

Excerpt from

Speak But the Word: From Multiple Personalities to Wholeness

by Leilani Claire

Speak But the Word

Introduction by Leilani Claire

I have lived my life as a young woman artist, a virgin named **LEILANI**

I have been a teenaged boy named **EDDIE**

I have been a traditional wife and mother named **LONNIE**

I have been a gay male named **MONTE**

I have been an angel named **CLAIRE**

I have been an animal named **ANGRY ONE**

I have been an alcoholic named **CONNIE**

I have been **NO NAME**

I have been **LUCKY**

I have lived as many people, but now I am one person named **LEILANI CLAIRE**

This is my true story.

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2/3/97

It is my belief that all human beings have multiple personalities in various stages of fragmentation and integration. Each of us is on a sacred spiritual journey that involves making peace with “our-selves” as we live on earth and, by living, move closer to the Source from which we came. We all contain parts of ourselves that specialize in our talents and abilities. To varying degrees, we all contain inner children, business people, thinkers, doers, angry parts, sad parts, spiritual parts, sexual parts, artistic and creative parts, whether expressed through hobbies or professionally, social personae we present to the world, and dark sides we try to keep hidden from view.

I am about to tell you my story, and how my sacred journey has unfolded thus far. It is a true story, although I have changed some of the names of family and friends to respect their privacy. It is not only a story about childhood sexual abuse and trauma, although my life does contain those painful elements. It is, more importantly, a story about regaining wholeness, hope, love, and a celebration of the miraculous human spirit, which strives to create solutions that transform pain and suffering into healing and forgiveness.

In sharing my sacred story, I had hoped to address many personal issues which concern me. I wanted to leave a legacy of hope for others who may have suffered

similar atrocities, and who believed themselves to be “crazy” for reacting to such trauma in similar ways. The diagnoses and labels of mental illness still carry a certain amount of shame for the courageous people who seek healing despite their fear that hospitalization or even outpatient treatment may bring disgrace to their families. One of my concerns was how would my children and grandchildren truthfully answer the insurance questionnaires and any number of health-care documents that ask if there is a history of family “mental illness” on the same form that asks about chicken pox and diabetes. The difference between having Multiple Personality Disorder (recently renamed Dissociative Identity Disorder) and other illnesses is that no one blames you or labels you “crazy” if you have arthritis or heart disease.

I believe MPD/DID is a “normal reaction,” and a wonderfully creative survival technique that each soul has to invent on the spur of the moment to cope with and survive “unnatural events.” I am not ashamed of my ability to have survived in this way. I am in awe of the mystery of it all, and grateful to the solution that saved my life, physically and psychically, until I could cope with the truth from a place of wholeness. This is obviously not a self-help book on how to split off from feelings and experiences with which we cannot cope. We all consciously or unconsciously know how to escape in our own way, through denial, abuse of alcohol, food, drugs, TV, shopping, sexual escapes, or workaholism, a list which includes a few of my personal favorites. Dissociation, however, was my all-time best escape. It was a sacred survival skill, which helped me cope during childhood, but became a burden during adulthood, when my fragmented memory and pattern of escaping reality did not serve me well. The magical solution had become the new problem.

I also want my great-grandchildren to know the truth about me from me. I don’t want my life’s experience to be written off by society’s acceptance that artists are supposed to be “crazy” and eccentric; I don’t want to hide my experience behind such labels. Sexual abuse violated all my boundaries and robbed me of my childhood innocence. It also took away my birthright of ownership of my own body. As a woman, I have experienced the psychological effects such boundary violations have had as being more damaging, and having more long lasting consequences, than any physical pain or damage my body may have endured at age three or thereafter. My healing has been my gift to myself to reclaim my body and soul, and reclaim my power of choice in sexual matters, rather than allowing myself to remain a victim. Reclaiming one’s personal power is not just a sexual abuse issue or a women’s issue. It is an aspect of the human condition that is always in need of some amount of work, if not total restoration.

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My healing process, as channeled through my art, has been about truth-telling and speaking out, not embarrassing members of my family of origin or punishing them for what happened long ago. By remaining silent I was continuing my own abuse by colluding with those who tried to convince me that “nothing happened,” but even if it did, it was somehow my fault, and I was **bad** for telling the truth. **That** was the lie. I was not bad or “crazy” or “damaged goods.” As in the prayer I learned in childhood, I had to “speak but the Word, so my soul could be healed.”

I am fortunate to be an artist and a writer. My creativity gave me an expressive outlet for feelings and memories I could not consciously deal with during the healing process. The drawings, paintings, poetry, etc., are real and tangible “products” that also bear witness to my journey. Some paintings and drawings have been “channeled” through LEILANI, the system’s artist, and others drawn by child alters. Those from the children contain the kind of innocence, pride, and self-confidence children have knowing their artwork will be accepted for exhibition on the “refrigerator door gallery.” Some are more shocking and graphic despite their crude cartoon-like style. Others are more sophisticated and became celebration pieces for issues finally resolved, after healing was received.

A difficult decision when contemplating turning my sacred writings and story into a manuscript to be published was whether the writing or the artwork would be the main focus. Would this be an art book with dialogue used as descriptive narration, or an autobiography illustrated with my own art work? It was clear from the beginning that my “System” did not want to be exploited in any way, and become the weird guest de jour on the Oprah Winfrey Show. “We” had all worked too hard to regain our dignity and self-esteem and wanted to avoid self-sabotage by “selling out” for notoriety disguised as “fame.”

Any writing or exhibiting of my artwork would have to serve my greater purpose of self-healing, and sharing my recovery with others who might need a beacon of hope during times when the healing process becomes dark and dismal and despairing. So although it began as a story about healing from childhood sexual abuse and trauma, it is really a story of my sacred journey towards wholeness and reunion with my inner being and with the God-dess within us all.

The struggle for people to grow up instead of just grow old is as heroic a journey today as it was in ancient times, whether they have been sexually abused or not. The experience of living offers us enough challenges and normal daily traumas to last literally a lifetime. How we confront life’s problems and face our personal demons is the unavoidable business of life that we all face. Everyone’s journey is sacred, whether we approach it consciously and honor it or not. The individual personality alters in

my System were all heroes in their own right. I have grown to love and respect them as I learned their stories. They each chose life and healing at every difficult crossroad, not out of fear of death, but from love of life's potential. I disagree with people who say that they don't have the "courage" to commit suicide. I believe wanting to die is motivated by overwhelming despair and hopelessness, but not courage. I believe it takes courage to live at those moments when dying seems the only option to end suffering. I also believe in God's grace, which, in my life, saved me when I was at that same threshold of suffering.

The story I am about to share with you is a story of courage, ingenuity, and Grace. My system members survived in the only way they could until recently, when they chose life again by speaking out through artwork and writing. They fought to protect and preserve me at age three and I can thank and honor them now by continuing to heal by speaking out, and encouraging others not to give up. The healing of old wounds required that we constantly say no to the abusive programming in our heads. It was that punishing voice that was eventually internalized, which told us that we were not worth it, that we were inherently bad, sinners, and liars, which replicated the voice of the perpetrators from the past. It was our sacred journey that led us back to the truth and to the dignity and ownership of the knowledge that each of us is a beloved child of God.

I am very fortunate to have shared my journey with a special therapist and healer, Dr. Stephen Merriman (whom I called Stephen), who created a safe place in which I could discover my own truth. Many times during the healing process, I would have been happy to find out that I was "wrong," and that indeed nothing did happen. I hoped, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, that I would awaken safe in my bed with Auntie Em telling me that it was all a bad dream, and I could once again feel that "There's no place like home!" I would have been happy to discover that mine were "false memories," but that is not so. I can understand why other people would not want to face such terrible, sad truths, and would like to deny them or blame others. Uncovering these memories can have devastating effects on families, destroying the status quo. I feel very fortunate that Stephen never suggested I explore the topic of sexual abuse, nor did he ever confirm that my suspicions were true. It was I who had to recover my own truth, and it is I who has to live with it each day. There is no benefit to inventing such stories. It has been a process that has proven very costly in time and tears, as well as financially, but it has been worth it in every way. Nothing else but a total commitment to healing could have restored my memory, my "sanity," and my dignity.

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In sharing my story, I do not claim to speak for other multiples. It is not my intent to judge or compare other stories to mine. In speaking out now, I just want to add my voice to all the heroic people who have chosen life and struggled to become whole in the midst of their own personal holocaust. I want to bear witness to the reality that it is possible to heal from sexual abuse trauma, MPD/DID, and become integrated, as well as sustain wholeness. I am living proof.

My healing began with my questioning the story behind an 8"x10" enlargement of a black and white photograph of myself at age three, which had always been in the baby book my mother made for me. Both the photograph, which was so shockingly unlike any other in the book, as well as the story given to me about its origin, seem unbelievable to me now. It was only because I was split that I couldn't see what is so obviously depicted on the face of that sad child in the photograph. I showed it to Stephen one day, wondering if the story given to me was incorrect. The eyes of that child were so "checked out" (dissociated), her hair was so disheveled, and her lack of under panties should have been obvious clues to me that "something happened." I can't imagine how Stephen could have looked at that photograph and said to me with a straight face that he didn't know what the story behind the photograph was. Only I could really know. And so we began our work together trying to solve a mystery I wasn't sure existed. It was the process of re-memembering a dismembered soul.

The story that follows was written for me by the last two personality alters (LONNIE, the "host personality", and LEILANI, the system's artist personality), who still remained after a long series of memory completions and the fusion and integration of more than twenty personalities, some of whom took an active part in daily life in the body, while others were only fragments who had little input in my outer life. The story's purpose was to welcome me back to my life that I was awakening to after being "asleep" in an amnesic coma for over fifty years. I was the "original personality" (Original "Leilani"), the child from whom the others split during a traumatic rape at age three, and continued to split and subdivide thereafter during other traumatic incidents that occurred up to the age of nine. The damning photograph of me was taken by one of the sadistic perpetrators whose violent acts caused me to split and "leave" for the first time. He had photographed me after the abuse and gave the photo to my mother with a lie about how I had been "bad" and this picture was the proof of it. This was a story she repeated to me all my life until I, as LONNIE, began to question it that day with my therapist. My personality System had thought that an inner child alter had "died" during the time of the abuse, but came to understand, after working through recovery for four years, that I was not dead, but ready to awaken, much like in fairy tales of old, and ready to join them and share in our life.

I was still “three years old” when awakened or “reborn” in Stephen’s office, so the story that was written for me by LONNIE and LEILANI was written for a young child. As it was read to me, and then, as I became able to read it, I “grew up,” age progressing as the story about my life progressed.

This story was LONNIE’s and LEILANI’s unique attempt to “break it to me gently” about what had caused me to go to sleep, and what had happened in the meantime to the life that I was now about to rejoin (Rip Van Winkle and Sleeping Beauty had nothing on me!). Between their therapy appointments, LONNIE and LEILANI each took turns writing the story for me late into the evenings. After I had age-progressed to the point where I could read, I would then read it aloud to Stephen at the next therapy session. This manner of retelling our past history gave them a way to solidify and reexamine all that they had uncovered during the therapy process, making it more real for them as well as informing me. As I read it in Stephen’s office, I grew up learning the truth about my life from their perspective. Accepting and knowing this truth on a feeling level took much longer, and was a process I found myself engaged in well into my post-integrated life.

The story is illustrated with the original drawings and paintings channeled through LEILANI and others, along with some black and white photographs dating from my childhood. Some were shown to Stephen in advance to inform him about, and to preview, the recall work depicted by the images. A number of pieces of the artwork were done as reactions to newly gained information. Some of the earliest drawings were made to encourage the landmark event of the System’s first integration between child alters. This event foretold and celebrated this event, which proved my system could, and was determined to, become whole.

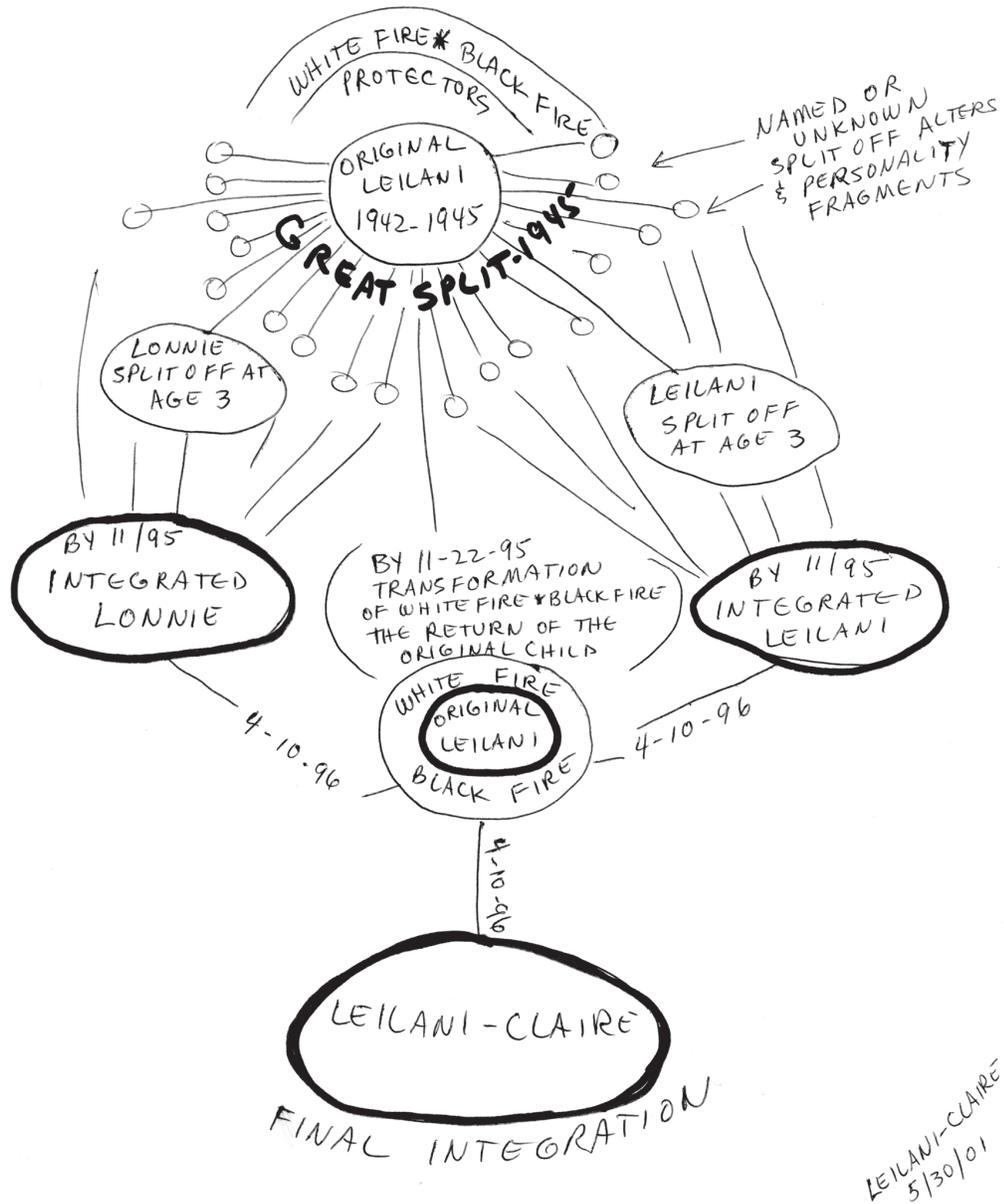
One of my biggest goals in my writing was to be thorough and honest about my experience. I also wanted to share some of the unusual experiences that (because I hadn’t read any detailed descriptions of similar experiences by other multiples in any of the clinical or personal writings on the topic) I believed were unique to me. I wanted to let others know that when I uncovered and explored my personality System, I too had encountered what might have been at first described as “weird” or scary inner beings. Alters with unusual gender and sexual identities as well as alters who described themselves as animals or angels were especially troubling to me at first.

For the most part I have left the original writing unedited, just as LONNIE and LEILANI wrote it for me in the form of a personal diary complete with the dates they wrote the entries. The two endings to the story were written by me. One is written in the style of a fable in the manner LONNIE employed when she began writing the original story for me. The last chapters, “One Year Later” through “Year Seven: Speak

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But The Word” offer an account of what my life has been like since the integration that left me on my own, as a neurologically unified, but still emotionally multifaceted person, complete with my inherited life and all its history and wonder. This may not seem like an unusual circumstance to people who have not been split, but having to adjust to a life without my most familiar escape from the normal pain and pressures of adult life has proven to be my greatest challenge, as well as triumph to date.

SYSTEM CHART ILLUSTRATING
SPLITTING & INTEGRATIONS



Ed. note: LEILANI, and subsequently Leilani Claire, constructed a small number of images as visual representations depicting how her/their multiple System was arranged. These are not static images, but, rather, give a sense of the "flow" that transpired, through time, leading to final integration. Other "System" images can be found on pp. 252-253. The System Chart, above, is the last of this brief series of images.



ANGEL CLAIRE - 7/21/92

The best and favorite painting of the System was painted by CLAIRE as a self-portrait, showing her, with eyes closed, confidently soaring in the night sky, not needing to look where she's headed. The clouds, representing safety, are shown internalized within her garment.



Leilani Claire
Post-Final Integration Portrait
4/10/96