrote, if I would take seriously that I failed, I would break", he says when I finishes reading. I can't believe he means this. I feel his reaction is exaggerated, immature. In my opinion, it would be painful for him to see reality, but he would not break. Couldn't it be healing to learn from mistakes? To learn new things? Why couldn't it be a relief to leave a disastrous working method and try something that works better? How can Robert take himself seriously as a therapist if he refuses to take criticism from a client into consideration? All these thoughts swirl through my head, but I don't manage to say any of it.

Robert also says that he doesn't feel good about my proposal to be partners, "since I don't feel safe with you because of your criticism". I have the answers to my questions. There is nothing more to say. Nevertheless, I don't leave immediately. The bond with Robert is too strong. For so many years he was the pivot on which everything in my life hinged. Nine years of therapy, with years of almost daily contact, years in which I only lived on and in sessions with Robert. It is hard to break that bond, hard to stand up and walk away for ever. But even more, I stay because of childhood feelings being triggered. When I came in I felt quite adult and strong, in the preliminary conversation as well, and also when I was reading aloud. But now I feel small, desperate and dependent. I am in pain. I am scared. Rationally I can see that this situation is totally hopeless, but my feelings tell me that it will be alright, that it has to be alright. It can't be true. I can't let this be true. I stay, stubbornly, hoping that another answer will come. This can't be Robert. Robert can't be this way. This must be a misunderstanding, I will die if this would be the truth. I stay, paralyzed, scared, with the truth being a monster before me that I don't want to see. Silently.

I start to cry, locked inside myself like I have been for years and years, like I experienced so many, many times in the contact with Robert. Not able to talk anymore, I can't even try to convince him that I am right. I just sit there, hoping Robert will change just by himself, which of course I can not expect to happen. Once again it is only Robert who talks, and I just cry. However, it is not as bad as it used to be. Now and then, with the utmost exertion, I manage to say something, I manage to say "no" to Robert's words. As always, I let myself be dragged along with his confusion. But now and then, I see that it is not true what he says and why it is not true. "You are wrong, Robert", I say.

Over the years Robert and I have had quite a lot of arguments. I did criticize him, and often he was able to hear and admit that, at least partially. But those arguments were always about details, like communication or the implementation of his therapy. Now, I am criticizing the principles of his therapy. Now I tell him that those nine years not only didn't bring me any improvement, they even brought me harm. Now I tell him that I really appreciated his warmth, his attention and his involvement, that I appreciated his efforts, but that the techniques he used were wrong and made me ill. Now I tell him that because of this, I lost nine years of my life, and that I feel very sad and angry about that.

Robert doesn't want to hear this. He says it has been a really valuable process we went through together, the repeating patterns we saw in our contact, the value of our relationship, the things we lived through together. He doesn't seem to realize that I didn't come to him for some questionable spiritual growth, nor

for intense experiences, but to get rid of my symptoms. I tell him that those years have been horrible for me, I have been continuously ill, and those years did not bring me anything. He maintains that he experienced this differently and that he felt that for himself it has been a good and valuable experience and that this counts, too. I feel this to be inconceivable and it makes it clear to me that he did have goals in my therapy that absolutely were not mine – goals in which he himself was the center of the therapy. It makes clear to me that I have been used. If he had been more explicit about this before, as he is now in this meeting, I would have left him long ago.

"For me, body psychotherapy felt good. I myself went through a whole development, doing and learning body psychotherapy. If all those years you did need something else than what I offered you, if I did not yet have the knowledge needed for your therapy, I couldn't help it, since I just had not gotten that far myself. I had to go through my own growth first." But what use is this to me? I didn't come to him for his growth, I didn't have time for his growth, to wait until he had gone through his own development so he could finally help me. Where am I in this whole story? I came to him, thinking he was a therapist, thinking that he was competent – not to wait patiently until he had gone through his process of growth. If he did not yet have enough expertise to help me, he should have told me honestly, and referred me to a therapist with more knowledge. He always lied to me, he always told me that I could trust him, that he was competent, he again and again told me he was a good therapist and that, when I did not trust this, this had to do with my problems, that my distrust was not realistic. And I always let myself be soothed and deceived by his words.

But not anymore. Now I realize he always just messed around and experimented with my therapy. He did have good intentions, but that doesn't help me, I won't get my life back with that. His messing around has destroyed a lot in my life, but he doesn't mind, I realize now. Everything is being sacrificed for his "growth". *His* growth. I don't want "growth", and even less *his* growth. I want results. I want my symptoms diminished. To him, spiritual growth is the goal of his life, at least it has been the goal of the therapy he did with me. But this was not my goal at all. I am terribly, horribly angry now that I found out, now that I find out in which way he has been doing my therapy.

"It is spiritually irresponsible to say that the therapy should have been different since I was just the way I was, and at that specific point in my development. I simply didn't have any other choice than to do what I did, so I am not responsible if this turned out wrong for you. You should see your experience with me as a valuable process of growing, you are wrong to reject experiences, this is really an unhealthy way to look at life. You should look at what it brought you."

Hearing Robert telling me this makes me sick. I realize he is captured in insane spiritual illusions that, though unspoken, have determined the therapy, and have brought me so much harm. I realize how my health and my life have been sacrificed to these illusions. And how easily he dodges his responsibility as a therapist.

Utterly upset I listen to him, and the only thing I manage to say is: "You are wrong, Robert." I am in the old familiar fog again and can hardly react, hardly think, but still I realize that it is totally false what Robert is telling me. The old fears hold me captive so I can not really say something, but I succeed to wrest from it a little bit and do whatever I can to say something back, although it is no more than: "You are wrong, Robert." That is all I can say, but at least it is more than it was before. Nevertheless, it can't chase away the fog and the paralysis.

Robert is angry about my reaction. "So then, how do you work with Stettbacher's four steps? Are you telling in the last step that your parents shouldn't have done with you what they did? Do you say they should have behaved differently?" Yes, of course, that is exactly what one is supposed to do in the fourth step of this therapy, of course I do that. Now Robert totally flies into a passion. Upset, with two hands desperately raised above his head, clearly scared and almost crying he bursts out: "Such ideas will make you mentally ill! So you will become insane, you will lose touch with reality!"

Amazed and overwhelmed I look at him, scared by his emotional outburst, scared now that I get a glimpse of the depth of his fears, his despair and confusion. Scared now that I see how frantically he is running away from the confrontation with his own childhood, the inner confrontation with his own parents. Scared to see how hostile he reacts even when he hears that someone else does confront her parents. So many times in all those years he has accused me of avoiding the confrontation with my parents and my childhood experiences when I refused to do "rage work". But now that we get to the point, it turns out that I am the one who has the courage to go through this confrontation, while he runs away as fast as he can. I see him, his arms raised in desperation, and I wonder why for heaven's sake I came to this man all

those years.

Meanwhile, Robert continues talking, telling me that I am only allowed to feel and express my old needs, but that I should never say that things should have been different, because then I would become mentally ill, I would fall apart. One should understand and see that things couldn't be any other way than they were. Only that will bring health. "It is important to see something good in what happened, to see something good in the abuse that you experienced. I wish for you that you will be able to see that."

I am absolutely sure he is wrong. For seven weeks I have seen the spectacular healing effect of the fourth step as Stettbacher describes it, as I did it. For seven weeks I have experienced how it heals me when I really reject the abuse, and stand up for what I should have had, for what I needed to grow up in health. I didn't become mentally ill, I didn't fall apart like Robert says would happen. On the contrary. I got integrated remarkably well, I became clear-minded and in touch with reality.

I know that realizing what happened on one hand, and what should have happened on the other hand, is the essence of mourning and the essence of recovery. Acknowledging this loss is intensely, unbelievably painful, but I can't avoid this pain and I have to stand up for my life as I deserved it, to heal my wounds. It isn't unless I dare to see how things should have been, that I am able to really mourn for what happened. Now I see, hear, Robert running away from this pain and I see how he wrapped it up in spiritual ideas, and I feel it's really incredible. But I am captured in the old fog and fear that have come back, and I still can only say: "You are wrong, Robert."

It is time to leave, I realize. It feels impossible to leave, since still everything in me tells me that things should become all right, that it shouldn't end this way, that I can't bear this, that this will kill me. But finally I manage to tear myself loose from him. I say goodbye, for one more time I cling myself to him, wildly crying, hugging him. I know this is the last time I will see him, and then I leave.

In the ten minutes that I need to get home, the fog lifts, right at the moment when I see that what Robert did is actually manipulative. This was pedagogic manipulation, pure black pedagogy like Alice Miller described in her books, subtly wrapped in a spiritual packaging. I realize that this can only bring disaster in a therapy. I experience now, from one second to the next, the difference between the fog that I had always lived in, and the relatively clear consciousness that I have gotten used to recently and that's coming back now. This way, I see how I, almost unseen, improved enormously. Also, I realize now that it have been Robert's insane ideas that sustained and worsened the fog all those years. It is totally clear to me now that I will never go back to Robert, not even in an emergency. Although I still feel attracted to him I will not go to him anymore, but I'll process these feelings in the therapy. Talking with Robert deprives me of my mental health, so I have to stay away from him.

When I get home, I read once more the information Stettbacher sent me. There can be no misunderstanding – how he describes the therapy is exactly the way I have done it in the past few weeks.

"Any abuse, in the present or in the past, has – in the therapy – to be denounced as well as acknowledged to be wrong. Also, the abuse has to be rejected with all your might and with total expression of one's feelings, and description of all the negative effects on one's whole life. When by doing this again and again – and finally with one's total consciousness – the purposelessness of the inconceivable suffering is understood, the last feelings of guilt that were caused by the abuse will vanish. This person then is no longer afraid, and no longer willing to suffer meaninglessly and without guilt. Therefore, he then is no longer scared and over-sensitive, on the contrary, he becomes open, clear, brave and willing to devote oneself to a constructive life, whenever that is possible."³

One week later, I get Jean Jenson's book. She gives lists of the ways people use to deny their childhood in more or less subtle ways – and Robert's ideas are mentioned in her lists.

But that is cold comfort. It really hurts to lose Robert. That night after our last meeting, I cry and cry and I am so scared, so scared to have to go on all by myself. But I consistently use the four steps to handle this, to process this old pain, and I come through it well. The next day I feel tired, and sometimes I still feel pain, but the fear has gone. I feel strong, clear and adult. I even feel good.

This last meeting has a short sequel. Two weeks later I get a letter from Robert. He proposes that I return to him to have therapy sessions, because, as he writes, "he would be able so well to help me working with

3 Translated from the original German text by myself.

the four steps" (!). I spend almost two weeks to process the childhood pain that this letter brings up, and then, when I feel adult feelings, I write back a letter that I certainly will not return to him for therapy. And I write him that our last meeting has only made this clearer, since I now know in which way he works with Stettbacher's therapy. I write him that as far as I know, this way is not really Stettbacher's therapy. He himself doesn't take the time to process the feelings my letter brings up and writes back to me immediately. He explains elaborately that he is right and I am totally wrong and that he can't stand the thought of me thinking of him this way. I again process what his letter brings up of my childhood pain and then I send his letter back with a short note that I don't want this correspondence. Then it becomes quiet. Robert is out of my life.

It is a sad and tarnishing end of a contact that has been so intense, that has been so important to me and that lasted so long. Robert has been everything to me, for many, many years. For years my life was totally determined by the contact with him, I lived on contact with him. He dedicated himself to me so much, it was as if he gave me everything I had always missed – warmth, humanity, honest empathy, a real, genuine, sincere contact, openness. The chance to get what I missed as a child. Someone with whom I was safe, someone I could trust totally. Someone where I could find shelter, someone whom I could tell things I never told anyone else, and who reacted positively, someone to whom I could talk straight, for the first time in my life. Someone I could tell what hurt me, what made me afraid, what happened to me. Someone who allowed me to be myself and who reacted with warmth, empathy and respect.

When I stepped into his room, out of the empty desert that was my life, it often was enough just to see him to be able to feel again. Seeing him brought relieving tears. Often, just hearing his voice on the telephone was enough to bring tears. An oasis in the desert. It is extremely painful to see that this therapy brought me nothing but lost years, that a lot of the apparently positive aspects of our contact turned out to be false and fake, and that it ended with total incomprehension.

To me the most awful, horribly awful fear resulting from all this is the thought that I may not be able to have children anymore, because of all the lost years with incompetent therapists. Twelve years of lost fertile years – won't I be too old to have a baby by the time I'm mentally and physically healthy? How long will it take to recover far enough to have children, and stable enough to give children the safe place they deserve? Won't I be too old then? I long to have children, intensely. I can't believe this will come all right, and the thought of remaining childless feels very painful.

The least Robert could have done was to acknowledge his limitations in an early stage, and to help me find someone who really was an expert at processing traumatic experiences.

Again and again he told me he was a good therapist – but he must have known he wasn't, since he was so well aware that he was developing, engaged with his "growth". Why didn't he see my distress? Why didn't he see I needed therapy, and had nothing to do with his "growth"? Why didn't he see I shouldn't be burdened with his "growth"? Why did he tell me lies? Why did he sacrifice my life and the life of my now unborn children, sacrifice it to his needs and limitations? If he hadn't lied to me again and again, told me again and again that he really was a good therapist, that he really was competent; if he hadn't again and again persuaded me to trust him, told me again and again that it had to do with my problems whenever I was critical of him, that it had to do with my problems if I didn't trust him (distrust which now turns out to be right); if he had been brave enough to acknowledge that maybe he was on the wrong track with me; if he had had the courage to be more humble, then I had felt free to look for therapy in other places. Then I would have been on the lookout for other therapies and for therapists who worked in a different way, like Stettbacher. Then this horrible history wouldn't have taken so long.

I stayed with him voluntarily, it was my own choice, and I do have my own responsibility for this. But still, the authority Robert had as a therapist made him responsible, too. I am disappointed that he doesn't have the courage to feel guilty about that and to acknowledge his responsibility as a therapist. Robert did really have capacities – his empathy, warmth, attention, humanity and effort made him tower high above the cold, killing indifference that I found at the RIAGG and in the University Hospital. Robert did manipulate a lot, but still far less than all the other therapists I encountered. Robert was more open to criticism than all other therapists I had known. He really did outshine others. His therapy was a disaster, but thanks to him I survived when I almost died of the even more disastrous methods of the RIAGG, and after I was forced to leave the RIAGG.

But empathy and effort alone are not enough. That a lot of therapists are even worse isn't a reason not to be critical of oneself. That a lot of therapists know less than you, is not a reason to hide your own limitations from a client. Then you should still do your best to find someone who is more competent than

you are, when it is clear that your help is not enough. Keeping a client for nine years without improvement of symptoms is absurd, in my opinion.

When I say this to Robert in our last meeting, his defense is that he always believed me when I said I was feeling better and now could try to start activities like volunteer work. But how could he confuse these empty remarks with real recovery? I didn't feel my own words to be convincing, and none of my symptoms had gone, or had even diminished. What I experience now that I am doing therapy with Stettbacher's four steps is so totally different from empty and dishonest remarks about feeling better. I think that if Robert would ever have seen a real recovery like I now experience myself, he could no longer confuse lies with real cure.

Jean Jenson, and help from other books

So now I am really without a therapist. But I get other help. The day after my meeting with Robert, I find in my mail a second letter from Stettbacher. He has included a report that an American man published on the Internet about how he helped himself with Stettbacher's four steps. It is a report from the first fifteen months of his self-help therapy. It feels like a gift from heaven.

And Jean Jenson's book *Reclaiming your Life* is published. I am very curious. Could Jenson's therapy help me? What kind of therapy would this be? Eagerly I read her book. To my astonishment Jenson's therapy is not at all new to me. From Alice Miller's book I understood that Jenson's and Stettbacher's therapies were very different, but it turns out that Jenson's therapy is one part of the therapy I do while working with Stettbacher's four steps: to become aware when my feelings are old and to connect these feelings to a memory.

Even though Jenson's therapy is familiar to me, I am very happy with her book. Jenson describes extensively and detailed how to notice when you run into memories in daily life. She lists the thoughts and feelings that never belong to the present but always to the past, which I find very useful. "I'll never get over..." versus "Everything changes with time." "Nobody likes me." versus "Out of the several billion people on this earth, hundreds would probably like you if they met you. Everyone is liked by someone." "There is nothing I can do about..." versus "There are response options in any situation short of captivity or loss through death." "I'll die if he or she leaves me." versus "Yes, it will hurt, but you won't die." "I'm not good enough." versus "Good enough for what? For whom? None of us is wonderful at everything. It shouldn't matter if someone else thinks poorly of you – unless the 'something' in question is your job and the 'someone' is your boss." Her lists of characteristics of childhood and adulthood make it easier for me to convince myself that my feelings are old when I overreact to present experiences, and then process my childhood memories.

And Jenson's survey of "denials" is important to me as well. "I deserved it", "other people had it a lot worse than I did", "they did the best they could", "everyone did it in those days", "it made me strong" and much more – many times I am caught in thinking up apologies for people who have hurt me. Jenson describes these apologies to be denials of the reality of the past. This helps me to disprove the excuses.

But what should I do when in the present something awful happens, while it also brings up old feelings? I myself had decided that my feelings then partly belong to memories of the past, and partly to the present. But Jenson makes it clear that that is wrong. She explains that when old feelings are brought up, all my feelings of that moment belong to the memories, none of them belong to the present. When I then process the memories, I can gain access to my adult feelings and thoughts. It's only then that I can notice how I as an adult will feel about the experience, and then I can act properly.

Jenson's book is inspiring. Her book helps me to believe that doing this self-help therapy is OK, that I could really recover this way. It is a relief to read her examples – they are so recognizable. To see how I, being stuck inside old pain and fear, do not react properly to people and to the present situation. And how I therefore often repeat the past. But her explanations also make it clear to me that this doesn't mean I am responsible for what people do to me, nor that I cause what they do, nor that it is "the path I have to go" or "karma" or whatever – things that several therapists have talked me into believing. Jenson's book makes clear to me that other people are responsible themselves for their feelings, behavior and reactions, just like I am. They act the way they do because that's how they are, even when they react to something I do. The aim of the therapy is to be able to handle in an adult way whatever I encounter in my life – something I couldn't do as long as I was trapped in the past – but the intention is not to make myself responsible for other people's behavior, or thinking I have magic powers causing other people's behavior.

Before, I was unable to prevent the past repeating itself, in my experiences with the Riagg and in the University Hospital. Again, I wasn't seen nor heard, again, nobody stood up for me. But I wasn't responsible for their incompetence or for the blunt way they treated me. Jenson's book gives me a clear view of reality. And it gives me useful tools to work towards living in that reality.

With only Jenson's book I would not be able to do the therapy, that much is clear to me. Then the same would happen as I experienced in body psychotherapy: I would drown in old pain, I wouldn't have the tools to structure and process the memories. Stettbacher's four steps to deal with a memory are not part of Jenson's therapy. And I need these four steps, especially to discover my feelings of guilt and to stand up for what I needed. Also, the four steps help me to be conscious that I am living now, and that a memory is in the past. The steps help me to be aware of what I am doing.

But Jenson's book is a good addition to Stettbacher's information. What helps me most of all, is her explanation of fear: the fear that I run into in the therapy, or when I wake up during the night, is the fear that I felt or suppressed as a child, and it has nothing to do with the present. No matter how scared I am, I am not in danger, so I shouldn't let this fear stop me from processing my memories in the therapy. No matter how strongly I feel that there is real danger now I am safe and the therapy is safe. Jenson gives a useful clue: look around you, look whether you really are in a physically life-threatening situation ("sitting in an airplane with engine problems"), and if not, then just continue to acknowledge and process the fear – it is a memory, there is no actual danger. Being afraid doesn't automatically mean that one is in danger: if the fear belongs to the past, nothing will happen now. This turns out to work really well for me and it is an important aid that makes it possible to keep on doing therapy on my own, with no one helping me.

Also, I feel much support from books with other people's stories, like *steinzeit* by Mariella Mehr. When I read *steinzeit* for the first time, it was really a revelation to me, and I read her book over and over: at last, finally, there was someone who described how I felt, finally someone who felt the same as me, finally someone who described the same kind of battle as I am fighting. Finally someone who understood me. Mariella Mehr gave words to what I myself couldn't tell. Now that I am doing therapy with Stettbacher's four steps, I am more and more able to find my own words, to tell my own history, but still she is my companion. I take her book with me night and day. Mariella's courage gives me courage. She has been doing just as badly as me, but she did this therapy and successfully fought herself through all this misery. She did have a therapist, Stettbacher, but still, her success gives me hope and support, gives me the confidence that things will become better for me, too. For a long time already, I feel more support from books than from direct contact with other people, I feel this kind of support works well with me. Besides, other people have managed to help themselves with self-help. I am able to do this.

I certainly have moments that I feel very much alone doing this therapy. Most of the time, I manage to work with these feelings in the therapy – feeling lonely, lost and abandoned, feeling that I can't do this therapy on my own. I do realize it would have been great if I knew other people who are also doing the therapy. But I don't know any. My friends find it really great what I am doing and they are interested, but no one starts doing this therapy herself, so I don't have a therapy companion. In the frightening days after reading Alice Miller's book, I try to find another therapist. But this isn't immediately successful, and then I quit trying. The feeling of urgency has gone already, and it is old, and then I decide it is not that important to find one. So I continue doing the therapy alone, and in spite of some hard moments, I am doing fine this way.

Sometimes I notice that it is even an advantage to do the therapy alone. If I had the chance, I might go and find someone to feel safer when I'm scared. But in that way I would continue to mix up past and present. I don't have to call someone, I don't need to go to a therapist: the reality is that I am safe and that my fear belongs to the past. Since I am doing the therapy alone, I am forced to see this reality and start doing therapy at those moments, instead of running to a therapist. It is hard and painful, but it works.

Symptoms that remain

I have been doing therapy now for two months. Several symptoms have diminished spectacularly, but the therapy has not yet brought me a normal life.

I still have big problems with sleeping. I lay awake long before falling asleep, sometimes even for five or six hours. My body feels painful when I lay awake, I often have pain in my vagina. Yet, I am doing better than I used to. For years, I didn't sleep at all, or I needed sleeping pills to get at least some sleep. Now, I

always do fall asleep in the end, and I sleep for a few hours. But I still don't get enough sleep to lead a normal life.

Falling asleep is hardest when I need to wake up early the next morning. I think this is caused by memories of high school. When I fall asleep in those nights in the end, I always have dreams filled with anxiety about having to go to high school early in the morning. But processing those memories doesn't bring any improvement. I try another association to deal with this problem: I make a connection between knowing I have to wake up and knowing that my father will wake me up and abuse me. When I process this with the four steps, my sleeping improves remarkably in the nights that I have to wake up early. But unfortunately, this is only temporary.

Also, I still can't sleep without interruptions. In the first period of self-help, in December 1995, I slept on relatively well – having a period during the night that I slept for four or five hours without a break. But in these first months of self-help, it happens often that I suddenly return to my old pattern of waking up every hour. March and April 1996 pass by with trying to find out why I can't sleep on. What wakes me up again and again? I find out that when this pattern starts, something has happened during the day that touched a memory, without me processing it in the therapy. If I make the connection between my feelings and one of my memories, and process it with the four steps, then the night afterwards I can sleep on for four or five hours again – but if I don't do that, I continue to wake up every hour.

The cause for waking up during the night almost never has to do with memories of my mother. It's always memories of my father. Sometimes they are about abuse, often they aren't. Often they are memories about pressure to achieve. Sometimes, I am reminded of having to achieve when someone compliments me about something I did well – then I always react with old feelings of not being seen, and of having to meet impossible demands. Sometimes I feel this pressure to achieve when I think I should be able to do what other people do, and start making plans to lead a normal life, with working, studying and things like that.

Around April 1996, I often feel the need to achieve because I am thinking about starting studying again. No matter how many problems I still have, I have made such enormous progress in the last few months that I expect that the remaining symptoms vanish just as fast. It won't take long before I will have a healthy and normal life. And then I would like to start studying again. Maybe I could finish my masters study at the conservatory, or start another study. I fetch some information about studying at the local university. When I read this, I panic and become so scared that I don't sleep anymore. Then I think about the Open University, a way of studying that allows me to do things at my own pace, step by step. But this still feels like a big step. I start by going to the library and lending some study books. Can I handle this now, trying to learn something? Do I manage? Soon I experience that I have big problems with reading, understanding, learning, answering questions, solving math problems. It brings up old panic, I feel hazy again, I can't read anymore, can't think anymore and get severe pain in my belly. So, every time I try to read or to learn, I am forced to do therapy instead of studying. That is not useless, of course, but it is frustrating.

In one of these therapy sessions I feel very clearly that I was not a genius. Not the child my father thought me to be. It is a very frightening discovery, and I realize I never dared to feel it so clearly as I do now. I am terribly scared. It is so threatening to be just who I am, with things I can do and things I can't do. It is threatening to realize I am just Me. Because my father didn't want me that way, and I did the utmost to pretend I was the genius he wanted me to be. Even though I thought I was stupid and I was scared it would come out I couldn't do what my father wanted – at the same time I took care that I believed myself in what he said about me. Now, in this therapy session, I realize that I wasn't a genius, and not a princess. I feel in danger, and at the same time relieved.

Suddenly I realize that I am fine just the way I am. What I needed, and still need, is to be allowed to be just human, with things I can do and things I can't do. What I need is to live with myself instead of living with illusions. Using the capacities I really had, developing my own talents. Now I understand my father shouldn't have rejected me when I couldn't do something. I realize that I should have been safe and loved with my limitations. I realize that it is possible to love someone even when she can't do something – that I was worth having a daddy who loved me even though I wasn't a genius. A daddy who could love me without using me to flaunt himself. I didn't meet my father's requirements, but still I have the right to live. All those years I had the right to exist but I didn't know. That hurts. I needed it so much to know this, but I didn't. I always thought I wasn't good enough. I always thought I was bad. But I wasn't. I was good the way I was. For the first time, I can feel this. Why, papa? Why didn't you see I was worthwhile? After this session, I can sleep for four hours without a break again – until old memories are triggered again.

I try to find out if just processing memories of having to achieve helps me to sleep, but unfortunately, my sleeping pattern doesn't react to this way of working. I have to look carefully at all the things that happened during the day, to find the moments when I felt old feelings but suppressed them, and then use the four steps to process these feelings. It works, but it's a time-consuming procedure. Often, it takes me several days to find out what the problem is. I always manage to improve my sleep, and that gives me hope. But the improvement never lasts long, and I am disappointed by that. After some nights when I could sleep on for four hours, I always fall back to waking up every hour.

Still, I have nightmares, every night, just like I have had my whole life. Sometimes I dream about my mother, although that is rare. But about my father I have nightmares almost every night. Now that I am using the four steps, in a way it is less frightening. The dreams and nightmares are just as awful as they always were, but sometimes when I am dreaming, I realize that this is a memory and then I start using the four steps while I'm asleep. This way, I am not as much at the mercy of these nightmares as I used to be. Other times, I don't manage to use the four steps in my dreams, but at least I can use them when I wake up scared. This way, my nights are less scary. What is it that I dream about?

In a dream, I live the normal life of a child during the day. But every evening at seven o'clock I have to go to jail. Every night I have to report myself at the jail, every night I have to go there and I can't escape it. I cry silent tears and feel so afraid. I cry and cry since I know that tonight at seven o'clock everything will change, as it happens every day.

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I dream that I am laying in my bed, now, as an adult. I look at the wall next to me. Then a shadow appears on the wall — that shadow is my father, papa is coming with his thing, his monster, his penis. I have to open my mouth, papa wants his thing in me. It goes in. I am so scared and I don't want to and I feel so powerless, I can not resist. My body has been taken away from me, I am not allowed to have my own will. Upset. In my dream I suddenly remember that this is a memory, and I start using the four steps. When I am doing the third step, I wake up, and half asleep I continue the therapy.

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I dream I am watching television. There is a boy who was captured during a war, he is about nine years old. The boy has been tortured. He tells what they did to him, he shows the scars on his body. He is in pain, he is terrified and panics. I see the panic in his eyes, desperate, mortal fear. Why has this been done to him? He is just a child. It has been done purely to hurt him, to bully him, a child. It has been done just to see the pain and the fear in his eyes. Slowly, almost ritually, the marks of the enemy have been cut onto his body. His body taken away from him, hurt, his mind terrorized. And some time later — killed.

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I wake up, totally scared, thinking a man is standing next to my bed and pulling my blanket away. It takes some time before I realize that this is not happening, but the fear stays and I can't sleep anymore.

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I wake up, desperate, scared and full of pain. Physical pain, in my belly and in my vagina. It is worse than other times, different, more severe and closer, more directly. It feels like I am being raped. Convulsions, spasms go through my body. This goes on for about two hours, then gradually it gets less intense and painful. It takes some time before I fall asleep again. When I wake up in the morning, I see a photograph of myself as a small child. Suddenly I feel upset when I see the eyes of this child. Suddenly I feel I am in danger, in danger of being killed.

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I wake up and lay frozen in bed for hours, in a nightmare on the edge between waking and sleeping. Mortal fear, confusion about present and past, thinking that either I'm back in the past or the same thing is happening as back then. I don't dare to move a muscle, I don't dare to utter a sound, I don't dare to open my eyes, I hardly dare to breathe. I am terrified. I feel myself laying in

my little bedstead in our house, in the room where I slept when I was about two years old. I see the door is ajar, opening wider. Someone is coming into my room.. For several hours I see again and again the image of the door opening. The memory doesn't go any further – and I am glad it doesn't. Even this short, it is unbearable. Total, devastating, mortal fear. After some hours, at daybreak, I hear the sounds of traffic and they break the spell of the past. I am still scared, but not confused anymore, I realize that this image is a memory and is not happening now. The sounds form a bridge to the present, and now I can process the fear with the therapy.

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I participate in some kind of quiz – having been chosen because of certain characteristics and then somehow obliged to participate. I feel overwhelmed but if they say I can do it and say I have just the right characteristics for it, if they say I am just the right person, well, then I will join. Some math problems are projected on a screen. I get thirty seconds to solve the problems. I have to put on my glasses since I can't read what is projected on the screen. But even with my glasses on I can't read well, the numbers and letters are vague and the problems are difficult, and I panic. With difficulty, I read the problems. The letters are *m* and *n* and I have to figure out what numbers they represent. I don't know how to solve these problems, I don't know where to begin. I must have learned this some time in the past, but I can't remember, and maybe I only learned the easier problems. My head is dazzled. Panic-stricken I try some numbers, try to check whether these are right. I just guess and try and I am scared and don't know anything anymore. The panic becomes so severe that I awaken myself.

When I fall asleep again, I have another dream, about rape and murder. My family doctor is helping me as a doctor and as a judge, questioning the perpetrators. I am there and I am scared.

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I am looking for people who are doing Stettbacher's therapy. I am scared and I need support. But I can't find anyone. Then suddenly I am in a therapeutic community, I am laying in bed at night and I wonder what I am doing there, since this kind of treatment doesn't give me what I need. I fall asleep on this ward and dream that I am laying there and at the same time in the past, in my little children's bedstead. I feel terrified, but I do know that I'm dreaming, within my dream. I see again the door of my bedroom opening, I feel mortal fear and pain in my vagina. I start to cry out loud out for fear. People from the therapeutic community come, but no one helps me. They all keep a distance. Then someone of the staff says that the rooms are going to be distributed differently, everyone gets another room. They all start packing their things and go to their new rooms and I have to go somewhere else, too. I feel abandoned. This gets me nowhere. This will not change my fear, nor change what happens during the night. Why doesn't anyone pay attention to that? Why doesn't anyone do something to stop it? Why all this attention to changing rooms? That is not important, isn't it? That is not a solution. I need a solution. A solution to my problem. A solution to the problem that my father abuses me. Then I wake up. I remember that this whole show of everyone changing rooms really happened, when I was 3 ½ years old. And again when I was 5 ½ years old. But this last time, it indeed was a solution. When I came to sleep in one room together with Matthew, I was safe.

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I dream about my father's funeral. Despair that I can't talk with him anymore about what he did. Hate. The dilemma whether I should tell what he did to the members of my family, who are there. Or should I restrain myself and act as if nothing happened? In the end I break down and I cry to Sarah that my father wasn't nice at all and that he raped me when I was only two years old. But she doesn't believe me. I can't reach her. I stay alone with all the pain and despair.

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I dream that I am in a hospital or a children's home or something like that. I am laying in my bed. I am still a child and a tall man with dark hair comes in. I know he is a serial killer and I am terrified. I know he is going to kill me. He comes to me and grips me by the waist. I cry, I cry for help. Then I wake up, terrified, and still feel the hands around my waist. Unbearable terror.

When I fall asleep again, I dream that I am at school, second grade or so. Another child says that

some of the children in our class have been killed. The teacher says this is nonsense, none of us has been killed. I want to protest, but then I realize that I can't possibly protest, we are all here so we indeed could not have been killed. But then I realize that something else is up. I say that there was someone who tried to kill me. But the teacher thinks that's nonsense, too. I feel desperate because of her denial and I run away, crying and upset and go to the attic of the school to hide.

In the attic, I find Susannah's room. I take a blanket and lay down on Susannah's bed and cry and cry and cry. Then the principal and the teacher come to me. They know why I cry and what's wrong, but they don't help me. The principal says it is important that I should live on my own, to leave my parent's house. This can't last. I agree.

But the only thing he then talks about is which color the bathroom should have in my new house. He lets me choose between blue and pink. I say I want yellow. But the only thing I am thinking of all the time is why he is talking about my bathroom when it's the least important detail in the whole situation. Why doesn't he help me with the important things? Why doesn't he help me with my pain and fear and grief? He continues talking about the bathroom and says he doubts whether yellow is a good choice, he will ask in the shop. I feel desperate and lonely. Why does no one pay attention to the fact that I was almost killed? I feel sad when I wake up.

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I am a small child, he holds my hands on my back and with the finger of his other hand he goes inside my body. I continue to see this image of his hand, his finger. Pain, fear and powerlessness.

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I dream that I want to sleep at the attic, as a preschooler, but the radio is turned on. I want to turn it off, but there is no switch to turn it off. I am desperate and upset and furious with my father who made this radio. I long to sleep so much and he makes it impossible. Then my brother in law comes and changes the radio and installs an on-off switch. Then I finally can turn off the radio.

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I am in a kind of discussion group. I am sad, but I don't say anything. A woman talks about her boundaries, that she has boundaries. A girl with Down Syndrome who has never talked before, now suddenly starts talking, a lot of words. She tells that it helps her so much to hear about boundaries, that this enables her to talk now. She says that she has boundaries herself, too, that she realizes this now. And she talks and talks. I do not understand everything she says but I am glad that she can talk now and I find her sweet and beautiful. Although she has Down Syndrome, she can talk now, she can say all this, and she is telling a lot! Maybe she is different from other people, she can't do all the things other people can do, but she can talk, a lot, and she has boundaries too, she understands that, she knows. She is nice and good, too, and she has the right to exist, too, although she can do less than the other people. I feel relieved by her words.

When I wake up I write in my diary. I cry and cry and cry. I write: "Is that me, the last-born who always could do less and knew less than the others? Who never could meet her father's requirements? Who felt that something was wrong with her, having "Down Syndrome"? But who did have boundaries – only never was allowed to stand up for them, never was allowed to say 'Stop!'. But I did have boundaries and I needed them to be respected."

Another problem that remains is feeling very awkward every time after physical effort. This has nothing to do with not being fit, with aching muscles or something like that. Even with a small effort, like running to catch the bus, cycling against the wind, swimming, or ice skating, I feel very weird and awkward, like I felt as a child during and after gymnastics lessons. I feel pain all over my body, like being torn into a thousand pieces, I feel totally and horribly exhausted, I feel hazy, very scared and tense, and I can't rest and I don't sleep during the night that follows. I don't know what to do with it in the therapy, I can't find any connections that bring improvement when I process them. This continually causes problems in my life.

The most prevailing symptom that remains, is being ill – throat infection, ear infection, fever, coughing, feeling exhausted. The first three months of doing self-help I am ill almost continuously. That's no worse

than it used to be in this part of year, but it isn't any better either. In the therapy I can't find triggers or memories that are connected with this symptom, and I feel desperate. Not being able to do anything, laying in bed, not really living, just surviving. Hoping for a future that doesn't come. I long so desperately to really live, to be healthy.

Will my sleeping problems and my physical problems improve yet? Will these symptoms disappear, just like the emptiness, the panic and the fog? What should I do to accomplish this? Why hasn't that happened so far? Why didn't the therapy have any effect on these symptoms? I have been doing the therapy thoroughly and conscientiously, every time I run across triggers, already for five months. I processed my memories often, and exhaustively. Then why I am still not doing fine? All these months I put together so many pieces of this puzzle – I must have done all of them. I processed my whole history. The therapy should have finished by now. I should have been cured. How come I am still ill? Is something missing? What? How could I find out?

Solving the puzzle

1996-2001

The door

May 1996. I am laying in bed with fever and a sore throat, again. Why? Why do I become ill again and again? And why do I recover so slowly? Why do I stay ill for weeks, only to become ill again a few weeks later? Today, I was asked to substitute at a school of music, tomorrow. Could my illness have something to do with that? It could be – teaching is not easy for me. At the conservatory, my internships were a disaster. I was very scared, every time again. I managed to turn the switch in time and function "just normally" every time, and I did do it well, but before and afterwards I always felt horrible. Later I had private pupils, and this worked better, but in these first months of self-help therapy, I have worked as a substitute at a school of music several times, and all these times I fell ill. A throat infection, a fever, "the flu". Why? What's the matter with teaching that makes me react so strongly?.

This night, I lay awake and start doing therapy. Which aspect of teaching is the trigger? There are so many things that could be the trigger. To teach, I have to talk, and that is hard for me. I work with this in the therapy, but no matter how much I process around "talking", I stay ill. I try something else. I do not really want to teach flute. Learning to play the flute seems so futile compared to the problems I am struggling with. I have the feeling I would rather help people with important problems than with something like learning to play the flute, which feels like just a luxury. It brings up a lot, that I am forcing myself to do something that I do not really want, and I work with the four steps, but I stay ill.

I keep on searching. In my imagination I wander through the room where I teach, I see myself teaching. I look very carefully at everything in the room. I try to notice where I feel fear or pain. Nothing seems to trigger strong feelings. Suddenly, I see the door, the door through which a pupil will come, and I feel how scared I am. Why I am so afraid of this door? Then I remember the image of the door of my bedroom when I was a small child. The door that opened in the night, my mortal fear, and I realize I am mixing up those two images.

I sleep in the first room on the right when you come up the stairs. That is my bedroom, from the time that I am 1½ years old until I am 3½ years old.

So small, still, at night in my little bed. The door opens. Fear. I am terrified, I know this. Frozen with fear I lay in my bed, I stop breathing, I hope this way I can work miracles, so it will not happen this time. I hope I can work miracles so he will not come this time. Fear, overwhelming, mortal fear.

But he does come. I want to hide somewhere but there is no place to go. Papa's hands come towards me, lift me from my bed, his hands around my body, around my waist, I go upwards, powerless. Papa presses me against him, fixates me, holding me tightly with his arm. Down in my body something comes inside me, into my belly, something big. Overwhelming, terrible pain. The only thing I feel is pain. I am torn apart, pain is killing me. Mortal fear. Powerless. I can't go anywhere. Totally helpless against papa. Papa is so big, so strong. I am no match for him. Papa is always there, always everywhere. And I need papa. Small child, need papa.

Why does this happen? Why do you come, papa? Why do you do this, papa? Papa, papa, I don't understand. It can not be papa who does this. It can't be. It shouldn't be. Papa didn't do this. Papa needs to be nice and safe, otherwise I can't live. It isn't papa. Papa is not guilty. The door did this. The door brought papa in. The door is guilty of all this.

But actually you were guilty, papa. Papa, you shouldn't have done this, you were wrong to do this, you weren't allowed to do this. You hurt me. I should have been safe.

Now, now that I see I made the door guilty, now for the first time I can see my father was responsible for what he did. My sore throat improves immediately, and the fever recedes.

Although this is not my only problem with teaching, this is what made me ill. This night, now that I see this and process it with the four steps, my sore throat improves immediately. I am not ill anymore. For the first time I can see my father as guilty. Before, I always said this in the therapy, but I couldn't feel it. Now

I can feel this and put the responsibility where it belongs. Finally I can see the reality of what happened and process it, as far as this is possible in one time. For the first time, I am not ill when I teach at a school of music – and it stays that way. For the first time, I have won a victory over being always ill. "Doors" are not the only trigger, and I will have to go a long way to discover the other ones, but the first victory is there, and that's really important to me.

Symptoms that get worse

With one of my other symptoms, I win less and less victories: sleeping without a break. More often than not, I fail to find the cause of my sleeping problem, and I get really tired from waking up so often during the night. Also, I am very scared and desperate at night, and I have more and more trouble with a symptom that I didn't have in the past: painful and frightening convulsions of my body. When the summer of 1996 comes, I sleep far worse than when I started therapy, late in 1995. This is a big disappointment, I had expected I would sleep better and better. It is clear that in this situation I lack the energy to start studying, and I postpone my plans to somewhere after the summer. Then surely I will be fine.

But it gets even worse. At the beginning of the summer, I don't fall asleep anymore, either. I now almost don't sleep at all and it's not getting any better. Only during a week with friends in Sweden, I sleep better, but when I get home again this stops. Every night I lay awake the whole night. Every time when I about to doze off I wake up with a start. The few moments that I sleep, I have nightmares. My eyes and my head hurt because I am so tired, I am exhausted and desperate, and far too tired to do therapy. But I do realize that I can only solve this problem by doing therapy, so I try. I don't have any idea where to look for the cause. Before or after my holiday? In Sweden, I slept better, and when I got home I also slept well for one night. I just don't know, I try very carefully to look at everything that happened, before as well as after the holiday. I process a lot that is very useful, but it doesn't bring me any sleep. I often think I will never sleep again, and will die from exhaustion.

I struggle with the fear of dying or of being killed. I wonder why. Often I hear a phrase in my head: "If you talk about it, I will kill you." A threat by my father. I try to process my fear of being killed with my memory of this threat, but it doesn't work. I still have horrible nights, I still get almost no sleep at all, I still have a lot of physical pain, I am terrified and think I will be killed.

I wonder whether the pain in my legs and my feelings of dying have something to do with falling from the emergency staircase, in the apartment building where we lived when I was two years old. When I was a child, I was often told that I fell from that staircase, and that my mother found me hanging upside down, with my feet stuck between the steps of the stairs. When I heard that story, I always imagined myself falling face down. But in my dreams, I always fall backwards – the metal stairs, falling backwards, mortal fear, thinking I am going to die or have died. I ask my mother, and it turns out my dreams are right: I fell backwards. In the therapy I try to connect my mortal fear and the pain in my legs with this event. But it doesn't work, this is not the right connection. The pain and the fear are about something else. But I don't know what.

During this summer I also have trouble with the "movie" in my head. Bizarre, violent images of my fantasy world. Images of being tied up. Images of being hurt. Punishment. Having to become better. Having to learn to obey. Torture. Having to learn to endure pain. I try to process this in the therapy but I find it very hard. Sometimes I manage to pick some aspects that I can acknowledge as true – the images of sexual abuse. Sometimes I can at least acknowledge some feelings, and process these feelings. But often, I am unable to find a way out of these feelings in the therapy, and I become totally confused. Chaotic feelings and the notion that what happens is good, as the man in the "movie" is telling me, and which I myself feel strongly, too. My mind says that this is not true, and that it is horrible what happens, but my mind seems to be totally turned off as soon as I get into these images. I am overwhelmed by these feelings, I vanish in them. I feel fascinated, pulled towards them, fear, a lot of fear, excitement, lust, not being able to break away from the images, not being able to stop them. I feel ashamed of these fantasies. I feel ashamed of my fantasies of sex and violence. I feel ashamed of my fascination for sex and sadism. But the images force themselves upon me, irresistibly, and I feel a strong longing to go with them, and the only thing I can feel is that the pain and the fear are good and nice. Here, the therapy is powerless.

I continue to have nightmares, in the rare moments when I sleep. My nightmares become even more scary and awful.

I am trying to hit my father, in a desperate attempt to reach him. Then he ties me up and

punishes me with electric shocks. I have a lot of pain and feel very scared and humiliated. I wake up and can't sleep anymore, I remain panicky since I think the door is opening and my father is standing next to my bed.

—

A nightmare about being Jewish, Nazis, being chased, living in a ghetto, not having enough to eat, afraid to be killed. A weird scene — I walk through a room, there are many people gathered in that room, all are afraid. There is a man sitting at his desk. He is going to pick out someone, and no one dares to breathe and everyone hopes he or she will not be the one. I walk to the toilet and I hope I do it unnoticed, I hope I will not attract attention. But suddenly I feel a horrible electric shock that goes through my whole body from my head to my feet. I feel burns on my heels but I have to go on normally, I have to go to the man, he picked me out. It hurts terribly.

—

I am in my class in high school. I cry, since I feel and see a memory of being two years old. I am sleeping. Papa comes in, I am still asleep. His hands goes into my panties. In my memory, I wake up because of the pain, pain down there, pain inside. Pain, fear, powerlessness. In my dream, I am crying because of this memory, and I leave the class. A classmate comes after me, tries to soothe me but that only makes it worse. He can't handle it, I have to reassure him, stop crying and be there for him. I have to act. I know and feel that crying is good, that I am mourning. But when he is there, this is not possible.

—

I dream that I am being punished. I am in some kind of reformatory and need punishment. A man (my father?) takes me to the room where this will take place. He puts a stick into my vagina. It hurts and it moves all the time and so it hurts even more. I have to sit there enduring this the whole duration of my punishment. I am in pain, I feel sad and scared and powerless.

Summer is ending, and I hang back from resuming my normal activities. No matter how few they are, it is more than I can manage, now that I get so very little sleep. What could have happened at the start of summer that made me so sleepless? What has been triggered? What have I overlooked in the therapy? Doing therapy doesn't bring any change at all. Nevertheless I continue therapy, I don't give up. Although it doesn't bring me sleep at the moment, I keep telling myself that the memories I do process will help me in the end.

One day at the end of August, I lay exhausted on my couch. I try to look carefully at the worst nights of the past few weeks. I try to see what happened in the days that preceded them. Suddenly I realize that all this started with one memory that I processed in the therapy. This memory I processed on the same day that I started sleeping badly, in early July. And one week ago I listened to the recording of this session, and afterwards I had some really horrible nights. Every time that I remember this memory, I feel severe pain in my heart region — I even worry about having a heart attack. A piercing pain in my chest and in my left arm.

Until now, the cause of insomnia was never in something I did in a session. So in these two months when I was desperately looking for the cause of my insomnia, I had processed everything I could think of, but I had never looked at what I did in the session on the day when my sleeping problems started.

It is a memory of my father. I am six years old and I am in first grade at school. I like school, and I learn easily. I don't really do my best, I just enjoy learning. I don't even know what marks are and what they mean. The record card that I get from school just before Christmas isn't important to me. That is — until my father looks at it and says "Just 'writing' should be better." There's a B for writing on my card, and all other marks are straight A's.

I never saw this as a dramatic event. I always remembered it, but I never remembered having any feelings about it. I did indeed start doing my best to write nicely after my father told me this. I even started doing my utmost to write nicely when, in third grade, I get a teacher who is extremely fussy about writing nicely. But I see no reason why I can't sleep anymore because of this memory.

I don't understand why, every time I encounter this memory of my father's reaction to my school record

card, I react with mortal fear and extreme physical symptoms. When I process this memory more carefully, I notice that I have always thought that my father was right, that I wasn't good enough and that I had no right to exist with only a B on my record card. Also, I always thought that there wasn't any other reaction possible than what my father did. With a lot of difficulty, I find out in the therapy that I am not worthless and that I do have the right to exist with a B for writing, and that there are other ways to react to a record card than to say what should be better. Finding out this in therapy is an intense relief and release.

Therefore, I expect to sleep well the night after this therapy session, a pattern I know from other times when I processed a memory that caused sleeping problems. But it doesn't happen. Instead, I have an extremely horrible night. I don't sleep, I am desperate and terrified and my only thoughts are: "I don't want to die, I don't want to die..." I experience severe pain in my chest and pain in my vagina. Nevertheless I am sure I picked the right memory. This memory clearly is the leading thread running through my sleeping problems of the past months, and yet processing this memory doesn't help me. Why doesn't the therapy work this time? Why does it make things even worse? I don't understand anything of it.

A few days later, I become upset because of financial problems with social services. My application for repayment of the costs of the therapy I did before, has been rejected. I feel overwhelmingly powerless. Pain and rage about the injustice of all this, and mortal fear. Why did social services do this? They acted this way because I made a mistake in the application procedure, I think. The idea that I did something wrong that has led to dismissal of my application, the idea that it's all my own fault, strengthens my panic and fear. The many "daily" mistakes I make no longer lead to strong reactions, but "big" ones do. I use the four steps the whole day, trying not to drown in my strong feelings.

My reaction to this kind of trouble is familiar. I know these triggers all too well. In the past, they have led several times to an overdose of pills. My reaction is just as strong as it was then, the feelings just as unbearable as they were in those crises. But Stettbacher's therapy enables me to handle the situation differently this time. Although it doesn't feel like it, I can see that my feelings are old and do not belong to the present situation. The situation isn't bad enough to reasonably be the cause of this strong reaction.

Consistently I use the four steps and try to find out what part of my past has been triggered. I say what I feel and think, I say everything what I can identify of the chaotic feelings and thoughts inside me, of the hurricane that rages inside me:

"I am so scared. I feel so powerless. It hurts so much, not getting money. I can't live this way. I need money to live. I want to live. It is not fair that I don't get this money. I feel so powerless. I didn't deserve to be treated this way. Why don't I get the money I need to live? Why don't I have the right to live? Why are you allowed to live but I'm not? There was a good reason for my therapy. My therapy wasn't just luxury, I really needed it. I was really doing very badly. I needed help. It isn't fair that this causes financial problems for me, too. I really would have wanted to be healthy and to be able to work, I wish I had enough money to pay for therapy myself. But I am not healthy and I don't have the money. I can't help being ill, I can't help that I need therapy. I can't help being without money. I would rather be healthy, but I am not. I don't want to be dependent on social services, I hate to be dependent but I have no choice. I need your help. Why don't you help me? I feel so powerless. I need that money. It is just fair for me to get it, even though I did something wrong in the application procedure. I am so scared. I didn't want to make a mistake, but I did. I am so terribly scared. Please, help me. You have all the power and I don't have any. You are much stronger than me. You shouldn't reject me just because of one mistake. I have the right to make mistakes. It's not true that I am not allowed to make mistakes. I am so scared. Please, help me to stay alive. I want to live. I don't want to die. You are not allowed to kill me. I am so scared. I feel so powerless. I can't escape. But I am allowed to make mistakes. I do have the right to live, even if I make a mistake. It isn't true that you are allowed to kill me. I am so scared, I don't want to die, please don't kill me, I am so scared, let me live, daddy, I want to live, I am so scared, I want to live..."

I try to acknowledge my feelings, thoughts and needs to be old, to be memories and not part of the current situation. I try to direct my words to the past. That's hard, but I realize that this is the only thing that can help me get through all this. I try to find out what part of the past is being triggered, but I can't find it. Nevertheless, after some hours, I do see the present situation more clearly and I can see better how to handle it, so that I may get what I think I deserve, in spite of maybe having done something wrong.

One thing I do conclude from this event, from the intense feelings I have this day, and I write in my diary: "The past is more horrible than I ever thought possible."

Surprisingly, I suddenly sleep better after this day. Although I didn't find the memory behind all those feelings, the things I said in the therapy this day, directed at the past, were apparently right. I hope that sleeping well will continue now and will improve, like I always hope and expect when I am sleeping better. Then sleeping well feels so natural, I just can't imagine that this will vanish again. This is something I can do. Of course this will stay. But unfortunately, it doesn't work this way. After a week, I sleep just as badly as I did during summer. And again I have no idea what caused it, or even what triggered it. It is clear that I need all my energy and attention for doing therapy. Disappointed, I put off my plans for studying. The few activities that I have are more than enough for me: concerts, volunteer work at a day-nursery, the normal household obligations, and social contacts. Now and then I have a night when I sleep better, but most of the time I sleep very little. I am tired, and sometimes ill.

Talking

At the end of September, I realize my nights are worst, with strong fear and physical pain, after I talked with someone during the day. I mean really talked, not small talk. During the summer it became easier for me to talk, something which always had been a big problem for me. In September I notice that I, for example, can say far more easily that I disagree, which is really new for me. I can talk, I can react, it feels sensational and at the same time natural. But afterwards, I can't sleep and I'm very scared.

I look for memories that fit in. I think of the prohibition of my father to talk, but I can't process that memory. It feels very far away and I don't get any improvement when I use it in the therapy. I feel unreal when I take a look at it, and so I stop paying attention to the memory. Next, I think of the memory of not being allowed to talk in class, the time I had a black out at school. But this connection I can't process either.

Most negative memories concerning talking are about my mother, and those memories are very real to me. She often reacted negatively when I told her something. When I said I felt ill or had pain, she told me it was just nothing, she told me other people had it far worse than me, and she told me I was a bad, selfish child to ask for attention. When I was enthusiastic about something and wanted to show it to my friend, my mother got angry, too, telling me that I was selfish and wanted too much attention. I just had to pay attention to what my friend said or liked, not ask attention for myself. And when I said "no" to something my mother wanted, she reacted disapproving and hostile, or disappointed and sad, and she asked me why I did this to her. It seems logical that this taught me not to tell anything about myself, and not to show my feelings. I now try to process these memories and stand up for my right to tell about myself and to have my own opinions, preferences and needs.

In the meantime, I have problems with the present contact with my mother, too. She is driving me insane by calling me every week, and then talking small talk for an hour or more – about her problems or about her neighbors, the friend of a friend of her neighbors and so on – whereas I don't tell anything myself. I can't stand anymore that she tells me she needs me, needs to hear my voice but never asks me anything, doesn't want to know how I am doing. I can't stand anymore that we never talk about things that are important to me, but I still have to listen to her with empathy and attention. I can't stand it anymore that I don't tell anything myself.

For about a month, I don't answer the telephone anymore, for fear that it will be her. I can't bear talking to her and I don't dare to tell her this. She leaves messages on my answering machine, her messages become more and more angry about me not answering the phone and not calling her back. But I need time to find out how to handle this situation, and to process my memories. I realize that I always thought that enduring her on the telephone was adult behavior. But actually, it wasn't. This is my childhood pattern. At the same time, I realize that getting mad at her and not wanting to speak with her also is based on my childhood feelings.

In a few weeks' time I try to process as many of my memories as possible. I try to improve so much that I can look at the situation from an adult point of view and act in an adult way. After some weeks, I feel strong and adult enough and I call her, in October. I tell her this has to stop. I tell her I do want contact with her, but not as often as she apparently wants, and I tell her that I don't like the way we talk with each other. I tell her I feel she doesn't pay any attention to me and to how I am doing, and that our telephone calls don't feel good this way.

We talk a long time. My mother reacts very negatively and at some moments she's just rude. Which makes it clear to me that my memories are not exaggerated. When I start telling her about how I am doing

(something I before never did), she reacts immediately: "Shall we end our phone call now?" She doesn't want to hear anything from me and she isn't able to show any interest in me or to show any empathy. We don't agree, nor do we understand each other. Finally, I say that I know I can't expect *her* to change, but that *I* certainly will change. I tell her that in the future I will tell her when I'm not in the mood to talk with her on the phone. I tell her that it is important for me to take care of myself. Afterwards, I feel relieved, and I can answer the phone again. Some time later, we talk again about all this, and this time it fares better. For some time, I sleep somewhat better, but still worse than a year ago.

Processing my memories of my mother about "talking" gradually makes it easier for me to talk, I am less scared. But the extreme reaction afterwards stays the same, and I sleep worse and worse – not falling asleep, not sleeping on, fear, despair, physical pain, and nightmares.

Headache

In November 1996, I win a victory again in my battle against falling ill. One night I wake up with a swollen, sore throat. I know that this normally means I will be ill for the next couple of weeks. I decide to start doing therapy immediately, instead of trying to fall asleep again, although I haven't gotten much sleep yet and I have to work at the day-nursery the next morning.

Maybe my illness has to do with my visit to a friend, that afternoon – the last time I saw her I also became ill the night afterwards. Then I couldn't find what had caused this and I had been ill for three weeks. I try to notice what touched me and what could be the connection with my past. I see all kinds of connections and process them. My throat doesn't become worse but neither does it improve, like that one time in June. I don't feel I have found the cause.

The next morning I decide to go to the day-nursery. I don't feel well, but not too bad either. At the end of the morning my throat starts to hurt more and more. As I am working with the children, I think about the therapy sessions last night, and suddenly I'm beginning to see the light. A memory comes up, a memory of my mother, and I feel strongly that this is what causes my sore throat. The friend I visited yesterday suffers from frequent, severe headaches and this time, as well as the last time, she has told me about it. That brought up a memory.

Somewhere during my high school years. I tell my mother I often have a very bad headache. It never continues for a long time, but it hurts a lot and feels frightening. A painful, cutting headache, especially early in the morning. My mother says that in the past she had terrible headaches and she describes how it felt. She asks if I feel the same as she felt. No, mine is different. "Well, be glad you don't feel what I felt, that was really terrible", she says – and that is the only thing she says about it. She doesn't pay any attention to me, she doesn't ask me about it anymore and walks away. I stay alone with the pain – pain and loneliness even more now that I am left alone with my pain, while I did have to pay attention to her pain. I think I am not allowed to ask for help again. My conclusion is that I have to think my headache is not bad.

Mama, why don't you pay attention to my pain? Why do you think only about yourself? Why do I have to be there for you? Why don't you help me? Am I not important for you? Don't you want my headache to be cured? Aren't you interested in how I feel? How is that possible, mama, you are my mom, aren't you? So then you have to help me, isn't it? I don't have another mama, I only have you and you have to help me. You should listen to me, take me seriously and go the doctor with me. Mama, why don't you do that? I need a mama who takes care of me. My headache is serious, mama, and I need your care.

My throat stops hurting, I don't become ill.

The movie

There is another cause for bad nights: I notice that my nights are worst when I've read about incest during the day, or when I've seen something on TV – about incest or murder or danger of being killed. Now that I see this pattern, I pay more attention to processing my memories of my father and of sexual abuse.

At the beginning of December 1996 I realize that my fear after having talked actually does belong to my father's threat. I can clearly feel the fear when I am talking, I tremble with fear, and I feel that I am afraid of my father, afraid because I go against his prohibition, scared that he will kill me now. I am not

only scared when the subject is abuse – I almost never talk about that. Just speaking, whatever it is about, feels dangerous. Now that I feel the connection with my father's threat, I can process it with the four steps.

When I process this fear in the therapy, I notice that the fear is connected with the attic, the place where I slept when I was between 3½ and 5½ years old. But I don't have any memories of abuse in the attic. I only have memories of the two years before that, in the other room where I slept when I was younger. When I processed abuse in the therapy, I always felt it belonged to that room. So what happened in the attic? Why don't I have any memories of that, whereas I do have memories of the earlier period? That doesn't seem logical. I feel that my father's threat that he would kill me if I "talked about it" is not about the sexual abuse that I have memories of. He told me this another time, on another occasion. What was it that I wasn't allowed to talk about? What makes me so afraid? I have no idea.

The financial problem that made me so upset in September, rears its head again in December. Documents are sent to me, there will be a hearing about it. I contact the counselor who is helping me with this. The case is somewhat different than I thought myself, when I thought I made a "mistake". Still, it brings up strong feelings again. I hate it that this problem is bothering me again. I just realized my father's threat and all the feelings this brings up, my daily life is already too much for me, I am exhausted and over-stressed. I can't handle this. It is not fair. But it is there, I have no choice, and the only thing I can do is to acknowledge my reactions as memories, try to get clarity about what is going on, and to process the memories.

Immediately when I get the documents I get very scared, and nauseous. When I am cycling, I am afraid I will faint again, as happened a month before when I was cycling in the street. Next, I feel overwhelmed by strong feelings of despondency, hopelessness and powerlessness. The feeling that I will always lose and that it's no use to resist. I feel an urge to "go to the colors". The nights and days that follow are hard. Fear and pain, pain in my chest and pain in my vagina and vehement convulsions of my body. The frightening feeling of having a dead body, which is much worse than I had before. It feels like my body is swollen, taking up more space than before. And at the same time it feels like being empty, dead. My body seems extended, my boundaries shifted, but at the same time more vague, without boundaries, without a body. At some moments my body seems to have fallen apart in a thousand bubbles which are spread through the whole room. It feels horrible. I have no idea what is happening with me, or to which events all these feelings and symptoms are connected, and I can't do anything against it.

One sleepless night, as I lay with this horrible, swollen, dead feeling in my body and pain from below, I try once again to find out what is going on. I try several connections that don't bring me sleep. I continue. Feeling my body as it feels now, one thing I realize very clearly: Something terrible happened to me – I don't know what, but it was terrible. This phrase is haunting me: "Something terrible happened to me."

Next thing, my "other world" starts, the movie in my head forces itself upon me. I try to process the feelings of this movie, like I always do when it happens. But suddenly I don't look just at the feelings that I experience in this movie, I look at the contents of the movie, too. And then I find myself thinking of abuse with wires and electric shocks. Suddenly, I see this as abuse that really happened – the "movie" that has been with me since I was a child, my dreams about "my other world", the painful convulsions of my body that go on and on. All this points to abuse that has actually happened this way. I blame myself for thinking that this could be real, but at the same time I feel relief. Very carefully, I start doing therapy with this. But when I step out of my bed in the morning, I feel this is too hard to believe. The morning sunshine tells me this can't be true. I end up with: let's stick to the conclusion that something terrible has been done to me, I don't know what, but it was terrible and somewhere around here I should look for it.

I also think of what my father told to the reverend in the last months of his life: that he had done terrible things. The same words I'm using now. I also think of the copy of *For Your Own Good* by Alice Miller that I lent to my mother ten years earlier, in an attempt to explain to her how I felt, and that somehow vanished into thin air – my mother said she couldn't find it anywhere. She thought my father had thrown it away, but why? I now suspect that my father saw it, read a part of it, felt confronted with what he did (since Miller writes about severe abuse of children), and therefore made it disappear. Now that I am starting to look at my "other world" as being real memories, I start to understand why he did this.

The next day is the day of the hearing. It is a hard day. The confrontation with the financial problems and with social services is painful. I am very scared and I am crying silently, I feel very small and inaudibly I say over and over: "Don't kill me, don't kill me..." The next night is horrible. I cry for hours and hours and hours. Why? In the therapy I look at all the things that happened in the hearing and at the way I felt then,

but this doesn't help me. I try another way of doing the therapy, I try to take note of what my feelings and my body are telling me.

I notice the tension that comes up because my alarm-clock will ring while I'm still asleep and don't want to wake up, not having had enough sleep yet. Having to rise in the morning – I can't, I can't. Powerlessness. Extreme fear. Being at the mercy of... Being no match for... Having to... Fear. Panic. Tension. Can't survive. Can't survive. Dying. Don't want to die. Having no chance. No help. No chance. It just happens. Can't escape. Being at the mercy of a madman.

Then, the "movie" in my head starts again.

The man says: "take off your clothes." awful.
I don't want don't want don't want.
"If you don't do it, I must punish you more", the man says.
He says I have to lay down on the bed.
Terrified. Can't escape. He is stronger. Have to obey, go to the bed.
Hurts inside.
Have to have to.
Man ties me up. At my wrists, at my ankles.
Child powerless, powerless, terrified, humiliated, betrayed.
Man puts electric wire in me, on me.
Shocks through my body. Electric shocks.
Pain, killing pain.
Don't do don't do, stop.
Not allowed to make a sound.
Hold on silently. Hold on till it's over.
But can't can't can't can't stand anymore. Hurts so much. Can't hold on.
Stop please Stop Can't No more Hurts so much.
Goes on and on. Can't No more.
"If you talk about it, I'll kill you."

The man says, all this is to make me better. I have to do it right. If I am not silent, I must get more pain. Until I learn.

It's a secret, I am not allowed to talk about it. But all children get this. It has to be done.

This night, experiencing this movie again and again, I fight in the therapy to disapprove of what happens in my "other world". To me, it seems so normal to take for granted what happens, to take for granted what the man says, to think it is necessary, to see it as something a child needs in order to get better, as deserved punishment for a bad child, a necessary treatment to become good. It seems legitimate punishment for a child's mistakes, I believe everything of what has to be done to children to become better. Now I'm fighting against these insane ideas.

Then I get physical memories again. Convulsions in my belly. Extreme fear, pain, bewilderment. Again I realize: something horrible must have happened. A madman did something horrible to me.

After struggling for many hours, I end up with the same conclusion as the night before: what happens in this movie in my head, really has been done to me. By my own father, at home, in the attic. My father tied me up and gave me electric shocks. I cry and cry and cry. The inconceivable has really happened. This time, I don't conceal this conclusion anymore when I get out of bed in the morning.

I do go to the day-nursery the next morning, even though I have only slept for half an hour and had a frightening, strenuous night. Under the circumstances, I function very well. I do feel amazed by the totally different world I am in now, and therefore it seems unreal what I went through last night. But somewhere, I still realize it is true. And I see around me children of the same age I was when this happened to me – and I am even more amazed. It is totally incomprehensible what my father did to me. Really inconceivably horrible. Small children, dependent, vulnerable, powerless. Beautiful, living people. Valuable creatures.

That night I sleep well, for the first time in a long while. The next few days I feel I am finally on my way to solving the puzzle. I feel I finally understand where all those severe symptoms come from. I feel finally I understand what my fathers prohibition to "talk about it" was referring to. Finally I understand what

caused my sleeping problems, what those painful convulsions of my body were, why I had pain in my chest, near my heart, why I had such pain in my belly, why I felt so nauseous, why I fainted. Why I got so much trouble with even the slightest physical strain, why I was always so exhausted, why I was so often ill and feverish. Why my father never stopped telling me that "people can't remember events that happened before they were six years old" – which isn't true since I do remember a lot from years at kindergarten, but which was apparently very important to him to tell me again and again, for twenty years. Why he told me that "people can't remember pain". Now I understand why my father told the reverend that he was very guilty. Indeed he was...

I also remember that a couple of years ago, I already started thinking that this abuse had really happened, that what happens in the movie in my head and in my dreams, abuse with electricity, was real. I then told this to Robert, my therapist – and he immediately talked me out of it. This was nonsense, this wasn't possible, these images were fantasies, symbolic fantasies. I locked up my thoughts again and went back to believing the "movie" in my head to be fantasies, sinister fantasies, symbolic for other abuse, like I used to think. But somewhere there still was the awareness that something didn't fit. Now I am surprised that it took me so long to end up with the same conclusion.

Who will believe me?

I am having hard times, now that I did acknowledge those images as memories. I have severe pain, pain in my whole body, pain in my heart region, cutting pain in my vagina, pain in my belly, nausea, and a feeling as if I'm going to faint (which doesn't happen). Sometimes my skin is glowing, it feels hot and red, although I am not ill and don't have a fever. My body feels raw, damaged. Crying hurts since it makes my belly move. My right wrist hurts and I can't use it. And I am so scared, so terribly scared.

Nevertheless, I keep my head above water. I have enough experience with the four steps to handle this. I almost automatically use the steps and do this almost continuously, during the day as well as in my nightmares. I sleep much better than I did before I acknowledged these memories. I function quite normally. I feel miserable and cry a lot, but apart from this I can do my normal daily activities. At the beginning of January I have to work a couple of days with the orchestra and I succeed in doing this without problems.

But I feel very fragile. Going by bus causes nausea, and triggers my fear and pain, and I am crying when I arrive. The physical strain of skating makes me sick, exhausted and desperate, even more than am I used to. A warm Jacuzzi feels like being tortured, and just taking a bath starts reliving of memories, too.

I feel such a strong need to go to people who understand what it is I'm going through. The past is so inconceivably horrible and it hurts so much. It hurts so much. I feel a need for support, for help. But there is none. I think about looking for help, looking for a therapist, but I remember all too well what I experienced with therapists before, and I realize I would endanger myself if I really tried to get help. I can't take the risk that a therapist would deny my memories. I decide to see this need as a childhood need, since then I can handle it. An urgent need for safety – but I am safe now.

If only I could talk about it, if I wouldn't be totally alone with this, if I could tell friends about my memories, that would make such a difference. I feel a strong need to tell, but I don't dare to. Now! I think during a talk. Now I'm going to tell about it – but then I don't do it, and the next time I don't tell it either. I tell some people that awful memories came up, but I don't tell what happens in these memories. It is too painful to talk about, I can't get the words out of my mouth. And my story is too bizarre. "No one will believe you", is a phrase that haunts me. Also, I have learned over the years that when I tell about my problems, people sometimes react in a way that hurts me. Sometimes I wished I hadn't said anything, although people meant well.

Christmas 1996, and it happens again. I try to explain to my brother-in-law why I am crying so much, I want to tell him what I went through the past week, what I saw and felt and what happened to me as a child. But before I really start telling, I stop because of his well-meaning but negative reaction to my crying. A friendly: "Just calm down" instead of saying: "Cry, it is OK, just cry as long as you need, talk and cry, I will stay with you", which I need so much. The question I long for: "Do you want to tell what happened", doesn't come. I don't tell anything. And I lose my feelings. I feel empty and desperate. I lose contact with myself, feel cut off from myself, from my feelings and from my history.

After this, I don't dare to try to tell anyone else anymore. But in January I do write letters to my friends in

Sweden with whom I stayed in the summer. I write how I did since the summer vacation, and what I found out about my history. Writing is easier for me than talking, and that these friends are living far away makes it safer, too. Besides, they are both very good friends whom I already told a lot about myself. From one of them I get a supportive and understanding letter back. I don't hear from the other.

I make an appointment with a doctor because I want to be sure that my physical symptoms (especially the pain in my chest and my arm) are caused by memories and there isn't a present physical cause for them. Therefore, I have to tell about my memories. But I can't. I just can't get the words out of my mouth and I start crying. Since I expected this, at home I wrote something about it and I let her read it. It is not my own doctor but a substitute, a female doctor. She reacts friendly, but it is not clear to me whether she believes me or not, and I notice that this feels important to me. But I don't dare to ask. Anyway, there isn't a physical cause.

Real, unreal

After the visit to my brother-in-law with Christmas, when I unsuccessfully tried to talk, my memories of my "other world" feel unreal. And not only my memories, everything feels unreal – myself, the world around me. I feel empty and far away, as if it's not true what I remember, as if I've been cut off from myself. As if I am not the one who went through all this. As if I do not live anymore. I still do have the awkward physical symptoms, the painful convulsions, going on for hours. Sometimes I feel pain in my whole body, I feel like my body has been shattered inside, a crushed mess, everything torn apart, all pieces painfully torn, no boundaries anymore. A horrible feeling. No body anymore, just a trembling, painful pap. I can't sleep anymore.

I remember I did sleep and I did feel alive when I believed my memories. When my memories felt real, I felt real myself, too, and I felt the world to be real, too. Therefore, in the therapy I try to convince myself that what I remember and what my body tells me really happened. But this doesn't work, I don't manage, no matter how hard I try.

Then I decide to pursue another strategy. I acknowledge that these experiences are so horrible that I can't reasonably imagine that someone really did this. It is indeed inconceivable what happened, it is unbelievable what my father did. It is natural that I can't believe this. This shouldn't have happened – and since it did happen, it is only natural that I have these feelings of not understanding, not believing and of unreality. It is really weird that I went through all this, since this has nothing to do with who I am, who I really am, since this never should have happened anyhow, and it isn't how my life should have been. I didn't deserve it, I didn't cause it.

And then the feelings change. They change into deeply felt, intense feelings of being ME. I now feel strongly that it wasn't my fault what happened, that it didn't have anything to do with me, that this shouldn't have happened. These are intense, but also very quiet feelings of mourning. Mourning that gives me back my life, mourning that gives me a past and a present, that puts me in touch with myself, and gives me a present that is different from the past. Suddenly I sleep much better.

Having felt this, the subject of "believing what happened" isn't over yet. Over the course of months I struggle with it again and again. Which part of my "other world" is fantasy and which part has really happened? What I can believe one day, I may question the next day. Is it out of fear that I sometimes decide that something can't have really happened, or is this a valid conclusion? I realize that I will have to find out for myself again and again what I think of my story, what I believe from this part of my history. I realize that this will be an ongoing process of sorting out, of changing opinions, of examining my thoughts and feelings. Again and again ascertain a view that I can believe on that moment, that I feel to be possible, probable, convincing. Again and again defining a version of my history as I believe it to be true at that moment, that I find plausible, convincing. I realize that this is a process that will probably never be really finished, although I also expect, guess and notice that it will gradually come to rest. I expect that, step by step, I will arrive at a version of my history that I feel to be true most of the time, as far as I can access the truth.

For several nights I have a lot of pain in my arm. During the day I don't have any problem with my arm, but as soon as I lay in bed I have severe pain. I wonder what is wrong. I didn't do anything special with my arm during the day, and I didn't lay on my arm in bed. It really hurts, especially moving it upwards is impossible. Pain in my whole arm up to my shoulder. The first night the pain is worst in my elbow, the second night it is worst at my shoulder. As if my arm has been torn from my shoulder. It hurts so much, a

lame wing that hangs from my body, apart from me.

It makes me think of a part of my "other world". The part where the child, me, doesn't want to obey and throws herself on the floor, resisting, refusing to go to the bed. And the man, my father, pulls the child along by her arm. The girl fights back, but she doesn't have a chance, being only four years old, up against an adult man. Is that the pain in my arm that I feel now? The pain of being pulled along harshly? I am not sure, but since I have to do something with it, I have to do something against this pain, I use this as starting point for the therapy in those nights. After the second night, the pain lingers on during the day, and then it vanishes. I am not sure if my guess has been correct, and I decide that I will check again if the symptom returns. But it doesn't return.

There are more things I don't understand. In a nightmare about the abuse, that quite literally tells my childhood memories, I struggle with something in my mouth. This is not part of the "movie". I remember my strong reactions to innocent daily events with my mouth – a toddler who puts cookie crumbs into my mouth, a toddler giving me a kiss on my mouth, bringing up mortal fear. I have strong physical feelings of wanting something to go out of my mouth, retching, vomiting. And I sleep with my jaws clenched, so tight that I constantly have aching jaws – one time I even break a molar. I don't know what this is, but it brings me horrible nights with flashes of lightning and my body convulsing. I want to know what all this is about. I add the images, my nightmares and my feelings and then I guess most probably my father put a handkerchief in my mouth. But it is no more than a reconstruction. I do not really know.

The movie does tell about having to be silent. Having to endure everything soundless, no matter how much it hurts. I do everything I can to be silent. I can't escape, I can't do anything to help myself, I have to obey, I mustn't make a sound. If I do make a sound, when I can't stand it anymore, when I resist – then I do have to get extra, in order to learn. It is important not to make a sound. But at the other hand – if I co-operate and manage to endure it, then I am ready for getting more and he will give me more. There is no way out. Whatever I do, I can't help myself.

Sometimes, dreams give me a sense of reality, give me the feelings that help me to do the therapy, to process what happened to me.

I dream that I am in the house that my parents moved to when I started my studies. In my dream my mother is there, and my sisters, too. I lay in the garden on a blanket in the sun. Suddenly I see my father coming. In my dream I am aware that this is a hallucination, since my father is dead already, so this can't be true. Nevertheless I cry, terrified because of this realistic image of my father approaching. But no one reacts to my cries, not my mother, not my sisters. My awareness that this is a hallucination or a dream becomes less, the experience start to feel more real, it feels as if things are happening now. Suddenly I'm laying not on a blanket but on a bed, and my father is standing next to me. He has some things with him, a blue-gray metal box. I am really scared of that, I know that this is the thing with which he used to hurt me in the past. He puts a metal clamp on my head and somehow he fastens it to the bed, I can't move anymore, it is really tightened and it hurts so bad that I can hardly stand it. I know that he will now take the wires and put them on my head and send flashes of lightning through my head, and that this pain is too horrible. I already have so much pain and I am so scared. I try to stay in the dream as long as I can, to hold on, but then I no longer can. I leave and the dream stops.

After this dream I cry and cry. I am aware that the details of this dream probably aren't correct, but the essence and my feelings about it are spot on. It is incomprehensible. Inconceivable. And reality at the same time. So insane. How could my father do this? I can't imagine. I don't understand. He took delight in the pain and fear of a child. His own child. It is so inconceivable that I start to think it can't have really happened. How could this happen to me, to me, whereas I am Janet and needed to live, needed to be safe, to be complete. Crying, crying. My tears won't stop anymore. But they are good tears, it helps to cry, these tears bring relief. My tears help me to acknowledge reality, they help me to live on now.

Now that my memories feel real again, I feel horrified and I feel betrayed. Especially about all those years afterwards when I lived in my father's house, and I tried so hard to live with him. Again and again I tried to find or create something positive in the contact with him, always giving him another chance. I always felt guilty about hating him, I always thought it was my fault. Children shouldn't hate their father, isn't it? I feel horrified about all those times he touched me, the times I sat in my father's lap, the times I kissed him goodnight. I feel betrayed by his lies, his web of lies in which he pretended everything to be good and normal, in which he acted as if he deserved respect and love and demanded this from me. But I was right, hating him.

Mortal fear

In the first months of 1997, I am continually afraid of being killed. It seems like I still do not realize that I survived, I don't realize that the danger is over, that I am safe now. In the therapy I try to be aware that I survived, that it's all over now. That I am no longer in danger. But I can't. I still react to certain triggers with the fear I'm going to be killed. Making mistakes is still a problem. When I suddenly realize I did something wrong, I become terrified. Coldness in my body, strangling coldness in my chest, nausea, heart fluttering, desperate panic.

One time I find out I planned two appointments at the same time – giving flute lessons at the school of music and playing in the orchestra. Rationally I know that this is indeed a problem, but that I will be able to solve it when I call and tell them. Yet I am absolutely sure I will be killed because of this mistake. It is Sunday, and at home I don't have the telephone numbers of the pupils, so I must wait until tomorrow to settle this. The whole day I am desperate, terrified, all my feelings telling me I will die. I think this will never be solved. There is no hope, no rescue. The whole day I cry.

That day I am doing therapy continuously. I try to find out what is going on, but I don't manage. I cry, cry, cry. The next day, I change the appointments with the pupils – without anyone even becoming angry, let alone wanting to kill me – and then I calm down. It is remarkable how I can turn the switch and calmly settle the phone calls, in an adult way. Like so often. On the moment I can do something about it, I can step into another role, push away all the fear.

Also in my nightmares I feel the fear of being killed.

A man, some kind of authority, an army officer or so, ties me up and tells me meanwhile that I will die at eight o'clock. I am powerless, but I resist fiercely, I fight for my life, I rage, but he is stronger. I am unbelievably scared and desperate. There are people around me, they don't do anything to help me, they even enjoy my resistance, they like to see my pain and mortal fear, my hopeless resistance, my hopeless, powerless struggle for my life, my powerlessness. I don't pay attention to them, I need all my attention for myself. Myself and this man who ties up my hands. Who rubs my skin at some places with some stuff and fastens the electric wires. It is so inconceivably horrible to know that I am going to die, being totally powerless. I wake up terrified.

I remember how fiercely but powerless I reacted, being seven years old, when my sisters and my brother were singing a song about a little girl who died. They liked the song, and even more liked it since I couldn't stand it. I really couldn't stand it, it made me so terribly desperate and angry and I hated them intensely because they liked to sing this song and liked my despair. I wanted them to stop singing, I told them to stop. But they laughed, they found it funny and just continued. I felt so desperate and lonely. Inconceivably desperate and lonely, I only consisted of pain and couldn't escape.

I remember a movie I saw on television, one time in my college years. A movie about something that really happened, about a boy who picks up two hitch-hikers. They assault him and take over the car. When he lays tied up on the back seat, he hears the two men discuss what they will do with him. Since for taking someone as a hostage they will get as much imprisonment as for murder, and the risk to be caught is smaller when they kill him, they decide to kill him. The boy hears their discussion and hears them deciding to kill him – while he lays there totally powerless, being tied up. It must have been horrible to know he would be killed. This starts my fear. I have the feeling that I am going to be killed, just now and here. Although I know very well that I am home alone with the door locked, so no one is killing me, I have at the same time the totally convincing, real experience that someone is killing me. I am fighting for my life. Nothing matters anymore, just surviving physically, fighting for the next breath. I really am convinced I'm looking death in the face. I am incredibly, horribly scared. This boy was really killed. But I'm alive, and I have no idea where this fear comes from and what to do with it.

Some progress

Nevertheless, I am making progress. I sleep better. I don't have convulsions of my body anymore, I have less nightmares, I can sleep for more hours without a break, and even though I wake up often, it's not every hour, like it always was, but every two hours. I still sleep badly, still I am tired from not getting enough sleep. But it is much better than it was.

And finally I dare to tell about my memories. In March 1997 I tell my friend Charlotte about the memories of my "other world". Although it took me a long time to find the courage to talk about this, now it feels natural and trusted to talk about my memories with her. And I feel safe and respected by the way she reacts. I don't show much of my feelings. I cry a little, but not much. But it feels good to do it this way.

Another friend also reacts well. I tell her my memories in a situation when I am panicky and crying and therefore feel a strong need to tell about what happened. When she asks me about it a couple of weeks later, I see that all those weeks I have carefully avoided to think back at this conversation with her, that I have avoided to remember that I revealed so much of myself. It feels frightening that I told her, and showed my feelings, having been so much more honest and vulnerable than usual. It has scared me more than I realized. Nevertheless, both times that I talked with friends about the abuse by my father, it did not bring up the fear and sleepless nights, when a few months earlier it would have done so, even if I'd have told something small. But after this I don't talk about it anymore, not even with the friends who now know.

Although I don't talk about my memories, I feel more and more real when communicating with other people. Not always do I succeed, I frequently cave in and start acting, but more and more I feel real. I notice I am less scared of people and feel less need to shut myself off from people. I can remain in the contact, feeling my feelings and my thoughts, I can show of my feelings and thoughts, instead of hiding them. But still I can stand only limited contact with other people. When I am with others for too long, I can't hold on and start feeling exhausted and far away. A job that would force me to have contact with people for the greater part of the day would be impossible for me. Also, I still can't think of letting someone come really near, like in a relationship or when living together with someone. And men are still a big problem, I am still scared of men.

But scared or not, I long to have a relationship. Although my feelings of intense loneliness had already vanished in the first weeks of my self-help therapy, and I am doing well on my own – and even function best when I don't see anyone for a couple of days – it feels painful not to have a relationship. How can I solve the problems that make it impossible for me to have a relationship? In order to get in touch with my feelings from the past and to process them, I have to do exactly what I'm scared of. That is one of the principles of the therapy. In the case of fear for having a relationship, I don't know how to do that. To feel what a relationship brings up, I will have to meet someone for whom I do feel love, and who feels that for me, too. But I am rarely able to have those kinds of feelings. So I guess the most I can do is trying not to run away from men and to maintain the few friendships with men that I have, even though these are fairly superficial and occasional contacts.

Only once in these months I see a man whom I like, a man I find attractive. I don't know him and don't talk to him. The moment I realize that I could just step up and talk with him, I realize I wouldn't know what to do with the contact. I feel like I am living in another world and I have no idea what to say to him. I don't feel a connection. I would feel like a small girl, totally out of place. Or I would find myself in the role of counselor, a role that I often have in contacts and doesn't feel good. Nevertheless, for a little moment there was this feeling of finding someone attractive, which is really rare for me.

What I miss the most, is having someone really close to me. Having an intense contact with someone. I am happy with the friendships I have, but I long for something that goes deeper than this. I feel a painful hole in my life.

I also try to improve the contact with my mother. Most of the time, just thinking of my mother for an instant is enough to immediately feel intense pain and anger. I have endless "talks" with her in my head that make me desperate. When I think about calling her or seeing her, I am afraid she will not hear me or understand me, and this notion makes me furious and powerless. Since December 1996, when I realized what my father had done to me when I was a child, I had the impression that the intense pain and anger I often feel is connected to my father. Maybe this is also the case on some occasions when I am very angry with my mother? I decide that when I feel these feelings, I will start to process memories of my father – together with the fact that my mother didn't help me back then.

This works remarkably well. Step by step I progress, until I can think of my mother without exploding immediately. The talks in my head stop. I still have feelings towards her, and surely negative feelings, but they are not that extreme anymore and they don't trouble me so much, they do not overwhelm me and I am not swayed by them. I can handle them and they stop when they are out of context. I feel it was horrible how she treated me as a child, but I also feel that my contact with her now is different, since I

am no longer dependent on her and I can defend myself effectively. This already became clear to me in October, but it becomes easier now. I don't feel powerless anymore, and do not feel such an urgent need to be heard and seen. I realize that our present contact is only limited and superficial, and that I really would like a warm, deep contact with her, but that that is not how things are. It hurts, but it is not a disaster. I will try to make the most of this contact. But I can live with the fact that the result will always be limited.

Out of these feelings of relaxation and rest, I am able to visit her in May 1997. I feel the contact then is better than it has ever been, and better than I ever had expected it to be. We both seem to have changed. I can intervene when I don't like the way we talk, and I can talk about myself (although I don't dare to talk about my memories of my father), even when she doesn't invite me to do so. And for the first time I feel she really listens to me, she reacts with empathy. There are still awkward moments, but I am satisfied with the way it works this time. All my fighting and struggling did bring me something indeed.

Yet, I feel sad after this visit. I strongly feel that I needed my mother's attention and empathy as a child, and not really as an adult. It is good what is happening now. But what I got, I actually needed when I was a child.

I made some other progress, really big progress. From December 1996 to May 1997 I have been ill for only three or four days – in the time of year in which I would always be ill for at least three months, many many years over. Always, without exception. It seems that acknowledging and, partly, processing my memories of abuse by my father, did bring enormous improvement of my physical health. I am really, really happy with this.

Internet

I try to find information about therapy on the Internet. I find websites about scientific research into memories and traumatic experiences. This information fits with my own situation – the fragments of memories, and these memories being "weird", different from daily memories. Especially Jim Hopper's website helps me to understand more of myself and feels like support that I can use well. Also I find information about books that help me, like *Betrayal Trauma* by Jennifer J. Freyd, *Unchained Memories* by Leonore Terr, *Recovered Memories of Abuse* by Kenneth S. Pope and Laura S. Brown, and *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Lewis Herman.

This last author describes in her book the aspects of traumatic experiences that should be talked over: giving words to the traumatic images including the physical sensations, carefully verbalizing feelings, the meaning of what happened ("why?", "why me?", issues of guilt and responsibility and a new interpretation of the traumatic experience), and an ethical attitude that support the dignity and value of the survivor. Stettbacher's four steps turn out to be rooted in more traditional trauma therapy.

I read this great fragment in a book by Kenneth S. Pope and Laura S. Brown: "...catharsis of the sort that was popularized in the early 1970s in the encounter movement, but which has not been shown to be effective in accomplishing much of anything except destroying pillows" and I think of my refusal to do rage work and Robert's incomprehension. Yes, it was only the sale of pillows that profited from this therapy.

On John Speyrer's *Primal Psychotherapy Page* I find e-mail addresses of people who are also doing self-help therapy by Jenson's and Stettbacher's books, and who want to write to other people about doing this. I like the idea, although I still am doing fine alone, even with the horrible memories that I became aware of the past period. I start writing with some people, and this feels good. But in the contact with John Speyrer and some other people on the Internet, I find out that they have little experience with Stettbacher's or Jenson's therapy. They have only been doing primal therapy, and they think that Stettbacher's therapy is primal therapy. I feel disappointed about this.

But the correspondence with John and some other people forces me again to make things really clear to myself, to be very much aware of what I am doing in my therapy. In spite of my disappointment, this helps me when I do the therapy.

I have experienced that the therapy of the four steps, unlike primal therapy, is not based on the idea that pain is good, is curing, or even necessary. The four steps lead me to standing up against such an idea. In the therapy I acknowledge the pain and I feel the pain, but the therapy is based on saying "no" to the pain, rejecting the pain. The principle of this therapy is that pain means: something is wrong. Pain is a signal

that something is harming me, and I have to stand up to restore my broken integrity. I have experienced how the therapy has cured me this way, by making sense of the past, unraveling the past. The therapy of the four steps means to me: bringing clarity where once was confusion and coming to a deeply felt rejection of what has been done to me.

I also read this in the additional information that Stettbacher sent to me:

The motto of my therapy is: "If there is any sense in suffering, I see this sense only in removing the suffering..."

The idea that in the therapy the suffering must be re-lived, is not only wrong, it is absurd. If that would be the goal of the therapy, this would be highly aggravating, since suffering that does not end, finally destroys life, kills all life.

There are indeed "therapies" that consist of re-experiencing pain; the result is a totally broken human being, who can only hope and wait for a "hereafter" and who does not find any joy in life anymore.

Yet, the motto of my therapy also leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to discover the causes of the suffering, to identify them, to resist them, in order to avoid and prevent suffering in the future, so that life can be preserved. (Translated from German by myself.)

When I was reading this for the first time, I felt confused about it, I didn't understand. Back then, I was doing therapy with Robert, and what Stettbacher writes is in contradiction with what I learned in Robert's therapy. But I thought about it and started using it in the self-help therapy, and then I experienced how important this was and how indispensable to make my problems disappear.

When I correspond with John and others I again conclude that for me "uncovering lies" is a really important part of my therapy. In a way, the conclusions I had to draw as a child about the abuse, have caused the most lasting harm. I had to believe so many lies, and I am still struggling with them. In the therapy I often encounter intense confusion whether it was good or bad what my father did. I found in myself a firmly rooted conviction that I needed all this, that I needed this punishment to become better, that I had been bad and should first be made better, so then papa would be able to love me. That it wasn't possible for him to love me now, I shouldn't be so bad. I could become better only through this punishment. Feelings that pain is good, that pain is nice and that pain means someone loves me. Sexual arousal together with pain. And the idea that nothing terrible happened, that what I remember wasn't bad, and that it is nonsense that I should have problems because of this. I am still alive, so nothing really bad happened. Why all this excitement? It wasn't bad, I survived, it was necessary and good.

I blame myself for not having cried for help, and I feel it is therefore *my* fault that I have been abused and not my father's fault. Besides, I cooperated, I undressed myself, walked to the bed and laid down – I did it myself. I also feel he had the right to do this to me since he had problems himself, so he couldn't help doing it and wasn't responsible. Besides, he made sure that I didn't die, he always stopped in time, never went "too far". I owe my life to him, so I should be grateful. He didn't harm me, he restrained himself and took care that nothing happened to me. He saved me. Also, I have strong thoughts that I am only a thing and that I am there for him, my own reason for existence lies in being there for him. Besides, I didn't have trouble with it since I just was so small when it happened. Small children don't feel.

I know all this is not true. I struggle and struggle with this in the therapy, but it is really hard to disprove this. I often notice that these ideas about abuse cause me to re-experience the feelings. The most effective sessions, the sessions that cause a clear improvement of my symptoms, are not the sessions in which I feel as if the abuse is happening again, are not the sessions in which re-experiencing takes place like the one primal therapists try to force, but the sessions in which I very carefully and honestly examine my memories, in which I discover the conclusions that are connected with this memory, and in which I can acknowledge these conclusions as being lies. When I was a child, I had no other option than to draw these conclusions and believe the lies – lies that were told me or suggested to me. Now, this isn't necessary anymore. I experience that unmasking lies has an immediate curing effect. Really knowing and realizing that the abuse was wrong, really saying "no" to abuse, that is what cures me.

But it isn't easy at all. Often I struggle for a long time with all kinds of lies that I still believe deep inside. When I discover such a lie, I often try to reject this lie immediately, saying "no" to it, telling that it is not true – since I did experience that saying "no" has a positive effect on my health. But unfortunately, it

doesn't work this way. On those moments I can say loudly "this is a lie", but all the while I still believe in it, deep inside I don't see it as a lie but as the truth. So it doesn't bring me any further to say "no" loudly. I have to face the lie, carefully look at it and really see why it is not true. I have to take seriously that I believed this lie and still believe it, I need to examine carefully why I believed it – which makes me scared since I think that I will have to conclude that it wasn't a lie but the truth, and I can't live with that. I have to look carefully what this lie is about, including all the painful details. Not in order to feel them, but to invalidate them. I have to know my "arguments" for this lie, to be able to find out that I don't agree with them. Then I can finally decide that this lie is a lie. And then my symptoms diminish immediately.

About all these things I write in my mails. Some e-mail correspondences don't bring me much since the therapies we do differ too much. Other correspondences do feel good. First, I feel e-mail contact is ideal for me. Writing is still much easier for me than talking. At first, it is a surprising discovery for me to write so intensively, I feel I can really relieve my feelings, really share what is bothering me (although I don't dare to write about my memories). I am happy with this. But gradually I start to feel that this indeed works well, but that I long for direct contact with people, too. People with whom I can talk, not only write. People who I can see, in spite of my fear of talking to people. I found a lot on the Internet, but now I need something else. Besides, I long for action, I long for doing other things than looking inwards.

Again... therapy

It is time to start living, and doing less therapy, I hope. I would like to meet new people, something that is special to me since I always felt strongly that I lacked the energy for contact with other people. I would like to go on holiday, to go walking in Scotland or canoeing in Sweden, that kind of thing. I long to be outdoors, in the open country, to go abroad and be active. Enthusiastically I start reading brochures.

But when I read them, I lose courage. I realize that even the most effortless holiday would be too hard for me. I don't sleep enough, I feel broken if I even go swimming for a quarter of an hour, and having people around me the whole day would totally exhausts me. This is not (yet) possible for me. I feel very disappointed.

This makes it especially clear to me how my reaction to physical effort limits my life. I always feel this when I swim, which I do every week with a friend. I like to swim, I like to be together with my friend, the contact with her is good, and I feel it is good to do some physical exercise to keep fit. But every week my body feels broken, and the night afterwards I have a lot of pain and don't sleep. My body still feels like it has been torn to a thousand pieces after the smallest physical effort. I feel scared and hazy, far away and not within my body anymore. The past months, I have come to think that maybe the way I feel after physical exercise looks like how I felt after being abused with electricity. A couple of times it did help me to process the symptoms this way in the therapy. Then the pain diminished and I slept well. But other times I couldn't do anything against it, therapy didn't work. I feel it can't be good to feel broken once a week, being exhausted already most of the time, and I consider to stop swimming.

But when I realize that I can't even do the most effortless holiday, I decide not to stop swimming but to pay more attention to this problem in the therapy. Sleeping has improved, I feel quite well during the day, this problem with physical exercise now really bothers me. It's keeping me from what I want to do, and I want to clear this up. I don't want to give up, I don't want to resign myself to the limits that my father's behavior has forced upon me.

I remember that these symptoms caused by physical exercise often troubled me when I went to Robert's therapy room. I then had to climb about four stairs. Having arrived upstairs I felt broken, not in the world anymore, out of my body, scared, exhausted and in pain. I remember Robert telling me that I shouldn't behave so dramatically tired every time I entered his room – but in reality I was concealing how awkward I felt, as much as I could. He thought I was behaving demonstratively to manipulate him, and asked me to think what it was I tried to get from him this way. It didn't enter his mind that this was simply a problem I had with physical effort, caused by what happened to me in the past. He didn't believe me when I told him.

Now, now that I'm helping myself with Stettbacher's and Jenson's methods, now I finally have the opportunity to really examine my problem concerning physical effort. And hopefully to solve it, since it makes a lot of things in my life impossible. I long so much for a life with less limitations. I long to be active, to really live, to be able to go on a holiday and to have the possibility to choose an active holiday. I want to be able to do more, to have a better life. I want to study, to have a job, meet new people, be in a relationship, have children. I feel my life is passing by. I feel good about some parts of my life – playing

in the orchestra and giving concerts, working at the day-nursery, and sometimes in social contacts. But this is only a small part of my life, far too small. The other, biggest part of my life feels awfully and unbearably purposeless. I am fed up with this situation.

Despite this, I am really better than I used to be, and progress steadily – going up and down, but gradually improving. I just would like it to go faster, and I would like more changes in my daily activities, in work and relationships, not only in my health, no matter how important those changes are.

I cancel my plans for a holiday, but I do try to find new activities. I again think of starting studying. But just the idea makes me sleepless again, I start getting convulsions in my body again, and I feel empty and dead inside. I am aware that if I'd persist, I will have hard times, and I doubt whether I will manage to handle this. I hesitate what is best to do.

And yet again I get problems with social services. In January 1997 I thought that the financial problems that had been discussed in the hearing, were solved. I was told then that my appeal was found legitimate and that I would get the money I had asked for. But social services doesn't pay me and in May 1997 I suppose something went wrong. I call about it, and I have to go there with the documents. This brings up a lot of old tension, it means having hard nights, but when I have been there, I expect everything to be settled. Then I get a letter that they will pay. But the amount of money they mention is only half the money that was promised to me after the hearing.

On one hand I realize that they probably just made a silly mistake, they didn't read the documents well, they worked sloppily. I think this will be set right if I call about it. But on the other hand it brings up strong old pain and again I am totally upset. Crying for hours and hours, totally desperate and in panic. Old feelings of being powerless, always losing, having no rights, being nothing, totally nothing, something other people can just treat the way they want, since I am nothing, worthless. Running into a wall, nothing I do does help, being used, downtrodden, being killed, killed by people who are totally indifferent towards my life, who wouldn't mind if I died, who have so much themselves but nevertheless want to take away from me the little bit I have. My father who takes away my life and wants it for himself, who takes away my body and wants it for himself, who doesn't care that I have nothing left, who himself wants everything, both what is rightfully his and what is rightfully mine. Feelings of not being allowed to protest, I get already so much, I should be grateful for whatever I get and shut up. I don't have the right to ask for more, I am (I think) only a parasite.

I am scared, too – this financial problem needs to turn out well, it has to. I need certainty, I can't stand any uncertainty anymore, I am so scared. It should be solved NOW, I need certainty NOW. I can't wait any longer, can't go on hoping, I can't stand not knowing whether it will be all right in the end or not. I need to be safe, not maybe in the future, not maybe in the future if I survive all this. I need to know it now, so that I won't have to be so scared anymore.

Feelings of total powerlessness, not being able to do anything against what is happening. Someone has to help me. I can't do this alone, I can't do this myself, I am no match. Mama has to come, mama has to help me, mama has to intervene. Despair. Where is mama? Mama should come, now, now, now, or else it will be too late, it is already too late, please help me now. Not yet another time, not any longer, I can't go on, can't go on, can't. I thought it was over and now it happens again, I can't go on. This is not fair, not fair, not fair. I didn't do anything wrong, nothing wrong, then why does this happen? Why does this happen to me again and again? Why? Why do I always lose? Why does he want to hurt me again and again? Why isn't there any safe place for me?

I need to be safe, you have to be nice to me, take care of me, see me, hear me, do what is good for me, you should give, be caring, give me what I need. You shouldn't harm me, shouldn't take from me. I should have power, my "no" should have stopped you, shouldn't even have been necessary, I shouldn't even have needed power since you shouldn't have wished to hurt me.

Hollow fear, not existing anymore, being dead inside, I cry for hours. I walk through my house in desperation and lay on the floor, desperately struggling with all this. I even think of suicide. Although it isn't in a way that would make me do it, it startles me. I haven't had this for a long time, feelings of wanting to be dead.

Consistently I use the four steps, try to find the connection with my past that causes all these feelings, but I don't succeed. I know from experience that it often is a detail, but I can't find the detail that started all this despair. Gradually, the strong feeling that this is unbearable, that I can't survive until tomorrow,

becomes less. I know the next day I will be able to do something about it, but not now – when I got the letter, social services was already closed. And my counselor, who helped me the past two years with these legal procedures, can't be reached until tomorrow. After some hours I manage to take up a pencil and write a letter to social services, writing them that a mistake has been made, asking why this has happened and whether it can be changed. In spite of my urgent feeling that I need my counselor, I decide that in the first instance this letter is enough. I guess my counselor would advise me to write a letter, too. My feeling that I need an authority to stand up for me is probably old.

Although I sleep better after writing this letter, the night afterwards I sleep badly, and also the next nights are hard. Before this happened, I was able to sleep for four hours without a break, but that is gone now. Yet, I feel that I have processed all triggers I could think of. Fortunately, I feel quite good during the day, and my sleeping isn't as bad as it was before. So I have the opportunity to look further during therapy sessions, to find out what is going on.

I am astonished and disappointed that this subject again causes so much pain, fear and despair. I had hoped that in December the connection with the past had been solved, but it hasn't. Nevertheless, my reaction is less severe than it was in December, things did change. Especially the awful physical symptoms that I had in December, when I felt my body was dead or swollen or falling apart in bubbles, are now almost absent, and also I almost don't have any re-experiences of shocks. The first hours I felt miserable, but then I started to feel quite well. The only problem left is sleeping badly. And I can't find out why and I can't solve it.

Old feelings that everything is my fault – I should have prevented this, I should have done the right thing so all this wouldn't have happened.

After two weeks in which I gradually become ill of exhaustion from lack of sleep, I remember the moment that I read the letter from social services. I remember my first reaction: I thought they made a stupid mistake, and I thought I could have known that they would make this mistake, and I could have prevented them from making this mistake if I had realized this before. This "I could have known it and I could have prevented it" brings up strong feelings and I realize that it was this what caused all my fear, pain, anger and despair. I wonder why this caused such an extreme reaction. I try to process it in a therapy session. I become aware that as a child, I did think that I could have prevented what my father did – if I hadn't done certain things or just had done other things, if I had understood what this time would be the reason for "punishment", then I could have done the right things in time. I realize that I desperately tried to find out what I did wrong, to make sure that it wouldn't happen again.

Now that I see this, I again realize that what my father did had only to do with what came up in his head, and that it never made any difference what I did or didn't do. I really wasn't able to do anything about the situation. In my head there was a whole system of what I should and shouldn't do, but I don't know whether he told me this or whether I made this up to find an explanation for his behavior and to get a feeling of exerting any influence. Which of these two possibilities was true – it wouldn't have made any difference. He did just what he wanted to. I wasn't able to prevent that anyhow.

In my present problem with social services, I think that maybe I could have prevented that they made this mistake, but in fact it wasn't my duty to foresee and prevent this. They should have worked more carefully and they shouldn't make such mistakes. I didn't fail by not preventing them from making mistakes, like I thought at first. After thinking it over carefully, after trying to understand what is and isn't true in the past and the present, I suddenly sleep much better. That is a relief.

And finally, after sending my letter, I do get the money – the total amount of money that was promised after the hearing. But in all these months, I didn't manage to do anything else than therapy.

Again... sleeping

In the meantime, a Dutch translation of Jenson's book has been published. On the first page, there is a short comment by two psychologists who are positive about Jenson's method. I decide to write to them and to ask whether it is possible to talk with one of them. I don't want to do therapy with them, but I would like to tell how I am doing the therapy myself and ask whether I might do some things differently. Somehow, I have the feeling that my therapy should have more and faster results. That my progress goes too slow. I feel like I am overlooking something.

With one of them, I have two meetings, July 1997. It feels good to tell my history to someone, especially since this psychologist reacts in a positive way. Also, it helps to talk with her about my sleeping problems, although this doesn't mean I immediately sleep better. I do indeed sleep better for a week after the first meeting, because of the relief of having told my story and getting an empathic reaction. But after that I sleep just as badly as I did before. What helps me nevertheless, is that this psychologist tells me that for someone with a history like mine, it is quite normal to have sleeping problems, even after several years of good therapy. On one hand, this is painful for me to hear, and I find it hard to accept that she doesn't have a quick solution to my problem. On the other hand it brings me more understanding of myself and it helps me to stop thinking that I'm doing something wrong in the therapy. This way, I can stop trying to find what I do wrong. I can continue the therapy in a more relaxed way, without pressing myself to solve this problem quickly.

I feel that this is the hardest part of doing therapy without a therapist: I don't have any information about the normal progress in a therapy process, I can't find out whether the improvement is fast or slow compared to others. I realize that therefore I run the risk of quitting therapy disappointedly. It seems natural to think that the therapy doesn't work when the changes don't come immediately – whereas the therapy really does work, but just not as fast as I would like it to. The meeting with this psychologist makes this more clear to me.

Furthermore, it turns out that my goal to find out whether I am doing something wrong in my self-help therapy is not realistic, at least not in two meetings. It's impossible to tell all of my history and talk about how I use the therapy, that this therapist could see things that I possibly overlooked. But she doesn't have any remarks about the therapy that I do not already know. On one hand I am disappointed about this, on the other hand it makes it clear to me that I am doing fine by myself and that I have enough knowledge and information. She says I am welcome to talk more often, but she also says I am doing well the way I am doing therapy alone.

I feel clearly that I don't want to have therapy with a therapist again – just two meetings while continuing to stand on my own two feet is fine, but I don't want more than that. My independence feels important to me, I don't want to be a patient anymore.

Sleeping is still a big problem, some weeks it is better, other weeks it is worse. I still often feel desperate at night, I have a lot of pain. No matter how tired I am, even when I fall on my bed in the evening staggering from exhaustion, I can't sleep. But during the day I clearly feel better than I used to. I still have days when I feel broken and exhausted, but more and more I have days that, in spite of having slept too little, I am far less tired than ever before. I have more energy to do things. I certainly can't function the whole day, but I can do more and function better than I used to. Partly this is because everything I do is easier for me, I don't have to exert myself to do daily things like watering the plants or calling someone, these things "just go by themselves". Compared to what I am used to, I function quite well. I feel clearminded and I can take initiatives.

Only once in these months do I take a sleeping pill, because I am feeling exhausted and desperate and can't sleep. I long for sleep so overwhelmingly, like so often, without getting it, and this time I take a pill. The next day, I feel absolutely miserable. Totally exhausted and like I am not on the world and with an enormous longing for sleep. With a feeling of lack of sleep that I remember from the years I slept on pills, which is far worse than when I hardly get any sleep at night. It's clear to me now that sleeping pills are not a solution to my sleeping problems, not even temporarily. But the real solution doesn't come, I don't see any progress in this matter.

How should I continue? Go to a therapist for help? I long so strongly for someone who can make me sleep. But I already know that no psychotherapist can do this, and again and again I conclude that I don't have any other choice than to continue the therapy that I am doing. This therapy brought me enormous progress, like nothing else ever did. How far it will bring me I don't know, but giving up will certainly bring me nothing. I try as much as possible to live the way I want to live, and to clear away whatever gets in my way. But also, I am simply fed up with doing therapy. I long so to just live my life, instead of again and again solving problems that make it impossible to live. I remind myself that, according to Stettbacher, this therapy takes a lot of time, patience and perseverance. I remind myself he advises not to give up. Stettbacher writes that lasting results can't be expected immediately, and that it is important not to quit but continue to protest and stand up for yourself in the therapy, to stand up for your rights as a child and for how your life would have been without damage.

So I keep going. I continue therapy. But I am sick of doing therapy, too. I just want an ordinary life,

without having to solve problems all the time. In spite of the words of the psychologist I met, I am worried about this sleeplessness. It is also frustrating to experience my life passing without being able to really live, just surviving.

From the library I fetch some books about sleeping problems, although I know that all the advice in those books is familiar to me, and that I have tried them all many times before, without result. But this time I read something that helps me: I read that being a night owl or an early bird is a biological fact that one can't change. The writers tell that past notions about this phenomenon have been wrong and moralistic. In the past, people thought that going to bed early and waking up early was healthy and morally right, and going to bed late and waking up late unhealthy and morally wrong. This idea is now known to be wrong. They write that it is important to arrange your life as much as possible to your own biological pattern. That that is good and healthy, not one of the two patterns. Nothing is wrong with being a night owl, there only is a problem since society is adjusted to early birds and doesn't take night owls into account. It can be hard to arrange your working and private life according to your own natural pattern when you are a night owl, but it nevertheless is the best solution. Anyhow, it is impossible to change this biological rhythm. It is not possible to change yourself into an early bird when you are a night owl.

Yes, I did experience this, and I cry intensely reading this. I have to cry so terribly when I read I am not wrong and it is not my fault that I am a night owl. My whole childhood, and as an adult, too, I heard that I was bad since I was active in the evening and couldn't sleep, and felt awful in the morning and preferred to sleep long. Again and again my mother told me that this was wrong and that I should change. That her way of living, sleeping early and rising early, was right and healthy and meant she was good. Again and again she told me that I was bad and that all my problems, illnesses, sleeplessness or whatever, would improve if I would show a bit more discipline and be active early in the morning and sleep early in the evening. If I tried hard enough, if I would persevere, this would finally work out. It would be the solution to everything that troubled me.

There even was a song when I was a child that said this – in the verses some disease was mentioned and then the refrain told "Go to bed early, go to bed early, that is the only medicine..." That song has been whining in my ears, even now. Every day of my life, as a child and as an adult, I disapproved of myself because I was a night owl. Every day again I tried to change. Added to the sleeping problems I already had, this made my situation even harder.

Now I cry and cry because of all the unfair, angry and condemning words of my mother, I cry realizing that I was good, all that time, but had to think I was bad. I cry that I was rejected because of something that was already a problem, since school and other obligations didn't take this into account. All that time I was rejected for something I needed help with. I needed understanding. I cry because all that time I got reproaches, when I needed support. My mother never saw me as good, but I had the right to have a mama who saw that I was good and who treated me that way. I had the right that she wanted to learn to know me as I was, and wanted to help me with my abilities and my impossibilities that I had as a human being. She had to be there for me, not against me.

Now that I read these books, I stop trying to turn myself into an early bird and I live more according to my own biological rhythm. I do in the evenings what I want to do then and I avoid as much as possible to have obligations in the morning – without telling myself that this is bad and should change, like I did for such a long time. I go to bed at one o'clock in the night, since then I have the best chance to fall asleep and before that time I never sleep anyhow, no matter how early I go to bed.

Accepting my own pattern doesn't bring changes to my sleeping problems – I have the same problems with falling asleep and sleeping on, and I have just as many nights without sleep and with desperate crying fits and a body that hurts from exhaustion. I have just as many nights doing therapy, sipping hot milk with honey, and trying all the other tricks that don't work. But although accepting that I am a night owl doesn't change my sleeplessness, it still improves how I think about myself and that is progress. And I don't force myself anymore to go to bed at ten o'clock, like I did before – at least I save myself some desperate waking hours.

A theme that often comes up in my daily life, and therefore also in the therapy, is whether or not I believe my own history, and my struggle to reject what my father did to me. Sometimes it helps when I can say sincerely that it is terrible that I am forced to spend so much time trying to believe my own history, finding out and being aware of what did and didn't happen. Then I sleep much better afterwards.

By the end of October 1997 I experience that whether or not I believe my own history also has

consequences for my health. I find out it isn't a coincidence that I almost haven't been ill since December 1996, when I realized what happened to me. In October 1997 I watch a documentary on television in which some women talk about being abused. While I am watching this, my own history seems implausible to me. I feel I will never be able to talk about my memories the way these women do, since no one will believe me, I will never tell about it since my history is too absurd. Some hours later, I am ill. Inflammation of my throat, fever, the usual symptoms. Also, I suddenly sleep badly, after a period that this has been better. I lay ill, exhausted and desperate on my bed and I don't know what to do.

Why did I become ill and sleepless, so suddenly? I process the events from the day I became ill, and I do see my reaction of "no one will believe me, my history is too absurd and I don't have evidence", the reaction I had when watching television. Also, in a therapy session some days later, I am aware that I not only expected other people to not believe me, but also that I don't believe it myself anymore. It makes me cry, realizing this, but it doesn't bring a change to my illness and insomnia.

Some days later, I read what I have written so far about my history and my self-help therapy. I read a page with dreams. Many dreams are about sexual abuse and abuse with electricity. While I read these dreams I suddenly think: "This has really happened. This is what I went through." At that moment I am deeply aware of this truth. In the next hours, my throat ache and fever leave, and that night I sleep well.

So, it's that important to acknowledge reality, to see reality as real, also deep inside. The days that I noticed my reaction to the documentary, the days that I realized that deep inside I didn't believe my history anymore, those days I still didn't believe my history. And therefore, the topic of "not believing" didn't improve my situation. It wasn't until I truly believed myself, that I could sleep again and recover from my infection.

Some weeks later, I re-read a part of what I have written, about what I started realizing at the end of 1996, and again I feel: "This really happened. And it should never have happened." That night I sleep 5½ hours without a break – a feat that is still rare.

Again... talking

I can distinguish some topics in events that cause the worst nights: I have always really bad nights after someone has touched me when I didn't want to, or in a way I didn't like. Also, I can't sleep when during the day I have been crying but had to stop before I had finished crying, for example because the door bell rang. And not being honest in social contacts, especially about topics that get in the way in the contact, also has a disastrous effect on my sleeping pattern. Although I speak out about what I feel and think much more than I used to, the situations in which I still don't do this become really clear. They touch upon an old mechanism that completely blocks my ability to sleep, even when the present event isn't that important. Every time that I am gently and politely dishonest, the night afterwards is a disaster.

I work on this in the therapy, but also in daily life, by trying to be honest nonetheless. This is not easy for me. It is frightening to have my own opinion, I am scared to disagree, scared to be caught when not being right, scared to be criticized in a way that humiliates and shatters me – like my father did, who always liked to bring me down.

I still feel the fear of not being able to defend my words. I am still easily silenced when other people don't agree with me and especially when people are telling me so in a less sincere way or even become angry – I tremble for fear when someone else shows the slightest sign of anger. And still, my words are frequently misunderstood or not heard or distorted – as probably happens to every human being, and often without bad intentions of the others. But as soon as someone else somewhat distorts, ignores or denies what I say, I feel overwhelmed by an intense, paralyzing, desperate powerlessness since I realize that my words can always be distorted, ignored or denied.

I realize how powerless and speechless I have been in the contact with my father, how he again and again silenced me, invalidated and discarded my words – like that time when I told him I didn't believe that my name was written on my back. I was so small then, I was no match for an adult man, and I was dependent on him. This happened so often, he did this continuously every day. I have been so scared and felt my words to be so powerless, so nonexistent. With this fear, this fear of drowning as soon as someone else says a word, I still struggle in my daily life. This fear paralyzes me, makes my head turn blank, leaves me speechless. But I fight back, I fight for my right to talk, for my right to be heard and for the right that my words are acknowledged.

Again and again I have to realize that my powerlessness to reach my father, to be heard and understood by him, was not caused by the words I used, but that this was his fault. He *chose* not to hear me, not to understand me. He did this because he wanted it this way. He wanted to distort my words. The problem was not that my words were unclear or ambiguous – for anyone who wanted to understand what I said my words would have been totally clear, there couldn't possibly have been a misunderstanding, and no reason to distort my words. I always tried to improve the situation by searching for different words, the right words, more words, clearer words. I was frantically looking for the correct words. But my words weren't the problem, I wasn't the problem. I just didn't have a chance against his blunt unwillingness, his malicious delight or even sadism. All the time I was thinking that if I would find the right words, I would be heard. For years and years I desperately tried to find the right words, the words that would reach my father. But that never helped, since there was nothing wrong with my words.

And even now I often try desperately to find the ultimate words, the words that tell so precisely what I want to say that it's impossible to distort them, that they can't be misunderstood – again and again I try to find those words. But those words don't exist. Again and again I have to find out in the therapy that I am not doing something wrong, that I do not fail to find the correct words, but that I just can't control what someone else does. Now that I see and feel how urgent my need for finding THE RIGHT words is, it becomes easier for me to see that I indeed had no other option as a child, but that I now do have other options, more effective strategies. As a child I couldn't say: "Why are you doing this, you reproduce my words wrongly, why do you distort what I say, why do you ignore what I say? I want you to listen to me." But the people I'm talking with now are not my father and I am no longer a small, dependent, powerless child. I start to realize that on many occasions, I can say this kind of things. And when I do this and find out I am safe doing this, my ability to sleep often improves considerably – for a while.

Also, I am intensely relieved by the occasions that I don't have to say such things, the times that people react in a nice, sincere way. Fortunately, I have contacts in which this happens, with friends and in some correspondences. These positive experiences also touch me deeply. These positive experiences, in which I feel understood and heard, bring me relief, the feeling of having the right to exist, they make me feel safe and relaxed. They help me to live, to exist.

And still I often notice my unwanted smile, that I hated so much in the contact with my father. This smile reared its head every time when I was angry with him. I didn't want to smile, but it just came. Even when I was an adult this always happened – instead of telling him "I don't want you to do this and I am angry with you, you don't have the right to do this", which I longed to say so strongly, I smiled and became very nice, childish and submissive. I hated it, I hated this smile that came on my face when I definitely didn't want it, and yet I couldn't control it. As an adult, I sometimes just averted my head, so he wouldn't see this smile. I couldn't manage to tell him what I wanted to tell him on those moments, I couldn't give him my anger and protest, but at least I managed not to give him that smile, and that felt good.

It strikes me that I often still react with such a smile, at moments when I would like to tell that I feel something is wrong in the contact. I notice very well that this smiling, confirming reaction does not solve the situation, it even makes it worse. I try to recognize these situations in time and to be aware of the difference between the past and the present, and then to say what I would like to say in spite of all the old signals that warn me for danger.

It remains a struggle: to talk, to express my feelings. But I don't give up. I fight, I fight for the right to my words, the right to be heard and acknowledged in what I say – then and now. And I improve, it becomes less hard for me to tell about my feelings and thoughts, and I am less scared afterwards. I do make progress.

Nightmares and other dreams

I have less and less nightmares. In the past I had them every night, and often several ones in one night. Now, I some weeks go by without even one nightmare. But sometimes I still have them.

I dream about a therapy group where people imitate abuse. They tie everyone up. I panic and I am upset and go away. Then they don't tie me up, but no one pays attention to how I feel.

I dream I see a king being murdered, and I see who did it, a man and a woman. It happens in a castle. I tell the police what I saw, who did it, but they don't believe me and don't do anything since the murderer is a prince. But now I am in danger because I told what they did. There is also another horrible thing happening at this castle. From above I am looking in a big glass room where people are being tortured with electricity. The floor of the room is electrified. People are pushed into the room. A lot of people in the room don't even look human anymore, it is horrible to see. They are being punished, but I don't know for what.

In a dream there is my usual confusion whether my father is dead or not. But suddenly it is completely clear: he is alive and kicking and I am standing right in front of him and I see my chance to ask him for clarity. I ask my father to acknowledge that he abused me with electricity. He reacts evasively, tries to dodge the question, but I continue to be clear and strong and I tell him I want him to tell me what he did.

And then he does. He tells the story as I remember it. Now that all is clear with all the horror, in this dream I get more empathy from other people, and I also understand more of myself. But from my mother I don't get any empathy, she only cares about what my father did to her, and still sees herself as his primary victim.

Then, in my dream, my father also tells that he cheated upon my mother with another woman. My father shows a video tape. I see an adult woman to whom he is doing the same things he did to me. On the video she begs him not to do electricity on her, no electricity, please not electricity, no electric current through her body, please, please. Begging, she goes on all fours on the bed. The camera shows the wires laying there, the wires that can do this. The woman begs him to be nice to her.

With tears in my heart and in full concentration I watch this movie, this movie that is telling me something about myself. I carefully look for some information about my own history. I see the wires, the wires that hurt me so much, too. I watch them carefully. I hear the woman say the words "electricity" and "current" and those words hurt so much and make me so scared, but it also feels good that she says them, that she names reality for me, that I hear it. It is so horrible to see this movie, but nevertheless the woman on the video is adult and has a lot of power and independence. What is most horrible of this movie is that this happened to me as a small, powerless child. I cry and cry.

In a dream I am on a train with a therapy group, we are going to a place where we will get therapy for a couple of weeks. Sebastian, my cat, is with me. But my father is here as well. When we arrive, I go to one of the therapists, a woman, since I am upset that my father is here, too. I wonder how I can do therapy this way. I feel I can't, with him being there, I will not be able to tell what he has done to me. I go to the woman to discuss this, but before I can even say a word she says hatefully: "Well, you want to demonstrate how smart you are? We don't like that here and we are not impressed. You must learn to be more humble. Go away now, I don't want you." I am dumbstruck and desperate and it hurts so much and I don't know where to go.

There isn't a place where I am safe and I will not be able to trust this therapy and I will not dare to tell what happened to me and how I feel. I don't know what to do. Like a wounded animal I retreat, I go to the room where the cats are. There are lots of them. As soon as I step into the room, Sebastian comes towards me with his familiar meow. I am so happy to see him and he comforts me. When I wake up, the reaction of the "therapist" makes me think of my mother.

Something is up with refugees who need second-hand clothes, and I decide to give them some of my clothes that I don't wear myself anymore. I look inside my wardrobe, select some clothes, and try on some of them to look whether I still want them or not. Then my mother comes in and she is angry and full of hate. She says I shouldn't hesitate and just give away those clothes since I know I haven't worn them for a long time. And besides, I have bought a lot of new clothes recently, sure

enough she saw that and that was wrong, too, and I should stop doing that. It hurts. It is the way she has treated me in the past, hateful anger, calling me wrong and bad. And I think of the time she forced me to give away one of my dolls.

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I dream I tell mama what papa did to me. She unwraps a package, and in this parcel is a doll I made myself and a letter in which I wrote what my father did, that he abused me with electricity. I had not yet decided whether to give my mother the package, but she finds it and opens it and now she knows. She reacts with shock and astonishment, and she believes me, but she doesn't support me in any way. She still only pays attention to herself.

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I am laying on my bed, my face to the wall. I hear someone behind me, I know it is my father and I am frozen with terror and panic since I know that I will have to go through unbearable pain again. I hear my father's breath, it is horrible to feel him so close to me. I can feel things he fastens to my body, and feel severe pain and cramp in my neck.

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I remember only fragments of the dreams. There is a short image of myself, as a little girl, curled up in a corner of her little bedstead, sleeping. I remember vaguely feeling grief since the girl has been awoken and is in pain. And a fragment with pain from below, I am torn open, widely open, and it hurts.

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In my dream I am in a psychiatric hospital. I walk into my room and then I am totally upset and in a panic. The room has been equipped with a special bed and equipment to give electric shocks. I think this is going to happen with me. I feel terrified and desperate and powerless. Then the psychiatrist comes in and finds me there, and she takes me with her and reassures me and says this is no longer my room and this will not happen to me, didn't I see that my stuff is not here anymore? She brings me to a new room. It is very small and cold since it has a stone floor but fortunately there is a carpet on the floor. I feel a bit sad about the nice big room that I lost. And I am still upset because of the fear I felt.

Then there is another fragment. I am sitting on the couch in the psychiatrist's room. She is asking me detailed questions about my physical symptoms and re-experiences. It is painful to answer but I try as well as I can. Then suddenly she leaves. I feel far away and in pain and I lay curled up on the floor. I wait until she will come back so we can make an appointment for the next meeting. But then the next patient comes in, a former classmate from high school. I am surprised to see her and I feel ashamed to be here myself, I try to behave as normally as I can, acting. I see people observing me and thinking: "Well, she really can behave normally, she doesn't have to be so withdrawn." My former classmate enthusiastically tells me about some education she is going to get, and I am jealous of her since she is healthy enough to be able to study.

In the next fragment my former classmate is sitting on the couch and I am on the floor again, far away, as if I am asleep but still able to perceive. The psychiatrist enters, I hope she will make a new appointment with me and finish our meeting. But she doesn't. She only comes for my classmate and is surprised to see me there. When we talked, she was friendly and warm and understanding, but now she isn't anymore. She makes a sarcastic remark, something like "Look what is laying on the floor there". She thinks I am annoying and she is not interested in me. She doesn't pay attention to me and doesn't make a new appointment.

In the next fragment I am with her in another room. The hospital is a school, too. I would like to study at the university but I feel I have no right to try, since I will not be able to do that. When the psychiatrist asks me I say "I can't, I am crazy". And I feel desperate and sad. But she says I will be able to do it.

—

In a dream I try to talk with my father and confront him with my memories of abuse. He not only laughs at me, he plainly is completely indifferent to how I feel and what I went through. His reaction is cold, harsh, cynical, cruel and sadistic, and he is only interested in himself. Then he touches me and holds me and I can't escape. He holds me and with a cruel grin, cold and selfish, he tickles me and I feel like I'm dying of despair since I can't make him stop and I can't free myself. Although he doesn't physically hurt me, inside, emotionally, it hurts horribly and I wake up terrified and feel torn apart. Horribly powerless and humiliated, a denial of who I am, my boundaries trampled.

A nightmare in which I am terrified of a thunderstorm that is my father. Thunder and lightning. The thunderstorm is my father, he is some kind of god who is shedding lightning and thunder over me. I try to find a safe place where I am protected, and fortunately there are more people in the house and this helps. But nevertheless I wake up terrified.

Now and then I have nice dreams, dreams in which I can play the flute well and people appreciate this. Dreams of skating, the great feeling of flying over the ice, wholly engrossed in the rhythm of the movement and the speed. To my surprise – I don't remember I trained for it – I win a medal at the Olympic Games on the 1500 meters speed skating.

My body

In the same period, autumn 1997, I realize that I really am a stranger to my own body and that it is important to learn to know it. Also, I suddenly realize that discovering my body has to do with feeling what I feel – and not with what I should feel but don't feel. I cry when I become aware of this. It seems I don't feel what other people do feel in their bodies – but what I don't feel can't be the starting point for my exploration.

I decide to first put up a large mirror in my bathroom. The mirror used to hang there, but I removed it because I only felt empty and unreal when I saw myself. For years, the mirror has stood in some dark corner. But this day, I put it up again.

Then I undress and look at myself. I am surprised. I find myself beautiful! Astonished and with pleasure I look at myself and love myself, love my body. This is totally new and wonderful. I had always hated my body, I found it ugly, I felt disgust. I never could accept my body, much less appreciate it. But now I can. I cry terribly and watch and watch and watch....

The tears keep on coming, while I realize how long I have hated my own body. All that time, I have been good and beautiful, but I didn't know. I realize it is terrible that my body has been "taken away" from me for so many years... I feel intense grief about all the things that have been done to me, that have made me think I am ugly, that made me dislike my body, that made me think my body was to blame for what happened to me – at this moment I feel that is not true. I love myself and I enjoy seeing my body in the mirror. I find my body beautiful and I feel people may see me, and I can touch myself without becoming empty.

The days and weeks after this experience I notice I have much more energy than usual. And although it goes up and down, in the next months I feel remarkably well. The fatigue that has troubled me for so long is almost gone, I have more energy, I can do more, I sleep better, and even after the occasional bad night, I still have more energy than I used to. I enjoy having more energy, I can do more of the things I really like to do without having to force myself, the normal daily activities don't exhaust me anymore, I can do more things that feel meaningful. I love being active. I still do not function totally normally, but the improvement is remarkable and I am happy with it. And there are even days that I almost have the feeling of functioning "normally".

Looking back, I think that the disgust with my body that I always felt, and my attempts to ignore my body, have taken a lot of my energy. For so many years I have tried to "live without a body" (and the "body psychotherapy" even made this worse, although it pretended to make me live "in my body") and now this is not necessary anymore. I notice how much more energy I have, now that I made peace with my body, now that I find my body beautiful and good, now that I acknowledge that it's not my body's fault what happened in the past. I experience that I can live "with" my body and this is radically different.

I still have hard moments, and days that I don't feel good, and nights that I don't sleep. But most of the time, there is a clear and constant improvement in my situation. I can live a far more active life.

What keeps me busy in therapy is my unfamiliarity with, and fear for, sexual feelings. I talk about it with a friend, and she says that sex, good sex, is a bit like cuddling. I feel a bit reassured when she says that – since I like to cuddle. Sometimes I have dreams about nice sexual feelings, and this reassures me as well. It seems that those feelings are still somewhere, although I can't find them when I am awake.

An ordinary life

Step by step my sleeping improves. Strangely enough, it happens less and less that I sleep on, but falling asleep is much better. I don't lay awake for hours anymore. I fall asleep when I go to bed, and when I wake up during the night I fall asleep again. Most of the time, I sleep for seven or eight hours at night, waking up about every two or three hours. This way, I get enough sleep to feel fit. For the first time in more than twenty years, I get enough sleep. Since I can function well this way, I no longer try to sleep without a break. As it is, it is good enough. I am doing less and less therapy. Daily life, with activities that I like, takes more and more of my attention, time and energy. This is possible now, and I enjoy it enormously. This is why I did this therapy.

I know I did not yet solve all of my problems, some of them remain. But about ninety percent of my problems have been solved by now. What remains are my problems with sleeping on, with frequently feeling that I am bad or guilty, avoiding television and movies since I can't stand anything that is about murder or cruelty or sex. And problems with sexual feelings. I can have some sexual feelings, for a little while – and then some door within is shut, my body starts to feel empty, and I get so much stress that I can't sleep the night afterwards.

I hope that the problems that I still have will gradually improve. Or that I can find a way to deal with them in the therapy later. Anyhow, at this moment I don't want to invest all my energy in therapy anymore, and I also feel that this would not work at this moment. In the therapy, I really tried to do something about the problems I still have, but I didn't succeed. Maybe I will find a good starting point for solving these problems in the future. Anyhow, I just want to live now. Just a normal, daily life. I long so much for that and I enjoy it so much.

I have energy for activities during the day. I enjoy my Psychology study at the Open University. The subject is interesting and I see that studying works well for me. I like to do it and my grades are very well. I gives me more self-confidence. I am not at all stupid!

I say goodbye to the day-nursery where I have worked with pleasure for many years. I start working three days a week at Victim Services, an organization that offers help to people who are the victim of a crime or of a traffic accident. It is a new challenge that I look forward to – and that I have energy for.

I like the work at Victim Services. The training that I get, on the theoretical background and about communication, is interesting. The contact with my colleagues feels good and inspiring. At first, I am afraid that the work may bring up many of my own fears and past, and will therefore be too hard for me. But that turns out better than I expected.

I notice my fear for men has become much less, I start looking around, I see men whom I like and even talk with them – which is new and unknown to me. I want to do something with my longing for a relationship. When I look at my usual daily activities, I realize that I do not meet any new people there. I don't get the chance to meet a man with whom I could have a relationship.

So, where can I find men? The Saturday newspaper contains a lot of personal ads, from people who are looking for a partner, and I decide to buy a newspaper and look at those messages (the period of Internet dating has not yet started). I read a lot of sympathetic messages. Messages from, it seems, nice men. I write some letters and this leads to some meetings, some nice and some less nice.

During these meetings, I sometimes run into old fear and pain, and I try as much as possible to process these. I hope that this will lead to what I want to achieve: being able to have a relationship. When I have sleepless nights I doubt whether this is a realistic goal, but I don't give up. Some meetings are really nice – but they don't lead to a relationship. Sometimes a contact seems to be developing into a relationship – then in the end it doesn't. Pity, but it was worth trying.

Some meetings are unpleasant. Not always do I handle that properly, but I'm learning. I learn that I am not required to answer when someone asks me questions. I learn that I myself may choose which and how much to reveal about myself. I learn by experience not to trust everyone. I learn to take my feelings seriously. I learn not to think that it might become nice later, when on a first date it doesn't feel good. I learn to say "no" to people who are nice but with whom I certainly will never have a relationship. More and more do I learn to say "no" – one of the hardest things for me to do.

Then I meet someone whom I really like. A nice, wise, intelligent, quiet man with a good sense of humor – and I fall in love with him. For some time, we only see each other in the weekends – David lives at the other side of the country, so we have to travel a lot to see each other. It feels good to be together, to love each other. It is a special, new experience for me. David and I make plans to live together.

A stupid, small car accident with a blow to my head puts a spanner in the works. It looks like a concussion – I have a headache, I'm nauseous, I can't stand noise and light. But it doesn't get better. My family doctor sends me to a neurologist. He can't find any neurological problems (my knee reflex and other reflexes are OK, I could have told him that beforehand...). The neurologist says I do not have a concussion, and so "I don't have a physical problem, it is just a psychological problem". Well, I do have a lot of experience with mental problems causing physical diseases, but I am very sure that now I have a physical problem. It isn't a concussion, so what is it?

Since I am not able to fend for myself, I stay with David. His family doctor finds out what's wrong: there is a problem with dislocation of the vertebrae in my neck. A physiotherapist gets the vertebrae in the right place again, the muscles around them calm down, and my symptoms disappear. The whole illness takes almost a year, but I am fine again. And in the meantime, David and I have started living together.

My biggest wish comes true: I am pregnant. A small human being is growing in my womb. I am intensely happy. Thomas is born in 2001, a healthy, beautiful boy. A miracle. I am a mother. Thomas, David and I are a family. Although not everything goes well, I am very, very happy. I enjoy taking care of Thomas, to carry him with me in a sling, I enjoy breastfeeding him, hearing his contented sounds while being nursed. I enjoy singing songs for him, to watch him playing with David, to hear him laugh, to see his eagerness to explore the world, to comfort him when he cries. I love Thomas. Being with the three of us is wonderful.

All my fighting and struggling did help. It was hard, but it was worth it. I feel deeply thankful to Alice Miller, to Konrad Stettbacher and to Jean Jenson – and also I feel grateful towards myself. I am alive, I am healthy, I have a husband whom I love and a child whom I love. This is what I did it for, and I did it well.

Epilogue

2001-2012

"And she lived happily and contentedly to a great age..." In spite of my history, in the year 2001 I still believe that life is fair. After so many years of misery and struggling, I feel I am owed a portion of happiness – and I think that this is coming now. I worked so very hard to get a life, I deserve that my life will be good, easy and long now.

In 2001 I am healthy and I feel really, really happy. Nevertheless, many things are not that easy. It starts with medical problems during pregnancy and a difficult delivery. And it goes on with a cute and lovely baby – but one that keeps us awake every night for several years. David and I are really tired. In 2002 a pregnancy ends when the baby in my womb stops growing. A lost child that I loved already. I am thirty-nine years old – will I be able to become pregnant again? Then Thomas becomes seriously ill, and we are afraid to lose him. Two times he is urgently taken to the hospital, but he survives. We get a second boy, Jonathan, and we are intensely happy with him, too. But he also has medical problems that exhaust us the first years. I had not expected it would go this way, but it does.

I want so strongly to protect my children from evil. But what Thomas goes through as a toddler in the hospital is very traumatic for him, and I am not able to prevent it. "Ah," the pediatrician says as David is holding a sick, terrified, and heartbreakingly sobbing child in his arms, "a child easily forgets these things." The pediatrician is wrong. Thomas struggles with his experiences for years – nightmares, fears, panic attacks, crying fits. In his sleep he is still crying: "Out! Out!", like he did during the CT-scan. He clings to us, doesn't want to be more than one step away from us. It hurts to see him this scared and desperate. He is struggling with his traumatic experiences for years. Problems at school also give him a lot of pain. And me, too.

I am tired of fighting and of problems. Nevertheless, it is different from the way it always has been. There is also joy and pleasure, and I can solve the present problems, now that I am free from the fog and the fears. I feel clear and real, nightmares have become rare, I fall asleep easily and sleep two or three hours at a stretch, I have more energy, I am healthy and I am even able to do quite a bit of physical exercise without getting weird symptoms. In spite of the difficulties, I feel good. It is great to be together with David, to feel each other's warmth, to talk, to be near and to be sure that we always find each other when things between us are difficult for a moment. I am glad to see Thomas and Jonathan playing, laughing, crying, learning, growing. I enjoy taking care of them, to help them, to play music together, to love them. I am really happy to see that Thomas and Jonathan become children who can speak up honestly when I do something wrong to them – and that I can apologize then. Working gives me pleasure, the orchestra I play in, passing on my love for music by giving flute lessons. I do not have much time left for my Psychology studies, but studying gives me an intellectual challenge that keeps a balance in my life. I enjoy my health, there is a lot of joy in my life.

The past, my childhood, my years in psychiatry, all these experiences more and more seem weird to me, something bizarre from a past life. On the rare occasions when I look back, I even doubt whether the history that I discovered is really true. Did this really happen? It seems implausible to me now. But most of the time I don't even think about it. I just enjoy life. I enjoy living a normal, ordinary life with a family and a job, to just be like the people around me.

Still, my life is not totally normal, I do not completely manage to have a life like other people have, people who had normal studies, and a full-time job after that. As a result of my past, I am limited in what jobs I can do, and I don't see how to change this, and certainly not now, having small children that I want to raise myself. But this will come later, I promise myself, this ordinary life with an ordinary paid job, I will see to this when my children are somewhat older.

Sometimes I still have troubles with childhood feelings. I still avoid watching television, since I react too strongly to that – watching toddler's programs with my children is OK, but it shouldn't be much more than that. Some nights I still can't sleep, especially in periods with problems, like at Thomas' school, that make me feel powerless. The insomnia lasts until I can start solving the problems – being able to change Thomas' situation helps me to sleep again. Also I still feel guilty easily, thinking I should be able to prevent misery, and blaming myself when I couldn't. After the birth of Thomas I feel very guilty that this delivery was so difficult. And nobody can talk me out of this. Then the delivery of Jonathan comes, a delivery that takes less than an hour – I can hardly hold him in until the midwife arrives at our home, and he is born

easily on the couch in our living room. It's only then that I realize that the difficult delivery of Thomas hasn't been my fault. Thomas was laying with his head crooked and was therefore stuck. Just bad luck, nobody's fault.

Some other situations also keep bringing up childhood feelings. But all these childhood feelings are only a small part of my life, I can avoid them most of the time, and they seem not very important. Not important enough to start doing therapy again. Having a family keeps me very busy and there are many things that require my attention, so I don't have time and energy for therapy. Also, there are so many things that are much nicer than doing therapy. And there is so much in my life that just goes right. And when the medical problems of the children and the problems at school are finally solved, there is peace in our family. In September 2009 everything is going fine. I look forward to some relatively easy years to enjoy. They seem to be coming now.

Then fate strikes. I almost haven't been ill for more than ten years. But in December 2009 I suddenly become ill. It turns out to be cancer, colona cancer, in an advanced stage and with a bad prognosis. "If you want to arrange things before you die, you have to arrange them *now*", the doctor says. How could this happen? I never smoked, I was a vegetarian from the time I was 18 years old, ever since I recovered from the abuse I got enough physical exercise, and I am only 46 years old. That does not match with colon cancer. And I was going to live happily and contentedly to a great age, wasn't I? That would have been fair. But life is not fair. Certainly not. On the contrary, I find out that people with a history like mine have a much bigger risk of illnesses like cancer.

I had wanted to shield my children from traumatic experiences. This already failed. But now it is very likely that they will lose their mother, and they're only 6 and 9 years old. This hurts horribly, and it is my biggest worry.

Also, I would have wanted to enjoy life myself for many more years. All those years that I struggled through the fog and the fears and the endless illnesses, the despair and the suicidal feelings, all those years I had always felt I wanted to live. The hope that some time in the future I would be able to "really" live, is what kept me going all those years. Somewhere, somewhere deep inside I have always thought this was possible for me, too. And when I succeeded, I enjoyed my life intensely. I enjoyed so much the years that I was mentally and physically healthy. I can't accept that this should be only for a short period. It is so horribly unfair that something I fought for so hard, now escapes me so quickly. I want to live. For a long time. But it seems this will not happen.

The surgeries and the chemotherapy are hard and bring up a lot – medical procedures look a lot like being abused. Memories come back in full force. A gynaecological examination, a rectal examination. Or just having to lay down in a CT-scan with my arms above my head – that makes me panic, I feel the terror of a four-year-old being tied up in that position when her father is about to hurt her. And in that CT-scan, concentrating on the present is no escape from the fear, since this CT-scan most probably means there will be bad news soon. I have lots of examinations in CT-scans, and I fear them. But also the simple, harmless, frequent request by a nurse to lay down – memories come up, and in my memory being asked to lay down isn't harmless at all. One time, getting chemotherapy, I come to the bed where I have to lay down (again: having to lay down, I hate those beds), and I see two syringe needles being ready. I know from experience that this is medication to prevent nausea — so it is something good that helps me. But what I think is: "Everything is ready to hurt me." And I feel the cold childhood fear in my body.

Being dependent and powerless, people touching me, people hurting me – I have a hard time trying to keep my head above water in the hospital.

Although I am aware that I mix up past and present, although I am very experienced with self-help therapy, in these circumstances I can't do therapy on my own. Fortunately, psychotherapy has improved in The Netherlands since Jean Jenson's book has been published. Ingeborg Bosch started working with Jenson's therapy and developed this therapy further. She trained other therapists. I find a psychologist who can help me, and with her help I work on the parts of my past that I couldn't handle before.

Doing therapy again, and now with a therapist, I find that some things are easier to handle with a therapist than when I was processing them on my own. Telling my history to a therapist makes it easier to make it clear that I don't accept my father's prohibition to talk about it. It is necessary to speak, to undo the prohibition to speak. Speaking to a cassette recorder wasn't enough for that, although it was very useful at the time. And when the therapist tells me that my father didn't have the right to do what he did, it is easier for me to believe this than when I have to struggle with all my excuses for him alone.

Also, my present situation is more complex, and therefore I now need a therapist more. When I was scared in therapy fifteen years ago, I could look around me and help myself with Jensen's example: am I in a crashing airplane? No? Then I consider my fear to be old, and will process it in the therapy. But now I really am in a crashing airplane. When I feel mortal fear, I can't tell whether my feelings are old or belong to the present. Now I need a therapist to help me find out.

I still think it was not wrong to do the therapy on my own at the time, fifteen years ago. It gave me a lot of self-confidence and independence. It forced me to realize that I was safe, to see the difference between the past and the present. And it got me far. Besides, at that time there simply wasn't a therapist who could help me with Stettbacher's therapy. But it is good to have a therapist now. It brings relief to tell my story with all my feelings, to someone who believes me. I believe myself again, too.

The therapy helps me to keep past and present apart, it makes it easier for me to endure the treatment in the hospital. I feel less stress, have less problems with memories coming up during medical procedures. And at moments when memories do come up, I manage to recognize what happens and help myself.

For a long time, the chances to survive are very thin. I am told that most probably I will die. I do what I can to keep on my feet, physically and emotionally. Gradually, the situation improves. The surgery and the chemotherapy work out well. In September 2010 there is a better chance that I will survive. But in December 2010 and in March 2011 new tumors are found, and I am told I will die soon. Then there is, unexpectedly, a year without a new tumor. But I know I most probably will not survive.

In the meantime, memories are bothering me more and more. My nights are awful, with physical memories that keep me awake and nightmares when I do fall asleep, and during the day I am mixing up past and present. I am scared, scared, scared, and continuously haunted by a phrase in my head: "I am going to kill you now." Finally I can't escape the conclusion anymore: my father has told me he was going to kill me, made preparations for that, tied me up and pretended he was doing that. For the first time I dare to acknowledge that his happened. Then the present becomes present again, the nightmares disappear, and for the first time in my life I sleep four, five, six hours straight, every night.

I feel an urgent need: "Start telling. Tell what happened to you." But I don't dare. Who will believe me? Who will believe such a bizarre story? I don't have any proof. My father has never acknowledged anything. He hasn't told anything, not to me, not to the reverend, not to others, he didn't leave a letter for me – nothing. No one will believe me, and I will lose everyone if I would tell my story. Would I start talking about the memories that haunt me, I wouldn't have any friends nor family left – and I need the people around me, my friends and my relatives, especially now, now that I am ill. I can't afford to talk. I can't afford losing friends and relatives.

But especially now, now that I am ill, I feel an urgent need to be honest. Especially now, I feel the need to share my feelings. Especially now, I need real support from the people who are close to me. How can I talk about what bothers me but be silent about the memories that are haunting me? How can I tell about my feelings but be silent about my history? How can I talk about my pain of losing a life that just began, without telling how it came about that my life had only just begun? How can I talk about my fear of the hospital and at the same time be silent about the memories that get triggered in the hospital? How can I talk about my fear of dying, but be silent about the mortal fear that I have already carried with me my whole life? How can I ask for support without being honest? How can I feel supported without being honest? Dying is very intimate. Dying requires honesty. I can't die with a secret. I don't want to die with a secret. I must tell. Then I'd rather lose people – better than to die with a secret. And maybe I don't have to be scared. Maybe it is old, that nagging phrase: "Nobody will believe you." Maybe there are people who do believe me. Maybe I don't lose everybody. Maybe I will have enough people left.

It is a relief to tell. My friends believe me, and react very supportive. All of them. It turns out people can listen far better than I thought. I can be honest with them.

My mother is glad I come to talk about the things my father did – she had wanted to ask me but didn't dare. And she believes me. Although at first, she isn't in any way supportive or sympathizing, although at first she only asks attention to her own story and says she has had a harder life than me – she believes me. And finally she does show empathy for what I went through as a child. That's something special in our contact, and I feel touched. That's something special in our contact, and I feel touched.

Talking with my mother brings me something else, too: a confirmation of a part of my story. There were

ropes at my father's bed. To my mother, too, he did things that still haunt her. "He was sadistic."

Talking with my mother, I hear how desperately my mother tried to maintain something like a normal family life, in spite of my father's bizarre behavior. How hard she tried to give her children a more or less normal life in spite of the problems he caused. And how she wasn't equipped for that in any way. How her own childhood history of neglect had left her with an overwhelming need for attention that couldn't be fulfilled anyhow, with an inability to understand children's needs, with a feeling of helplessness against my father, and with an urge to change him instead of leaving him as soon as possible. She often hurt me, and she let me down when she should have protected me, but it was she who provided the little bit of normal life and security that our family gave me, and she struggled hard for that. It was she who took care of food, clothes and shelter, of a place to play, books to read, a lap to sit in. That has been important for me to maintain my lust for life.

Matthew and Karen, my brother and sister, also believe my story. They have their own bad experiences with their father, and they know his predilection for sadistic sex (it turns out the whole family knew that already, except me). They can easily imagine him doing this with a preschooler. "He could do this, and he was alone with you often enough to have the chance to do it", my brother says. And my sister says: "He was an electro-technician, he had the skills to do this."

It is good not to have secrets anymore. It is good I started talking. People do believe me. Even, even more, those who knew my father.

I wish I had started talking about this much earlier. Maybe, maybe, maybe, if I hadn't kept my "other world" a secret for so long, then maybe my immune system wouldn't have been down for such a long time. Maybe, if I had known earlier of the family secrets, then maybe I'd have understood more about myself. Maybe, if I had been able to acknowledge my history earlier, then maybe there would have been less stress in my life, and then maybe I wouldn't have got cancer.

I wish I had been in time to talk with my father. Maybe, I would have got acknowledgment even from him – that would have saved me a long search and years of illness, and maybe that tumor wouldn't have developed. Maybe my father could have told me whatever possessed him to do this – then I would have known it hadn't been my fault, then I could have stopped feeling guilty, then I could have stopped being so scared. Maybe without all that guilt and fear, I wouldn't have become ill.

But no one can tell me whether I would have got cancer or not, would I have spoken out earlier. And I couldn't talk earlier. I did the best I could to help myself, and more.

Anyhow, it is good I started talking now. This is what I still can do for myself. It is good to stop being silent about things that are that much important for me. It is good to stop feeling ashamed of my history. To stop being alone with my memories. To stop feeling guilty about all the things that went differently in my life because of the history of my childhood. My father will not admit the truth anymore – the only thing left that I can do, is to believe myself and to stop keeping secrets.

Now I have words to tell my story.

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Appendix 1

A summary of the therapy of Konrad Stettbacher

Based on information Stettbacher sent to me, and on my own experiences. Quotes translated from the German text by myself.

Painful and frightening experiences that happened in your childhood could not be processed back then. As a child, you were not able to defend and protect yourself since as a child you were dependent and weak. You learned to expect pain in several situations, but you couldn't allow yourself to notice. So you created defense mechanisms to survive. These defenses still function now that you are an adult, and this causes a lot of suffering.

Situations and people in the present carry signals that in the past meant: "danger!", and your old defense mechanisms start working without you noticing this. As a child, you learned not to notice, and you still do not notice. Now that you are an adult this is no longer necessary, since you are not weak and dependent anymore.

To stop this old pain interfering with your present life, you must learn to recognize the connection between your current symptoms and your experiences in the past that caused them. Next, you have to set four steps with these experiences: perceiving, feeling, thinking, and articulating needs. Or in other words: what happened, how did you feel, why did it happen and what ought to have happened.

First you set the steps in the present situation. If you feel awful, if you are scared, if you panic, if you are angry, lonely, or upset, if you feel a need for distraction or numbing like watching TV, taking sweets, or drinking alcohol, if you want to hurt yourself or someone else, if you can't sleep or whatever else is wrong: you describe what is happening now and what consequences this has for your present life (first and second step), you examine your thoughts and longings (third and fourth step). Why does this happen now? Why do you feel this way? What are these needs about? Is this part of the present or is this part of your childhood?

You carefully look if sometime in the past you had similar experiences, feelings, thoughts or needs as you have now. If you come across a memory (or something that you know that has happened because you have been told about it), you take the four steps with this memory. If you do not have a memory at all you can nevertheless acknowledge your feelings as "old" and set the steps in more general terms because you feel exactly the same as in the past. It is essential to always set all four steps. One, two or three of them will not do, that does not heal.

It is important to speak or write in the form of a dialogue: you address yourself to the person(s) in your memory.

1. In the first step you describe the situation and what is happening, right now or in a memory. You tell what you perceive, what you see, hear, what is being said to you, what you feel in your body, what people do to you, etc.
2. In the second step you tell what this is doing to you, what the consequences are for you, you tell how you feel with this and you express these feelings (crying, for example).
3. The third step is about understanding the experience. You ask questions about why it happened: "Why do you do this to me? What purpose does this serve?" You look carefully within yourself what you think or thought that the answers were to these questions: "Is it because...? Is it because you...? Is it because I?" You look carefully what ideas you have/had about yourself being guilty: "Did I provoke it by..., because I did, because I was..., because I said...?" You look whether you think now that these ideas are right, and if you find they are wrong you say so. You put the responsibility where it belongs. (A child that is being abused always blames himself/herself for this. In reality he/she is never the one to blame for the abuse. It is important to discover this in your own history again and again, what you were accusing yourself of and to really realize that you were not the one who was guilty. As a child you couldn't see this; now that you are an adult, you can.) You also look at other ideas that you have, that you see or saw as being good reasons for abuse or that you see or saw as an apology for the perpetrator. You try to examine the reality of the past and to deal with the lies that were told to you or that you had to tell yourself.

4. In the fourth step you say what you want and what you don't want. You express a powerful "no" to what happened: "I don't want this, it was wrong what you did." And you tell what should have happened so that you could have grown up healthily, the way you needed this person to act in order for you to have felt cared for and about: "What I need is..."

You can do the therapy aloud, but also in writing, or even in thought if there is no other possibility at that moment. What works well is to do it aloud and record it on a voice recorder or MP3 player. When you listen to this, more can come up, you can add things you forgot earlier and you can check whether you did set all four steps.

Quit habits that you are using to suppress feelings, such as smoking, sleeping pills, alcohol, watching television, etcetera. It is important to work regularly with the therapy. It has to become daily behavior: every time that you come across problems that are caused by the past, you use the four steps.

Improvements may at first be only temporary. Persistence and patience with yourself are important to finally arrive at a result. Very painful experiences can not be dealt with in one go. You have to work through this memory with the steps several times.

Anything that is preventing you from doing the therapy can itself be used as starting point for the therapy. These are things like fear, feelings of hopelessness or disappointment, pressuring yourself too much, having the feeling that you can't do the therapy without help from others, etcetera.

Becoming aware of the extent of the old pain and of its consequences can be overwhelming, and can give you feelings of hopelessness, especially when you see how easy the suffering could have been prevented. It is important not to give up in despair, but to continue to protest and stand up for yourself in the therapy, for your rights as a child and for how you could have been as an adult if you hadn't been harmed. In the therapy, you are the lawyer of the child that you were.

Re-experiencing old pain is not the goal of the therapy. Stettbacher writes: "This would be a very harmful principle, since suffering that does not end, will in the end destroy life." In the therapy, you will encounter old pain, but the goal of the therapy is to protest against this, to reject this pain. The aim of the therapy is to maintain life: to acknowledge that deeds that cause harm are incompatible with life, and that it doesn't feel good to feel pain. "In the therapy, any abuse, in the present or in the past, has to be denounced as well as acknowledged to be wrong. Also, the abuse has to be rejected with all your might and with total expression of one's feelings, and description of all the negative effects on one's whole life. When by doing this again and again – and finally with one's total consciousness – the nonsense is understood of the inconceivable suffering, the last feelings of guilt will leave that were caused by the abuse. This person then is not afraid anymore and no longer willing to suffer meaninglessly and without guilt."

More information you can read in Stettbacher's book *Making Sense of Suffering*, and on <http://www.therapie-der-vier-schritte.ch/>

Appendix 2

Stettbacher, Jenson and scientific research

The scientific foundation of the four steps

What can be concluded from my story? Konrad Stettbacher¹ and Jean Jenson² are not well-known names among psychologists — was I really cured by their methods? Is there any proof that their therapies work? Can I advise people to do these therapies or not? What do experts think to be good treatment for people suffering from a history of childhood sexual abuse? And what kind of problems do these people have? Was I an exception, with the kind of symptoms that were troubling me?

While studying Clinical Psychology at the Open University in The Netherlands, I started doing research into treatment of people with childhood sexual abuse. For this research, I have read a lot of scientific articles, and in those articles, I have looked for answers to these questions.

What are the consequences of childhood sexual abuse?

People with a history of childhood sexual abuse who seek help, often have symptoms that have been described in the diagnosis of complex posttraumatic stress disorder (CPTSD)³. This diagnosis is not part of the DSM-IV⁴ (the list of psychiatric disorders as used by psychiatrists and psychologists around the world) but has been introduced by the famous American psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman³ as the diagnosis for people suffering from chronic trauma.

The DSM-IV⁴ does contain the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), describing symptoms that emerge from a single traumatic experience in adulthood, like a traffic accident or rape. People suffering from PTSD are easily startled, have repeated, disturbing re-livings of their stressful experience, and try to avoid their memories. People who have had several traumatic experiences over a longer period as a child, like sexual or physical abuse, get more problems than just PTSD. Apart from PTSD symptoms, they also suffer from symptoms like self-harming and suicidal behavior, physical symptoms, social problems, dissociative symptoms (the generic term for experiences like not feeling real, "living in a fog", "stepping out of your body" and memory problems) and feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, helplessness, shame and guilt.³ It is also known that their memories can be "different" from normal memories, for example physical re-livings.⁵ Another term to describe the results of chronic traumatic experiences is "disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified" (DESNOS).⁶ The diagnosis DESNOS has the same symptoms as CPTSD — symptoms that are well recognizable in my story.

It is not known how many people suffer from CPTSD or DESNOS, since they are often diagnosed with another disorder, like PTSD, borderline personality disorder or dissociative identity disorder.³ Yet, the data tells us that a considerable part of the psychiatric patients do have a history of childhood sexual abuse: research shows that 36 to 70% of the female psychiatric patients has been sexually abused as a child.⁷ Often they don't tell about the abuse of their own accord during treatment, sometimes because they don't see a relation between their problems and their history, sometimes because they don't see their memories as memories or don't remember, sometimes because they have bad experiences with talking about their history.⁸ So, I wasn't the only psychiatric patient with such a history, and not the only one who was silent about this.

What works and what doesn't?

The first thing that is obvious from scientific research, is that "doing nothing" doesn't bring any improvement when people suffer from CPTSD — people on a waiting list don't show any progress.⁹ People who have problems because of childhood sexual abuse do not recover spontaneously, so my recovery in the years that I did self-help therapy probably wasn't spontaneous either, but it has been the therapy that has helped me.

The next thing that emerges from scientific research is that the contact with the therapist is seen as a crucial part of the therapy.¹⁰ As I did my therapy totally alone, without a therapist, my progress is most

probably the result of the therapy method that I used.

There are many therapy methods for people suffering from childhood sexual abuse. Exposure¹¹, EMDR¹², cognitive processing therapy¹³, John Briere's self-trauma therapy and cognitive processing therapy working with "hot cognitions",¹⁵ are all mentioned in scientific articles as good treatment for traumatized people. Some people do improve a lot using these methods, others a bit, and some don't show any progress.¹⁶ For many people, the tested methods are not sufficient, but these people often got only six or eight sessions during research, while people normally do therapy much longer.¹⁷

What are these methods, the therapy methods that are described in scientific literature? Are there similarities between these methods and the therapy methods of Stettbacher and Jenson, or do Stettbacher and Jenson have a totally different approach? Which advantages and disadvantages do the various methods have?

Exposure and EMDR

Exposure involves giving words to memories and feelings – comparable with step 1 and 2 from Stettbacher's therapy, and also part of Jenson's therapy. The main aim of exposure is the disappearance of fear (extinction). This fear is aroused by telling in detailed about the memories during an exposure session, and it vanishes when the client stays in the fearful memory for a longer period (30-45 minutes) while using relaxation of muscles and breathing retraining.¹¹ For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, gradual exposure (systematic desensitization) is preferred: clients establish a hierarchy of fear-inducing stimuli and start with recalling the least distressing memory. Then, during several exposure sessions, the client processes increasingly fear-inducing memories or aspects of memories.¹⁸ A difference with Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapy is that, before the exposure session starts, the story that is going to be told is recorded precisely, and during the sessions the therapist will guide the client through her memories by asking questions.

Therefore, exposure requires a clear, accessible history. For people who have little awareness of what happened to them, maybe this therapy method can't be used.

When working with EMDR, people also describe their feared memories, but they are more free to tell what comes to mind than when using exposure. They can determine for themselves which memory they will talk about, and may go from one memory to another,¹² like in the therapy methods of Stettbacher and Jenson. Using EMDR, people are being distracted while feeling intense emotions, for example by following the therapist's finger with their eyes as it passes back and forth in front of their face. Apparently, having to use working memory while reliving traumatic experiences seems to be what makes EMDR work.¹⁹ This also happened when I did my self-help therapy, since I had to guide myself through the four steps.

Reliving traumatic memories, as happens during exposure and EMDR, has been shown to be effective in treating acute adult traumas: PTSD symptoms diminish this way.²⁰ Not all researchers think this kind of therapy is suitable for people suffering from childhood sexual abuse, having more and more difficult problems. Some people warn that symptoms of complex posttraumatic stress disorder can be exacerbated by exposure,²¹ and some therapists choose present-centered treatment that avoids trauma focus.²² However, several researchers conclude that clinicians are unjustly afraid of using exposure therapy when they treat patients suffering from PTSS or childhood sexual abuse.²³ The long-term benefits of exposure and EMDR are superior to those found in present-centered treatment.²⁴

Because of the risk of worsening symptoms, exposure treatment for people with complex posttraumatic stress disorder is often organized into phases, where phase 1 comprises taking care of a more or less safe and stable personal environment, phase 2 consisting of the processing of memories by exposure or EMDR, and phase 3 the building of a new life with regards to social contacts and jobs.²⁵ Stettbacher and Jenson also advise not to start therapy in a situation that is instable or not safe,²⁶ and to avoid sudden, major changes in one's life (job, relationship etc.) when processing memories.²

Some people say it's not a good idea to postpone processing memories until the second phase of therapy, since it's the processing of traumatic experiences that brings the desired stability.²⁷ Looking at myself, I think I would never have been admitted to the second phase, considering the limited therapeutic treatment offered in the first phase.²⁵ Without processing memories, I most probably would not have reached the required level of dealing with my feelings without regressing into maladaptive behavior such as self-harm, suicidality or dissociation – although I can never say for sure, not having done this therapy.

An important difference between exposure and EMDR on one hand and my self-help therapy on the other

hand, is the fourth step: articulating needs. This fourth step is missing in exposure and in EMDR. I noticed that this step of telling what I needed, has helped me to reach a feeling of relaxation. The third step (thoughts) is part of exposure and EMDR, but not in the systematic way that Stettbacher's therapy presents this. It was this step that led to rapid improvement when I first worked with Stettbacher's four steps.

Another difference is that exposure and EMDR only take place in sessions with a therapist, whereas Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapy methods can be provided in two ways: as sessions with a therapist, or as self-help that a client can use at home, at moments when the past is disturbing the present. I myself noticed that this offered me more useful therapy time (as I didn't have to wait until a next appointment but could do therapy at home), and that this made my therapy more efficient (as I didn't have to search for old feelings in a session, they were just there already). But most of all, this way of working gave me a tool to handle my daily problems — I was no longer at the mercy of recurring panic and fear, and emergency situations didn't get out of hand anymore. The sense of control that the four steps offered me was extremely important when I started to realize that my "other world" really happened: I doubt if I would have made it without the four steps as a tool to handle my feelings. Treatment with exposure or EMDR wouldn't have provided me with such a tool, and that would have been a disadvantage for me.

Cognitive Processing Therapy

In scientific research, it has been remarked that exposure does indeed help against fear, but that besides fear other feelings and thoughts also play an important role in traumatic memories, such as shame, guilt, anger, helplessness, humiliation and disgust.²⁸ Unlike fear, these feelings and thoughts don't vanish when reliving them. Staying in them for a longer period, like happens during exposure, can be counterproductive: the feelings can be strengthened this way.²⁹ The advice is to process these feelings and thoughts through cognitive processing therapy (CPT).¹³

In cognitive processing therapy, three aspects of a memory are under discussion: the events that took place, the thoughts that came up, and the feelings of the victim that can be expressed in the therapy¹³ — equivalent to the first three steps from Stettbacher. In CPT, emphasis is put on what is the third step in Stettbacher's therapy: becoming aware of, and changing your thoughts about the traumatic experience. The client learns to challenge beliefs and assumptions through Socratic questioning, like unjust feelings of guilt about what happened.¹³ Cognitive restructuring also takes place during EMDR, but mostly spontaneously from within the client and not by logical reasoning.³⁰ Unlike exposure, CPT is advised in the first phase of therapy,³¹ since it can help people to become more stable. That has happened with me, too: when I started doing self-help with Stettbacher's therapy, it was this third step that brought immediate progress.

Some authors point out that ideas that are believed only rationally ("cold cognitions") bring little change, while ideas that are deeply felt ("hot cognitions") do bring change. They argue for another way of cognitive processing therapy, in which the new thought is inserted into the traumatic memory, and they advise to use for that the moments when memories are triggered,¹⁵ much like Stettbacher and Jenson use these moments.

Differences between CPT and Stettbacher's four steps are the fourth step being absent from CPT, and the order of the steps. "Perceiving, thinking, feeling" in CPT is in Stettbacher's therapy "perceiving, feeling, thinking". The latter ordering seems to me the better one, since perceiving immediately leads to feelings that demand attention. Moreover, the feelings disappear during the step "thinking" (changing the meaning of the traumatic experience). It doesn't seem a good idea to bring up the feelings again after that, since the goal of the therapy is to get rid of them.

In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman describes what should be done with traumatic experiences in the therapy: to give words to the traumatic images and the physical sensations, to verbalize the feelings and the meaning of what happened ("why?", "why me?", matters of guilt and responsibility and a new interpretation of the traumatic experience), and to take an ethical attitude that supports the dignity and value of the survivor.

This description of what should happen in a therapy corresponds with Stettbacher's four steps. Herman doesn't carry this through as systematically as Stettbacher and Jenson do (who stimulate clients to process memories on a daily basis), and Herman doesn't give the four steps as a tool for moments when memories are triggered. But what she describes are the same four elements that form Stettbacher's four steps.

Most similar to Stettbacher's therapy is John Briere's self-trauma therapy.¹⁴ In Briere's therapy, the client learns to take several steps when negative feelings intrude:

1. Identify the triggers that cause flash-backs or intrusive negative feelings (e.g. a thought, or someone being

angry at the survivor).

2. Search for a matching memory (e.g. abuse by an angry parent).

3. Identify one's thoughts (e.g. "he hates me"/"I must have done something wrong"), and realize whether this is realistic from an adult point of view (e.g. "I didn't deserve this"/"it wasn't because I did something wrong but because he was drunk/was angry with my mother"). Cognitions are not labeled as "irrational": they were logical when the trauma occurred. Now, looking back, it is possible to give another meaning to the traumatic experience. Also, there must be a disparity between the contents of the traumatic memory (danger) and the client's experience of the current environment (safe).

4. Describe and express feelings (e.g. anger, fear, sadness).

Briere's model holds that self-trauma therapy reflects the survivor's own adaptive attempts to process memories by spontaneous re-livings. This way of working avoids activating more painful memories than can be tolerated. And the resolution of painful memories is likely to slowly reduce the survivor's overall level of posttraumatic stress and associated dysphoria. As a result, successful ongoing treatment allows the survivor to confront other, increasingly painful memories without exceeding the survivor's (now greater) self capacities.¹⁴

Briere's step 1, 2 and 4 are similar to the description of Jenson's therapy, and all of Briere's steps are part of Stettbacher's therapy. But just like CPT, self-trauma therapy uses the less natural order "perceiving, thinking, feeling" instead of "perceiving, feeling, thinking" as it is done in Stettbacher's therapy. Also, Stettbacher and Jenson emphasize using the therapy method in daily life, more than Briere does, and self-trauma therapy lacks the fourth step. Briere does write that the survivor's previous and current entitlement to integrity and self-determinism should be reinforced, but this isn't a step in the therapy, like the fourth step in Stettbacher's therapy.

Conclusion

The symptoms that troubled me can be recognized clearly in the scientific literature – I surely wasn't an exception with the problems that I had. Also, I wasn't the only one with a history of childhood sexual abuse that sought psychiatric help, and not the only one who couldn't tell about this history.

Nowhere in scientific literature did I read the names of Stettbacher and Jenson, but their ideas can be substantiated by other therapy methods. Almost all elements of Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapy methods have been described in the "official" therapies in scientific articles that describe exposure, EMDR, CPT (including the form that stresses "hot cognitions"), and Briere's self-trauma therapy. Since these therapies have been proven to work, it is reasonable to suppose that Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapies can help to process traumatic childhood experiences.

But I think more can be said about the therapy as I did it. Yes, all elements of my self-help therapy, based on a combination of Stettbacher's and Jenson's methods, can be found in scientifically validated therapy methods. But compared to these methods, my self-help therapy was more complete and the elements were more coherent, and were carried through more systematically than any therapy method that I saw in scientific literature. And working this way, I found that it was this completeness that was crucial for my recovery. Learning to identify triggers, searching for a memory that matches my feelings or thoughts, and taking the four steps with this memory: what happened, how I felt, what I thought (then and now) and what I needed. Using only some of these steps, as happens during exposure, EMDR, CPT or self-trauma therapy, couldn't help me escape from the fear and the pain – but using all the steps could. Only taking all of these steps brought me what I wanted: to be free from the fear and pain. And for that, I needed to take the four steps every day.

Since I wasn't exceptional in the symptoms that bothered me, I would expect that more people will react in the same, positive way to the therapy. Maybe more people with a complex posttraumatic stress disorder could benefit from a therapy that includes all of these steps.

Therefore, I hope that, in addition to the existing scientific research on parts of the therapy as I did it, research will start on this whole therapy method. I hope that more psychologists and psychiatrists will be educated to help people with a history of childhood abuse, to help them process their memories, so no one will have to do a therapy on her own, like I did. Most of all, this way I hope victims will get a better life.

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Appendix 3 The Stettbacher-Miller controversy (December 1996-December 1997)

At the end of December 1996 and in the first months of 1997 I am overwhelmed by the images and feelings that I now take seriously for the first time – the abuse by my father. But in this period there is something else that for several months dominates my thoughts and feelings. To my astonishment I find out that Alice Miller doesn't support Konrad Stettbacher's therapy anymore. I discover this when I am looking for the story by Gerald, an American who wrote about his first fifteen months of self-help therapy with the four steps and published it on the Internet. In a footnote is mentioned that Alice Miller recently rejected Stettbacher's therapy totally.

I am scared and confused by this news. Until then, Alice Miller's support has been crucial for me in my self-help therapy. I fear that this news means that the therapy that I am doing will not have good results in the end. On John Speyrer's Primal Page, I correspond with several people about Miller's decision, to get my thoughts clear. I need to find out whether I can continue my self-help therapy.

Within some weeks, I conclude that there is no reason to stop my therapy. So, looking back, this affaire hasn't had much influence on my therapy process, although it felt really important at the time. Therefore, I don't describe this in the main text of my book. Nevertheless, sometimes people still ask me questions about Miller's rejection of Stettbacher's therapy. Below, I give my contribution to the discussion on the Primal Page about this matter between December 1996 and December 1997.

Why did Alice Miller change her mind?

The footnote of Gerald's story tells that Alice Miller recently rejected Stettbacher's therapy totally and refers to an open letter by Miller, titled *Communication To My Readers*. So I expect this *Communication* will clarify why Alice Miller took this remarkable step, only to find out that in this *Communication* Alice Miller doesn't mention any reason for rejecting Stettbacher's therapy. She doesn't criticize the four steps. She doesn't even mention the four steps at all. So then what could be the reason Alice Miller changed her mind? The things that Alice Miller writes in her *Communication* seem weird, illogical and irrelevant to me, and I can't see them as a valid reason for her change of mind. She writes very sharply, negatively and emotionally, but the reason *why* doesn't become clear. My own experience tells me that Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapies until now have been the only therapies that worked. And not only that: they worked very well. I have not found these therapies to be wrong or harmful. Am I overlooking something? What's the matter? What does Alice Miler write?

In her *Communication*, Alice Miller blames Stettbacher for the fact that 15.000 people have asked him for help – and of course he can't help them all. But why does she blame him for that? It think it is perfectly understandable that so many people have asked him. After all, Alice Miller strongly recommended his therapy as the only good therapy in existence. So it was to be expected that people would ask him for a therapist. Some people may have done so before even trying self-help therapy, others may have asked him because they didn't know how to continue self-help. Why does she blame Stettbacher? That makes no sense to me. It is the logical consequence of her own actions. Maybe she herself is the one to blame for that...

Besides, is this such a disaster? I myself have asked Stettbacher for a therapist, too, and there was none, but I could continue self-help therapy because he sent me useful information about the therapy. That could be the case with many more of those 15.000 people on Stettbacher's waiting list. I feel that Alice Miller makes this fact sound far too tragic, as if these people are all totally desperate and on death's doorstep. Why doesn't it occur to her that at least a part of those people are fine, thanks to some extra information and Jenson's book? This seems to confirm the impression she made with the new edition of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, in which she seems to think that no one has managed to do this self-help therapy, except for herself. But that is not true, and by saying this, she makes people needlessly scared.

It would have made more sense if she had provided some extra information, to help and support people, instead of rejecting this therapy. It would have made more sense if she had tried to find out what exactly were the problems that people struggled with when doing self-help therapy, and how to solve them. Why does she react so inadequately? The reasons she gives in *The Drama* for her own success with self-help and "other people" failing, namely her insight in the subject gained from writing her books and the painting she did, these reasons point to a need for more information for people doing self-help, instead of an outright rejection of the therapy. (The other reason she gives, namely that she was very motivated to discover her childhood history, I refuse to consider. I find this a weird remark that seems to suggest that

she was motivated but other people were not. This is certainly not true.)

Also, she writes that she found out that Stettbacher didn't have a degree as a psychologist. I am not impressed by this fact, I can imagine it very well. I remember the incompetence of the psychologists and psychiatrists who treated me. To me, the proper certificate is not a good reference, let alone a criterion to be a good therapist. In the past, Alice Miller thought the same way about this, I remember from her books. And suddenly she has changed her mind. She now writes that being trained as a "psychologist or psychoanalyst" is necessary to be a therapist. *Psychoanalyst?* I am perplexed, how can she write this? This completely contradicts what she herself wrote in the past. Before, she wrote very clearly that a training as a psychoanalyst teaches people to treat patients in the wrong way. Now in her *Communication* she writes that this education "doesn't guarantee that therapists don't abuse patients (...)". I would add: this education is a guarantee that therapists will abuse patients. My own experience with psychoanalysts is a painful example. I was almost killed by these people, exactly the way Alice Miller describes in her books. What the hell is going on with Alice Miller, to suddenly forget what she knew before? Is she worried about her reputation, if someone she widely recommended turns out not to have the proper certificates? I think this is a childhood feeling that she should acknowledge and deal with in the therapy, in order to find adult solutions for the problem (if there is a problem at all). Or is there another explanation for Miller's behavior? Then what is the matter with her?

Miller writes that she found out that primal therapy does not have lasting results, and that catharsis brings only temporary relief and no cure. But Stettbacher's therapy is not primal therapy and is not based on catharsis, so why does she use this as an argument to reject the four steps? She writes that she found out that primal therapy makes people addicted to pain. Yes, I experienced that myself. That is precisely the difference between primal therapy and the four steps – this addiction indeed happens when one does primal therapy, and it doesn't happen when one uses Stettbacher's four steps. At least, that is my experience. And besides, this seems obvious when you look at the differences between those therapies. Also, she writes that she became aware that it can be harmful to totally go back to a regressive state, like in primal therapy. This, too, is nothing new, and this is also an important difference between primal therapy and the four steps. When I did primal therapy, I drowned in old pain, I was once again a powerless, desperate, "blind" child, I was only repeating the old misery. This way, my symptoms worsened. But when I do the four steps they make me aware that I am experiencing memories and at the same time still am an adult. The four steps give me the tools to handle what is happening to me, and to ensure that all aspects of what happened to me are processed: what happened, how I felt, why it happened and what should have happened. This forces me to realize that there is a present, and it prevents me from getting stuck in experiencing old pain and fear.

Merely re-experiencing old pain and fear is a labor of Sisyphus, and is harmful; Alice Miller is totally right about that. And at the same time she seems confused since she doesn't see the difference anymore between primal therapy and the therapy of the four steps. Stettbacher's therapy has good results because it doesn't have the disadvantages of primal therapy. In her book *Banned Knowledge* Alice Miller was still aware of the differences between the therapies. Why doesn't she know this anymore? Why does she suddenly think the four steps are primal therapy?

It is clear that Alice Miller doesn't criticize the content of the four steps, and that therefore she doesn't give any valid reasons not to use the four steps. She only gives arguments that do not concern content and that don't even have anything to do with the four steps. She does write in an exaggerated, fierce and emotional way. Whatever her feelings and motives may be, it seems they have to do with herself and not with the therapy of the four steps. She writes about things that don't have anything to do with the subject – to prove something that has an enormous emotional weight for her and in which she seems to have a personal interest. It is clear to me that in her *Communication* she doesn't give any valid arguments. I decide I can continue my self-help therapy. Nevertheless, Miller's rejection of Stettbacher's therapy affects me strongly, and I still feel a lot of fear and confusion. Fortunately, in the story of Gerald's self-help therapy, he writes that he is still enthusiastic about this self-help method, five years after he started doing it. This helps me, it gives me courage and hope and support during all this confusion and fear.

There is one thing that really frightens me in what Alice Miller writes: she writes that in 1978 a patient of Stettbacher accused him of sexual abuse. But since Alice Miller doesn't write more about it than this single remark, it is not really clear. The idea crosses my mind that this patient may have had the same realistic re-experiences as I had. I've had several times when only the absolute certain fact that I was alone at home with all the doors locked could convince me that I was not being abused here and now. If I had been in a therapy room with a therapist, and even more if this had been a darkened room, I am not sure what my conclusions would have been. But Miller's writings don't give any indication whether this abuse in 1978

really happened, or that this woman had experiences similar to mine during therapy. And since this subject brings up a lot in me, I decide to let it rest until I will get more clarity about it.

I ask John Speyrer to send me the Appendix to Miller's *Communication*. Two weeks later, I find it in my mailbox. I am hard hit. The Appendix is a part of an interview with the woman who accused Stettbacher twenty years ago. This interview was published in *Der Bund* in 1995. The woman, called U. Sch., tells about the abuse during her therapy. Now that I read this, I feel ashamed for thinking it might not have really happened. I do not have any doubt anymore that her story is true. I also feel totally overwhelmed, and a lot of old fear and pain is brought up – it causes many sleepless nights. I am speechless and upset. How could Stettbacher do this? It is horrible what U. Sch. describes. She tells that he sexually abused her, threatened her, told her not to talk about it and told her no one would believe her if she did. How could he do this? I believe her and I can't understand. This is really, really bad.

In court, Stettbacher had been found innocent, but I am not impressed by that. Sexual abuse is hard to prove. And when it is just the word of one person against the word of another, there is little chance that the perpetrator will be sentenced. So many abused women have not found justice in court because evidence and witnesses were lacking. I believe U. Sch. and I find it really terrible what happened to her.

Even if Stettbacher himself believed that there had been a love affair between him and U. Sch., as he said in court according to the interview, he should never have had sexual contact with her. He should have stopped himself. Such a relationship with a patient is never allowed, and I think this is always abuse. I can't imagine that he really thought he was having a love affair with her.

Can a therapy method that is designed by someone who abused one or maybe even more, be any good? Should I continue the therapy I am doing? My initial feelings are that I can't continue, this therapy can't be right. It has been contaminated. But when I look carefully at the self-help method, I can't find anything wrong with it, I can't find any abuse or manipulation. I have nothing but positive experiences with Stettbacher's therapy. It is the first therapy that has really helped me, and the first therapy without hidden abuse or manipulation. I don't understand that the one who designed and described this could abuse his patients. His book has been written with so much integrity and in his words is such empathy with abused people – how could he abuse people himself? I really don't get it, I don't understand it. Why didn't Stettbacher stop himself before he started the abuse? After all, he himself writes in his book that strong longings and urgent desires are a reliable track to someone's past. Why didn't he use his therapy at that moment? I don't understand and I feel very disappointed in him. U. Sch.'s story convinces me that this really happened, although Stettbacher has been found innocent, and I feel very sorry for her. But however inconceivable it seems after reading U.'s story, the four steps still seem like a good therapy method to me.

There is more that I feel puzzled about: in this entire affair there is the extreme contrast between U. Sch.'s story and Mariella Mehr's story, as she described in her book *steinzeit*. As far as I know, both U. Sch. and Mariella Mehr were Stettbacher's patients during the same period, but their experiences seem to be opposites.

While U. writes about being abused and threatened, Mariella Mehr writes about the therapist and the therapist as being very safe and supporting. While U. writes about being totally isolated during the first weeks of the therapy, Mariella writes about a friend visiting her there. While U. writes about getting injections to calm down, Mariella seems to deal with the horrible events of her past by just doing the therapy. While U. writes about being forced into memories in a rough way without her fear being taken into account, and as a result of that, having to deal with too much at once, it is clear in Mariella's book, that she has been treated with great care and respect and that she deals with the past that comes to her consciousness bit by bit. While U. describes the therapy room more or less as a room of torture, Mariella writes about it in a very tender way, and calls it a "warm belly". While U. tells that she became very ill because of all this, Mariella tells that this therapy saved her life.

Why these totally different stories? Did they get such different therapies from the same therapist? I don't know. I can't make these stories fit together. I can't manage to make sense out of these two stories. I feel really puzzled and confused since they both seem to be telling the truth. Am I right or wrong in believing them both? I don't know.

According to the Appendix, the Psychiatric Polyclinic that U. went to already had had to take over more of Stettbacher's patients in similar regressive states like U. I am a bit irritated by this remark. Of course, I am not acquainted with this hospital, but I presume that it is not very different from Dutch hospitals, and with them I am very much acquainted. I presume that the results by this hospital will not be any better

than the results by psychiatric hospitals in the Netherlands, and this means that they are regularly having their own patients back in hospital, in all sorts of regressive states. I think it is a cheap shot to suggest that this especially happens to Stettbacher's patients. Even when this hospital's treatment is comparable with the best treatment that I experienced myself in a psychiatric hospital, it is nothing to be proud of.

When I look at myself, I see that I have been in psychiatric hospitals six times before I started working with Stettbacher's self-help therapy. After that, I have been in a psychiatric hospital only once, about five months after I started working with the four steps. This time I was on a ward where I had been before, and the staff were impressed with the progress that I had made since the last time I had been there, although I had been working with the four steps only occasionally. They advised me to continue this therapy. It was the last time I have been in a psychiatric hospital.

Also, I do not find it a failure when someone doing self-help therapy needs support or help for some time. What I find irritating is the suggestive tone of this part of the interview, because of my own bad experiences with psychiatric hospitals and the bad experiences of other patients that I saw there. And especially because of my best friend who received psychiatric treatment for many years, and died in 1993 - a "natural" death from exhaustion, despair and hopelessness. Her heart just stopped one night. I loved her and I still miss her. I frequently wonder if she would have stayed alive with Stettbacher's and Jenson's therapy.

It would be interesting to do research on how often people end up in a psychiatric hospital, to compare people who are and who are not working with Stettbacher's self-help therapy. In my case, the result is positive for Stettbacher. To be correct, these self-help Stettbacher patients are in another situation than U. was, because they weren't abused during the therapy, like she was.

What does Stettbacher's behavior say about the four steps or about the therapy of Jenson? As I see it, neither Stettbacher nor Jenson "invented" this therapy. It is just a natural process that nature gave to human beings. Jenson and Stettbacher noticed and described this process, both of them in their own way. And I think they did a wonderful job, and they must have had a lot of courage and integrity to succeed. I am very grateful for it.

Alice Miller herself wrote about the four steps being a natural process in her book *Abandoned Knowledge*. Why did she change her mind? I do not understand why Miller throws away a natural process because someone who described it made serious mistakes as a therapist. Nature does not change because of one man's mistakes, even if these are very serious mistakes. Also, there is the question whether Miller rejects only Stettbacher, or rejects Jenson as well, or perhaps rejects all self-help therapies and Stettbacher in particular. In her *Communication* Alice Miller doesn't mention Jenson at all. If she rejects Stettbacher's four steps but still supports Jenson's therapy, I would like to know how she can match this with the fact that the two therapies are almost the same. As I see it, Jenson's therapy is certainly not "another therapy", it is just a part of Stettbacher's therapy.

I wonder if Alice Miller now regrets having worked with the four steps herself. Does she regret the healing it gave her? Would she like to be again in the condition she was in before she did this therapy? Does she have "negative side-effects" herself? Is she still dealing with her past? If so, how does she do that if she does not perceive, feel, think and articulate needs anymore? How does one do therapy when one leaves out these four elements? These are all questions I have. I would like to have answers to these questions. But neither in her *Communication* nor in the Appendix she writes about these things. I do not understand Alice Miller anymore.

The more I think about it and go through all her remarks, the more negative I become about Alice Miller and the more angry I become with her. I find her present view and the vague but emotional, piercing and even manipulative way she brings it, irresponsible. She shouldn't do this to her readers.

I also feel that Miller's rejection of the four steps could have had most serious consequences for me if I had known about it earlier. Now that I read it, at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, I am strong enough to do the therapy of the four steps without her support. I feel able to judge a therapy myself, and I feel able to deal with it when I am confused and feel "abandoned" by her. But that would have been different some years before. I couldn't do without her support then and I don't know if I would have survived. I wonder if Alice Miller realizes the consequences of what she is doing.

I am not suggesting that she would be responsible if someone would kill himself after having read her *Communication*. The fact that I give her the honor of having saved my life in the past because she did

write the right things then, does not mean that I would blame her for someone's death when she writes things that I think are wrong. I think everyone himself is responsible for a decision about suicide. But I do think that Alice Miller should carefully reconsider what she is doing. I do think that she, because of her influence as a writer, is responsible for writing the truth, and I doubt if she is writing the full truth in her *Communication*. I want her to be open and honest about her true, and maybe personal, reasons for rejecting the four steps and Stettbacher as a person and therapist. What she is writing now is at least not clear. I feel disappointed in her. I thought she could do better than this.

I still appreciate Alice Miller enormously, for her earlier books and for the courage she showed by writing those books. Her books have been extremely important to me, they kept me alive for some time, and I am really grateful to her. Without her books I would have died long before Stettbacher's book was even published. She gave me hope and (some) understanding of myself, and that made it possible for me to stay alive until I found a good therapy. I owe her a lot. But what I am most grateful of, is that she brought me to Stettbacher's self-help therapy. In the end it was this method that saved my life. So I am in a strange situation with my gratitude to her at the moment.

I remember that some years before, I did think about writing to Alice Miller. At that moment no therapy seemed to help and I thought that I also had tried Stettbacher's therapy or even that I was still doing it (although I was applying the four steps at most once every few months, and only superficially) and that this therapy didn't work for me. I didn't know what to do anymore and wondered why the therapy of the four steps worked well for Alice Miller but not for me. Now, I thank heaven that I didn't write to Alice Miller then, but instead, some time later, to Stettbacher. Alice Miller would have added me to her list of people for whom self-help was a failure, and wouldn't have done anything to help me. Stettbacher sent me information that made it possible for me to continue therapy. Now that I read what Alice Miller was doing in the years before 1997, this feels like a narrow escape.

In the spring of 1997 I get more information about Miller's recent ideas. I read that Alice Miller stated in an interview that it doesn't matter which therapy method is used by a therapist, since it is the human contact with the therapist that cures, and that's what should be central in the therapy. I find this a very dangerous idea. I experienced with Robert that this doesn't work, that the method is crucial and that a therapy method that is based on the healing relationship with the therapist, makes the patient totally dependent on the therapist. Such a therapy "method" makes it almost impossible for the patient to see what is happening in the therapy and to have control over the situation. Also, using this "method" it is really tempting for the therapist to use the therapy for his own narcissistic needs, since the progress of the patient depends on him as a person. This also creates the risk that the therapist is central in the therapy, instead of the patient.

These are my own experiences with this way of doing therapy, and although I know that people are different, I find it a really bad idea to recommend this way of working. For me, the warmth of the human contact has been really addictive, and that made it so hard to leave the therapy, despite the fact that there wasn't any improvement of my symptoms. Finally, after nine years I left Robert, feeling used by him.

I don't understand how Alice Miller can recommend a way of doing therapy that makes patients so extremely dependent on the therapist. This is in contradiction with her former ideas, as she described them in her books. Back then, she explicitly sought to avoid the pitfall of dependency and of being used by a therapist. I myself came to the conclusion that therapy should always include self-help, even when it is accompanied by a therapist. A patient should always have the information with which he can help himself in the therapy.

Still, a lot of questions about Stettbacher and Alice Miller remain unanswered. But I feel I can continue therapy in spite of all these unsolved mysteries. For me, the four steps are a good therapy method. I needed more information than Stettbacher's and Alice Miller's books gave me, but from the moment I got this information, I was able to do the therapy and get good results with it. I do not find it easy to do this therapy, I have a hard time with the memories I encounter, but for that I blame my parents and not the therapy.

I have done so many therapies, and nothing worked, everything turned out to be a disaster and made me more ill. The therapies of Stettbacher and Jenson are the first, and until now only, therapies that really have lasting positive results, and doing these therapies I started to understand why. I feel it would be insane to give up this therapy and go back to any of these other methods – speech therapy, RET, medication, psychoanalysis, psychodrama, psychosynthesis, Gestalt, haptonomy, rebirthing, regression therapy, primal therapy, Reichian therapy, rage work, dynamic meditation, encounter, Voice Dialogue, NLP,

guided imagination, hypnosis, creative therapy, spiritual "paths" or whatever else I did, growth processes, individual processes, psychiatric hospitalizations, whatever. It only brought me misery, and I will certainly not return to this. Doing no therapy at all, but liberating myself through artistic expression, as Alice Miller now recommends in her newest edition of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, I find too naive to take seriously. I already experienced that this does not work. Doing nothing and letting myself drown, I also do not find a good idea.

So I continue to fight for my life, I continue to process my past using the four steps, every time the past gets in my way. I do run into old pain in my daily life, the pain is there, this is reality, and the best thing I can do is to process the pain every time it hurts me. That's what I have done in my self-help therapy until now, and I can't find anything wrong with it. On the contrary, to me it seems good and constructive.

Finally, my conclusion is that Alice Miller is not a reliable guide to therapy anymore, like she has been for such a long time. Her present negative ideas about self-help with the four steps seem to me a personal problem of herself, and I won't let my life be influenced by that anymore. I have thought over all the arguments that Alice Miller wrote, and have come to my own conclusions. I don't try to find out anymore what could be the matter with Alice Miller. I am busy with my own life, not with hers. I don't need Miller's consent and approval. I continue helping myself. And with success.